

How to Create Brand Evangelists: A Conceptual Framework

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ABSTRACT

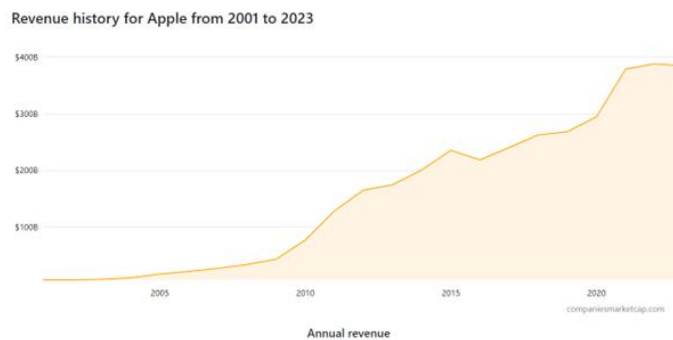
This study aims to investigate the relationship between brand personality, brand symbolism, self-expressiveness, affective commitment, and brand trust on brand evangelism using data from Telkom University Bandung students. The research model used is structural equation modeling (SEM) with a partial least square (PLS) approach. The results showed that brand trust and affective commitment are the most important antecedents of brand evangelism, followed by brand personality, self-expressiveness, and brand symbolism. Brand trust acts as a mediating variable between brand personality, brand symbolism, self-expressiveness, and affective commitment with brand evangelism. This research has several implications for companies in building brand evangelism. Companies need to build a strong brand personality, use the right symbols, increase self-expressiveness, and build strong emotional relationships with consumers.

Keywords: Affective Commitment, Brand Evangelism, Brand Personality, Brand Symbolism, Self-Expressiveness

INTRODUCTION

The growing population will increase consumption, one of which is the purchase of electronic products. The continuous development of scientific research proves that electronic products play an important role in social life. In light of this, Apple Inc. is constantly innovating to shorten product cycles, leading consumers to feel dissatisfied if they do not purchase the latest products (Lan, 2021). In the calculation of market value, according to Apple's latest financial report, October 2023 Apple has a market capitalization of \$2.629 trillion. And Apple's revenue was \$383.93 M. In 2022 the company generated revenue of \$387.53 M, an increase from 2021 revenue of \$378.32 M.

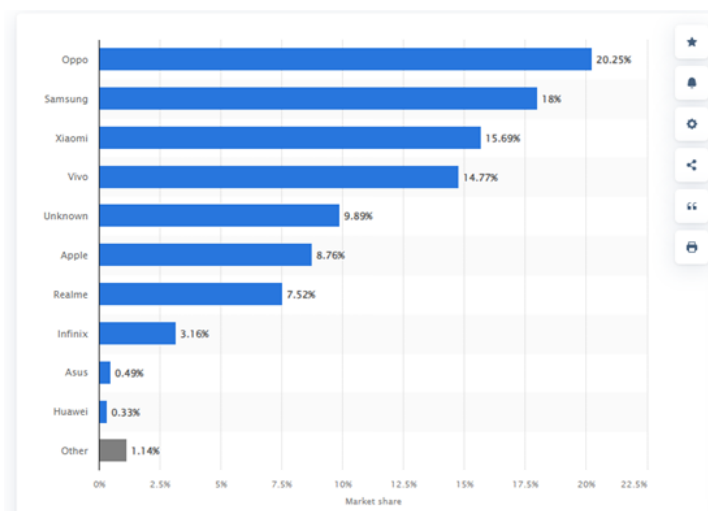
Figure 1. Revenue History of Apple 2001-2023



Source: *Companies Market Cap (2023)*.

Apple's iPhone sales in China experienced a 5% decline in total revenue due to a loss of market share, primarily caused by the following factors: overpricing, lack of popular features such as WeChat, and a failure to meet the desires of Chinese consumers. Additionally, Apple's market share in Indonesia, where it holds 8.76% share, is also struggling due to the dominance of the lower-middle-class market by other brands.

Figure 2. Indonesia Market Share of Leading Mobile Brands



Source: *Statista (2023)*.

By 2023, Apple plans to incorporate recycled plastic and aluminum into certain components and internal structural frames. Apple also aims to eliminate plastic from its product packaging by 2025. This includes retail bags, product boxes, customer-shipped packaging, AppleCare packaging, and secondary packaging for Apple devices and accessories (Apple, 2023).

