

# WHAT MAKES ONLINE BRAND COMMUNITIES PROSPEROUS: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF SENSE OF BELONGING AND BRAND LOYALTY

*Completed Research Paper*

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## **Abstract**

*Companies recently are interested in online brand communities (OBCs) because they provide valuable opportunities to earn revenues via sales promotion, product improvement and new product development. OBCs are also contributing in improving consumers' brand loyalty and companies' brand image. We examined consumers' motivations that influence OBC's acceptance and the behavioural intention to use OBCs based on the technology acceptance model and the motivation model and the taxonomy theories regarding OBC members' behaviours. Six motivations were extracted from investigating OBC members' behaviours: web quality, information quality, sense of belonging, brand loyalty, reputation and trust. Our findings indicate that all six motivations are significant for consumers to accept and intend to use an OBC. Brand loyalty has a significant role as a belief to perceived ease of use, usefulness, and enjoyment. Our results may help companies to attract consumers to participate in OBCs activities which can help to improve consumers' brand loyalty.*

**Keywords:** Online brand community, user acceptance, consumer behaviour, brand loyalty

## Introduction

Internet advancements enable easier and faster connection and communication without geographical limitations. It creates a space where people who have same interests or hobbies can interact in ways beyond simple chat or information provision as a database. In this way, the ubiquity of internet in combination with the human desire for connectivity, knowledge and information sharing has created new social forms such as online communities (OCs) (Jang et al. 2007). An OC is a computer-mediated space that has been developed in various forms, such as forums and social groups in social network services. Sharratt and Usoro (2003) argue that OCs have a significant role on knowledge management because information systems (IS) nowadays are not regarded only as a depot, but also as a collaborative tool of knowledge. One of the differences between traditional communities and OCs is that the latter enable the exchange of valuable knowledge and information via web without geographical limitations. A form of OC that is rapidly growing is online brand communities (OBCs) (Madupu and Cooley 2010).

Recently, OBCs have noticeably concentrated the interest of both academia and business practice. From the business perspective the interest on OBCs is raised not only because of marketing purposes, but also of engineering and design purposes focusing on New Product Development (NPD). Marketers have recognised OBCs as an important tool for consumer-brand relationship-building and hence have mainly created OBCs hosted in their company websites. Although some OBCs are commonly created voluntarily by consumers, marketers have also shown interest in the consumer-initiated OBCs and they are trying to interact with the members through events, advertisements and performances. Armstrong and Hegel (1996) argue that OBCs are growing as a key instrument of a company's internet marketing strategy and help the company to build brand loyalty effectively. Additionally, scholars and engineers are interested in product innovation collaborated with consumers in OBCs (Kim et al. 2008). The members of OBCs establish brand relationship as well as social relationship and share their knowledge and brand experiences with the other members. They also share and discuss ideas for potential product's improvements or developing new products.

An OBC offers many advantages for both customers and companies. Consumers benefit from OBCs, since they can make a more informative purchase decision or they can use the branded products or services more efficiently through sharing experiences and knowledge with other users. Furthermore, interpersonal relationships that are improved among the members empower themselves to be protected against unfair trading practices, such as monopoly or collusion and anticompetitive actions. As a result, OBCs promote the provision of better quality of products or services. Secondly, companies benefit from OBCs to increase their profitability because instead of using traditional marketing, companies can reduce both time and cost dedicated in market research to investigate consumers' demands. Moreover, OBCs provide an efficient way to develop new products that reflect more accurately consumers' demands. It is also a way to receive fresh ideas from consumers that can provide more advantages and revenue for the companies. Finally, the customers' brand loyalty can be increased by a well-operated OBC and enhance consumers' decision to repurchase brand products or services (Fournier and Lee 2009).

In order to acquire these advantages, consumers' participation to OBCs is a determinant factor. Many scholars argue that consumers' participation of OBC is a key indicator and an important instrument to a successful community. Higher levels of participation can boost the adoption of a new product from the favored brand and turn down the probability of adopting new products from other brands (Madupu and Cooley 2010). This is the reason why companies have progressively become more interested in fostering successful OBCs.

As evidence suggests, OBCs cannot reach their peak of potentiality if they are not accepted, tried, and used by potential consumers. This places the understanding the behavioural intention to use an OBC as one of the most important factors to increase participation. Adopting this standpoint, several studies have examined a) the way to increase members' knowledge sharing in an OC (Chen and Hung 2010; Chiu et al. 2006; Hsu et al. 2007; Lin et al. 2009) and b) the factors that are crucial to increase OC loyalty (Brandzæg and Heim 2007; McAlexander et al. 2003; Yung-Cheng et al. 2010) and c) the factors that crucial to increase brand loyalty (Casaló et al. 2010; Holland and Menzel Baker 2001; Thorbjørnsen and Supphellen 2004). However, previous studies reveal a lack of understanding of consumers and members' motivations for acceptance and intention to use an OBC. Even though OBCs have clearly provided an innovative and profitable business model centered on marketing and NPD, the reasons why members adopt an OBC remain unclear.

The principle aim of this study is to investigate OBC members' behavioural intention to use an OBC based on the technology acceptance model (TAM) originated by Davis (1989), and the motivation model (MM) originated by Davis et al. (1992) and the social identity theory developed in social psychology.

This study adopts the theory of classification of OC members behaviours from a marketing perspective (Kozinets 1999; Mathwick 2002) and a technology mediate communication (TMC) perspective (Preece and Shneiderman 2009) to investigate the intention to participate to OBCs. This study also based on the social identification theory developed in social psychology.

