

Effect of Brand Community Commitment on Loyalty and Brand Outcomes in Iranian Samsung Mobile Users

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The objective of this study was to investigate the effect of brand community commitment on loyalty and brand outcomes between Iranian Samsung mobile users. Cluster sampling method has been used to collect data from 384 mobile users. The instrument used in this quantitative research was a questionnaire which had been qualified for reliability and validity. The proposed hypotheses were tested using structural equation modeling (SEM). Path coefficients of all hypotheses were statistically significant in the predicted direction. Findings confirm that brand community commitment has a positive and significant impact on loyalty (repurchase intention, word-of-mouth, constructive complaint) and brand outcomes (brand attachment, brand commitment and brand trust). These results have some behavioral implications about brand community commitment and sustainable development, which are explained in the discussion and conclusion section.

Keywords: brand community effect, brand community trust, brand community, repurchase intention, word of mouth, constructive complaint

People have increasingly based their societal identity on their consumptive role, related their identity to the brands they consume, and developed fairly defined consumer identities (Wirtz et al., 2013). Research interest in brand communities was initiated by the fact that brand communities help companies to attract individual customers and to strengthen relationships with those customers, thereby establishing long term relationships (Hur, Ahn, & Kim, 2011).

Behavioral intentions can be divided into two categories: economic behavior and social behavior. Economic behavioral intentions are customer behaviors that affect the financial aspects of companies such as repurchase behavior, willingness to pay more and switching behavior. Positive relationship between customer satisfaction and repeat purchase is reported. Repurchase intentions of satisfied customers are significantly more than dissatisfied customers. Overall satisfaction leads to higher repurchase intentions and actual repurchase behavior. Social behavioral intentions are customer behaviors that affect potential and existing customers of the company includes complaints and word of mouth communication. Social behavioral intentions positively and negatively affect customers and also have an impact on other customers' opinion (Bendall-Lyon & Powers, 2004).

Previous researchers have proposed certain important relationships linked to brand community, for example Hur, Ahn, & Kim (2011) in their research tested the structural model including antecedents of brand community commitment, brand community commitment, and brand community outcomes (loyalty behaviors) and have found that there is significant positive paths among brand community trust and brand community commitment, brand community affect and brand community commitment, and brand community commitment and brand loyalty behaviors, also, some researcher even developed and tested online brand

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community dimensions (Wirtz et al., 2013, Jang, Olfman, Ko, Koh, & Kim, 2008). Algesheimer, Dholakia & Herrmann (2005) developed and estimated a conceptual model how different aspects of customers' relationships with the brand community influence their intentions and behaviors. The authors described how identification with the brand community leads to brand positive consequences such as greater community engagement and negative consequences such as normative community pressure and ultimately reactance. Loureiro and Pires (2011) presented a conceptual model of antecedents and outcomes of consumer brand community participation. They suggested that being engaged with community activities, the interaction among members, friendship and the sharing of plans, and goals are important drivers to motivate the active participation in the community. Finally, participation exercises a positive effect on loyalty and word of mouth communication.

Therefore, understanding the relationships between brand community commitment that affect loyalty behaviors (e.g., repurchase intention, word of mouth communication and constructive complaints) is the main concern of this study in Iran. In this study we used proposed model of Hur, Ahn, & Kim (2011) to extend the relevant literature. Results from this study will help to determine a robustness of results generated by previous studies and will help Iranian managers dealing with Samsung mobile brand to know and better understand their customers and pay more attention to this brand community in Iran which had been ignored before because according to the market research report in Iran (Ahmadizad, Omati, & Rastad, 2015), Samsung has the most market share and it should get more attention by managers. In addition, this study uses structural equation model (SEM) to test the proposed model among Iranian Samsung mobile users.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: first, we review the relevant literature and theoretical framework. We then develop several hypotheses to be tested and describe the empirical approach and the data collection. The last section outlines the implications of our findings and discusses avenues for further research.

