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Brand Loyalty in Online Brand Communities in Malaysia: A Uses and Gratifications Perspective

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Abstract

This study examines the online communities' gratifications of social media usage and to understand how their perceived values within an online brand page environment can affect brand loyalty. In addition to the content-oriented and relationship-oriented aspects of uses and gratifications of online brand communities, this study also includes economic value to the existing model considering online promotions and rewards may encourage consumer brand engagement and subsequently lead to brand loyalty. The data collected via snowball sampling method consisted of the responses of 150 respondents who are in one or more online brand communities of different brands in Malaysia. The result shows that functional value and hedonic value are the most important motivators to drive brand loyalty in online brand communities. The result implies that the brand loyalty in online brand communities in Malaysia depends on the functionality and pleasant sensations experienced from the brand fan page. The result suggests that brand page should deliver informative, rich and customised information contents to fulfil the satisfaction of online communities. This study provides insight on social media users' perceived values that drive their satisfaction and loyalty towards the brand via the fan page, which in turn helps brand marketing practitioners in Malaysia to understand on how these perceived values may influence the brand loyalty of online communities, particularly from the perspective of the Uses and Gratifications theory.

1. Introduction

Brand loyalty cannot be taken for granted as this issue has become a great challenge for many businesses and brand marketers nowadays. Brand loyalty has been well accepted as one of the main determinants of business success (Percy, 2017). Not only the increasing competition makes it difficult for firms to develop brand loyalty, but also the high connectivity and increasing exposure to a myriad of different things and new experiences have provided consumers with more choices than ever before. Consumers who are digitally-savvy from a very young age are tempted to try new things as they become more affluent. They are not only demanding but also easily discontented, thus, it is difficult to keep these consumers committed to brands and make repeat purchase from the same brand (Nielsen, 2019a).

A global consumer study conducted by Nielsen (2019a) highlights that disloyalty levels are increasing worldwide, with just merely 8% of global consumers committed loyalty to their

favourite brands. They also report that: "Asia Pacific consumers have the highest brand-switching propensity, with 47% willing to switch brands or try different products. This is closely followed by Africa and the Middle East (45%) and Latin America (42%). Consumers in North America and Europe are somewhat less likely to switch brands (36% and 33% respectively)". In Malaysia, the consumers are willing to switch brand as well, with only a small group of consumers (9%) that consider themselves loyal to their favourite brand. Nielsen (2019b) shows that majority of consumers would rather move away to new brands and products (44%) or sometimes try fresh experience if there are attractive and good reasons (47%).

The establishment of online brand communities is becoming increasingly popular due to the increase in the access of two commonly major social network websites which are Facebook and Instagram, which enable companies to connect individuals and groups through online networks (Son & Damhorst, 2016). According to Statista (2020), there are 3.96 billion social media users as of July 2020. The use of both platforms has been growing sharply during the pandemic. Likewise, in Malaysia, there are 26 million social media users, representing 81% of social media penetration (Statista, 2020). The most active social media platforms among Malaysian users are Facebook (85.3%), Facebook Messenger (65.9%), Instagram (38.3%), and LinkedIn (17%) as of July 2020 (NapoleonCat, 2020). These users spent more than 2 hours and 14 minutes on average on social media each day, which is almost equal to one-third of the time spent using internet each day (Kemp, 2020). As the users spend more time on social network, this indicates more engaging activities when browsing and more likely to be interested in the brand's content (Chen & Tsai, 2020). As such, many brands and businesses have set up their own official brand/business page on social networking sites and utilise them as a platform connecting with potential and existing consumers (Jayasingh & Venkatesh, 2015; Fang, Li, & Bhatti, 2020).

Many brands have successfully transformed stakeholders, customers and potential customers into their online brand communities by setting up brand page, therefore, enabling brands and customers to use new ways to connect with each other. The online brand community has been a trend and has become part of brand management strategies (Gummerus et al., 2012). With strong online community as foundation, the brands are able to use this huge group of consumers to improve their market position (Kelley & Alden, 2016). Furthermore, the brand pages could be used as a bridge between consumers and the brand to interact with potential and existing customers as well as gain access to customers' feedback, thus fan pages are useful in enhancing the relationships between firms and their customers (Thongmak, 2017; Huang et al., 2018). Moreover, the brand page offers brands the opportunities to create values for customers, influence brand communities' perception regarding the brand, encourage customers to give new ideas and contribute their experiences and opinions (Machado et al., 2019; Ceyhan, 2019). By participating on fan page, the online brand communities are forming meaningful connection with a specific brand and increasing their loyalty towards the brand.

While product market competition becomes more intense, it is even harder to hold onto customers, and businesses need to strive hard to plan all types of creative marketing strategies to retain customers. As such, in order to venture into a new target market segment, marketers everywhere have begun to direct their focus on building, managing, and maintaining brand communities (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002; Hur, Ahn, & Kim, 2011). The critical issue for a marketer in managing an online brand community effectively is to know what factors affect their needs and wants in order to create loyalty to the brand through the brand page (Wirtz et al., 2013). Therefore, to manage long-term customer relationships, it is helpful for brands and businesses to identify customers' needs and motivation so that the marketers are able to develop branding and marketing strategies more effectively and practically. Previous study highlights that only when the consumers feel the values perceived are worthwhile, they are more likely to be active on a brand page and stay loyal to the brand (Ismail, 2017). Additionally, they suggest that consumer gratifications obtained should be consistent to drive for not only active participation in brand community, but also brand commitment and loyalty (e.g., Lischka, 2015).

