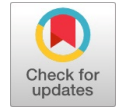# Exploring the Process of Online Brand Advocacy: An In-depth Qualitative Study of Active Fashion Brand Advocates in Indonesia Online Marketplaces

Ahmad Priyagung

Abstract: Customers actively supporting a company or product online is known as online brand advocacy and is a crucial component of online marketing. From the standpoint of active fashion brand advocates in online marketplaces, little studies focused on the steps or processes of online brand advocacy. This study attempts to fill this knowledge gap by investigating the process of online brand advocacy through in-depth interviews with 15 active fashion brand supporters in Indonesia online marketplaces. There are four key stages of online brand advocacy: (1) the initial stages of learning about and using the product; (2) the stages of developing a favorable attitude and emotional connection with the brand; (3) the stages of actively sharing and promoting the brand; and (4) the stages of developing a strong brand advocacy and community. The research also revealed that the participants' reasons for online brand promotion varied, including social identification, personal interest, and reciprocity. The results add to our understanding of online brand advocacy by giving us insights into the process from the viewpoints of active fashion brand advocates in Indonesia online marketplaces.

Keywords: Online Brand Advocacy, Online Marketplace, In-Depth Interview, Customer Behavior, Brand Promotion.

I. INTRODUCTION

The growth of the internet and social media platforms has revolutionized the way companies market their brands, products, and services (Rust, 2020) [28]. Many internet-based communities such as blogs, and forums have appeared online, along the development digitalized social world (Kozinets, 2010) [19]. Among these online communities, brand advocates serve a role to provide an important link within the producer-consumer relationship, providing guidance, advice, and recommendations in the online community (Christopher et al., 1991 [6]; Peck et al., 1999) [25]. In recent years, online brand advocacy has emerged as a form of brand communication that are independent to the brand owner (Parrott et al., 2015) [24]. Many studies had shown the importance of online brand advocacy for its positive influence on opinion and purchase intention (Choi et al., 2021) [5]

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Within the fashion industry practitioners, social media is considered as one the most effective strategies for business expansion (Reynolds, 2002) [27]. New consumers that purchase products online might have new set of behavior, and it is an important element for fashion e-commerce markets (Sutinen et al., 2022) [31]. This emergence of new behavior is the result of rising popularity of mobile internet usage, and smartphone ownership (Kim and Ko, 2012) [18]. E-commerce application in the fashion industry allows manufacturers to have lower price than traditional fashion brands, wider access to consumers [15], and a more convenient shopping experience (Blázquez, 2014) [2].

As the online fashion industry continues to grow, so too does the importance of online brand advocacy (Parrot et al., 2015). Brand advocacy refers to the actions taken by consumers to actively promote and recommend a brand to others. Online brand advocacy can take many forms, including sharing content on social media, leaving reviews, and recommending products to friends and family (Wilk et al., 2021) [37]. Understanding the stages of online brand advocacy and the motivations behind it is crucial for fashion brands looking to build a loyal customer base and increase sales.

Given the increasing importance of online brand advocacy in the online fashion industry, there is a need to understand the stages of online brand advocacy and the motivations behind it. Some studies have explored the concept of online brand advocacy along with developing its multiple item scale (Wilk et al., 2019) [36]. Another study explores the preceeding phenomenon that leads to online brand advocacy in the luxury fashion industry (Wong 2023) [38]. Truong, Jesudoss, and Molesworth (2022) [32] examines how consumers online may perform mischief online and causes backfire to user-enerated content strategy that brand owners employed. It is clear that in recent years, there is a limited study of specific stages in the process of online brand advocacy, especially in the context of online fashion industry in an emerging market such Indonesia.

To address this gap in the literature, this study aims to explore the stages of online brand advocacy in the Indonesian fashion industry and the motivations behind each stage. Therefore, the main questions to be answered would be firstly, what are the stages of online brand advocacy in the context of the Indonesian online fashion industry?; and secondly, what are the motivations behind each stage of online brand advocacy in the context of the Indonesian online fashion industry?