Literature Review

Brand Community and Community Affect and Trust

A community is defined as an organization of individuals or small groups having intention to get together with a sense of responsibility for other individuals (Jang et al., 2008). Community-based brand relationships in marketing literature have been discussed commonly with a focus on brand communities. A brand community is a “specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand” (Muniz & O’guinn, 2001). Brand communities have been found to be crucial in order to understand brand loyalty (Fournier & Lee, 2009; McAlexander, Kim, Roberts, 2002). Morgan and Hunt (1994) defined commitment in business-to-business as mutual trust which requires efforts to maintain a sustainable relationship, arguing that commitment appears when community members believe the relationship among members is valuable. Interactive communication facilitates community members' positive attitude toward the community operator as well as the community, which, in turn, enhances the level of commitment to the community (Kang, 2004). In addition, commitment is regarded as the source of a company's sustainable competitiveness because it has causal relations with a company's cost reduction and profit increase, the word of mouth effect through recommendations, and a premium pricing effect (Reichheld, 1996). Oliver (1999) has drawn a definition of loyalty, demonstrating that consumer loyalty comes from a consumer's high level of commitment, which leads to product or service repurchasing by the consumer.

The major goals of brand community participation are functional and hedonic. Functional goals refer to information exchange among community members, whereas hedonic goals lead people to have a rich and positive experience through the interactions among them (Holland & Baker, 2001). Studies reported that community members who commit more to their online communities perceive brand identification more positively and clearly, showing stronger attachment to brand relationship quality (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005).

Brand trust can be seen as the tendency of the customer to believe that a brand keeps its promise regarding performance (Fuller, Matzler, & Hoppe, 2008). It takes longer to build trust than satisfaction, and customers depend more on their trust than on satisfaction in their decision making in terms of whether they commit or not. A logical extension along these lines is that trust toward a brand community positively influences brand community commitment, while noting that currently there is a lack of studies dealing directly with the relationship between trust and commitment in the brand community context (Hur, Ahn, & Kim, 2011). Whereas trust reduces uncertainty and reinforces relationships with customers at a cognitive level, affect is often related to a positive emotional response, one that is more spontaneous, more immediate, and less deliberately reasoned in nature (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). The positive affect generated by brand community activities will enhance committed responses, such as consciousness of a kind (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001) and integration in the brand community (McAlexander et al., 2002).

Brand Community Commitment and Loyalty and Brand Outcomes

Wiener (1982) considered commitment as a process of bridging between a certain set of leading variables and the resulting behavioral outcomes, and concluded that commitment can be considered a motivational factor. Staw (1980) classified commitment into two types: attitudinal and behavioral. The former refers to emotional attachment towards a community and often leads to strong community membership, while the latter results in actual behaviors beyond mere emotional attachment. Oliver (1999) has drawn a definition of loyalty, demonstrating that consumer loyalty comes from a consumer's high level of commitment, which leads to product or service repurchasing by the consumer.

Dholakia, Bagozzi, and Pearo (2004) and Bagozzi & Dholakia (2006) did not differentiate community-related outcomes. Their research only defined community-related desires, intentions and behaviors in terms of interaction of group members, not in terms of which rituals they participate in. Similarly, Algesheimer et al., (2005) divided community-related outcomes further, but only included community participation, community recommendation, and membership continuance intentions and community membership duration. Word of Mouth (WOM) is a form of community-related behavior where community members discuss the brand, advantages and disadvantages and give recommendations to other members. Consequently, WOM forms part of the outward-oriented practices by Schau, Muniz, & Arnould (2009), because WOM is concerned with the brand more than with the community. Brown et al. (2007) define WOM as "a consumer-dominated channel of marketing communication where the sender is independent of the market. It is therefore perceived to be more reliable, credible, and trustworthy by consumers compared to firm-initiated communications" (Brown, Broderick, & Lee, 2007). Ganesh, Arnold, & Reynolds (2000) classify loyalty behaviors into two categories, so that active loyalty includes positive word of mouth and additional sales, whereas passive loyalty includes service maintenance. In addition, brand community offers a space for committed users to express their brand improvement ideas and/or complaints about bad experiences with the brand. Such expressions

appear more from highly committed users (Schappe, 1998; Van Dyne & Ang, 1998), which represent the positive relationship between brand community commitment and constructive complaints from brand community users (Hur, Ahn, & Kim, 2011).

