How does Involvement Build Loyalty towards Music-Streaming Platforms? A Multi-Analytical SEM-ANN Technique

Theadora Clarissa[a], Maria Veronica Amelia[b], Garry Wei-Han Tan[c,d,*], Pei-San Lo[e], Keng-Boon Ooi[f,g], Yogesh K. Dwivedi[h,i]

[a]Faculty of Business and Management,
UCSI University, No. 1 Jalan Menara Gading,
UCSI Heights, 56000 Cheras, Kuala Lumpur, W. P. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Email: gunardi.claire@gmail.com

[b]Faculty of Business and Management,
UCSI University, No. 1 Jalan Menara Gading,
UCSI Heights, 56000 Cheras, Kuala Lumpur, W. P. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Email: ameliamariaveronica@gmail.com

[c]UCSI Graduate Business School,
UCSI University, No. 1 Jalan Menara Gading,
UCSI Heights, 56000 Cheras, Kuala Lumpur, W. P. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

[d]School of Finance and Economics,
Nanchang Institute of Technology, Nan Chang City,
Jiang Xi Province, People's Republic of China
Email: garrytanweihan@gmail.com

[e]UCSI Graduate Business School,
UCSI University, No. 1 Jalan Menara Gading,
UCSI Heights, 56000 Cheras, Kuala Lumpur, W. P. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Email: oeiansan@gmail.com

[f]UCSI Graduate Business School,
UCSI University, No. 1 Jalan Menara Gading,
UCSI Heights, 56000 Cheras, Kuala Lumpur, W. P. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

[g]College of Management, Chang Jung Christian University,
Tainan City, Guiren District, Taiwan
Email: ooikengboon@gmail.com

[h]Emerging Markets Research Centre (EMaRC),
School of Management, Room #323
Swansea University, Bay Campus, Fabian Bay, Swansea, SA1 8EN, Wales, UK
Email: y.k.dwivedi@swansea.ac.uk

[i]Department of Management, Symbiosis Institute of Business Management,
Pune & Symbiosis International (Deemed University),
Pune, Maharashtra, India

[*]**Corresponding author:**
Dr. Garry Wei-Han Tan
Professor
UCSI Graduate Business School,
UCSI University, No. 1 Jalan Menara Gading,
UCSI Heights, 56000 Cheras, Kuala Lumpur, W. P. Kuala Lumpur
Email: garrytanweihan@gmail.com

Abstract:
Purpose: Given the acute competition between music-streaming platforms, this research seeks to identify the relational motivators of brand loyalty towards the music-streaming platform in terms of user-brand involvement, brand trust, brand engagement, brand recommendation, and brand loyalty.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Cross-sectional quantitative data, gathered from a total of 340 eligible respondents via an online questionnaire survey was empirically analysed and validated using a hybrid predictive-analytics Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) and Artificial Neural Network (ANN) method.

Findings: The results demonstrate that user-brand involvement promotes brand loyalty toward a music-streaming platform by fostering brand engagement, brand trust, and positive word-of-mouth. SEM and ANN data comparison reveals good consistency.

Research Limitations/Implications: The generalizability of the research outcomes may be constrained as this study only considers the data from a single country (i.e., Malaysia) and one music streaming platform (i.e., Spotify). This research highlighted the relevance of user-brand involvement and non-core supporting services in the cultivation of brand loyalty, particularly their salient roles in promoting favourable attitudes and behaviours towards platform brands.

Practical Implications: The insights produced can aid music-streaming platforms in devising better user retention strategies that can be utilised to maintain their competitive edge over time. The findings made it abundantly evident that practitioners should facilitate more user-brand cooperative activities to encourage user-brand involvement and, ultimately, foster brand loyalty.

Originality: This study has addressed a major research gap by examining the relational roots of brand loyalty, which transcend the typical focus on transactional factors and technical lock-in. This research pioneered the investigation of brand involvement with user involvement.

Keyword:
music streaming, platform branding, cognitive dissonance, brand loyalty, user participation, user involvement, brand involvement, brand engagement, brand trust, word-of-mouth, Spotify, SEM-ANN

1.0 Introduction

The consumption of audio content (i.e., tracks and podcasts) has undergone a massive evolution due to the prevalence of music-streaming platforms (MSP), with people now able to stream an infinite database of audio content on demand through MSP for a flat monthly subscription fee or endure a cacophony of third-party advertisements and in-app restrictions. While MSPs may appear to be neutral conduits looking only to promote content fluidity, these platform brands are, in actuality, active gatekeepers that govern the circulation of audio content to further their organizational goals (Hracs and Webster, 2021).

The cage fight for market share among MSPs has become increasingly acute as MSPs enter mainstream use with a looming problem of platform parity that impedes user retention (Hracs and Webster, 2021). In response to the practical call, several studies have employed a branding approach to examine the potential motivators of brand loyalty towards MSP; however, most of these investigations are still in their early stages and concentrate on specific sources of brand loyalty (i.e., experience quality and user satisfaction) (Hsu *et al.*, 2021). Nonetheless, prior studies have yielded some interesting findings indicating that MSP foster brand loyalty through "velvet handcuffs"—a technical form of lock-in that uses trapped data and the fear of losing music libraries accumulated over time to disincentivize existing users from switching platform brands (Hracs and Webster, 2021). Similarly, Jones (2020) examined the influence of asset specificity on brand loyalty towards MSP by focusing on how assets like saved music libraries, built-up algorithmic data, curated playlists, and existing followers can dissuade users from switching MSP because they take time, effort, and money to build and will need to be rebuilt after the switch. Asset specificity describes investments in people or physical assets within a particular relationship that confers market power to one player in the relationship (Jones, 2020). In brief, the literature review shows that current studies focus exclusively on procedural switching costs while disregarding the relational aspects of brand loyalty, demonstrating a research gap in needs to be filled, as these latter factors can arguably forge a stronger and longer-lasting user-brand tie that compels users to stick with a platform brand (Harrison *et al.*, 2012; Krishen et al., 2021; Rather *et al.*, 2019). Additionally, the inclusion of such relational elements can offer a fresh perspective that broadens the current understanding of brand loyalty towards MSP, emphasising the staying behaviour rather than switching preventions (Ok *et al.*, 2020). To capture the distinctive nature of MSP today, in which platform brands are no longer simply tools for music distribution but rather specialised engineers of branded music experiences, this study aims to probe the effects of user-brand involvement, defined as users' psychological affiliation with a platform brand as a result of user participation (Kappelman and McLean, 1991), in generating other vital brand-related outcomes that can subsequently cultivate brand loyalty. To be clear, user-brand involvement differs from customer involvement, which has been extensively studied in current MSP literature (e.g., Barata and Coelho, 2021), as customer involvement generally describes the level of importance a person places on a specific product or service, and the level of attention that a person invests in purchase decision-making instead (Bian and Haque, 2020).

