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**BRAND ADVOCATES AND CROWDSOURCING PRACTICES ON
SOCIAL MEDIA: A CONCEPTUAL PAPER**

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Abstract

The current demand for maintaining successful relationship marketing has prompted companies to use various tools with diverse techniques to achieve their communication objectives. Crowdsourcing can be considered as a promising concept which has revolutionized the process of obtaining, managing and maintaining consumers via the seamless connectivity of the online environment. Through this concept, companies can incorporate brand advocates into their communication programs as an effort to establish relationship with potential consumers. This seems to be congruent with the act of brand advocates increasingly using social media to share opinions and provide positive mentions about a brand. Their participation and engagement on social media can be examined through their willingness to recommend a brand without any incentives or rewards. In this research, the motivation for volunteering will be assessed along with the evaluation of brand relationship quality to demonstrate the intensity and strength of the relationship between the advocates and a brand. This paper presents a comprehensive framework of crowdsourcing practices on social media that describe the volunteering motives of brand advocates, which in turn leads to satisfactory and powerful relationship building. Data is proposed to be collected through a web-based survey and analyzed using the structural equation modelling technique. This study provides a practical framework to enhance brand relationship using technologically advanced crowdsourcing practices with digital communication as a platform.

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Keywords: Brand advocates, brand relationship quality, crowdsourcing, persuasive technology



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1. Introduction

The consumption of social media across the globe has led to increase interest in organisations' marketing activities especially in the demand that businesses need to address the most effective and appropriate techniques to communicate and hence, build relationships with consumers (Obinwanne & Ukabuilu, 2019). The use of social media tools to express thoughts, share experiences and presenting views involving the process of generating relevant knowledge and collecting individual perceptions, which is a content co-creation activity, commonly known as crowdsourcing. Content co-creation, through social media, can contribute to reinforcing the connection between companies and consumers. Crowdsourcing is also used as a method for online marketing purposes in which online users are creating original and useful branding and marketing content which employed by companies to create meaningful solutions without involving any monetary and incentives (Bal et al., 2017; Dissanayake et al., 2015).

Crowdsourcing practices on social media could strengthen the alternative route towards maintaining successful relationship marketing. In the interactional view, brand advocates willingly participate on social media and lead potential consumers to connect, interact or commit to a brand quicker than the business could do through their standard marketing practices (Sashi et al., 2019). The participation and engagement of brand advocates on social media can be an important marketing insight in influencing potential consumers. Understanding the motivation behind brand advocate's behaviour on social media is very important to connect it with the concept of crowdsourcing. For this purpose, volunteering behaviour is predicted to be an important aspect underlying brand advocates as valuable content creator. The act of volunteering substantially influences the willingness of brand advocates to share their ideas and knowledge (Asmolov, 2015; Clary et al., 1998; Wu et al., 2018b). In explaining the commitment and importance of brand advocates in social media crowdsourcing practices, attention is given on how the volunteering participation and engagement can be associated with brand relationship quality. This concept is predicted to explain the intensity of volunteering in relations to brand advocates, thus enlightening the effort to harness brand advocates potential via social media crowdsourcing practices (Fournier, 1998; Solem, 2016). It is predicted that an investigation of brand relationship quality will demonstrate the focus on consumer connectedness, particularly on sustaining relationship with brand advocates.

2. Problem Statement

No matter how much a company spends on its marketing, if the consumers does not relate to the brand, it wastes the marketing resources in connecting brand and consumers (Bhati & Verma, 2020). In the era of heightening competition, there is a need to establish a unique relationship with consumers. This made the need for considering brand advocates to be part of marketing strategy in the form of crowdsourcing practices on social media, due to the plethora of benefits they bring (Direction, 2020; Mathur, 2019). It is critical for companies to identify their passionate advocates through all their touchpoints (Singh & Trinchetta, 2020).

3. Research Questions

The study on social media crowdsourcing practices would be a venue to provide reliable input to enhance relationship marketing knowledge. Having said this, the specific research questions devise for this study are:

- What are the volunteering motivations driving brand advocates to participate and engage in crowdsourcing practices on social media?
- To what extent the volunteering participation and engagement by brand advocates lead to brand relationship quality?

