

## The Effect of Brand Commitment on e-WOM and Brand Image in the Mobile Market

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**Abstract:** The popularity of online communication and electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM) has become important in e-Commerce. Therefore, this study aim to understand how brand commitment influence brand image as well as moderate effect of electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM) on brand image in the mobile market. Questionnaires were designed to measure variables of the apple brand. The samples were selected randomly. Also, SPSS and Amos Software were used to analyze data and test hypotheses. The study found that brand commitment affects e-WOM and e-WOM is one of the most effective factors influencing brand image in the mobile market. While this study outlines ways to effectively promote a brand through brand commitment, there is a substantial research stream that examines branding of consumers goods and an increasing literature on product brands, little is known about brand image in the context of online communications.

**Key words:** Brand, brand commitment, brand image, electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM), mobile

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### INTRODUCTION

Today, many products of one category are not significantly different from each other but it is brands which cause important distinctions and the preference for one product over the other. These differences are so important that nowadays many market leaders view their brand as a means to create competitive advantages. Although, brands are given meaning by a product, they are not products themselves. Brand is the product's meaning (Kapferer, 1992). The American marketing association defines a brand as a name, word or phrase, mark, sign, symbol, design or a combination of them its purpose is to introduce a product or service which a seller or group of sellers offer in order to distinguish them from the products of competing firms. In fact, a brand represents a seller or manufacturer's product (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010).

Meanwhile, over these past few decades, the penetration of internet technology and telecommunication devices enhancement has successfully made a significant alteration both for the social and the cultural of the community (Purnasari and Yuliando, 2015). It will be an advantage for marketing managers to realize this social phenomenon and to build an effective movement towards their customers since, there are a lot of evidences that

marketers are able to gain a sales leverage from their customer in this era through Word-of-Mouth (WOM) (Chevailier and Mayzlin, 2006; Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006). WOM is suggested to have a significant role more than any other source in influencing consumers' perception of a firm and product (Allsop *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, one of the most important duties of a brand manager is to create a favorable image of the brand. Brand image is a feeling about a brand as the brand associations are reflected in consumer's memory (Keller, 1993). In addition, brand image may be improved through the word-of-mouth. The literature acknowledges that the negative effects of word-of-mouth also are (Purnasari and Yuliando, 2015). This study has evaluated the effect of brand extension strategies upon brand image in the mobile market.

### A review of the theoretical literature

**Brand commitment:** Determining a name and ID for a product is an important process which is considered when designing a product's strategies. Manufacturing companies eventually come to know that their brand is a power source obtained from the market. The American marketing association defines a brand as a name, word or phrase, mark, sign, symbol, design or a combination of them its purpose is to introduce a product or service

which a seller or group of sellers offer in order to distinguish them from the products of competing firms (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010). The degree of loyalty and commitment that consumers have for a given brand in that they are likely to re-purchase the offering in the future. As a brand metric this indicates the degree to which a brand's customer base is protected from competitors.

Brand commitment is a comprehensive and flexible tool that very simply measures the psychological links between customers/users and brand, product or service. This model allows us to estimate the possible brand potential and to predict the risk of leaving to other brands. Brand commitment has been shown to play a critical role in determining resistance to various actions such as brand transgressions and outside attacks on the brand. The more committed an individual is toward a brand, the more likely they will resist information that attacks that brand. When faced with negative information regarding a brand, consumers committed to the brand counter-argued negative information about the brand (Ahluwalia *et al.*, 2000).

**e-WOM:** With the rapid growth of the internet, electronic communication has become a critical phenomenon. According to Buttle, computer-mediated communication such as blogs, message boards and emails can also be included in the definition. Following the notion, Hennig-Thurau described electronic word of mouth as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual or former customers about a product or company which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the internet". Comparing with WOM, Bickart and Schindler showed that e-WOM may have higher credibility, empathy and relevance to customers than marketer-created sources of information on the web because it is perceived to provide comparatively reliable information (Gruen *et al.*, 2006).