To improve product marketing and build a strong brand, effective communication by company leaders is essential. Steve Jobs, known for his transformative and transactional leadership style, played an important role in this aspect. Jobs prioritized product excellence over short-term profits and fostered a culture that rewarded individuals for top performance. Jobs' important contributions to Apple's growth covered areas such as product innovation, improved user experience, branding, and marketing strategies. In particular, pioneering the successful launch of innovative products such as iPod and iTunes (Kodama, 2017). Apple employs hunger marketing strategies to target market needs by controlling supply and creating an illusion of demand to maintain high profit margins. This strategy involves shortening product cycles and launching new products annually to keep consumers eager and willing to purchase the latest offerings. In fact, in markets like India and Dubai, consumers have been known to queue for hours or even days at the launch of new iPhones, demonstrating the effectiveness of Apple's hunger marketing tactics. In addition, Apple's presence has an impact on the electronic retail environment, Apple's loyal consumer base makes purchases at premium prices in the hardware and accessories category with high margins on comparable products (Montgomerie & Roscoe, 2013).

The widespread use of the internet, increased customer searches for brand-related information, and the ease of commenting online have increased attention to how brand-directed behavior affects sales and company value. In response to these events, Apple uses community-based approaches to provide tailored information for users with a positive mindset, expertise, and a willingness to discover new solutions. This information is prominently featured on the Apple Support homepage. Apple selects a group of top contributors from the community to join an exclusive group called Apple Community + Global each year. Members of this group have access to exclusive resources and experiences, with the goal of sharing positive information that builds community trust and ultimately creates brand advocates (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013). The main part of a brand evangelist is selling the dream of a brand and convincing others to believe in what the brand believes in. Those people, in turn, will appreciate and actively promote it in the social environment to believe in the brand (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013; Kawasaki, 2004; Mohammed & Al-Swidi, 2021; Wallace et al., 2022).

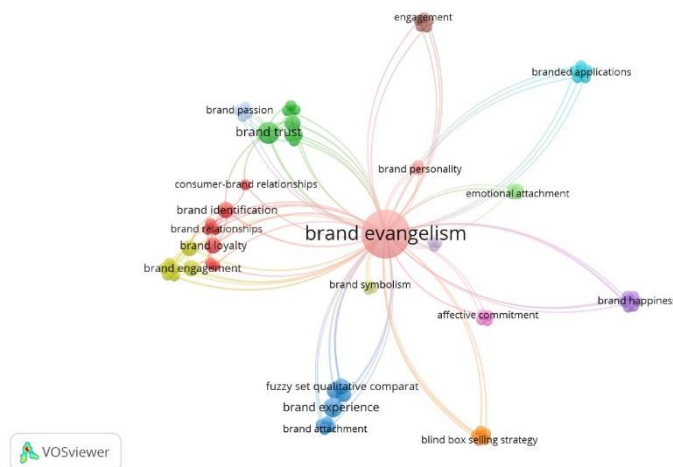
When it comes to promoting new technology products, word-of-mouth recommendations from satisfied customers are much more influential than traditional print or television advertisements, with a power ratio of 10:1 (Anggraini, 2018). The dynamic interplay between consumers and brands holds significant importance for marketers, as it grants consumers the power to sway the purchasing decisions of others, either by endorsing or dissuading them. This influence is particularly pivotal in today's market landscape, which is predominantly driven by consumer behavior and preferences (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013; Chen et al., 2022; Kotler & Keller, 2012). The relationships between consumers and brands can lead to the emergence of brand communities, which are structured social relationships and specialized communities formed by brand enthusiasts. These communities are established due to the unwavering commitment and trust that consumers place in the brand. Trust plays a pivotal role in driving loyalty as it fosters highly valued associations, thereby solidifying the bond between consumers and the brand. In this perspective, the development of brand trust is based on consumers' continuous learning and experience with the brand, which is influenced by previous

interactions and past experiences, shaping not only repeat purchases but also consumers' attitudes towards the brand (Anggraini, 2018; Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013; Delgado-Ballester, 2004; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Mvondo et al., 2022; Rungruangjit et al., 2023). For example, consumers who view Apple products as innovative and high-end are more likely to believe that any new products launched by Apple will maintain the same standards of quality and innovation.

