

# Investigating the behavior of Iranian consumers in brand communities based on social media

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## Abstract

Social media has an effective role in the formation and cohesion of brand communities and relationships of brand members. In this article, the pattern of Iranian consumer behavior of brand communities based on social media (in this study Instagram) obtained from Sadeghi (2017) qualitative research, been investigated. We tested the obtained model by designing a questionnaire and distributing it among 413 people and analyzing it by structural equations and factor analysis. In this model, the motivations for joining brand communities are shown and on the other hand, the effect of participation in brand communities on relationships. The customer is identified with the elements of the brand, the value chain, the quality of the brand relationship and the signs of the brand communities. In this regard, 18 hypotheses were identified, all of which were confirmed. The results showed that participation in brand communities has a positive effect on brand loyalty, brand recommendation and brand trust

**Keywords:** Consumer Behavior, Brand Communities, Social Media, Qualitative Method

## Introduction

Studies show that social media can increase sales, brand performance, brand loyalty, brand trust, awareness and other marketing practices by brand and consumers (Lroche, Habibi, & Richard, 2013; Laroche, Habibi, Richard, & Sankaranarayanan, 2012; Rapp, Beitelspacher, Grewal, & Hughes, 2013; Sonnier, McAlister, & Rutz, 2011). The results of social media efforts on the brand and customers, show themselves well in the context of the brand community (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Therefore, in this study, this issue is examined from the perspective of brand communities. The many successes of brand communities over time (Belk & Tumbat, 2005; Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry, 2003) and the benefits of social media in marketing have led many marketing managers to focus on building brand in brand communities based on Social media (Zaglia, 2013).

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As a comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior on social media provides a deep insight into better planning for marketers and even managers in this environment, this has become an important issue as well as Few studies have been done in this field, especially in Iran. There is a need to study consumer behavior with more and more comprehensive study to better understand and be aware of consumer behavior in Iran with respect to culture. Reach people and contribute to the development of existing literature and assist marketers and business owners in our brand planning and management of brand communities. Therefore, in this study, we examine how participation activities in brand communities can lead to brand loyalty and brand trust. There are a number of models about brand communities and consumer behavior in these communities around the world, but given that culture is one of the factors that affect consumer behavior, and it is possible that each country and culture is a unique model And because there is very little indigenous model of consumer behavior of social media-based brand communities in Iran and little research has been done on it, we have tried to use a quantitative method (structural equations). And factor analysis) test the model taken from Sadeghi (1396) dissertation which has been obtained through qualitative method.

This article is organized as follows. We first presented the conceptual model derived from the qualitative data. In the next section, we explained the elements of the conceptual framework and then introduced the research hypotheses. After the experimental findings, we report the proposed model. We conclude by discussing our findings, research limitations, and ways of future studies.

### 1.1. Brand Community

The brand community is a specialized and non-geographical community, which is formed on the basis of a structural set of social relationships between fans of a brand. Among the symptoms of a brand, community are shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and obligation to society (Muniz et al., 2001).

- Shared consciousness: For the first time, Gusfield used this term in 1978, and it means the intrinsic connection that members of a community feel towards each other, and the collective feeling in a society is not different (Weber, 1978).
- Rituals and Traditions: By focusing on shared experiences, people express their own brand experiences that enhance the history, culture and common awareness of society (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001).
- The obligation to society: A sense of duty to the community acts as a person and members of this community. This sense will be reflected in collective action at the time of the warning to society (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001).

### 1.2. Participation motivations in brand communities based on social media

Researchers have identified many motivations for participating in brand communities via theoretical frameworks. For example, in connection with the reasons for the participation and joining persons to brand communities, Janzik and Rassch (2011) stated that entertainment is a more important motivation than the personal need for joining to a brand community. Social motivation also plays an important role in the development and promotion of products (Janzik and Raacsh, 2011).

Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2008) have identified new motivations for using Facebook, for example: creating new friends, maintaining offline relationships, posting and viewing images, learning about social activities, and feeling a connection, and so on. Joinson (2008) has introduced seven motivations for joining people to Facebook (social connection, viewing or

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sharing photos, social research, social networks, content, status updates, and shared identity). In McCann's 2010 study on Wave 5 - The Socialization of Brands, nine reasons for joining people to brand communities were identified as: 1) To support a cause 2) Share appreciation with others 3) Join an interesting thing 4) Learn more about it 5) Feel affiliated with a sensible community 6) Get free content 7) Fill out time/having entertainment 8) Because it is recommended 9) Obtain product progress information

The Wave 5 study have explored only the reasons for participating in online brand communities and has not talked about the specific motivations of activities carried in online business communities, especially on social media platforms. A number of previous studies focused on social interaction as the motivation for using social media (e.g., Boyd, 2008, Daugherty, Eastin, & Bright, 2008, Muntinga et al., 2011, Kaye, 2007). Existing literature have identified a sense of affiliation, communication with friends and the search for emotional support as effective motivations for social exchange (Muntinga et al., 2011). Research has shown that the impact of consumer advice on products or brands is greater than advertising, and consumers are more likely to trust it (Xie, 2015). Existing research also shows that social interaction on the social media platform dramatically improves brand loyalty (Arora, 2009; Casalo, Flavian, & Guinaliu, 2008).

### 1.3. Participation results in brand communities

Customer participation in the brand communities has advantages that the first advantage is the strong customer relationship with the company, brand, other customers, and product. The main advantage is that participation in the brand community acts as an intermediary and promotes brand trust by improving customer-product and customer-brand relationships (Habibi et al., 2014). By examining the literature, some results suggest that loyalty (eg Bowden, 2009; Casalo et al., 2007), satisfaction (eg, Bowden, 2009), emotional connection (eg, Chan & Li, 2010), sense of belongingness (eg, Lee, Kim, & Kim, 2011) and empowerment (eg, Cova & Pace, 2006) are among the results of participation in brand communities, among which loyalty and commitment to the community show selves greater in online brand communities (Brodie et al., 2013).

Algesheimer, Dholokia, and Herrmann (2005) have introduced continuity of membership, brand community advice to non-members and levels of participation as three types of behavioral tendencies for brand community members.

### 1.4. Value creation practices

Based on the research, the value creation practices are meant to enhance the interaction and association among members of a brand community, with the help of which members become closer and members' belongingness to the brand will increase (Carlson et al., 2008; Zaglia, 2013). The value creation practices are divided into four subsets: social networks, social participation, impression management, and brand use (Schau et al., 2009).

- how to use the brand name: The ways of using brand name improve and enhance brand use, including product care, customization, and product changes (Schau et al., 2009).

- Impression management: impression management practices include those that create an outward and external focus on creating the desired emotions related to brand name, brand enthusiasts and brand communities in the social world beyond the brand Emotion management leads to issues such as promotion and justification (Schau et al., 2009).

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**1.5 Brand relationship quality:**

According to Fournier, brand relationship quality is an indicator of the strength and depth of brand name, customer, and the relationship between them (Fournier, 1994). Research has been conducted on this subject. Researchers such as Aggarwal (2004), Fournier (1994), and Sheth (1995) have investigated brand relationship management, focusing on consumer relationships with brands and their effects on brand loyalty and customer loyalty. Previous studies show that in a customer-driven model, there are four types of relationships in a brand community that consumers create with brand community elements: brand, products, company, and other consumers (Mc Alexander et al., 2002).