## Conceptual Background

### *Online brand community*

The definition of a community is "a group in which individuals come together based on an obligation to one another or a group in which individuals come together to be one in purpose" (Rothaermel and Sugiyama 2001). Hegel and Armstrong (1997) define OCs as an aggregation of people who share common interests and communicate via electronic mail and chatting on the web in internet user groups using computer-mediated mechanisms. Bagozzi and Dholakia (2006) defined a brand community as "a group of consumers with a shared enthusiasm for the brand and a well-developed social identity, whose members engage jointly in group actions to accomplish collective goals and/or express mutual sentiments and commitments." A brand community consists of four relevant relationships: (1) customer and product, (2) customer and brand, (3) customer and company and (4) customer and other customers (McAlexander et al. 2002). Before internet use, brand communities existed in face-to-face form and had geographical limitations. These refer to offline brand communities many of which were initiated by companies. However, most of brand communities had location and accessibility constraints that resulted in limited memberships and less frequent members' interaction (Madupu and Cooley 2010). McWilliam (2000) argues that the emergence of internet has enabled the establishment of brand communities with no-geographically boundaries. The rapid development of internet technology made many brand communities able to be established on the World Wide Web and to bring together consumers without geographical restrictions. These communities are referred to as virtual brand communities or online brand communities (Madupu and Cooley 2010). An online brand community is defined as a specialised and non-geographically bounded community based on a structured set of social and interpersonal relationships among consumers who admire of a brand (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001). Online brand communities represent a grown class of marketplace communities where consumers or members can share and exchange information on products or services regarding a specific brand as well as common interests on the web. These communities do not have any restrictions regarding geographic, temporal and physical boundaries and therefore, consumers are able to communicate at any time regardless their location (Jae Wook et al. 2008). Many offline brand communities have launched on the Web sites by taking advantage of the rapid IT development (Madupu and Cooley 2010). Some OBCs initiated by companies while others are established and maintained by individuals. Some online brand communities are hosted on independent Web sites while others are settled on portal sites such as Yahoo and Goggle and MSN Groups (Madupu and Cooley 2010).

### *Online brand communities and members' behaviours*

Some scholars argue that the OCs members can be classified into four types of behaviours. Kozinets (1999) studied about OC members from a marketing perspective and identified four different members' behaviours in relation to consumption behaviour and intensity of the social relationships: (1) tourists (2) mingler (3) devotees (4) insiders. The characteristic of 'tourists' is that they lack social relationship to the group and their consumption activities maintain only a superficial and temporary interest. 'Minglers' behaviours are adopted by people who keep strong social ties, but their interests of consumption are only perfunctorily. 'Devotees' behaviours have a strong and enthusiastic interest in consumption activities and few social attachments to the group. Lastly, the 'insiders' behaviours have strong for both consumption behaviour and social relationship.

Mathwick (2002) examined the nature of online relational behaviour in OSs from a marketing perspective. His study focused on the relationship between transactional community sponsors and their patrons from a marketing perspective. He argues that differences in relational norms will result in differences in online behaviours. He classified the behaviours of consumers in transactional OSs into four clusters: (1) Lurkers (2) Socialisers (3)

Personal connectors (4) Transactional community members. Members who act as ‘Lurkers’ have low communal and exchange relationships. They stay on sidelines in the community and they participate normally only by observing and buying products. They are not interested in connecting with other members. ‘Socialisers’ behaviours indicate members who are much more interested in communal relationship than exchange relationship. They are interested in sharing their interest such as hobbies and recreational activities and politics and religion. They are the most active members toward self-help and interpersonal relationship than the other clusters. ‘Personal connectors’ are members who are not interested in intrinsic value as social interaction but they are close with other members related with their interest and they are significantly loyal customers to the online retailers. ‘Transactional Community Members’ indicate members who have stronger communal and exchange relationship than other groups. This group is more likely to provide feedback about products and services and to participate in online dialog with other members as fellow patrons. This group is one of the most loyal customers for virtual community sponsors.

Preece and Shneiderman (2009) classified members’ behaviours of virtual communities into four types: ‘readers’, ‘contributors’, ‘collaborators’ and ‘leaders’. This study focused on revealing the usability factors and sociability factors which affect technology-mediated communication of members in OSs. This research presents the ‘Reader-to-Leader Framework’ which explains how people join social media through first reading and how people contribute and collaborate and lead to OSs activities. From a usability perspective, ‘Readers’ gather information related to their interest. For these members, the clear navigation paths to easy control, the interface design and attractiveness and the well-organised layout are the significant factors to encourage participation. From a sociability perspective, a sense of belonging based on related people’s recognition and charismatic leaders with visionary goals can affect to Readers’ participation. ‘Contributors’ are members who start to act visible, but not vitally. Hence, the significant factors to lead contributors’ participation are the visibility for users’ contributions and the frequency of views and ratings and the comments by other members. Preece and Shneiderman (2009) indicate that collaboration tools are important to communicate within groups and visible recognition and rewards is one of the significant factors for Collaborators to engage in OSs. From a sociability perspective, an atmosphere of empathy and trust can promote sense of belonging in the community and willingness to work within this groups. The ‘Leaders’ are members who have high visibility in the OC. Their effort will be important to other members and other members would give special tributes or rewards to them. Leaders also have special status such as promotion agenda or expending resources and mentorship that is appeared by comments from other members as mentees. From a sociability perspective, Leaders will get an honoured position and respect from other members and their behaviours will help others deal with their problems.

### ***Technology acceptance model***

In the IS literature, technology acceptance model (TAM) is one of the most prominent and it widely and effectively used by researchers for explaining and developing the relation between the user and IS acceptance. TAM is originally proposed by Davis (1989) and it is used to explain users’ usage of IT. Specifically TAM was developed to predict and explain users’ behavioural intention to use IT and it is supported by the numerous recent empirical studies through validations, applications, and replications (Venkatesh 2000).

TAM (Davis 1989) is based on theory of reasoned action model (TRA) (Ajzen and Fishbein 1977; Ajzen and Fishbein 1980). According to the TRA, an individual’s behaviour is determined by one’s behavioural intention (BI) and the BI is jointly determined by individual attitudes (AT) and subjective norms (SN). TRA has been empirically demonstrated and is widely used for predicting or explaining cognitive and affective behaviour using ‘belief-attitude-intention-behaviour’ relationship in social psychology. TAM applied the TRA of belief-attitude-intention behaviour to explain the determinants of IT acceptant. TAM explains the beliefs of TRA by two factors that are perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU). The definition of PU is “the degree to which a person believes that a particular information system would enhance his or her job performance” by reducing the time to achieve a task or providing timely information. PEOU is “the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free of effort” (Davis 1989). Davis (1989) claimed that an individual’s IS acceptance is determined by two major behavioural variables that are PU and PEOU and both influence the behavioural intention (BI) and actual use (AU) in particularly IT. The study revealed that PU powerfully influences user’s intentions and PEOU affects the intention of users significantly but it had a smaller effect (Davis et al. 1989) than PU. TAM further theorizes that PU and PEU will act as mediators between external variables and behavioural intention to use (Venkatesh and Bala 2008) and many scholars have recommended that TAM is able to be enhanced by incorporating additional beliefs from other theories (Cao and Mokhtarian 2005; Davis 1989). Karahanna and Straub

(1999) also argued that investigating antecedent variables that can explain the core TAM variables such as PU, PEOU and BI enhances TAM and the study for extension of TAM enhances our ability to better understand the acceptance and usage of existing and new IT. Moon and Kim (2001) suggested that external variables contributing to the acceptance of an IT are likely to change with the target users, technology, and context.

