# Social media marketing in the hospitality industry: The role of benefits in increasing brand community participation and the impact of participation on consumer trust and commitment toward hotel and restaurant brands

by

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#### ABSTACT

Online community is an effective tool for building the relationship with consumers. Many hospitality firms (i.e., hotels and restaurants) have utilized online communities a new marketing channel to reach their consumers. Previous studies have identified four participation benefits (functional, social, psychological, and hedonic) in the member participation of community activities. In addition to these four factors, this study also added monetary benefit as a predictor of member participation. Demographic factors (i.e., age and biological gender) were proposed to influence the relationships between benefits and community participation. As results of member participation in online communities, trust and commitment toward hotel or restaurant brands have been considered as important factors that enhance consumer relationships with hospitality brands. The purpose of this study was to investigate benefit factors of member participation and the relationships between community participation, brand trust, and brand commitment in hotel and restaurant online communities.

The present study investigated the conceptual model in two contexts, including hotel and restaurant Facebook fan pages. The data on the hotel Facebook fan pages were collected from both the panel of an online research company and the alumni of Iowa State University; whereas the data on the restaurant Facebook fan pages were only collected from the alumni of Iowa State University. After conducting confirmatory factor analysis, the present study identified four benefit factors (functional, hedonic, monetary, and social-psychological benefits) as the predictors of member participation in hotel and restaurant Facebook fan pages. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to test the conceptual model.

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Based on the results of SEM, hotel and restaurant studies showed different results. The results of the hotel study indicated that three benefit factors (functional, hedonic, and social-psychological benefits) positively influenced members' community participation; member participation positively influenced their trust toward a hotel brand. Biological gender had a significant moderating effect on the relationship between functional benefits and community participation in the hotel study. The results of the restaurant study indicated that two benefit factors (hedonic and social-psychological benefits) positively influenced members' community participation; member participation positively influenced their trust and commitment toward a restaurant brand; members' brand trust also positively influenced their commitment toward the restaurant brand.

The findings of this study provide significant insights for the researchers and marketers. From the theoretical perspective, this is the first empirical research that investigated consumer benefits and responses (i.e., community participation, brand trust, and brand commitment) in online communities managed by hospitality firms. Thus, the study contributes to the understanding of consumer behavior in social media. From the practical perspective, the study suggests some strategies to effectively design hotel and restaurant Facebook fan pages, which can strengthen the relationships with current consumers and attract potential consumers.

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## **CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION**

# Background

The Internet has revolutionized communication, allowing individuals and organizations to overcome geographical and time constraints, which in turn allows consumers and companies to connect around the world at any time (Harris & Rae, 2009). Online communities allow people to gather together on the Internet for various reasons, including searching for and sharing information, discussing communal issues, and making inquiries (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004a). With rapid changes in information technology, these online activities are now performed via a new form of communication technology known as 'Web 2.0' or social media (Gretzel, Kang, & Lee, 2008).

Social media are defined as "a second generation of Web development and design, that aims to facilitate communication, secures information sharing, interoperability, and collaboration on the World Wide Web" (Paris, Lee, & Seery, 2010, p. 531). There are numerous social media sites; among the most popular are Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter (Jain, 2010). In 2010, Facebook announced it had over 500 million users; in the same year, Twitter reported 75 million users (Paris et al., 2010; Owyang, 2010). On average, consumers spend more than 5.5 hours per day participating on social media Websites (Nelsonwire, 2010). With their increasing use, these sites are perceived as tools for creating online communities of users who share interests, activities, and objectives (Bolotaeva & Cata, 2010).

Many companies view the use of online communities as a profitable marketing tool from which they can derive several benefits. First, companies can obtain vast amounts of feedback regarding their products and brands by monitoring consumers' online conversations,

thus enabling them to resolve problems quickly and work to improve future brand performance (Madupu, 2006). Second, online communities provide a real-time resource regarding market trends and consumer needs. Companies can use these resources to modify advertising messages and develop special targeted features for future products. Third, companies can observe whether their brands are truly suited to consumers' lifestyles and can learn which features of their products make them special or unique in consumers' eyes (Kozinets, 1999). Through online communities, companies allow consumers to become involved, directly or indirectly, in creating new products and brands (Sawhney & Prandelli, 2000). Overall, the popularity of online communities has heavily influenced many firms' marketing activities in recent years.

A brand community is comprised of consumers who are interested in a specific brand (Jang, Ko, & Koh, 2007). There are two types of online brand communities: consumerinitiated and company-initiated. As the names suggest, a consumer-initiated brand community is developed voluntarily by consumers, whereas a company-initiated community is sponsored and developed by a company. In a consumer-initiated community, consumers benefit from uncensored feedback from other members (Jang, Olfman, Ko, Koh, & Kim, 2008). In contrast, a company sponsoring an online community may control the content posted by its members. For instance, a message may be deleted if it contains negative consumer opinions and experiences. If consumers recognize these actions, the company may fail to build a strong online community because consumers can lose trust in the company and its brand because of the perceived lack of transparency. A company should seek to foster high levels of trust in and commitment to its brands in company-sponsored online

communities, factors that are more critical to the company than in consumer-initiated communities (Jang et al., 2008).

Through participation in a company-sponsored online community, consumers can compare products or services, share experiences with other users of the products, and suggest alternative product choices. Moreover, consumers who participate in company-sponsored online communities are often able to obtain exclusive information and special deals (Antikainen, 2007) offered by the company. In such communities, companies can enhance their relationships with consumers by providing special benefits that consumers consider important (Antikainen, 2007). Through online member activities, positive attitudes about other members of the community may be generated, and a sense of belonging can develop. This further encourages consumers to share their experiences about the company's products, especially when they have compliments or complaints (Madupu, 2006). Because of the benefits of participating in online communities, a growing number of consumers join company-sponsored online communities before making purchasing decisions (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

Researchers have emphasized that community members' active participation is critical in ensuring an online community's long-term survival (Madupu, 2006). Consumers may be dissuaded from joining online communities if they do not see active communication among the members and company. If the communities do not provide useful information about products or brands, then consumers may show little interest in joining (Preece, Nonnecke, & Andrews, 2004). Conversely, online communities with actively participating members can attract new consumers and entice existing members to visit the community more frequently or for longer periods (Preece, 2000).

In order to build and manage an active online community, companies first need to understand their members' motivations with regard to the benefits that they expect in return for their participation (Wasko & Faraj, 2000). If companies provide the desired benefits such as information and a sense of belonging, they will be able to attract new consumers, build relationships with them, and motivate them to visit again (Antikainen, 2007; Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Pearo, 2004).

By building an active and effective online community, companies can foster strong trust in and commitment to their brands. The majority of information and content in a consumer-based online community results from consumers' experiences with products, particularly with regard to their quality, maintenance, and directions for use (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). When the members collect information about a product from an online community, they then anticipate that the products will perform as expected based on the information provided by other members. When the members continuously experience positive product performance and perceive the information to be trustworthy, they are more likely to develop trust in the brand. Trust develops from shared beliefs about information provided by community members and expectations of reciprocal communication (Blau, 1964).

In addition to trust, online community members can build commitment through continuous participation. McWilliam (2000) revealed the impact of online communities on building strong relationships between companies and their consumers. These strong relationships reflect members' psychological attachment to the community and mutual belief in each other (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Commitment, like trust, can be enhanced as members increasingly rely on the Internet for product information that will help them make purchasing

decisions (Shankar, Smith, & Rangaswamy, 2003). Reciprocal communication regarding consumption experiences with brands enhances consumers' brand involvement and brand commitment, especially when the products perform as expected based on the information obtained (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002). Companies can therefore utilize online communities to establish a strong bond with active community participants, which in turn can generate trust and commitment to their brands (Ulusu, 2010).

While online community-building is a relatively new marketing strategy, its usage has increased dramatically (Sweeney, 2000). The emergence of online communities has stimulated researchers' and practitioners' interest regarding ways to accommodate these types of communities into new business models. However, few researchers to date have empirically investigated whether member benefits influence the level of participation in these communities (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004a) as well as positive consumer behaviors such as loyalty and contributions to the community (Kim, Lee, & Hiemstra, 2004; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004b). Their findings indicate that members spread useful information about products and brands to other members and/or to their friends and thus increase community participation (Kozinets, 2002). The relevance of online communities for marketers is that active participation may create high levels of trust among members as well as loyalty to the brand (Koh & Kim, 2004).

The majority of marketers would agree that the operation of a successful online community is now highly relevant to successful marketing activities for many companies, yet studies regarding online communities have been rarely conducted in the hospitality industry. For this reason, the present study proposes the necessity of identifying and understanding the factors that attract consumers to online communities for hospitality companies, and

investigating the relationships between consumer participation, consumer trust in brands, and commitment to brands. From a theoretical perspective, this research provides an enhanced understanding of consumers' motives for online social exchanges (e.g., Internet-based social gatherings with other consumers and with a company) and of their cognitive processes during the development of commitment to a particular brand. From a practical perspective, online marketers can establish sustainable marketing strategies to keep online communities active, identify what benefits community members look for in participating, and retain members who are willing to be involved in a long-term relationship with the community.

#### **Problem Statement**

The present study focuses on how hospitality companies develop online communities and which online platforms that they employ for building their communities. Despite the proliferation of online communities in the hospitality industry, it is rare to find one that calls itself an "online hotel/restaurant community." In fact, online communities launched by hotels are commonly referred to as "online travel communities." For example, the Marriott Corporation has launched an online travel community to replace its rewards program (www.marriottrewardsinsiders.marriott.com). While a large number of hotels and restaurants such as Hyatt and Marriott use social media as a platform for their online communities, they are referred to as "online travel communities" rather than "online hotel/restaurant communities" (Chkhikvadze, 2010).

Through social media, consumers share experiences with and suggest ideas to others while developing new relationships within their communities. For this reason, many hospitality firms consider social media a powerful tool to enhance consumer loyalty and

satisfaction (Kasavana, 2008). The results of a survey conducted by the Center for Hospitality Research at Cornell University's School of Hotel Administration indicated that approximately 25% of business travelers and over 30% of leisure travelers use social media sites to read hotel reviews and obtain travel information before they make their travel plans (Social Media, n.d.). Paris et al. (2010) indicated that Facebook is an excellent example of a successful online community, with more than 500 million registered users around the world. Given the number of users, upscale or boutique hotel properties in major tourism destinations should create business Facebook pages to retain repeat guests and communicate with future guests (Social Media, n.d.). Due to its worldwide popularity, Facebook was chosen as the context of the present study.

A number of studies regarding online travel communities have identified the benefits of member participation in online communities (Chung & Buhalis, 2008; Hwang & Cho, 2005; Wang, Yu, & Fesenmaier, 2002). Wang et al. (2002) identified four categories of benefits: functional, social, hedonic, and psychological, and found that these benefits bear an impact on whether members participate actively or passively. Although previous studies have applied benefit constructs similar to those developed by Wang et al. (2002), the results of these studies have been inconsistent, with diverging categories of benefits. These discrepancies can occur due to the varied characteristics of online communities, such as member characteristics, mutual member interests, and the communities' purposes (Kim et al., 2004; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004a).

The present study argues that, in addition to the four categories of benefits mentioned above, monetary benefits influence member participation in an online community. Consumers frequently seek monetary rewards from community participation (Seo, 2005).

Providing benefits of monetary value, such as discounts or coupons, may encourage the participation of nonmembers, since economic value has been found to be a key element in the initiation of a new relationship (Treadaway & Smith, 2010). Accordingly, the present study employs previous benefit constructs specific to online communities and integrates the new monetary benefit factor to investigate what members of a hospitality community seek to obtain from their online interactions.

As mentioned earlier, the relationships between participation, trust, and commitment to the community and to specific brands are important for the success of an online community (Kim, Choi, Qualls, & Han, 2008; Ridings, Gefen, & Arinze, 2002). Studies have found different outcomes from the relationships between these three components. For example, Wu and Chang (2005) found a correlation between trust and member interaction, indicating that each factor influences the other. Casaló, Flavián, and Guinalíu (2007) found trust to be an outcome of member participation in an online community. Later, they showed that trust is an antecedent of member participation (Casaló, Flavián, & Guinalíu, 2008). Due to the intangible nature of service, consumers in the hospitality industry tend to value feedback based on other consumers' service experiences. Online community members are more likely to search for information about hotels/restaurants before making a reservation for rooms or tables and to compare their own service experiences to the information they obtained from the community. If there are no discrepancies between their experiences and the community information provided, members gain trust in the information obtained from their community. The present study therefore proposes that trust is an outcome of member participation (e.g., searching for information).

## **Study Objectives**

The objectives of the present study are to (a) identify the benefits that participants in online communities seek, (b) examine the relationships between members' levels of participation, brand trust, and brand commitment, and (c) investigate the moderating effect of demographic characteristics (i.e., gender and age) on the relationship between participation benefits and community participation.

#### **Definitions of Terms**

Throughout the present study, the following terms are utilized for the purpose of conceptualizing social media marketing and defining user behaviors:

- *Brand commitment*: Strong and positive psychological attachment of consumers to a specific brand (Beatty & Kahle, 1988).
- *Brand trust*: Consumer confidence in a brand's reliability or ability to perform its stated function (Ha & Perks, 2005).
- *Functional benefit*: Value derived from achieving specific purposes (i.e., transactions, information gathering and sharing, and convenience and efficiency) (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004a).
- *Hedonic benefit*: Hedonic consumption experiences on the Internet that form creative stimulation, positive emotions that are closely affiliated with feeling good, enjoyment, excitement, happiness, and enthusiasm (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004a, p.712).

- *Monetary benefit:* Monetary advantages (i.e., monetary rewards such as discount coupons or special deals) from relationships with a service provider (Gwinner, Gremler, & Bitner, 1998).
- Nonmonetary benefit: Time saved in searching for information (Gwinner, Gremler, & Bitner, 1998).
- *Online community*: A group of people who share their consumer experiences via social media, including communicating with other members or the company regarding their concerns and opinions and providing critiques of offered services (Rheingold, 1993).
- *Psychological benefit*: Value derived from a sense of belonging to the community and a sense of affiliation with other members (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004a).
- *Social benefit*: Value derived from building relationships and performing interactions such as providing information to help-seekers and receiving help (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004a).
- *Social media*: "Web-based services that allow people to create a public profile, share the connection with other users, and view and traverse their list of connections in common network" (Ulusu, 2010, p. 2949).

#### **CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

This chapter reviews the recent literature on social media and online community marketing, and provides the underlying theoretical foundations of characteristics of online communities. The participation benefits of online communities, member participation, and consumer trust and commitment to a specific brand are discussed. Online communities in the hospitality industry are conceptualized, taking into account the current usage of social media for creating companies' online communities. Studies of brand trust and brand commitment are examined to elucidate why members choose to maintain or enhance their relationships with a specific brand on which an online community is based.

## Social Media and Online Community Marketing

Social media are innovative Web-based applications in online marketing (Yang, Kim, & Dhalwani, 2008). Companies utilize social media to form online communities to (1) build new business models that include a new product marketing channel (Chung & Buhalis, 2008; Ulusu, 2010; Yang et al., 2008), and (2) build strong relationships with consumers by overcoming limitations of time and place (Bolotaeva & Cata, 2010; Sigala, 2003).

As a new marketing channel, online communities allow marketers to (a) gather information about potential or current consumers from their profiles, (b) infer consumers' needs and preferences based on their history of community usage, and (c) obtain direct replies from consumers (Sigala, 2003). Marketers can achieve a high level of customization by monitoring content posted by community members and can obtain an in-depth understanding of each consumer's needs, using this information to develop new

products/services. This helps marketers to advertise their new offerings to targeted consumers (Chung & Buhalis, 2008).

Marketers view online communities as effective tools for building strong relationships with consumers. These relationships can be enhanced further by the concept of "Website stickiness." The "stickiness" of a site is defined as its ability to draw and retain consumers by creating consumer value, such as rewards for loyalty, personalized or customized products/services, and trust (Zott, Amit, & Donlevey, 2000). Website stickiness can encourage consumers to interact more often with other members of the online community and with the company (Sigala, 2003).

Although social media provide companies with various marketing opportunities by enabling them to build online communities, negative outcomes may arise with regard to privacy concerns (Spangler, Hartzel, & Gal-Or, 2006). Social media encourage people to provide personal information. In some cases, however, people may fail to take potential risks into account, such as disclosing their information to the public. Details such as contact information, age, and other specific information can be misused or can result in identity theft by employees or third-party outsourced companies (Han & Maclaurin, 2002).

Despite privacy concerns, social media are nonetheless perceived as excellent platforms for building a firm's online community because of the above-mentioned marketing advantages (Sigala, 2003). In order to take advantage of online community use for marketing purposes, a company must determine its target consumers and learn what motivates them to visit its online community (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004a). With the increasing usage and popularity of online communities, most major companies no longer question whether they should build online communities through social media.

## **Online Communities**

# Definition of an online community

Although much research has been conducted regarding online communities, there is still no generally accepted definition of the term 'online community.' Among the various definitions of online communities shown in Table 1, similarities drawn from these definitions include that: (a) communication technologies (e.g., chat rooms, e-mail, and bulletin boards) are the first prerequisite for the existence of online communities and (b) member communication and interactions are functions of relationship building (Å kkinen & Tuunainen, 2005; Lee, Vogel, & Limayem, 2003). Considering these aspects, Lee (2005) defined an online travel community as a collection of people who share interests in travel and tourism, interact through online environments supported by advanced technologies, and observe the shared values and norms of the online community. The present study uses the following definition of online community for hospitality businesses: A group of people who share their consumer experiences via social media, including communicating with other members or the company regarding their concerns and opinions and providing critiques of offered services.

Researchers	Definition
Jones & Rafaeli	A symbolically delineated computer-mediated space where people
(2000)	interact with each other by participating in and contributing to the
	community.
Williams &	Groups of people who engage in many-to-many interactions online.
Cothrel (2000)	
Preece (2001)	A group of people who interact in a virtual environment. They have a
	purpose, are supported by technology, and are guided by norms and
	policies.
Balasubramanian	Any entity that exhibits all of the following characteristics: an
& Mahajan (2001)	aggregation of people, rational utility-maximizers, interaction
	without physical collocation.
Boetcher, Duggan, &	The gathering of people, in an online "space," where they
White (2002)	communicate, connect, and get to know each other better over time.
Ridings et al. (2002)	Groups of people with common interests and practices, who
	communicate regularly and for some duration in an organized way
	over the Internet through a common location or mechanism.
Bagozzi & Dholakia	Mediated social spaces in the digital environment that allow groups
(2002)	to form and be sustained primarily through an ongoing
	communication process.
Lee et al., (2003)	A cyberspace supported by computer-based information technology
	centered upon communication and interaction of participants to
	generate member-driven content, resulting in a relationship being
	built.
Kang, Lee, Lee, &	A social group or organization, where people voluntarily become a
Choi (2007)	member and participate in interaction activities with other members
	to exchange desired benefits they seek through a chosen community.

Table 1. Definitions of online communities in the 21st Century

Note. Source: Lee (2005, p. 10)

## Characteristics of an online community

Along with the various definitions of online communities, the characteristics of these communities also vary across academic disciplines such as computer science, business, and sociology (Wang et al., 2002). For instance, from a computer science perspective, Ellis, Gibbs, and Rein (1991) characterized the online community as having two key components: synchronous and asynchronous communication. Response time is the criterion that distinguishes these components. Synchronous technologies, such as a chat room, require people to be at their computers in order to communicate simultaneously, whereas with asynchronous technologies such as bulletin boards and e-mail, people may respond to others' postings and take part in discussions at a later time. Online communities can provide both synchronous and asynchronous technologies to support different communication tasks.

From a business perspective, Hagel and Armstrong (1997) identified three components of an online community; a Webpage is published content, environment, and commerce. Content published in an online community is the integration of members' communications based on specific topics. The Internet environment allows people to generate and distribute their content without limitations of time and place. Companies can serve commercial functions by facilitating online transactions in their online community.