Although there are many ways to facilitate user-brand involvement (Chen *et al.*, 2021; Elsharnouby *et al.*, 2021; Leso and Cortimiglia, 2021), this study focuses specifically on music curation as it offers a highly illustrative case to exemplify user-brand involvement in MSP (Hracs and Webster, 2021). Additionally, it is imperative to recognize the significance of music curation, specifically user curation as a non-core supporting function, in driving brand loyalty to chart a clear executable path for enhancing MSP's user retention strategy (Prey, 2020; Wang, 2011). User curation refers to the process of strategically selecting, organising, and presenting tracks into playlists for monetary and/or psychological gains by the users themselves, whereby the playlists act as roadmaps for other users to navigate around

the plenitude of audio content in MSP (Hracs and Webster, 2021). User curation was the key value co-elevation activity that promotes user-brand interaction in MSP, yet the recent intervention of MSP with algorithmic curation has shifted the dynamic. Spotify, for instance, has been deliberatively demoting user-curated playlists in favour of Spotify-curated playlists to ensure that the ultimate control over users' consumption agendas remains in the hands of the platform brand (Prey, 2020). Consequently, playlists have become less social, more impersonal, and biased over time in the eyes of some MSP users (Hesmondhalgh, 2021; Hracs and Webster, 2021). That said, user reactions to the supplant of user curation with algorithmic curation have been mixed, with many expressing a preference for algorithmic curation as it makes it simple to find complete playlists that match their musical tastes without having to manually sift through the enormous catalogue (Webster, 2019). For this reason, this research seeks to uncover the impact of user curation, as a non-core supporting feature of MSP, in inducing user-brand involvement to foster brand loyalty. In short, a robust investigation was done in the specific setting of Spotify to evaluate the impact of user-brand involvement alongside the components of customer relationship management: brand engagement, positive word-of-mouth, and brand trust on brand loyalty (Alam *et al.*, 2021b), as the market-dominant brand offers an effective inroad to understanding the state of user retention under platform parity (Hracs and Webster, 2021).

From a theoretical standpoint, this study answers Rather *et al.*'s (2018) urgent request for further research on brand loyalty using a relational approach. Following that, this research tackles the inadequacies of prior research in MSP, which mainly focuses on the technical lock-ins and transactional components, by looking at how relational constructs, which include user-brand involvement, brand trust, brand engagement, and positive word-of-mouth, affect brand loyalty. Moreover, this investigation into the context of MSP can enrich the existing knowledge of platform branding and platform competition by identifying additional drivers of the MSP's network effects (i.e., user-brand involvement) (Hracs and Webster, 2021). This study is also among the first in the area of platform branding and information technology to look at brand involvement with user participation. Though the focus of this study is on user-brand involvement driven by user curation, it opens the door for future researchers to explore the construct through other user-brand collaborative activities to deepen our understanding of user participation, user involvement, and brand involvement. In a similar line, this study adds to current knowledge as to how a non-core supporting feature (i.e., user curation) can enhance user loyalty to the core service (i.e., music streaming) (Wang, 2011). Practically, the relevance of this study is embedded in the value of brand loyalty to attain long-term brand success as the insights generated from this study can help MSP devise a better user retention strategy to safeguard their market position in the long run. While the data-rich culture may help MSP better understand users' demands, the take-over of algorithmic curation may jeopardise the brand experiences in MSP as well (Webster, 2019). This study, therefore, seeks to understand the role of user participation in cultivating brand involvement to help MSP strike a more delicate balance between human involvement and machine intervention. Moreover, this study can inform practitioners of possible strategies for leveraging non-core supporting features and relational elements to enhance brand loyalty for MSP. In sum, this study employs the user viewpoint to demonstrate how practitioners can drive brand engagement, brand trust, positive word-of-mouth, and ultimately, brand loyalty via user-brand involvement.

2.0 Literature

2.1 Brand Loyalty

The term "brand loyalty" describes the profound bond between a consumer and a brand, which can manifest into behavioural dedications in the forms of anti-switching and staying behaviours (Atulkar, 2020). Simply put, brand loyalty is the predisposition of individual consumers to pick a specific brand as their definitive preference, with some resistance toward competing alternatives. Brand loyalty provides platform brands with a sustainable competitive edge over their contenders with beneficial financial outcomes to boot (Issock *et al.*, 2020). Aside from a lower propensity to switch and a higher frequency of repurchase, loyal customers are usually less price sensitive (Joseph *et al.*, 2020); hence, loyal customers foster a more consistent revenue stream for brands. Further, the cost of managing existing customers is substantially cheaper than gaining new ones as they generally react more favourably to brand messages (Mora *et al.*, 2021). Loyal customers can also help recruit new customers through peer referral, and in turn, contribute to the network effects of MSP (Hracs and Webster, 2021). In short, nurturing loyal customers is a highly lucrative strategy for brands.

Based on Prey (2020), MSP should be seen as experiential platform brands that make deliberate decisions to produce distinct branded music experiences that resonate with their respective audiences, rather than mere channels for content distribution; as such, this research argues that the study of MSP through the branding lens is of relevance. Currently, platform parity among MSPs has hampered MSPs' ability to nurture brand loyalty (Hracs and Webster, 2021). On that basis, investigating the potential determinants of brand loyalty beyond the basic transactional aspects (e.g., price, function, and content) is essential for MSP (e.g., Spotify) to maintain a competitive market position. A careful literature review has indicated that the field of research is still in its infancy, Little research has been done on the relational motivators of brand loyalty to MSP, whereby Bhartyadhikara's (2020) inquiry into the impact of brand image, brand quality, brand experience, and brand satisfaction on brand loyalty in the context of MSP posed as a rare exception. Although Hracs and Webster (2021) have briefly examined the possible factors that may influence brand loyalty towards an MSP, the qualitative research still needs further empirical validation to support the proposition; hence, this study strives to close the research gap by uncovering the correlations between user-brand involvement, brand trust, brand engagement, positive word of mouth, and brand loyalty in MSP.

2.2 User-Brand Involvement

In essence, the notion of involvement describes "a person's perceived relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values and interests" (Zaichkowsky 1985, 342). Additionally, involvement can also be seen as a function of personal traits (e.g., needs, values, and goals), contextual conditions (e.g., purchase occasion and purchase risk), and stimulus features (e.g., media source, product class, and product type) that can take many forms (e.g., user involvement, product involvement, consumer involvement, brand involvement, etc.) (Zaichkowsky, 1985; Hagen, 2015). The definition of user involvement has been inconsistent and ambiguous across existing literature, whereby it has often been used synonymously with distinct concepts like participation, engagement, and influence (Leso and Cortimiglia, 2021). In the field of information systems, the definition of user involvement can be classified into two general themes: (1) the participative behaviour of user representatives in the information system development (Ives and Olson, 1984); and (2) the psychological state of specific users in relation to how important and relevant an information system is to them personally (Barki and Hartwick, 1989; 1994). According to Kappelman and McLean (1991) and Leso and Cortimiglia (2021), user involvement must be taken in relation to user participation to be

substantive. Here, considering the unique nature of MSP as a platform brand, the notion of user involvement is applied to the branded music experience in MSP; extending the concept of user involvement with the notion of brand involvement, which refers to the level of consumer enthusiasm or excitement for a specific brand (Bian and Haque, 2020). Notably, while brand involvement is gaining momentum in academic literature, most current studies remain fixated on customer involvement instead (Bian and Haque, 2020); thus, this research seeks to nuance this under-researched area by proposing the notion of user-brand involvement—that is, the psychological identification of a user with a platform brand, such that the platform brand is deemed important and relevant to them, in response to their participation and/or intervention in the process of production, distribution, and/or promotion (Kappelman and McLean, 1991; Brian and Haque, 2020)

