

Investigate the Impact of Brand Identification on Brand Evangelism with the Mediating Effect of Online Brand Community Engagement with Special Reference to the Retail Fashion Industry in Sri Lanka

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Digital marketing is crucial because it enables businesses to effectively reach and engage their target audience online, driving growth and measurable results in a cost-efficient manner. This study examines the mediating role of online brand community engagement in the relationship between brand identification and brand evangelism within the Sri Lankan retail fashion industry. Despite the increasing significance of online brand communities in enhancing consumer loyalty and emotional connections, significant performance deviation persists in their practical implementation within this industry. While previous studies have explored these dynamics separately, limited empirical focus exists on their interrelations, especially in localized contexts such as Sri Lanka. A review of existing literature reveals gaps in understanding the interplay between brand identification, online brand community engagement, and brand evangelism, particularly given the unique cultural and economic characteristics of Sri Lankan retail fashion industry. In light of these discrepancies, this study aims to fill them by analyzing how brand identification impacts on brand evangelism with the mediating effect of online brand community engagement.

The research adopted a positive philosophy, utilizing a deductive approach to test predefined hypotheses. A structured quantitative methodology was employed, with data gathered via a cross-sectional survey of 390 participants, selected through convenience sampling. The questionnaire, developed using established measures and validated through pilot testing, focused on brand identification, online brand community engagement, and brand evangelism. Data was analyzed using SPSS software, employing multiple regression to examine relationships and mediation effects. This rigorous methodology

ensures the validity and reliability of findings, contributing to a robust understanding of consumer behaviors within the studied context.

Key findings indicate a significant positive relationship between brand identification and brand evangelism, mediated effectively by online brand community engagement. Consumers with strong brand identification demonstrate higher levels of brand evangelism when actively engaged in brand communities. The study underscores the role of emotional and cognitive dimensions in fostering brand loyalty and highlights how strategic community-building initiatives can amplify brand evangelism. These results emphasize the necessity of integrating digital platforms to leverage consumer-brand relationships effectively, ensuring a competitive edge in the Sri Lankan retail fashion industry.

Managerially, the findings provide actionable insights for enhancing brand strategies in digital ecosystems. Companies are encouraged to focus on fostering engaging online brand communities to strengthen consumer-brand connections. Further, empirically, the study extends theoretical frameworks by integrating mediating variables in the relationship between brand identification and brand evangelism. However, limitations include the use of non-probability sampling and the restriction to the Sri Lankan context, potentially affecting generalizability. Moreover, research could explore longitudinal approaches, diverse cultural settings, and additional mediators to deepen the understanding of these dynamics.

Keywords: *Brand Identification, Brand Evangelism, Online Brand Community Engagement, Sri Lankan Retail Fashion Industry*