4. Purpose of the Study

Based on the idea of crowdsourcing practices on social media, grounded by relationship marketing theory, the research questions will contextually draw a model that predicts the advancement of crowdsourcing practices through brand advocates on social media by delineating the key determinants of brand advocates' behaviour. This research is hoped to contribute to the literature by developing a comprehensive understanding to broaden the crowdsourcing practices in the context of consumer connectedness. It will introduce volunteering behaviour as a substance of crowdsourcing and set a new theoretical implication for brand relationship quality. Since this proposed research is at conceptual stage, this paper is organised by firstly highlighting the relationship marketing theory and further explain on crowdsourcing practices and its relation to social media, brand advocates, volunteering motivations and brand relationship quality. Finally, the research framework is illustrated with the hypothesized relationship.

5. Literature Review

5.1. Relationship Marketing Theory

Grönroos (1996) was one of the early researchers to discuss the relationship approach to marketing and developed strategic and tactical implications for an organization attempting to apply relationship marketing plan. Since then, relationship marketing has moved away from activities from attracting consumers to activities for having consumers and taking care of them. As relationship marketing is an approach to develop long-term loyal consumers and thus increasing profitability through interaction in networks of relationship (Gummesson, 2011), companies may enhance marketing productivity by achieving efficiency and effectiveness in managing relationship with consumers. Marketing should be regarded from the point of relationship, networks and interaction (Hunt, 2018). According to Sheth (2017), relationship marketing should measure the strength of the relationship beyond financial outcomes for an organization. It is crucial for organizations to retain consumers which encompasses mutual understanding, mutual respect, a feeling of joy and satisfaction (Høgevoid et al., 2020). In this context, the volunteer-motivated behaviour of brand advocates may possibly allow organizations to extend their reach beyond their typical act of persuasion. Applying this concept of consumer focus, crowdsourcing practices on social media can attract interest of the marketing scholars and academic community. This research possibly

benefits companies in terms of greater consumer retention, increased loyalty, reduced marketing costs and more profits.

5.2. Crowdsourcing Practices

The concept of crowdsourcing has received considerable attention in the literature. It is a process of seeking knowledge, goods or services from a large group of people. People from various background submit their ideas in response to online requests through social media, apps or dedicated crowdsourcing platforms (Livescault, 2019). By turning to wisdom of the crowd, companies can have huge benefits in terms of marketing, brand visibility and consumer loyalty. Crowdsourcing can offer other advantages such as lower costs, greater speed and more diversity.

Brabham (2017) have classified four types of crowdsourcing, (1) knowledge discovery and management, (2) broadcast search, (3) peer-vetted creative production and (4) distributed human intelligence tasking. For this study, knowledge discovery and management crowdsourcing are ideal for building collective resource which gives an option for companies to invite online community to gather information in order to build a common asset. There are various examples of how crowdsourcing is perceived to a powerful tool for knowledge discovery and management. Wikipedia, for instance, is a modern example of crowdsourcing project, being the user-moderated online encyclopaedia. The well-defined scope of Wikipedia made the online crowd to contribute ideas and generate content for this platform. Another prominent example is crowdsourcing can be utilized by companies of all kinds to find valuable ideas from consumers and fans. In February 2013, Porsche asked their fans to help design the ultimate car, where the post resulted in 16,000 likes and 1,200 comments. The fan 'built' car was released in August 2013 and the company posted the photos of the car to their Facebook page. This provides the basis for understanding crowdsourcing as a variation of content co-creation. Crowdsourcing generates interesting, meaningful and relevant content which makes the consumers feel more connected to the brand. This dimension of idea crowdsourcing (Wilson et al., 2017) holds great potential to tap into individuals' creativity and help companies to build stronger connection with consumers. Increase in number of consumers, reaching potential consumers and remaining high quality consumers are often the results of crowdsourcing practices on social media (Kohler, 2015).