Hypotheses Development

Research finds that members' commitment to a brand community leads to their commitment to the brand (Kim, Choi, Qualls, & Han, 2008). Consumers committing to a brand community tend to purchase the same brand consistently (Algesheimer et al., 2005). In a long-term relationship with a brand community, consumers continuously interact with other members and draw values and utilities from consuming the same brand. This sharing over time derives more brand value, developing closer consumer relationship within the community and brand love (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). So:

Hypothesis 1: commitment toward a brand community positively affects brand commitment.

Hypothesis 2: commitment toward a brand community positively affects brand attachment.

As previous researchers have suggested, the online brand community is a significant venue for use in building long-term relationships between brands and consumers (Algesheimer et al., 2005; McAlexander et al., 2002). In the context of the online brand community, brand trust is a critical construct in understanding these long-term relationships since trust tends to drive successful relationships (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). So:

Hypothesis3: commitment toward a brand community positively affects brand trust.

Studies in marketing channel management or in organizational behavior conceptualize repurchase intention in terms of relational commitment, as an intention to keep the relationship (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). It is also wisely held that affective commitment, including psychological attachment and a sense of unity, induces customers to remain in the existing service and keeps them from trying competitors' services. Word-of-mouth (WOM) is defined as consumer to consumer communication about goods and services. It is a powerful persuasive force, particularly in the diffusion of information about new products (Dean & Lang, 2008). Word-of-mouth is especially important for service providers whose offerings are largely intangible, and experience or credence based. In these services customers rely heavily on the advice and suggestions from others who have experienced the service. Furthermore, consumers often trust each other more than they trust communication from firms, thus highlighting the importance of WOM (Ng, David, & Dagger, 2011).

Customers' sense of unity with a brand community leads to their active word of mouth. Several studies on organizational commitment have also identified the significant effect of commitment on positive word of mouth (Hur, Ahn, & Kim, 2011). To understand the complaint activity, it is necessary to describe what takes place after the negative incident is generated but before the customer eventually decides to engage in complaining behavior. The customer will use the available resources in the given context, together with information available at the present time, to articulate the unfavorable experience that has emerged (Tronvoll, 2012).

Committed customers acknowledge that the service failure is directed toward the performance of the company, not the company itself, and they therefore tend to express their bad experience to the company (Hur, Ahn, & Kim, 2011). So these hypotheses can be proposed:

Hypothesis 4: Brand users' commitment toward a brand community will have a positive effect on repurchase intentions toward a brand.

Hypothesis 5: Brand users' commitment toward a brand community will have a positive effect on word-of-mouth toward a brand.

Hypothesis 6: Brand users' commitment toward a brand community will have a positive effect on their constructive complaints toward a brand.