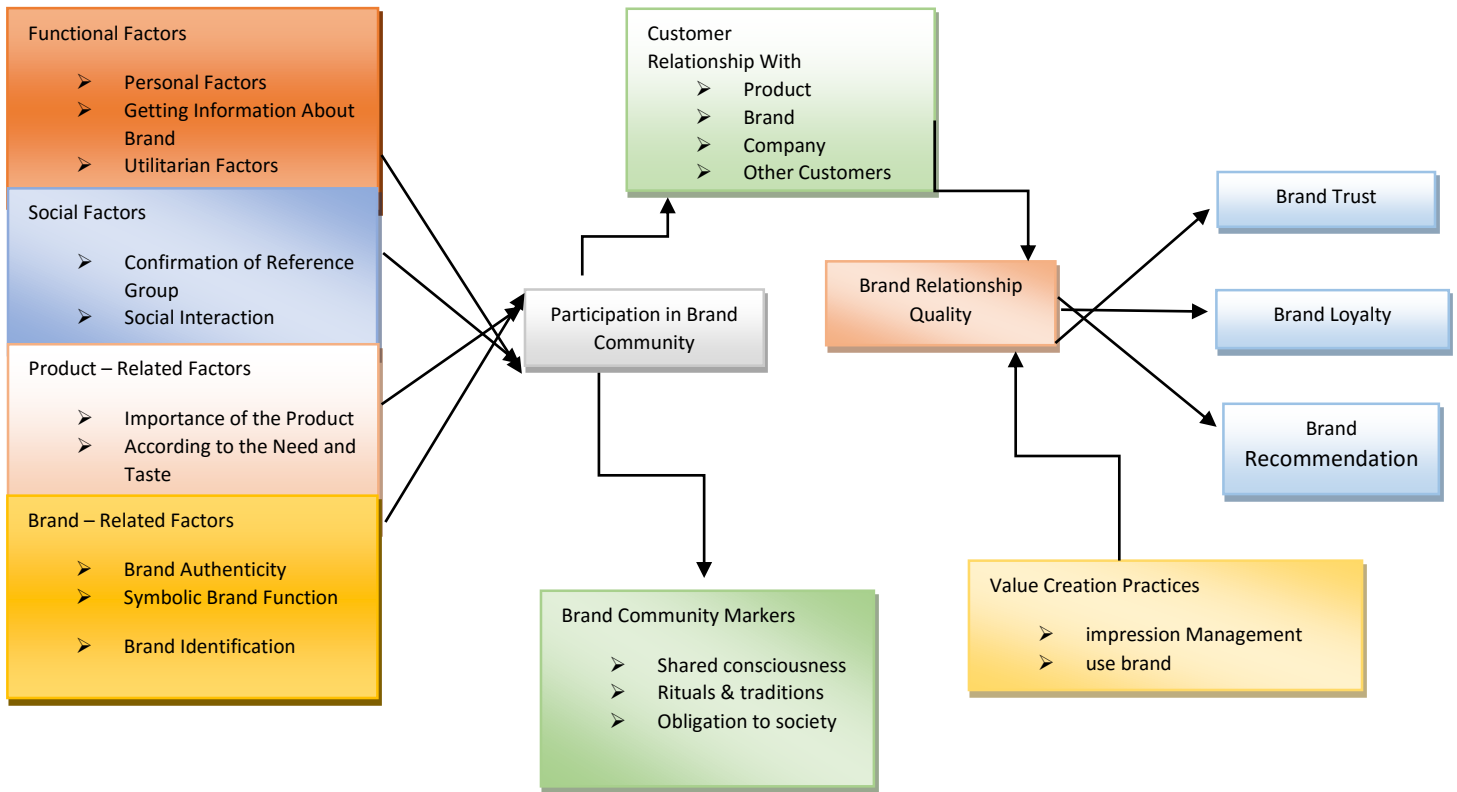
**1.6. Brand Identity:**

The process of creating a brand identity includes the formulation of the mentalities that the brand intends to create, ensuring identification of the brand by the customer and linking it to a specific class of need (Keller, 2003). Brand identity is a unique collection of brand associations that implies the closing of the covenant with the customers (Ghodeswar, 2008). A brand identity needs to be integrated with its customers, distinct from the brand of competitors, and show its organization as it wants and can be, to be effective. The effectiveness of brand identity means establishing a strong relationship with the customer that distinguishes that brand from other competitors and determines what company wants to do in the long term (Joachimsthaler et al., 1997). One of the motivations for customers to participate in brand communities is that they want to live with the symbolic functions of the brand. The symbolic function is the key dimension of brand identity (Aker, 1996), which often goes beyond its usual features, some of the brands such as Harley Davidson, Nike, Apple, and Benz achieved a symbolic position, partly due to their symbolic meaning. For such brands, the brand community may become more solid and be a place where members meet each other and talk about their interest in the brand.

**1.7. Customer Relationship with Brand Elements**

According to Habibi et al. (2014), customer-brand, customer-product, and customer-brand relationships affect brand trust positively, and the relationship between customers and other customers has a negative impact on brand trust. The reason for its negative impact may be: 1) because there is no clear hierarchy and structure in the brand community, so some members may doubt the accuracy of the information received. 2) Consumers are empowered through social media (Fournier & Avery, 2011; Powers et al., 2012). Customer interactions together increase their power and increase their expectations of the brand. To reduce the negative impacts of consumer empowerment, researchers are suggesting that facilitate and not disrupt consumers' conversations (Fournier & Avery, 2011). Facilitating customer-customer relationships is one of the goals of brand communities (Hagel and Armstrong 1997; Williams Cothrel 2000). Adjei and Nobel (2010) in their studies showed that the impact of negative information published in the online environment is not as much as the positive information. Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) also stated in their studies that the consumer-company relationship is often boosted by online brand communities.

Therefore, in this article, we examine the behavioral pattern of consumers of brand communities in social media, which is Sadeghi conceptual model (1396) in Figure 1 as follows. 18 hypotheses have been obtained from this model, which we will examine in the following.