Crowdsourcing together with social media are shaping the way companies interact with consumers (Paniagua & Korzynski, 2017). It offers a wide range of possibilities for companies to draw knowledge and resources from disperse online users. Many researchers have investigated the viability of social media as a platform for consumer interactivity (Dolan & Goodman, 2017; Hidayanti et al., 2018; Nisar et al., 2018). Social media platforms allow potential consumers to gather and utilize information concerning a brand (Dedeoğlu et al., 2020). Lei et al. (2017) commented that consumers are searching for brand information on social media platforms and expect the company to socialize and build relationship with them. As Ramanathan et al. (2017) argue, consumer reviews available through social media need to be considered by companies to design unique marketing approaches that will improve consumer relationship. Social media triggered a revolution in marketing communication and offers new possibilities for interaction between user and brand (Stojanovic et al., 2018).

Together with this development, volunteering approach could be considered as one of the principles of crowdsourcing when brand advocates are contributing their ideas in which they expect positive emotional response and satisfaction from the social media activity rather than receiving any physical remunerations (Sahimi et al., 2018; Widjaja, 2010). In a way, volunteering may connect people to people, contribute to social change, develop higher-order thinking skills, advance interpersonal skills and build up collaborative mindset (Shetty, 2019). Interaction occurring among brand advocates on social media is essential to provide new means to reach more consumers and promote products and services.

With the technological advancement, volunteering can be emphasized and associated with crowdsourcing as the reason for brand advocates' participative online activity (Kankanamge et al., 2019). Wilk et al. (2018) asserted that brand advocates' online posts seems to be a persuasive attempt of a non-incentivized and volunteering behaviour to positively position a well-liked brand to another prospective consumer. Brand advocates takes every chance they get to recommend a brand and share stories about a company, simply because they want to help others (Fuggetta, 2012; Linden & Linden, 2016). Correspondingly, there are frequent calls to action from brands on social media. Brands want to encourage their consumers to become active advocates (Karunanayaka et al., 2018). Several global companies do realize the importance of advocates who can actively champion and inspire other people to engage with a brand. In fact, brand advocates are perceived as far more important than the brand image itself. In this sense, one can logically describe the crowdsourcing practices on social media as one of the best methods for brand advocates to effectively increase favourable mentions of a brand and help the organizations to attract and retain consumers. In other words, this study believes that studying the brand advocates' volunteering participation and engagement on social media will help to understand the consumers' experience with brands.

Interaction between advocates and brands via social media may improve brand relationship quality. Consumers who project themselves into a brand show a sense of attachment with the brand. Brand relationship quality contributes wide spectrum of factors towards the establishment of long lasting and stable consumer-brand relationships (Rafique et al., 2018). It is based on the consumers' actions which may affect the form of the relationship, focusing on how brands are personalized. The evaluation of brand relationship quality, based on users' experience, ultimately leading to brand loyalty (Fernandes & Moreira, 2019). Having said this, it is easy to arrive at the point that brand advocates' volunteering participation and engagement on social media magnifies brand development and strengthen brand management. Therefore, it is regarded that the measurement on the brand relationship quality may provide significant value for organizations to increase the value of brand advocates and acquire the right consumers.

6. Conceptual Framework

6.1. Volunteering Motivations

Volunteering motivations conceptualised as the willingness of brand advocates to participate and engage on social media without being induced or paid by the organizations. Being a satisfied consumer and becoming connected to a brand, brand advocates volunteer themselves to participate and engage on social media so that they can support, promote and recommend the brand to others. As a volunteer, they are

motivated by several factors. This study categorises volunteering motivations into five factors to include protective, values, social, understanding and enhancement (Clary et al., 1998; Niens, 2019).

6.1.1. Protective motive

The motive of protective believed to defend one's ego by reducing negative effect associated with loneliness or escaping from negative feelings. It has been recognised to reduce individuals' feelings of guilt associated with their own fortunate circumstances (Fletcher & Major, 2004; Pearl & Christensen, 2017). In general, protective here means negating negative effects (Brayley et al., 2014). In addition, researchers have shown that it is one of the ways of addressing one's own personal problem too (Hoffman, 2017; Newnam et al., 2009). For example, people volunteer to escape from their own troubles. Protective can be an important motive for brand advocates to participate and engage on social media in terms of sharing experience, guidelines and ideas as a reasonable way to assist others. Moreover, protective is a favourable motive which can give a positive outcome for brand advocates who are looking for satisfaction in lending a hand to others which also can provide solutions for one's predicament. Hence, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1 (a): Protective motive encourages brand advocates towards volunteering participation on social media.