Typaldos (2000) identified twelve elements of online communities drawn from sociological theory: purpose, identity, reputation, governance, communication, groups, environment, boundaries, trust, exchange, expression, and history. These twelve elements are considered influential factors that lead to the success of a community. The first six elements are based on individuals' needs and expectations of the community to which they belong; the remaining six are related to the success of the community:

- (1) Purpose: Members share a common goal and interest in the community.
- (2) Identity: Members recognize other members' identities and create relationships.
- (3) Reputation: Members build status based on their activities and others' expressions.
- (4) Governance: The community controls members' behavior based on shared values.
- (5) Communication: Members interact with each other to share information.
- (6) Groups: Members build small groups based on specific interests/tasks.
- (7) Environment: Members interact in a synergistic environment, which enables people to achieve their goals efficiently.
- (8) Boundaries: Members are aware of those who belong to the community.
- (9) Trust: Members trust other members and community organizers, leading to group efficiency and problem-solving.
- (10) Exchange: Members exchange resources, such as knowledge, goods, and services.
- (11) Expression: Members recognize how other members participate.
- (12) History: Members keep track of past events and respond to them.

Wang et al. (2002) considered the sociological aspects of online communities, with particular regard to the question of whether people apply the same social roles and governance as those of physical communities. From theoretical and operational perspectives, Wang et al. (2002)'s specific functions and features of online travel communities are described in Figure 1. The theoretical characteristics are place, symbols, and virtual. Place involves more than communication technologies; rather, it is a physical community that exists in members' minds. Symbols refer to the meanings and identities given to community members. Virtual characteristics represent computer systems that influence how people form communities. Wang et al. (2002) 's operational characteristics of an online community include (a) people, who are the core of the community and actively perform activities; (b) the purpose(s) shared by members and used to attract potential members, (c) the policies that direct members' online behaviors; and (d) the computer system that makes this phenomenon feasible in cyberspace.

In order to gain an understanding of what motivates individuals to participate in online communities, the present study adopts Wang et al.'s (2002) sociological perspective regarding what encourages member participation in online communities. From this perspective, the present study focuses on members' psychological mechanisms that determine participation, and the influence of online community on members' social interaction (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002). The present study also considers Hagel and Armstrong's (1997) business perspectives for marketing practitioners, which explain that people may extend their relationships with an online community for the purposes of finding friendships, sharing common interests about particular products, gaining social support regarding their consumption experience, and getting help in making purchasing decisions. Based on the above discussion, the present study assumes that members decide to participate based on the perceived benefits (i.e., to engage in activities that will help them achieve their purposes such as gathering information, having fun, or making purchase).



*Figure 1*. Concepts of the virtual community (Source: Wang et al., 2002, p. 410)

## **Theories to Explain Participation in an Online Community**

Various economic and social theories have explained why people visit online communities: to gather information; to make transactions; to communicate and interact with others; to have fun and experience enjoyment; to build new relationships; and to express opinions and identity. All of these reasons for participation are contingent upon community members' characteristics, shared purposes, and interests (Wang et al., 2002). In this section, the reasons for individuals' participation are elaborated in light of theoretical explanations.

#### **Economic theory**

Online communities have gained attention from marketers and researchers due to their economic power and their ability to affect power relationships between marketers and consumers (Hagel & Armstrong, 1997). Because an online community is an aggregate of consumers who show high interest in specific products or services, consumers who are members of the community have greater intention to buy the products sold by the company for which the community exists. Community members therefore can contribute to increased profits for the company. These communities can also shift the balance of power from company to consumers, because consumers are able to collect far more information than ever before and their ideas influence the development and promotion of products (Butler, 2001).

A number of researchers have suggested that economic theory explains participation in online communities (Gu & Jarvenpaa, 2003). Butler (2001) suggested the resource-based model, which involves the concepts of perceived value defined by Zeithaml (1988): consumer value will be created if consumers perceive more benefits gained than resources sacrificed. The perceived benefits are the opportunities to obtain information resources and knowledge from others, develop interpersonal relationships, etc.. The consumers sacrifice time, attention, knowledge, and energy in order to receive these benefits. If the benefits obtained exceed the sacrifices made, the community will provide value to its members, and the number of participants will thereby increase (Butler, 2001). Similarly, Gu and Jarvenpaas (2003) indicated that individuals will contribute only if they perceive more benefits than costs, and that they are more likely to increase their participation when they recognize incentives in the form of tangible or intangible returns. Member participation is significantly

related to the benefits that they expect to receive from the community. Therefore, providing benefits that the members desire can encourage their participation.

# **Social theories**

The present study employs two social theories (social exchange and social identity theory) to elucidate members' motivations for social interaction within an online community. Accroding to Blau (1964), social exchange is defined as reciprocal interaction among individuals that benefits the involved parties. Individuals in these exchanges expect social rewards (i.e., approval, status, and respect) through community participation. While there is no guarantee for receiving anything for their contributions, individuals are willing to contribute to the community as long as they can expect reciprocal interaction among community members. That is, members A and B of a community (comprising members A–*Z*) will provide help to members C and D without expecting gratitude or rewards from C or D; however, they do expect to receive rewards from the community as a whole. Moreover, the members who contribute to their community also expect to receive help from others when they need it (Ridings et al., 2002). Social exchange theory explains that a higher level of member interaction in the community will encourage the participation of others in community activities (Blau, 1964).

Social identity theory explains how individuals identify themselves as members of a group (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002). Social identity is a psychological state with cognitive, affective, and evaluative components (Dholakia et al., 2004). The cognitive aspect of social identity figures in the process of categorization, as individuals seek similarities with other members and perceive dissimilarities with nonmembers. The affective component of social

identity involves emotional attachment or affective commitment to online communities (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002). This emotional state influences the creation of loyalty and citizenship behaviors (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch & Topolnytsky, 2002) and the retention of relationships within the community (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Finally, the evaluative component is an individual's assessment of the value of being a member of the online community (Dholakia et al., 2004). Members establish social identity based on the degree to which they feel a sense of belonging to the community as well as the degree to which they gain benefits from social interaction (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). When members identify themselves as a part of the online community, they are likely to join and actively participate in the community's activities (Dholakia et al., 2004).

### **Online Community Participation**

Researchers have identified several categories of online community members, based on levels of observation frequencies and community interactions (Table 2). Not all members maintain the same level of interaction with other members and with the community as a whole (Okleshen & Grossbart, 1998). "Observation frequency" indicates the extent to which members visit online communities but do not participate in community activities, whereas "community interaction" denotes the extent to which members contribute to community activities (e.g., sharing information and experiences; Lee, 2005).

Participation in online communities can be characterized as passive or active. Active community members are those who interact with other members as opposed to those who merely observe information (Madupu, 2006). Passive members browse online communities but rarely become involved in community activities. Such members are referred to as

"lurkers or free riders" (Preece, Nonnecke, & Andrews, 2004). Because lurkers generate traffic and increase Website hits, if online communities have a large number of members (i.e., both passive and active members), they tend to be successful. However, the numbers of lurkers in an online community does not guarantee the community's success, given that these members do not contribute to community activities. Rather, lurkers tend to pursue their own goals and merely take advantage of the benefits of the communities (Ridings, Gefen, & Arineze, 2006).

In contrast, active members are highly motivated to participate in online communities and thus they are likely to share information and knowledge, contribute to fast dissemination of valuable content to other members, and provide emotional support to other members (Casaló et al., 2007). For instance, the popularity of YouTube is due to active members' considerable contributions to the community (Casaló et al., 2007). As community members actively post product information and share experiences, the community acquires substantial information that can attract new consumers and maintain strong relationships with existing members. Furthermore, members' active participation enhances their knowledge regarding brands and products (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001) and thus enables them to offer suggestions to solve problems with product usage and help each other make purchasing decisions (Flavián & Guinalíu, 2006). Active member participation is the key predictor of determining community growth and ensuring the community's long-term survival (Koh & Kim, 2004).

Authors	Categories	Description
Kozinets (1999), Wang &	Tourist	Has weak social ties with other members
Fesenmaier (2004a)	Mingler	Has somewhat strong social bonds with their
		group and occasionally contributes to the
		community
	Devotee	Strongly tied to the other members,
		enthusiastic, and frequently participates in
		community activities
	Insider	Maintains very strong bonds with other
		members and very actively contributes to the
		community
Burnett (2000), Preece et al.	Lurker	"Free-riders" who take advantages of the
(2004), Ridings et al. (2006)		community, but do not contribute to the
		community
	Poster	Participates in posting information and
		messages and has higher willingness to
		provide information and exchange social
		support
Akkineu & Tuunainen	Lead user	Provides the necessary information to
(2005)		develop new products for their community
	Active user	Provides valuable information for new
		members

Table 2. Categories of community participants

Researchers have found that community members' behaviors tend to evolve from passive to active (Kozinets, 1999; Walther, 1996). New consumers may passively participate in online activities to gather information and determine whether they share community interests (Walther & Boyd, 2002). However, as consumers spend more time in a community and the number of their interaction experiences increases, they are more likely to become frequent users, perceive themselves as members, and eventually become active members of the community and loyal consumers of the company's products (Preece et al., 2004). Thus, understanding the evolution of online community member involvement helps marketers segment their members into subgroups based on their level of participation (Preece et al., 2004).

As discussed above, members' active participation in online communities is a key element to ensure the growth and sustainability of these communities. In order to attract new members and encourage existing members' active participation, online community marketers must understand consumers' motivations to participate relative to what they desire to receive from online communities. Understanding participation benefits is critical in order for online community marketers to establish the optimal approaches not only to attract new members but also to encourage non-active members' participation, which means converting lurkers into active participants. Ultimately, companies that have online communities with a large number of active members tend to become successful in building long-term relationships with their consumers.

## **Participation Benefits**

In order to build successful online communities, community marketers must attract participants and encourage them to remain loyal to the community. One way to maintain online community traffic is to provide members with specific benefits that they desire from their participation as a community member (Wang et al., 2002). Kang et al. (2007) emphasized that such benefits should be consistently provided. If the online community fails to deliver consistent benefits to community members, the success of the online community may be jeopardized (Wang et al., 2002). When members perceive the benefits as worthwhile, they are more likely to become more active participants (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Table 3 shows that researchers have identified a variety of reasons that consumers possess for participating in an online community, including motivational and benefit factors (Armstrong & Hagel, 1996; Koh & Kim, 2004). The former reasons were developed by Dholakia et al. (2004) while the latter were developed by Wang and Fesenmaier (2004a). Dholakia et al. 's (2004) study focused on the social influence of consumer participation in online communities and found five motivational factors: purposive value, self-discovery, entertainment, maintaining interpersonal interconnectivity, and social enhancement. The findings explained communities' social influence on members through an understanding participation benefits that they desire to obtain from social interaction. For example, in a network-based online community where participants are not familiar with each other in most cases, members seek to attain benefits based on their individual needs as related to purposive value (e.g., obtaining information), self-discovery (e.g., expressing preferences), and entertainment. In contrast, the social influence model suggests that a member's decision to participate relies on other members' participation behaviors (i.e., intentional social action). In other words, members may choose to participate only if they observe high levels of interaction among other members (Dholakia et al., 2004).

In an online tourism community, members seek to accomplish a variety of travelrelated tasks such as gathering travel information, making transactions (e.g., booking travel packages), anticipating new relationships with people in remote and international places, and looking for individuals to accompany them on a backpacking or knapsack tour of Europe (Hagel & Armstrong, 1997; Wang et al., 2002). According to Wang and Fesenmaier (2004a), these can be considered as tourists' fundamental needs (i.e., human needs), and they have been generally accepted and classified into four categories: functional, social, psychological, and hedonic. Functional benefits are related to information gathering and transactional processes; for example, online community members compare the quality of information obtained with the amount of time and effort that has been invested in community activities. Social benefits describe the development of relationships with other people through communication and interaction. Psychological benefits refer to the emotional aspects of relationships, such as a sense of belonging and affiliation with the community (Wang et al., 2002). Hedonic benefits indicate a positive emotional state resulting from entertainment and enjoyment (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004a). These four benefits are discussed further in the next section.

Authors	Benefits or needs	
Hagel & Armstrong (1997)	Transaction, interest, fantasy, relationship	
Vogt & Fesenmaier (1998)	Functional, hedonic, aesthetic, innovation, and sign needs	
Wang & Fesenmaier (2004a)	Functional, psychological, social, and hedonic needs	
Kim et al. (2004)	Membership, influence and relatedness, integration and	
	fulfillment of need, shared emotional connection	
Hwang & Cho (2005)	Functional, social, psychological needs	
Chung & Bulahis (2008)	Information acquisition, social-psychological needs,	
	hedonic needs	

Table 3. Reasons for participating in online communities

Wang and Fesenmaier (2004a) argued that the motivation for consumer participation in an online tourism community relates to fundamental needs (i.e., participation benefits), whereas Dholakia et al. (2004) contended that this motivation is determined by social influence (i.e., the influence of other members' interaction on one's participation decision). However, Madupu (2006) claimed that Dholakia et al.'s (2004) motivation model can be reconciled with Wang and Fesenmaier's (2004a). According to Dholakia et al. (2004), motivational factors only take into account consumers' intentional social action in online communities. That is, individual members tend to more actively engage in community activities for purposive value (e.g., exchange information), self-discovery (e.g., expressing preferences), interaction (e.g., making friendship), social support (i.e., emotional support), and entertainment (e.g., recreation). Table 4 shows that Dholakia et al.'s (2004a).

Wang and Fesenmaier's (2004a) framework is employed in the present study because hospitality-related communities have features similar to travel communities. Members of a
hotel or restaurant community are likely to be involved with activities such as searching for information about a property (e.g., the ambience of hotel or restaurant and the quality of service), sharing service experiences with other members, and communicating with the service provider. For example, a hotel guest may seek out other guests' experiences with a property in the hopes of gaining more information about the neighborhood with regard to sightseeing and restaurants ("Hotel News", 2008). Restaurant consumers can search for information about menus and new promotions while making a decision to make reservations, visit a restaurant, or place orders via a company's online community (Kasavana, 2008).

In addition to the four benefits identified by Wang and Fesenmaier (2004a), the present study considers consumer desire for economic advantages from building a relationship with a service provider (Harris, O'Malley, & Patterson, 2003). The term "monetary benefit" is adopted from Gwinner et al. (1998); this benefit can significantly influence the extent of members' participation in online communities. Based on the discussion above, the present study proposes that members hope to gain five specific types of benefits from participation in the online community: functional, social, psychological, hedonic, and monetary.

Category	Benefit			
Functional	Information/Purposive value <sup>*</sup>			
	Efficiency			
	Convenience			
Psychological	Affiliation			
	Belonging			
	Identification			
	Self-Discovery <sup>*</sup>			
Social	Communication			
	Relationship/maintaining interpersonal interconnectivity*			
	Involvement			
	Trust			
	Social enhancement <sup>*</sup>			
Hedonic	Entertainment <sup>*</sup>			
	Enjoyment			
	Amusement			
	Fun			

Table 4. Community benefits from participation

*Note.* Source: Madupu (2006). \* Motivational factors from Dholakia et al. (2004) related to Wang and Fesenmaier's (2004a) benefits.

# **Functional benefits**

A functional benefit is one that increases the ease and/or efficiency of completing transactions (i.e., purchasing products and services) and exchanging information (i.e., information gathering and sharing) (Peter, Olson, & Grunert, 1999). One of the functional benefits of an online community is that interaction with other community members can facilitate purchasing decisions (Armstrong & Hagel, 1996). Information exchange is one of the major reasons for online community participation (Arsal, Backman, & Baldwin, 2008). Activities included in information gathering and sharing can be divided into two categories: solving problems and sharing information with others (Nishimura, Waryszak, & King, 2006). While searching for information, community members can obtain answers to their questions or disseminate useful information to others, including families, friends, and other community members (Wang et al., 2002). Convenience and efficiency can be realized through the Internet since members can have easy access to a vast amount of information relevant to their purposes with no temporal or geographic constraints. Since the information is stored and accessible within online communities, members can search for and exchange information more efficiently (Wang et al., 2002).

The relationship between functional benefits and community participation has been well documented but inconsistent in tourism research. Wang and Fesenmaier (2004a) found functional benefits to have a negative impact on members' participation. One reason for this negative relationship may be that members enjoy the fun and interactive parts of the community activities more than the task-oriented ones. Hwang and Cho's (2005) study revealed no significant relationship between functional benefits and members' community activities. In contrast, Chung and Buhalis (2008) found a positive relationship between members' information acquisition and their participation. Although members might not have specific plans for travel or dining out, they can still collect and share information about destinations, hotels, and the best restaurants in the area. If members can achieve their specific goals, such as acquiring information quickly, they are more likely to visit their online community.

Based on the above discussion, the present study posits that the relationship between functional benefits and community participation can vary depending on what community users want to gain from the community (i.e., whether they focus on entertainment or information acquisition). However, the present study postulates that members in specifically hospitality-related communities have explicit needs to obtain information with regard to

hotel facilities, room rates, restaurants, and tourism information, especially when they are actively planning a trip. They will also share their experiences with others, offering suggestions or responding to questions. Thus, the following hypothesis, indicating a positive relationship to stimuli members' active participation, is proposed:

H1: Functional benefits have a positive influence on online community participation.

# **Social benefits**

Social benefits are the various kinds of help and support that members provide for each other (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004a). Community members help and support each other by exchanging ideas and opinions of interest, answering other members' questions, and introducing new topics for discussion (Dholakia, Blazevic, Wiertz, & Algsheimer, 2009; Madupu, 2006). All of these activities can be enhanced when community members are highly involved with each other. Frequent participation in community activities engenders trust (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004a), which in turn leads to flourishing relationships among community members and with organizers of the community (Preece, 2000). For example, sharing service experiences at a hotel or restaurant with other members and finding people who have similar concerns and needs regarding room type or dinner menus require active interaction among members who have similar interests and experiences. When individuals recognize each other and identify the online community as their reference group, they are more likely to contribute valuable information and support each other's activity (Preece, 2001).

The rapid growth of online communities around the world speaks to the popularity of establishing and nurturing social interactions. As members spend more time online in the

community (Walther, 1996), this social interaction becomes a part of their lives (Feenberg & Bakardjieva, 2004). Because the Internet enables people to overcome the limitations of time and space on communication and interaction, individuals from different countries can join together and contribute to the knowledge and information (Chung & Buhalis, 2008).

Previous studies have indicated that social benefits significantly influence members' attitude toward an online community (Chung & Buhalis, 2008; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004a). Coon (1998) found that the primary reason people choose to participate in online communities is to build friendships with others who have similar interests or purposes. Online community members tend to increase the number and length of visits to online communities, and to actively participate in online community activities, when they recognize that they share mutual interests with other members (Hwang & Cho, 2005). Based on these findings, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Social benefits have a positive influence on online community participation.

# **Psychological benefits**

Psychological benefits are derived from feeling connected to community members, and include identity expression through the community, a sense of belonging to the community, and a sense of affiliation with other members (Bressler & Grantham, 2000). According to Kozinets (1999), online community members can gain knowledge not only about products or services but also about group norms, specialized language, and concepts within the community (i.e., members' identities). As members gain such knowledge about their online communities, they come to understand the community and feel a strong sense of belongings and affiliation, which in turn develops a permanent sense of identification (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004a). Once members fully identify themselves as a member of the community, they are more likely to rely on information provided by the community (Anderson & Weits, 1989). This psychological dependence makes members feel confident and positive about their interactions, a psychological benefit that encourages members to increase their participation.

Bressler and Grantham (2000) indicated that psychological benefits are a starting point for joining an online community due to an individual's need for a fulfilling sense of belonging to a community. However, in one particular tourism study, no relationship was found between psychological needs and member participation (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004a). Wang and Fesenmaier (2004a) provided an explanation for this result, stating that, in online travel communities, members do not know each other well, and may not desire a sense of community with other members or feel the necessity of developing member identification (Dholakia et al., 2004). In another tourism study, Hwang and Cho (2005) indicated that psychological benefits significantly influence members' attitudes toward the online community, while Kim et al. (2004) found a positive relationship between sense of community and members' loyalty to the community.

Although previous studies have obtained different results regarding this relationship, more studies show that psychological benefits have a positive influence on online community participation than not (Dholakia et al., 2004; Kim et al., 2004). Consumers may increase their level of participation in order to express their preferences, which lead to the formation of an emotional attachment with other members and the community (Lee, 2005). A sense of community enables consumers to share experiences and solve problems related to consumption (Bakos, 1998). This is an effective way to allure new consumers and retain them as loyal consumers (Kim et al., 2004). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Psychological benefits have a positive influence on online community participation.

