How to Make Loyal Fans in Virtual Communities: Evidence from the Facebook Fan Pages of Smartphones

Li-Chun Hsu

National Taitung University, Department of Cultural Resources and Leisure Industries, Taitung, Taiwan, R.O.C.,
lchsu@nttu.edu.tw

Abstract

This study targeted community members who have purchased smartphone and have joined the official brand fan pages of the smartphone brands for at least six months. A total of 681 valid samples were collected. Structural equation modeling was employed to conduct path analyses, and the results show that the 7 hypothetical paths proposed in this study are supported by the theoretical model, which exhibited desirable goodness of fit. In the mediation effect, brand passions partially mediate exogenous factors and brand loyalty. This study is aimed at increasing understanding of how a firm that possesses a cluster of fans who actively protect its brand maintain a strong brand relationship with its brand fans through brand community.

Keywords: Facebook fan pages of smartphone, Brand self-expression and uniqueness, Hedonic products, Brand passion, Brand loyalty

1   Introduction

According to the Statista [129], a Taiwan-based think tank on information and communication technology, the number of online users worldwide was approximately 2 billion and, if it continues to grow, will have reached 2.62 billion by 2018. Social Media Examiner [128], a U.S. media firm, reported that the world's most popular social media platform was Facebook (93%), followed by Twitter (79%). In 2012 and 2013, eMarketer (a market research firm) surveyed branded firms about the social media platforms they use and determined that 90% of them conducted marketing activities on Facebook. Moreover, the 2015 Social Media Marketing Industry Report suggested that 96% of the market specialists surveyed conducted marketing through social media, and 92% stressed the importance of social media to businesses [128]. SNSs are online platforms where consumers with common interests, backgrounds, or lifestyles can develop interpersonal relationships [143]. In addition, the function of online social networks (OSN) has evolved in the past few years, resulting in new opportunities for marketers to generate brand awareness among consumers [21], [69]. Branded firms, such as Starbucks, HTC, ASUS, and Mini Cooper, have created fan groups on Facebook to launch marketing campaigns and maintain long-lasting consumer-brand relationships with their fans.

Clearly, online communities offer multiple functions and benefits. Their widespread use in marketing has shifted to brand management. Brand communities and Facebook fan groups are intended to develop and maintain consumer-brand relationships, attract potential consumers, generate word-of-mouth (WOM) referrals through interaction between members, and even translate favorable consumer perceptions into purchases and fan loyalty. In summary, how branded firms can use SNSs to build a solid relationship with consumers, spread WOM, and create a loyal fan base has become a trending topic in the field of brand marketing.

In the past, few studies on consumer-brand relationships have discussed the construction of the models of brand passion; one reason for this literature gap is the lack of consumer-brand relationship paradigms [53]. Moreover, how branded firms establish stable relationships with consumers has become an increasingly prominent topic because marketing scholars argued for the emotional attachment of consumers to brands [68].This study reviewed studies and detailed their limitations as follows.

First, brand passion is a crucial variable of the strength of consumer-brand relationships in the field of brand marketing [110]. In research context for consideration, numerous studies have examined passion in the context of organizations [33], [112], Internet use, and online games [138], [145]. Some recent studies have suggested that brand passion is crucial to SNS development [66].

In research variable for consideration, previous studies on brand marketing have focused predominantly on brand trust [17], brand commitment [55], brand attachment [106], and brand love [35], although a few have discussed brand passion [110]. In comparison to brand commitment and brand love, brand passion pertains more closely to fervor about a brand and encompasses stronger emotions and feelings toward it [10]. Therefore, the literature does not solve these research gap.

A second limitation of the relevant studies is that although they have analyzed the antecedents of brand passion from a single perspective, few have done so from multiple perspectives [11], [134]. However, some researchers have elucidated the concept of brand passion and explored the relationship between brand passion and brand characteristics (e.g., brand reputation and brand uniqueness; [23]). Albert *et al.* [11] shed new light on brand passion, constructing a model of the antecedents and outcomes of brand passion-although the model was based on brand characteristics and provided a limited understanding of the different factors affecting brand passion. To fill the aforementioned literature gap, the present study determined which of the three different factors-brand self-expression [134], brand uniqueness [8], and hedonic products [71]-was a crucial antecedent of emotional attachment to brands and affected brand loyalty.

This study focused on how consumers develop passion for a brand and how further brand loyalty that results in favorable behavioral consequences can be generated. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions: How can brand self-expression, brand uniqueness, and products with hedonic value be approached through dual brand passion (harmonious passion versus obsessive passion)? To what extent does induced dual brand passion toward a brand fan page increase the positivity of a consumer's perception of the various behavioral consequences of brand loyalty? What is the mechanism by which dual brand passion fostered by brand fan pages affects brand loyalty? Does brand-relationship quality exhibit a mediating effect between brand self-expression, brand uniqueness, and products with hedonic value on brand loyalty? Given the aforementioned questions, this study strove to (a) examine the antecedents of brand passion; (b) analyze the outcomes of brand passion; and (c) explore brand self-expression, brand uniqueness, and products with hedonic value and compare the mediating effects and explanatory power of harmonious and obsessive brand passion.

2   Literature Review

This section discusses the theoretical basis and development of the concept of passion, the antecedents and outcomes of brand passion.

2.1   Theoretical Basis and Development of the Concept of Passion

The concept of passion has long been a topic of interest among Western philosophers. The term *passion* is etymologically from the Latin *passion*, which means *suffering*. Viewed in a negative light, passion enslaves individuals; put in a positive light, it engrosses people in their pursuits [134]. Philosophers argue that an individual without passion lives a rudderless life [41]. Thus, passion is an inherent human experience and a motive for participation in meaningful activities [41].

The present study charted the development of the concept of passion from psychological and sociological perspectives, drawing on the triangular theory of love [131], self-determination theory [142], and brand identity theory [134], the last of which redefines passion.

Brand passion is a critical construct derived from the triangular theory of love. The literature on consumer-brand relationships provides a foundation for the proposed model. The established Brand-relationship theories (e.g., self-determination theory and brand identity theory) all offer crucial perspectives regarding the formation of brand passion. According to the brand-passion model developed by Albert et al. [11], the self-determination and brand-identity theories used in this study are both antecedents for the creation of brand-passion. Accordingly, the theories are explained as follows:

2.1.1   The Triangular Theory of Love

In psychological research, passion is normally analyzed through Sternberg's [131] triangular theory of love. The theory states that love encompasses the components of intimacy, commitment, and passion. Passion refers to a close emotional relationship between individuals, a desire to establish a relationship with others, and a feeling stimulated by sensory attractiveness and sexual and physical arousal [110]. Sternberg [132] defined the passion component as "the drives that lead to romance, physical attraction, and sexual consummation in loving relationships" [110]. By using the triangular theory of love in the context of brand research, one can assume that a relationship similar to a human love affair may develop between a consumer and a product or brand [125]. Consumers passionate about a brand long for the brand and develop an affection for it; therefore, passion for a brand is a crucial motive for loving the brand, a major dimension of emotional attachment to the brand [136], and an integral part of brand passion [22]. In summary, passion is often discussed when it comes to love [116].

2.1.2   Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory holds that humans are predisposed to assimilate and integrate external behavioral thoughts to facilitate their decision-making [42]. To optimize their internalization, people must develop autonomy, competence, and relatedness to each other in the social environment [92]. Moreover, a person's self-identity about the activity they have passion for is subject to different internalization processes. Accordingly, Vallerand *et al.* [142] proposed a dualistic perspective of passion on the basis of self-determination theory [117], dividing passion into harmonious and obsessive types [41]. Vallerand *et al.* [142] used the triangular theory of love to define passion as "a strong tendency towards an object or activity that an individual likes and finds important, and on which he or she invests time and energy" [41]. Both harmonious and obsessive types of passion are defined as follows.