H2 (a): Protective motive encourages brand advocates towards volunteering engagement on social media.

6.1.2. Values motive

According to Chen et al. (2019), values is referred as volunteers' desire to help other people and show concern towards the community. More specifically, this motive implies the importance of altruistic and humanitarian concerns on others. As values has been the guiding principle for selecting and evaluating behaviour, people and events, this motive has largely played significant role in explaining behaviour. Values does affect individual's decision to volunteer (Wicker, 2017) in which most of the volunteers translate their deeply held values into action (Nacheva, 2019; Wang, 2004). For example, brand advocates get involved in crowdsourcing activities because they have genuine intention and concern for the group they are serving. Therefore, brand advocates may express the values of assisting others to be the reason for their tendency in participating and engaging on social media. This prediction is summarized in the following hypotheses:

H1 (b): Values motive encourages brand advocates towards volunteering participation on social media.

H2 (b): Values motive encourages brand advocates towards volunteering engagement on social media.

6.1.3. Social motive

Social motive concerns the need to appear favourably if friends or significant others regard volunteerism as respected activity (Wu et al., 2018a). The motive of social in volunteerism defined as getting along with others in his or her reference group which may strengthen one's social responsibility. This has positive effect on how an individual adjusting to the environment by making friends. This motive considers socialization as an on-going process (Erasmus & Morey, 2016). Studies show that strong normative and social pressure also being the factors of individuals becoming volunteers (Clary et al., 1998; Cooper, 2017). They are concern about others' opinion. If people around them cherish volunteerism, they will step forward to volunteer too. This may give a rise to the belief that if brand advocates volunteer in participating and engaging on social media, it can increase their circle of attachment besides being acknowledged for their opinion and advice. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1 (c): Social motive encourages brand advocates towards volunteering participation on social media.

H2 (c): Social motive encourages brand advocates towards volunteering engagement on social media.

6.1.4. Understanding motive

The motive of understanding refers to the desire to learn new skills and to utilize knowledge or abilities that might otherwise remain unused. Studies have identified the meaning for the motive of understanding as learning more about the world and exercising knowledge, abilities and skills that are often unused in other areas (Breitsohl & Ehrig, 2017; Kim et al., 2010; Marta et al., 2006). Understanding motive also holds the hope to receive benefits in terms of self-development, learning and variety in life. The intention of volunteering driven by desire to encounter new experience which is rarely obtained in daily normal activities. In that case, participating and engaging on social media may provide opportunity for brand advocates to explore their own strength and gain new perspective which may have direct effect on their self-development satisfaction. Therefore, the following hypotheses are suggested:

H1 (d): Understanding motive encourages brand advocates towards volunteering participation on social media.

H2 (d): Understanding motive encourages brand advocates towards volunteering engagement on social media.

6.1.5. Enhancement motive

The motive of enhancement is all about feeling good about oneself. As such, enhancement is the motive of achieving and sustaining positive effect (Fletcher & Major, 2004; Pearl & Christensen, 2017). Nacheva (2019) suggested that by volunteering, individuals may enhance self-esteem and positive strivings of their ego. Volunteering may make them feel needed and important. This is a distinguishing motive which characterizes the definite attainment of volunteerism. In the present study, the motive of enhancement can be examined as one of the motives which is driving the brand advocates to participate and engage on social media. Hence, the following is expected:

H1 (e): Enhancement motive encourages brand advocates towards volunteering participation on social media.

H2 (e): Enhancement motive encourages brand advocates towards volunteering engagement on social media.