**Fig.1:** The Pattern of Iranian Consumer Behavior of Social networking sites- Based Brand Communities

H1-Utilitarian values have a positive and significant impact on the participation in Virtual brand communities

H2- Getting information about brand content has a positive and significant impact on the participation in Virtual brand communities.

H3- Personal factors have a positive and significant impact on the participation in Virtual brand communities.

H4- Brand matching and its products have a positive and significant impact on the participation of Virtual brand communities with consumers' needs and taste.

H5- The importance of the product has a positive and significant impact on the participation in Virtual brand communities.

H6- Confirmation of the reference group has a positive and significant impact on the participation in the Virtual brand communities.

H7- Social interaction has a positive and significant impact on the participation in Virtual brand communities.

H8- The symbolic brand function has a positive and significant impact on the participation in Virtual brand communities.

H9- brand identification has a positive and significant impact on the participation in Virtual brand communities.

H10- Brand authenticity has a positive and significant impact on the participation in Virtual brand communities.

- H11- Participation in brand communities has a positive and significant impact on customer relationship with product, brand, company and other customers.
- H12- Participation in brand communities has a positive and significant impact on brand community markers.
- H13- Customer relationship with product, brand, company and other customers has a positive and significant impact on brand relationship quality.
- H14- brand community markers have a positive and significant impact on brand use in that community.
- H15- brand community markers have a positive and significant impact on impression management in that community.
- H16- Brand relationship quality has a positive and significant impact on brand trust.
- H17- Brand relationship quality has a positive and significant impact on the brand recommendation.
- H18- Brand relationship quality has a positive and significant impact on brand loyalty.

**Research method**

We used the quantitative method (factor analysis and structural equations) to test the obtained model from the qualitative part. We ran the models using AMOS and SPSS. Two-stage approach has been used in structural equation modeling. In the first step, the measurement models are compiled. In this way, by means of confirmatory factor analysis, the relationships between markers and structures or latent adjectives are considered in order to determine that the markers of each structure measured a structure by how much accuracy, and in the second stage, based on the structural equation model, the effect of structures on each other has been studied. By examining the index of skewness and kurtosis, it was found that all variables are normal and their values are between 2 and -2. Therefore, structural equations are proposed to perform. The Kieser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test for sampling adequacy was conducted, which showed that the KMO value for all scales was more than 0.7 (Cerny & Kaiser, 1977). Therefore, the sample size is good enough to perform a confirmatory factor analysis. a questionnaire containing 80 questions with a Likert scale from very little to very large, was sent electronically to 600 members of the brand communities, of which 413 questionnaires were completed.

**Findings**

In this article, for each structure, two AVE and CR indicators are used to measure the validity and reliability of the structures. According to previous studies (Fornell, & Larcker, 1981) values higher than 0.5 represent the appropriate validity structure. If the CR value for the structures is greater than 0.6, then they show an acceptable reliability (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988).

Table 2. The values of standardized load factors and the validity and reliability indices of structures

Main dimensions	Variable name	AVE	CR
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<i>Functional factors</i>	<i>Personal factors</i>	0.567	0.839
	<i>Utilitarian values</i>		
<i>Social factors</i>	<i>Getting information about the brand content</i>		
	<i>Confirmation of reference group</i>	0.615	0.941
<i>Brand-related factors</i>	<i>Social interaction</i>		
	<i>Brand Authenticity</i>	0.621	0.942
<i>Brand-related products</i>	<i>Symbolic brand function</i>		
	<i>Brand identity</i>		
<i>Participation in brand communities</i>	<i>Brand importance</i>	0.584	0.889
	<i>Fit to needs and tastes</i>		
<i>Brand community markers</i>	<i>Visit</i>	0.620	0.931
	<i>A sense of altruism</i>	0.618	0.946
<i>Customer relationship</i>	<i>Common customs</i>		
	<i>Moral accountability</i>		
<i>Value creation practices</i>	<i>Product</i>	0.638	0.959
	<i>Brand</i>		
<i>Brand relationship quality</i>	<i>Company</i>		
	<i>Other customers</i>		
<i>Brand loyalty</i>	<i>How to use brand</i>	0.612	0.935
	<i>Emotion management</i>		
<i>Brand recommendation</i>	<i>Brand relationship quality</i>	0.653	0.972
	<i>Try, recovery, prefer and buy</i>	0.644	0.985
<i>Brand trust</i>	<i>Brand recommendation</i>	0.587	0.953
	<i>Trust</i>	0.602	0.924

The results of the above table indicate that the selected markers for measuring the structures of the model are accurate and meaningful.