Wirtz et al. (2013) has pointed out that due to the: "dramatic technology-lead changes that continue to take place in the marketplace, researchers and practitioners alike are keen to understand the emergence and implications of online brand communities". Several studies have examined different value dimensions of online communities and determined the effects of these values on different aspects of brand loyalty and brand page usage. The most discussed values among previous studies are functional value, hedonic value, social value, brand interaction value and economic value, but the findings are mixed and their direct effects on the brand loyalty of online brand communities remain untested in Malaysia. Therefore, this study aims to understand the factors, that influence brand loyalty within the context of online brand communities, particularly from the perspective of the Uses and Gratifications theory. Specifically, this study examines the relationship between the aforementioned gratifications values of the online brand communities and brand loyalty in a social media context. This study focuses on Malaysian social media users who are following brand pages and actively participating in the on-going activities on brand pages, likes, comments, sharing, etc. The result of this study shows that both the functional and hedonic values on the brand page are the most important motivators to drive brand loyalty among online communities in Malaysia. The online brand communities mostly seek for more functional and hedonic values derived from their brand page usage, whereas, the social, brand interaction and economic values have no significant influence to brand loyalty of online communities in Malaysia.

The significance of this study is threefold. Interestingly, the finding reveals that social and brand interaction values are not that relatively important to retain customers on the brand page and loyalty, and these results are different from the findings of many other researches. Past studies emphasize on the interactivity among the consumers and between brand and consumers (De Vries & Carlson, 2014; Seo & Park, 2018) as to suit the characteristic of social media which is able to enhance the interactive capabilities. Even though past research highlighted the importance of customer-brand relationship, but it may not have a direct effect on brand loyalty. As such, brand loyalty of online community is not affected by social and brand interaction values, even though they are active users. They may be influenced more by functional value and hedonic value or the other perceived values such as self-concept value (Jahn & Kunz, 2012), co-creation and brand strength (De Vries & Carlson, 2014), self-presentation (Hsu et al., 2015), self-brand image and value congruity (Islam, Rahman, & Hollebeek, 2017) and others factors. Second, the finding can assist the businesses in developing more proactive marketing and branding strategies in engaging with their customers via social media, to enhance their loyalty towards the brand. The brand managers could apply different marketing and branding strategies on social media based on different characteristics of consumers because the gratifications gained on engaging brand page among the online community are varied.

Third and lastly, previous studies have shown that active users in brand page or engaged consumer in the online community increase brand loyalty (Jahn & Kunz, 2012; Jayasingh, 2019). However, most of the studies have focused on the mediating roles of brand page engagement or participation between the motivators of perceived values and brand loyalty, but studies on their direct relationships are limited. This study fills this gap by investigating factors that have a direct effect on brand loyalty of online community, and contributes to the increasing literature on brand loyalty by providing insights of motivation that drive consumers' loyalty to the brand in the context of business page on social media platform in Malaysia. The rest of the paper is organised as follows. Section 2 presents the literature review, followed by the methodology in Section 3. Section 4 presents the results and discussion, and lastly, Section 5 concludes the paper.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1 Brand loyalty
Brand loyalty is one of the most vital success measurements for businesses. It not only reflects a company's performance (Limpasirisuwan & Donkwa, 2017), but also drives companies for additional financial profits. Company needs six fold of costs and efforts to attract a new customer

against retaining an existing one (Rosenberg & Czepiel, 1984). The customers who have strong positive feelings towards a brand are dedicated to repurchase the product/service from the same brand consistently and not easily influenced by competitors' greater appeals (Oliver, 1999). Hence, loyal customers can be considered as significant strategic assets which enables the company to achieve sustainable competitive advantage over competitors and to stand out in a competitive marketplace (Jiang & Zhang, 2016; Sharif & Sulaiman, 2019). Brand loyalty is mostly reflected from customers' attitude and behaviour (Oliver, 1999; Jahn & Kunz, 2012). The attitudinal loyalty emphasizes on the psychological attachment of consumers to a brand, such as commitment and their beliefs that the brand is unique (Kujur & Singh, 2020). The sense of commitment in brand loyalty indicates the strong feeling of identification and affiliation with the brand. According to Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpande (1992), customers who have high brand commitment are dedicated to maintain a good relationship with the brand, and willing to exert effort in maintaining the goals on behalf of the brand (Kim et al., 2008).

Alternatively, the behavioural loyalty emphasizes on repurchasing the same brand due to habitual or convenience regardless of their liking and without much thought (Kang, 2015). The behavioural loyalty is not limited to repurchasing from the favourite brand, but make further recommendations to others by word-of-mouth. The positive or negative image of a particular brand can flow from one customer to another customer, and the spread can be very fast especially in today's digital world through electronic-word-of-mouth. The loyal customers would voice out their thoughts and experience of purchasing the product or service of the brand not limited to only family and friends, but also to the public openly (Abu-Alhaija et al., 2019). The previous studies highlighted that a satisfied customer with the brand may recommend the brand to others regularly and pay the brand compliments (Nikhashemi, Paim, & Khatibi, 2015). Those who are not happy with the brand will also share their not-so-pleasant experiences through social networking sites (Hur et al., 2011).

2.2 Online brand communities

The online communities which follow or participate in a brand page are those sharing common values, beliefs and thoughts which evolve through the brand community (Sharif & Sulaiman, 2019). The online brand communities can be established voluntarily by community consumers themselves or built by the company with ownership of the brand (Jang et al., 2008). The roles of the brand page are not only limited to explicit communication and interaction channels for a company but also to establish a bond with consumers via an online community mechanism. The online brand communities will serve as the basis of relationship marketing which allows companies to attract, maintain and enhance long-term customer relationships (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001). Scholars have been explaining the concept of a long-term relationships with customers by extending the relationship models, from the traditional consumer-brand model to the consumer-brand-consumer model (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001). Brand communities not only interact with brands only, but also interact with each other by exchanging valuable information and experiences of the brand (Andersen, 2005; Laroche, Habibi, & Richard, 2013). The consumer-brand-consumer or customer-centric model (McAlexander et al., 2002) expands the brand community into customer-brand, customer-company, customer-product, and customer-customers. The study of Laroche et al. (2013) found that a social media-based brand community has a strong effect on all four types of relationships which further enhance the brand community's loyalty to the brand.