6.2. Volunteering Participation and Engagement

Crowdsourcing drives participation. In the crowdsourcing context, participation incorporates the initiating action of brand advocates which is rather informal compared to engagement. Meanwhile, engagement directly indicates the level of interest shown by the brand advocates in interactive experience. Considering engagement as an active participation of brand advocates, the benefit of participation normally results in engagement initiatives (Al-Quraan & Abu-Shanab, 2015). So, it is assumed that effective engagement derived from the participation process. Therefore, it is further hypothesized that:

H3: Volunteering participation on social media by brand advocates will have a positive impact on volunteering engagement.

6.3. Brand Relationship Quality

In the context of crowdsourcing, brand relationship quality appears to be interesting particularly in testing the depth and strength of relationship built between brand advocates and brands through volunteer participation and engagement on social media. Brand advocates who have volunteered themselves to participate and engage with brands shall view a brand as a satisfactory partner in an ongoing relationship and this benefits the organization. This can be generally seen in the six concepts of brand relationship quality to be adopted in this study, namely love/passion, self-connection, interdependence, commitment, intimacy and brand partner quality.

6.3.1. Love/passion

Love/passion refers to the affect-based feelings related to a brand (Pham, 2017). Fournier (1998) defined love/passion as the affecting grounding reminiscent of concepts of love in the interpersonal domain and the affect supporting brand relationship endurance and depth. It is based on possessiveness towards the brand which is concerned on the indicators of warmth, affection and passion. In corresponding the brand relationship quality with volunteering participation and engagement on social media, love/passion is viewed as the feeling of uniqueness. Love and passion in this context of study can then be defined as brand advocates who volunteer to participate and get themselves engaged on social media, develops an affection with the brand which is characterized as irreplaceable and unique. Brand advocates may feel upset if they couldn't find the brand when they wanted it. An affection with the brand also means having positive perception of a brand. Love and passion in brand relationship quality clearly highlights passion, infatuation and obsessive dependency towards a brand. If love/passion towards the brand is proven to be significant, then it will build a fair perception of volunteering crowdsourcing effort among the organizations. Therefore, based on the above idea, it is hypothesized that:

H4 (a): Brand advocates who volunteer to participate on social media will have stronger love/passion towards a brand.

H5 (a): Brand advocates who volunteer to engage on social media will have stronger love/passion towards a brand.

6.3.2. Self-connection

Self-connection is concerned on the extent the brand becomes the focus of the consumer's life. It refers to the past, present and future experiences. Researchers in brand relationship literatures suggests that strong self-connection support relationship maintenance (Fournier, 1998; Savrun et al., 2017). Self-connection serves not only as a means of identity concerns, tasks or themes but also as a support to maintain relationship. MacInnis and Folkes (2017) agreed that self-connection is what the brand symbolizes for the consumer and the relation that it creates with consumer's unique self. A brand may remind the consumers of the things they have done or places they have been. This domain increases when a brand occupies central position in consumers' life. It ranges from past to current and future where it provides a sense of belongingness for the consumers. Less self-connection may impair brand advocates' perception towards a brand, and they will feel less likely to further interact with the brand. It is assumed that the volunteering participation and engagement by brand advocates may induce self-connection with the brand. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4 (b): Brand advocates who volunteer to participate on social media will have stronger self-connection with a brand.

H5 (b): Brand advocates who volunteer to engage on social media will have stronger self-connection with a brand.

6.3.3. Interdependence

Interdependence is related to the day-to-day routine interaction with a brand (Alvarez & Fournier, 2016). It is based on the consumption rituals emerged as a central process. In brand relationship situation, brand advocates who are interdepending on a brand may show more favourable attitude towards a brand. Inter-dependence is a relationship construct which captures frequent brand interaction. It suggests that the increased scope and diversity of brand-related activities may heightened the intensity of online users' interaction events (Pham, 2017). In crowdsourcing setting, this relationship can be stated as brand advocates maintain long-term relationship with a brand, and it is significantly related to the enjoyment and satisfaction with the performance of a brand. Brand advocates want to keep using the brand. The following hypotheses are thus proposed:

H4 (c): Brand advocates who volunteer to participate on social media will have stronger interdependence with a brand.