# **Hedonic benefits**

Hedonic benefits include positive emotional states, such as feeling entertained and amused and experiencing enjoyment that occurs when participating in community activities (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004a). In online communities, members are likely to engage in activities that not only provide valued information but also elicit positive emotions (e.g., happiness, excitement, and enthusiasm) (Armstrong & Hagel, 1995). Some online communities allow members to play games or participate in contests or polls related to members' mutual interests, which lead to pleasure, fun, and entertainment (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004a). From a hedonic perspective, community members are viewed as pleasure seekers, who place more value on the experiential aspects of consumption than on other participation benefits discussed above (Vogt & Fesenmaier, 1998).

For some online community members, hedonic benefits are more important than other benefits (Hoffman & Novak, 1996). Participation in an online community is influenced by hedonic benefits that members gain from discussion forums, electronic bulletin boards, and features for sharing pictures and videos (Dholakia et al., 2004). If participating in an online community is perceived as fun or entertaining, members are more likely to visit the community and to spend more time visiting it. Therefore, the following hypothesis regarding hedonic benefits and community participation is proposed:

H4: Hedonic benefits have a positive influence on online community participation.

#### **Monetary benefits**

Consumers seek to receive economic advantages from a relationship with a service provider, which can be referred to as monetary savings (Gwinner et al., 1998). Monetary savings (i.e., discounts or special price breaks) is a primary reason for a consumer to develop a relationship with a company (Harris et al., 2003; Peterson, 1995). Gwinner et al. (1998) illustrated the importance of monetary benefits when developing a relationship with a service company. In the following excerpt, they give an example of the monetary benefits gained by loyal consumers:

Monetary benefit: I often get price breaks. The little bakery that I go to every morning, every once in a while they'll just give me a free muffin and say, "You're a good consumer, it's on us today." Also, my hair stylist one year said, "Oh, it's your birthday, okay; I'll give you your haircut." You're not going to get that if they don't know you. (p. 104)

In hospitality research, monetary benefits have been considered a part of individualized services that fulfill consumers' specific needs (i.e., special treatment benefits) (Lee, Ahn, & Kim, 2008). Han and Kim (2009) found that special treatment benefits (e.g., gift certificates) had a positive effect on the way that consumers felt about a restaurant. A similar process is likely to occur in online communities for hotels and restaurants (Kozinets, 1999). That is, offering monetary benefits is likely to have as positive an effect on online community members as it does on actual patrons of a restaurant (Kozinets, 1999). These businesses tend to offer special promotions and coupons to attract new members and benefit online community members (Treadaway & Smith, 2010). For example, community events and contests that provide winners with something of monetary value (e.g., coupons,

information about sales) may encourage member participation and entice nonmembers to register with the community. Thus, monetary benefits attract new members and maintain existing relationships. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed regarding the relationship between economic benefits and community participation:

H5: Monetary benefits have a positive influence on online community participation.

# **Outcomes of Online Community Participation**

In this section, the relationships between online community participation, brand trust, and brand commitment are explored and hypotheses are developed. Through participation in online communities, members provide helps to others and receive helps when they need it. Because hospitality products and services cannot be evaluated without consumption, consumers can be significantly influenced by others who have had experiences with those products and services. Once consumers find information provided by other people to be trustworthy, they learn to rely on these opinions (Paris et al., 2010). A high level of trust fosters emotional attachments among members of online communities (Hagel & Armstrong, 1997; Hess & Story, 2005); it also increases their level of commitment to a particular brand (Casaló et al., 2007).

# Brand commitment of online community members

Consumers have been shown to engage different cognitive processes in evaluating information about their preferred brands or competing brands (Raju, Unnava, & Montgomery, 2009). The information selection process can be influenced by brand commitment, which is defined as a strong and positive psychological attachment of consumers to a specific brand (Beatty & Kahle, 1988). On the one hand, consumers who are highly committed to a specific brand evaluate competing brands less positively or avoid considering competitors' brands when making purchasing decision (Ahluwalia, Burnkrant, & Unnava, 2000). They tend to defend their favorable attitudes toward brands when perceiving a threat such as unfavorable information about their preferred brands or favorable information about competing brands (Chaiken, Liberman, & Eagly, 1989). Consumers who perceive such threats tend to secure their positive attitudinal position toward their preferred brands by searching for favorable information about their brand (Jain & Maheswaran, 2000) and maintaining their beliefs about the brands (Kunda, 1990). In other words, consumers want to see evidence that their preferred brands are different from and better than other brands (Chaiken et al., 1989).

On the other hand, consumers who are less committed to a specific brand are less likely to be threatened by competing brands (Jain & Maheswaran, 2000). These consumers are likely to consider any brand that satisfies their needs and to seek information about new brands (Raju et al., 2009). They look for similarities between the positive aspects of their preferred brand versus its competitors (Sanbonmatsu, Posavac, Vanous, & Ho, 2005). There is a high possibility that these consumers may accept alternatives when they feel that the competing brand is similar to their preferred brand (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996).

An online community often constitutes a group of committed consumers because the group consists of people who share common interests and purposes (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002). Members are likely to discuss how to use products, and ask other members for product repair and maintenance information (Casaló et al., 2007). As members frequently and actively participate in online communities, they become more familiar with the brand, and thus develop expertise on products and brands. These members also are likely to help

other members within the community (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Information or content posted by these members contains positive messages in support of their favorite brands, which protects their attitudinal positions about those brands (Raju et al., 2009).

Being highly involved in community activities (e.g., participating in discussions and posting positive messages about a brand) positively affects commitment and emotional attachment to a brand (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005). Consumers' emotional ties toward particular brands can develop as a result of active participation in online communities (Casaló et al., 2007). For example, when consumers discuss common issues related to their favorite brands, they are more likely to create emotional ties with each other, and they reach agreement more easily. Active participation increases members' commitment to particular brands because members who share similar interests in those brands can communicate and interact with each other through community discussion boards. When they experience shared sympathy on specific issues related to their preferred brands or consumption experiences, positive attitude toward those brands can be enhanced (Algesheimer et al., 2005; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004a). Therefore, the level of participation positively affects commitment to a brand. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: Online community participation has a positive influence on brand commitment.

# **Brand Trust among Online Community Members**

Trust is a fundamental principle of interpersonal exchange, built up gradually through repeated interactions (Gefen, 2000; Leimeister, Ebner, & Krcmar, 2005). Brand trust is defined as consumers' secure belief that a brand will perform as expected upon consumption (Ha & Perks, 2005; Pitta, Franzak, & Fowler, 2006). Trust is an essential element in reducing

perceptions of risk. When a brand successfully performs its expected function, consumers begin to trust it and decide to continue a relationship with the company or brand (Butler & Cantrell, 1994). Without trust, interactions may not continue beyond a single occasion (Gefen, 2000).

According to Flavian and Guinaliu (2006), frequent participation in community activities (e.g., posting and reviewing messages) enables consumers to be more knowledgeable about brands. For example, consumers can discuss experiences of product usage and suggest alternative ways to use or fix the brand's products (Flavian & Guinaliu, 2006). These discussions increase consumers' confidence that they will be satisfied with a particular brand and thus build trust in that brand (Ha & Perks, 2005).

In addition, online communities serve as bulletin boards for posting consumers' opinions and suggestions, and companies consider these resources when developing new products or modifying brand products (Casaló et al., 2007). Companies seek to utilize their online community as a tool for exchanging ideas about new offerings, directly listening to product/service comments from consumers, and learning more about consumers' needs. Through continuous interaction between companies and consumers, their trust in the company and its brands is eventually generated (Tung, Tan, Chia, Koh, & Yeo, 2001). Based on this communication and interaction, consumers are satisfied with what they receive from participation, they may increase their levels of trust toward the online community and the brand (Deighton, 1992).

In numerous marketing studies, trust has been identified as a major predictor of consumers' long-term relationship with and commitment to a brand (Garbarino & Johnson,

1999; Harris & Goode, 2004; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Brand commitment is referred to as consumers' positive emotion toward a brand (Beatty & Kahle, 1988). Since committed consumers are satisfied with the brand, they are less likely to look for other brands, which will save them time and effort (Garbarino & Mark, 1999). Positive emotion toward a brand is related to consumers' trust that the brand will perform its functions (Ha & Perks, 2005). In addition, brand trust strengthens attachment and favorable behaviors toward brands (Beatty & Kahle, 1988). Loyal consumers tend to avoid all other alternatives and rely on information about their favorite brand (i.e., a tendency to resist changes) (Pritchard, Havitz, & Howard, 1999). Based on the above discussion, the following two hypotheses are proposed:

H7: Online community participation has a positive influence on brand trust.

H8: Brand trust has a positive influence on brand commitment of online community members.

#### **Moderating Role of Demographic Characteristics**

Certain demographic characteristics affect the way online consumers behave (Morris & Venkatesh, 2000; Serenko, Turel, & Yol, 2006). In particular, consumer age and biological gender have been identified as influential determinants in an individual's behavior (e.g., information searching, downloading and updating information, and purchase/reservation transactions) (Matzler, Grabner-Krauter, & Bidmon, 2006; Saad & Gill, 2001). For example, younger consumers, between the ages of 20 and 30, use the Internet frequently for chatting, emailing, meeting new friends, and playing games (Thayer & Ray, 2006), whereas older Internet users between the ages of 50 and 64 use it more often for

checking email and communicating with family members (Howard, Rainie, & Jones, 2001). Previous studies have also found biological gender differences in Internet usage behaviors; women are more involved with social relationships and prefer to maintain those relationships more intimately than men (Boneva, Kraut, & Frohlich, 2006). Because age and biological gender are associated with patterns of Internet usage behaviors, understanding the effects of these two demographic characteristics on online communities is important (Igbaria & Chakrabarti, 1990).

# Moderating roles of age

Age has been considered as the most important personal characteristic that affects computer adoption and Internet usage behaviors such as messaging, searching, downloading information, and purchasing (Teo, 2001; Serenkoet al., 2006). Morris and Venkatesh (2000) linked technology adoption with age differences. Younger individuals are more open to using a new technology than older ones, since older people tend to be more concerned about the difficulties they may have in learning new systems (Hertzog & Hultsch, 2000). However, Teo (2001) found no significant differences in Internet usage for online shopping across age groups. In terms of Internet usage, differences may exist between the types of content that individuals seek out depending on age group (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004b). For instance, older consumers are less likely to look for new information, whereas younger consumers seek alternative information and various decision criteria when making purchase decisions (Evanschitzky & Wunderlich, 2006). Wang and Fesenmaier (2004b) also found that younger groups (i.e., up to 40 years old) appreciated functional benefits (e.g., information gathering and ease of transactions) from community participation. Young adults (under age 20) were

more likely to pursue social and psychological benefits (e.g., a sense of belonging and enhanced social status) than adults over the age of 55. Adults between the ages of 20 and 40 placed more value on hedonic benefits (e.g., entertainment) than other age groups. Likewise, consumers or members in online communities for hospitality companies (i.e., hotels and restaurants) may have different reasons to participate in different activities. Based on the age differences discussed above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H9: Younger people are more likely to be strongly affected by participation benefits—functional (H9a), social (H9b), psychological (H9c), hedonic (H9d), and monetary (H9e) —than are older members of online communities.

#### Moderating roles of biological gender

Biological gender has been widely used as a moderator variable, particularly in consumer behavior research (Saad & Gill, 2001). Many studies have shown that social roles differ based on biological gender differences, which indicate specific behaviors that men or women are expected to display. For example, men often learn to be assertive and aggressive, whereas women are more nurturing and tend to be naïve (Putrevu, 2001). These differences have revealed distinct patterns in communicating and building relationships with others (Serenko, Turel, & Yol, 2006). For example, men tend to control relationships and dominate conversations with other people; in contrast, women are more likely to express their personal feelings, be supportive, and cooperate with others for interaction (Boneva et al., 2006).

Similar differences in biological gender have been found in the usage of Websites (Wasserman & Richmond-Abbott, 2005). Men exhibit preferences for entertainment aspects such as building Web pages, searching for information about products, and participating in

online games (Weiser, 2000). In contrast, women are more interested in maintaining social connections through e-mail and online chatting, communicating with friends, and sharing personal issues and emotions (i.e., social benefits) (Jackson, Ervin, Gardner, & Schmitt, 2001). Nie and Erbring (2000) found that women tend to use email and online chatting more frequently than men for interpersonal communication (i.e., social benefits). Phillip and Suri (2004) found that women prefer to receive advertising e-mails more than men do, which indicates they are less task-oriented (e.g., information search). Based on the above discussion, differences in biological gender have been observed in online communication and usage behaviors. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H10: The gender of online community members moderates the effect of participation benefits on online community participation.

H10a: The effect of functional benefits on community participation will be stronger for male members.

H10b: The effect of social benefits on community participation will be stronger for female members.

H10c: The effect of psychological benefits on community participation will be stronger for female members.

H10d: The effect of hedonic benefits on community participation will be stronger for male members.

H10e: The effect of monetary benefits on community participation will be stronger for female members.

#### **Research Model**

Based on the above discussion, the present study proposes a conceptual research model of relationships: (a) the relationships between community participation and participation benefits (Figure 2), (b) the relationships between community participation, brand trust, and brand commitment (Figure 2), and (c) the moderating effect of demographic characteristics (i.e., gender and age) on the relationship between participation benefits and community (Figure 3 and Figure 4).



Figure 2. Proposed conceptual model for development of an effective online community







Figure 4. Moderating effects of gender

#### **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN**

This chapter introduces the research methods utilized to test the H presented in Chapter 2. The selection of hotel and restaurant brands' Facebook pages, sampling and data collection methods, the survey instrument, and the statistical analysis process are discussed in the following sections.

## **Selection of Online Communities in Facebook**

The present study investigates hotel and restaurant brands' Facebook pages. These two groups were selected because they are the most important segments of the hospitality industry. Many Facebook pages for hotels and restaurants have incorporated unique features (e.g., promotions) in order to encourage member participation. Among the numerous fan pages on the site, four hotel and four restaurant brands' Facebook pages were chosen from the list of "10 Awesome Hotel Facebook Pages to Like" (http://www.businessinsider.com/10awesome-hotel-facebook-pages-to-like-2011-1) and "Best Restaurant Facebook Fan Pages" (http://hilinskyconsulting.com/blog/2009/11/12/best-restaurant-facebook-fan-pages/). The former article was published by BusinessInsider.com, an online community that shares business news. The latter was published by a social media marketing consulting company. The successfulness of these Facebook pages was based on a high number of fans as well as a high number of postings by members (Preece et al., 2004). From the two lists, the following Facebook pages that meet both criteria were chosen: (1) Marriott Napa Valley Hotel and Spa, Beacon Hotel, The Westin Dragonara Resort Malta, and The Hermitage Hotel; (2) Outback Steakhouse, Chili's Grill & Bar, Red Lobster, and The Cheesecake Factory.

#### Sample

The sample for the present study consisted of fans of the hotel and restaurant brands' Facebook pages listed above. Following approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Iowa State University (Appendix C), an online survey was developed and distributed to potential respondents, both male and female, of at least 18 years of age. The advantages of online surveys are their (a) low cost, (b) interactivity, (c) high accessibility to the respondent without time and space constraints, and (d) convenience for data entry and checking (Stopher, Collins, & Bullock, 2004).

#### **Survey Instrument**

The survey consisted of four sections: (1) participation benefits; (2) community participation, brand trust, and brand commitment; (3) demographic information; and (4) manipulation checking. Prior to starting the first part of the survey, participants were asked whether they had ever joined either hotel or restaurant brands' Facebook pages. Only those who had confirmed that they have been or currently were a member of a Facebook page operated by a hospitality company were eligible to complete the survey.

For the hotel questionnaire, a list of hotels indicated in the previous section ("selection of online communities in Facebook") was given as choices for participants to indicate for which brand pages they are members. For the restaurant questionnaire, a list of restaurants indicated in the above section ("selection of online communities in Facebook") was given as choices. For respondents who were not a member of given hotel or restaurant brands' Facebook pages, an open-ended question was provided for them to provide another hotel or restaurant name.

The first part of the survey measured five categories of member benefits (exogenous variables): functional, social, psychological, hedonic, and monetary benefits, using five-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (*not important at all*) to 5 (*extremely important*). Four benefit variables—functional, social, psychological, and hedonic—were adapted from Wang and Fesenmaier (2004a); these have been successfully used in a number of studies of online communities. First, functional benefits were assessed with four items: "obtaining up-to-date information", "ease/convenience of communicating with others", "efficiency of online communication", and "sharing experiences". Next, social benefits variables consisted of four items: "having trust in the community", "seeking self-identity", "communicating with other members", and "getting involved with other members". Third, three items were employed to investigate psychological benefits: "seeking a sense of affiliation in the community", "seeking a sense of affiliation in the community", "seeking a sense of affiliation in the community", "to be entertained by other members". To be entertained by other members", "to have fun", "to seek enjoyment", and "to be entertained".

In addition to these four benefit variables, monetary benefits were assessed using three items adapted from Gwinner et al. (1998) and Lee et al. (2008). These items related to special deals, discounts, or company events offered on the community site: "obtaining discounts or special deals that most consumers don't get", "obtaining better prices than most consumers", and "receiving free coupons for hotel stays or food/beverages by becoming a member of this Facebook page".

The second part of the survey examined levels of community participation, brand trust, and brand commitment (i.e., endogenous variables). All items in the second part were measured using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). To measure community participation, four items were adapted from Koh and Kim (2004) and Casaló et al. (2007): "I take an active part on the hotel/restaurant brand's Facebook page", "I usually provide useful information to other members", "In general, I post messages and responses on the hotel/restaurant brand's Facebook page with great enthusiasm and frequency", and "I do my best to stimulate the hotel/restaurant brand's Facebook page". These items served to gather more detailed information regarding member behavior than do assessments of use frequency or log-in times (Casaló et al., 2008; Madupu, 2006).

The second part of the survey also included the questions regarding brand trust and brand commitment. All items for the two constructs were measured using a 5-point Likerttype scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Brand trust was measured using items from Chiang and Jang's (2006) and Wilkins, Merrilees, and Herington's (2010) work. Respondents were asked to rate the extent of their agreement with the following four statements: "What the hotel/restaurant brand says about its products/service is true", "I feel I know what to expect from the hotel/restaurant brand", "the hotel/restaurant brand is very reliable", and "the hotel/restaurant brand meets its promises". To measure brand commitment, three items were adapted from Ahluwalia (2000): "if the hotel/restaurant brand were not available for reservation (e.g., rooms, tables), it would make little difference to me if I had to make reservations at other hotels/restaurants", "I consider myself to be highly loyal to the hotel/restaurant brand", and "when another brand has a

special deal (e.g., lower room rate/price for meal), I generally stay at the hotel/ visit the restaurant with the better deal".

The third part of the survey elicited demographic information such as education, biological gender, and age. Age ranges were adapted from Wang and Fesenmaier's (2004a): (1) younger than 21, (2) between 21 and 30, (3) between 31 and 40, (4) between 41 and 55, and (5) over 55. Several open-ended questions were also included in this part of the survey: (1) How long have you been a member of this hotel's/restaurant's Facebook page?, (2) How long, on average, do you participate in this brand's hotel/restaurant Facebook page each week?, and (3) How many Facebook pages of hotels/restaurants are you a member of?

In the last part of the questionnaire, respondents were asked about the perceived success of the Facebook page as a manipulation check: "The interaction between the company and other members is active", "The hotel/restaurant brand's Facebook page is successful", and "I like visiting the hotel/restaurant brand's Facebook page". All items were measured using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

A pilot test was undertaken by distributing the survey to a total of 15 graduate students majoring in hotel management to determine whether wording changes were needed to enhance clarity. Based on the feedback gathered, minor changes were made to ensure that participants would have no difficulty understanding or answering questions.