There are many past researchers who have examined brand loyalty of social media brand communities. A study showed that customers who had become a fan on a restaurant's brand page had heightened brand loyalty which was proven from the increase of visitation frequency, despite the total amount spent is lesser during the visits (Dholakia & Durham, 2010). In another study of a fan page from a South Korea luxury brand community, it was concluded that attitude has a positive influence on brand loyalty and purchase pattern and intention (Kim & Lee, 2019). The sharing of information from the online brand communities influences the purchase and

repurchase intention significantly (Adjei, Noble, & Noble, 2010; Jahn & Kunz, 2012). A study by Kim et al. (2008) also revealed the importance of online brand communities to the brand as they possess higher brand commitment than other consumers. Researchers also found that the more time and frequency consumers spent on engaging with the brands, the more the willingness to purchase products (Jahn & Kunz, 2012). Study also shows that brand community engagement on brand page increases word of mouth intention, brand promotion and brand loyalty (Karjaluoto, Munnukka, & Tikkanen, 2014).

2.3   The Uses and Gratifications Theory

The Uses and Gratifications Theory has been widely used for understanding consumer' behaviours on social media. This renowned communication theory adapted the principles of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, and was developed to explain why individuals possess different consumption patterns of certain mass communication media (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). Traditionally, most studies apply the Uses and Gratifications Theory to demonstrate why individuals have different media usage patterns. Along with the emergence of new media in recent decades, the Uses and Gratifications Theory has been extensively used to understand consumers' motivation on different media platforms, including social networking sites and virtual community environments etc. (Ruggiero, 2000; Wang et al., 2019).

According to the Uses and Gratifications Theory, media users are active and goal-oriented. Individuals have different reasons to choose which media they want to use. The selection of media usage is based on the needs and goals they want to achieve. Various types of media will satisfy their various needs specifically, hence the gratifications they receive from a certain media shall determine an individual's media usage (Katz et al., 1974). In the virtual environment, the online communities are viewed as active participants of social media as well, and they do expect needs and goals to be achieved when they access certain brand page (West & Turner, 2018). The gratifications through media has been developed according to social and psychological aspects. McQuail and Van Cuilenburg (1983) developed four types of common needs for media use, which are seeking information, personal identity, integration and social interaction, and entertainment. Along with the new technology development on social network sites, the characteristics and users' motivation of media usage are different from the traditional media.

In previous studies, researchers have identified three main types of needs that social media users and online brand communities are looking for: informational, social, and/or hedonic needs (Lee & Jeong, 2014; Hollebeek, Srivastava, & Chen, 2019; Islam et al., 2017). On top of these that gratify social media users, research by Dolan et al. (2016) added rewarding components that matters to social media users. The Uses and Gratifications Theory could also relate the online community of a brand page to loyalty and satisfaction by identifying factors that motivate consumers' participation in brand page and how these factors influence consumers' brand loyalty. In other words, when the brand page satisfies particular needs of the online brand communities, this satisfaction should lead to a higher brand loyalty. A study on users of a hotel's Facebook page confirmed that there is positive relationship between user satisfaction and the intention to stay at that hotel (Choi et al., 2016). To what extent consumers use and participate on brand page depends on the satisfaction they gained through a range of activities that they carry out online (Gummerus et al., 2012). The gratifications they get to quench their needs determines their attitude towards the brand page, which will in turn affect an individual's choice to select and participate in a community or a brand page, and the behavioural outcome, and to visit it repeatedly or even the continuance of usage of the media and its content (Kujur & Singh, 2020).

Previous studies suggested that consumers can establish strong relationships with a brand because of the emotional and tangible gratifications it offers when the need arises. The degree of online community's loyalty to a brand depends on sought and obtained gratifications from the brand page use. The theoretical framework conceptualises the distinct motives of online community that invoke loyalty towards the brand on the brand page. What motivates consumers

to adopt and use a wider range of brand page can be explained by using the Uses and Gratifications Theory. Participation or engagement on brand page has become the centre of research topic, especially the factors and its consequences. Customers with strong engagement on brand page facilitate the strong emotional bonds that render increased consumer loyalty to particular online brand communities (Islam et al., 2017). Many studies confirmed that increased participation and engagement on brand page can lead to brand loyalty (Kang, Tang & Fiore, 2014; Jayasingh, 2019). Also, other factors such as brand love, consumer and brand engagement, brand identification, and group characteristics were also found to influence brand loyalty (Kumar & Nayak, 2019; Le, 2021; Liao et al., 2020; Lin et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2019).

Meanwhile, there have been several studies that explained the factors affecting online community engagement behaviour and brand loyalty in terms of perceived values, satisfaction and trust (Limpasirisuwan & Donkwa, 2017). Value judgments based on cognitive and affective evaluation have been shown to lead directly to satisfaction and customer loyalty. Jahn and Kunz (2012) categorised the gratifications of online community derived from brand fan page into three main aspects: content-oriented (i.e., functional value and hedonic value), relationship-oriented (i.e., social interaction value and brand interaction value), and self-oriented (i.e., self-concept value), to examine the impact of customer engagement and brand loyalty. De Vries and Carlson (2014) further modified Jahn and Kunz's research model by adding co-creation value, brand strength while remaining functional value, hedonic value and social value. When a study on a restaurant's Facebook fan page, Kang et al. (2014) explored the impact of functional benefits, hedonic benefits, social-psychological benefits and monetary benefits on active participation, brand trust and brand commitment. In examining customer satisfaction and customer engagement behaviour outcomes such as purchase and feedback behaviour, Carlson et al. (2017) conceptualised five dimensions of values: functional value, socialisation value, emotional value, innovativeness value and relationship building value, and constructed them into value-in the-brand-page-experience. Jayasingh (2019) constructed seven factors on brand loyalty, which are information seeking, entertainment, economic benefits, social benefits, trust, social influence and brand love.