Harmonious passion grows from independently internalizing an activity into one's identity. This internalization process occurs when an individual undertakes an activity-willingly and without any contingencies attached to it-that they deem important [142]. When an individual with harmonious passion engages in an activity voluntarily and attaches importance to that activity, their preference for it does not affect their self-perception [142]. Harmonious passion has been determined to be the most decisive factor in persuading an individual to engage in an activity or accept an object [145].

Conversely, obsessive passion originates from a controlled internationalization of an activity into one's identity. Individuals with obsessive passion find themselves immersed in partaking in an activity they deem enjoyable; however, when prevented from their passionate activities, they become furious and uneasy and even unable to concentrate on other activities [145]. Moreover, because obsessive passion is outside of one's control, individuals with such a passion feel an uncontrollable urge to engage in the passionate activity with certain contingencies attached to it and experience intrapersonal pressure and interpersonal conflicts [84].

2.1.3   Brand Identity Theory

Depending on the manner in which brand identity is internalized, the concepts of harmonious and obsessive passion can be integrated into brand passion as *harmonious brand passion (HBP)* and *obsessive brand passion (OBP),* respectively [41], [134], [141]. Swimberghe *et al.* [134] employed brand identity theory to redefine passion. A consumer's identity about a brand is generally defined on the basis of social identity theory [140]. Brand identity, according to Del Rio, Vazquez, and Iglesias [43], can be further defined as personal identification or social identification [34]. Personal identification refers to identifying with and developing an emotional attachment to a given brand, whereas social identification regards a brand as a means of communication that unites individuals to build the most friendly social environment possible [43]. In summary, internalizing brand passion in an online brand community may result in not only personal but social identification with the brand.

When a consumer feels strongly about a brand, this feeling-associated with physical arousal-causes the consumer to own or purchase the brand's products and develop a deeper understanding of it and can therefore be referred to as brand passion [11]. Brand passion can also be defined as "a primarily affective, extremely positive attitude toward a given brand that leads to emotional attachment and influences relevant behavior factors" [23] or "a psychological construct comprised of excitation, infatuation, and obsession for a brand and a feeling consumers embrace" [110]. A passionate consumer tends to connect emotionally with a brand and, when that brand disappears, feel a sense of loss [11].

Brand passion comprises two components: the presence of the brand in the mind of consumers and the idealization of the brand [9], [11]. Brand passion is a strong emotional connection between a consumer and a brand that motivates the consumer to own or use the brand's products, spend their money and resources on it, and incorporate it into their self-identity [134]. As such, brand passion determines the strength of consumer-brand relationships [110] and plays a key role in the recent development and application of marketing theories.

2.2   Antecedents of Brand Passion

Three dimensions of brand passion-brand self-expression, brand uniqueness, and hedonic products are discussed in the following subsections.

2.2.1   Brand Self-Expression

Self-expression refers to the manner in which individuals articulate their beliefs, preferences, emotions, and values through concrete and tangible means to make their thoughts and feelings known and is a necessity for humans [78]. Self-expression is an element of branding, because a brand is an external signal with distinctive attributes with which its users identify [27]. Thus, in the domain of branding, self-expression can be perceived as a process in which consumers use a brand to express their self-identity and reshape their self-image [3]. Accordingly, when choosing a product of a brand, consumers determine, knowingly or unknowingly, whether this brand conforms to their ideal selves. Moreover, if consumers deem a brand appealing, the brand is likely to enable them to express themselves [76]. When a brand's attributes correspond with a consumer's personality, the consumer may perceive the brand as a person or even a key partner [76]. Robust emotional support from a brand indicates a close relationship between the self and the brand, and a consumer-brand relationship strengthens when using the brand helps achieve self-expression [105], [139].

Choosing among products and services is a form of self-expression [83]. It is, in the view of Chernev, Hamilton, and Gal [39], an act of interacting and competing with others. In addition, purchasing a brand is an act of extending the self because it allows one to achieve self-awareness and self-expression [118]. Brands enable consumers to express their real [26], ideal [4], and old selves [139].

When it comes to the motivation to purchase a brand, self-expression can be interpreted in various ways. For example, to achieve and express their desired levels of social status, consumers may engage in conspicuous consumption [39], in which they purchase a given brand to display their wealth, cultural knowledge, taste, and membership in a group they belong to [12]. Furthermore, one can consistently use a given brand to build self-worth and self-esteem. After all, brands are intended to satisfy consumers' desires [88]. Brands allow consumers to represent their self-concept [139]. Carroll and Ahuvia [35] defined brand self-expression as a process in which a brand is perceived by a consumer to improve self-worth in society and reflect the real self. Thus, consumers can use brands to develop self-concept and recognize their self-identity [27].

Consumers choose brands that are consistent with their self-concept, and, symbolically, such brands disclose what they aspire to share and conceal what they do not wish to share [46]. When consumers believe that a brand can change their self-concept, they have a strong motivation to purchase it [118]. On the basis of this rationale, many marketing studies have indicated that the symbolic meanings and self-expressive nature of brands help shape self-concept [46], [81], [119], [139].

The self-expressive nature of a brand allows consumers to enhance their self-worth, personal values, and beliefs [39] and secures the relationship between the brand and the consumers to strengthen consumer attachment to the brand [59], [105]. In addition, when a brand serves as a vehicle for self-expression, the relationship between the brand and consumers becomes closer. As such, consumers can use the brand to shape an ideal self and convey their personalities, thereby distinguishing themselves from others and satisfying their inner desires [139].

2.2.2   Brand Uniqueness

Brand uniqueness can be defined as the perception of a consumer that a given brand is unique in a manner that distinguishes itself from its competitors. If a brand is not perceived to be distinguishable from its competitors, it is not likely to command high prices [100]. However, not all brands arouse passion from consumers. Thomson *et al.* [136] showed that people tend to maintain relationships with certain brands [23]. Taylor, Hunter & Lindberg [135] suggested that brand uniqueness and brand attitude help build customer-based brand equity. Thus, uniqueness is crucial and instrumental in maintaining and enhancing a brand's performance [114].

On the basis of the concept of the need for uniqueness (NFU) [127], Tian *et al.* [137] proposed the concept of consumers' NFU, which refers to a consumer's attempt to achieve distinctiveness from others, develop self-image and personal identity through acquiring consumer goods. Consumers with a high NFU experience positive emotions when they perceive themselves having low similarity to others; however, when they perceive themselves highly similar to others, they believe that their self-image is threatened, and therefore experience negative emotions and seek to pursue differentness moderately [124]. Tian *et al.* [137] proposed three dimensions of consumption behavior to illustrate how consumers demonstrate their NFU: *creative choice counterconformity, avoidance of similarity,* or *unpopular choice counterconformity.*

Consumers who engage in creative choice counterconformity not only purchase unique products that display their individuality but also tend to be accepted by others. Those who engage in avoidance of similarity seek to achieve differentness by buying rare goods, even if these products have fallen out of vogue. Those who engage in unpopular choice counterconformity differentiate themselves by breaking their existing consumption habits and choosing products unconventionally [124]. In summary, consumers with a stronger NFU prefer products with brand uniqueness.

2.2.3   Hedonic Products

Hedonic consumption provides consumers with sensory experience and enjoyment in their interaction with products [109]. Depending on their nature, products can be primarily utilitarian or hedonic [37], [50], [109]. Hedonic products (e.g., bouquets, designer clothing, music, sports cars, luxury watches, and chocolate) create a sensory experience of pleasure, fantasy, and fun, providing more experiential consumption, fun, pleasure, and excitement; whereas utilitarian goods (e.g., microwaves, detergent, minivans, and personal computers) are instrumental and functional and help consumers accomplish a goal [44].