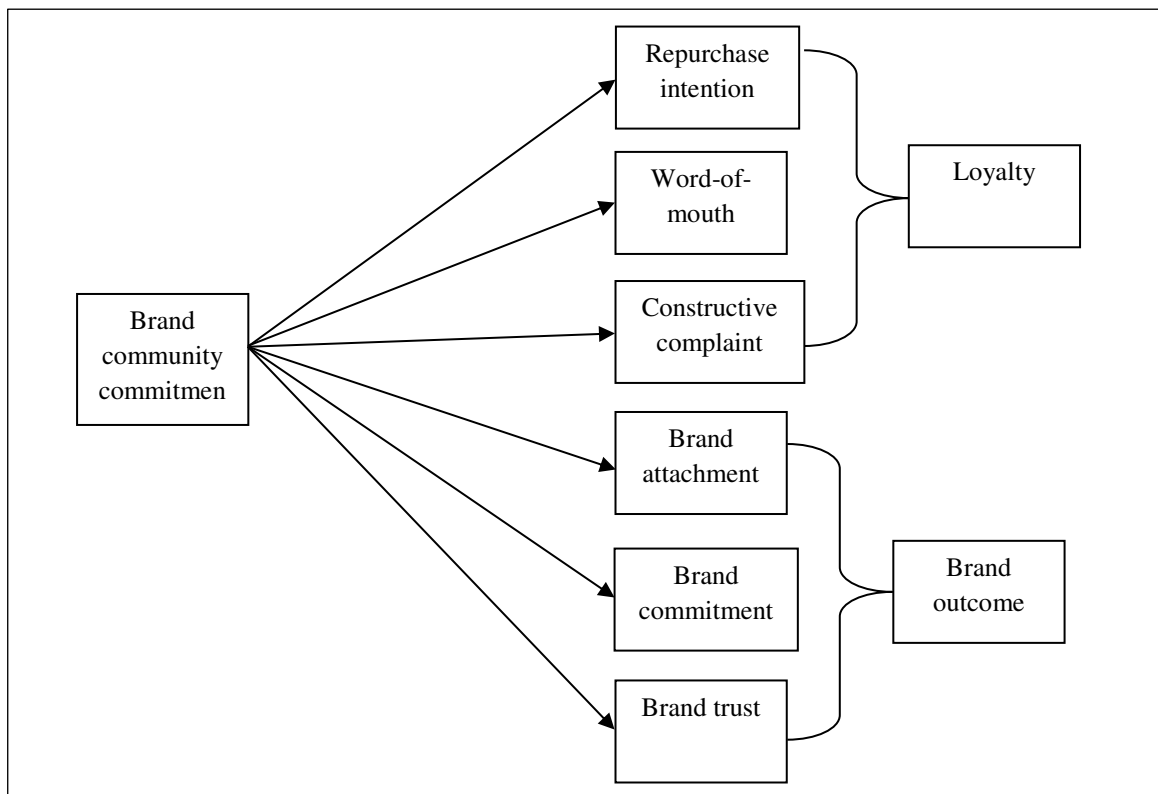


Figure 1. The Conceptual Model of a Causal Relationship of brand community commitment

Methodology

Sample

In this research, the samples include Samsung mobile user in Mazandaran province in Iran. So, to determine our sample size we use Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table for determining the sample size from a given population. According to this table our minimum sample is 384. To distribute our questionnaire cluster sampling have been used. According to this method Mazandaran province in Iran has been divided in three parts includes West, Center and East part. So, in each part some cities have been chosen randomly and the questionnaire have been distributed between mobile users. 384 questionnaires had been distributed within 3 month during June 2016-August 2016 and 384 correct questionnaires had been collected. In the sample of 384 respondents 43.22 percent were male ($n=166$) and 56.78 percent were female ($n=218$). The age ranged was 53.2 percent less than 30, 28.1 percent were between 31 to 50 years of age, and 18.7 percent were above 51.