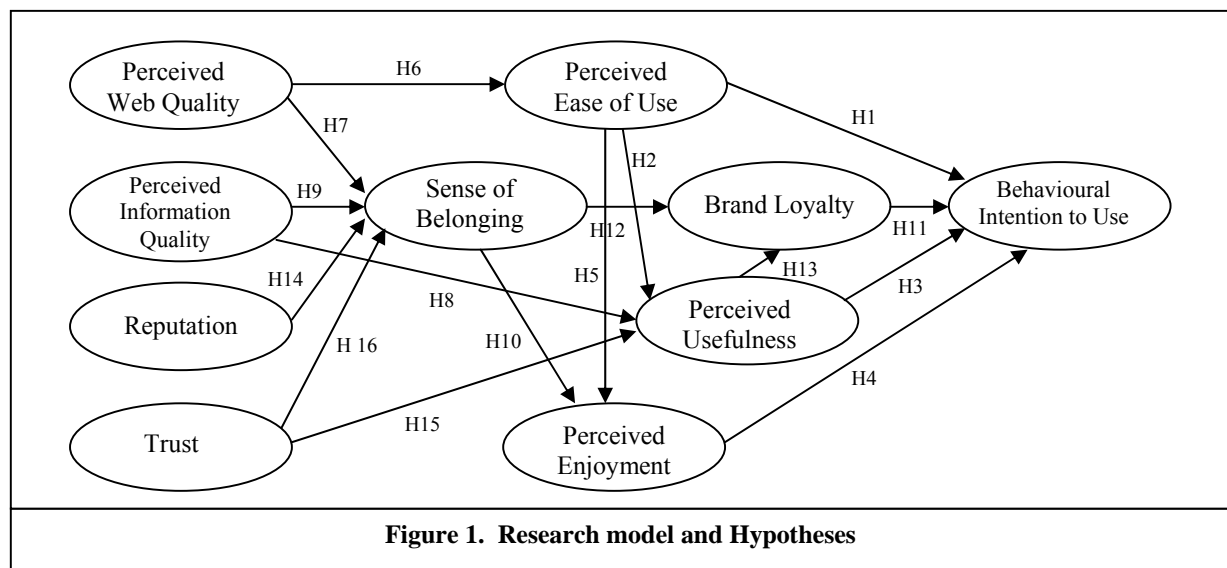
### Motivation model

Legris et al. (2003) revealed that there is a need to include other beliefs for providing a broader insight and a better description of IT adoption. Specifically, components related to human and social change processes should be incorporated (Lee et al. 2005). For instance, in an extended TAM, Davis et al., (1992) studied about extrinsic and intrinsic motivation to use computers in the work place. The study discovered that perceived usefulness (PU) as extrinsic motivation and perceived enjoyment (PE) as intrinsic motivation influence usage intention directly and usage behaviour through their effects on intentions. They recommended that ignoring the point of intrinsic enjoyment in work activities by computer could put at risk whatever productivity gains that are provided by computer use. Viswanath et al.(2002) also extended TAM with a motivational model and the result verified both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations as predictors of behavioural intention to use.

### Research models and Hypotheses

The aim of this study is to investigate motivations that enable consumers and members to accept and behaviourally intent to use an OBC. IS acceptance research examines the different behaviours of end users confronted with a new IS. OBCs are an established form of IS (Sharratt and Usoro 2003).

The research model is based on the classification of OBC members and TAM model as shown below in Figure 1.



### Perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use

The more useful is an OBC in helping users to accomplish their tasks the more likely will be to be used. Extrinsic motivation as perceived usefulness influences behaviour due to strengthening the value of outcomes (Davis et al. 1992). Therefore, TAM as one of the prevailing behavioural models is considered to investigate OBC members' behavioural intention of OBC usage. Davis (1989) predicted these two factors – Perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use- are as main determinants to influence the behavioural intention to use in particularly information technology. [H1] [H2] [H3]

H1. Perceived ease of use would positively affect to behavioural intention to use of OBC.

H2. Perceived ease of use would positively affect to perceived usefulness of OBC.

H3. Perceived usefulness would positively affect to behavioural intention to use of OBC.

### ***Perceive enjoyment***

Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), recognize 'consciousness of kind' as the key component of a brand community. The consciousness of kind is "an intrinsic connection that members feel toward one another and the collective sense of difference from others". One essential feature of OBC is sense of community. Davis et al. (1992) demonstrate that perceived enjoyment is a significant belief in intention to use a computer. Therefore, Perceived enjoyment is as an intrinsic motivation would be a significant determinant predictor of intentions to use an OBC, and Motivation model (MM) is considered to conduct our study. [H4] [H5]

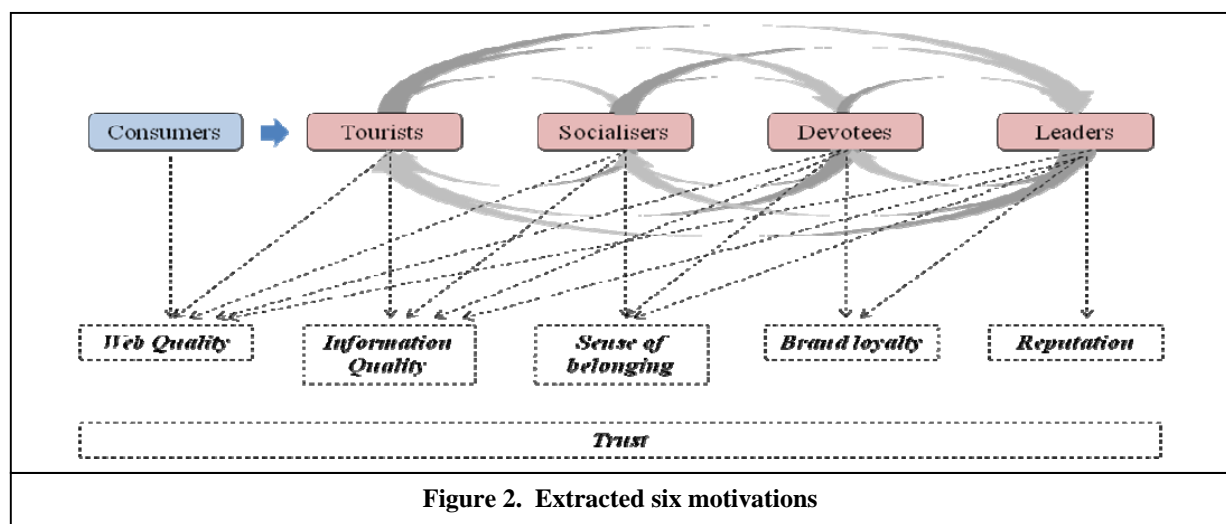
H4. Perceived enjoyment would positively affect to behavioural intention to use of OBC.