Because hedonic products typically trigger strong emotional reactions in consumers [23] and provide sensory enjoyment and affective experiences [37], [44], many studies on such products have suggested that consumers emphasize consumption patterns and goods that provide them with sensory experience, entertainment, and pleasure [109].

2.3   Harmonious Brand Passion (HBP) vs. Obsessive Brand Passion (OBP)

HBP and OBP are both a strong emotional attachment characterized by an individual's valuing a brand highly, desiring to own the brand, incorporating it into their self-identity, and investing in it on a long-term basis. However, a review of recent studies on the concept of passion suggested that both differ in certain aspects. For one thing, HBP regards a brand as *ancillary* to one's life, whereas OBP sees a brand as *integral* to one's life. For another, HBP is characterized by being passionate about a brand without any contingencies, whereas OBP is characterized by being passionate about a brand to gain social acceptance. In short, HBP and OBP differ in the manner in which consumers integrate a brand into their self-identity but are similar in emphasizing a brand as part of one's identity. Both play a vital role in a brand's shaping the self-identity of consumers. The respective dimensions of HBP and OBP are introduced as follows, and the similarities and differences of HBP and OBP are presented in Tables 2-1 and 2-2.

2.4   Outcomes of Brand Loyalty

Loyalty is a highly complex concept [70], and it cannot be defined in simple language. The American Marketing Association defines brand loyalty as "the situation in which a consumer generally buys the same manufacturer-originated product or service repeatedly over time rather than buying from multiple suppliers within the category" [96], [97]. Oliver [102] described brand loyalty as "a deeply held commitment to repurchase a preferred product or service consistently in the future, thereby developing a preference for a given brand and causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having potential to cause switching behavior," [62]. Aaker [1] perceived brand loyalty as a situation in which consumers purchase a preferred brand product consistently when a change is introduced in the price and product features of that brand or when other competitor brands offer products or services of higher quality and value [96]. Thus, brand loyalty can be perceived as when a

consumer is committed to repurchasing a preferred brand and does not change that commitment in any circumstances, and the consumer's positive emotions about that brand can cause repurchase intentions [51]. On the basis of these definitions of brand loyalty, this study defined brand loyalty as when a consumer becomes committed to a preferred brand and does not change that commitment in any circumstances, thereby developing a preference for that brand, and the consumer's positive emotions toward the brand can cause them to repurchase and support it. This study also proposed three outcomes of brand loyalty (brand purchase intention, brand advocacy, and willingness to pay price premiums), as detailed in the following subsections.

2.4.1   Brand Purchase Intention

Purchase intention refers to a plan or willingness to purchase a product or service [120]. It may cause consumers to make a purchase and accordingly can be used as a strong predictor of purchase behavior [120]. Purchase intention has two possible interpretations: (a) either that a consumer is willing to consider a purchase, make a future purchase, or decide on a repurchase or (b) that the extent to which the consumer is willing to purchase a given product or service [18]. Early behavioral scientists suggested that an intention encompasses a belief, emotion, and, purpose, and referred to it as the most accurate predictor of purchase behavior [107].

Studies on brand purchase intention are aimed at establishing the rationale behind the decision of purchasing a given brand. What affects the purchase intention of a brand includes attitudes toward not only that brand but also other brands that sell identical products [123]. Behavioral studies have indicated that consumers' perceptions about a product, which follow from their experience with the product, determine their future purchase intentions of it, influencing their purchase or use of it [79]. Brand purchase intention can also be defined as an individual's conscious attempt to purchase a brand [113].

2.4.2   Brand Advocacy

Christopher, Payne, and Ballantyne [40] indicated that brand advocacy is crucial to the development of firm-consumer relationships [64]. As such, if a consumer views a brand favorably, the consumer may recommend the brand to their relatives and promote it through blogs, online forums, or networking sites [87]. Moreover, brand advocacy-as characterized by consumers' support for and loyalty to a brand, willingness to recommend the brand, promote it through various means, and share their positive experiences with it and ideas about its value and benefits-is an informal form of behavior that offers no financial rewards [91]. In the domain of marketing, WOM is a means of brand advocacy [56]; consumers engaging in such form of marketing recommend or extol the product or service they are favorably disposed to [64]. WOM reviews about and loyalty to a brand can contribute to the sales of the brand [91]. One of the benefits of brand advocacy is that an individual can obtain positive information about a brand from other consumers' sharing their experiences with the brand [87]. Thus, brand advocacy is a consistent effort by a consumer to speak in favor of a brand and may occur in social settings (e.g., recommending the brand or defending it when it is criticized) and in daily life.

2.4.3   Willingness to Pay a Price Premium

A price premium refers to how much, under normal competition circumstances, the market price of a branded product is greater than those of its rivals [28]. Some consumers are willing to pay the price premiums for certain branded products that are more expensive than their competitors [14]. As such, consumers may purchase preferred brands that are more expensive than nonpreferred ones. This willingness to pay price premiums is a predictor of brand strength [2], a crucial measure of brand loyalty, and the most viable composite indicator of overall brand equity [2], [14], [100]. The price premium is also known as the *reservation price* which refers to the highest price that a consumer is willing to pay, or has ever paid, for a brand [98]. Moreover, the price premium is considered as a predictor of attitudes toward payment and, in studies that have adopted the theory of planned behavior [5], [6], [7], it is used to measure purchase behavior.

2.5   Hypothesis Development

Establishing a highly emotional consumer-brand relationship is the driving force behind marketing [53]. Brand fans can be created through the following three methods. First, when a brand adequately conveys the personalities of consumers, consumers use that brand to shape an ideal self, articulating their personality traits [139], and enhancing their self-worth, personal values, and beliefs [39]. Second, a brand should satisfy consumers' NFU because people tend to engage in consumption behavior to differentiate themselves, create a self-image, and express their uniqueness [124]. Third, products or services can be developed in a manner that produces hedonic effects. Because hedonic products provide a sensory experience of pleasure, fantasy, and joy and are therefore highly likely to connect emotionally with consumers, consumers may base their purchase decisions on the feelings triggered during their purchase of such items. In short, identifying the antecedents of brand passion from the perspectives of consumers, brands, and products may help to elucidate the emotional connection among fans, brands, and products.

2.5.1   Relationship between Brand Self-Expression and Brand Passion

Brand self-expression can be defined as a process in which a brand is perceived by a consumer to improve self-worth in society and reflect the real self [35]. A brand with self-expressive attributes strongly influences consumers' passion for it [23]. Moreover, passion for a brand occurs when that brand represents the inner self. Specifically, when

consumers perceive a brand as an extension of their self-definition, they develop a positive emotional attachment to the brand and become passionate about it [11]. Swimberghe *et al.* [134] showed that brand self-expression has significant positive effects on HBP and OBP. Accordingly, consumers who are emotionally attached to a brand strengthen their self-identification with the brand, as well as their HBP and OBP. On the basis of these arguments, H_{1a} and $_b$ are described as follows:

H1a: Brand self-expression has significant positive effects on HBP.

H1b: Brand self-expression has significant positive effects on OBP.

2.5.2   Relationship between Brand Uniqueness and Brand Passion

A brand that dominates the mind of consumers is a brand whose products and services are distinctive and competitive [86]. Such a brand is perceived by consumers to differ strikingly from its rivals [100]. Hoyer and MacInnis [63] noted that when people are emotionally attached to external things, they long to possess certain distinguishable brands to become even more unique and stand out among other members of a group [23]. Thomson *et al.* [136] suggested that people tend to develop an emotional connection to certain brands [23]. Furthermore, uniqueness is central to a brand's success and competitiveness [77], and it is also an antecedent of brand passion and a factor in consumer behavior [85]. In their analysis of the determinants of brand passion, Bauer *et al.* [23] reported that brand uniqueness exerts significant positive effects on brand passion. On the basis of these arguments, H_{2a} and $_b$ are described as follows:

H2a: Brand uniqueness has significant positive effects on HBP.