According to anecdotal evidence, it is generally assumed that people engage in activities because they believe they would enjoy it, as opposed to realising this after the fact. This premise is shared by some of the most prevalent models of human behaviour (e.g., the Theory of Reasoned Action and the Theory of Planned Behaviour) (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). The notion of user-brand involvement, however, offers a new perspective by considering the inverse. The notion of behavioural-led attitudinal change in user-brand involvement can be explained by the identification theory, which asserted that users may be motivated to place higher value in a brand because they realise that the brand reflects and enhances their identity after engaging with it (Burke and Reitzes, 1991); and the commitment theory which posits that the more a person behaves in a certain way toward a brand, the more attached he/she feels toward the brand (Chang and Stansbie, 2018). Additionally, the ecological paradigm of commitment theory proposes that people within an "environment"—or instance, participating in value co-creation in MSP via user curation—may be exposed to certain external stimuli, and find unique value, such as social value in terms of ego satisfaction, in such environments that they may not have otherwise known as an outsider who has never been exposed to those experiences (Stern *et al.*, 1962; Chang and Stansbie, 2018). The theoretical lens of user-brand involvement allows researchers to take user participation and its psychological outcome (i.e., brand involvement) into account as a single unit of analysis to yield more practical implications as it is linked to an actionable strategy—that is, through value co-creation activities. To date, research into user involvement in platform branding has been scarce, much lesser for brand loyalty, with several calls made to bridge the research gap (Saragih *et al.*, 2018). This phenomenon of research paucity is especially curious as user involvement has been a "well-known" subjective factor that can steer user satisfaction toward an information system (Ives and Olson, 1984). In short, this research is a response to the past calls made for the inclusion of user involvement in the discourse of user loyalty toward platform brands (Saragih *et al.*, 2018).

2.3 Cognitive Dissonance Theory

Festinger's (1957, 1962) cognitive dissonance theory serves as the underpinning theory for this study. The effects of the cognitive dissonance on consumer behaviour have been extensively studied for decades with substantial theoretical evidence indicating that cognitive dissonance theory acts as an effective theoretical lens to elucidate customers' attitudinal and behavioural changes, particularly at the post-purchase stage (Johnson *et al.*, 2021; Jeong *et al.*, 2019). According to the cognitive dissonance theory, people have an innate tendency, known as cognitive consistency, to maintain harmony among their attitudes and behaviours, and avoid cognitive dissonance, which describes a state of mental discomfort and psychological stress caused by having opposing attitudes, beliefs, or values simultaneously (Festinger, 1957). Cognitive dissonance induces people to alter one of their conflicting attitudes, beliefs, or behaviours to alleviate the displeasure and restore balance, whereby the intensity of the

pressure to reduce cognitive dissonance is determined by the magnitude of the dissonant cognitions. A person generally experiences cognitive dissonance when they act or speak in a way that is inconsistent with a pre-existing attitude or belief; or when they simultaneously hold two or more opposing beliefs. Prior studies have found that cognitive dissonance can be reduced using four approaches, namely: (1) eliminate dissonant cognitions, (2) enhance consonant cognitions, (3) decrease the magnitude of dissonant cognitions; and (4) increase the magnitude of consonant cognitions (Harmon-Jones and Mills, 2019). To put it another way, aside from modifying or rationalising their contradicting behaviours or cognitions to reduce cognitive dissonance, people may opt to avoid hearing polarised opinions to steer clear from such discomfort as well (Jeong *et al.*, 2019). The decision on which particular conflicting cognition to alter is dictated by a cognition's resistance to change; that is, "the responsiveness of the cognition to reality and on the extent to which the cognition is consonant with many other cognitions" (Harmon-Jones and Mills, 2019, p.4). In sum, it is theorised that users with strong user-brand involvement, due to the high level of affection and importance placed on a platform brand, may become more rigid in their preconceived cognitions (George and Edward, 2009). Consequently, rather than altering that initial cognition, users will try to downplay conflicting perceptions and actively seek supportive information instead, to protect and even, strengthen initial cognition, thereby resulting in other favourable brand outcomes, such as brand engagement, brand trust, and positive word-of-mouth, that subsequently drive brand loyalty (George and Edward, 2009).

3.0 Hypotheses

3.1 User-Brand Involvement (UBI)

Despite extensive research into the concept of involvement in the context of MSP (e.g., Barata and Coelho, 2021), there has been a noticeable lack of research on user-brand involvement. In short, user-brand involvement refers to users' psychological identification with a platform brand—such that, the platform brand is deemed important and relevant to them—in response to their participation in value co-creation activities. Although prior studies have uncovered an indirect link between brand involvement and brand trust (Samarah *et al.*, 2021), there has not been much research that studies the direct influence of user-brand involvement on brand trust. This relationship coincides with the cognitive dissonance theory, which states that people will avoid doing things that create dissonance or negative drive states that occurs when a person holds multiple contradictory cognitions at the same time (Festinger, 1962). It is argued that users, who have already psychologically and behaviourally affiliated themselves with an MSP, will try to reduce dissonance by trusting the MSP instead of making a deliberate effort to alter the preconceived notions that are already deeply ingrained in their minds (George and Edward, 2009). In a similar vein, Elsharnouby *et al.* (2021) asserted that customers with high brand involvement will opt to trust the brand, thereby building stronger resilience to negative information (Saleem *et al.*, 2018; Festinger, 1962). Furthermore, prior studies have established that if a brand offers its consumers the chance to participate in its marketing initiatives, the subsequent interactions can foster the development of an emotional bond between the brand and its consumers, which may, in turn, promote brand commitment, brand trust, and brand loyalty (Kamboj *et al.*, 2018). Here, user-brand involvement embodies both the component of participatory behaviour and its resultant state of emotional attachment—through which users may find the platform brand to be important and relevant to them; as such, with the theoretical support from Kamboj *et al.* (2018), this study argues that user-brand involvement enhances brand trust.

Although the terms involvement and engagement are frequently used interchangeably, the two concepts are not the same (Samarah *et al.*, 2021). User engagement refers to a positive state of mind that motivates further user-platform interactions that transcend

financial transactions (Hollebeek, 2011). In line with Samarah *et al.* (2021), this research posits that user-brand involvement can positively affect user engagement. In particular, user-brand involvement can foster a sense of belonging to the MSP, which helps to strengthen the bonds between individual users and platform brands to motivate out-role behaviours, (e.g., recommendation intention) (Hollebeek, 2011; Buil *et al.*, 2019). According to Chiang et al. (2020), user involvement in brand communities has a synergistic and interactive effect that indirectly promotes consumer engagement. On the basis that user-brand involvement captures the psychological state of identification in relation to the initial act of participation, this research, therefore, posits that user-brand involvement can lead to brand engagement and the spread of positive word-of-mouth. Moreover, using the brand identification theory, it is argued that users who are more involved with the MSP are more inclined to participate in pro-brand activities, such as supporting brand goals and products, taking part in brand activities, guarding its reputation, and becoming loyal (He and Li, 2011). Besides, users may be more willing to associate themselves with the brand due to such identification; hence, more inclined to openly speak of MSP in a positive light (Hollebeek, 2011). In sum, it is proposed that:

H1: User-brand involvement positively relates to brand trust.
H2: User-brand involvement positively relates to brand engagement.
H3: User-brand involvement positively relates to positive word-of-mouth.