H5 (c): Brand advocates who volunteer to engage on social media will have stronger interdependence with a brand.

6.3.4. Commitment

Commitment shows the longevity of the brand relationship and stability to be maintained by the consumers. Studies have proven that consumers have openly professed emotional commitments through brand pledges (Akrouf & Nagy, 2018; Johnson, 1973). Commitment is described as brand advocates' intention to continue purchase and create brand loyalty. Studies suggest that the intention to continue purchase is attributable to the trust on brand (Su et al., 2016). Commitment is the relationship not just worth to be maintained but also shows improbability to switch to another brand. Chen and Myagmarsuren (2011) also posited that commitment refers to readiness to rely on exchange partner. Brand advocates may feel something missing if they stop using a brand. As such, this dimension should explain the impact of volunteer participation and engagement on social media. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4 (d): Brand advocates who volunteer to participate on social media will have stronger commitment towards a brand.

H5 (d): Brand advocates who volunteer to engage on social media will have stronger commitment towards a brand.

6.3.5. Intimacy

Intimacy is the strong belief about the superior performance of a brand. Brand advocates remember a brand and associate it with their personal experience. Such beliefs tend to further embellish with slogan or brand characters. A brand may be deemed popular if it provides consumers with easy tags which can be personalized and stored in memory (Tho et al., 2016). Intimacy derives from superior product performance. Brand advocates are provided with extensive and significant amount of information about a brand and its performance. Thus, they have the feeling that they know a brand for a long time (Kressmann et al., 2006; Pham, 2017). This dimension shows deep understanding about the brand which promotes familiarity, closeness and openness (Kim et al., 2011; Rufer, 2018). With the unrestricted information disclosure on social media, brand advocates become intimate with a brand. In this regard, brand advocates know many things about a brand, and it may determine the nature of their relationship; thereby, the following are proposed:

H4 (e): Brand advocates who volunteer to participate on social media will have stronger intimacy with a brand.

H5 (e): Brand advocates who volunteer to engage on social media will have stronger intimacy with a brand.

6.3.6. Brand partner quality

Brand partner quality takes brands as a reliable and trustworthy partner (Ahn & Back, 2018). Fournier (1998) suggests five central components of brand partner quality i.e. positive feeling of the brand, overall dependability, implicit relationship, faith and comfort. This indicates the sense of being respected in the presence of a brand. Volunteer participation and engagement have effect on brand-partner quality. Brand-partner quality increases positive orientation of a brand, which refers to the judgments of the brand's

overall dependability, reliability and predictability. Consequently, it intensifies the trust and faith and brand advocates recommend the brand to others. Brand advocates also being comfortable with a brand when the brand treats them as an important and valuable patron. Volunteer participation and engagement on social media is expected to affect the dimension of brand partner quality. Therefore, the following hypotheses are advanced:

H4 (f): Brand advocates who volunteer to participate on social media will have stronger brand partner quality with a brand.

H5 (f): Brand advocates who volunteer to engage on social media will have stronger brand partner quality with a brand.

Based on this, the conceptual framework consists of three main constructs: (i) volunteering motivations, (ii) crowdsourcing practices on social media and (iii) brand relationship quality is hence proposed. This framework is assumed to introduce crowdsourcing on social media as a method in build and sustain relationship with consumers. The proposed model is illustrated in Figure 1.