H2b: Brand uniqueness has significant positive effects on OBP.

2.5.3   Relationship between Hedonic Products and Brand Passion

Hedonic consumption provides consumers with sensory experience and enjoyment in their interaction with products [109]. Hedonic products satisfy consumer needs for sensory enjoyment and emotional experience and often induce strong emotions in consumers [23]. Because hedonic products are designed to offer pleasure, purchase motivation regarding them is predominantly emotional [126], as is satisfaction with them [149]. Caroll and Ahuvia [35] indicated that hedonic products have significantly positive effects on brand love, which is an attribute of brand passion [11], [31]. Furthermore, brand passion is a fundamental element of brand love [134]; therefore, hedonic products have significant positive effects on brand passion. This relationship has been further validated by Bauer *et al.* [23]. Indeed, hedonic products can trigger strong feelings and passion in consumers, and passion plays a role in the emotional connection among a consumer, product, and brand. On the basis of these arguments, H3a and b are described as follows:

H3a: Hedonic products has significant positive effects on HPB.

H3b: Hedonic products has significant positive effects on OPB.

2.5.4   Outcome Variables of Brand Passion and Hypothesis Development

Over the past decade or so, the dualistic model of passion has been applied in different topics of research-for example, the continuity and universality of athletes' passion for activity [142], passion for Internet use [121], passion for online games [145], passion and gambling behavior [80], and teenagers' passion for Internet activity [138]. Accordingly, consumers integrate their preferred brands into their self-identity, developing a robust emotional connection to the brand that prompts them to own or use it and expend their money and resources on it [134]. This is instrumental in forming brand loyalty.

2.5.5   Relationship between Bbrand Passion and Brand Purchase Intention

When consumers develop a preference for a brand, they become emotional and passionate about the brand [35]. This strong emotional attachment can cause consumers to repurchase the same brand and overlook others and later transforms into loyalty to the brand [35]. Consumers with brand passion are excited about, infatuated with, and mesmerized by a brand, desire to own or purchase the brand, and seek to form a closer relationship with it [110]. When consumers experience a positive emotional relationship with a brand, they may actively spread WOM reviews about the brand [45], [148] and accordingly become loyal to it [23]. Such earnest behavior associated with brand passion may ultimately morph into brand loyalty [22].

Moreover, spreading WOM reviews is a display of brand passion specific to consumers and an outcome of HBP [134]. Consumers with HBP perceived their preferred brands as part of their self-identity simply because they found the brand satisfying. With this satisfaction, consumers choose their preferred brand and disseminate their positive opinions about it to express their self-identity [15]. The more a brand and the self of a consumer are in agreement, the more likely the consumer is to react positively to the brand [134].

Swimberghe *et al.* [134] reported the significant positive effects of OBP on brand evangelism, indicating that passionate consumers are more likely to advocate their preferred brands. An advanced form of WOM marketing, brand evangelism involves efforts to convince other people to buy and use a particular brand [94], and it is also a demonstration of brand loyalty. Consumers with OBP normally embrace their preferred brands as part of their self-identity because the brands

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allow them to display socially acceptable values and self-esteem and are a focus of their daily lives [134], [142]. In addition, when such consumers fail to control their obsession with their preferred brands, they may engage in behaviors other than speaking in favor of the brands [11]. On the basis of these arguments, brand passion transforms into brand purchase intention, and HBP and OBP affect this intention positively. This conclusion leads to H4a and b:

H4a: HBP has significant positive effects on brand purchase intention.

H4b: OBP has significant positive effects on brand purchase intention.

2.5.6 Relationship between Brand Passion and Brand Advocacy

Consumers passionate about a brand are willing to share their experiences with others because of their infatuation with or excitement about it [11], [94]. In particular, consumers who advocate for the value of their preferred brands and contribute to the reputation of the brands are likely to spread favorable WOM about them [11], [72]. WOM is a form of brand advocacy [56]; it indicates the willingness of consumers to recommend or applaud a product or service they value highly [64], [72]. Brand passion determines the strength of consumer-brand relationships [53], [110], [134] because when the relationship between a consumer and a brand develops positively, the consumer may come to support the brand [73], [74] and become more willing to purchase and advocate it [55]. In addition, brand passion may lead to brand advocacy, contributing to the sales of brands being supported or the profits of companies that own the brands [110], [133]. Consumers with HBP tend to spread WOM about their preferred brands [134], whereas those with OBP typically embrace their preferred brands as an integral part of their daily lives [142] and spread WOM about the brands and engage in other forms of behavior intended to support them, such as advocacy [110]. On the basis of these arguments, brand passion has significantly positive effects on brand advocacy [110]. As such, both the harmonious and obsessive dimensions of brand passion have significantly positive effects on brand advocacy, as detailed respectively in H5a and b:

H5a: HBP has significant positive effects on brand advocacy.

H5b: OBP has significant positive effects on brand advocacy.

2.5.7 Relationships between Brand Passion and Willingness to Pay a Price Premium

Brand passion has been determined to exert significant positive effects on the willingness to pay price premiums [136]. For example, the more a consumer values a brand, the more willing the consumer is to accept increases in the price of the brand [11]. Accordingly, brand passion affects consumer acceptance of increases in the brand price [23], and consumers passionate about their preferred brands are likely to pay for them at higher prices [10], [11]. Swimberghe *et al.* [134] used the dualistic model of brand passion to investigate the relationship between brand passion and brand premium, showing that both HBP and OBP influence consumer willingness to pay for higher brand prices. They also determined that brand premium is more strongly related to OBP than to HBP, probably because consumers with HBP have positive experiences with their preferred brands and devote themselves moderately to the brands. Moreover, consumers with HBP regard their preferred brands as part of their lives and are willing to pay price premiums for the brands [134], [142], whereas those with OBP-who experience intrapersonal or interpersonal pressure because of conflicts in everyday life that arise when the consumers focus their purchase predominantly on their preferred brands or internalize them-tend to pay for the brands at higher prices [134], [142]. On the basis of these arguments, both HBP and OBP have significant positive effects on the willingness to pay price premiums, as detailed respectively in H6a and b:

H6a: HBP has significant positive effects on the willingness to pay price premiums.

H6b: OBP has significant positive effects on the willingness to pay price premiums.

3 Methodology

This section discusses the theoretical and research framework, data collection, operational definitions and measures.

3.1 Theoretical Rationale and Research Framework

This study was theoretically based on the dualistic model of brand passion, adopting the argument of McAlexander, Schouten & Koenig [95] that a brand community involves multiple interactive relationships and a fan's preference for a brand indicates a relationship among the fan, the brand, and the product under the brand [19], [60]. The study examined brand uniqueness and hedonic products on the basis of the relationship between brand self-expression and uniqueness and elucidated brand loyalty by redefining brand passion and assessing it quantitatively. It differed from previous studies because of the following reasons: (a) analyzing brand self-expression, brand uniqueness, and hedonic products to address the lack of conclusive evidence from brand community research; and (b) identifying factors of greater discriminatory power in consumer decision-making on brands (whereas previous studies on consumer decision-making on brands have focused predominantly on brand loyalty), dividing brand loyalty into brand purchase