Divergent validity is investigated by comparing the squared coefficient of correlation between structures and their average variance extracted (AVE).

Table 3. Verifying the Divergent Values of the Measurement Model

Variables	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10
<i>Q1 (Functional Factors)</i>	AVE = 0.56									
<i>Q1 (Social Factors)</i>	( r2 = 0.12)	AVE = 0.61								
<i>Q3 (Product-related factors)</i>	( r2 = 0.19)	( r2 = 0.26)	AVE = 0.62							
<i>Q3 (Brand-related factors)</i>	( r2 = 0.22)	( r2 = 0.15)	( r2 = 0.14)	AVE = 0.63						

<b>Q5</b> (participation in communities)	( r2 = 0.12)	( r2 = 0.12)	( r2 = 0.13)	( r2 = 0.16)	AVE = 0.58
<b>Q6</b> (customer relationship with brand elements)	( r2 = 0.14)	( r2 = 0.15)	( r2 = 0.25)	( r2 = 0.23)	AVE = 0.62
<b>Q7</b> (brand community markers)	( r2 = 0.12)	( r2 = 0.16)	( r2 = 0.18)	( r2 = 0.13)	AVE = 0.61
<b>Q8</b> (value creation practices)	( r2 = 0.14)	( r2 = 0.10)	( r2 = 0.12)	( r2 = 0.14)	AVE = 0.63
<b>Q9</b> (brand relationship quality)	( r2 = 0.10)	( r2 = 0.13)	( r2 = 0.13)	( r2 = 0.15)	AVE = 0.61
<b>Q10</b> (final results of model)	( r2 = 0.10)	( r2 = 0.14)	( r2 = 0.12)	( r2 = 0.18)	AVE = 0.60

The table above shows that the average variances extracted (AVE) of structures is higher than the second exponent of correlation coefficient with other structures, so the divergent validity of structures have confirmed.

To determine the appropriateness and fit of the structural model, fit indices have been calculated, and the results are presented in the table below.

Table 4. Fit indices of research structural model

Index	Optimum limit	Reported amount
<b>X2/df</b>	3 and lower	1.85
<b>RMR</b>	Close to zero	0.044
<b>GFI</b>	0.9 and higher	0.917
<b>AGFI</b>	0.9 and higher	0.906
<b>NFI</b>	0.9 and higher	0.928
<b>RFI</b>	0.9 and higher	0.950
<b>IFI</b>	0.9 and higher	0.924
<b>TLI</b>	0.9 and higher	0.953
<b>CFI</b>	0.9 and higher	0.917
<b>PRATIO</b>	0.5 and higher	0.507
<b>PNFI</b>	0.5 and higher	0.672
<b>PCFI</b>	0.5 and higher	0.551
<b>RMSEA</b>	lower than 0.08	0.034

The results of the above indices show that structural models have suitable fit. Therefore, based on a verified structural model, research hypotheses are evaluated at an efficient level of 99%.



Table 5. The table of hypotheses results

Sub-hypothesis	Relationship	Standardized coefficient	Critical Ratio CR	Significance level	The result of the hypothesis
H1	Utilitarian values → Participation in virtual brand communities	0.55	6.79	0.001	Confirmed
H2	Getting information about the brand content → Participation in virtual brand communities	0.65	7.76	0.001	Confirmed
H3	Personal factors → Participation in virtual brand communities	0.42	5.46	0.001	Confirmed
H4	Brand fitting and its products with tastes and needs of consumers → Participation in virtual brand communities	0.49	6.13	0.001	Confirmed
H5	The importance level of the product → Participation in virtual brand communities	0.54	6.64	0.001	Confirmed
H6	Confirmation of reference group → Participation in virtual brand communities	0.60	7.26	0.001	Confirmed
H7	Social interaction → Participation in virtual brand communities	0.48	6.07	0.001	Confirmed
H8	symbolic brand function → Participation in virtual brand communities	0.62	7.42	0.001	Confirmed
H9	Brand Identification → Participation in virtual brand communities	0.57	6.94	0.001	Confirmed
H10	Brand Authenticity → Participation in virtual brand communities	0.53	6.76	0.001	Confirmed
H11	Participation in social brand communities of reference groups → Customer relationship with product, brand, company, and others	0.59	7.06	0.001	Confirmed
H12	Participation in brand communities → Signs of Brand Communities	0.65	7.58	0.001	Confirmed
H13	Customer relationship → Brand relationship quality	0.60	7.08	0.001	Confirmed
H14	Brand Community markers → use brand	0.55	6.85	0.001	Confirmed