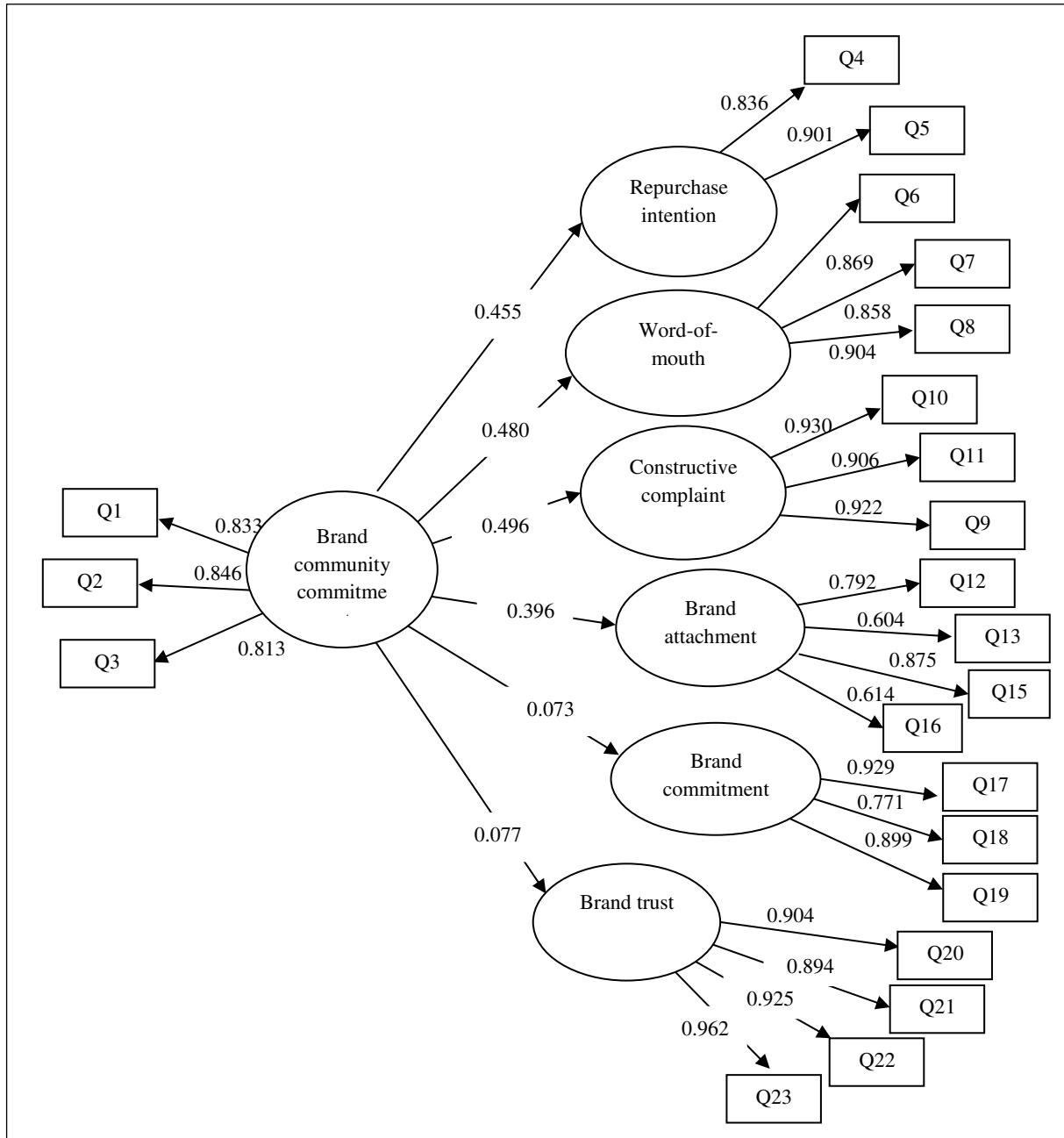


Figure 2. Confirmatory factor analysis of the conceptual model.

Measures

The questionnaire used in this study is a modified questionnaire based on what Hur et al. (2011) and Bidmon (2016) used for measuring brand community among young users. To measure the effect of brand community commitment on repurchase intention, word-of-mouth, constructive complaint, brand attachment, brand commitment and brand trust in the research was used 23-items questionnaire developed as follows: we used 3 questions of brand community adapted from (Hur et al., 2011) scale items (question 1-3), repurchase intention items adapted from (Hur et al., 2011) scale items (question 4-5), word of mouth (WOM) adapted from (Hur et al., 2011) scale items (question 6-8), constructive complaint adapted from (Hur et al., 2011) scale items (question 9-11), brand attachment adapted from (Bidmon, 2016) scale items (question 12-16), brand commitment adapted from (Zhou, Zhang, & Zhou., 2012) scale items (question 17-19) and brand trust adapted from (Jung, Kim, & Kim, 2014) scale items (question 20-23) and constructed with a five point scale ranging from 1

(strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). For determining validity, convergent validity was assessed for all constructs and indicators. Convergent validity was assessed by examining the factor loading for statistical significance. Measures (brand community commitment, repurchase intention, word-of-mouth, constructive complaint, brand attachment, brand commitment and brand trust) were subjected to a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). For determining validity of each construct we used discriminant validity (AVE) which has been shown in Table 1 and figure 2.

Results (Figure 2) indicated that all factor loadings (CFA) ranged from 0.6 to 0.8 and all AVE coefficient ranged from 0.6 to 0.7 were statistically significant and the scales were considered to be reliable (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011).

For determining reliability of the questionnaire in this research, Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability were used. According to table 1 Cronbach's alpha for constructs are above the threshold. Construct reliability in which its value is at least 0.70 (Limpasirisuwan & Donkwa, 2017, according to Hair et al., 2010) for constructs also has shown in Table 1 and is acceptable, so the questionnaire reliability is acceptable too. Briefly, constructs value a brand attachment (0.81), brand community commitment (0.86), brand commitment (0.90), brand trust (0.95), constructive complaint (0.94), repurchase intention (0.86) and word of mouth (0.90).

Table 1

Discriminant validity (AVE), Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability of conceptual model

	AVE	Composite Reliability	R Square	Cronbach's Alpha
Brand attachment	0.53	0.81	0.15	0.72
Brand community commitment	0.69	0.86		0.77
Brand commitment	0.75	0.90	0.005	0.88
Brand trust	0.84	0.95	0.005	0.94
Constructive complaint	0.84	0.94	0.24	0.90
Repurchase intention	0.75	0.86	0.20	0.68
WOM	0.76	0.90	0.23	0.85

Furthermore, the fit index of internal model or structural model is Construct Cross validated Redundancy (Q^2) that must be positive and shown in table 2 which was acceptable. So model displayed reasonably good fit to the data.

Table 2

Fit Indices of Model

Total	SSO*	SSE*	1-SSE/SSO
Brand attachment	1532.00	1422.31	0.07
Brand commitment	1149.00	1147.53	0.001
Brand trust	1532.00	1525.42	0.004
Constructive complaint	1149.00	911.89	0.20
Repurchase intention	766.00	648.12	0.15
WOM	1149.00	951.43	0.17

Note: SSO- Sum of square of Observations; SSE- Sum of Squares of Prediction

Results

The proposed hypotheses were tested using structural equation modeling (SEM) via PLS software. To determine whether the hypotheses were supported, each structural path coefficient was examined with fit indices of the proposed model.

Table 3

Main hypotheses of the research model

Path	Path coefficients	t-value	Results
H1: brand community commitment – brand commitment	0.07	6.7	Supported
H2: brand community commitment – brand attachment	0.3	8.1	Supported
H3: brand community commitment - brand trust	0.07	8.9	Supported
H4: brand community commitment – repurchase intention	0.4	9.0	Supported
H5: brand community commitment – WOM	0.4	9.4	Supported
H6: brand community commitment – constructive complaint	0.4	8.8	Supported

Note: * $p < 0.05$

As shown in figure 3 and table 3, the service brand community commitment – brand commitment path is positive and statistically significant and supports H1. Brand community commitment positively affects brand attachment (H2). The effect of brand community commitment on brand trust is positive and is statistically significant (H3). Brand community commitment positively affects repurchase intention (H4) and the effect of brand community commitment on WOM and constructive complaint is positive and statistically significant (H5) (H6). Therefore, all hypotheses were supported in the predicted direction.