Construct	Measurement items
Functional benefits	<ul> <li>Obtaining up-to-date information</li> <li>Ease/convenience of communicating with others</li> <li>Efficiency of online communication</li> <li>Sharing experiences</li> </ul>
Social benefits	<ul> <li>Having trust in the community</li> <li>Seeking self-identity</li> <li>Communicating with other members</li> <li>Getting involved with other members</li> </ul>
Psychological benefits	<ul> <li>Seeking a sense of affiliation in the community</li> <li>Seeking a sense of belonging</li> <li>Establishing and maintaining relationships with other members</li> </ul>
Hedonic benefits	<ul> <li>To be entertained by other members</li> <li>To have fun</li> <li>To seek enjoyment</li> <li>To be entertained</li> </ul>
Monetary benefits	<ul> <li>Obtaining discounts or special deals that most consumers don't get</li> <li>Obtaining better prices than most consumers</li> <li>Receiving free coupons for hotel stays or food/beverages by becoming a member of this community</li> </ul>
Community participation	<ul> <li>I take an active part in the hotel (restaurant) brand's Facebook page</li> <li>I usually provide useful information to other members in the hotel (restaurant) brand's Facebook page</li> <li>In general, I post messages and responses in the hotel (restaurant) brand's Facebook page with great enthusiasm and frequency</li> <li>I do my best to stimulate the hotel (restaurant) brand.</li> </ul>
Brand trust	<ul> <li>What the hotel (restaurant) brand says about its products/service is true</li> <li>I feel I know what to expect from the hotel (restaurant) brand.</li> <li>The hotel (restaurant) brand is very reliable.</li> <li>The hotel (restaurant) brand meets its promises.</li> </ul>
Brand commitment	<ul> <li>If the hotel (restaurant) brand were not available for reservations (e.g., rooms, tables), it would make little difference to me if I had to make reservations at other hotel/restaurant brand.*</li> <li>I consider myself to be highly loyal to the hotel (restaurant) brand.</li> <li>When another brand has a special deal (e.g., lower room rate/price for meal), I generally stay at the hotel/visit the restaurant with the better deal rather than the hotel (restaurant) brand.*</li> </ul>

 Table 5. Constructs and items of the survey

Note. Reverse-coded item\*

#### **Data Collection**

The data were collected between June 25 and July 5, 2011. Participants were recruited from two sources. First, a panel of participants identified by the online research company, Qualtrics, was used. Participants were also drawn from a list of alumni of Iowa State University. The data on the fans of hotel brands' Facebook pages were collected from both the Qualtrics panel (154 responses) and university alumni (60 responses); whereas the data on the fans of restaurant brands' Facebook pages were collected from university alumni.

An email invitation was sent to potential participants, along with a link to the online questionnaire. The invitation sent by Qualtrics included a \$1 incentive for each of their panel members, whereas the invitation to the alumni of Iowa State University included a message regarding a drawing for a \$50 gift card as a participation incentive. A total of 21,000 invitations were sent to the alumni list. From the 21,000 alumni, 452 responses were received (60 from members of hotel brands' Facebook pages and 392 from members of restaurant brands' Facebook pages), with the response rate of 2.15%. Because of the low response rate in the category of hotel respondents, the present researcher determined to employ Qualitrics, an online research company, to further collect data from fans of hotel brands' Facebook pages. A total of 5,000 invitations were sent to the panelists of the company's database. The response rate was 3.08%; 154 responses were collected.

## **Data Analysis**

In the data analysis process, descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used for demographic data. Furthermore, the mean values for each item were calculated.

The present study employed the two-step structural equation modeling (SEM) approach suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). The first step involved confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to validate the scales for the measurement of specific constructs proposed in the research model (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). When using CFA, items that produce factor loadings lower than 0.5, the cut-off value suggested by Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, and Tatham (2006), were deleted. The second step involved examination of the structural model through SEM in order to evaluate the validity of the proposed model and H. The maximum likelihood procedure was used to estimate the measurement model and structural model (Namkung & Jang, 2007) in Amos 6.0.

# **Measurement model**

CFA was utilized to evaluate the overall measurement quality (Anderson & Gerbing, 1992), while a reliability test (Cronbach's *alpha*) was conducted to assess the internal consistency of each construct. The cutoff value of .70 for Cronbach's *alpha* (Nunnally, 1978) was used. A significant conventional chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ) statistic indicated a poor fit. The cutoff point of  $\chi^2$ /df was set at 3:1 (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1988). In other words, if the ratio ( $\chi^2$ /df) fell between 1 and 3, the model fit was perceived as acceptable (McIver & Carmines, 1981). TLI and CFI values greater than .90 indicated a satisfactory model fit (Hair et al., 2006; Yuan & Jang, 2008; He & Song, 2009). These two indices can be influenced by the

average size of the correlations in the data. If the average correlation between variables is low, then the TLI (and the CFI) will have a low score (Kenny, 2010). RMSEA with a value below .08 was recommended (Byrne, 1998; Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2000).

# Structural model

Two structural models were tested. The first assessed the proposed causal relationships between participation benefits (functional, psychological, social, hedonic, and monetary), community participation, brand trust, and brand commitment (Figure 2.1) which reflected H1 through H8. The second model examined the moderating role of two demographic variables, age (Figure 2.2; H9a~e) and biological gender (Figure 2.3; H10a~d), on the relationships between participation benefits and community participation using a multi-group SEM approach suggested by Joreskog and Sorbom (1993). The mediating effect of brand trust between community participation and brand commitment was tested using Baron and Kenny's approach (1986).

#### **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS**

This chapter reports the results of the analysis, which include demographic characteristics of the sample, descriptive statistics of the variables, and measurement and structural equation model tests.

#### **Demographic Characteristics**

A total of 606 questionnaires were collected (214 responses from hotel respondents and 392 responses from restaurant respondents). The data were screened to control response bias. Responses that included one or more unanswered sections and those with extreme answers were removed. After deleting 72 invalid surveys, 534 responses (203 hotel responses and 331 restaurant responses) were kept for further analysis. Table 6 and Table 7 present the demographic profile of the hotel and the restaurant respondents, respectively. In addition to demographic characteristics such as biological gender, age, and education, tables include respondents' information regarding geographic regions where respondents reside, duration of membership, average time spent on hotel or restaurant brands' Facebook pages per week, and the number of Facebook page memberships.

In the hotel study (Table 6), approximately 52% of the participants were female and 48% were male. Among them, 54% ranged in age from 21 to 40 years old. 33.2% of the participants had completed bachelor degrees and 29.5% had earned a graduate degree. The majority of participants (97.4%) were Americans. Approximately 74% of the participants had been members of hotel brands' Facebook pages for less than 12 months. In terms of the usage of hotel brands' Facebook pages, over half of the participants had spent one to five

hours per week (65.6 %) on the pages, and belonged to two to five hotel brands' Facebook pages (55.4%).

For the restaurant sample (Table 7), the majority of respondents were female; 70.3% of the participants were female and 29.7% were male. The majority of restaurant participants' ages ranged from 21 to 30 (53.4%), followed by 31-40 age group (25.5%). The majority of participants (97.9%) was American and highly educated (80.2%); 38.3% of respondents had completed a bachelor degree, while 41.9% possessed a graduate degree. Sixty-five percent of the participants had been members of restaurant brands' Facebook pages for less than a year. In terms of the usage of restaurant brands' Facebook page, more than a half of the participants had spent one to five hours per week (56.4%) and belonged to two to five restaurant brands' Facebook pages (69.1%).

Demographic characteristics	•	Frequency	Percentage
Biological gender ( $n = 195$ )			
	Male	101	51.8
	Female	94	48.2
Age ( <i>n</i> = 193)			
	18-20 years old	10	5.2
	21-30	59	30.6
	31-40	45	23.3
	41-55	54	28.0
	Over 55	25	13.0
Education ( $n = 190$ )			
	High school or less	35	18.4
	Associate degree	36	18.9
	Bachelor degree	63	33.2
	Graduate degree	56	29.5
Geographic region ( $n = 193$ )	-		
	United State of America	188	97.4
	European	2	1.0
	Asian	3	1.6
Duration of membership			
( <i>n</i> = 193)			
	Less than 12 months	142	73.6
	12-24 months	41	21.2
	25-36 months	6	3.1
	Over 36 months	4	2.1
Average hour spent per week			
on Facebook pages ( $n = 192$ )			
	Less than 1 hour	46	24.0
	1-5 hours	126	65.6
	6-10 hours	9	4.7
	More than 10 hours	11	5.7
Number of Facebook page			
memberships $(n = 193)$			
	1 membership	39	20.2
	2-5 memberships	107	55.4
	6-10 memberships	21	10.9
	More than 10 memberships	26	13.5

Table 6. Demographic characteristics of the hotel sample

Demographic characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Biological gender ( $n = 327$ )			
	Male	97	29.7
	Female	230	70.3
Age ( <i>n</i> = 326)			
	18-20 years old	36	11.0
	21-30	174	53.4
	31-40	83	25.5
	41-55	29	8.9
	Over 55	4	1.2
Education $(n = 329)$			
	High school or less	49	14.9
	Associate degree	15	4.6
	Bachelor degree	126	38.3
	Graduate degree	138	41.9
Geographic region ( $n = 330$ )			
	United State of America	323	97.9
	European	2	0.6
	Asian	5	1.5
Duration of membership			
(n = 324)			
	Less than 12 months	212	65.4
	12-24 months	84	25.9
	25-36 months	28	8.6
	Over 36 months	0	0.0
Average hours spend per week			
on Facebook pages ( $n = 328$ )			
	Less than 1 hour	185	56.4
	1-5 hours	99	30.2
	6-10 hours	34	10.4
	More than 10 hours	10	3.0
Number of Facebook page			
memberships ( $n = 320$ )			
	1 membership	56	17.5
	2-5 memberships	221	69.1
	6-10 memberships	18	5.6
	More than 10 memberships	25	7.8

 Table 7. Demographic characteristics of the restaurant sample

#### **Brand Profile and Manipulation Check**

Table 8 shows the profiles of hotel and restaurant brands listed in the previous section ("selection of online communities in Facebook"). More than 50% of the hotel data were from the Marriott hotel group and 32% were from 36 different hotel brands including Hilton, Intercontinental, Ritz Carlton, and Westin. On the other hand, approximately 54% of the restaurant data were from 135 different brands including Olive Garden, Panera, Texas Roadhouse, and Chipotle Mexican Grill.

To check the successfulness of Facebook pages operated by the hospitality companies named by the respondents, the mean values for the three items related to the perceived successfulness of the Facebook page were calculated for each brand (Table 9). All of the mean values were above 3.0, which indicated that participants generally perceived the Facebook pages to be actively managed, successful, and they liked visiting the brands' pages. Accordingly, the respondents created an appropriate sample for the present study due to their strong interest and concern for Facebook page brands related to the hotel and restaurant establishments.

Hotel ( <i>n</i> = 203)	Frequency	Percent
Marriott	108	53.2
Stanley	10	4.9
Beacon	7	3.5
The Algonquin	13	6.4
Others (specified by respondents).	65	32.0
Restaurant $(n = 331)$	Frequency	Percent
Outback Steakhouse	28	8.5
Chili's	32	9.7
Red Lobster	32	9.7
The Cheesecake Factory	61	18.4
Other (specified by respondents).	178	53.8

 Table 8. Brand profile of the sample

# Table 9. Perceived success of Facebook pages

Hotel $(n = 203)$	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
There is active participation between the hotel and members.	3.72	.85	2	5
The hotel brand's Facebook page is successful.	3.96	.80	1	5
I like visiting the hotel brand's Facebook page.	3.91	.80	1	5
Restaurant ( $n = 331$ )	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
There is active participation between the restaurant and members.	3.36	.89	1	5
The restaurant brand's Facebook page is successful.	3.76	.67	1	5
I like visiting the restaurant brand's Facebook page.	3.52	.76	1	5

# **Descriptive Statistics for Measures**

Table 10 reports the descriptive statistics of the hotel and restaurant studies, including empirical items for each construct, mean, standard deviation, and minimum and maximum of each measurement item. These statistics were used to understand the variation of each item for the proposed constructs measured in the causal model. The constructs were functional benefit, social benefit, psychological benefit, hedonic benefit, monetary benefit, participation, brand trust, and brand commitment.

<b>^</b>	Hotel ( <i>n</i> =203)			Restaurant (n=331)				
Constructs	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Items								
Functional benefit								
Obtaining up-to-date information about the	4.22	.84	1	5	3.84	.89	1	5
Hotel (Restaurant) brand								
Conveniently communicating with others	3.82	.98	1	5	3.14	1.08	1	5
online								
Efficiently communicating online	3.95	.90	1	5	3.45	1.03	1	5
Sharing experiences in the Hotel (Restaurant)	4.07	.89	1	5	3.72	.97	1	5
brand								
Social benefit								
Having trust in the community of Facebook	4.03	.91	1	5	3.43	1.04	1	5
Seeking self-identity	3.40	1.15	1	5	2.68	1.10	1	5
Communicating with other members	3.82	1.00	1	5	3.10	1.06	1	5
Getting involved with other members		1.00	1	5	2.84	1.03	1	5
Psychological benefit								
Seeking a sense of affiliation in the community	3.53	.99	1	5	3.09	1.11	1	5
Seeking a sense of belonging	3.53	1.07	1	5	2.87	1.07	1	5
Establishing and maintaining relationships	3.72	1.07	1	5	3.03	1.11	1	5
with other members of Facebook								
Hedonic benefit								
Being amused by other members	3.64	.93	1	5	3.37	1.01	1	5
Having fun on the brand's Facebook page	3.81	.91	1	5	3.33	1.03	1	5
Seeking enjoyment on this Facebook page	3.79	.91	1	5	3.24	1.06	1	5
Being entertained on this Facebook page	3.77	.91	1	5	3.34	1.00	1	5
	•							

# Table 10. Descriptive statistics for all items used to measure model constructs

Note. Reverse-coded item\*
## Table 10. (continued)

	Hotel ( <i>n</i> =203)				Restaurant (n=33			1)
	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Monetary benefit								
Obtaining discounts or special deals that most	4.44	.75	1	5	4.53	.75	1	5
consumers don't get								
Obtaining better prices than other consumers	4.36	.82	1	5	4.28	.85	1	5
Receiving free coupons for the Hotel	4.32	.83	1	5	4.42	.81	1	5
(Restaurant) brand by becoming a member of								
the Facebook page								
Participation								
I take an active part in the Hotel (Restaurant)	3.27	1.07	1	5	2.45	.97	1	5
brand's Facebook page								
I frequently provide useful information to	3.35	1.03	1	5	2.14	.87	1	5
other members								
In general, I post messages and responses on	3.16	1.09	1	5	2.12	.92	1	5
the brand's Facebook page with great								
enthusiasm and frequency								
I do my best to participate in activities offered	3.43	1.02	1	5	2.53	.100	1	5
on the brand's Facebook page								
Brand trust								
What the Hotel (Restaurant) brand says about	3.91	.78	2	5	3.72	.77	1	5
its products/service is true								
I feel I know what to expect from the Hotel	4.06	.76	1	5	3.98	.62	1	5
(Restaurant) brand								
The Hotel (Restaurant) brand is very reliable	4.15	.67	2	5	3.97	.65	1	5
The Hotel (Restaurant) brand meets its	4.11	.74	1	5	3.98	.630	1	5
promises								

# Table 10. (continued)

Hotel (n=203)				R	Restaurant (n=33		
Mean	SD	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
2.32	.99	1	5	2.23	.92	1	5
3.65	.99	1	5	3.22	.99	1	5
2.43	1.08	1	5	2.36	.98	1	5
	Mean 2.32 3.65 2.43	Hotel (           Mean         SD           2.32         .99           3.65         .99           2.43         1.08	Hotel (n=203)           Mean         SD         Min.           2.32         .99         1           3.65         .99         1           2.43         1.08         1	Hotel (n=203)           Mean         SD         Min.         Max.           2.32         .99         1         5           3.65         .99         1         5           2.43         1.08         1         5	Hotel (n=203)         R           Mean         SD         Min.         Max.         Mean           2.32         .99         1         5         2.23           3.65         .99         1         5         3.22           2.43         1.08         1         5         2.36	Hotel (n=203)         Restaura           Mean         SD         Min.         Max.         Mean         SD           2.32         .99         1         5         2.23         .92           3.65         .99         1         5         3.22         .99           2.43         1.08         1         5         2.36         .98	Hotel (n=203)         Restaurant (n=332)           Mean         SD         Min.         Max.         Mean         SD         Min.           2.32         .99         1         5         2.23         .92         1           3.65         .99         1         5         3.22         .99         1           2.43         1.08         1         5         2.36         .98         1

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## **Measurement Model**

The measurement model consisted of eight latent variables: five benefit variables (functional, social, psychological, hedonic, and monetary benefits), participation, brand trust, and brand commitment. Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to evaluate the overall fit of measurement items in the conceptual model.

#### Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for the hotel study

The initial measurement model of the hotel brands' Facebook pages was comprised of 29 measurement items. The initial estimation of this measurement model did not fit well. The chi-square value of 796.11 with 349 degrees of freedom was statistically significant at p < .001. Moreover, the other model fit indices used in the study were not acceptable (TLI = .84, CFI = .86, RMSEA = .08). Based on the results of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), one measurement item of brand commitment, "I consider myself to be highly loyal to the hotel brand." was deleted because it presented a factor loading lower than 0.50 (i.e., .39) which is the cut-off value suggested by Hair et al. (2006).

After deleting this item, CFA was conducted with the 28 measurement items, and the model fit for the revised measurement model was still found to be unacceptable ( $\chi^2 = 691.23$ , df = 322, p < .001, TLI=.86, CFI=.88, RMSEA=.075). Due to the poor model fit, the present researcher checked the correlation coefficients between the variables of the causal model (Table 11). The results showed that the exogenous variables (functional, social, psychological, and hedonic benefits) were highly correlated with each other, with correlations ranging from .53 to .87. This indicated multi-collinearity problems among the

exogenous variables. To resolve this issue, the present researcher carried out two processes in order to eliminate highly correlated items:

- Identified constructs to be compounded as a single construct;
- Deleted items that produced the lowest factor loadings from highly correlated constructs, even when all factor loadings were equal to or greater than .50.

First, social and psychological benefits were combined into a single construct due to their high correlation (r = .87). This compound construct was renamed as 'social-psychological benefits' for later CFA. Second, measurement items with the lowest factor loadings were identified from the four exogenous variables that were highly correlated with each other and a total of four items were eliminated for a better model fit. These items were: "obtaining up-to-date information about the hotel brand (.56)", "having trust in the Facebook community (.57), "establishing and maintaining relationships with other members of Facebook (.75)", and "being amused by other members (.66)."

After deleting these four measurement items, CFA was conducted with 24 items for the seven latent constructs (functional benefits, social-psychological benefits, hedonic benefits, monetary benefits, participation, brand trust, and brand commitment). The fit for the measurement model with two revisions was still not acceptable at  $\chi^2 = 515.23$ , df = 231, p< .001, TLI = .87, CFI = .89, RMSEA = .078. Using the same process, social-psychological benefits were found to be highly correlated with functional benefits (r = .67) and hedonic benefits (r = .64). The two items of social-psychological benefits that were primarily responsible for the multi-collinearity problem were deleted. These two items were "seeking self-identity (.70)" and "communicating with other members (.72)".

Constructs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Functional benefits	1							
2. Social benefits	.77**	1						
3. Psychological benefits	.62**	.87**	1					
4. Hedonic benefits	.53**	.73**	.59**	1				
5. Monetary benefits	.50**	.31**	.26**	.26**	1			
6. Participation	.50**	.60**	.53**	.49**	.13	1		
7. Brand trust	.38**	.30**	.24**	.27**	.49**	.45**	1	
8. Brand commitment	18	17	21**	07	03	02	.09	1

Table 11. Correlation coefficients of constructs: initial measurement model for the hotel study

*Note*: non-significant; \**p* < .05; \*\**p* < .01

After deleting two measurement items of social-psychological benefits, the final model, consisting of seven latent variables with 22 items, was tested. All the variables included at least three measurement items, with the exception of brand commitment. The CFA results showed a satisfactory model fit ( $\chi^2 = 355.22$ , df = 188, p < .001, TLI = .91, CFI = .93, RMSEA = .066). Since the ratio ( $\chi^2/df = 1.89$ ) fell between 1 and 3, the model fit was determined to be acceptable (McIver & Carmines, 1981). The values for TLI and CFI were greater than .90 and the value for RMSEA was below .08, indicating a satisfactory model fit (Byrne, 1998; Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2000; Hair et al., 2006). The correlation

coefficients among the variables are illustrated in Table 12. All variables in the final model (functional benefits, social-psychological benefits, hedonic benefits, monetary benefits, participation, brand trust, and brand commitment) were either moderately or highly correlated with each other, with the correlations ranging from -.19 to .59. Table 13 shows final measurement items with factor loadings and Cronbach's *alpha* estimates for the constructs. All the factor loadings in the final measurement model were equal to or greater than .59. The Cronbach's *alpha* estimates for the constructs in the present study ranged from .79 to .88, which were above the cutoff value of .70 (Hair et al., 1998; Nunnally, 1978). Thus, the data showed an acceptable level of internal consistency.