2.4 Hypothesis development

2.4.1 Functional value

Functional value is one of the key motivators to drive consumer participation on brand page and brand loyalty. The functional value refers to as the utility derived from a product, expected performance, and/or perceived quality (Kang et al., 2014). The degree of functionality of the brand page determines the online community's attitude and behaviour towards the brand. Online communities search for information about the brand, product, service or company because they want to get information about new products, how the service works and also look for product reviews (Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; Ceyhan, 2019). Research on airline marketing reveals that the customers preferred the most up-to-date and reliable information to decrease risk or anxiety (Seo & Park, 2018). The information quality also affects the attitude of the online communities and they could easily make comparison among the brand pages (Zhang, Benyoucef, & Zhao, 2016). In order for the online communities to satisfy their functional-gratifications needs, they require access to functional, helpful, useful and practical content (De Vries & Carlson, 2014; Ceyhan, 2019). The online communities are willing to share, comment and repurchase the products when they feel their functional value have been met on the brand page.

There are some situations that the functional value may not be the main motivators for online communities. The degree of participation on brand page is varied and depends on the industry, such as restaurants. A study by Kang et al. (2014) indicates that functional value has no significant effect to motivate online community in participating actively on the restaurant's brand page as the brand page is not a primary outlet for consumers to seek product information. The most important factor to drive consumers into visiting and engaging on brand pages is for seeking information. The consumers tend to access the business page on social media to find out information and reviews related to products/services before purchasing (Whiting & Williams,

2013; Jayasingh, 2019). They may use social media to seek health information, personal or professional growth (Asghar, 2015). The consumer will actively engage on the related brand page and stick on the brand page if they find the page provides the information they need. This reasoning leads to the hypothesis that there is a significant positive relationship between functional value and brand loyalty.

2.4.2 Hedonic value

Hedonic value is a basic motivation for any media use (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2015), hence it is definitely a strong driver of brand page usage. Hedonic value refers to utility derived from feelings or affective states gained through consumer experiences (Kang et al., 2014). The content that can arouse or excite positive emotions or passions are the intangible returns that the online community look for (Kang et al., 2014). The online communities also look for activities to relax or escape (Whiting & William, 2013) and to pass the time on social media where they can expect fun and enjoyment that they cannot experience offline (Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; Jayasingh 2019). Brand pages which are fun, entertaining, pleasant and exciting attract more active participation from online communities (Jahn & Kunz, 2012). The online communities are motivated to like, comment and share the contents with other online communities when they gain hedonic gratifications (Hsu et al., 2015). The entertaining content is not necessarily brand related, as long as it entertains the online communities (Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013).

However, research by Ceyhan (2019) revealed different results which showed hedonic value has no significant influence towards the Instagram page on brand loyalty although it motivates purchase intentions of Instagram users. Hedonic value is considered as one of the most important determinants of brand loyalty. A study showed that hedonic value encourages consumers to participate on restaurant brand Facebook fan pages and influences brand commitment (Kang et al., 2014). Other studies also revealed that users who are amused by the brand page will share and recommend the posts to others, and in turn this leads to brand loyalty (Jahn & Kunz, 2012; Jayasingh, 2019). As such, this study expects a significant positive association between hedonic value and brand loyalty.

2.4.3 Social value

Social value refers to gratifications gained through social interaction among individuals and groups on the social networking websites. The online communities have the opportunity to meet new people and communicate with each other. Individuals join brand's online communities and participate in a group to seek social support and friendship in the community (Hajli, 2014). To get new friends is one of the key factors for consumers to participate on brand page and feel attached to the brand (Jayasingh, 2019). Studies have shown that, by communicating and exchanging ideas and experiences of a product/service on a brand page, the individuals of the brand's online community may develop friendships (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis 2014; Ceyhan, 2019).

According to Jahn and Kunz (2012), consumers participate in fan page to meet, to find out and to interact with people like them. Similarly, Sharif and Sulaiman (2019) also assert that customers tend to search for other customers who share similar thoughts, beliefs and goals. The online brand communities satisfy their social needs when they find someone with similar interests, values and behaviours (Jayasingh, 2019). Few scholars use social identity theory to explain consumers' active participation in the brand page's activities because of the social interaction benefit and the feeling of sense of belonging in the online community (Dholakia & Durham, 2010; Kang et al., 2014). Once the online brand communities feel satisfaction from social value gained on brand page, they are more engaged on brand page and this leads to brand loyalty. Nevertheless, a study from Ceyhan (2019) revealed that the social value has no significant impact on purchase intention among Instagram users, however, it is still an important motivator to increase their brand loyalty on different perspectives such as commitment and word of mouth.

Social value was found to stimulate the brand loyalty. The brand communities are willing to share their personal experience, opinion and recommendation with others personally or via social

media. Social value influence customer's engagement with brand pages, which in turn leads to brand loyalty (De Vries & Carlson, 2014). Social value has been shown to have a significant effect on members' active participations on fan pages, and in turn encourages brand trust and brand commitment (Kang et al., 2014). From the aforementioned studies, this study also anticipates a significant positive relationship between social value and brand loyalty.

2.4.4 Brand interaction value

A good long-term relationship established with the online community get much attention from brand marketers. The brand pages served as a popular platform where the relationship arises through the two-way communication and interaction between brand marketers and the online community (Kujur & Singh, 2020). Interesting enough the online community would see brands as their friends and tend to build relationship with their favourite brand. High brand interaction value perceived by the online communities ensure that they access the brand page more frequently and enhance the relationship with brand. A strong brand relationship established on social networking sites increases the likelihood of online community's commitment to the brand, word-of-mouth and repurchase (Jahn & Kunz, 2012).