Consumers' emotional relationships with them can also be formed from distinctive brand characteristics and symbols (Berry, 2000; Tong et al., 2018) as these can provide the potential for customer social recognition, expression, and the need for consumer status (Orth & De Marchi, 2007) because it can provide the potential of customer social recognition, expression, and the need for consumer status (Orth & De Marchi, 2007). Relationship benefits, including increased self-confidence, special treatment, and social benefits, are sought by customers in addition to financial benefits (Liao et al., 2023; Rungruangjit et al., 2023). Vigneron & Johnson (2004) state that symbolism value consists of consumer perceptions, signaling prestige, social expression, intrinsic value, unique, and hedonic values. Apple has a brand symbolism that lies in its logo which shows luxury and simplicity and gives a premium impression to its users (Barroso et al., 2017). Consumers are very concerned about the products to be used so that they choose good quality products that can show their status (Mao et al., 2020) and the extent to which customers perceive that the brand has a symbolic image that matches their personality or is self-expressive (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Apple products are often associated with groups that feel exclusive and have products that only a few people own. This exclusivity can lead to increased brand trust, as consumers who feel they own exclusive products are more likely to feel confident in their choices. For example, some people who use well-known and expensive products will give the perception that they are in a high economic class so that they can buy and use several products with expensive brands according to their personality (Kang et al., 2020). Apple has a significant interest in maintaining and strengthening the brand trust that has been built. This is achieved by continuing to innovate and maintain the quality of their products in accordance with the brand personality attributes that have been instilled. Affective Commitment will be exhibited by customers who are perceiving more benefits (Molinillo et al., 2017). Referring to (Allen & Meyer, 1990) research, the emotional attachment and loyalty that consumers experience towards a brand can be attributed to their psychological relationship and affiliation with the brand, resulting in Affective Commitment (Mvondo et al., 2022). The formation of a strong emotional connection with a brand is associated with increased trust and the perception of reliability, credibility, and competence. This foundation of trust, created by the emotional bond, is known to exert a positive influence on various aspects of consumer behavior and decision-making. (Mohammed & Al-Swidi, 2021; Mvondo et al., 2022).

In support of this study, researchers used the bibliometric analysis method in VOSviewer software, which analyzes trends in individual research or fields of study, provides evidence for the impact of individual research or fields of study, discovers new and emerging areas of research. The following are the results and discussions:

Figure 3. Co-Occurance Network Visualization



Approaches to identifying patterns and links between distinct phrases or concepts in a certain field of study is co-occurrence analysis based on keywords utilizing bibliographic maps. In this study, there were 82 keywords. Based on Figure 3, the most dominant keyword is brand trust. In more detail, brand evangelism has 235 links including brand trust, brand personality, brand personality. Meanwhile brand trust has 14 links, some are linked to self-expressive brand, brand satisfaction, customer brand engagement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theory of Reasoned Action

Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) is a framework in social psychology commonly used in marketing to understand and predict consumer behavior (Junaid-ur-Rehman, 2022). This theory states that consumer behavior can be anticipated through evaluating their intentions to take certain actions. TRA explains that consumers form their intentions based on their beliefs about the outcomes of using the product. These beliefs include their positive views on the quality, reliability, innovation and features of a product. Positive beliefs about the product can encourage consumers to have a positive intention to buy or use the product. Subjective evaluation in TRA refers to how consumers evaluate whether using the product matches their personal values, interests and preferences. In the context of Apple marketing, companies should create advertising and branding messages that stimulate positive subjective evaluations, such as emphasizing the style, status, and elegance associated with Apple products (Ajzen, 1991).

Theory of Planned Behavior

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is an extension of the TRA that incorporates factors that control behavior into the analysis of consumer behavior. TPB assumes that a positive intention to buy or use an Apple product is the first step, and factors such as perceived behavioral control and subjective norms will influence whether consumers ultimately act on that intention (Junaid-ur-Rehman, 2022). Behavioral control factors in TPB include everything that affects consumers' ability to take a particular action, such as financial factors, product accessibility, or practical barriers (Gundlach et al., 2003). Companies can create strategies to overcome these barriers, such as offering financing options or ensuring adequate product availability in the market. Subjective norms refer to the influence of others' opinions on consumer behavior (Abbaspour & Hashim, 2015). In the context of Apple, this can include the influence of friends, family or other influencers on consumers' views of products. Companies can influence subjective norms by creating a positive image and promoting their products as symbols of status and

excellence. By understanding the elements of TPB, companies can design more comprehensive marketing strategies. They can increase consumers' positive intentions by emphasizing the benefits and quality of their products, overcoming practical barriers, and creating a positive culture around the product. In this way, companies can more effectively understand and influence consumer behavior regarding their products and services.