Constructs	1	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Functional benefits	1						
<ol> <li>Social- Psychological benefits</li> </ol>	.59**	1					
4. Hedonic benefits	.49**	.57**	1				
5. Monetary benefits	.44**	.28**	.24**	1			
6. Participation	.51**	.52**	.48**	.13	1		
7. Brand trust	.34**	.25**	.27**	.49**	.45**	1	
8. Brand commitment	17	19**	06	03	02	.09	1

 Table 12. Correlation coefficients of constructs: final measurement model for the hotel study

*Note*: non-significant; \**p* < .05; \*\**p* < .01

Construct	Standardized	Cronbach's	
	<b>Factor Loadings</b>	alpha	
Functional benefits		.80	
Obtaining up-to-date information about the hotel	-		
brand. <sup>d</sup>			
Efficiently communicating with others online.	.84		
Conveniently communicating online.	.86		
Sharing experiences in the hotel brand.	.59		
Social-Psychological benefits		.86	
Having trust in the Facebook community. <sup>d</sup>	-		
Seeking self-identity. <sup>d</sup>	-		
Communicating with other members. <sup>d</sup>	-		
Getting involved with other members.	.72		
Seeking a sense of affiliation in the community.	.87		
Seeking a sense of belonging.	.88		
Establishing and maintaining relationships with other members of Facebook. <sup>d</sup>	-		
Hedonic benefits		.85	
Being amused by other members. <sup>d</sup>	-		
Having fun.	.77		
Seeking enjoyment.	.90		
Being entertained.	.75		
Monetary benefits		.85	
Obtaining discounts or special deals that most	.77		
consumers don't get.			
Obtaining better prices than other consumers.	.88		
Receiving free coupons for the hotel brand by becoming	.78		
a member of the Facebook page.			
<i>lote</i> : <sup>d</sup> item removed from the original scale	-		

Table 13. Item measurement properties for the hotel study

Table 13. (continued)

	Standardized	Cronbach's
	<b>Factor Loadings</b>	alpha
Participation		.88
I take an active part in the hotel brand's Facebook page.	.83	
I frequently provide useful information to other members.	.81	
In general, I post messages and responses on the	.81	
brand's Facebook page with great enthusiasm and		
frequency.		
I do my best to participate in activities offered on the brand's Facebook page.	.76	
Brand trust		.84
What the hotel brand says about its products/service is	.66	
true.		
I feel I know what to expect from the hotel brand.	.78	
The hotel brand is very reliable.	.81	
The hotel brand meets its promises.	.79	
Brand commitment		.79
If the hotel brand had no available reservations, I would	.60	
have no problem finding a different hotel with which I		
would want to make reservations.		
I consider myself to be highly loyal to the hotel brand. <sup>d</sup>	-	
When another brand has a special deal (e.g., discounted	1.09	
room rates), I generally visit the hotel with the better		
deal.		

#### Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for the restaurant study

The initial measurement model of the restaurant brands' Facebook pages was comprised of 29 measurement items. The initial measurement estimation of this model did not fit well ( $\chi^2 = 947.62$ , df = 349, p < .001, TLI = .87, CFI = .89, RMSEA = .072). Three measurement items were found to have factor loadings lower than the cutoff value of .5 (Hair et al., 2006). These items were "obtaining up-to-date information about the restaurant brand (.27)", "sharing experiences in the restaurant brand (.49)", and "having trust in the Facebook community (.48)". To keep at least three measurement items in the exogenous construct, the item with the factor loading of .49 was retained. Thus, two measurement items were removed based on the factor loadings.

After the deletions were made, CFA was conducted with the 27 measurement items. The model fit for the second measurement model was not acceptable at  $\chi^2 = 770.77$ , df = 296, p < .001, TLI = .89, CFI = .91, RMSEA = .070. Since the model fit was low, correlation coefficients between the variables of the causal model were investigated. Table 14 illustrates the correlation coefficients among the variables. Similar to the results obtained with the hotel study, multi-collinearity problems among exogenous variables were detected, with the correlations ranging from .51 to .94.

The same CFA process utilized for the hotel study was conducted in the restaurant study. Due to the extremely high correlation of the social and psychological benefit constructs (r = .94), these two constructs were combined into a single construct, which was re-named as "social-psychological benefits" for later CFA. All the factor loadings were equal to or greater than .52, with the exception of an item of functional benefits ("sharing

experiences in the restaurant brand" = .49). Due to the high correlation among the three constructs (social, psychology, and hedonic benefits), three measurement items (one for each of the three constructs) were deleted even though their factor loadings were acceptable. These items were "seeking self-identity (.70)", "establishing and maintaining relationships with other members of Facebook (.69)", and "being amused by other members (.52)".

After deleting the three measurement items above, CFA was conducted with 24 items for seven latent constructs (functional benefits, social-psychological benefits, hedonic benefits, monetary benefits, participation, brand trust, and brand commitment). The fit for the measurement model with two revisions was satisfactory at  $\chi^2 = 526.34$ , df = 231, p < .001, TLI = .92, CFI = .93, RMSEA = .062. Although the model fit was acceptable, the correlation coefficients between functional and social-psychological benefits were still high (r = .62). Therefore, the measurement item that produced the lowest factor loading of socialpsychological benefits was deleted ("communicating with other members" = .79). In addition, to keep the same measurement items as the causal model in the hotel study, the present researcher determined to remove one measurement item of brand commitment that had been deleted in the hotel response sample, although the factor loading of this item was .74. The item was "I consider myself to be highly loyal to the restaurant brand".

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Constructs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Functional	1							
benefits	1							
2. Social	62**	1						
benefits	.05	1						
3. Psychological	50**	0/**	1					
benefits	.30	.94	1					
4. Hedonic	11**	51**	50**	1				
benefits	.44	.51	.52	1				
5. Monetary	02	10	08	12	1			
benefits	.02	10	08	.12	1			
6. Participation	.28**	.41**	.42**	.33**	06	1		
7. Brand trust	.18**	.19**	.29**	.21**	.06	.19**	1	
8. Brand	12	17	21	03	<b>77</b> **	20**	15**	1
commitment	.13	.1/	.∠1	.05	27	.29	.45	1

 Table 14. Correlation coefficients of constructs: initial measurement model for the restaurant study

*Note*: non-significant; \*p < .05; \*\*p < .01

After deleting the two measurement items above, the final model, consisting of seven latent variables with 22 items, was tested. All variables included at least three measurement items, with the exception of brand commitment. The CFA results showed a satisfactory model fit ( $\chi^2 = 337.03$ , df = 188, p < .001, TLI = .95, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .049). Based on the ratio ( $\chi^2/df = 1.79$ ), the model fit was perceived as acceptable because the ratio fell between 1 and 3 (McIver & Carmines, 1981). The values for TLI and CFI were greater than .90 and the value for RMSEA was below .08, which indicated a satisfactory model fit (Byrne, 1998; Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2000; Hair et al., 2006). Table 15 presents the correlation coefficients among the variables. All variables in the final model (functional benefits, social-psychological benefits, hedonic benefits, monetary benefits, participation, brand trust, and brand commitment) were moderately to highly correlated with each other,

with correlations ranging from -.40 to .55. Table 16 shows the final measurement items with factor loadings and Cronbach's *alpha* estimates for each construct. All factor loadings in the final measurement model were equal to or greater than .53. Cronbach's *alpha* estimates for the constructs in the present study ranged from .75 to .89, with the exception of the brand commitment variable. All the Cronbach's *alpha* values were greater than .70, indicating a good level of internal consistency (Nunnally, 1978). The Cronbach's *alpha* estimate for brand commitment (.60) was also acceptable, being at or above .60 (Horne, Hankin, & Jenkins, 2001; Nully, 1967; Ogilvie et al., 2007). Therefore, the data showed an acceptable level of internal consistency.

Constructs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Functional	1						
benefits	1						
3. Social-							
Psychological	.55**	1					
benefits							
4. Hedonic	12**	40**	1				
benefits	.43**	.49**	.1				
5. Monetary	02	10	10*	1			
benefits	.03	10	.12	1			
6. Participation	.27**	.39**	.33**	06	1		
7. Brand trust	.18**	.28**	.20**	.06	.19**	1	
8. Brand	07	14	00	10**	16**	77**	1
commitment	.07	.14	09	40	.10***	.21	1

 Table 15. Correlation coefficients of constructs: final measurement model for the restaurant study

*Note*: non-significant; \**p* < .05; \*\**p* < .01

Construct	Standardized	Cronbach's
	<b>Factor Loadings</b>	alpha
Functional benefits		.75
Obtaining up-to-date information about the restaurant	-	
brand. <sup>d</sup>		
Efficiently communicating with others online.	.77	
Conveniently communicating online.	.90	
Sharing experiences about the restaurant brand.	.49	
Social-Psychological benefits		.85
Having trust in the Facebook community. <sup>d</sup>	-	
Seeking self-identity. <sup>d</sup>	-	
Communicating with other members. <sup>d</sup>	-	
Getting involved with other members.	.72	
Seeking a sense of affiliation in the community.	.87	
Seeking a sense of belonging.	.86	
Establishing and maintaining relationships with other members of Facebook. <sup>d</sup>	-	
Hedonic benefits		. 88
Being amused by other members. <sup>d</sup>	-	
Having fun.	.80	
Seeking enjoyment.	.85	
Being entertained.	.87	
Monetary benefits		.88
Obtaining discounts or special deals that most	.92	
consumers don't get.		
Obtaining better prices than other consumers.	.84	
Receiving free coupons for the restaurant brand by	.78	
becoming a member of the Facebook page.		
<i>Vote</i> : <sup>d</sup> Item removed from the original scale.		

Table 16. Item measurement properties for the restaurant study

Table 16. (continued)

	Standardized	Cronbach's
	<b>Factor Loadings</b>	alpha
Participation		.87
I take an active part in the restaurant's Facebook page.	.74	
I frequently provide useful information to other members.	.85	
In general, I post messages and responses on the	.86	
brand's Facebook page with great enthusiasm and frequency.		
I do my best to participate in activities offered on the	.71	
brand's Facebook page.		
Brand trust		.89
What the restaurant brand says about its	.63	
products/service is true.		
I feel I know what to expect from the restaurant brand.	.83	
The restaurant brand is very reliable.	.95	
The restaurant brand meets its promises.	.90	
Brand commitment		.60
If the restaurant brand had no available reservations, I	.53	
would have no problem finding a different restaurant		
with which I would want to make reservations.		
I consider myself to be highly loyal to the restaurant	-	
brand. <sup>d</sup>		
When another brand has a special deal (e.g., discount	.81	
price for meal), I generally visit the restaurant with the		
better deal.		

## **Structural Model**

The structural model shown in Figure 5 and Figure 7 proposed the causal relationships among five exogenous (functional, social, psychological, hedonic, and monetary benefits) and three endogenous (participation, brand trust, and brand commitment) constructs. A structural equation model was estimated using a maximum-likelihood estimation procedure. The two figures provide standardized path coefficients ( $\beta$ ) and *t*-values for each significant path of the conceptual model.

### Testing the structural model for the hotel study

The structural model for the hotel study is shown in Figure 5, concentrating on the proposed causal relationships derived from the hypotheses. Since social and psychological constructs were combined into a single construct (social-psychological benefits), H2 and H3 were deleted. A new path between social-psychological benefits and participation was indicated as H11: social-psychological benefits have a positive influence on community participation. All indices illustrated a satisfactory model fit ( $\chi^2 = 403.97$ , df = 196, p < .001, CFI = .91, RMSEA = .072) with the exception of TLI (.90). The chi-square ratio ( $\chi^2/df$ ) was 2.06, which was acceptable.

Among the seven paths proposed in the conceptual model, only four paths were statistically significant: the path from functional benefits to participation ( $\beta = .31$ , t = 2.91, p < .05), the path from social-psychological benefits to participation ( $\beta = .24$ , t = 2.42, p < .05), the path from hedonic benefits to participation ( $\beta = .23$ , t = 2.51, p < .05), and the path from participation to brand trust ( $\beta = .46$ , t = 5.67, p < .001). These results statistically supported

H1, H4, H7, and H11. In other words, consumers' participation benefits (functional, hedonic, and social-psychological benefits) positively influence consumer participation, and this participation has a significant influence on brand trust.

Three hypotheses were not supported: H5, which predicted a positive effect of monetary benefits on consumer participation; H6, which posited the positive effect of participation on brand commitment; and H8, which posited the positive effect of brand trust on brand commitment. Due to the rejection of H6 and H8, the mediating effect of brand trust on the relationship between participation and brand commitment was not tested. The summary of this causal model is illustrated in Table 17.







Hypothesis	Path	Proposed effect	Result
H1	Functional benefits→ Participation	+	s.
H4	Hedonic benefits→ Participation	+	s.
H5	Monetary benefits→ Participation	+	n.
H6	Participation→ Brand commitment	+	n.
H7	Participation $\rightarrow$ Brand trust	+	s.
H8	Brand trust $\rightarrow$ Brand commitment		n.
H11	Social-Psychological benefits→ Participation	+	S.

Table 17. Summary of support for hypotheses based on the results of SEM in the conceptual model (hotel study)

*Note*: n.= non-significant; s. = significant

## Testing the fully recursive model for the hotel study

A fully recursive model including all the plausible paths was constructed and estimated using SEM (Figure 6). The model generated a total of 15 paths, with 8 paths more than the original conceptual model. The fully recursive model was significant at  $\chi^2 = 355.22$ , df = 188, p < .001. The model fit was also satisfactory (TLI = .91, CFI = .93, RMSEA = .066). Since the chi-square ratio ( $\chi^2$ /df) was 1.89, which fell between 1 and 3, the model fit was perceived as acceptable (McIver & Carmines, 1981). The  $\chi^2$  values of the fully recursive model decreased to 48.75 with 8 df, which was statistically significant at p < .001. In comparison with the finalized conceptual model, the fully recursive model indicated a better fit, according to the goodness-of-fit indicators. From the results, the fully recursive model appeared to be more suitable than the conceptual model (Table 18). The significant paths were the same as the conceptual model. By testing the fully recursive model, the present study identified a new, direct path from monetary benefits to brand trust (H12a). The standardized path coefficient between monetary benefits and brand trust was .48, which was statistically significant (t = 5.36, p < .001). This result indicated that monetary benefits have a significant influence on brand trust. Although the relationship between the two constructs was not proposed, the structural model with this additional path indicated significantly improved model fit indices. Table 19 shows path coefficients and t-values for each path in the reduced (theoretical) model and the fully recursive model. The new path will be discussed in chapter 5.

Model comparison	$\chi^2$	df	$\chi^2/df$	TLI	CFA	RMSEA
Conceptual model	403.97	196	2.06	.90	.91	.07
Fully recursive model	355.22	188	1.89	. 91	.93	.066
$\Delta \chi^2(df)$	48.75 (8)					
р	< .001					

 Table 18. Chi-square test of model comparison for the hotel study

	Reduced	d (theoretical	) model	Fu	Fully recursive model				
	Community	Brand	Brand	Community	Brand trust	Brand			
	participation	trust	commitment	participation		commitment			
		<b>b</b> ( <i>t</i> )			b( <i>t</i> )				
Functional	.52(2.91)			.52(2.91)	05(49)	19(-1.36)			
benefit									
Social-psychological	.25(2.42)			.25(2.49)	06(98)	15(-1.63)			
benefit									
Hedonic	.25(2.51)			.24(2.48)	.01(.19)	.05(.77)			
benefit									
Monetary	14(-1.32)			18(-1.68)	.40(5.36)	.00(.04)			
benefit									
Community		.28(5.67)	.12(1.37)		.28(5.36)	.17(1.35)			
participation									
Brand			27(-1.66)			.05(.65)			
trust									
$\mathbf{R}^2$	.38	.21	.00	.38	.41	.08			
Model fit	$\chi^2 = 403.97, df$	= 196, TLI =	= .90,	$\chi^2 = 355.22, df = 188, TLI = .91,$					
	CFI = .91, RM	SEA = .072		CFI = .93, RM	ISEA = .066				

Table 19. Unstandardized path coefficients and *t*-Values for structural model (hotel study)



*Figure 6.* Standardized coefficients and t-values for paths in the fully recursive model (hotel study)

#### Testing for moderating effects of age and biological gender for the hotel study

The moderating effects of age and biological gender were estimated through a multigroup analysis process proposed by Joreskog and Sorbom (1988). In the conceptual model, the moderating effects of age and biological gender on the paths between participation benefits (functional, social-psychological, hedonic, and monetary benefits) and community participation were examined. Since social and psychological benefits were combined into one construct, H9b-c and H10b-c were removed from the moderating model. The relationship between social-psychological benefits and community participation generated a new path. Thus, the present researcher proposed new hypotheses in regard to the effects of age (H9f) and biological gender (H10f) on the relationships between social-psychological benefits and community participation.

The moderating effects were tested in two procedures. First, a chi-square difference test was conducted between a constrained and an unconstrained model. The constrained model set all the paths, variances of latent variables, and factor loadings to be equal across the moderating groups, whereas the unconstrained model released all the paths that were restricted in the constrained model. Second, the constrained model was re-estimated by releasing the restriction of equal path estimates for one particular path. Since this model had one degree of freedom less than the model with all constrained paths, a significant model improvement was achieved when the drop in  $\chi^2$  between the two models for one degree of freedom less than 3.84 (p < 0.05). These procedures were used for testing the moderating effects of both age and biological gender.

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To test the moderating effect of age, the present researcher used a median-split procedure to create elder and younger age groups (Harrington, Ottenbacher, & Kendall, 2011; Park, Yang, & Lehto, 2007). According to the median of age, participants who indicated their age as under or equal to 40 years were assigned to the younger group, whereas those who indicated that they were older than 40 years of age were assigned to the older group.

With regard to the potential moderating effect of age on the relationship between participation benefits and community participation, no moderating effects were confirmed. H9a and H9d were tested, but not statistically supported. H9e (the path between monetary benefit and participation) was not examined because the corresponding path was not statistically significant in the causal model. H9f (the path between social-psychological benefits and participation) was statistically significant, but was not supported due to the opposite direction of the finding. Table 20 shows the moderating effect of age on the relationship between each participation benefit and participation.

H9a posited that the effect of functional benefits on participation would be stronger for the younger group than that for the older group. The path coefficients for the younger members (p < .05) and older members (p < .01) were both significant, but the significance level and the path coefficients were higher for the older members than those for the younger members. However, the drop in  $\chi^2$  after relaxing the restriction of equal path coefficients across the two groups was .98, which did not exceed the minimum value of 3.84. Thus, this hypothesis was rejected.

H9d posited that the effect of hedonic benefits on participation would be stronger for younger members than for older members. The path coefficient between hedonic benefits

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and participation was significant (p < .05) for older members and non-significant for younger members. After relaxing the restriction of equal path coefficients across the two groups, the drop in  $\chi^2$  was 1.01, which did not exceed the minimum value of 3.84. Therefore, this hypothesis was not statistically significant.

Since the path between social-psychological benefits and participation was a new relationship identified after reducing measurement items, the present researcher posited H9f: younger members of online communities are more likely than are older members to be strongly affected by social-psychological benefits. The path coefficient between social-psychological benefits and participation was significant for older members (p < .001), but non-significant for younger members. The drop in  $\chi^2$  after relaxing the restriction of equal path coefficients across the two groups was 8.98, exceeding the minimum value of 3.84. However, this finding is contrary to the proposed hypothesis, indicating that older members were more strongly affected by social-psychological benefits. A finding opposite in the direction to the proposed hypothesis leads to the rejection of that hypothesis (H9f).