H5. Perceived enjoyment would be as a mediator between perceived ease of use and behavioural intention to use of OBC.

### ***External variables***

#### **Extract motivations**

From referring the theories of classification of OC members' behaviours, six common motivations are extracted from investigating OBC members' behavioural intention to use an OBC (Figure 2).



#### **Web quality**

The web quality would be a significant factor to accept and to intend to use an OBC (Zhou et al. 2007). Aladwani and Palvia (2002) proposed and validated four dimensions of web quality that are appearance, technical adequacy, content quality, and specific content. Huizingh (2000) focused on two aspects of web quality: content and design. Liu and Arnett (2000) suggested that web quality is consisted by information and system quality. However, in overall, web quality is composed largely by three dimensions: web design, information quality, and system quality. Huizingh (2000) proposed three dimensions to measure web design: quality of the navigation structure as perceived by web visitors, the presentation style such as layout, colour, font style and size, and multimedia capabilities of the web. We considered web quality as web design quality to consist of ease of web site use and navigation as technical adequacy and presentation style quality as web appearance.

The appearance and layout of web design would act as a significant factor for acceptance and intention of OBC usage. Appearance refers to the visual attractiveness of a web site and it is influenced by colours, fonts and features. Furthermore, appropriate overall layout design can enhance the aesthetics and visual attractiveness of the site. In the

context of OBCs, appearance can represent the identity of brand with colour, symbols and logo type. The brand identity which portrayed on an OBC would make consumers to decide joining and would also make members who are brand users to maintain committing to the brand and the OBC. When consumers are searching for an OBC to become a member, they may think about the logo of the brand. Hence, the web quality such as appearance of design would be a significant factor for the selection of an OBC. However, this applies not only to novice members but also to experienced members. Wolfinbarger and Gilly (2001) argued that experiences OBC consumers exist in virtual environments and gather information regarding brand products or their interests or hobbies or positive sociality or bargain hunting. These shoppers are attracted to well-designed web sites that are consisted by appealing appearance and easy navigation to use. Childers et al. (2001) claim that the good quality of a web site can support to enhance the degree of consumers' interactivity and establish a sense of community for consumers. [H6] [H7]

H6. Perceived web quality would positively affect to perceived ease of use of OBC.

H7. Perceived web quality would positively affect to sense of belonging of an OBC.

### **Information quality**

Consumers who participate in OBCs are motivated by information needs and they may join a certain OBC because they are interested in a specific brand relevant to them (Shang et al. 2006). In this stage consumers or members of OBC may tend to investigate other members' satisfaction level or appraisal of the branded products or services and they would be influence their decision. In this process of comparing products to make a purchase, information quality is helpful and can be a determinant of consumers' purchasing decision on the Internet (Jeong and Lambert 2001). Therefore, accurate information quality is exceedingly important to making right decision. Also, the luckers appear after purchasing a branded product because, they would like to find information about usage or solutions regarding their problems of product use. Therefore, if the information quality is not sufficient or accurate, the members feel it to be useless and they may leave it to find another OBC. [H8]

Anderson (2005) suggests that brand communities initiate and maintain buyer-seller relationships as well as members relationship and enable professional knowledge exchange and good quality of information, thereby increasing the behavioural involvement of community members. Therefore, information quality would be a significant factor to increase the sense of belonging of OBC members. [H9]

H8. Perceived information quality would positively affect to perceived usefulness of an OBC.

H9. Perceived information quality would positively affect to sense of belonging in OBC.

### **Sense of belonging**

According to social identity theory developed in social psychology field, social identification means reflects that a person identifies him/herself as a member of a society (Kim et al. 2001). According to the theory, a person's The self-concept is comprised of her/his personal identity which includes peculiar idiographic characteristics (e.g., bodily attributes, abilities, psychological traits, interest) and a her/his social identity which is encompassing prominent group classifications. Hence, sSocial identification is the perception of oneness with, or belongingness to, some human collective (Ashforth and Mael 1989). People tend to use diverse factors to categorize themselves as belonging members of a specific group. and tThis phenomenon is broadly embedded in our social life and . This phenomenon is often called social identification. Social identification and in short, social identification implies the sense of belonging to certain groups or organizations (Kim et al. 2001).

In OBCs, this phenomenon can be occurred observed among OBC members. Kozinets (1999) argued that identification of an OBC member can be explained by two aspects both a combination of consumption behaviour and social relationship building. Firstly, wWhen an individual becomes an OBC members use OBC, a person is she/he is likely to establish her/his personal identity through her/his by a person's psychological self-concept. Different Mmembers have got different consumption behaviours for consumption in an OBC. Hence, Kozinets (1999) argued that the personal identity is created from one's consumption activity. He argued that the person's self-image regarding consumption behaviour is as like a significant symbol to her herself or himself in the OBC activities and that the OBC members are more likely to be valuable members in the OBC through her or his self-image. Secondly, when a person establishes a personal identity, the person would like to possess the social identity through building social relationships with other members of an OBC.