Literature has shown that trust, satisfaction and commitment are the main parameters of the quality of the relationship between a brand and its consumers (Kujur & Singh, 2020). The capability of the brand owners in enhancing brand trust among the brand community leads to improvement in the relationship with customers and subsequently their customer loyalty (Laroche et al., 2013). Similarly, Jahn and Kunz (2012) also emphasize that the opportunities given to the online community to interact and communicate with the brand, give feedback to and get answers from the brand are important to enhance brand loyalty. The online brand communities are concerned about the responsiveness of the brand page managers. An immediate reply and proactive communication with online communities would cultivate their sense of brand-related belonging and hence encourage their commitment to the brand (Islam et al., 2017).

The online communities feel more engaged when they are able to interact, communicate, give feedback and get answers with the brand (Jahn & Kunz, 2012). The high level of interaction with brand would foster the bond which further affect their loyalty to the brand (Habibi, Laroche, & Richard, 2014, Hsu et al., 2015, Thongmak, 2017). As the online community has strong trust on brand page and their needs are met through interaction with brand, it is more likely that they will engage more with the brand page, purchase or repurchase, and recommend the brand to others. Therefore, this study expects a significant positive relationship between brand interaction value and brand loyalty.

2.4.5 Economic value

Economic value refers to special deals, better price and free coupons (Kang, 2015) and it also can be viewed as discount, promotions, free gifts, reward and to win prizes over the competition or games (Jayasingh, 2019). Social networks sites provide a convenient and a comfortable way to receive brand related information including special offers (Gironda & Korgaonkar, 2014). As being part of a long-term relationship with companies, the online brand communities focus on not only the core benefits of products/services, but also expected additional incentives, rewards, prizes (Muntinga, Moorman, & Smith, 2011). Also, monetary savings such as discounts or special prices, as well as special treatment, individualised services (Gwinner, Gremler, & Bitner, 1998; Harris, O'Malley, & Patterson, 2003), where they are able to access particular information or enjoy VIP services to reflect their special consumer status (Hollebeek & Solem, 2018). Although strong supporters of a brand are willing to pay premium prices for the brand, but they feel more valued when additional benefits are given in terms of economic value (Gwinner et al., 1998).

The online brand communities would feel motivated if there are some remunerations in return for participating in activities launched on brand page. Their economic value gratifications would be met when they get some remuneration on interacting, sharing and commenting on brand page (Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; Jayasingh, 2019). Studies also suggest to launch special promotions and give away coupons for online community to enhance their loyalty towards the brand page

(Kang et al., 2014). However, there are concern that monetary benefits give negative perception on perceived quality and may dilute the brand image. It is considered as an ineffective strategy to hold on to an online community on a brand page (Buil, Chernatony, & Martinez, 2013). Furthermore, a few prior studies have shown that economic value such as incentives has no significant relationship with consumer engagement (Chua & Banerjee, 2015) and or leads to low level engagement activities such as likes, shares and comments (Kujur & Singh, 2020).

Economic value, such as discounts, promotions, free gifts, rewards and chances to win prizes has been shown to encourage consumer engagement and subsequently leads to positive attitudes and higher purchase intentions (Drossos et al., 2007; Jayasingh, 2019). A few studies found a positive effect between economic value and brand loyalty. In particular, where consumers' attitude toward restaurants increases when the restaurants offer gift certificates (Han & Kim, 2009) and where special promotions and coupons effectively strengthen consumer-brand relationship among online communities (Treadaway & Smith, 2010). In line with previous studies, this study anticipates a significant positive relationship between economic value and brand loyalty.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research framework

Based on the Uses and Gratifications Theory as a theoretical framework, this study examines the motivation of an individual in the online brand communities behind their loyalty towards the brand on the social media page. The factors of functional value, hedonic value, social value, brand interaction value and economic value have been identified as those which may influence Malaysian online brand community's brand loyalty. This study established the framework based on modification of the research model by Jahn and Kunz (2012) and Jayasingh (2019). This study considers the functional value, hedonic value, social value and brand interaction value suggested by Jahn and Kunz (2012) to examine whether these factors have positive relationship with the brand loyalty among the online brand communities in Malaysia. An additional factor, that is the economic value introduced in Jayasingh (2019)'s study, is also added to the framework considering that monetary benefits have been widely used in businesses.

Figure 1 presents the framework of this study, to examine the effect of functional value, hedonic value, social value, brand interaction value and economic value, on the brand loyalty. These values have been found in variety of journals which either have direct or indirect relationship with brand loyalty.
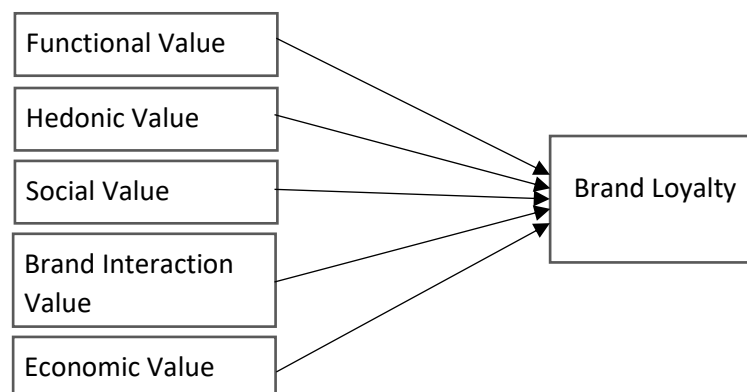