The study will use in-depth

interviews with consumers who have engaged in online brand advocacy to gain insights into their experiences and perceptions. By doing so, this study aims to contribute to the existing literature on online brand advocacy and provide practical implications for fashion brands looking to develop effective online brand advocacy strategies.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Online Brand Advocacy

Some define brand advocacy as the degree that customers are prepared to invest energy and time in actively recommending and supporting a brand because of a significant emotional connection to a brand (Jillapalli and Wilcox, 2010 [14]; Anderson, 1998) [1]. Brand advocacy is also referred to as social advocacy, which includes promoting a product or service to others, standing up for a brand when it is looked-down upon, or enlisting the help of prospective customers (Stokburger-Sauer et al. , 2012 [30]; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). Based on a solid brand foundation, brand advocacy integrates voluntarily positive conversation, active engagement, and emotional connection (Lowenstein, 2011) [21]. Supporters of the brand frequently have an emotional bond with it; they overlook any problems that may be causing them dissatisfaction and frequently stand up for it when it is criticized, taking enjoyment in their participation in the online community (Cant et al. ,2014) [4].

B. Online Community Classification

Even though a recent study highlighted the call for action in further investigation of the characteristics in posts that are endorsing brands (Parrott et al., 2015), little attention has been paid to the process of how online brand advocacy takes place, especially through the qualitative lens. According to O'Reilly (2005) [23], the online environment has given rise to prosuming users, also known as "prosumers," who are highly active in the online space, simultaneously consume and create content, and stand out in online discussion forums. Despite of whether an online community is privately or corporately owned, research has shown that such conversations have an impact on sales (McAlexander et al., 2002; O'Guinn and Muniz, 2001) [22]. For instance, Yahia (2005) [39] differentiates between product- based communities, and non-commercial brand-based [33], as well as those that are bound on discussions related to the brand itself, while Porter (2004) [26] distinguished between non-commercial and commercial virtual communities [40]. This study will use the classification that Wilk (2019) proposed:

1.) Online brand communities that are managed, sponsored, and controlled by brands, with discussion board participation as the main mode of decision-making [41]. The community's objective is to introduce users to the owner's brand without limiting the discussions, which may or may not be about the brand, and to focus on topics of shared interest; and 2.) Online open communities that are unaffiliated with any brands, are run and owned by consumers, and may receive funding from advertising [42]. These online communities unite customers who share a passion for a particular brand and offer discussion forums for brand-related topics as well as information and support on related subjects.

C. OBA and E-WOM

OBA is available on a number of online platforms, including various social media platforms (e. g. Facebook or Twitter), or online discussion forums (e. g. tripadvisor.com) and as well as online discussion boards or communities (e. g. reddit.com) [17]. OBA is sometimes defined as WOM resulting from Facebook "Likes" and online recommendations to "friends [35]," and has been compared to viral or connected marketing activities (Wallace et al. , 2012) [34], talking about brands on blogs (Chu and Kamal, 2008) [7], Facebook brand interactions done by consumers (Hausman et al. , 2014), posting online reviews (Karakaya and Barnes, 2010) [16], or "following" customer's favorite brand on social media platform like Twitter (Bulearca and Bulearca, 2010).

Online brand discussions can serve as online equivalents of offline brand discussions and appear to affect both online and offline purchasing decisions (Godes and Mayzlin, 2004 [11]; Fagerstrm and Ghinea, 2011) [10]. By using brand-related User- Generated Content (UGC) [12], consumers promote brands on the internet (Smith et al., 2012) [29] that is present throughout various social media platforms. Online UGC differs from content found in offline communication (e. g. Information has a broad impact, is easily accessible for an endless amount of time, and can be used immediately). Communicators can be stay unknown to the public's eyes because senders and receivers of information may only be identified by online usernames. As eWOM has been repeatedly differentiated from offline WOM (Chu and Kim, 2011 [8]; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004) [13], OBA needs to be investigated and evaluated separately. However, there seems to be a lack of studies done in terms of investigating the process of how an OBA takes place from the first-person perspective.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Approach

In studying people's behavior, qualitative studies are often used to provide context when exploring complex phenomenon or human experiences (Corbin, Strauss, & Strauss, 2015) [9]. Therefore, in order to examine the research questions mentioned above, a qualitative approach is used.