McMillan and Chavis (1986) defined that sense of community within a group is “a feeling that members have of belonging” and “a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together.” Sense of belonging is treated as an essential element to participate in OC’s activities. If this is absent the members would not participate and be involved in an OC (Lin 2008) because social participation in OCs is associated with interpersonal and affiliate behaviours of members (Van Dyne et al. 1994). Commitment in social relationship is an emotional attachment that corresponds to a desire to belonging to the brand or the brand firm (Allen and Meyer 1993). Hedonic websites aim to satisfy members’ entertainment purpose and utilitarian websites to satisfy members’ performance purpose (Heijden 2004). The purpose of using OBCs is not only for information sharing regarding the brand but also for improving interpersonal relationships through information sharing (Kozinets 1999) which results in building sense of community. Perceived enjoyment as intrinsic motivation strongly affected web site use for entertainment purpose (Atkinson and Kydd 1997). [H10]

H10. Sense of belonging would positively affect to perceived enjoyment of OBC.

### **Brand loyalty**

A higher level of sense of community can make consumers to prefer toward a brand and makes them to purchase specific branded products or services because they have substantial sense of belonging of the community as well as the brand (Bouhlej et al. 2009).

According to social identity theory in the psychology, organisation identification is as a special specific type of social identification (Kim et al. 2001). The definition of organisation identification is defined as the process by which the goals of the organization and people its members become increasingly integrated and harmonious (Ashforth and Mael 1989). The organisation/organization identification also indicates as shared characteristics, loyalty and cohesion. It reflects and it is as an attachment based on a desire for affiliation rather than as a perceived oneness with the organisation (Ashforth and Mael 1989).

An OBC can be an instance role of an organisation that represents a brand. Members are likely to feel that they belonging in the OBC and will become integrated. Also, members are also likely to share their interest on the brand, characteristics of the OBC and their brand loyalty which and it would will make them to be solidarity united. Kozinets (1999) argued that if a person who devoted himself to a brand has got a strong social bond with the other OBC members, then the person would like to share his consumption passion related with the brand with them other members. Therefore, sense of belonging would increase the loyalty of consumers or members to a brand or a brand firm which influences positively the intention to permanently maintain a relationship (Petty 2003). The sense of belonging results in two key behavioural consequences. Firstly, it makes consumers to change preference of brand (Crosby et al. 1990) and secondly, it improves loyalty to the brand, repurchasing and intention to maintain the relation (Fournier and Yao 1997). Kozinets (1999) argued that devoted members use OBC because of brand loyalty. Hence, it would make members to behaviourally intent to use of OBC. [H11]

Social relationships are the extremely core of human existence and the foundation of social behaviours (Hinde, 1979). Social relationships of individuals consist of attachment and commitment. The attachment dimension refers to keeping in constant contract with other peoples while the commitment component means to retain established relationships. Both attachment and commitment are primary elements to interpersonal relationships (Dahui et al. 2005). Commitment can be classified into attitudinal and behavioural commitment. Attitudinal commitment refers to the emotional attachment while behavioural commitment refers to the actual behaviour (Staw 1980). Emotional attachment is as a satisfying essence when it corresponds to a desire to belonging to the brand or the brand firm (Allen and Meyer 1993). Behavioural commitment is as a rational and cognitive essence when the consumer adopts a behaviour based on a purchase decision by the change costs (Bouhlej et al. 2009). Oliver (1999) reveals that consumer loyalty results to a consumer’s high level of relationship commitment, which leads in repurchasing a product or service. Aaker (1991) refers to it as brand loyalty. Jang et al. (2008) demonstrate that OBC commitment positively and directly influence to increasing brand loyalty and the OBC commitment can be measured by sense of belonging, degree of emotional attachment. Carlson et al. (2008) defined psychological sense of brand community as “the degree to which an individual perceives relational bonds with other brand user.” He demonstrates that psychological sense of brand community has a positive influence on brand commitment. [H12]

H11. Brand loyalty would positively affect to behavioral intention to use of an OBC.

H12. Brand loyalty would be as a mediator between sense of belonging and behavioral intention to use of an OBC.



When consumers or members of OBC gather rich and accurate information on a branded product or services from other members, they feel that the OBC is useful and this makes them to purchase or repurchase the brand. Although accurate statistics are not available, the ratio of lurkers-to-posters was estimated as high as 100:1 (Carroll and Rosson 2008; Nonnecke and Preece 1999). Takahashi et al., (2003) argue that the OBC members who use community just for information gathering as lurkers are still active members on the overall OCs. Shang et al.,(2006) argued that the purpose of lurking is to seek out information regarding product function of performance and found those members' lurking behaviours in OCs to contribute to brand loyalty. [H13]

H13. Perceived usefulness would be as a mediator between information quality and brand loyalty to use of OBC.

### **Reputation**

Chan et al. (2004) validated that three forms of recognition exist in OCs; namely members' self identity, reputation and fellowship. The recognition of other members' name is the basic level of recognition (Blanchard and Markus 2002). The posting of an individual can be distinguished by having an online identity and this conscious identity can make a member to be more powerful. Furthermore, a strong identity creates the member's reputation and enhances one's self-esteem and may increase the quality of online activities (Chan et al. 2004). Secondly, members who have a strong identity want to be acknowledged regarding their expertise or knowledge from other members (O'Dell and Grayson 1998). If the members are considered by other members as experts, they are likely to participate in an OC's activities to exchange more knowledge with mostly intangible rewards such as self-esteem boost and self-efficacy (Constant et al. 1994; Jarvenpaa and Staples 2000). Furthermore, many studies mention that the desire of status and prestige is one of the motivations to participate in the activities of virtual communities (Andrews 2002; Hars and Ou 2002; Rheingold 1993). Lastly, Chan, et al. (2004) suggest that possessing the fellowship in position of expert is able to enhance participation in OC's activities (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001). Recognition refers to the extent that the OC recognises a member's contribution (Kang et al. 2007). Support activities from members' contribution such as prompt and proper response, real-time feedback and responsive interaction simulate more energetic communication and interpersonal relationship among members of community. This interactive communication also enhances members' satisfaction, sense of closeness and sense of belonging of the community (Kang et al. 2007). [H14]

H14. Perceived Reputation would positively affect to sense of belonging in OBC.