intention brand advocacy, and brand equity (on the basis of relevant literature), This study also analyzed the mediating effects of factors in brand passion on the antecedents and outcome variables in the study model. Figure 1 depicts the research framework.
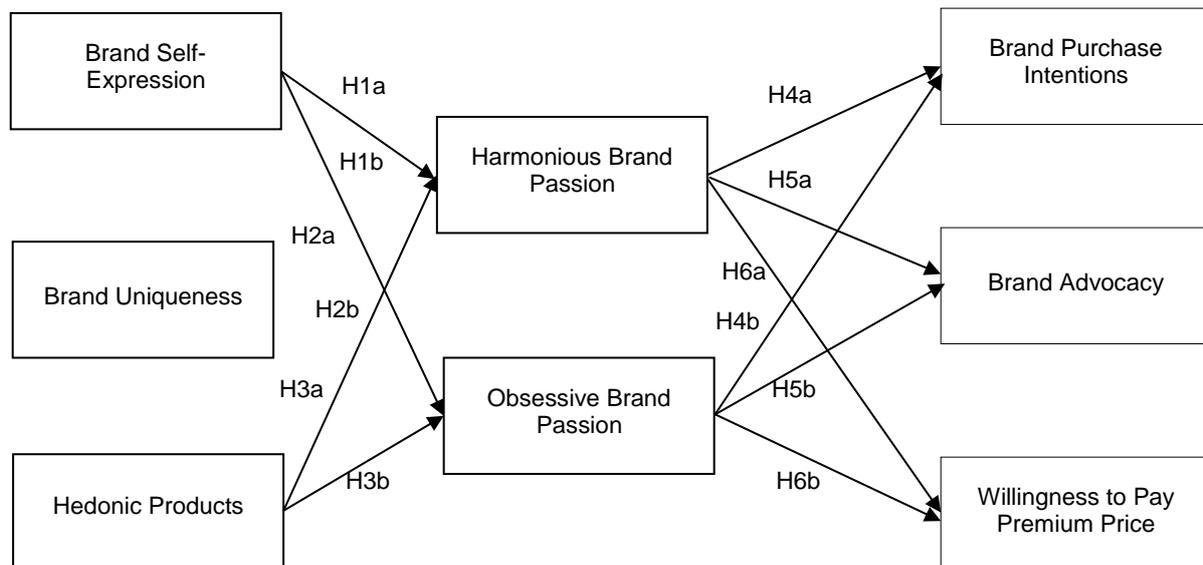

Figure 1: Proposed model

3.2   Sample and Data Collection

The sampling procedure involved a review of the 2015 Best Global Brands report by Interbrand (a world-renowned brand consultancy)-in which Apple, valued at US$17.3 billion (a 43% growth from the year before), clinched the No. 1 spot, and Sony, valued at US$7.7 billion, was ranked 58th. This report suggests that both Apple and Sony are among the 100 most influential global brands. A survey of *The Most Influential Brands in Taiwan*, conducted in 2015 by Ipsos (a market research firm), was also reviewed.

The survey shows that Apple, Sony, and HTC are the three most influential brands in the category of electronic goods. On the basis of the results of the report and the survey, this study investigated a sample of subjects who, within a 6-month period, had stayed abreast of information published on the respective Chinese-language Facebook fan pages of the three brands that target consumers in Taiwan: @TaiwanApple (or *Apple 中文粉絲團* in Chinese), Sony Taiwan, and HTC Taiwan. Data were collected through a questionnaire administered using mySurvey website. The first item of the questionnaire was a filter question designed to determine the eligibility of respondents for participation.

A formal questionnaire was administered from November 15, 2016, to March 15, 2017. Over the 4-month period of data collection, 821 responses were obtained, with 681 valid ones for a valid response rate of 82.95%. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the sample. Male respondents ($n = 351$, 51.5%) outnumbered female respondents ($n = 330$, 48.5%). 7.7% of the respondents were ≤ 19 years old, 22.5% were 20-24 years old, 16.6% were 25-29 years old, 18.2% were 30-34 years old, 16.2% were 35-39 years old, and 18.8% were ≥ 40 years old. Obviously, most respondents were young adults. The majority of respondents held a Bachelor's degree or above (64.8%) and resided in Northern Taiwan (52.2%). Most reported daily Internet use of < 1 h (35.8%), followed by 2-4 h (29.1%) and 5-7 h (19.8%); had an experience of 1-2 years or less than 1 year with Facebook fan pages; and visited the pages for less than 1 h per daily (77.7%). Thus, most respondents read Facebook fan pages occasionally.

3.3   Measurement

The questionnaire, which was developed on the basis of a literature review, comprised the constructs of brand self-expression, brand uniqueness, hedonic products, brand passion, and brand loyalty (divided into three behaviors: brand purchase intention, brand advocacy, and willingness to pay price premiums) (See Appendix A). The questionnaire was prepared in English, translated into Chinese by independent translators, and then translated back into English to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the translation according to the appropriate guidelines [30].The number of point levels in a Likert scale affects the reliability and validity of the questionnaire in which the scale is applied. Generally, a 7-point scale is preferred because of its high reliability. Based on the argument of *Nunnally* [101], Chang [38] confirmed that, among the possible scale ranges, the 7-point scale exhibits the highest reliability. Therefore, the questions in the instrument were rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). All constructs are defined as follows.

Table 1: Demographics of respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	351	51.50
Female	330	48.50
Age		
<19	53	7.70
20-24	153	22.50
25-29	113	16.60
30-34	124	18.20
35-39	110	16.20
>40	128	18.80
Education		
<High school	132	19.30
College	441	64.80
>Graduate	108	15.90
Living area		
Northern	355	52.20
Central	114	16.70
Southern	197	28.90
East	15	2.20
Average spent online of daily time		
<1 hour	244	35.80
2-4 hours	198	29.10
5-7 hours	135	19.80
>8 hours	104	15.30
Contact Facebook fan pages time		
<1 year	218	32.00
1-2 years	219	32.10
2-3 years	125	18.40
>3 years	119	17.50
Average spent Facebook fan page of daily time		
<1 hours	529	77.70
>1 hours	152	22.30

3.3.1 Brand Self-Expression

Brand self-expression was defined as *a brand fan's perception about the extent to which a brand reflects his or her actual self*. This construct encompassed 4 questions [35].

3.3.2 Brand Uniqueness

Brand uniqueness was defined as *a brand fan's perception about the extent to which a brand is unique.* This construct encompassed 2 questions [8].

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3.3.3 Hedonic Products

Hedonic products ere defined as *goods that, for a brand fan, provide pleasure and joy and appeal to the senses*. This construct encompassed 6 questions [35].

3.3.4 Brand Passion

Brand passion was divided into HBP *(when a brand fan derives pleasure from a brand and puts the brand on an equal footing with other activities in life)* and OBP (*when a brand fan has a strong reliance on a brand that is difficult to control*). This construct encompassed 8 questions [84].

3.3.5 Brand Loyalty

The construct of brand loyalty was divided into three subconstructs: (a) brand purchase intention (*the possibility that a brand fan purchases a product under a brand*); (b) brand advocacy *(the attitudes characterized by a brand fan's affective, behavioral, and cognitive support for a brand, despite the existence of other brands)*; and (c) willingness to pay price premiums *(the willingness of a brand fan to pay for products under a brand at higher prices)*. The subconstruct of brand purchase intention encompassed 4 questions [25], that of brand advocacy comprised 3 questions [87], and that of willingness to pay price premiums comprised 3 questions [36].

4   Results

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was conducted through AMOS to analyze variables used in this study. Data analysis with SEM was performed in two stages [13]: (a) analyzing the measurement model to test whether measurement variables in the study model accurately measured latent variables in the model and (b) using the structural model to estimate the effect size and explanatory power of the causal relationships between variables in the acceptable measurement model derived from the testing procedure conducted at the previous stage. Finally, the mediating effects of HBP and OBP were assessed through the Sobel test, bootstrapping, and regression analysis.

4.1   Measurement Model

The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the measurement model was based on the criteria for convergent validity analysis [13], the evaluation criteria for CFA [16], and the goodness-of-fit index (GFI) recommended by Gefen *et al*.