3.2 Brand Engagement

According to Agyei *et al.* (2020), behavioural engagement does not equate to real engagement. Users with real engagement must possess a strong psychological bond with a brand, which prompts behavioural participation beyond in-role tasks (Hollebeek, 2011; Buil *et al.*, 2019). In short, user engagement refers to the emotional bond of individual consumers with a particular brand that manifests into proactive mindsets (e.g., vigour, dedication, and absorption) that drive both in-role and out-role behaviours (Dessart *et al.*, 2015; Agyei *et al.*, 2020). On that account, this study postulates that user engagement may be able to fuel brand recommendation intention in the form of positive word-of-mouth (Moliner *et al.*, 2018). Based on the concept of relational trust, brand engagement can instil brand trust by forging a relationship between the user and the MSP (Riana, 2018). According to Samarah *et al.* (2021), prior findings concerning the correlation between brand engagement and brand trust have been contradictory; hence, further research to validate the relationship is imperative. Moreover, brand engagement can lead to the temporal formation of brand loyalty as well. According to Fernandes and Moreira (2019), brand engagement has become a supplement, if not an alternative to user satisfaction in the study of brand loyalty; as such, brand engagement may strengthen the user-brand tie as the presence of attachment object can meet the users' demand for comfort, joy, and security (Ghorbanzadeh and Rahehagh, 2021). Additionally, this study argues that users will more likely develop brand trust, engage in positive word-of-mouth, and ultimately, become loyal to a brand platform to avoid jeopardising the existing psychological bond with the MSP as per the cognitive dissonance theory; hence, it is proposed that:

H4: Brand engagement positively relates to brand trust.
H5: Brand engagement positively relates to positive word-of-mouth.
H6: Brand engagement positively relates to brand loyalty.

3.3 Brand Trust

Brand trust is a multidimensional construct that represents the propensity of users to depend on the capability of a particular brand to deliver on its promises and satisfy expectations (Menidjel *et al.*, 2017). According to Halaszovich and Nel (2017, p. 125), the most critical

factor influencing the outcomes at various stages of the buyer-seller relationship is trust, which serves as a "potent glue that holds buyer-seller relationships together". Brand trust fuels relationship progression beyond a basic transactional relationship (Samarah *et al.*, 2021). In sum, brand trust is the foundation for any long-term relationships (i.e., brand loyalty) (Kosiba *et al.*, 2018); thus, this study posits brand trust as a key component for the cultivation of brand loyalty towards an MSP (Menidjel *et al.*, 2017; Kwon *et al.*, 2021; Wallace *et al.*, 2022). Extensive research has validated the positive relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty (Kosiba *et al.*, 2018). For instance, Atulkar (2020) found that the reason positive experience encourages repurchase intention is due to brand trust and Samarah *et al.* (2021) have revealed that brand trust predicts brand loyalty; hence, it is proposed that:

H7: Brand trust positively relates to brand loyalty.

3.4 Positive Word-of-Mouth

Positive word-of-mouth refers to the extent to which users are willing to talk about certain brands in a favourable light, such as the spread of positive experiences and the relay of positive information (Dayan, 2020). It is extremely important to understand the effect of positive word-of-mouth as word-of-mouth has also been determined to be a key success for mobile applications due to the flexibility for users to spread opinions, without the constraints of place and time (Kim *et al.*, 2016). Prior research has demonstrated contradictory evidence whereby certain research (e.g., Issock *et al.*, 2020) has found that positive word-of-mouth is a consequence of brand loyalty, rather than the antecedent, and vice versa (Ngoma and Ntale, 2019). This research postulates that positive word-of-mouth can foster brand loyalty, as per the theory of brand attachment which dictates that constant vocalisation about brands can strengthen social bonds and thus, foster brand loyalty (Ngoma and Ntale, 2019; Aziz and Ngah, 2019). The commitment theory supports the premise that the more positively users act toward a platform brand, the more appealing the MSP appears to them (Chang and Stansbie, 2018). Furthermore, the correlation between positive word-of-mouth and brand loyalty can be explained using the cognitive dissonance theory as well, whereby users who talk about an MSP in a positive light to support their initial choices may gradually become more attached to the platform brand as they may use their overt behaviours to determine their personal attitudes if no external incentives are deemed to be dictating that behaviour (Aziz and Ngah, 2019; Harmon-Jones and Mills, 2019); hence, it is proposed that:

H8: Positive word-of-mouth positively relates to brand loyalty.

4.0 Methodology

4.1 Data Collection

This study intends to analyze the relational elements of brand loyalty toward the MSP in Malaysia; thus, the target population comprises Spotify users who reside in Malaysia. The income of Malaysia's music streaming segment is predicted to hit US$28.12 million in 2022, with a 10.64 percent annual growth rate, indicating a rather profitable market worth further research (Statista, 2022). Using the "10-Times Rule" by Hair *et al.* (2018), a minimum sample size of 30 was set. Additionally, data was collected via an online questionnaire survey to overcome the constraints of time, place, and budget, associated with the impracticability of a large population (Fowler, 2014). To ensure the quality of the responses, a screening question was used to eliminate any ineligible respondents without adequate experience with Spotify, whereby all respondents must possess at least a year of experience using Spotify. The time- and cost-efficient method of snowball sampling was undertaken to maximize the reach of questionnaire distribution (Baltar and Brunet, 2012). The respondents were enquired to offer their contact details to other potential informants, who will then be contacted to fill out the survey questionnaire (Noy, 2008). To prevent hesitancy in recommendation and

participation, none of the questions is sensitive or personal. The survey questionnaire was simultaneously distributed across social groups on Facebook and Reddit to counter the main downfall of snowball sampling which may limit the representativeness of the sample.

4.2 Measurement Development

The survey questionnaire can be sorted into three sections: (1) Section A collects the demographic details of respondents; (2) Section B focuses on the perception of respondents towards measured items, and (3) Section C appertains to the level of brand loyalty of respondents towards Spotify. As shown in Table I, all constructs have 5 measurement items that were adopted and adapted from published literature, and subsequently anchored on a 5-point Likert Scale that scores from (1) "Strongly Disagree" to (5) "Strongly Agree".

Table I: Measurement Items and Respective Sources.

Constructs	Items	Sources
User-Brand Involvement	UBI1: I have a stronger interest in Spotify after I curate my own playlist. UBI2: Spotify is more important to me after I curate my own playlist. UBI3: Spotify matters more to me after I curate my own playlist. UBI4: I consider this Spotify brand to be a relevant part of my life after I curate my own playlist. UBI5: My music listening activity with Spotify has become a continual interest to me after I curate my own playlist.	Cheung and To, 2020
Brand Engagement	BEN1: When someone praises Spotify, it feels like a personal compliment. BEN2: I am someone who enjoys interacting with like-minded others that use Spotify. BEN3: In general, I thoroughly enjoy exchanging ideas with other people that Spotify BEN4: I am immersed in my interaction with Spotify. BEN5: I spend a lot of my discretionary time on Spotify.	Hapsari et al, 2016; Islam, 2016
Brand Trust	BTR1: I rely on Spotify. BTR2. I expect the Spotify to deliver on its promise. BTR3: I am confident in Spotify's ability to perform well. BTR4. The quality of Spotify has been very consistent. BTR5: Spotify has good intentions towards its users.	Huaman-Ramirez, 2019; Menidjel, 2017
Positive Word-of-Mouth	WOM1: I say positive things about Spotify to other people. WOM2: I recommend Spotify to other people. WOM3: I encourage friends and relatives to use Spotify. WOM4: I encourage friends and relatives to take the service of Spotify. WOM5: I discuss the quality of the service Spotify offered.	Zhang et al, 2017; Roy, 2018
Brand Loyalty	BLO1: Positive perception and satisfaction influence me to take repurchase decisions on Spotify.	Zeithaml, 1996;