### **Trust**

When consumers exchange their interests, knowledge with others through computer-mediated communication, they normally consider whether the information is real and trustworthy (Bhattacharjee 2002). Therefore, trust would be a significant motivation that influence acceptance of OBC. Gefen et al. (2003) suggest that trust can also increase the perceived usefulness of the web site and trust reduces behavioural uncertainty. Pavlou (2003) argues that if the web retailer is not trustworthy, consumers may give up the transaction. As like this, if the members of an OBC are not honest and trustful, consumers or members may suffer a loss of time from OBC usage, and they may feel that the OBC is not useful and then leave to find trustful OBCs. [H15] Consumers who communicate with unknown users on the web are understandably concerned with whether what others say is true or not (Bhattacharjee 2002). Communication in virtual space needs an element of trust because OC activities lack face-to-face contact (Lin 2008). Bhattacharjee (2002) argues that trust enhances building long-term relationship among members and the lack of trust is a major obstacle in establishing an online brand community (Lin 2008). [H16]

H15. Trust of members would positively affect to perceived usefulness of OBC.

H16. Trust of members would positively affect to sense of belonging in OBC.

## **Research Methodology**

### ***Research Context***

We adopted an online survey method for data collection. The Survey took place in Republic of Korea because Republic of Korea is one of the most developed countries for information technology (IT) and brand communities established and operated voluntarily by users are mature enough. Data were collected from the members of fifteen online brand communities which are located at Naver (<http://www.naver.com>) in Korea. Naver is the most popular portal site and used by most of the Korean people. It includes more than 5,000,000 OCs (<http://www.naver.com>). Additionally, data were collected from two online brand communities; namely Dcinside (<http://www.dcinside.com>) and SLR Club (<http://www.slrclub.com>) which are the most popular communities in Korea. These are not hosted in any portal site and they do not have their own domain. Specifically, seventeen online brand communities were selected by IT product brands; i.e. brands for mobile phone, such as i-Phone and Samsung Galaxy, and Digital single-lens reflex camera, such as Sony and Cannon and Nikon and Samsung.

### ***Instrument development***

We adopted existing validated scales for our study. Two IS researchers reviewed the survey instrument for validity. The instruments were also reviewed by a focus group of eight members who have experience for using OBCs and are members to OBCs to detect any ambiguities in wording and format. The questionnaire was originally designed in English and then translated into Korean by a bilingual interpreter. It was then back translated from the Korean into English by another bilingual interpreter. There were few discrepancies, and all were resolved before disseminating the questionnaire. All items were measured on a seven-point Likert scale (from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree).

### ***Data collection***

The survey was conducted using a survey website namely surveymonkey (<http://www.surveymonkey.com>) and the survey invitation message which contains the URL of the survey website was placed in freeboard of each OBCs. 584 of OBC members read the invitation message and participated in the online survey. Participation to the survey was voluntary over a period of one month from 24th of May to 20th of June.

The final sample consisted of 517 completed and usable responses Male respondents made up 80.5% of the sample. The majority of the respondents were young, between 18 and 29 years of age (56.9%). 32.7% and 54.6% of the respondents were students and workers respectively. 69.4% and 54.9% of respondents had been using OBC for at least six months and have got the brand products that belong in the OBC more than one respectively.

## **Data analysis and Results**

### ***Instrument validation***

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 18 and Amos 17. The fit indices showed that the model fit was good: the normed  $\chi^2$  ( $\chi^2$  to degree of freedom) was 2.04, the RMSEA was 0.045, the standardized root mean-square residual (RMR) was 0.062, the goodness-of-fit index (GFI) was 0.91, the comparative fit index (CFI) was 0.97, and the normed fit index (NFI) was 0.94.

In order to validate the survey instrument, convergent and discriminant validity tests were conducted. Convergent validity was established by assessing the standardized path loading, construct reliability (CR), Cronbach's  $\alpha$ , and the average variance extracted (AVE). First, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using Amos 17 (see Table 2). The standardized path loading were greater than 0.7. The construct reliability (CR) and Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for all constructs exceeded 0.7. The average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct exceeded 0.5. Hence, the convergent validity for the constructs was established.

**Table 2. Results of convergent validity testing**

Item	Question	Std. loading	AVE	CR	Alpha
PE1	I have fun using the OBC.	0.90	0.75	0.90	0.90
PE2	Using the OBC provides me with a lot of enjoyment.	0.88			
PE3	I enjoy using the OBC.	0.82			
PWQ1	The OBC looks easy to navigate through.	0.91	0.81	0.93	0.93
PWQ2	The OBC looks attractive.	0.94			
PWQ3	The OBC layout looks organized	0.86			
PEOU1	My interaction with the OBC is clear and understandable	0.84	0.73	0.89	0.89
PEOU2	It is easy for me to become skillful at using the OBC.	0.84			
PEOU3	It is easy for me to become skillful at using the OBC.	0.88			
BL1	I say positive things about the OBC's brand to other people.	0.67	0.71	0.91	0.90
BL2	I am going to use the OBC's Brand in the future	0.87			
BL3	I always buy the same brand of the OBC because I really like this brand	0.87			
BL4	I am going to purchase the OBC's brand in the future	0.94			
BIU1	I always try to use the OBC to do a task whenever it has a feature to help me perform it.	0.83	0.71	0.88	0.88
BIU2	I will frequently use the OBC in the future.	0.83			
BIU3	I intend to continue using the OBC in the future.	0.88			
RP1	I earn respect from others by Participating in OBC	0.88	0.77	0.91	0.91
RP2	Participating in the OBC's activity would enhance my personal reputation in the OBC.	0.92			
RP3	Participating in the OBC's activity would improve my status in the OBC.	0.82			
PU1	Using OBC would enable me to accomplish my purpose for purchase decision making and knowledge sharing of the brand product more quickly.	0.72	0.68	0.85	0.85
PU2	Using OBC would increase my productivity for purchase decision making and knowledge sharing of the brand product.	0.85			
PU3	Using OBC would enhance my effectiveness on purchase decision making and knowledge sharing of the brand product.	0.87			
PU4	Using OBC would make it easier to make purchase decision and share knowledge of the brand product.	0.85			
TR1	The OBC members are concerned about what is important to others.	0.82	0.65	0.85	0.85
TR2	The OBC members will do everything within their capacity to help others.	0.82			
TR3	The OBC members try hard to be fair in dealing with each other.	0.78			

SOB1	I feel a strong sense of being part of OBC.	0.90	0.74	0.90	0.89
SOB2	I enjoy myself as a member of this OBC.	0.87			
SOB3	Overall, there is a high level of morale in OBC.	0.81			
PIQ1	The OBC provides me with a complete set of information.	0.85	0.65	0.85	0.85
PIQ2	The information from the OBC always up to date.	0.74			
PIQ3	The OBC provides me with all the information I need.	0.83			

Note: PE = Perceived enjoyment, PWQ = Perceived web quality, PEOU = Perceived ease of use, BL = Brand loyalty, BIU = Behavioural intention to use, RP = Reputation, TR = Trust, SOB = Sense of belonging, PIQ = Perceived information quality

The discriminant validity of the measurement model was evaluated by comparing the square root of the AVE for each construct with the correlations between that construct and others. Discriminant validity was established because of AVE for a given construct exceeded the correlations between it and others. Table 3 shows that discriminant validity demonstrates all constructs were true. Thus, the discriminant validity of the instrument was established.