<b>H15</b>	Brand Community markers	→	Impression management	0.63	7.47	0.001	Confirmed
<b>H16</b>	Brand relationship quality	→	Brand trust	0.67	7.94	0.001	Confirmed
<b>H17</b>	Brand relationship quality	→	Brand recommendation	0.66	7.86	0.001	Confirmed
<b>H18</b>	Brand relationship quality	→	Brand loyalty	0.65	6.94	0.001	Confirmed

**Hypothesis 1:** In this hypothesis, "utilitarian values" have a positive and significant impact on "participation in brand virtual communities." motivations consist of four dimensions of information, rewards and learning, and time-saving which the word of the usefulness was obtained from the study of Babin et al. (1994), that includes easy access, time-saving and online shopping. This research refers to factors that benefit the person and make the work easier for him. In the present study, each of the four dimensions is illustrated in the interactive behavior of consumers with brand pages in the Instagram. In previous researches, information (eg, Kaye, 2007; Valenzuela et al., 2009; Riding & Gefen, 2004; Sangwan, 2005), rewards (eg, Hars & Ou, 2002; Muntinga et al., 2011; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2003) and learning (Xie, 2015) were introduced as the main factors in the use of social media. In this paper, a new functional issue was identified as "time-saving" which is one of the motivations for interacting with the brand pages of Instagram. Many respondents acknowledged that one of the reasons for joining the online brand communities at Instagram was time-saving because they believed that the information that they get about the products in this way would make it easier to make decisions and also make buying faster.

**Hypothesis 2:** In this hypothesis, it was stated that "obtaining information about brand content" has a positive and significant effect on "participation in the virtual brand community". Many studies, including those conducted by Orslott and Schroeder (2008), have emphasized that customers may become members of brand communities because they want to ensure the quality of products or services that have important features, such as items. Expensive like a car. Acquiring information about brand contents refers to those factors that lead to better knowledge of the brand. For example, including: information about brand products, information about brand news, information about prices, research, etc. Previous research has identified information as one of the motivations for joining social media (Kaye, 2007; Valenzuela et al., 2009; Riding & Gefen, 2004; Sangwan, 2005). Managers of brand communities should focus more on the quality of published information (relevance, timeliness, repetition and continuity) in the community, as it can have a huge impact on customer buying behavior (adjei and nobel 2010). Brand virtual communities provide an opportunity to search, connect and share with other like-minded people. Therefore, the level of consumer engagement with the product; Increases or decreases his participation and interaction with the brand's virtual community (Bagozi and Dolakia, 2002). The results of this study in line with previous research confirm the effect of this factor on participation in virtual communities of the brand.

**Hypothesis 3:** According to this hypothesis, "personal factors" have a positive and significant impact on "participation in the virtual brand community".

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This is consistent with Quan Xie (2015) and Muntinga (2011). Personal factors mean factors that are important to the individual and are somehow the inner motive for the individual that may vary from person to person. The study identified three subsets for personal factors that include entertainment, inspiration, and reminder of good memories. Existing literature has shown that entertainment is one of the main motivations for using social media (e.g., Courtois, Merchant, De Marez, & Verley, 2009; Sangwan, 2005; Shao, 2000).

**Hypothesis 4:** According to this hypothesis, "matching the brand and its products with the needs and tastes of consumers" has a positive and significant effect on "participation in the virtual brand community." Sadeghi studies (1396) showed that the reasons for people's participation in brand communities can be because the products meet their needs (for example: high quality, professionalism of the product, maintaining health, price diversity and brand experience). It solves and is in accordance with the tastes (for example: up-to-date, simplicity of appearance and having different and special products) of consumers. These results are consistent with the findings of Dehdashti Shahrokh et al. (2015).

**Hypothesis 5:** In this hypothesis, it was stated that "product importance" has a positive and significant effect on "participation in the virtual brand community". According to Sadeghi (2017), the importance of the product is one of the subsets of brand-related factors. The results show that customers are more obsessed with information than products that are more important to them, and therefore more inclined to participate in brand communities. Research literature also shows that when people are faced with a complex product, in other words, a product that is very important to them, rely on information provided by other members of the brand's virtual community to facilitate their purchasing decision (adjei et al, 2010). The results of this section confirm the findings of other studies including Adjei (2010) and Ouwersloot & Schröder (2008).