Discussion and Conclusion

The objective of this study was to investigate the effect of brand community commitment on loyalty and brand outcomes. The proposed hypotheses were tested using SEM. path coefficients of all hypotheses were statistically significant in the predicted direction.

The hypothesized model testing found that brand community commitment has a positive effect on brand commitment and brand attachment (H1) (H2). This result is support by past research. Kim et al. (2008) suggested that members' commitment to a brand community leads to their commitment to the brand. Algesheimer et al. (2005) also suggested that Consumers committing to a brand community tend to purchase the same brand consistently. Also, Carroll & Ahuvia (2006) find that in a long-term relationship with a brand community, consumers continuously interact with other members and draw values and utilities from consuming the same brand. Model confirms that brand community commitment toward a brand community positively affects brand trust (H3). This is similar with past research too; Algesheimer et al. (2005) suggested that online brand community is a significant venue for use in building long-term relationships between brands and consumers. Dwyer et al. (1987), Garbarino & Johnson (1999) and Morgan & Hunt (1994) also suggest that in the context of the online brand community, brand trust is a critical construct in understanding these long-term relationships since trust tends to drive successful relationships. It is widely held that affective commitment, including psychological attachment and a sense of unity, induces customers to remain in the existing service and keeps them from trying competitors' services. Word-of-mouth (WOM) is a powerful persuasive force and a consumer to consumer communication about goods and services particularly in the diffusion of information about

new products. Ng et al. (2011) research suggested that some customers highlighting the importance of WOM. For example services customers rely heavily on the advice and suggestions from others who have experienced the service. Furthermore, consumers often trust each other more than they trust communication from firms. Hur et al. (2011) also suggests that customers' sense of unity with a brand community leads to their active word of mouth. Several studies on organizational commitment have also identified the significant effect of commitment on positive WOM. Tronvoll (2012) suggested that Customers will use available resources, together with information available; to articulate the unfavorable experience that has emerged. Hur et al. (2011) in their research found that committed customers confirm that the service failure is directed toward the performance of their company, not the company itself, and they therefore tend to express their bad experience to the company (H4, H5 and H6). Bidmon (2016), Jung et al. (2014), Zhou et al. (2012) and Kuo & Feng (2013) also suggest similar findings to the result of this study.