	BLO2: I am always loyal to Spotify which creates an emotional attachment. BLO3: I recommend Spotify to someone who seeks my advice. BLO4: I consider Spotify as my first choice in mobile music. BLO5: I will use Spotify for the next few years.	Atulkar, 2020

4.3 Respondents' Profile

This research has gathered a response rate of 75.5% with 340 eligible responses collected out of 450 survey questionnaires distributed. The sample size of 340 has surpassed the minimum suggested sample size of 30. The sample consists of 50% male respondents and 49.7% female respondents. 75.3% of the sample falls into the age bracket of 20 to 24 years old. According to a start.io survey, the majority of Malaysian Spotify users are between the ages of 18 and 24, which explains why the collected sample age mainly ranges from 20 to 24 years old. Besides, 75.6% of the sample has a monthly income or allowance of less than RM2,000. 72.1% of the sample have undergone undergraduate education with either a bachelor's degree or other professional qualifications. Moreover, 79.1% of the respondents have over a year of experience with Spotify, and 15.3% of those respondents have over 4 years of experience with Spotify. Finally, 28.5% of the sample spend an average of 1 to 2 hours each day on Spotify.

4.4 Statistical Analysis

Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was conducted for data analysis with the use of SmartPLS 3.2.6 version software. PLS-SEM enables simultaneous analysis of multiple correlations between exogenous and endogenous variables (Hair *et al.*, 2017). PLS-SEM was implemented due to two major reasons: (1) PLS-SEM is suitable for predictive and theoretical research to achieve maximum variance explained; and (2) PLS-SEM is appropriate for multivariate non-normal data (Hair *et al.*, 2018). The Mardia's multivariate skewness and kurtosis (β=5.618, $p<0.001$; β=46.355, $p<0.001$, respectively) indicate that the multivariate assumption has indeed been compromised; hence, PLS-SEM is suitable. A pre-test was done to reduce any misinterpretations and vagueness in the survey questionnaire. An academician and eight professionals were consulted. The experts have expressed confusion concerning the measurement items for UBI. Consequently, the measurement items were altered with reference to Cheung and To (2020) for clearer wording that is more comprehensive and relevant to the research. Subsequently, a pilot test was conducted with 30 Spotify users in Malaysia, who were tested randomly and voluntarily without any compensation to attain real and accurate results. The data was assessed whereby the reliability of the measurement items was established with readings all above 0.7.

4.5 Common Method Bias

Given that this research used a self-administered survey questionnaire for data collection, common method bias (CMB) may be an issue pertaining to this study. Notably, multiple procedural techniques were implemented during data collection to prevent CMB (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003), which include: (1) the definitions for all jargon used were given; (2) simple words were used throughout the survey questionnaire; (3) the respondents were given repeated assurance of anonymity; and (4) the assurance that there is no right, or wrong responses were given. The post-hoc statistical technique was also employed to test for CMB via the PLS approach after data collection (Liang *et al.*, 2007). As shown in Table II, all substantive factor loading (Ra) are significant at $p<0.001$. In addition, most of the method

factor loading (Rb) values were found to be insignificant with only 8 significant paths. Finally, the Ra2 values are greater than the Rb2 values. In sum, the results show that CMB is not a threat to this study.

Table II: Common Method Factor Analysis

Constructs	Items	Substantive Factor Loading (Ra)	Ra^2	Method Factor Loading (Rb)	Rb^2
Brand Loyalty	*BLO1*	0.784^{***}	0.615	-0.024^{NS}	0.001
	BLO2	0.891^{***}	0.794	-0.223^{*}	0.050
	BLO3	0.792^{***}	0.627	0.057^{NS}	0.003
	BLO4	0.765^{***}	0.585	0.111^{NS}	0.012
	BLO5	0.796^{***}	0.634	0.031^{NS}	0.001
User-Brand Involvement	*UBI1*	0.768^{***}	0.590	0.019^{NS}	0.000
	UBI2	0.968^{***}	0.937	-0.037^{NS}	0.001
	UBI3	0.958^{***}	0.918	-0.040^{NS}	0.002
	UBI4	0.865^{***}	0.748	0.030^{NS}	0.001
	UBI5	0.862^{***}	0.743	0.033^{NS}	0.001
Brand Trust	*BTR1*	0.379^{***}	0.144	0.469^{***}	0.220
	BTR2	0.823^{***}	0.677	-0.010^{NS}	0.000
	BTR3	0.999^{***}	0.998	-0.141^{**}	0.020
	BTR4	0.994^{***}	0.988	-0.177^{***}	0.031
	BTR5	0.920^{***}	0.846	-0.126^{*}	0.016
Brand Engagement	*BEN1*	0.853^{***}	0.728	-0.083^{NS}	0.007
	BEN2	1.034^{***}	1.069	-0.262^{***}	0.069
	BEN3	0.936^{***}	0.876	-0.128^{**}	0.016
	BEN4	0.830^{***}	0.689	0.042^{NS}	0.002
	BEN5	0.411^{***}	0.169	0.419^{***}	0.176
Positive Word-of-Mouth	*WOM 1*	0.825^{***}	0.681	0.047^{NS}	0.002
	WOM 2	0.972^{***}	0.945	-0.072^{NS}	0.005
	WOM 3	0.845^{***}	0.714	0.066^{NS}	0.004
	WOM 4	0.879^{***}	0.773	-0.030^{NS}	0.001
	WOM 5	0.856^{***}	0.733	-0.011^{NS}	0.000
Average		0.840	0.729	-0.002	0.026

4.6 Outer Measurement Model Evaluation

Based on Table III, internal consistency reliability was validated as the readings of Dijkstra and Henseler's rho (pA), Cronbach's alpha (CA), and composite reliability (CR) are all above the minimum cut-off point of 0.70. Following that, the convergent validity of the outer measurement model was assessed using standardised factor loading and average extracted variance (AVE). Convergent validity was established as all external factor loadings meet the minimum threshold of 0.7. All AVE have exceeded the 0.5 cut-off level as well; thus, convergent validity has been statistically validated as per the general rule of thumb by Hair *et al.* (2018). Next, discriminant validity was assessed via the Hereto-Trait-Mono-Trait (HTMT) ratio. Based on Henseler *et al.* (2015), HTMT below 0.85 is acceptable. As such, the HTMT results shown in Table IV indicate that discriminant validity is not an issue for this study. In addition, the HTMT inference was examined via the bootstrapping technique, as suggested by Tan and Ooi (2018), with 5,000 subsamples, no significant change, and bias-corrected and accelerated (BCa) bootstrap with 95 percent confidence intervals. The results of HTMT

inference show that all confidence intervals (2.5 and 97.5 percent) do not meet the required value of 1; thus, discriminant validity was established.

Table III: Consistency Reliability Analysis and Convergent Validity Analysis.