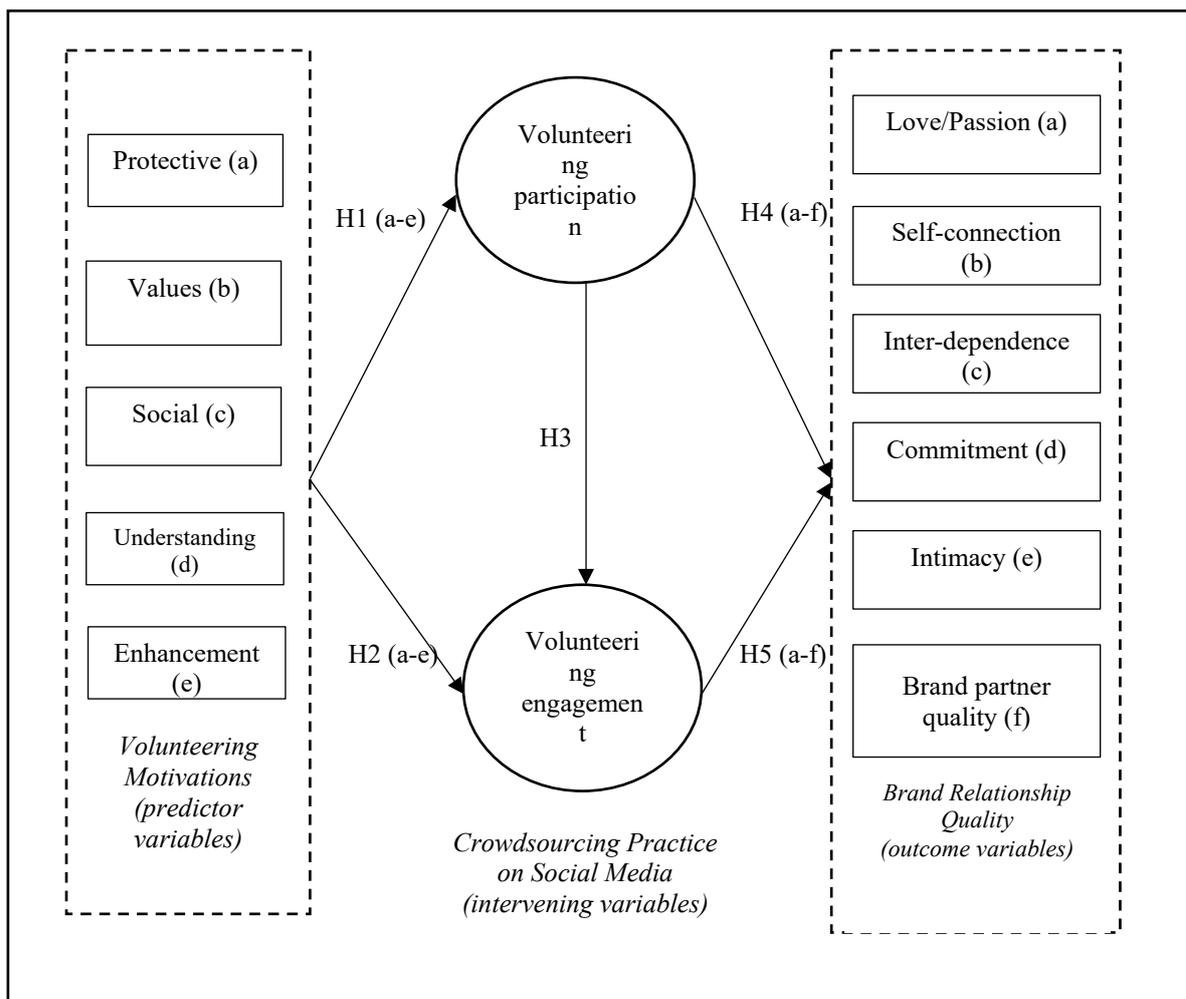


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

7. Research Methods

Quantitative method will be used in this research with hypothesis testing of cause-and-effect relationship between volunteering motives and brand relationship quality within crowdsourcing practices. The respondents for the survey questionnaire will be those brand advocates who are participating and engaging via Facebook. A variance based structural equation modelling (SEM) through PLS or known as PLS SEM will be employed to analyse the survey dataset in this study.

8. Conclusion

A major challenge facing the study of crowdsourcing practices on social media lies not only on the understanding of the activity itself, but also the comprehension of the whole process with other variables. This study has outlined significant constructs and variables that should be taken into consideration to predict the feasibility of crowdsourcing practices to enhance relationship between companies and consumers. The proposed framework appears to be valuable to strengthen the existence and sustainability of brands among consumers. In order to cope with the current technological advancement, a model that incorporates the crowdsourcing practices on social media into marketing strategy is a crucial approach in enhancing brand value.

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