Affective Commitment on Brand Trust

Affective Commitment is a crucial aspect of customer-company relationships, representing the unwavering desire to uphold and expand mutually beneficial connections with a company. The emotional attachment formed by customers with the company is measured, while their tendency to stay with the company due to the lack of superior alternatives is evaluated by continuous/calculative commitment. In marketing, brand trust and affective commitment are closely connected concepts that play a crucial role in shaping the relationship between consumers and products (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Mvondo et al., 2022; (Rather et al., 2019). Affective commitment is the result of consumers forming a strong emotional bond with a brand, while brand trust represents the level of confidence and trust they have in the brand. Consumers with high brand trust firmly believe that the brand will consistently deliver reliable and high-quality products and services. This emotional attachment ultimately leads to complete trust in the brand, as consumers are convinced that the brand consistently provides top-notch products and satisfying services. The strong correlation between affective commitment and brand trust results in the creation of loyal customers (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Customers consistently choose and promote a brand, leading to satisfaction. This can be achieved through advertising campaigns, branding initiatives, and continuous improvement in product and service quality. Building trust with loyal customers is crucial for a brand to maintain long-term relationships. This can be achieved through emotional connections, continuous improvement, and a strong emotional connection with the brand (Rane et al., 2023; Iglesias et al., 2011).

Brand Personality on Brand Trust

The idea of brand personality refers to the unique characteristics and traits associated with a specific brand, similar to those of an individual. Brand trust, on the other hand, refers to the level of confidence and reliance consumers have in a particular brand. Trust includes aspects such as credibility, integrity, and benevolence. Recent scholarly research has extensively explored the correlation between brand personality and brand trust from various perspectives. These studies have highlighted the positive impact of this relationship on three key aspects of consumer-brand interactions: brand recognition, brand trust, and brand loyalty. These findings greatly contribute to understanding the complex dynamics of consumer behavior and their implications for branding strategies (Munuera-Aleman et al., 2003; Molinillo et al., 2017). Consumers who value attributes such as inventiveness and reliability are more likely to trust Apple products and services. This trust is often linked to the belief that businesses with a strong brand identity consistently deliver the promised value, which in turn generates higher consumer trust. Additionally, brand persona is widely recognized as a crucial factor in predicting customer preferences and decisions, making it a significant area of interest in consumer behavior research (Eisend & Stokburger-Sauer, 2013; Gordon et al., 2016; Guèvremont & Grohmann, 2013; Hultman et al., 2015). The personality traits connected with a brand are critical in developing customer trust in the product's capacity to match their desired lifestyle. To improve the link between brand personality and brand trust, it is critical to emphasize brand image maintenance and assuring consistency between the perceived personality and real customer experiences (Loureiro et al., 2014; Veloutsou, 2015; Mabkhot et al., 2017; Wantini & Yudiana, 2021; Villagra et al., 2021).

Self-Expressiveness on Brand Trust

Consumers are inclined to choose specific brands that align with their self-image, as they believe these brands reflect their identity. Furthermore, they make purchases of these brands with the intention of expressing and reinforcing their self-concept through the products they consume (Aaker, 1996). Identifying with a brand fosters a sense of belonging and can boost self-esteem. This sense of affiliation fosters emotional attachment to the brand (Wallace et al., 2022). Hence, the dynamic relationship between consumers and brands serves as a fundamental framework for nurturing long-term commitment and repeat business, ultimately leading to brand loyalty (Kaltcheva et al., 2014). Individuals that are inspired by self-expression are more engaged with brands (Wallace et al., 2022) consumers trust brands to convey their 'real self' and social identity, and once trust in a brand is established, consumers with a strong brand identity are more likely to acquire trust, which leads to increased loyalty (Leckie et al., 2016). As a result, self-expressive brands will increase loyalty, and future study on brand trust should be performed for the same reason (Leckie et al., 2016). According to (Akrouf & Nagy, 2018), consumers who join in communities enjoy hedonic advantages through emotional satisfaction, which leads to higher trust in the community. Furthermore, (Laroche et al., 2012) discovered that brand utilization in online communities had a favorable effect on brand trust.