[58]. The measurement model was a good fit, with a x^2/df of 3.231, GFI of 0.875, adjusted GFI (AGFI) of 0.849, comparative fit index (CFI) of 0.938, and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) of 0.057. Notably, the GFI and AGFI of the model exceeded the acceptable level of 0.8 [67]. The composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) of each dimension of the model was estimated according to an estimation procedure proposed by Gaski and Nevin [57]. Most of the dimensions had CR and AVE values of 0.7 and 0.5, respectively, indicating that each subscale of the questionnaire had acceptable convergent validity. Table 2 tabulates the results of the analysis of the measurement model.

Table 3 presents the AVE values calculated according to Fornell and Larcker's method for assessing discriminant validity. On the basis of the method, if the squared AVE value for a latent dimension is greater than the correlation coefficients between latent dimensions, then this dimension has good discriminant validity. In this measurement model, the squared AVE value for each dimension exceeded the correlation between dimensions; therefore, each dimension had high discriminant validity.

Table 2: Measurement model

Constructs/ Items	Factor loading	SMC	CR	AVE	Cronbach's α
Brand Self- Expression			0.946	0.813	0.946
BSE1	0.893	0.798			
BSE2	0.880	0.774			
BSE3	0.923	0.853			
BSE4	0.910	0.828			
Brand Uniqueness			0.846	0.735	0.860
BU1	0.923	0.927			
BU2	0.786	0.618			
Hedonic Products			0.910	0.629	0.910
HP1	0.819	0.671			
HP2 (R)	0.820	0.672			
HP3	0.875	0.765			

Table 2: continuation						
HP4 (R)	0.726	0.527				
HP5	0.756	0.572				
HP6	0.752	0.566				
Harmonious Brand Passion			0.826	0.543	0.827	
HBP1	0.741	0.549				
HBP2	0.678	0.460				
HBP3	0.788	0.621				
HBP4	0.737	0.543				
Obsessive Brand Passion			0.915	0.730	0.914	
OBP1	0.852	0.725				
OBP2	0.845	0.714				
OBP3	0.868	0.753				
OBP4	0.852	0.725				
Brand Purchase Intentions			0.868	0.624	0.866	
BPI1	0.709	0.503				
BPI2	0.817	0.668				
BPI3	0.805	0.648				
BPI4	0.822	0.676				
Brand Advocacy			0.848	0.651	0.844	
PA1	0.837	0.700				
PA2	0.776	0.601				
PA3	0.806	0.650				
Willingness to Pay Premium Price			0.918	0.789	0.917	
WTP1	0.885	0.783				
WTP2	0.886	0.784				
WTP3	0.892	0.796				

Note. (R): Reverse coded.

Table 3: Correlation matrix

Constructs	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Brand Self-Expression	4.746	1.185	**0.973**							
Brand Uniqueness	8.018	1.160	0.537***	**0.927**						
Hedonic Products	3.072	1.027	0.242***	0.146***	**0.954**					
Harmonious Brand Passion	3.806	0.577	0.577***	0.529***	0.213***	**0.909**				
Obsessive Brand Passion	3.417	0.866	0.627***	0.491***	0.243***	0.620***	**0.956**			
Brand Purchase Intentions	3.305	0.723	0.487***	0.253***	0.252***	0.454***	0.586***	**0.931**		
Brand Advocacy	4.964	1.251	0.544***	0.418***	0.219***	0.558***	0.623***	0.569***	**0.919**	
Willingness to Pay Premium Price	3.670	0.656	0.537***	0.495***	0.264***	0.547***	0.671***	0.519***	0.648***	**0.958**

Note: ***$p<0.001$; Diagonal elements are the square root of the average variance extracted for all constructs.

4.2 Structural Model

The structural model had a χ^2/df of 3.782, GFI of 0.87, AGFI of 0.845, CFI of 0.93, RMSEA of 0.064, nonnormed fit index of 0.907, and incremental fit index of 0.93. Notably, the GFI and AGFI of the model both exceeded the acceptable level of 0.8 [67], indicating that the model and its observation data were good fits [24].

Regarding the path coefficients of the hypotheses proposed in this study, γ is the path relationship between exogenous and endogenous variables and β is the path relationship between endogenous variables. Regarding hypothetic models, brand self-expression had significant direct positive effects on HBP ($\gamma_{11} = 0.440$, $p < .001$) and OBP ($\gamma_{22} = 0.225$, p

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< .001). Hedonic product had significant direct positive effects on HBP (β_{31} = 0.163, p < .001) and OBP (γ_{22} = 0.100, p < .01). Regarding the relationship between mediating and outcome variables, HBP (β_{31} = 0.163, p < .001) and OBP (β_{32} = 0.571, p < .001) had significant positive effects on brand purchase intention; HBP (β_{41} = 0.382, p < .001) and OBP (β_{42} = 0.500, p < .001) had significant positive effects on brand advocacy; and HBP (β_{51} = 0.281, p < .001) and OBP (β_{52} = 0.583, p < .001) had significant positive effects on willingness to pay price premiums. The results validated all the hypotheses (See Figure 2).

Note: χ^2=1474.973, df= 390, χ^2/df= 3.782, GFI=0.870, AGFI=0.845, RMSR=0.059, RMSEA=0.064
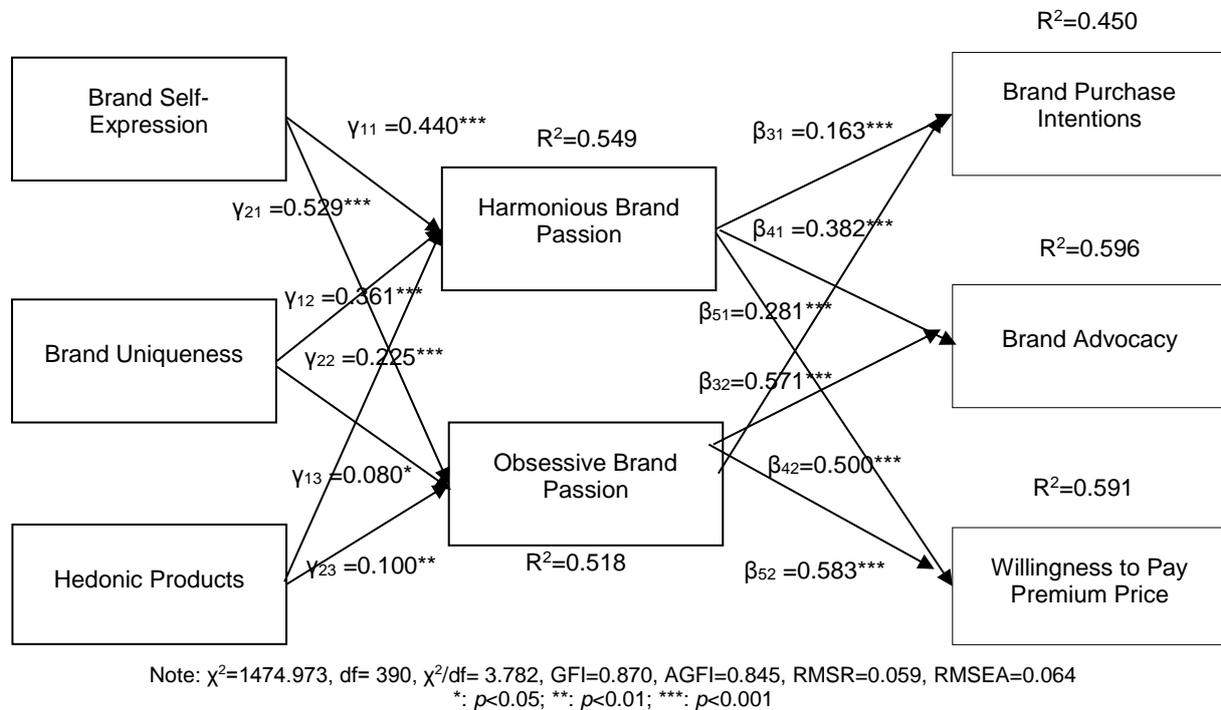*: p<0.05; **: p<0.01; ***: p<0.001

Figure 2: Results of the structural analysis

4.3 Post Analysis: Mediating Effect Test

The mediating effects of HBP and OBP were assessed through the Sobel test [20] and bootstrapping [111]. The results of regression analysis, as shown in Table 4, indicated the partial mediating effects of HBP and OBP. Moreover, the Sobel test statistic of HBP and OBP was significantly greater than 1.96. The results of bootstrapping, as presented in Table 5, suggested that after the sampling process was simulated 2,000 times to improve the accuracy of the estimation of the mediating effects of HBP and OBP, the percentile and bias-corrected confidence intervals of the overall model were both greater than 0 at the 95% confidence level. This indicated significant indirect effects [151]. Thus, HBP and OBP mediated between exogenous and outcome variables [48].