Product reviews that consumers post on the internet constitute one of the most important forms of online WOM communication and for consumers it is increasingly common to look for online product reviews when gathering pre-purchase product information and forming purchase intentions. Furthermore, the issue of branding has been deemed as primary capital for many industries. Strong brands can increase customers' trust in the product or service purchased and enabling them to better visualize and understand intangible factors. According to Yoo and Donthu (2001), brand image can influence a company's future profits and long-term cash flow, a consumer's willingness to pay premium prices,

merger and acquisition decision making, stock prices, sustainable competitive advantage and marketing success.

**Brand image:** Brand image is a simple perceptual phenomenon which is influenced by the company's activities. Professor Kevin Keller, a leading scholar and theorist in the field of brand management, defines brand image as the consumer's perception of brand which is reflected in memory by the current brand associations. A positive brand image reduces the consumer's perceived risk about the brand and increases the level of consumer's satisfaction and loyalty. Similarly, a brand which has a good image in the consumer's mind will facilitate the process of determining the product's line because a strong and positive brand image is easier to be carved in the consumer's mind. In fact, a brand value is obtained from a general brand image which is perceived by individual consumer through associations (Michell *et al.*, 2001). Therefore, insistence on a positive image based on core values and other values which distinguish one brand should be a top priority for any company (Han and Sung, 2008; Aaker, 1997).

Brand image can be defined as consumer's thoughts and feelings about the brand (Roy and Banerjee, 2008). According to Hsieh and Li, strong brand image does create a superior brand message of a particular brand over the rivalry brand. Consequently, customer's behavior will be affected and determined by brand image (Burmam *et al.*, 2008). Consumers employ a product's brand image in deriving overall perceptions of the specified product, a product with higher brand image may be inferred by consumers as product of superior quality and value (Richardson *et al.*, 1994). Furthermore, Jacoby conduct an experiment research and have discovered that consumers' perception of quality and value are significantly affected by brand image (Severi and Ling, 2013). According to the theoretical literature, the hypotheses of this research are:

- H<sub>1</sub>: brand commitment has a significant impact on electronic word of mouth in the mobile market
- H<sub>2</sub>: electronic word of mouth has a significant impact on brand image in the mobile market

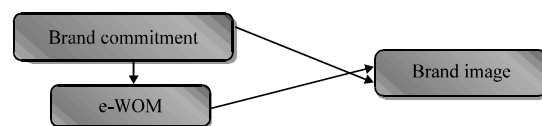


Fig. 1: Research conceptual model

- H<sub>3</sub>: brand commitment has a significant impact on brand image in the mobile market (Appendix 1)

Considering available theoretical literature in the study and mentioned hypotheses, the conceptual model of this research is shown in Fig. 1.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The study in term of objectives is applied and methods for data collection are descriptive survey.

**Research population and sample:** The population of this research is buyers of mobile phones in Aladdin Mobile Shop Centre. In this study, random sampling is used. The number of samples required is determined by the number of samples required structural equations. In the above formula, the sample size should be between 5 and 15 times the number of items in the questionnaire, the 14 questions are based on 210 questionnaires were distributed and analyzed has been chosen.

**Research variables measurement:** The questionnaire used in this study has two parts. The first part included demographic variables and the second part was devoted to measure the variables in this study. Grading scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree questions on a score from 1-5 were prepared. The content validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by experts and professors. Cronbach’s alpha was used to determine the reliability of the test. Cronbach’s alpha for all questions relating to the

variables in the analytical model to study 0.92% were found to have acceptable levels. In Table 1, Cronbach’s alpha for each of the variables of the study.

**Analytical findings of the research conceptual model**

**Results of confirmatory factor analysis:** The first step is to fit the measured patterns. The fit parameters are given in Table 2 patterns.

Measurement model fit well and in a way that confirms the overall index and the data clearly support that pattern. The factor loadings were all >0.3 and a significance level of 0.000, respectively. Structural equation modeling analysis to evaluate the measurement and verification of the model in the first step, the second step is to test the hypotheses; structural equation modeling analysis is fitting. The overall model parameters are presented in Table 3.