Brand Symbolism on Brand Trust

Brand symbolism includes symbolic attributes associated with a brand. Brand symbolism creates a unique and strong brand image in the minds of consumers (Kaur & Kaur, 2019). A positive and strong brand image built through brand symbolism significantly impacts brand trust (Hokky & Bernarto, 2021). Brands that are perceived to have high quality and meet consumer expectations will gain a higher level of brand trust. Brand symbolism also influences how consumers perceive the alignment of products with their self-image (Portal et al., 2019). Consumers who identify with brand attributes such as innovation and exclusivity are more likely to see Apple products as a choice that fits their lifestyle and values (Roggeveen et al., 2021). This contributes to brand trust as consumers are more likely to trust brands that they perceive as relevant to themselves (Hernandez-Fernandez & Lewis, 2019). Brand symbolism can strengthen customer loyalty. Consumers who have trust in brand symbolism tend to remain loyal to the brand because it reflects their values and preferences (Jeon, 2017). High customer loyalty can lead to higher brand trust, as loyal customers believe that will continue to meet their expectations. Companies can utilize brand symbolism in their marketing messages to strengthen brand trust (Cardoso et al., 2022). Messages that reflect brand attributes such as innovation and quality can increase consumer trust in the brand (Hernandez-Fernandez & Lewis, 2019). Marketing messages that are consistent with the brand image help build and maintain a high level of brand trust. Brand symbolism and brand trust work together to build consumer trust in the brand (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). A positive image built through brand symbolism leads to strong brand trust, and conversely, brand trust strengthens brand image. Overall, brand symbolism and brand trust are two interrelated concepts in understanding how consumers respond to brands (Surapto, 2020). A strong and positive brand image built through brand symbolism can result in a high level of brand trust, which in turn affects customer loyalty and brand endorsement.

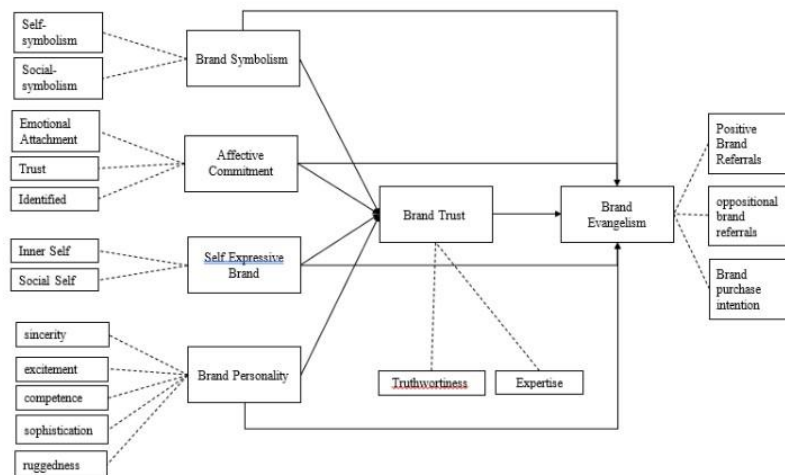
Brand Trust on Brand Evangelism

Trust is a vital element in marketing, as it is the consumer's ultimate goal when selecting a service provider or brand. Trust in brands is a precursor to favorable outcomes such as brand loyalty, increased market share, and higher relative prices (Clara, 2023). When consumers trust a brand, they are more likely to become loyal customers and advocate for the brand, sharing their positive experiences with others (Rasidi & Tiarawati, 2021; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013; Mvondo et al., 2022).

Brand trust and brand evangelism work together to create a powerful network effect. When a consumer with high brand trust becomes a brand evangelist, they can influence others in their social circle to believe in the Apple brand and its products. Positive reviews from friends or family who have had positive experiences with Apple products increase their trust in the brand (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013; Djameludin & Fahira, 2023; Rungruangjit et al., 2023,). Brand evangelists often provide additional support to brands, such as promoting products on social media, participating in brand communities, and sharing the latest news about products and innovations. This helps brands create a positive buzz around their products and build strong fan communities. Brands can play an important role in encouraging brand evangelism by facilitating positive customer experiences, providing platforms for customers to interact and share their experiences, and offering incentives or incentive programs for customers actively involved in brand development (Mabkhot et al., 2017; Sharma et al., 2022). In conclusion, brand trust and brand evangelism are mutually reinforcing elements in marketing. Capitalizing on this relationship by inspiring customers to share their positive experiences and maintaining high quality standards ensures that customers continue to have a reason to become brand evangelists (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Daulay, 2022; Muna et al., 2023).

Figure 4 shows the theoretical framework developed in this study. brand personality, brand symbolism, self-expressiveness, affective commitment, and brand trust as mediators of brand evangelism. Specifically, the framework proposes that brand personality, brand symbolism, self-expressiveness, affective commitment four constructs are hypothesized to influence brand trust to ultimately establish brand evangelism.