	Path	Unstand path coe	lardized efficients	Drop in χ <sup>2</sup>	<i>p</i> - value
		Young ( <i>n</i> =114)	Older ( <i>n</i> =79)		
H9a	Functional benefits→ participation	.39*	.63**	.98	-
H9d	Hedonic benefits→ participation	.18	.33*	1.01	-
H9e	Monetary benefits→ participation	-	-	-	
H9f	Social-psychological benefits→ participation	.17	.55***	6.29*	< .05

Table 20. Moderating effects of age on the relationship between participation b	enefits
and participation in hotels' Facebook pages	

*Note:* \* *p* < 0.05; \*\* *p* < 0.01; \*\*\* *p* < 0.001

With regard to the moderating effect of biological gender on the relationship between participation benefits and participation, statistically significant differences in biological gender were found in two paths: the relationship between functional benefits and community participation (H10a) and between social-psychological benefits and community participation (H10f). H10a was supported, whereas H10f was not supported due to the opposite direction of the finding. H10d was not significant. H10e was not tested due to the rejection of the previous causal relationship. Table 21 shows the moderating effects of biological gender on the relationship between each participation benefit and participation.

H10a posited that the effect of functional benefits on participation would be stronger for males than for females. The path coefficient between functional benefits and participation was significant (p < .001) for males and non-significant for females. In addition, the drop in  $\chi^2$  after relaxing the restriction of equal path coefficients across the two groups was 7.37, exceeding the minimum value of 3.84. This result indicated that males seek out more functional benefits than do females. Therefore, this hypothesis was supported.

H10d posited that the effect of hedonic benefits on community participation would be stronger for male members. The path coefficient between hedonic benefits and participation was significant (p < .05) for males and non-significant for females. However, the drop in  $\chi^2$ after relaxing the restriction of equal path coefficients across the two groups did not exceed the minimum value of 3.84. Therefore, this hypothesis was not statistically supported.

For the same reason indicated in H9f, the present researcher posited H10f: the effect of social-psychological benefits on online community participation would be stronger for females. The path coefficient between social-psychological benefits and participation was significant (p < .01) for males and non-significant for females. The drop in  $\chi^2$  after relaxing the restriction of equal path coefficients across the two groups was 4.28, exceeding the minimum value of 3.84. However, this finding is contrary to the proposed hypothesis, indicating that male members were more strongly affected by social-psychological benefits. Due to the opposite finding, H10f was rejected.

	Path	Unstand path coe	ardized fficients	Drop in χ <sup>2</sup>	<i>p</i> - value
		Male ( <i>n</i> =101)	Female ( <i>n</i> =94)		
H10a	Functional benefits→ participation	.89***	.27	7.37**	< .01
H10d	Hedonic benefits→ participation	.32*	.21	0.44	-
H10e	Monetary benefits→ participation	-	-	-	
H10f	Social-psychological benefits→ participation	.36**	.11	4.28*	< .05

 Table 21. Moderating effects of biological gender on the relationship between participation benefits and participation in hotels' Facebook pages

*Note:* \* *p* < 0.05; \*\* *p* < 0.01; \*\*\* *p* < 0.001

## Testing the structural model for the restaurant study

The structural model for the restaurant study is shown in Figure 7, which focused on the relationships among the proposed constructs. As performed through SEM for the hotel study, social and psychological constructs were incorporated into a single construct (socialpsychological benefits). Accordingly, H2 and H3 were removed, and H11 was added as a new path, which illustrated the relationship between social-psychological benefits and participation. In other words, it was proposed that social-psychological benefits would have a positive influence on community participation. All model fit indices indicated an acceptable model fit ( $\chi^2 = 394.63$ , df = 196, p < .001, TLI = .94, CFI = .95, RMSEA = .055). The chisquare ratio ( $\chi^2/df$ ) was 2.01, reflecting an acceptable model fit according to values proposed by McIver and Carmines (1981). Among the seven paths proposed in the conceptual model, five paths were statistically significant, which included the path from the hedonic benefits to participation ( $\beta$ = .178, *t* = 2.44, *p* < .05), from social-psychological benefits to participation ( $\beta$  = .27, *t* = 3.28, *p* < .05), from participation to brand commitment ( $\beta$  = .17, t = 2.23, *p* < .001), from participation to brand trust ( $\beta$  = .20, *t* = 3.35, *p* < .001), and from brand trust to brand commitment ( $\beta$  = .25, *t* = 3.17, *p* < .05). These results statistically supported H4, H6, H7, H8, and H11. In other words, consumers' participation benefits (social-psychological and hedonic benefits) positively influence consumer participation, which leads to consumer trust and commitment toward a particular restaurant brand.

Two hypotheses were rejected: H1, predicting a positive effect of functional benefits on consumer participation and H5, predicting a positive effect of monetary benefits on consumer participation. The summary of this causal model is illustrated in Table 22.



*Note:* \**p* < .05; \*\**p* < .01



Hypothesis	Path	Proposed effect	Result
H1	Functional benefits→ Participation	+	n.
H4	Hedonic benefits→ Participation	+	s.
H5	Monetary benefits→ Participation	+	n.
H6	Participation→ Brand commitment	+	s.
H7	Participation $\rightarrow$ Brand trust	+	s.
H8	Brand trust→ Brand commitment	+	s.
H11	Social-Psychological benefits→ Participation	+	s.

Table 22. Summary of support for hypotheses based on the results of SEM in the conceptual model (restaurant study)

*Note*: n. = non-significant; s. = significant

#### Testing the fully recursive model for the restaurant study

A fully recursive model including all plausible paths was constructed and estimated using SEM (Figure 8). The model generated a total of 15 paths, with eight paths more than the original conceptual model. The fully recursive model was significant ( $\chi^2 = 337.03$ , df =188, TLI = .95, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .049). The chi-square ratio ( $\chi^2$ /df) was 1.79, which fell within McIver and Carmines' (1981) acceptable range of 1 and 3. The fully recursive model decreased the  $\chi^2$  values to 57.60 with 8 degrees of freedom, which was statistically significant at p < .001. In comparison with the original conceptual model, the fully recursive model indicated a better fit for the goodness-of-fit indicators. From the results, the fully recursive model appeared to be more suitable than the conceptual model (Table 23).

Model comparison	$\chi^2$	df	χ²/df	TLI	CFA	RMSEA
Conceptual model	394.63	196	2.01	.94	.95	.055
Fully recursive model	337.03	188	1.79	.95	.96	.049
$\Delta \chi^2(df)$	57.60 (8)					
р	< .001					

 Table 23. Chi-square test of model comparison for the restaurant study

By testing the fully recursive model, the present study identified four positive paths and two negative paths that were statistically significant. Four paths were positive, including the path from social-psychological benefits to participation ( $\beta = .26$ , t = 3.20, p < .001), the path from hedonic benefits to participation ( $\beta = .18$ , t = 2.49, p < .05), the path from socialpsychological benefits to brand trust ( $\beta = .23$ , t = 2.71, p < .05), and the path from brand trust to brand commitment ( $\beta = .29$ , t = 3.55, p < .001). However, two paths were negative, including the path from hedonic benefits to brand commitment ( $\beta = -.18$ , t = -2.08, p < .05) and the path from monetary benefits to brand commitment ( $\beta = -.38$ , t = -4.21, p < .001). Among these, the path from social-psychological benefits to brand trust was newly identified through the fully recursive model (H12b). In addition, the two negative paths from hedonic benefits to brand commitment (H13) and from monetary benefits to brand commitment (H14) were also identified as additional paths.

On the other hand, the paths that were statistically significant in the conceptual model were not found to be significant in the fully recursive model. H6, which posited that online community participation has a positive influence on brand commitment, was not supported (p = .13). H7, which proposed that online community participation has a positive influence

on brand trust, was not statistically significant (p = .17). Although these two hypotheses turned out to be non-significant, the structural model with its newly identified paths indicated significantly improved model fit indices. However, the present researcher accepted the conceptual model because the model made better sense than the fully recursive model. In the chapter 5, these new paths will be discussed with possible explanations because they are important findings for future studies. Table 24 shows path coefficients and *t*-values for each path in the reduced (theoretical) model and the fully recursive model.



*Note:* \**p* < .05; \*\**p* < .01



	Reduced (theoretical) model				Fully recursive model			
	Community	Brand trust	Brand		Community	Brand trust	Brand	
	participation		commitment		participation		commitment	
		b ( <i>t</i> )				b ( <i>t</i> )		
Functional	.08(.68)			-	.08(.70)	.01(.10)	.06(.69)	
benefit								
Social-	.26(3.28)				.21(3.20)	.15(2.71)	.02(.34)	
psychological								
benefit								
Hedonic benefit	.14(2.44)				.15(2.49)	.03(.62)	10(-2.08)	
Monetary benefit	06(-1.05)				06(-1.02)	.07(1.40)	26(-4.21)	
Community		.17(3.35)	.15(2.23)			.08(1.38)	.08(1.51)	
participation								
Brand trust			.26(3.17)				.23(3.55)	
$R^2$	.18	.04	.11		.18	.10	.27	
Model fit	$\chi^2 = 394.63, df$	f = 196, TLI = .9	94, CFI = .95,		$\chi^2 = 337.03, df$	f = 188, TLI = .9	5, CFI = .96,	
	RMSEA = .05	5			RMSEA = .04	9		

Table 24. Unstandardized	oath coefficients and <i>t</i> -Value for structural model (	(restaurant study)

## **Testing for mediating effects**

The mediating role of brand trust on the relationship between community participation and brand commitment was investigated with the analysis procedure of Barons and Kenny's (1986). To test the mediating effect of brand trust, the structural equation model was re-estimated by constraining the direct effect of brand trust on brand commitment (the path coefficient was constrained to zero). The first condition would be met if community participation (the independent variable) was found to influence brand trust (the mediator variable),  $\beta_{21}$ . The second condition would be satisfied if brand trust (the mediator variable) affected brand commitment (the dependent variable),  $\beta_{32|1}$ . The third condition would be satisfied if community participation (the independent variable) influenced brand commitment (the dependent variable),  $\beta_{31|2}$ . These three conditions were met in the original conceptual model, given that all three paths were significant. The fourth condition would also be met if the parameter estimate between community participation and brand commitment ( $\beta_{31|2} = .15^*$ , t = 2.23) in the mediating model became less significant (partial mediation) than the parameter estimate ( $\beta_{31} = .25^{***}$ , t = 3.26) in the constrained model (Table 25). The results showed that brand trust had a partial mediating role. In addition, the difference in the  $\chi^2$ between the mediating model ( $\chi^2 = 394.63$ , df = 196) and the constrained model ( $\chi^2 = 404.77$ , df = 197) was statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 10.14$ , df = 1). Thus, the mediating effect of brand trust clearly demonstrates that members' community participation favorably affects brand commitment through brand trust.

The indirect effect of community participation on brand commitment through brand trust was .048 ( $\beta_{21} * \beta_{32|1} = .19 * .25$ ). Even though the indirect effect was less than the direct

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effect between participation and brand commitment ( $\beta_{31|2} = .18$ ), this result emphasized the role of brand trust as a mediating variable between community participation and brand commitment.

	Mediating model	Constrained model			
	Standardized path coefficient				
Participation $\rightarrow$ Brand trust	.19***				
Participation $\rightarrow$ Brand commitment	.18*	.22***			
Brand trust $\rightarrow$ Brand commitment	.25**	-			
Indirect effect	.048				
Total effect	.22				

Table 25. Mediating effects of brand trust	t in r	restaura	nts' Faceb	ook pages		
		10		a i	•	

*Note:* \* *p* < 0.05; \*\* *p* < 0.01; \*\*\* *p* < 0.001

## Testing the moderating effects of age and biological gender for the restaurant study

In order to examine the impact of the moderator variable of age, a median age was calculated to classify younger and older sub-groups. Based on the median age, participants who indicated their age as under or equal to 30 years were assigned to the younger group, whereas those indicating an age older than 30 years were assigned to the older group. In order to evaluate the moderating effects of age and biological gender, the same procedures utilized in the hotel study were conducted. Table 26 and Table 27 show no moderating effects of either age or biological gender in the restaurant study. H9a and H9e were not tested due to the insignificant findings in the causal model.
H9d posited that the effect of hedonic benefits on participation would be stronger for the younger group than for the older group. The path coefficients between hedonic benefits and participation were significant for both the groups at the same significant level (p < .05). However, the drop in  $\chi^2$  after relaxing the restriction of equal path coefficients across the two groups did not exceed the minimum value of 3.84. Therefore, H9d was rejected.

To provide greater detail with regard to the effects of age, H9f posited that younger members are more likely to be strongly affected by social-psychological benefits than are older members. The path coefficients between social-psychological benefits and participation were significant for both the younger group (p < .01) and for the older group (p < .05). However, the drop in  $\chi^2$  after relaxing the restriction of equal path coefficients across the two groups was .057, which did not exceed the minimum value of 3.84. Thus, this hypothesis was not statistically significant.

	Path	Unstandardized path coefficients		Drop in χ <sup>2</sup>	<i>p</i> -value
		Younger ( <i>n</i> =210)	Older ( <i>n</i> =116)		
H9a	Functional benefits→ participation	-	-	-	
H9d	Hedonic benefits→ participation	.15*	.22*	.57	-
H9e	Monetary benefits→ participation	-	-	-	
H9f	Social-psychological benefits→ participation	.21**	.19*	.057	-

 Table 26. Moderating effects of age on the relationship between participation benefits and participation in restaurants' Facebook pages

*Note*: \* *p* < 0.05; \*\* *p* < 0.01

H10d posited that the effect of hedonic benefits on participation would be stronger for males than for females. The path coefficient between hedonic benefits and participation was significant (p < .05) for females and non-significant for males. The drop in  $\chi^2$  after relaxing the restriction of equal path coefficients across the two groups did not exceed the minimum value of 3.84. Accordingly, this hypothesis was not statistically significant.

H10f posited that the effect of functional benefits on participation would be stronger for males than for females. Table 27 shows that the path coefficients between socialpsychological benefits and participation were significant for both male (p < .05) and female groups (p < .01). However, the drop in  $\chi^2$  after releasing the restriction of equal path coefficients across the two groups was .019, which did not exceed the minimum value of 3.84. Thus, this hypothesis was rejected.

	Path	Unstandardized path coefficients		Drop in $\chi^2$	<i>p</i> - value
		Male ( <i>n</i> =97)	Female ( <i>n</i> =230)		
H10a	Functional benefits→ participation	-	-	-	
H10d	Hedonic benefits→ participation	.18	.14*	.13	-
H10e	Monetary benefits→ participation	-	-	-	
H10f	Social-psychological benefits→ participation	.21*	.20**	.019	-

 Table 27. Moderating effects of biological gender on the relationship between participation benefits and participation in restaurants' Facebook pages

*Note*: \* *p* < 0.05; \*\* *p* < 0.01

#### **Summary**

A brief summary of the research findings is provided. This study examined the relationships between consumers' participation benefits derived from the visits to brands' Facebook pages and behavioral outcomes (community participation, brand trust, and brand commitment). Responses to Facebook pages for hotels and for restaurants were examined separately. Each study was conducted in two steps: 1) investigating the causal relationships reflected in the hypotheses of the study, and 2) examining the moderating effects of age and biological gender on the relationships between benefits and community participation. Table 28 shows the results regarding causal relationships and the results of moderating effects in the hotel segment. Table 29 illustrates the results for the restaurant segment.

Hypothesis	Path	Proposed effect	Result
Proposed model			
H1	Functional benefits→ Participation	+	<b>S</b> .
H2	Social benefits→ Participation		n.t.
H3	Psychological benefits→ Participation		n.t.
H4	Hedonic benefits→ Participation	+	s.
Н5	Monetary benefits→ Participation	+	n.s.
H6	Participation→ Brand commitment	+	n.s.
H7	Participation $\rightarrow$ Brand trust	+	<b>S.</b>
H8	Brand trust→ Brand commitment	+	n.s.
H11	Social-Psychological benefits→ Participation	+	<b>S.</b>
<b>Fully recursive m</b>	<u>odel</u>		
H12a	Monetary benefits $\rightarrow$ Brand trust	+	s.

 Table 28. Result of hypotheses tests for the hotel study

*Note*: n.t. = not tested; s. = significant; r. = significant, but in a reverse direction to the original hypothesis; n.s. = non-significant

# Table 28. (continued)

# Moderating variable: Age

H9a	Functional benefits→ Participation	n.s.
H9b	Social benefits→ Participation	n.t.
Н9с	Psychological benefits→ Participation	n.t.
H9d	Hedonic benefits $\rightarrow$ Participation	n.s.
Н9е	Monetary benefits→ Participation	n.t.
H9f	Social-Psychological benefits→ Participation	r.
Moderating varial	ole: Biological gender	
H10a	Functional benefits→ Participation	s.
H10b	Social benefits→ Participation	n.t.
H10c	Psychological benefits→ Participation	n.t.
H10d	Hedonic benefits→ Participation	n.s.
H10e	Monetary benefits→ Participation	n.t.
H10f	Social-Psychological benefits→ Participation	r.

Hypothesis	Path	Proposed effect	Result
Proposed model			
H1	Functional benefits→ Participation	+	n.s.
H2	Social benefits→ Participation		n.t.
H3	Psychological benefits→ Participation		n.t.
H4	Hedonic benefits→ Participation	+	<b>S.</b>
H5	Monetary benefits→ Participation	+	n.s.
H6	Participation→ Brand commitment	+	s.
H7	Participation $\rightarrow$ Brand trust	+	<b>S.</b>
H8	Brand trust $\rightarrow$ Brand commitment	+	s.
H11	Social-Psychological benefits→ Participation	+	<b>S.</b>
<b>Fully recursive m</b>	<u>odel</u>		
H12b	Social-psychological benefits $\rightarrow$ Brand trust	+	<b>S.</b>
H13	Hedonic benefits→ Brand commitment	-	s.
H14	Monetary benefits $\rightarrow$ Brand commitment	-	<b>S.</b>

 Table 29. Result of hypotheses tests for the restaurant study

*Note*: n.t. = not tested; s. = significant; r. = significant, but in a reverse direction to the original hypothesis; n.s. = non-significant

# Table 4.29 (continued)

# **Moderating variable: Age**

H9a	Functional benefits→ Participation	n.t.
H9b	Social benefits→ Participation	n.t.
Н9с	Psychological benefits→ Participation	n.t.
H9d	Hedonic benefits→ Participation	n.s.
Н9е	Monetary benefits→ Participation	n.t.
H9f	Social-Psychological benefits→ Participation	n.s.
<b>Moderating varial</b>	ole: Biological gender	
H10a	Functional benefits→ Participation	n.t.
H10b	Social benefits→ Participation	n.t.
H10c	Psychological benefits→ Participation	n.t.
H10d	Hedonic benefits→ Participation	n.s.
H10e	Monetary benefits→ Participation	n.t.
H10f	Social-Psychological benefits→ Participation	n.s.

#### **CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

This chapter discusses the interpretations of the findings. Conclusions, implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research are also presented in this chapter.

#### **Discussion of Findings**

#### **Relationships between participation benefits and community participation**

In the hotel study, functional, hedonic, and social-psychological benefits (H1, H4, and H11) from hotel brands' Facebook page members were found to positively influence community participation. In contrast, the results from the restaurant study indicated that community participation was significantly influenced by hedonic and social-psychological benefits (H4 and H11), but not functional benefits (H1). In both studies, monetary benefits were found to be a non-significant factor in community participation (H5).

The positive relationship between functional benefits and community participation for hotel pages (H1) is consistent with the findings of Chung and Buhalis (2008) and Hwang and Cho (2005), who indicated functional benefits as the most influential factors affecting the level of members' participation in online travel communities. In relation to functional benefits, members of hotel brands' Facebook pages in the present study desired efficiency and convenience of communicating with others online, and desired sharing information about their service experiences with the hotel brands. To fulfill these desires, members appeared to visit the site frequently to gather information and communicate with others regarding the hotel and its services. Accordingly, the findings of the present study identified functional benefits as a significant element that increased member participation in the hotel brands' Facebook pages. The non-significant relationship between functional benefits and community participation for restaurant pages (H1) is consistent with the findings of Wang and Fesenmaier (2004b), who reported that the functional benefits of online travel communities were not a primary reason that members increase their visiting frequencies. One possible explanation for this is that people may utilize other resources to obtain information about restaurants, such as restaurant review sites and friends' referrals (O'Connor, 2009). Therefore, the Facebook page may not be the only outlet from which to receive desired functional benefits.