Table 1: Variable’s mean

Variables	No.	Cronbach’s alpha
Brand commitment	5	0.90
Electronic word of mouth	6	0.93
Brand image	3	0.88

Table 2: Indices of overall fit of the measurement model

Variables indicators	Brand commitment	Electronic word of mouth	Brand image
CMIN/DF	1.98	1.120	-
RMR	0.05	0.008	0.000
GFI	0.95	0.970	1.000
AGFI	0.92	0.930	-
IFI	0.97	0.980	-
NFI	0.98	0.970	1.000
CFI	0.97	0.980	1.000

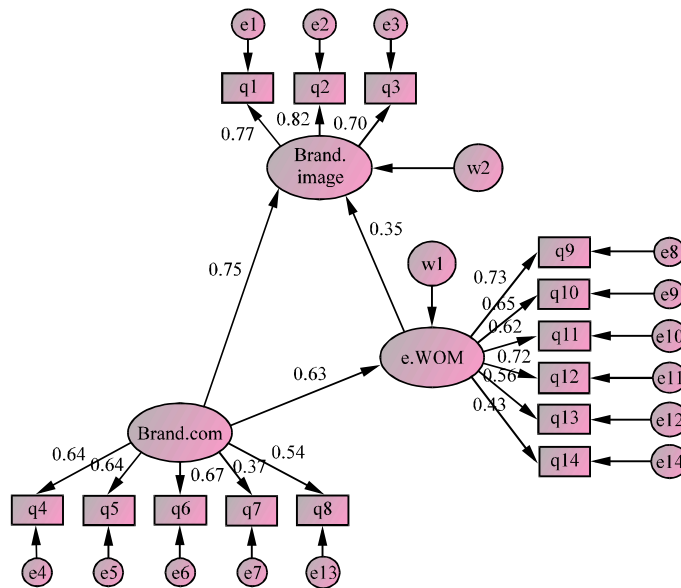


Fig. 2: Structural equation modeling

Table 3: Indices fitness model

Models	CMIN/DF	RMSEA	GFI	NFI	CFI	IFI	RMR
Basic model	1.10	0.009	0.94	0.95	0.97	0.97	0.003
Reception area	1-3	<0.080	>0.90	>0.90	>0.90	>0.90	0.000

Table 4: Hypothesis test results

Test	Correlation coefficient	Significant No.	Sample	No.
Verification	0.63	0.000	210	1
Verification	0.35	0.000	210	2
Verification	0.75	0.000	210	3

**The results of structural equation modeling analysis:** Information presented in Table 3, the results are as follows: Amos output results in the standard model prediction shows that the path analysis model is an appropriate model. Chi-square value between 1 and 3 is normal. GFI and AGFI and NFI indices and the value of all the CFI and IFI are above 90%. Finally, the RMSEA and RMR are close to zero. The values of fit indices for all models in the reception area are these indices showed a good fit to the data model and the data collected by the data as well as the patterns are supported. Hypotheses with partial regression coefficients and the values of the parameters associated with each hypothesis are presented in Table 4 and Fig. 2.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Research findings:** As it is perceived from the results in Table 4, it can be concluded that brand commitment in any condition has affected brand image. Also, the following results were obtained through testing hypotheses:

- H<sub>1</sub>: brand commitment has a significant impact on electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM) in the mobile market

Based on testing research hypotheses and the sig. of this relationship which is <0.05, it can be said that brand commitment with a certainty of 95 %, positively influences Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM) in the mobile market. As expected with a more favorable brand commitment, Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM) is increased because commitment leads to many cooperative behaviors among marketers and buyers in regard to maintain the relationship. Thus, a strongly committed consumer of a brand because of defense motivation is more likely to resist information that attacks or undermines the meaning of the brand. This counter argumentation occurs to protect one’s brand which defines their self-image. This research’s result is in line with the results by Ratneshwar and Chaiken (1991) and Koslow (2000):

- H<sub>2</sub>: electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM) has a significant impact on brand image in the mobile market

Based on testing research hypotheses and the sig. of this relationship which is <0.05, it can be said that electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM) with a certainty of 95%, positively influences brand image in the mobile market. According to a study conducted in past “brand image can influence the profits earned by any company by impacting its cash flows; an impressive brand image can also make consumer pay premium price.” The importance of this study in brand image is formed on basis of consumption of any that service or past experiences of such consumption and intangible factors as after sales service can’t be availed before any consumption, thus, this whole process involves risk of purchasing service and experiencing it. That’s why consumers nowadays are more leaned towards influences from e-WOM to gain an insight of experience shared by other consumers of same service. This research’s result is in line with the results by Lewis and Chambers (1999), Yoo and Donthu (2001), Litvin *et al.* (2008) and Charo *et al.* (2015).