B. Sample and Recruitment Process

To make this study consistent with the qualitative research paradigm, a purposive sampling approach was used to gather respondents from the Jakarta metropolitan area, Indonesia. The towns comprised Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and Bekasi. In-depth interviews with a semi-structured question set were conducted until redundancy was reached. The interview participants gathered consisted of 15 respondents who i.) had bought fashion products through the online marketplace in the past 6 months; and ii.) had left reviews regarding their purchases on the online marketplace page. The participants included students,

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private sector employees, and some government employees within the age group of 18–25 years. The interviews were conducted in Bahasa, and the length of the interviews varied between 30 and 45 minutes. The interviews were conducted in public areas of the participants' choice to make them comfortable.

C. Data Collection

Open-ended semi-structured question set was asked to participants to allow unexpected themes to surface. The methodology used also enabled the interviewer to do follow-ups, clarifications, and probing questions to have a more complex understanding of the issue discussed, and also allow participants to freely express any concerns they might

have. The interview session was audio- recorded after being granted permission by participants.

D. Analysis Method

Interview transcripts were then processed for content analysis. The analysis followed the coding and thematic analysis guidelines proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) [3]. The first step is to code words and phrases that provide significance to the topic researched [20]. The coded words and phrases will later be grouped into similar themes based on emerging patterns and consistency in the data. A thematic map was then developed to define and name the major themes that emerged.

IV. FINDINGS

Table-I: Respondent Profile

ID	Age	Gender	Occupation	Living Area	Most Used Online Shopping Platform
1	20	Female	Student	Jakarta	Shopee
2	23	Male	Professional	Depok	Tokopedia
3	18	Female	Student	Bekasi	Shopee
4	24	Male	Student	Tangerang	Shopee
5	22	Male	Professional	Jakarta	Tokopedia
6	19	Male	Student	Depok	Shopee
7	25	Male	Professional	Tangerang	Tokopedia
8	21	Female	Student	Jakarta	Tokopedia
9	18	Male	Student	Jakarta	Tokopedia
10	25	Female	Professional	Bekasi	Shopee
11	19	Male	Student	Depok	Tokopedia
12	22	Male	Professional	Jakarta	Tokopedia
13	20	Female	Student	Bekasi	Zalora
14	23	Female	Professional	Tangerang	Shopee
15	21	Female	Student	Jakarta	Zalora

Step 1: Initial stages of learning about and using the product

In the initial stages of learning about and using the product, customers are focused on gathering information and making a purchase decision. They may spend time browsing through the online fashion marketplace and reading product descriptions and reviews to get a sense of the brand's offerings. Customers may also explore the brand's social media presence, website, or other online sources to learn more about the brand's history, mission, and values. The information customers gather during this stage is crucial in shaping their initial perceptions of the brand and its products.

"I stumbled upon this online fashion marketplace while scrolling through Instagram. I was curious about the brand, so I decided to click on their website and browse their products. I was impressed by their unique designs and reasonable prices, so I decided to make a purchase." – Female, 24

Once customers have made a purchase, they will try out

Step 2: Stages of developing a favorable attitude and emotional connection with the brand

As customers begin to use the product and interact with the brand, they will start to develop a favorable attitude and emotional connection. Customers who are satisfied with their purchase may begin to feel a sense of satisfaction with the product's quality and performance, and build a sense of trust in the brand. They may also identify with the brand's values and aesthetic, and feel a sense of pride in owning and

the product and assess its quality and fit. If the product meets or exceeds their expectations, customers may start to form a positive impression of the brand.

"When I received my order, I was initially skeptical about the product's quality. But as I tried on the clothes and accessories, I was pleasantly surprised by the attention to detail and overall craftsmanship. It was clear that the brand puts a lot of effort into creating high-quality products." – Male, 22

Conversely, if the product fails to meet their expectations, customers may become disappointed or frustrated, which can damage their trust in the brand. Therefore, the initial stage of learning about and using the product is critical for building the foundation of a positive brand experience, which sets the stage for future advocacy.