**Hypothesis 6:** According to this hypothesis, "reference group approval" has a positive and significant effect on "participation in the virtual brand community". The approval of the reference group has two sub-categories (approval by celebrities, approval by experts). A group of interviewees in Sadeghi study (1396) believed that the approval of this group of people in the community avoids uncertainty and by influencing their attitude, it directs their behavior and increases their willingness to participate in the brand's virtual communities. Another group also acknowledged that they know that their favorite brand is used and endorsed by this group. They are different from the rest. In other words, one of their motivations for participating in brand communities was to be like their target group and to behave similarly to them because they believed it would give them confidence. (2008), Schau (2009) and Muntinga (2011).

**Hypothesis 7:** According to this hypothesis, "social interaction" has a positive and significant effect on "participation in the virtual brand community". Research findings in this section with several studies including Casalo (2008) research; Dholaki (2004) and Muniz & Oguin (2001) agree. Based on the findings, it was found that consumers join brand communities for reasons such as exchanging information with other people in the brand community, recommending their friends and getting help from other members regarding the brand and products.

**Hypothesis 8:** According to this hypothesis, "symbolic function of the brand" has a positive and significant effect on "participation in the virtual brand community". This result is consistent with the findings of several studies, including the study of Ouwersloot & Schröder (2008), which stated that one of the main motivations of participants in brand communities was the symbolic function of the brand. The results of in-depth interviews with Sadeghi et al. (2017), for the symbolic function of the brand, which is one of the subsets of brand-related factors. 3

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sub-categories (brand specificity, brand popularity, positive mentality to the brand) were conceived. Respondents believed that one of the reasons they chose a brand was because they thought it was a special brand or because it was famous. In other words, they were more likely to accept well-known brands.

**Hypothesis 9:** In this hypothesis, it was stated that "brand identification" has a positive and significant effect on "participation in the virtual brand community". This result is identified by previous research findings such as Algesheimer (2005) With brands and their communities, it has a positive effect on participation in brand communities, is consistent and consistent.

**Hypothesis 10:** In this hypothesis, it was stated that "brand originality" has a positive and significant effect on "participation in the virtual brand community". These results are consistent with the findings of Habibi et al (2016). Brand originality is a unique variable that was identified in this study as one of the subsets of brand-related factors. The results of in-depth interviews in Sadeghi (2017) research show that consumers feel better and have more confidence than older brands. The meaning of brand originality in our qualitative study is the historical antiquity of the brand and its history. Our research shows that people feel better about older brands than newcomers. Of course, the role of product quality should not be overlooked. In other words, they are more inclined to old well-known brands than newer brands. Some respondents named this factor as one of the motivations for their participation in brand communities.

**Hypothesis 11:** In this hypothesis, it was stated that "participation in brand communities" has a positive and significant effect on "customer relationship with the product, brand, company and other customers." According to the regression coefficient output, the effect of "participation in brand communities" on "customer relationship with product, brand, company and other customers" is equal to 0.59, which indicates a positive and significant effect of this variable. The results showed that people believed that When they became members of the brand community and actively participated in it, their relationship with the product and brand improved by increasing their knowledge about the brand and its products. A number of respondents also stated that the company answers their questions in a timely manner and supports They offer good and appreciated the company in this regard. On the other hand, some others emphasized on improving their relationship with other members of the community (Sadeghi, 1396).

**Hypothesis 12:** In this hypothesis, it was stated that "participation in brand communities" has a positive and significant effect with "signs of brand communities". This result is consistent with the findings of Habibi et al (2016). Rejection of people with active participation in brand communities feel more intimacy with members of the brand community, which makes them feel more responsible and belonging to the community, so people consider themselves members of that community and in return They try harder to help and guide other members.

**Hypothesis 13:** In this hypothesis, it was stated that "customer relationship with product, brand, company and other customers" has a positive and significant effect on "brand relationship quality". This result is consistent with the results of research by Algesheimer (2005) and Schau (2009).

**Hypothesis 14:** In this hypothesis, it was stated that "signs of brand communities" have a positive and significant effect on "how to use the brand". The results of this part of the study are consistent with the findings of Habibi et al (2016) and Algesheimer (2005).

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**Hypothesis 15:** In this hypothesis, it was stated that "signs of brand communities" have a positive and significant effect on "emotion management". The results of this part of the study are consistent with the findings of Habibi et al (2014) and Schau (2009).