Figure 1. Research framework

3.2 Data

According to Statista (2020), the social media users in Malaysia represent 81 percent of its total population as of January 2020. Considering that the difficulty in identifying and locating the population of the online brand communities from these social media users, the target population of this study consists of social media users in Malaysia who are following any brand page on Facebook and Instagram. However, this study did not focus specifically on a particular brand. In other words, the respondents in this study are those in one or more online brand communities of different brands from various industries, taking into account the generalization of the result and also ensuring there are sufficient data collected for analysis. By setting an alpha error of 0.5 with 5 tested predictors, the minimum sample size recommended for this study, as given by the G power is 138. As such, this study has collected a total of 150 responses from those respondents who are in one or more online brand communities of different brands in Malaysia. This study adopts the measurement items of functional value, hedonic value, social value and brand interaction value used by Jahn and Kunz (2012). The measurement item of economic value is adopted from Jayasingh (2019)'s study. Please refer to Appendix A for the detailed measurement items. Only those respondents who are following a brand page on social media are requested to answer the questionnaire. Snowball sampling, a non-probability sampling method is used in this study to find the respondents from different regions, age groups, ethnicity and income levels, through referrers or respondents' networking (Vehovar, Toepoel, & Steinmetz, 2016). The questionnaires were distributed online through emails, WhatsApp and other social media platforms such as Facebook, and Instagram.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Results

The descriptive statistics of the 150 respondents taking part in this study is presented in Table 1. The table shows that there are slightly more females (87%) compared to males (63%). The largest proportion of the sample (34.7%) falls in the age group of 36 and 45 years old, followed by age group of 26 and 35 years old (23.3%). While respondents aged between 46 and 55 years consist of 27%, below 25 years old are 16% and more than 56 years old are 12%. A total of 97 (64.7%) of the respondents are Chinese, 42 (28%) of the respondents are Malay and 11 (7.3%) are Indian. The data of this study is collected from different regions in Malaysia. Majority of the respondents are from the Northern Region (38.7%), Central Region (27.3%), and Southern Region (21.3%). Other's respondents are from the Eastern Region (11%) and East of Malaysia (8%). In the aspect of income level, most of the respondents' earnings are between RM2501 to RM5000 monthly (39.3%), followed by a monthly income ranging between RM5001 and RM10000 (27.3%) and below RM2500 (21.3%), while the rest earned above RM 10000 (12%).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

	Frequency	Percentage		Frequency	Percentage
Gender			*Region*		

Male	87	58.0	Northern (Perlis, Kedah, Penang)	58	38.7
Female	63	42.0	Central Region (Perak, Selangor, Kuala Lumpur)	41	27.3
Age (years)			Southern Region (Negeri Sembilan, Melaka, Johor)	32	21.3
< 25	24	16.0	Eastern Region (Pahang, Kelantan, Terengganu)	11	7.3
26 - 35	35	23.3	East Malaysia (Sabah, Sarawak)	8	5.3
36 - 45	53	34.7			
46 - 55	27	18.0			
> 56	12	8.0			
			Income Level (RM)		
Ethnicity			< 2500	32	21.3
Malay	42	28.0	2501 - 5000	59	39.3
Chinese	97	64.7	5001 - 10000	41	27.3
Indian	11	7.3	> 10000	18	12.0

In measuring the internal consistency of all variables, the findings of reliability test for this study shows that, the Cronbach alpha coefficient of all the five independent variables and dependent variable ranged from 0.881 to 0.976, which are all above 0.70, as presented in Table 2. The result is in line with the guidelines that state a minimum reliability of 0.70 would be an acceptable level (Rovai, Baker, & Ponton, 2014). The table also shows that the mean for Brand Loyalty is 3.4778 with the standard deviation of 0.7538. Among all independent variables, the highest mean value is Functional Value which is 3.5867 with standard deviation 0.7974. It is followed by Hedonic Value with a mean value of 3.4550 and standard deviation 0.7853; Brand Interaction Value with a mean score of 3.3600 and standard deviation 0.7866; Economic Value with a mean value of 3.2222 and standard deviation 0.9660. The factor that has the lowest mean is Social Value which is 3.1533 with standard deviation 1.0366.

Table 2. The reliability test and descriptive statistics of the variables

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Mean	Std. Dev.	*N*	Min	Max
Brand Loyalty	9	0.944	3.478	0.754	150	1.44	5.00
Functional Value	4	0.934	3.587	0.797	150	1.00	5.00
Hedonic Value	4	0.933	3.455	0.785	150	1.25	5.00
Social Value	4	0.976	3.153	1.037	150	1.00	5.00
Brand Interaction Value	4	0.917	3.360	0.787	150	1.00	5.00
Economic Value	3	0.881	3.222	0.966	150	1.00	5.00

Note: Please refer to Appendix A for the detailed means and standard deviations of the measurement items.

Table 3 shows that the Pearson's pairwise correlations between all the independent variables and the Brand Loyalty (dependent variable) are statistically significant at the 1% significance level. The pairwise correlations between the independent variables are also found to be significant, however, there is no serious correlation issue between independent variables since the highest magnitude of correlation of 0.682 between Social Value and Hedonic Value is still lower than the typical threshold of 0.800 (Berry & Feldman, 1985).

Table 3. Pearson Correlation Analysis

	Brand Loyalty	Functional Value	Hedonic Value	Social Value	Brand Interaction Value	Economic Value
Brand Loyalty	1					
Functional Value	0.653*	1				
Hedonic Value	0.634*	0.629*	1			
Social Value	0.520*	0.538*	0.682*	1		
Brand Interaction Value	0.502*	0.601*	0.600*	0.656*	1	
Economic Value	0.227*	0.336*	0.304*	0.342*	0.511*	1

*Note: * denotes significant at 1% (two-tailed) significance level.*

The result of the multiple regression model is presented in Table 4. The ANOVA result reported in Table 4 (Panel A), the *F*-value of 30.523 indicates that the model is fit and is statistically significant at a 1% significance level. The R-squared value of 0.515 implies that 51.5% of the variance of Brand Loyalty can be explained by all five factors. Consistent with the result of the pairwise correlations reported in Table 3, the model does not suffer from multicollinearity, as shown by the variance inflation factor (VIF) in Table 4 (Panel B). The lowest VIF value in the model is 1.357 and it is given by the Economic Value. The highest VIF value is given by the Brand Interaction Value (2.426), and it is lower than the VIF thresholds of 2.5 suggested by Johnston, Jones, and Manley (2018).