"Unfortunately, I had a negative experience with one of the products I purchased. The fabric was flimsy and started to fall apart after just a few wears. I was disappointed and felt like I wasted my money on a product that wasn't worth it." – Female, 20

promoting it. The emotional connection that customers develop with the brand can be an important factor in building long-term loyalty and advocacy.

"Despite my negative experience, I decided to give the brand another chance. I did some research and found that they have a good reputation for creating high-quality products. I also appreciated that they

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were responsive to my concerns and offered a solution to my issue. This experience helped me develop a more favorable attitude towards the brand and build trust in their products." – Female, 24

In addition, customers who have a positive experience with the brand may be more likely to engage with the brand on social media, leave reviews, or recommend the brand to friends and family. This positive word-of-mouth can help to spread awareness of the brand and expand its reach. Therefore, the stages of developing a favorable attitude and emotional connection with the brand are important for building long-term loyalty and advocacy.

"After my positive experience with the brand's products, I started talking about them with my friends. I recommended the brand to a few people who were looking for affordable and stylish fashion options. It felt good to be of use to my friends." – Male, 18

Step 3: Stages of actively sharing and promoting the brand through writing online reviews

Once customers have developed a positive attitude towards the brand, they may enter the stages of actively sharing and promoting the brand through writing online reviews. This involves taking the initiative to write detailed and enthusiastic reviews of the brand and its products on the online fashion marketplace. Customers may also mention the brand in online discussions or forums, and engage with other customers who share their enthusiasm for the brand.

"I was so happy with my purchase that I decided to leave a positive review on the brand's online marketplace page. I wanted to let others know about the quality of their products and the excellent customer service I received." - Female, 22

Customers who write online reviews are often motivated by a desire to help others make informed purchase decisions. They may also feel a sense of satisfaction in sharing their positive experience with others. When customers write reviews, they are contributing to the brand's reputation and helping to shape the perceptions of others who are considering purchasing from the brand. Therefore, the stages of actively sharing and promoting the brand through writing online reviews are critical for building a positive reputation and expanding the brand's reach.

"My positive online review was motivated by my satisfaction with the product and the desire to share my positive experience with others. I believe that leaving reviews is important for both the brand and other customers who are considering making a purchase." - Male, 24

Step 4: Stages of developing a strong brand advocacy and community

Finally, customers may progress to the stages of developing a strong brand advocacy and community continuous purchase. More experience with the product helped in writing a more detailed and enthusiastic reviews that help to shape the brand's reputation on the online fashion marketplace. Customers may also form connections with other customers who share their passion for the brand, creating a strong sense of community and loyalty.

"Since my initial purchase, I've continued to buy products from this brand. As I became more familiar with their products, I started leaving more detailed reviews that discussed the fit, quality, and overall design of the items." - Male, 25

Customers who are highly engaged with the brand may also participate in brand-related activities or events, share brand-related content on social media, or even create their own content that promotes the brand. By doing so, these customers become a critical part of the brand's advocacy efforts, helping to expand its reach and build a loyal following.

"I don't typically promote brands on my personal social media, but I have mentioned this brand to a few friends who were looking for affordable and stylish fashion options. I think it's important to support brands that you believe in and share your positive experiences with others." - Female, 23

V. CONCLUSION

Overall, the stages of developing a strong brand advocacy and community through writing online reviews are critical for building long-term loyalty and advocacy. By actively promoting the brand and engaging with other customers, these customers become an integral part of the brand's reputation-building efforts. Through their efforts, they help to shape the perceptions of others and build a strong sense of community and loyalty around the brand.

DECLARATION STATEMENT

After aggregating input from all authors, I must verify the accuracy of the following information as the article's author.

- **Conflicts of Interest/ Competing Interests:** Based on my understanding, this article has no conflicts of interest.
- **Funding Support:** This article has not been funded by any organizations or agencies. This independence ensures that the research is conducted with objectivity and without any external influence.
- **Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate:** The content of this article does not necessitate ethical approval or consent to participate with supporting documentation.
- **Data Access Statement and Material Availability:** The adequate resources of this article are publicly accessible.
- **Authors Contributions:** The authorship of this article is contributed equally to all participating individuals.

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