Constructs	Items	Loadings (p-levels)	Cronbach's Alpha (CA)	rho (pA)	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
User-Brand Involvement	UBI1	0.787 ($p < 0.001$)	0.931	0.934	0.948	0.786
	UBI2	0.934 ($p < 0.001$)				
	UBI3	0.922 ($p < 0.001$)				
	UBI4	0.891 ($p < 0.001$)				
	UBI5	0.892 ($p < 0.001$)				
Brand Engagement	BEN1	0.774 ($p < 0.001$)	0.870	0.882	0.905	0.656
	BEN2	0.810 ($p < 0.001$)				
	BEN3	0.821 ($p < 0.001$)				
	BEN4	0.869 ($p < 0.001$)				
	BEN5	0.772 ($p < 0.001$)				
Brand Trust	BTR1	0.793 ($p < 0.001$)	0.883	0.890	0.914	0.681
	BTR2	0.819 ($p < 0.001$)				
	BTR3	0.873 ($p < 0.001$)				
	BTR4	0.837 ($p < 0.001$)				
	BTR5	0.801 ($p < 0.001$)				
Positive Word-of-Mouth	WOM1	0.867 ($p < 0.001$)	0.924	0.925	0.943	0.767
	WOM2	0.908 ($p < 0.001$)				
	WOM3	0.905 ($p < 0.001$)				
	WOM4	0.851 ($p < 0.001$)				
	WOM5	0.847 ($p < 0.001$)				
Brand Loyalty	BLO1	0.764 ($p < 0.001$)	0.957	0.868	0.898	0.639
	BLO2	0.685 ($p < 0.001$)				
	BLO3	0.846 ($p < 0.001$)				
	BLO4	0.866 ($p < 0.001$)				
	BLO5	0.825 ($p < 0.001$)				

Table IV: Discriminant Validity Analysis.

Constructs	BLO	BTR	BEN	UBI	WOM
BLO					
BTR	0.762 [0.667,0.838]				
BEN	0.676 [0.595,0.749]	0.612 [0.523,0.691]			
UBI	0.820 [0.761,0.866]	0.752 [0.684,0.813]	0.660 [0.568,0.738]		
WOM	0.887 [0.841,0.926]	0.695 [0.610,0.771]	0.706 [0.618,0.781]	0.770 [0.700,0.823]	

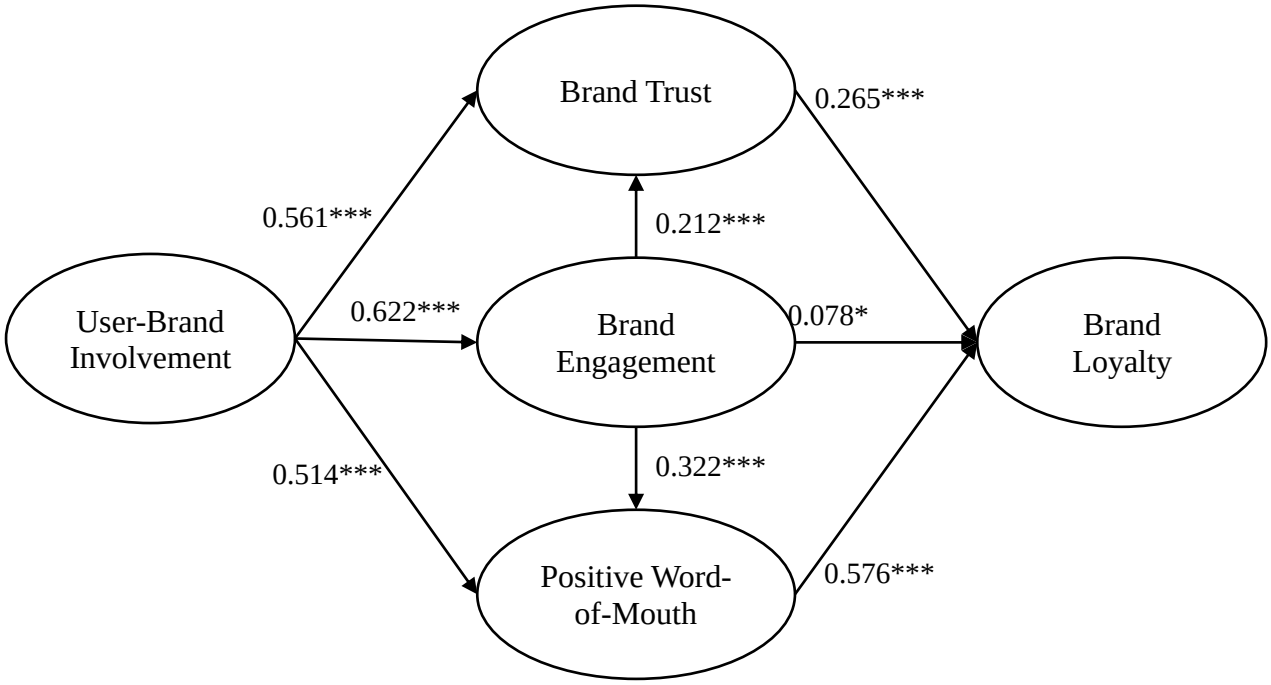
4.7 Inner Structural Model Assessment

The model fit was assessed using the Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) (Henseler *et al.*, 2016). Based on Hu and Bentler (1998), the model fit is attained as the saturated and estimated model values are less than 0.08. Next, the variance inflation factor was used to test for multicollinearity, by which no multicollinearity problem is present as the variance inflation factors are below 5.0 (Hair *et al.*, 2017). The inner structural model assessment was carried out with 5000 subsamples of bootstrapping technique with no significant change option and BCa bootstrap at 95% confidence intervals, as suggested by Tan and Ooi (2018). The t-values of the path coefficient were used to determine the significance of the relationship between the latent constructs. The results, as shown in Table V, demonstrated that all relationships hypothesised are valid and significant, given that the confidence intervals do not contain 0 with p-values below 0.05 (Sekaran and Bougie, 2010). To clarify, brand engagement (β=0.078, $p<0.05$), brand trust (β=0.265, $p<0.001$), and positive word-of-mouth (β=0.576, $p<0.001$) all indicated a significant positive relationship with brand loyalty. Meanwhile, brand engagement has demonstrated a significant positive influence on brand trust (β=0.212, $p<0.001$) and positive word-of-mouth (β=0.322, $p<0.001$). Finally, brand trust (β =0.561, $p<0.001$), user involvement (β=0.622, $p<0.00$), and positive word-of-mouth (β=0.514, $p<0.001$) are all significantly and positively influenced by user-brand involvement. In sum, all hypotheses are empirically supported, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Table V: Hypotheses Testing.

Paths	Path Coefficients	Confidence Interval (2.5%)	Confidence Interval (97.5%)	T Statistics	P Values	Remarks
UBI → BTR	0.561	0.104	0.317	11.331	0.000	*Supported*
UBI → BEN	0.622	0.553	0.690	17.593	0.000	*Supported*
UBI → WOM	0.514	0.389	0.690	8.418	0.000	*Supported*
BEN → BTR	0.212	0.104	0.317	3.989	0.000	*Supported*
BEN → WOM	0.322	0.206	0.447	5.239	0.000	*Supported*
BEN → BLO	0.078	0.004	0.155	1.993	0.046	*Supported*
BTR → BLO	0.265	0.162	0.371	4.918	0.000	*Supported*
WOM → BLO	0.576	0.472	0.671	11.382	0.000	*Supported*

Figure 1: Hypothesis Testing.