The result of the regression model also shows that both the Functional Value and Hedonic Value are statistically significantly positively related to the level of Brand Loyalty at 1% significance level. However, the Social Value, Brand Interaction Value and Economic Value are found to be statistically insignificant in improving the Brand Loyalty. The result implies that higher level of Functional Value and Hedonic Value, which may cause greater satisfaction among the online brand communities, will result in increase in Brand Loyalty. On average, an additional increase by one unit in Functional Value and Hedonic Value will improve the Brand Loyalty of the online brand communities by 0.380 and 0.305 unit respectively. The beta of Functional Value and Hedonic Value shows that, ceteris paribus, for every increase of one standard deviation in Functional Value and Hedonic Value respectively, there is a 0.402 and 0.318 standard deviation, or 0.402×0.7538=0.303 and 0.318×0.7538=0.240 increase in the Brand Loyalty of the online brand communities.

Table 4. The results of the ANOVA and regression model

Panel A: ANOVA Result	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F-value*
Regression	43.560	5	8.712	30.523***
Residual	41.101	144	0.285	
Total	84.660	149		
R-square	0.515			

Panel B: Regression Model	Coefficients	Beta	Std. error	*t*-value	VIF
Constant	0.870***	-	0.238	3.652	
Functional Value	0.380***	0.402	0.076	5.012	1.907
Hedonic Value	0.305***	0.318	0.085	3.596	2.323
Social value	0.052	0.072	0.064	0.820	2.280
Brand Interaction Value	0.050	0.052	0.087	0.572	2.426
Economic Value	-0.044	-0.056	0.053	-0.835	1.357

*Note: Dependent variable: Brand Loyalty; *** denotes significant at 1% significance level.*

4.2   Model assumptions validity

Since the reliability of a regression model very much depends on the validation of the model assumptions, in addition to the multicollinearity test discussed earlier, further tests that is, the normality, and heteroscedasticity tests were undertaken to ensure no violation of the regression model assumptions. The results are presented in Figure 2. The distribution of the distribution patterns illustrated by the histogram and normal probability plot of the regression standardised residual, as shown in Figure 2 (a) and (b), indicate that the data does not violate the normal distribution assumption. The scatter plot of the regression standardised residual also shows that the residuals are randomly scattered above and below the *x*-axis, which implies that the data is homoscedastic and does not suffer from heteroscedasticity.
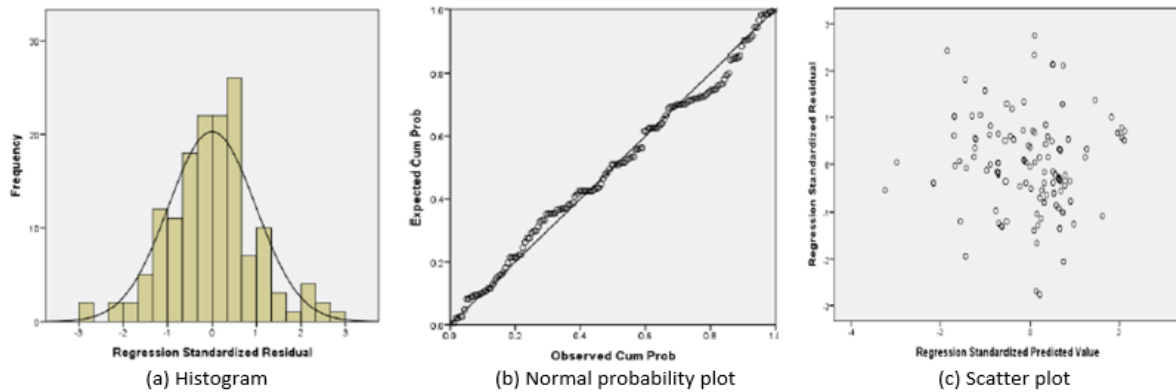

Figure 2. Regression model assumptions validity: (a) Histogram, (b) Normal probability plot, and (c) Scatter plot of regression standardised residual.

4.3 Discussion

The statistically significant positive association between functional value and brand loyalty found among online community in this study is in line with the findings of previous studies (Ceyhan, 2019; Jayasingh, 2019). These studies have shown that information is the most important motivational factor that drives consumers' loyalty towards brand on the social media pages. Consumers would become more knowledgeable, informative and satisfied by following their favourite brand page and subsequently developing positive feeling towards the brand, and sharing the brand with others or repurchasing the brand (Gummerus *et al.*, 2012). The significant positive relationship between hedonic value and brand loyalty is supported by studies that reveal hedonic value is an important determinant of brand loyalty (Jahn & Kunz, 2012; Kang *et al.*, 2014; Jayasingh, 2019). Clearly, consumers are seeking for entertainment on their favourite brand page. They are looking for fun and pleasure to fill up spare time and to alleviate stress when using social networking sites.