Table 4: Mediating effects of harmonious and obsessive brand passion

IV	M	DV	IV→DV	IV→M	IV+M→DV		Sobel Test	
					IV	M	Statistic (Z)	p-value
BSE	HBP	BPI	0.297***	0.281***	0.326***	0.205***	6.146	0.000
		BA	0.353***	0.281***	0.488***	0.215***	8.739	0.000
		WTP	0.567***	0.281***	0.770***	0.351***	8.452	0.000
BU	HBP	BPI	0.158***	0.263***	0.558***	0.011	9.120	0.000
		BA	0.277***	0.263***	0.624***	0.113***	9.979	0.000
		WTP	0.534***	0.263***	0.857***	0.309***	9.039	0.000
HP	HBP	BPI	0.177***	0.120***	0.526***	0.114***	5.137	0.000
		BA	0.163***	0.120***	0.714***	0.078***	5.368	0.000
		WTP	0.322***	0.120***	1.114***	0.189***	5.342	0.000

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Table 4: continuation

BSE	OBP	BPI	0.297***	0.459***	0.387***	0.120***	10.285	0.000
		BA	0.353***	0.459***	0.412***	0.164***	10.687	0.000
		WTP	0.567**	0.459***	0.796***	0.202***	12.396	0.000
BU	OBP	BPI	0.158***	0.367***	0.509***	0.029	11.122	0.000
		BA	0.277***	0.367***	0.488***	0.098***	10.861	0.000
		WTP	0.534***	0.367***	0.814***	0.236***	11.327	0.000
HP	OBP	BPI	0.177***	0.205***	0.466***	0.082***	6.111	0.000
		BA	0.163***	0.205***	0.537***	0.053*	6.187	0.000
		WTP	0.322***	0.205***	0.932***	0.131***	6.257	0.000

Note: IV: Independent Variable; M: Mediation Variable; DV: Dependent Variable; BSE: Brand Self- Expression; BU = Brand Uniqueness; HP = Hedonic Products; HBP = Harmonious Brand Passion; OBP = Obsessive Brand Passion; BPI = Brand Purchase Intentions; BA = Brand Advocacy; WTP = Willingness to Pay Premium Price

Table 5: Bootstrapping analysis for the mediating effects of harmonious and obsessive brand passion

IV	M	DV	Indirect effect	Mean	S.E.	Bootstrapping 95% CI			
						Percentile method		Bias-corrected	
						Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper
BSE	HBP	BPI	0.092	0.091	0.017	0.056	0.125	0.061	0.127
		BA	0.137	0.153	0.018	0.101	0.174	0.103	0.176
		WTP	0.217	0.202	0.028	0.165	0.274	0.165	0.274
BU	HBP	BPI	0.147	0.204	0.018	0.112	0.183	0.113	0.185
		BA	0.164	0.229	0.019	0.128	0.202	0.128	0.202
		WTP	0.225	0.311	0.029	0.169	0.283	0.175	0.288
HP	HBP	BPI	0.063	0.085	0.013	0.040	0.090	0.040	0.090
		BA	0.085	0.115	0.017	0.054	0.122	0.054	0.122
		WTP	0.133	0.177	0.026	0.083	0.188	0.086	0.190
BSE	OBP	BPI	0.178	0.246	0.019	0.139	0.214	0.142	0.217
		BA	0.189	0.264	0.022	0.148	0.232	0.149	0.233
		WTP	0.365	0.519	0.034	0.302	0.433	0.302	0.435
BU	OBP	BPI	0.186	0.265	0.167	0.155	0.220	0.156	0.221
		BA	0.179	0.252	0.019	0.144	0.216	0.145	0.218
		WTP	0.298	0.425	0.027	0.247	0.355	0.249	0.358
HP	OBP	BPI	0.096	0.128	0.017	0.063	0.129	0.064	0.130
		BA	0.110	0.147	0.020	0.071	0.151	0.071	0.151
		WTP	0.191	0.142	0.034	0.127	0.258	0.127	0.259

Note: IV: Independent Variable; M: Mediation Variable; DV: Dependent Variable; BSE: Brand Self- Expression; BU = Brand Uniqueness; HP = Hedonic Products; HBP = Harmonious Brand Passion; OBP = Obsessive Brand Passion; BPI = Brand Purchase Intentions; BA = Brand Advocacy; WTP = Willingness to Pay Premium Price

5   Discussion and Conclusions

This study used the dualistic model of brand passion to study brand communities, thereby explicating the Brand-community relationship. The results suggested that brand self-expression, brand uniqueness, and hedonic products were all the antecedents of brand passion, and HBP and OBP had mediating effects on all brand-loyalty behaviors.

5.1   Research Implications

This study has the following findings. First, brand self-expression had significant positive effects on HBP and OBP, which corresponds with the findings of Bauer *et al.* [23] and Swimberghe *et al.* [134]. Consumers tend to use their preferred brands to express their actual selves [22], pursue their actual selves [22], build their ideal self-image, convey their personal traits, achieve differentness from others, and satisfy their inner desires accordingly [29], [88], [139]. Thus, brand fans typically express their actual and ideal self-images through their preferred brands, deepening their affection for the brands, and building an emotional bond with them. Indeed, the self-expressive nature of a brand allows consumers to enhance their self-worth, personal values, and beliefs, and strengthens the link between the brand and the consumers.

Second, brand uniqueness had significant positive effects on HBP and OBP, which corresponds with the findings of Bauer *et al.* [23] and Li *et al.* [85]. If a brand is perceived to be unique and exhibit unparalleled distinctiveness, it is more likely to win fans and elicit their passion. Indeed, a unique and emotionally engaging brand may reduce consumers' perceived risks, render its intangible value more perceivable [93], earn favor and respect from consumers that ensure sustained support and advocacy even if its products encounter challenges [22].

Third, hedonic product had significant positive effects on HBP and OBP, which corresponds with the findings of Bauer *et al.* [23] and Kang *et al.* [71]. Accordingly, if a product under a brand provides a sensory experience of pleasure, fantasy, and fun, it may arouse passion from consumers for the brand, deepening their involvement in the community intended for the brand.

Accordingly, although the hypothesized effects of brand self-expression, brand uniqueness, and product's hedonic value on brand passion were all supported, the intensities of the effects differed. In particular, the effect of brand self-expression on brand passion was greater than the effects of brand uniqueness and product's hedonic value on brand passion. This finding indicates that service providers should enhance the presentation of their brands' distinct features; a brand with clear positioning on the market can connect customers' brand passion with their desire for self-expression.