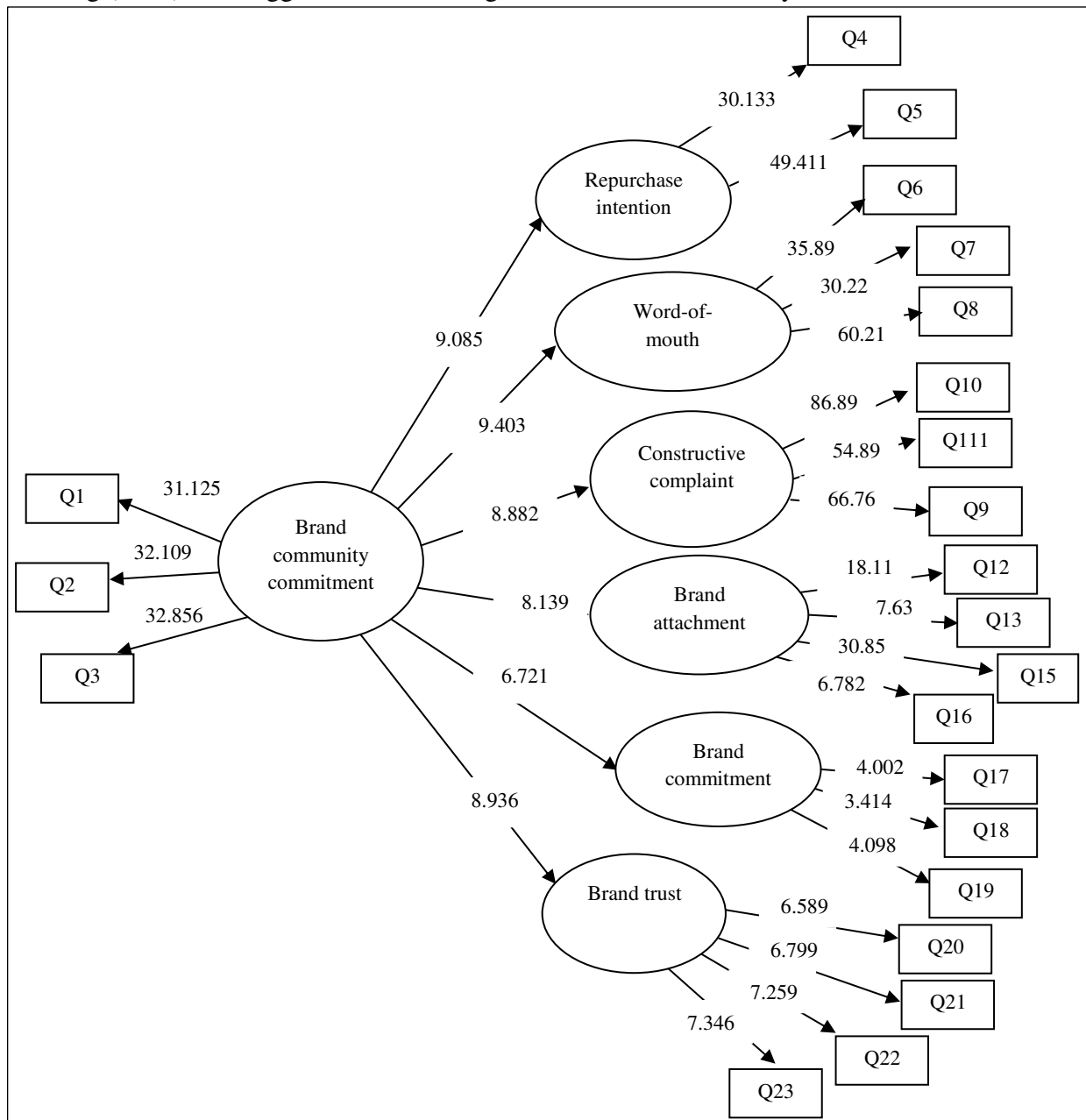


Figure 3. *t*-value results for path coefficients

From a practical perspective, findings confirm that brand community commitment has a positive and significant impact on loyalty (repurchase intention, word-of-mouth, constructive complaint) and brand outcomes (brand attachment, brand commitment and brand trust). This findings has an important implication, not just for Iranians users and firms, at first instance for firms which are involved in selling of Samsung mobile and at the second instance for all the other firms which are in relationship with all of customers in the market to pay more attention to the concept of brand community commitment because our results show that brand community commitment has a directly impact on loyalty and behavioral intentions of users. So, our suggestion is: paying more attention to brand community and increase the sense of belonging in their brand community, reinforcement of information in these communities, paying more attention to complain customers and paying more attention to the information and opinion of the member of these communities. Also brand community commitment can show the attention to sustainable development and especially to the social dimension of sustainable development. It means that when a brand show its community commitment, it consider the social issues of its activities and this orientation can effect on word of mouth, customers have more trust about it and their repurchase intention increase (Hur et al., 2011). So the implication for managers is to consider the sustainable development dimensions (social, economical and environmental) in their activities in order to show a better image of their brand activity in the societies and finally increase their brand loyalty and outcomes.

Limitation and Suggestions for Future Research

Although effort has made to decrease the limitations of this study but there is some limitation still need to be mentioned and need more attention in the future studies. First, in generalizability of the findings this study may have some limitation. We have sample limitation in this study. It would be more meaningful if the same study is done with other mobile users and customers from other firms and countries for comparative studies. Future research could investigate among customers of other sections to compare the results. Future research needs to examine the relationship between brand community commitment and other factors like switching behavior, different kind of loyalty, brand performance and sustainable development dimensions.

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