**Hypothesis 16:** In this hypothesis, it was stated that "brand relationship quality" has a positive and significant effect on "brand trust". The results of this part of the research are consistent with the results of Algshmir (2005) and Habibi (2016).

**Hypothesis 17:** In this hypothesis, it was stated that "brand relationship quality" has a positive and significant effect on "brand recommendation". This result is consistent with the findings of previous research such as Rapp (2013) and Seeto & Ho (2014).

**Hypothesis 18:** In this hypothesis, it was stated that "brand relationship quality" has a positive and significant effect on "brand loyalty". This result is consistent with the findings of previous research such as Habibi (2016) and Rapp (2013).

## Discussion

In this study, we examined the model of Iranian consumer behavior of brand communities in social media. The conceptual framework obtained from this study is unique and shows what factors affect the consumer behavior of brand communities and the relationship between marketing variables such as the quality of the brand relationship, customer relationship with the product-brand-other customers-company, signs what are brand communities and how to create value? It also shows how participation in brand communities through the legal network leads to brand loyalty, brand trust and brand recommendation. These findings provide useful insights into marketing activities in the social media environment to marketing managers and business owners, especially in Iran. In this research, the hypotheses were supported using structural equations. Our findings contribute to the success of brand communities. According to the model, the first step to success is to strive for greater consumer participation in brand communities, so we need to focus on the factors that influence consumer behavior. According to the model output and our findings, companies should make more efforts to attract customers to brand communities and maintain them. In this regard, our results indicate that gaining knowledge of brand content ranks first among the factors affecting brand participation, it is recommended that marketing managers pay special attention to it and design brand pages and content in such a way that consumers can have access to all the information you need about the brand and its products. Another factor influencing participation in brand communities is utilitarian values that need to be addressed and provide easier access and convenience for consumers in virtual brand communities. Another factor is brand identification, which means that consumers choose a brand that gives them confidence, to be able to express themselves and see themselves as different from others. Based on the findings, quality is a very important factor in selection. In other words, quality is an integral part of decisions related to a brand. Findings indicate that participation in brand communities should be encouraged as this factor strengthens the signs of brand communities. By participating in brand communities, people feel a sense of belonging to a particular community where they can share and exchange experiences. Also, participating in brand communities leads to the formation of a customer relationship with the product-brand-company and others. Becomes customers. In this study, the relationship between consumers and the company improved with the membership of individuals in brand communities. According to the results of Sadeghi (2017) qualitative research, it was found that some people appreciate the company and answer their questions under the posts. They are better than the company and stated that their relationship with the company has improved. Of

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course, for some people, participating in brand communities is just to be informed about the news related to that brand, and they do not feel a sense of belonging and loyalty to that community, which these people are usually considered passive members. The question is how Turn passive people in these communities into active members, which could be the subject of future research.

Our results, similar to the research of Algshmir et al. (2005) show that the quality of brand relationship has a positive relationship with brand loyalty. Also, a positive and significant relationship between brand quality and brand recommendation and brand trust was identified in this study. They argued that the better the quality of the brand relationship, the more consumers enjoy the brand and the more willing they are to repurchase the brand and its products. They are also more eager to recommend the brand and share their positive experiences with others.

We found results on the positive effect of brand community signs on value creation practices that ultimately lead to increased brand quality, which proves the pattern obtained from Sadeghi (2017) qualitative research. Thus, the results show that people find a sense of compassion and responsibility for each other because they feel they are part of a society in which everyone is alike and have in common, so they like others. Share in the joy of using the product. Especially for those who are new to the brand community, older people tend to explain how to use products optimally. Also in relation to perception management, they tend to inform people about their satisfaction with a product by publishing good news and somehow encourage others to buy that product so that they can enjoy it as well. In general, the results of our research prove the accuracy of the model obtained from Sadeghi (1396) qualitative research method and our results are completely consistent with its findings. Also, our study in line with the research of Fournier & Avery (2011), Habibi et al (2016) ) Points out that social media activities are not harmful to brands, but can strengthen the brand, and there are many benefits to investing in social media marketing. Therefore, we advise marketing managers and business owners to increase their loyal customers and improve their business by facilitating brand communities on social media and predicting consumer behavior in this environment. .

### Suggestions and future research

In Iran, a particular brand society has not been formed as it should be, and even if it has been formed, it has lost its cohesion after a while. The question that arises is what factors have shaped the foundations of a brand society in a country like Iran? It makes it stronger and more durable, which could be the subject of future research. Another issue that arises is how passive people in brand communities can be turned into active members, which could also be the subject of future research.

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