- H<sub>3</sub>: brand commitment has a significant impact on brand image in the mobile market

Based on testing research hypotheses and the sig. of this relationship which is <0.05, it can be said that brand commitment with 95% of certainty, positively influence brand image in the mobile market. In fact, when there is a strong current brand commitment, brand image will be more favorable. Brand commitment has been shown to play a critical role in determining resistance to various actions such as brand image and outside attacks on the brand. The more committed an individual is toward a brand, the more likely they will resist information that attacks that brand. This research’s result is in line with the results by Ahluwalia *et al.* (2000) and Salinas and Pinaperez (2009).

**Theoretical implications:** Indue respect, longitudinal studies which continually measure the same sample units of population over a period of time is recommended to be used in the future research. Furthermore, in terms of restriction of generalization, it would be suggested to use probability sampling technique in the future study for the reason of improving and enhancing the validity and generalization of these research findings.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to analyze the effects of e-WOM on brand image for more brands and in other product categories because e-WOM may have a particularly important influence on consumers' perceptions of products/services that have high credence qualities.

Finally, it would be useful to test constructed model of this study for exploring the antecedents to brand image. It would provide guidance form an agers who want to strengthen their products' brands.

**Managerial implications:** In this study, the effect of brand commitment on e-WOM and brand image has been the subject of discussion. According to the results of this study, we believe this research makes several contributions to brand commitment and brand management literature as well as to the practices of brand managers. These findings have substantial implications for brand managers. Specifically, brand managers should recognize that their committed customers may have the strongest reaction to e-WOM and it is a positive response. To avoid alienating committed customers brand managers should consider the response of their customers.

Also, marketers could develop appropriate communication tools to make consumers more knowledgeable about specific brand characteristics and try to change some of the negative associations that consumers have about the brand or the product through e-WOM. It is important to say that positive WOM and e-WOM play an important role in creating a favorable image of the company and its brand and reducing promotional expenditures.

**CONCLUSION**

This study extends existing measurement of brand image to a new setting, namely e-WOM. This study provides valuable insight into the measurement of brand commitment, e-WOM and brand image in the mobile market and offers a foundation for future product branding research.

**LIMITATIONS**

This research examined the effects of brand commitment upon e-WOM and brand image; however, there are still some limitations:

- This study was conducted in Iran, Isfahan and among consumers of mobile market. Thus, these results to other countries and provinces are limited because different cultures may lead to different results
- Another limitation is related to the variables used in the study. Although, other variables can also be effective on brand image, in this study only some variables such as brand commitment and electronic word of mouth were evaluated
- As a result, this study has not considered all the variables existed in brand image that this issue influences research's results. Future, researchers should investigate real market conditions to find whether validated relationships still remain under the effect of other variables. Also, this study can be applied to other countries and provinces with different cultures

**APPENDIX**

**Appendix: Measurement scales**

Scales	Description	References
<b>e-WOM</b>		
e-WOM 1	I often read other consumers' online product reviews to know what products/brands make good impressions on others	Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold (2011)
e-WOM 2	To make sure I buy the right product/brand, I often read other consumers' online product reviews	
e-WOM 3	I often consult other consumers' online product reviews to help choose the right product/brand	
e-WOM 4	I frequently gather information from online consumers' product reviews before I buy a certain product/brand	
e-WOM 5	If I don't read consumers' online product reviews when I buy a product/brand, I worry about my decision	
e-WOM 6	When I buy a product/brand, consumers' online product reviews make me confident in purchasing the product/brand	
<b>Brand image</b>		
BI 1	In comparison to other products/brand, this product/brand has high quality	Davis <i>et al.</i> (2009)
BI 2	This product/brand has a rich history	
BI 3	Customers (we) can reliably predict how this product/brand will perform	
<b>Brand commitment</b>		
BC 1	I'm willing to put a great deal of effort, beyond what is expected to help the success of this brand	Kimpakorn and Tocquer (2009)
BC 2	I'm proud to tell others that this is a great brand to be part of	
BC 3	For me this is the best of all possible brands to be part of	
BC 4	I regret I chose to work for this brand over others considering	
BC 5	It would take very little to cause me to leave this brand	

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