4.8 Predictive Relevance and Effect Size

Table VI illustrates the R-square results, which show that the model has a moderate predictive accuracy with R-Square values between 0.50 and 0.75 (Hair *et al.*, 2017). Based on Table VI, the Q-square data indicate predictive relevance, by which the readings are all higher than 0. Next, the effect size was also measured with reference to Cohen's (1988) rough rule of thumb. As shown in Table VII, the relationships between user-brand involvement → brand trust (0.392), user-brand involvement → brand engagement (0.631), user-brand involvement → positive word-of-mouth (0.381), and positive word-of-mouth → brand trust (0.497) are all considered strong. Conversely, the relationships between brand trust → brand loyalty, brand engagement → brand trust, and brand engagement → positive word-of-mouth are weak. Finally, the value of effect size for brand engagement → brand loyalty is less than the 0.02 bottom threshold; thus, there is no effect.

Table VI: Coefficient of Determination (R^2) and Predictive Relevance (Q^2).

Constructs	**R-Square**	**Q^2 (=1-SSE/SSO)**	**Predictive Relevance**
BEN	0.387	0.230	$Q^2 > 0$
BTR	0.508	0.330	$Q^2 > 0$
WOM	0.574	0.435	$Q^2 > 0$
BLO	0.683	0.431	$Q^2 > 0$

Table VII: Effect Size (f^2).

Constructs	**BEN**	**BTR**	**WOM**	**BLO**
UBI	0.631	0.392	0.381	
BEN		0.056	0.150	0.010
BTR				0.123
WOM				0.497

4.9 Artificial Neural Network (ANN) Analysis

Since PLS-SEM can only check for a linear relationship, it may not be suitable for a complicated decision-making process. Therefore, Artificial Neural Network (ANN) is combined with PLS-SEM to capture the non-linear relationship among the constructs in this research. ANN is a "huge processor consisting of simple processing units known as neurons that can store knowledge for future use" (Ooi *et al.*, 2018, p.387). In this study, four ANN models were constructed for user-brand involvement, brand trust, brand engagement, positive word-of-mouth, and brand loyalty. Table VIII shows the mean and standard deviation (SD) of Root Mean Squared Error (RMSE) values for the training (learning) and testing (predicting) stages. Since the RMSE mean value for Model A, B, C, and D ranges from 0.078 to 0.927, which can be considered as small with negligible SD in both learning and predicting stages, the ANN models show a great level of accuracy in predicting the relationships (Alam *et al.*, 2021a; Lo et al., 2022).

To rank the exogenous constructs in this research, a sensitivity analysis was conducted as shown in Table IX. The results in ANN Model A indicate that user-brand involvement is the most important predictor of brand trust (100% normalised relative importance) while brand engagement (68.701%) is the second most important predictor of brand trust. In ANN Model B, since there is only a single neuron model, the sensitivity analysis indicates 100% of normalised importance. As for Model C, user-brand involvement (100%) is the most important predictor, followed by brand engagement (78.987%). Finally, in ANN Model D, the most important predictor is positive word-of-mouth (100%), followed by brand trust (59.981%) and brand engagement (26.953%). A comparison was conducted in Table IX to determine the differences in ranking for PLS-SEM and ANN by comparing the patch coefficient and normalised relative importance respectively. All models for PLS-SEM and ANN show consistency in ranking for ANN Model A, B, C, and D.

Table VIII: RMSE Values for Brand Trust, Brand Engagement, Positive Word-of-Mouth, and Brand Loyalty.

	Model A		**Model B**		**Model C**		**Model D**	
	Input: UBI, BEN		Input: UBI		Input: UBI, BEN		Input: BEN, BTR, WOM	
	Output: BTR		Output: BEN		Output: WOM		Output: BLO	
Neural Network	Training	Testing	Training	Testing	Training	Testing	Training	Testing
	RMSE	RMSE	RMSE	RMSE	RMSE	RMSE	RMSE	RMSE
ANN1	0.098	0.086	0.933	0.129	0.105	0.089	0.092	0.063
ANN2	0.102	0.080	0.888	0.132	0.103	0.111	0.091	0.062
ANN3	0.106	0.074	0.836	0.120	0.105	0.104	0.091	0.072
ANN4	0.101	0.082	0.901	0.143	0.107	0.089	0.085	0.113
ANN5	0.098	0.125	1.133	0.125	0.110	0.087	0.087	0.065
ANN6	0.119	0.102	0.928	0.169	0.105	0.106	0.087	0.086
ANN7	0.106	0.079	0.863	0.132	0.105	0.104	0.094	0.075
ANN8	0.116	0.083	0.847	0.123	0.102	0.125	0.091	0.083
ANN9	0.098	0.102	1.020	0.122	0.109	0.099	0.083	0.092
ANN10	0.097	0.083	0.923	0.137	0.105	0.099	0.087	0.071
Mean	0.104	0.090	0.927	0.133	0.106	0.101	0.089	0.078
SD	0.008	0.016	0.089	0.014	0.002	0.012	0.004	0.016

Table IX: Comparison between PLS-SEM and ANN results

PLS Paths	Original Sample (O)/ Path Coefficient	Ann Results: Normalised Relative Importance (%)	Ranking (PLS-SEM) [Based On Path Coefficient]	Ranking (ANN) [Based On Normalised Relative Importance	Remark
Model A (Output: BTR)					
UBI → BTR	0.561	100.000	1	1	Match
BEN → BTR	0.212	68.701	2	2	Match
Model B (Output: BEN)					
UBI → BEN	0.622	100.000	1	1	Match
Model C (Output: WOM)					
UBI → WOM	0.514	100.000	1	1	Match
BEN → WOM	0.322	78.987	2	2	Match
Model D (Output: BLO)					
BEN → BLO	0.078	26.953	3	3	Match
BTR → BLO	0.265	59.981	2	2	Match
WOM → BLO	0.576	100.000	1	1	Match

5.0 Result

From the results, it is clear that user-brand involvement significantly and positively influences brand trust (Kwon *et al.*, 2021). Practically, user-brand involvement through music curation gives consumers some sense of control over what they consume in MSP, even if they may not be in actual control; as such, user-brand involvement helps to strengthen brand trust by negating the notion that MSP possesses some kind of "corrupt" motives—to force feed consumers with undesirable content for financial gains. Further, such association can be linked to the cognitive dissonance theory as well, whereby users who are deeply involved with a platform brand, both behaviourally and psychologically, via user-brand involvement, may be more likely to trust the platform brand to maintain consistency in their cognitions (Saleem *et al.*, 2018; Festinger, 1962). In line with Hollebeek (2011) and Samarah *et al.* (2021), user-brand involvement was found to have a salient positive correlation with brand engagement as well, as it can induce a sense of belonging, which strengthens the relationship between individual users and the platform brands, resulting in increased brand engagement (Buil *et al.*, 2019). The correlation between user-brand interaction and favourable word-of-mouth is also significantly positive, supporting Cheung and To (2020) and Wangenheim and Bayon (2007). The brand identification theory states that users who are more involved with the MSP are more likely to partake in brand-promoting behaviours, such as but not limited to, spreading positive word of mouth (He and Li, 2011). In sum, H1, H2, and H3 are all empirically supported.