Table3. Correlations between latent variables										
Variables	PE	PWQ	PEOU	BL	BIU	RP	PU	TR	SOB	PIQ
1. PE	<b>0.87</b>									
2. PWQ	0.55	<b>0.90</b>								
3. PEOU	0.61	0.60	<b>0.85</b>							
4. BL	0.49	0.41	0.38	<b>0.84</b>						
5. BIU	0.73	0.54	0.75	0.50	<b>0.84</b>					
6. RP	0.69	0.39	0.47	0.40	0.56	<b>0.87</b>				
7. PU	0.57	0.52	0.66	0.42	0.65	0.48	<b>0.82</b>			
8. TR	0.62	0.57	0.59	0.39	0.58	0.52	0.60	<b>0.81</b>		
9. SOB	0.83	0.49	0.53	0.51	0.62	0.73	0.46	0.58	<b>0.86</b>	
10. PIQ	0.49	0.38	0.44	0.46	0.47	0.38	0.51	0.43	0.48	<b>0.81</b>

Note: PE = Perceived enjoyment, PWQ = Perceived web quality, PEOU = Perceived ease of use, BL = Brand loyalty, BIU = Behavioural intention to use, RP = Reputation, TR = Trust, SOB = Sense of belonging, PIQ = Perceived information quality

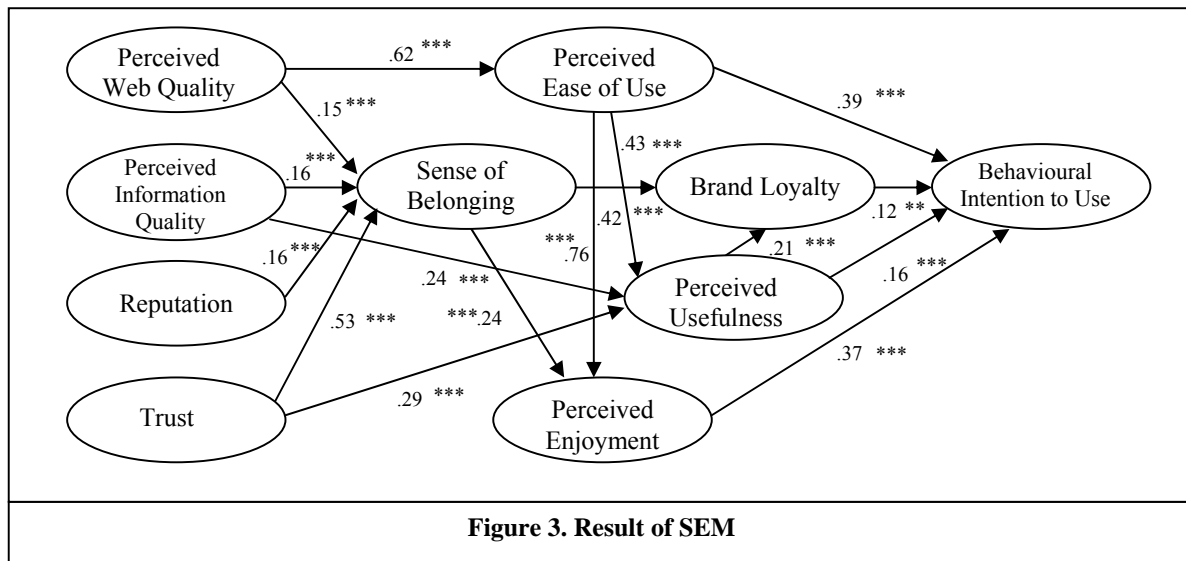
### ***Hypotheses testing***

We assessed the structural equation model using AMOS 17. The following indices and standards were applied to assess a model fit: normed  $\chi^2$  less than 3.0, RMSEA less than 0.08, GFI, CFI, NFI greater than 0.90, and AGFI greater than 0.80.

The structural model had good fit indices: normed  $\chi^2$  was 2.26, RMSEA was 0.049, GFI was 0.90, CFI was 0.96, and NFI was 0.93 and AGFI was 0.88. These results indicated that the structural model adequately fit the data. The standardized path coefficients could be employed for hypothesis testing.

The results (see Fig. 3) showed that perceived ease of use significantly affected the behavioural intention to use (H1) and perceived usefulness (H2) and perceived enjoyment (H5). Perceived usefulness significantly influenced on behavioural intention to use (H3) and brand loyalty (H13). Perceived enjoyment directly affected on behavioural intention to use (H4). Brand loyalty significantly affected on behavioural intention to use (H11) and sense of belonging directly influenced on brand loyalty (H12) and perceived enjoyment (H10). Perceived web quality directly affected on perceived ease of use (H6) and sense of belonging (H7). Perceived information quality (H9),

reputation (H14), and trust (H16) also significantly influenced on sense of belonging. Perceived information quality (H8) and trust (H15) directly affected on perceived usefulness.



## Discussion and implications

### Discussion of findings

The objective of this study was to find and validate motivational factors for consumers' behavioural intention to use OBC. This study extracts six motivation variables; i.e. brand loyalty, sense of belonging, web quality, information quality, reputation and trust based on the theory of OBC members' behaviours and purchase making decision theory in marketing and computer mediate perspectives.