Hedonic benefits were found to be a significant motivating factor for community participation in both the hotel and restaurant studies (H4). This supports previous findings that indicate that members participate in community activities because they perceive these to be relaxing and entertaining (Ridings & Gefen, 2004; Wasko & Faraj, 2000). Members are likely to spend more time, especially when hotel or restaurant brands' pages incorporate unique features that are geared toward members' interests and that give members another way to interact (Dholakia et al., 2004).

Monetary benefit was a new construct added that extends Wang and Fesenmaier's (2004b) conceptual model. Contrary to past research looking at book clubs and airlines (Peterson, 1995), monetary benefits did not have a significant relationship with community participation in either the hotel or restaurant study (H5). The present results also conflicted with the results from Treadaway and Smith (2010) and Harris, O'Malley, and Patterson (2003). Treadaway and Smith (2010) found that monetary benefits potentially help generate member interest about hotel and restaurant brands and encourage members to participate in community activities. Harris et al. (2003) reported monetary benefits as consumers' primary

reason to begin a relationship with a company. One possible reason for the conflicting results is because the present study focused on taking part in activities rather than generating initial interest or joining the community. For this reason, monetary benefits need to be more thoroughly investigated to determine if they can stimulate potential consumers to join hotel or restaurant brands' pages. In other words, monetary benefits can be an influential factor that increases the number of members, but not necessarily the level of subsequent participation.

According to the data analysis for H11, social-psychological benefits were composed of two components, social benefits (getting involved with other members) and psychological benefits (seeking a sense of affiliation and belonging in the community). This analysis indicates that consumers do not make a distinction between social and psychological benefits; rather, they perceive them to be a single benefit factor. In other words, members of the hotel or restaurant brands' Facebook pages sought both psychological attachment to the community and social relationships with other members. This merger of social and psychological benefits aligns with past research (i.e., Chung & Buhalis, 2008; Lee, 2005).

The significant relationship between social-psychological benefits and community participation in this present study also confirms the findings of previous studies (e.g., Ahuja & Galvin, 2003; Langerak, Verhoef, Verlegh, & Valck, 2003). These social-psychological benefits may also enhance the perceptions of community attractiveness and lead to useful feedback about community service (Bendapudi & Berry, 1997).

#### Relationships between community participation, brand trust, and brand commitment

H6, H7, and H8 delineated the relationships between community participation, brand trust, and brand commitment. The underlying assumption of these relationships posited that active interaction with a particular brand evokes emotional attachment in its consumers and enhances member trust toward the brand, which in turn, influences the development of a deeper attachment to the brand (Thompson, MacIinnis, & Park, 2005). In the hotel study, the relationship between community participation and brand trust (H7) was supported, whereas the relationships between community participation and brand commitment (H6), and between brand trust and brand commitment (H8), were not supported. In contrast, the results from the restaurant study indicated that these three proposed relationships (H6, H7, and H8) were supported.

The positive effect of community participation on brand trust (H7) was found in the hotel study. The present study found that active participation in community activities (e.g., posting and reviewing hotel information and service experiences and actively participating in community activities) was associated with trust toward the hotel brand. This result supports the finding of Casalo et al. (2007), who reported that participation in community activities fosters consumer trust. Specifically, Bagozzi and Dholakia (2006) and Ha and Perks (2005) reported that consumers who are highly involved in community activities tend to build trust toward the online community and the brand because consumers support each other's use of a brand's product.

The positive effect of participation on brand commitment (H6) and the positive effect of brand trust on brand commitment (H8) were not significant in the hotel study. These results indicated that community participation and brand trust did not produce a positive feeling of attachment to a brand. The results for H6 are contrary to the results of Jang et al. (2008) and Casaló, Flavian, and Guinaliu (2010), who found a positive effect of member participation on commitment toward a brand. The results for H8 also contradicted previous relationship marketing literature that indicated that brand trust significantly influences strong personal attachment and commitment of community members (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Ellonen, Tarkiainen, & Kuivalainen, 2010). The findings of the present study are noteworthy in that neither participation nor brand trust had a significant impact on brand commitment among hotel respondents. This aligns with the research on brand commitment (Matzler, Grabner-Krauter, & Bidmon, 2006) that showed that promotions and promise of benefits offered by competitors lured hotel consumers to switch to a competitor's brand.

One possible explanation for the behavior of hotel respondents is the amount of time dedicated to interaction between members and brands. Ellonen et al. (2010) emphasized the role of online consumer-brand interactions in strengthening consumer relationships with a particular brand. They pointed out two key influential factors of consumer-brand relationships: frequent participation and longer individual visits to online brand communities. According to Merisavo and Raulas (2004), positive emotional responses occur as consumers increase the amount of time that they spend with a brand, which enhances the relationship with the brand (Merisavo, 2008). In contrast to these findings (Merisavo & Raulas, 2004; Merisavo, 2008), member profiles of hotel respondents in the present study showed that over 70% of respondents had relatively short-term relationships with hotel brands' Facebook pages (e.g., the duration of membership was less than a year) and nearly 90% spent less than an hour per day participating in activities on hotel brands' pages. This indicates that

members of hotel brands' pages have relatively low levels of interaction with hotel brands. In addition, the hotel study identified functional benefits as the most influential factor overall on community participation (path coefficient = .31; see Figure 5). This indicates that members may intend to visit hotel brands' pages more often when they need to fulfill specific needs, such as obtaining information about hotel packages and events. Because of the goal-oriented behaviors of hotel members (pursuing specific needs for a special occasion such as a trip), the members' visits to the hotel brands' pages are inclined to be infrequent rather than consistent.

Unlike the hotel study, the results from the restaurant study supported the three hypothesized relationships: the positive effect of participation on brand commitment (H6), the positive effect of participation on brand trust (H7), and the positive effect of brand trust on brand commitment (H8). These results support the findings of (a) Casaló et al. (2007), who found that participation positively affected trust and commitment toward community brands in the context of the online community of free software; (b) Holland and Baker (2001), who revealed a significant relationship between frequency of visits to brand sites and brand loyalty in the context of corporate websites; and (c) Ha (2004), who confirmed the positive effect of brand trust on brand commitment in the online business context. Overall, the results of the restaurant study indicate that participation in restaurant brands' pages may evoke positive emotional responses in the minds of members and strengthen their trust in restaurant brands, which, in turn, helps build a strong relationship between members and restaurant brands.

With regard to the mediating effects of brand trust (Table 4.18), the indirect effect of community participation on brand commitment (path coefficient = .048) was weaker than the

direct effect (path coefficient = .18). Although brand trust did not strengthen the effect of participation on brand commitment, this finding reveals that community participation not only directly influenced brand commitment, but also indirectly influenced brand commitment through brand trust.

### Moderating effects of age and biological gender

H9 and H10 postulated the moderating effects of age and biological gender on the relationships between participation benefits and community participation. Based on the results of the causal model, H9a and H10a were not tested in the restaurant study, because the paths between functional benefits and community participation were not significant. In addition, H9e and H10e were not tested in either the hotel or the restaurant studies for the same reason.

With regard to the moderating effect of age, the findings of the present study did not provide evidence to support the effect of age on the relationship between participation benefits and community participation. Specifically, the hotel study rejected the moderating effect of age on the relationship between functional benefits and community participation (H9a). The proposed moderating effects of age on the relationship between hedonic benefits (H9d) or social-psychological benefits (H9f) and community participation were rejected in the hotel and restaurant studies, respectively. Interestingly, H9f was rejected because the effect of age was significant but in the opposite direction from what was hypothesized. Similar to prior studies (White, 2008; Zaphiris & Rifaht, 2006), the impact of socialpsychological benefits on community participation was stronger for older members than younger members.

With respect to the moderating effect of biological gender, the impact of functional benefits on community participation was stronger for males than females in the hotel study (H10a). This same relationship was not tested in the restaurant study. The finding of the hotel study supports several previous studies (Mo, Malik, & Coulson, 2009; Phillip & Suri, 2004) that found males to be more likely than females to participate in information search and practical tasks online. The moderating effect of biological gender on the relationships between hedonic benefits (H10d) or social-psychological benefits (H10f) and community participation were not supported in either the hotel or restaurant study. H10f of the hotel study, which posited that the effect of social-psychological benefits on community participation would be stronger for females than for males, was rejected due to a significant path in the opposite direction of what was proposed. The result of the hotel study indicated community participation was more strongly affected by social-psychological benefits for males than for females. These findings illustrating few moderating effects of age and biological gender reinforce previous studies (Jones & Fox, 2009; Ono & Zavodny, 2005) that revealed that the differences in online behavior caused by age and biological gender have disappeared over time or have reversed.

The non-significant moderating effects of age are consistent with previous studies (Hernández, Jiménez, & Martin, 2011; Jones & Fox, 2009) that found that age is not an obstacle that prevents people from using the Internet. With regard to participation in online communities, older people tended to seek information, make purchases, and build social networks (Jaeger & Xie, 2009; Jayson, 2009). From this perspective, older members may seek hotel information, share experiences with others, and feel affiliation with the group through participating in the activities on Facebook pages. Accordingly, the present research

argues that the community benefits perceived by older members are similar to those perceived by younger members.

#### Additional paths between participation benefits, brand trust, and brand commitment

A fully recursive model was tested with all the possible paths in the conceptual model. The results generated several unexpected paths that were statistically significant. Specifically, the hotel study identified a direct path from monetary benefits to brand trust (H12a). Because the inclusion of this path significantly improved the model fit of TLI, CFA, and RMSEA (see Table 4.13), which was low in the finalized conceptual model, this new path is considered important when examining the impact of member benefits on brand trust.

Prior studies showed that consumers feel monetary loss and/or insecurity about products or services purchased online when the products/services do not meet their expectations, thus resulting in a decrease in consumer brand trust (Alam & Yasin, 2010; Ha, 2004). Because brand trust refers to consumers' secure belief in a brand's ability to perform as promised, it can be achieved when a brand satisfactorily fulfills consumer needs (Ellonen et al., 2010; Ha & Perks, 2005). With the new path identified between monetary benefits and brand trust, the present study suggests that members of hotel brands' Facebook pages may experience an increase in trust in the brand only when they receive the services or products promised in special offers.

The restaurant study identified three unexpected paths: a positive significant path from social-psychological benefits to brand trust (H12b); and two significant negative paths, from hedonic benefits to brand commitment (H13), and from monetary benefits to brand commitment (H14). Despite these newly identified paths, the present researcher suggests that the conceptual model is a better model, because the model fit indices of the fully recursive

model were only slightly improved in comparison to those of the finalized conceptual model (see Table 23), but this slight improvement came at the cost of losing two significant hypothesized paths of the conceptual model (H6: community participation -> brand trust and H7: community participation -> brand commitment). In addition, the fully recursive model identified two negative paths that may require further analysis in order to arrive at satisfactory explanations.

H12b, which posited that social-psychological benefits have a positive influence on brand trust, was newly identified. This finding aligns with previous research. For instance, Bove and Johnson (2000) revealed that highly affiliated members are likely to show high levels of trust in service employees. Social-psychological benefits are achieved through communication and shared experiences (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004b). Information shared by other members affects a member's level of trust in the community because of high credibility given to trusted members (Stockdale & Borovicka, 2006; Watson, Morgan, & Hemmington, 2008). According to Stockdale and Borovicka (2006), the members of online communities feel a strong sense of social belonging when viewing postings (messages or contents by others in the community), if the content reveals similar interests and views. This similarity of view can increase the sense of trust (Ridings et al., 2002).

For H13, a negative relationship was found between hedonic benefits and brand commitment toward a restaurant. This indicates that the importance of hedonic benefits, such as feelings of entertainment and enjoyment while engaging in community activities, negatively influenced consumers' brand commitment. One possible explanation may be found in McAlister and Pessemier's study (1982); the desire for hedonic benefits may encourage consumers to seek variety in the given product category. Similar behavior has been found for hedonic experiences (Dodd, Pinkleton, & Gustafson, 1996). Consumers may switch to other brands to obtain new hedonic experiences of fun and excitement from products or services (Chandon, Wansink, & Laurent, 2000). Thus, restaurant brands that offer a higher level of hedonic benefits may be less likely to maintain loyal consumers (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006) because these consumers may seek hedonic experiences through visiting a variety of restaurant Facebook fan pages. Variety-seeking behavior, associated with hedonic pleasure, may also lead members to switch to Facebook pages of other brands. The present study supports this argument because 86.6% of restaurant respondents joined two or more restaurant brands' Facebook pages (see Table 4.2).

A negative relationship between the importance of monetary benefits and brand commitment was found for H14. In other words, the higher the importance of monetary benefits, the lower the brand commitment. Because monetary benefits in the present study were defined as monetary savings such as discounts or special price breaks, it is not surprising to learn that members of a restaurant brand Facebook page are less likely to feel committed toward the brand when monetary benefits could be found on Facebook pages of numerous brands.

#### **Conclusions and Implications**

The purposes of this present study were to (a) identify online hotel and restaurant Facebook page members' participation benefits; (b) examine the relationships between members' levels of participation, brand trust, and brand commitment; and (c) investigate the moderating effects of demographic characteristics (i.e., age and biological gender) on the relationship between participation benefits and community participation. First, the results produced different sets of community benefits for the hotel and restaurant segments. These findings suggest that the marketers in the two segments need to use different approaches to manage their brand pages in social media. Second, the outcomes of community participation were also different between the two segments, which emphasizes that there were differences in consumer behavior associated with hotel and restaurant brands. Hospitality marketers for hotels and restaurants may need to apply different marketing strategies to build brand relationships with their respective consumers.

The study of hotel or restaurant brand use of social media, particularly in the context of Facebook pages, is relatively new in the area of hospitality marketing. The present study is the first to empirically examine benefits from member participation in brand communities managed by hospitality firms and to investigate the impact of this participation on consumer responses. These responses have marketing implications for each hospitality segment, including the design of hotel or restaurant brand Facebook pages and other variables (e.g., brand awareness, brand loyalty, and perceived quality) for practitioners to attract potential consumers and strengthen relationships with current consumers. This study also examined the outcome variables of community participation (brand trust and brand commitment), which strengthen consumer relationships with a particular brand. Previous studies had indicated that community members were often persuaded by other consumers to purchase and bond with a brand, which in turn built brand commitment (Casaló et al., 2007; Ellonen et al., 2010). The results from the hotel study did not provide evidence for the connections between community participation, brand trust, and brand commitment. In contrast, the restaurant study confirmed a significant impact of community participation on brand trust and brand commitment. These results of the present study provide brand page marketers with insights into relationship marketing endeavors. Marketers of hotel brands' pages must focus on a way to create relationships between consumers and the hotel brand, whereas restaurant brands' page marketers need to consider a way to strengthen their relationships with current members.

The present study proposed demographic characteristics of community members (age and gender) as a significant potential factor in influencing member participation. The results of the present study indicated that the strength of relationships between participation benefits and community participation did not vary with age and biological gender. The role of demographic characteristics in influencing consumer behavior seems to be nullified due to increased user experience with social media. Therefore, the present research suggests that marketers need to identify other factors that influence members' participation behavior for their market segmentation.

### Managerial implications for the hotel study

The present study suggests significant strategies for online community design by

identifying benefit factors that encourage member participation on hotel brands' Facebook pages. The findings indicated three desired participation benefits for hotel members: functional, social-psychological, and hedonic benefits. These benefits are related to multiple consumer needs. From a managerial perspective, marketers of hotel brands' pages first need to be aware of their members' characteristics and understand who their members are before developing strategies for successful Facebook pages. In addition, these benefits can be used to attract potential consumers to join the hotel brands' pages.

Hotel firms should provide communication devices with diverse formats (e.g., realtime synchronous or asynchronous communication technologies such as chat or bulletin boards, virtual product presentations) that enable members to exchange information about hotel properties/services, provide critiques of ambiance, and share service experiences. Information gathering through brand pages is the most influential element to attract potential consumers to join hotel brands' Facebook pages and to encourage current members to frequently visit the page.

Valuable information for the firm can be collected from the communication among consumers. By analyzing the information, hotels may gain new insights into consumer trends, needs, and experiences that affect (dis)satisfaction (Harwood & Gary, 2009). Hotel firms should consider data-mining software to monitor the content of information posted by their members. This would enable marketers to analyze the success of current marketing activities and create opportunities to refine strategies, which in turn enhance business performance (Kasavana, 2008; Fisher, 2011a). Through monitoring, marketers may provide ongoing updates to brand-related information in order to satisfy members' current needs. Satisfying members' information needs is important, because efficient and convenient information gathering was a primary purpose of hotel brands' page members in the present study.

Hotels should enhance opportunities that help members identify like-minded consumers who are seeking similar hotel services (e.g., in-room hotel technologies such as touch screen tablets or Wi-Fi). It is the nature of an online community that individuals gather together based on similar interests and purposes (Wang & Fesenmiar, 2004a). On a hotel brand's page, individuals may form a variety of sub-groups based on similar or specific needs for hotel services. Marketers need to identify these potential sub-groups and provide more specialized and personalized services to each group (Kasavana, 2008).

In addition to categorizing sub-groups, marketers need to incorporate a variety of tools in order to facilitate the hedonic nature of their brand pages. For example, hotels may use a gaming platform (e.g., simple poll, online flash, online puzzles) for notifications of new services. Adding videos related to new brand information and virtual tour devices gives members enjoyable experiences during their visit to the hotel brands' pages (van Dolen & Ruyter, 2002). New technologies including RFID (Radio-frequency identification) can be employed to allow members to carry out community activities (e.g., photos taken at a hotel are automatically posted on its brand Facebook page and tagged on members' own pages) without the presence of a computer or smart-phone during their stay (Harbison, 2011). With these features, hotel brands can enhance member engagement by increasing the hedonic experiences of being a member of the hotel brands' pages and directly influence the positive impression of brands. Therefore, it is critical that marketers implement various features that enable members to enjoy all of the content on the brands' pages.

Hotels may also launch marketing campaigns that increase member participation in their brands' pages by encouraging members to post messages and photos. At the same time,

they may reward the members for their participation with an element to enhance their hedonic experience such as a free drink at check-in. These types of campaigns may be more effective at engaging members in the activities of the brand page because they foster a hedonic benefit such as enjoyable experiences, pleasure, and positive emotions. Moreover, marketing campaigns with free gifts or free samples (e.g., Westin providing a signaturescented candle) might be more effective over simple discounts and coupons in generating favorable evaluation of a given brand (Chandon et al., 2000).

Interactions and communication among consumers do not appear to help hotel brands develop consumer commitment. Marketers may need to devise methods that depend on business-to-consumer activities rather than facilitating interaction among consumers in order to build consumer commitment towards the brand. For example, direct communication via online chat features between consumer service and consumers when making reservations may be an effective approach to build consumer commitment. Through this process, hotel staff could directly identify consumer preferences (e.g., the type of pillow or room they prefer) and special requests (e.g., particular room temperature and particular newspaper they want to be delivered) (Weed, 2011). Based on the information collected through this chat feature, hotels may provide personalized service that underlines the value of staying at the hotel brand. This may enhance consumer commitment toward a hotel brand and produce loyal customers.

Finally, social media is an innovative tool by which hotel brands can take a proactive approach to manage brand relationships with their consumers. Hotel marketers can identify the most important attributes of their brands (e.g., rooms, front desk, breakfast, room rates, and cleanliness) by analyzing the consumers' posts on the brand pages. Following this

analysis, marketers can take immediate actions based on both complimentary reviews and complaints about service. Particularly for uncomplimentary reviews, marketers can mitigate their potential harmful effects by effectively responding to consumers' comments. All of these efforts can assist hotel brands in creating favorable brand images and building strong relationships with their members.

#### Managerial implications for the restaurant study

As in the hotel study, the findings of the restaurant study provided a number of critical managerial implications to increase the success of restaurant brands' Facebook pages. Two benefit factors, social-psychological benefits and hedonic benefits, were derived from the restaurant consumers' need for participation. Restaurant members perceive a sense of community and affiliation as the highest benefits they receive from restaurant brands' Facebook pages. In addition, they enjoy visiting restaurant brands' pages for fun and entertainment. These benefits are important in helping hospitality firms to encourage the involvement of the members in community activities that in turn may enhance brand relationships with these current and potential consumers.