According to relational trust and cognitive dissonance theory, the results show that brand engagement can result in brand trust. The findings coincide with Wallace *et al.* (2022) and Kwon *et al.* (2021) as brand engagement encourages a sense of familiarity, which lessens the fear of uncertainty and enhances brand trust. The positive correlation between brand engagement and positive word-of-mouth, as suggested by Agyei *et al.* (2020) has been empirically validated as well. Brand engagement is the proactive mindset that motivates extra-role behaviours; hence, it is almost definitive that brand engagement will lead to positive word-of-mouth (Moliner *et al.*, 2018). Additionally, in line with Ghorbanzadeh and Rahehagh (2021), there is a significant positive correlation between brand engagement and brand loyalty. However, this study discovered that the association between brand engagement,

especially in terms of psychological engagement, with brand loyalty has been overstated in prior research because there is a rather weak effect between the two variables, with brand engagement being the least influential factor in the model. This indicates that the positive psychological motivation for users to engage with a brand does not necessarily foster a strong sense of brand loyalty, as brand engagement does not dictate whether real actions are taken to solidify the user-brand tie (Hollebeek, 2011). Apart from that, brand loyalty was found to be significantly and positively influenced by a brand trust. The outcome is consistent with Kosiba et al. (2018), who assert that brand loyalty can only be inculcated if the brand is perceived to be trustworthy. Finally, it was discovered that positive word-of-mouth positively affects brand loyalty, supporting the notions put forth by Aziz and Ngah (2019) and Ngoma and Ntale (2019). The result was also supported by the cognitive dissonance theory, which holds that users tend to want to act consistently with past attitudes and behaviours; hence, it is less likely for them to go against what has been said (Saleem *et al.*, 2018; Festinger, 1962). As a result, users may feel obliged to stay committed to the MSP that they have previously openly praised.

6.0 Discussion

While numerous works of literature have sought to broaden our understanding of brand loyalty in the context of MSP, significant research gaps remain unfilled because past studies have yet to examine the relational aspects of brand loyalty (Hsu *et al.*, 2021). The fundamental question of whether user-brand participation is vital and relevant to the establishment of brand loyalty, in particular, remains unclear in current literature. To address this research gap, this study transcends the transactional features of MSP to examine the impact of relational components, which include user-brand involvement, brand engagement, brand trust, and positive word-of-mouth, on brand loyalty toward an MSP. The empirical portions highlighted the role of user-brand involvement, brand engagement, positive word-of-mouth, and brand trust in the building of brand loyalty towards an MSP and elucidate the complex relationship between the constructs. The findings contribute several critical theoretical and practical implications that may be useful to advance the current knowledge and practice.

From a theoretical standpoint, this research is the first to propose the concept of user-brand involvement, which analyses user participation in relation to brand involvement as a single unit of analysis to capture the unique nature of experiential platform brands, like MSP. This new approach has broadened the current understanding of brand involvement by linking a practical replicable process (i.e., user participation) to the concept (Kappelman and McLean, 1991). Future research may seek to validate the applicability of user-brand involvement to drive brand-related outcomes via other user-brand collaborative activities (e.g., content creation) in other contextual settings (e.g., social media) based on the groundwork laid in this study. The examination of user involvement in value co-elevation at the distribution stage via user curation, rather than the development stage, has also expanded the vision and application of the construct beyond its current scope in information system development (Leso and Cortimiglia, 2021). Following that, the insights further underscore the importance of investigating behavioural-led attitudinal change, which may inspire further investigations to diverge from the conventional approach that examines primarily attitude-led behaviours (Chang and Stansbie, 2018; Shang *et al., 2006*). Moreover, this study has successfully breached the research gap by uncovering the relational motivators of brand loyalty in the context of MSP, looking beyond the technical form of lock-ins, known as “velvet handcuff”. Specifically, this study identified the salient role of user-brand involvement in reinforcing favourable attitudes and behaviours towards a platform brand to produce other brand-related outcomes as users with high user-brand involvement are keen to support their preconceived

cognitions due to the high level of affection and significance already placed on MSP (George and Edward, 2009). In conclusion, this study has established that users who associate themselves with a brand, both psychologically and behaviourally, through user-brand involvement are more likely to hold favourable attitudes and behaviours towards a platform brand, leading to greater brand engagement, brand trust, recommendation intention, and, ultimately, brand loyalty. Future research should look into more relational components that can encourage users to stick with an MSP (Rather *et al.,* 2018).

From the practical perspective, the findings help practitioners recognise the role of user curation, as a vital non-core supporting service, which can further user-brand involvement, brand trust, brand engagement, and brand loyalty towards MSP to drive the network effects of MSP, ensuring long-term business success (Hracs and Webster, 2021; Wang, 2011). Rather than focusing solely on enhancing their core service experience—that is, the music-streaming experience—MSP should seek to enhance the experience of user curation as well, to motivate participation and promote greater user-brand involvement, thereby building a stronger relationship between users and platform brands that may subsequently translate into platform loyalty (Hesmondhalgh, 2021). For instance, MSP can try to drive user participation by increasing the visibility of user-curated playlists in search rankings and imposing a monetisation system for high-rank user-curated playlists to incentivise users into investing more time and energy into user curation. Similarly, MSP can work on identifying and improving other non-core supporting services to facilitate a pleasurable experience for users, which can motivate users to stay by forging a stronger tie between individual users and platform brands (Wang, 2011). The results imply that a stronger user-brand tie not only helps to keep users around but also motivates them to partake in other pro-brand activities that further fortify the favourable attitudes and behaviours toward the MSP over time, ultimately fostering greater brand loyalty. Further, MSP should offer users more touchpoints to directly engage with the platform brand in their day-to-day usage, closing in on the psychological proximity with users (Dong and Wang, 2018). For instance, MSP can try to cultivate a brand community by adding a live message function and comment section on the platform to offer users a medium to provide feedback and discuss music, podcast, and playlist (Shang *et al.,* 2006). In essence, MSP should embrace the opportunities in the increasingly sophisticated brand community, which enable consumers to become more involved in elevating brand values as "collaborators". To this end, MSPs must enhance their adaptive capacity to "capture, manage, and exploit" such opportunities from users through constant monitoring as well as text and image analysis to optimally enhance user experiences in MSP (Dwivedi *et al.,* 2021, p.11).

7.0 Limitations and Recommendations

This study suffers some limitations that should be acknowledged and addressed by future studies. First, the cross-sectional research design limits the predictability of brand loyalty in the long run. Herein, future studies are advised to extend the data collection period with longitudinal research to validate the findings. Next, the snowball sampling method adopted limits the sample's diversity and representativeness, restricting the generalizability of the findings to only Spotify users in Malaysia. Future studies should be cautious when generalising the findings to other cultural contexts as the results of this study were derived from a single country only (Al-Saedi *et al.,* 2019). Additionally, the limitation of the research scope within Spotify may also restrict the transferability of the results to other MSPs. On that account, future studies could conduct a similar investigation in other MSPs to uncover the differences in attitude and behaviour between different platform users and further validate the findings produced in this study. Last but not least, future studies can investigate other

relational components of brand loyalty that may not have been considered in this research to produce more insightful findings (Rather *et al.*, 2018).

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