Fourth, HBP had significant positive effects on brand purchase intention, whereas OBP did on brand advocacy. This finding corresponds with those of Albert *et al.* [11], Pourazad and Pare [110], and Swimberghe *et al.* [134]. Previous studies that focus on brand passion and the willingness to pay price premiums have not discussed the dualistic concept of brand passion. Moreover, some studies have shown significant positive effects of brand passion on the willingness to pay price premiums [23], whereas others have reported nonsignificant positive effects of brand passion on the willingness to pay price premiums [10], [11]. As such, brand fans who derive pleasure and fun from and have obsession with their preferred brands tend to become loyal to the brand and advocate and repurchase them, whereas those with an uncontrollable, heavy reliance on preferred brands are willing to pay for products under the brands at higher prices.

The findings indicated that the effects of obsessive brand passion on the three behavioral consequences of brand loyalty were all greater than the effects of harmonious brand passion. Therefore, if brand managers intend to create a spillover effect, they should enhance online community members' obsessive brand passion. Stimulating fan page members' emotional connections to a brand may also increase their purchase intentions, brand advocacy and willingness to pay premium price.

5.2   Managerial Implications

To enhance the self-expressive nature of brands, brand or marketing managers should bolster the connection between brands and consumers' personality traits by, for example, designing the brands in a manner that represents the actual or ideal selves of the consumers to enhance their passion for them. To align brands with consumers' self-images, brand or marketing managers can create a brand image in line with the self-concept of a targeted set of customers. They can do so by asking brand lovers and fans-through questionnaires (administered in print or online), interviews, or community discussions-which attributes of their preferred brands dovetail with their ideal selves and enhancing these attributes to improve the emotional connection between the consumers and the brands. Marketing campaigns in this regard may include using popular celebrities to convey the attributes of products in a manner that articulates the values and characters of the brands under which the products are sold. This may earn favorable consumer feedback, making brands more relevant to the ideal selves of consumers, and strengthening consumers' passion for and attachment to the brands.

To increase the uniqueness of a brand, the brand should be developed in a manner that gains a devoted following, thereby maximizing its value. Jennifer Tang, former managing director of the Taiwanese branch of Ogilvy & Mather, argues that brands should *accentuate their ideals and the value of their products*, stressing the significance of *the overarching vision* to a brand [108]. Thus, to make a brand noteworthy and unique and distinguish it from its rivals, its core message should be clearly communicated. Brand or marketing managers can adequately convey the values of their products or services through fan pages to their fans or potential fans. Strategies for doing so on fan pages may include describing the conception of a brand, the outreach initiatives undertaken by the owner of the brand, and the positive feelings the brand has aroused in consumers, promoting the uniqueness of products or services, articulating the overall objectives of the owner of the brand, narrating the history of the brand, and sharing fans' experiences about the brand. Such strategies can help to establish the emotional connection between a brand and its fans and potential consumers. In brief, brand marketing should be based on values, render a brand relevant to consumers, ensure its differentiation, cement its position in their mind, further their passion for it, and maintain their loyalty to it.

From the hedonic perspective, products should be designed to engage consumers in a sensory experience of pleasure, fantasy, and joy and provide more experiential consumption, delight, and enjoyment [44]. The values, philosophies, logos, packaging, and marketing messages and activities of brands can be thematically tailored to specific consumer groups. For example, the visual presentation of a brand's website can be renewed by changing its cover page and page theme and keeping such visual elements in line with the philosophy of the brand.. Moreover, arousing obsession and emotional reactions in consumers concerning a brand prompts them to partake in activities within the community of the brand.

In addition, recent developments in information and communication technology have been perceived as an innovative means for enabling consumers to experience value co-creation [65]. Moreover, C2C interaction-related cues have become the optimal communication channel for motivating customers to discuss, exchange, and share knowledge, and such actions can reduce uncertainty during the process of formulating purchase decisions [152]. Specially, highly interactive social media platforms offer individuals and communities opportunities for sharing, co-creation, and discussion, and enable companies to generate products inspired by customer viewpoints [75]. Therefore, this customer-centric approach creates value linked to the market and allows online operators to interact with its customers closely and directly and to benefit from customer ideas and knowledge.

Moreover, a brand that allows consumers to express their actual selves and accentuate their uniqueness elicits support and passion from consumers. When a fan identifies with a preferred brand, the fan's passion for the brand underpins their preference, support, and advocacy for it. Efforts should be made to maintain the uniqueness of brands and imbue them with attributes necessary to arouse affection in consumers, which-depending on the developments in the brands-can grow into a passion eventually, loyalty.

5.3   Limitations and Future Directions

The limitations of this study, as well as possible approaches to them, are described as follows. First, this study adopted a cross-sectional design that enabled the collection of data only on subjects' opinions at a single point in time but provided no understanding of how brand fans interacted with each other or how brands and consumers developed relationships. Furthermore, the study design did not address changes in brand passion with time. To elucidate the long-term influence, longitudinal studies can be conducted to investigate changes in fans' brand passion and loyalty over time and provide an adequate understanding of consumer-brand relationships and the interaction between fans. In future studies, questionnaire surveys administered in two stages (at two time points) may be used to determine whether the loyalty of fans changes over time.

Second, this study investigated a nonprobability sample of subjects who visited *Facebook fan pages* established by their preferred smartphone brands. Future studies can focus on other types of online communities, such as blogs, forums, and discussion boards. Future studies may examine various online platforms to determine whether research results vary according to platform and thereby enhancing the generalizability of the results of the present study.

Third, this study did not use additional relevant variables to explore consumer-brand relationship. The present study is based on the suggestion by Voss *et al.* [144] suggested that hedonic value strengthens the purchase intentions of certain products more effectively than utility does. Hedonic products either gratify the senses and satisfy emotional needs [150] or provide fun and enjoyment [89]. Moreover, utilitarian goods can be employed as an exogenous variable in research into consumer-brand relationships. Consumers are more likely to search for information online when they aspire to purchase utilitarian products than when they aspire to purchase hedonic ones, and this consumer tendency makes reviews on utilitarian goods more influential than those on hedonic ones [37]. Thus, by using utilitarian product as exogenous variable, one may determine more accurately which of the attributes is more critical to the formation of a consumer-brand relationship.

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Appendix A: Scales

Constructs/Items
Brand Self- Expression [35]
1. This brand symbolizes the kind of person I really am inside.
2. This brand reflects my personality.
3. This brand is an extension of my inner self.
4. This brand mirrors the real me.
Brand Uniqueness [8]
1. This brand is special.
2. This brand is unique.
Hedonic Products [32]
1. Is Functional/Is Pleasurable
2. Affords Enjoyment/Performs a Task (R)
3. Is Useful/Is Fun
4. Is a Sensory Experience/Does a Job (R)
5. Is a Necessity/Is an Indulgence
6. Is a Must in Life/Is One of Life's Rewards
Brand Passion
Harmonious Brand Passion [84], [142]
1. XXX allows me to live memorable experiences.
2. XXX is in harmony with other activities in my life.
3. XXX reflects the qualities I like about myself.
4. XXX allows me to live a variety of experiences.
Obsessive Brand Passion [84], [142]
1. I can't live without XXX.
2. I am emotionally dependent on XXX.
3. I have tough time controlling my need to use at XXX.
4. The urge is so strong; I cannot help myself from XXX.
Behavioral Consequences of Brand Loyalty
Brand Purchase Intentions [25]
1. In the near future, I would probably buy the brand.
2. In the near future, I intend to buy smartphones made by the brand.
3. In the near future, I would likely buy the brand.
4. In the near future, I would possibly buy the brand.
Brand Advocacy [87]
1. I feel the need to tell others how good this brand is.
2. If someone speaks negatively of this brand, I will defend the brand.
3. I have recently recommended this brand to other people.
Willingness to Pay a Premium Price [36]
1. Buying this brand seems smart to me even if they cost more.
2. I'm ready to pay a higher price for this brand.
3. I'd still buy this brand if other brands reduced their prices.

Note. (R): Reverse coded