Figure 4. Theoretical Framework



RESEARCH METHOD

This research utilizes a correlational approach to investigate the relationships between six key factors: Brand Personality, Brand Symbolism, Self-Expressiveness, Affective Commitment, Brand Trust, and Brand Evangelism. The sample population consists of students enrolled at Telkom University who own multiple Apple products. The sample for this research will be selected utilizing purposive sampling methods, which involve the incorporation of specific criteria into the sampling process. The study's sample consists of students enrolled at Telkom University who possess a minimum of one Apple product. A Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach to Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) will be utilized to analyze the gathered data. SEM-PLS is a method of statistical analysis utilized to validate structural equation models that incorporate latent variables.

RESULT

The extensive use of the internet, increased customer searches for brand-related information, and the simplicity with which online comments can be made have heightened interest in how brand-directed behavior influences sales and corporate value. In response to these occurrences, Apple employs community-based techniques, such as offering information about communities developed for users with a good attitude, expertise, and desire to discover new solutions that will have a large impact on the Apple Support webpage. The steadfast dedication and confidence that customers have in the brand has led to the establishment of these communities (Kaltcheva et al., 2014). Trust is crucial in building loyalty because it develops highly valued associations, strengthening the bond between consumers and the brand (Molinillo et al., 2017). In this view, brand trust is built on consumers' ongoing learning and experience with the brand, which is influenced by previous interactions and past experiences, impacting not only repeat purchases but also consumers' views toward the brand (Mvondo et al., 2022). The other hand, advertising campaigns and branding initiatives also play a significant role in customer trust (Hernandez-Fernandez & Lewis, 2019). They help customers develop a strong emotional connection with a brand, which ultimately influences their decision-making process (Iglesias et al., 2011). By consistently choosing and promoting a brand, customers are more likely to remain loyal and satisfied with the products and services offered (Rather et al., 2019). The use of advertising campaigns helps create brand awareness and showcases the unique selling points of a brand. It is important to target the right audience and convey the brand's message effectively to build trust and loyalty among customers. Branding initiatives, on the other hand, focus on creating a consistent brand identity, image, and personality (Villagra et al., 2021). This involves designing a unique logo, choosing specific colors and fonts, and creating a brand voice that resonates with the target audience (Hammerl et al., 2016; Orth & De Marchi, 2007). Consistent branding helps customers easily recognize and identify a brand, which can lead to increased satisfaction and loyalty (Hultman et al., 2015). By creating a strong and memorable brand identity, businesses can establish an emotional connection with their consumers (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999). This connection is essential for building trust, as consumers are more likely to trust a brand they feel emotionally attached to and believe shares their values. So that brand symbolism plays a vital role in building brand trust (Jeon, 2017).

DISCUSSION

When customers trust a brand, they are more likely to remain loyal to it, even in the face of competition. Loyal customers are more inclined to make repeat purchases, recommend the brand to others, and provide positive reviews and feedback. Therefore, it is important for members to share positive information that will build trust within the community and ultimately create brand evangelists (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013). Brand trust and brand evangelism are mutually reinforcing elements in marketing. Capitalizing on this relationship by inspiring customers to share their positive experiences and maintaining high quality standards ensures that customers continue to have a reason to become brand evangelists. Brands rely on brand evangelists to amplify their message and create a positive image of their products or services (Kang et al., 2020; Rungruangjit et al., 2023; Sharma et al., 2022). These individuals are passionate supporters who voluntarily engage in activities that promote the brand. One way they contribute is by utilizing social media platforms to share their positive experiences with the brand's offerings. By doing so, they effectively endorse the products or services to their network of friends, followers, and connections (Fierro et al., 2014; Muna et al., 2023; Rungruangjit et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

This conceptual paper explores the relationship between brand trust, affective commitment, brand personality, self-expressiveness, brand symbolism, and brand evangelism so statistical results are not yet available for this study. The model suggests that brand trust and affective commitment are the most significant factors influencing brand evangelism. Brand personality, self-expensive brand, and brand symbolism also rank in importance. Consumer confidence in a brand is crucial for a strong brand-customer relationship, as it influences satisfaction and advocacy. Affective commitment refers to the emotional reliance consumers have on a brand, and those with a strong emotional attachment are more likely to exhibit loyalty and participate in brand evangelism. The paper suggests that businesses should prioritize establishing emotional connections and brand confidence among their customers through superior products and services, excellent customer service, consistent brand messaging, a solid brand personality that aligns with their target market, reflecting the consumer's inner self, and effectively using brand symbolism to convey their brand identity and core principles.

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