TAM and MM are adopted for this study and the results demonstrate that the behavioural intention to use OBC can be explained by the two models. In this study, perceived ease of use and usefulness of OBC significantly influence the intention to use of OBC as beliefs. Perceived usefulness as extrinsic motivation is significantly affected by perceived ease of use and acts as a mediator to behavioural intention to use of OBC. Perceived enjoyment as intrinsic motivation adapted by MM also has a significant role to the intent to use of OBC. As motivation theory by Davis (1992), this study revealed that perceived ease of use considerably affects to increase perceived enjoyment of OBC to influence on behavioural intention to use of OBC.

A significant finding of this study is that the brand loyalty and sense of belonging are extraordinarily significant motivations to the use of OBC. Both the sense of belonging and brand loyalty are the key elements to build and maintain brand communities. Firstly, the brand loyalty of OBC members plays a role to directly influence behavioural intention to use an OBC similarly to perceived ease of use and usefulness and enjoyment. As argued by Kozinets (1999), members who have a strong brand loyalty are using OBC regardless of emotional attachment. The members desire the sense of belonging to the brand or the brand firm (Allen and Meyer 1993) and they would generally focus on building a relationship with retailers or marketers as well as members who devote the brand (Mathwick 2002). Second, if members feel a strong interpersonal relationship in OBC this improves their loyalty to the OBC and the brand. In addition, such a strong relationship would improve members' sense of belonging in the OBC. A satisfying relationship is likely to make members to enjoy the OBC usage and a utilitarian relationship in OBC would make them to be loyal consumers of brand. Hence, this study revealed that the sense of belonging in OBC indirectly influences behavioural intention to use an OBC through perceived enjoyment and brand loyalty.

The findings further reveal that the web quality of OBC significantly affects and enhances perceived ease of use and sense of belonging of OBC. As suggested by Huizingh (2000), the web quality as web appearance and navigation are significant determinants of consumers' acceptance and intention to use. The well navigated layout of web design would make members to get a perception of ease of use and visual appearances that imply brand or its image through colour, symbol or typography would make members to get the sense of community. Information quality also has significant role on members' behavioural intention to use OBCs. Firstly, this study revealed that the information quality of an OBC directly influences perceived usefulness and indirectly affects brand loyalty increase via perceived usefulness. As argued by other scholars (Kozinets 1999; Mathwick 2002; Preece and Shneiderman 2009), the reason why consumers decide to join and use an OBC is most likely the need of information for decision making to purchase or to learn about the product or services usage. Shang et al. (2006) also argued that consumers may join a consumer community because they share the issues regarding the specific brand. Therefore, the high-quality of information can make consumers or members to perceive useful the OBC. In this case, they become faithful to the information as well as the brand and they tend to purchase or repurchase the branded products and services. This study also reveals that perceived usefulness acts as a mediator to improve OBC members' brand loyalty in OBC. This study also exposes the significant role of information quality on boosting the sense of belonging in an OBC. As stated by Anderson (2005), the perception of good information quality from other members can build a strong relationship in the OBC and it enables the exchange of more professional knowledge and accurate information, thereby increasing the behavioural involvement of community members in OBC.

Additionally, the findings highlight that perceived reputation from other members of OBC directly affects the increase of one's sense of belonging in the OBC. If the members are considered by other members as facilitators or assistants or experts, they get identification by other members of OBC. The recognition contributes to them growing up their reputation as intangible reward and it increasing their self-esteem and self-efficacy (Constant et al. 1994; Jarvenpaa and Staples 2000). This stimulates effort and support activities, active communication and interpersonal relationship among members of community (Kang et al. 2007). Interactive communication also increases members' satisfaction, sense of closeness and sense of belonging in the community (Kang et al. 2007). Battacherjee (2002) also demonstrate that sense of virtual community is characterised by recognition, identification, support, relationship, attachment, and obligation. Finally, trust is also a significant role as ascendant on behavioural intention to use an OBC. Firstly, if members trust other members regarding shared information or experience, they feel that the OBC is useful. Secondly, as suggested by Lin (Lin 2008), trust helps to maintain OBC members' relationship and promotes strong sense of belonging.

### ***Implications for research and practice***

Previous studies in the OBCs field examined the motivations to fertilize knowledge sharing and improve brand loyalty. However, the area of behavioural intention to use an OBC was previously unexplored. This study has contributed to the understanding of the motives relevant to consumers' OBC acceptance decisions. We also attempted to conceptualise the value framework in the context of OBC with different members' behaviours that have been discussed in the context of OBCs from marketing perspective and CMC, providing a structured theoretical framework and new insights to OBC researchers. Our study demonstrated that investigation of OBC members' behaviour by the perspective of marketing and CMC is crucial in explaining consumers' behavioural intention to use of OBC.

The application of the theories of different OBC members' behaviours provided some new insights. We found six motivations which are able to explain why consumers and members accept and intent to use an OBC. Also, we revealed prerequisites for OBC existence, such as sense of belonging and brand loyalty which act as mediators for behavioural intention to use OBC. Thus, our taxonomy based on OBC members' behaviour provides a better understanding to the intent to use an OBC.

Our findings identify that brand loyalty has a vital role in the acceptance and intention to use an OBC as an additional belief to OBC acceptance research. We verified perceived enjoyment as intrinsic motivation as the most important factor affecting acceptance and behavioural intention to use OBC which is largely influenced by sense of belonging. OBC providers planning to increase participants' intention should prioritize their efforts and focus on these factors. In particular, our findings show that practitioners should pay attention not only to extrinsic factors as usability, information quality of OBC but also to intrinsic essence to increase OBC members' sense of community such as reputation, trust, and aesthetics and so on.

## Conclusion

Today, communication with OBCs and its members is important and considerable factor for marketing and NPD as well as improving companies' brand value. OBCs and their members pose significant role in providing new sources of revenue for business. Examining the motivations to accept and the intention to use OBCs is crucial for the success of these sources of revenue. Despite the importance of identifying motivators, there is a lack of understanding in the process by which members adopt an OBC and the factors which affect their decisions to use an OBC. We examined the acceptance and intention to use an OBC by developing a conceptual framework via IS acceptance models and taxonomy theory of OBC members and by examining motivators along different behaviours of OBC members. Based on the different behaviours of OBC members, we identified six motivations that influence behavioural intention to use an OBC. Our findings show that both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation and its' antecedents from new insight through OBC members behaviour were key dimensions of OBC usage for acceptance and intention. The findings also indicate that brand loyalty acts as an additional belief's role and can be as a significant motivation in OBC acceptance research.

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