Although this study found insignificant effect of social, brand interaction and economic values on brand loyalty, such finding it not unique. De Vries and Carlson (2014) and Ceyhan (2019) also found that social value has no significant influence either on loyalty or engagement of brand fan page, or to purchase the related brand. Likewise, Jahn and Kunz (2012) also found that social value does not have direct consequences towards brand loyalty, and the result suggests that the interaction among individuals in online brand communities may lead to increase of engagement but not necessarily encouraging brand commitment, word of mouth and purchase intention. The online community may visit the brand page and are satisfied with only reading the posts, without any interaction with other people on the brand page. Also, although the online community may have high brand interaction value, that is, they are satisfied with the responsiveness of the brand and are engaged with the brand, but they may not engage in other behavioural consequences, such as word of mouth or repurchase. The insignificance of economic value may be explained by previous studies which found that economic benefits have no influence on either satisfaction or

loyalty (Gummerus *et al.*, 2012), monetary benefits have no influence on brand page participation (Kang *et al.*, 2014) and engagement (Kumar & Nayak, 2019; Kujur & Singh, 2020) which further led to brand loyalty. The price discounts, special offers, competitions may attract the online community to the brand page, but do not increase satisfaction or loyalty (Gummerus *et al.*, 2012). The online brand communities who have strong commitment to the brand may not be sensitive or interested in the discount price, prize and other rewards.

5. Conclusion

This study portrays the online community as an important group of consumers in fostering brand loyalty and aims to identify the motives of the online community for their continuous participation on a brand page, hence would be a good orientation for brand loyalty development and enhancement. This study found that both functional value and hedonic value on the brand page are the most important motivators to drive brand loyalty among online communities in Malaysia. The result suggests that marketers should focus more on the functional value and hedonic value (content-oriented) of their brand page, rather than the social value, brand interaction value (relationship-oriented), and economic value. In other words, the online community may not necessarily be looking for social support, interaction with other people and brand marketers, or special offers on the brand page. Hence, these values do not have a significant effect to enhance their commitment and loyalty to the brand. The result also implies that marketers should develop contents that are most appealing to the online brand community's gratifications values to improve their loyalty towards the brand. The brand page should deliver informative, rich and customised information contents to fulfil the satisfaction of online communities. The brand page should focus on offering interesting, entertaining and innovative content to online communities as media richness is shown to enhance brand loyalty (Huang *et al.*, 2018; Jahn & Kunz, 2012).

This study augments literature related to brand loyalty, online brand communities and the Uses and Gratifications theory. Specifically, the study provides insight into social media users' perceived values that drive their satisfaction and loyalty towards the brand via the fan page. The result also helps brand marketing practitioners in Malaysia to understand how these perceived values may influence the brand loyalty of online communities, particularly from the perspective of the Uses and Gratifications theory. This study has a few limitations. First, this study focuses on the online communities of brand pages created by the brand providers. Such online communities may be different from the online communities initiated by the brand consumers and supporters themselves, in which the latter provides more opportunity for user generated content and interaction among members. Hence, future studies can consider the interactivity element (Huang *et al.*, 2018), relational (Carlson, 2018), social influence (Jayasingh, 2019) and sense of membership (Huang *et al.*, 2018) in their research. Second, this study assumes that the respondents from online communities are actively engaging with the brand page and online brand communities, thus the mediating roles of participation or brand page engagement were not included in the study. Therefore, for a more comprehensive study, the engagement factors could also be included in future studies (De Vries & Carlson, 2014; Chen & Tasi, 2020). Third, the respondents in this study were selected from online brand communities of different brands from various industries, which may have different values, needs and wants. Future research can focus on a specific brand or a certain group of online brand communities (Jahn & Kunz, 2012; Islam *et al.*, 2017). Lastly, this study is conducted at a particular point in time. Since consumer habits may change over time, it is recommended to undertake longitudinal research to observe the dynamic behaviours of online communities. Future studies can examine the needs and wants of online brand communities during a specific time, such as during festival seasons or crisis. Such knowledge is useful to brand practitioners in developing brand-related offerings in different situations (Islam *et al.*, 2017).

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Appendix A. The measurement item, mean and standard deviation of the variables.

Brand Loyalty	Mean	Std. Dev.
I feel I am part of a community around this brand.	3.19	0.967
I am an active supporter of this brand.	3.37	0.966
I interact with this brand.	3.08	1.114
I recommend this brand to other people.	3.69	0.811
I introduce this brand to other people.	3.63	0.855
I say positive things about this brand to other people.	3.83	0.755
I intend to remain loyal to this brand in the future.	3.55	0.864
I will not stop buying/supporting this brand.	3.47	0.887
I think of myself as a loyal consumer/supporter of this brand.	3.48	0.903
Functional Value		
The content of this fan page is helpful for me.	3.59	0.837
The content of this brand page is useful for me.	3.65	0.891
The content of this brand page is functional for me.	3.58	0.861
The content of this brand page is practical for me.	3.53	0.902
Hedonic Value		
The content of this brand page is fun.	3.35	0.868
The content of this brand page is exciting.	3.43	0.886
The content of this brand page is pleasant.	3.61	0.818
The content of this brand page is entertaining.	3.43	0.870
Social Value		
I can meet people like me on this brand page.	3.31	0.835
I can meet new people like me on this brand page.	3.29	0.856
I can find out about people like me on this brand page.	3.41	0.906
I can interact with people like me on this brand page.	3.43	0.915
Brand Interaction Value		
I can interact with the brand on this brand page.	3.31	0.835
I can communicate with the brand on this brand page.	3.29	0.856
I can give feedback to the brand on this brand page.	3.41	0.906
I can get answers from the brand on this brand page.	3.43	0.915
Economic Value		
I interact this brand page in order to access discounts and promotions.	3.47	1.079
I interact on this brand page to participate in competitions and games to win prizes.	2.90	1.015
I interact on this brand page to get reward/free gifts.	3.29	1.127

Note: The 5-point Likert scale measurement items of Brand Loyalty, Functional Value, Hedonic Value, Social value, Brand Interaction Value were sourced from Jahn and Kunz (2012), and the Economic Value were sourced from Jayasingh (2019).