Marketers are advised to monitor the communication among the members on restaurant brands' Facebook pages to gain insight. Restaurant attributes, such as the quality and taste of food and employee service are frequently evaluated (Dellarocas, 2001). Active participants are likely to post their personal thoughts and emotions regarding their dining experiences; the content of these posts may influence other members (Green, 2009). Marketers may identify groups of consumers categorized by certain criteria such as postings about the taste of particular food items, preferences for food presentation, and positive or negative opinions about new menu items. This may aid marketers in identifying the special interests of their members and finding additional niche segments in existing markets. Restaurants can develop new menus or items based on such content in order to meet the specific needs of each target group.

Marketers of restaurant brands must provide numerous Internet-based opportunities for members to share their experiences and interact with others (Watson, Morgan, & Hemmington, 2008). For example, a restaurant may consider providing a personal space on its Facebook page for active participants to post their own dining experiences, to which other members could provide feedback. Because the postings and reviews from a personal page are perceived as coming from trusted members of the community, other members would consider them to be more credible than other review sites (Watson et al., 2008). By doing so, members may experience enhanced positive feelings about the community of like-minded people and may experience greater hedonic benefits of participation (Stockdale & Borovicka, 2006).

Moreover, marketers are advised to consider using a variety of tools such as games, videos, and applications in order to create opportunities for positive experiences when members visit. When using such entertainment tools, consumer engagement comes from seeking hedonic experiences, a primary desire for community members. The purpose of member visits is simply to play games or watch video, as opposed to participating in community activities (Fisher, 2011b). Accordingly, games or videos should be developed with the concept of entertaining members and sharing information about restaurants while members are playing or viewing.

Although restaurant consumers appear not to be primarily driven to seek restaurant information through Facebook pages, it is critical for restaurants to promote their menus and entice potential consumers to visit their restaurants through this platform. To entice consumers, marketers of restaurant brands' Facebook pages may consider providing special offers and interesting content through the elements desired by Facebook users, such as newsfeeds and widgets (Fisher, 2011b), which include updated information and make unique impressions.

As discussed previously, encouraging member participation on Facebook pages by offering monetary benefits such as coupons and reduced prices to existing consumers appears to be an ineffective approach. As indicated in previous studies (Buil et al., 2011; Chandon et al., 2000), it is preferable to develop non-monetary promotions such as free beverages or free sample menu items as compensation to existing members to encourage active participation. However, monetary promotions can be used to entice potential consumers who are not yet members of a brand page. Furthermore, a promotion should involve some activities to engage consumers (e.g., announcing the winners of photo contests to provide social recognition within the brand page). Facilitating monetary and non-monetary promotions with pleasurable experiences can increase the popularity and success of a restaurant brand's Facebook page.

In conclusion, social media can be an effective platform for consumer engagement in the restaurant industry. Restaurant brand pages enable both members and marketers to carry out interactive communication. Marketers must design various marketing strategies that strengthen consumer loyalty.

#### Summary

Social media provide a technology infrastructure that hospitality firms can embrace with suitable planning and guidelines for consumer engagement. The present study found several important benefit factors (i.e., social-psychological and hedonic benefits) that influence member participation in both hotel and restaurant brands' pages. Marketers are advised to provide these benefits to members of hotel or restaurant brands' Facebook pages. Such strategies include:

- Enhancing opportunities for interaction and engagement among like-minded members of a brand's Facebook page to foster sharing of interests and carrying out similar purposes for joining.
- Incorporating various features into a brand's Facebook page that provide positive experiences (e.g., entertainment, pleasure, and enjoyment) with the brand.
- Monitoring members' communications to identify new market segments and provide customized services based on common interests about products/services, visiting purposes, and other factors.

Consumer-generated content posted prior to, during, and following experiences with hotel and restaurant brands is one of the most important resources that affect favorable brand image and experiences. Hospitality firms may be tempted to keep only positive messages and compliments on their pages and to delete negative content in order to create favorable brand images and experiences. However, marketers should realize that brand pages that contain only positive content are typically perceived with skepticism by visitors (Kasavana, Nusair, & Teodosic, 2010). Brand page marketers can take advantage of negative comments by giving satisfactory explanations on their Facebook pages and/or by following up with the customer to rectify the problem, which may lead to the regaining of consumer trust. Such efforts to address these issues can directly affect the consumers who post negative contents and indirectly influence the others who view the communication.

Overall, a primary goal of brand page marketers using Facebook pages is to convert the existing and new members into committed members in order to form long-term relationships. Hospitality firms can foster brand commitment by providing specialized and personalized services on Facebook (e.g., American express cards partners with several hotels and restaurants to provide special deals based on member interests and likes in both categories). In addition, hotels and restaurants need to be selective in order to provide the right combination of services to an identified consumer segment. For example, a price reduction offer may be attractive to new community members or consumers who are price sensitive, but not effective for committed members who were found to be less price sensitive. Companies can also treat committed members as a special group of consumers who receive advance notice of new products or services, giving them exclusive opportunities for preexperience or pre-purchase comparisons (e.g., restaurants may invite their loyal consumers to a sampling party) before other consumers. Since committed consumers are willing to spend more, visit more frequently, and spread referral information to their friends, hospitality firms may ultimately expect profit increases by successfully operating brand pages (Kasavana et al., 2010).

#### **Limitations and Future Study**

The present study contains several limitations that should be identified and that lead to suggestions for future research. First, the sample for the study was conducted from two sources: an online research company and an alumni list of Iowa State University. The majority of hotel data were obtained from the online research company, and the respondents had a range of education levels. Conversely, the data for the restaurant study were obtained exclusively from the alumni of Iowa State University, and the majority of respondents were highly educated, holding either bachelor or graduate degrees. These two sets of data were used in distinct studies; it is possible that the differences in the results were caused by the demographic differences in the two groups of respondents. Future research comparing hotel and restaurant Facebook pages may use one source of data and/or ensure similar percentages of respondents from each demographic category are represented. Scant empirical literature on online hospitality brand communities provides a rudimentary foundation for the present study. Future hospitality research is needed to strengthen the theoretical and empirical background that explicates the role of benefits from the firm's Facebook pages on consumer responses.

Second, the measurement scales for participation benefits were highly correlated and thus, multi-collinearity problems occurred during confirmatory factor analysis and SEM's structural analysis. Six of the eighteen measurement items were eliminated to resolve this issue. Future studies may focus on refinement and validation of the scales employed in the present study to help marketers gain significant insight into the beneficial aspects of social media communities valued by their target markets. In addition, the present study suggests the need to improve measurement scales for brand commitment. In the hotel study, the factor loading of one measurement scale, brand commitment, was larger than 1. This may be caused by various reasons, which needs further analysis in future studies. In the restaurant study, the Cronbach's *alpha* estimate for brand commitment (.60) was relatively low as compared to the cutoff value of .70 (Nunnally, 1978). Future research needs to develop an internally consistent measurement scale for brand commitment in the restaurant context.

Third, the present study identified two negative paths between hedonic benefits and brand commitment and between monetary benefits and brand commitment. The two negative paths may be caused by the multi-collinearity issues mentioned above. These results, in the direction opposite from predicted, suggest future studies are needed to examine if negative relationships truly exist, and if so, why hedonic and monetary benefits offered by a brand's Facebook page negatively affect brand commitment. Future studies may conduct interviews to determine consumer perceptions about hedonic and monetary benefits of online brand communities and the direction of impact these benefits have on brand commitment.

Fourth, the present study found that age and biological gender did not play a moderating role in evaluating the effects of benefits on member participation. Future studies may employ other factors, such as involvement or personality traits, which may influence the relationships in the conceptual model. For example, involvement with a brand may affect the strength of the relationship between participation benefits and member participation (Lee, 2005; Tsao & Chang, 2010). Personality traits may also be considered as an influential moderating variable, because certain personality traits can influence the relationship between participation on brand pages (Morse, 2009). Conducting research using other moderating variables could help explain consumer participation behavior in online brand communities.

Fifth, the path from monetary benefits to brand commitment in the hotel study should be investigated further. The path direction may run in reverse between the two constructs, with brand commitment affecting desired benefits rather than benefits affecting commitment. Committed members may desire monetary benefits as a reward for their commitment toward the hotel brand. Monetary benefits given to committed members may encourage them to participate in various community activities, such as posting positive service experiences, promoting brand pages to potential consumers, and supporting other members' opinions. Thus, future research may consider the effect of brand commitment on benefits, which in turn enhance member participation on brand pages.

Finally, the present study proposed a single final consequence of community participation, which was brand commitment. Future research may investigate other consequences of active participation such as brand loyalty, purchase intention, or brand equity. This may provide hospitality companies with specific information needed to implement marketing strategies that encourage more active member participation.

## APPENDIX A: A QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE HOTEL SEMENT

Hello Everyone,

I am a Ph.D student in the hospitality management program at Iowa State University. As a part of my dissertation, I am conducting a survey to investigate consumers' motivation and experiences on Facebook Fan pages of Hotel brands. I would greatly appreciate if you would fill out a short survey. If you choose to participate, you may choose to not answer a question if you desire. However, having a complete survey is very helpful for the study. It will take no more than ten minutes.

**Your participation in this study is voluntary, but you must be 18 or older to participate.** Your responses are kept anonymous and will be used for research purposes only. This project has been approved by Iowa State University's Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Juhee Kang, Doctoral candidate Hospitality Management Program Iowa State University

Screening Question: This study aims to investigate the experiences of fans on Facebook pages of hospitality companies. Therefore, if you have no experience visiting the Facebook pages of any hotels please quit the survey now. Otherwise, please choose which Facebook pages you are a fan of.

- O Hotel
- O Restaurant
- O Quit Survey

### Please select only one of the following:

- O Marriott Napa Valley Hotel and Spa
- O Stanley Hotel
- O Beacon Hotel
- O The Algonquin Hotel
- O Others. Specify

Please recall your prior experience on the specific hotel Facebook page. Then answer the questions in the following sections.

**Section 1:** In this section, we are interested in the benefit you derive as a fan of a Hotel brand's Facebook page. Please use the following scale to rate your level of agreement with each statement.

I think the following is important	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree
Obtaining up-to-date information about the Hotel brand	1	2	3	4	5
Conveniently communicating with others online	1	2	3	4	5
Efficiently communicating online	1	2	3	4	5
Sharing experiences in the Hotel brand	1	2	3	4	5
Having trust in the community of Facebook	1	2	3	4	5
Establishing and maintaining relationships with other members of Facebook	1	2	3	4	5
Communicating with other members	1	2	3	4	5
Getting involved with other members	1	2	3	4	5
Seeking a sense of affiliation in the community	1	2	3	4	5
Seeking a sense of belonging	1	2	3	4	5
Seeking self-identity	1	2	3	4	5
Being amused by other members	1	2	3	4	5
Having fun on the brand's Facebook page	1	2	3	4	5
Seeking enjoyment on this Facebook page	1	2	3	4	5
Being entertained on this Facebook page	1	2	3	4	5
Obtaining discounts or special deals that most consumers don't get	1	2	3	4	5
Obtaining better prices than other consumers	1	2	3	4	5
Receiving free coupons for the Hotel brand by becoming a member of the Facebook page	1	2	3	4	5

**Section 2:** We are interested in how you participate as a fan of the brand Hotel's Facebook page and your thoughts about the brand. Please indicate how you agree or disagree with each statement, using the following scale:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongl y agree
I take an active part in the brand Hotel's Facebook page	1	2	3	4	5
I frequently provide useful information to other members	1	2	3	4	5
In general, I post messages and responses on the brand's Facebook page with great enthusiasm and frequency	1	2	3	4	5
I do my best to participate in activities offered on the brand's Facebook page	1	2	3	4	5
What the Hotel brand says about its products/service is true	1	2	3	4	5
I feel I know what to expect from the Hotel brand	1	2	3	4	5
The Hotel brand is very reliable	1	2	3	4	5
The Hotel brand meets its promises	1	2	3	4	5

**Section 3:** We are interested in further thoughts about the Hotel brand you chose. Please indicate the level of agreement with each statement using the following scale:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongl y agree
If the Hotel brand had no available reservations, I would have no problem finding a different Hotel with which I would want to make reservations	1	2	3	4	5
I consider myself to be highly loyal to the Hotel brand	1	2	3	4	5
When another brand has a special deal (e.g., discounted room rate), I generally visit that Hotel with the better deal	1	2	3	4	5

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree		
There is active participation between the company and members	1	2	3	4	5		
The Hotel brand's Facebook page is successful	1	2	3	4	5		
I like visiting the Hotel brand's Facebook 1 2 3 4 5 page					5		
Section 5: Demographic Information.							
What is your biological gender? OM	ale O Fe	male					
How old are you? O18 - 20 years old over 55	O 21 - 3	30 O 31	- 40 (	D 41 - 5	5 O		
What is the highest level of education v	ou have com	pleted?					
OHigh school or less O Ass	ociate degree	e 0	Bachelor	's degree	2		
O Graduate degree (Master's, J.D., M.D.,	or Doctoral	) O	Other deg	gree			
In what region of the world you do resid	le?						
O Africa O Asia	O Ocea	ania	0	Europe	e		
O United States O Canada	O Cen	tral Americ	a O	South	America		
O Middle East O Others. Specify				]			
(1) How long have you been a member of	of this Hotel	brand's F	acebook j	page?			
months							
(2) How long, on average, do you partic	ipate in this	Hotel bran	nd's page	each w	eek?		
hours							
(3) How many Hotel Facebook pages are you a member of?							
Please provide your email address if you want to be considered for drawings:							
<b>**</b> Your email information will not be connected with your response.							
Thank	You Very M	luch					

Section 4: Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements.

## APPENDIX B: A QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE RESTAURANT SEMENT

Hello Everyone,

I am a Ph.D student in the hospitality management program at Iowa State University. As a part of my dissertation, I am conducting a survey to investigate consumers' motivation and experiences on Facebook Fan pages of Hotel brands. I would greatly appreciate if you would fill out a short survey. If you choose to participate, you may choose to not answer a question if you desire. However, having a complete survey is very helpful for the study. It will take no more than ten minutes.

**Your participation in this study is voluntary, but you must be 18 or older to participate.** Your responses are kept anonymous and will be used for research purposes only. This project has been approved by Iowa State University's Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects.



As an incentive for your participation, you can choose to have a chance to win a \$50 VISA gift card. To be entered in the drawing, please provide your email address at the end of the survey so that we can contact you if you should win. If you choose to enter your email address into the drawing for a \$50 Visa Check Card, the survey is no longer anonymous at that point; however, your responses will remain strictly confidential.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Juhee Kang, Doctoral candidate Hospitality Management Program Iowa State University

Screening Question: This study aims to investigate the experiences of fans on Facebook pages of hospitality companies. Therefore, if you have no experience visiting the Facebook pages of any hotels/ restaurants please quit the survey now. Otherwise, please choose which Facebook pages you are a fan of.

O Hotel O Restaurant O Quit Survey
# Please select only one of the following:

- O Chili's
- O Outback
- O Red Lobster
- O The Cheesecake Factory
- O Others. Specify

# Please recall your prior experience on the specific restaurant Facebook page. Then answer the questions in the following sections.

Section 1: In this section, we are interested in the benefit you derive as a fan of a Restaurant brand's Facebook page. Please use the following scale to rate your level of agreement with each statement.

I think the following is important	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree
Obtaining up-to-date information about the Restaurant brand	1	2	3	4	5
Conveniently communicating with others online	1	2	3	4	5
Efficiently communicating online	1	2	3	4	5
Sharing experiences in the Restaurant brand	1	2	3	4	5
Having trust in the community of Facebook	1	2	3	4	5
Establishing and maintaining relationships with other members of Facebook	1	2	3	4	5
Communicating with other members	1	2	3	4	5
Getting involved with other members	1	2	3	4	5
Seeking a sense of affiliation in the community	1	2	3	4	5
Seeking a sense of belonging	1	2	3	4	5
Seeking self-identity	1	2	3	4	5
Being amused by other members	1	2	3	4	5
Having fun on the brand's Facebook page	1	2	3	4	5

1	3	7
T	$\mathcal{I}$	'

Seeking enjoyment on this Facebook page	1	2	3	4	5
Being entertained on this Facebook page	1	2	3	4	5
Obtaining discounts or special deals that most consumers don't get	1	2	3	4	5
Obtaining better prices than other consumers	1	2	3	4	5
Receiving free coupons for the Restaurant brand by becoming a member of the Facebook page	1	2	3	4	5

**Section 2:** We are interested in how you participate as a fan of the x brand Restaurant's Facebook page and your thoughts about the brand. Please indicate how you agree or disagree with each statement, using the following scale:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree
I take an active part in the x brand Restaurant's Facebook page	1	2	3	4	5
I frequently provide useful information to other members	1	2	3	4	5
In general, I post messages and responses on the brand's Facebook page with great enthusiasm and frequency	1	2	3	4	5
I do my best to participate in activities offered on the brand's Facebook page	1	2	3	4	5
What the Restaurant brand says about its products/service is true	1	2	3	4	5
I feel I know what to expect from the Restaurant brand	1	2	3	4	5
The Restaurant brand is very reliable	1	2	3	4	5
The Restaurant brand meets its promises	1	2	3	4	5

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree
If the Restaurant brand had no available reservations, I would have no problem finding a different restaurant with which I would want to make reservations	1	2	3	4	5
I consider myself to be highly loyal to the Restaurant brand	1	2	3	4	5
When another brand has a special deal (e.g., discount price for meal), I generally visit that restaurant with the better deal	1	2	3	4	5

**Section 3:** We are interested in further thoughts about the Restaurant brand you chose. Please indicate the level of agreement with each statement using the following scale:

Section 4: Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree
There is active participation between the company and members	1	2	3	4	5
The Restaurant brand's Facebook page is successful	1	2	3	4	5
I like visiting the Restaurant brand's Facebook page	1	2	3	4	5

# Section 5: Demographic Information.

What is your biological gender? OMale O Female

## How old are you?

## What is the highest level of education you have completed?

OHigh s	chool or	less
---------	----------	------

O Associate degree

O Bachelor's degree

O Graduate degree (Master's, J.D., M.D., or Doctoral)	O Other degree
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## In what region of the world you do reside?

0	Africa	O Asia	0	Oceania	0	Europe
0	United States	O Canada	Ο	Central America	0	South America
0	Middle East	O Others. Spe	cify			7

- (1) How long have you been a member of this Restaurant brand's Facebook page? \_\_\_\_\_months
- (2) How long, on average, do you participate in this Restaurant brand's page each week? \_\_\_\_\_hours

(3) How many restaurant Facebook pages are you a member of?

Please provide your email address if you want to be considered for drawings:

\*\* Your email information will not be connected with your response.

Thank You Very Much

#### APPENDIX C: APPROVAL OF THE USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS

Institutional Review Board Office for Responsible Resear

Vice President for Research

			Ames, Iowa 50011-2207 515 294-4566 FAX 515 294-4267
Date:	5/12/2011		
То:	Juhee Kang 7E MacKay Hall	CC: Dr. Liang Tang 12 MacKay Hall	
From:	Office for Responsible Research		
Title:	The Use of Social Media for an and Activities in Building Brand	Dnline Hospitality Community: The Role of Trust and Commitment	f Participation Beneftis
IRB Num:	11-217		
Submission	Type: New	Exemption Date:	5/10/2011

The project referenced above has undergone review by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and has been declared exempt from the requirements of the human subject protections regulations as described in 45 CFR 46.101(b). The IRB determination of exemption means that:

· You do not need to submit an application for annual continuing review.

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- You must carry out the research as proposed in the IRB application, including obtaining and documenting informed consent if you have stated in your application that you will do so or if required by the IRB.
- Any modification of this research should be submitted to the IRB on a Continuing Review and/or Modification form, prior to making any changes, to determine if the project still meets the federal criteria for exemption. If it is determined that exemption is no longer warranted, then an IRB proposal will need to be submitted and approved before proceeding with data collection.

Please be sure to use only the approved study materials in your research, including the recruitment materials and informed consent documents that have the IRB approval stamp.

Please note that you must submit all research involving human participants for review by the IRB. Only the IRB may make the determination of exemption, even if you conduct a study in the future that is exactly like this study.

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