Online brand community engagement: Scale development and validation

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Abstract

In a quest for connecting with customers, the world’s largest brands have gone online to develop communities to interact with consumers. Despite widespread adoption less is known about what motivates consumers to continually interact in these communities. Across six studies, we develop and test a typology of online brand community engagement (i.e., the compelling intrinsic motivations to continue interacting with an online brand community). We identify 11 independent motivations and test the scale’s predictive power for participation in an online brand community. This study provides a much needed refinement to the disparate conceptualizations and operationalizations of engagement in the literature. As a result, academic researchers can now rely on a diverse set of motivational measures that best fit the context of their research, adding to the versatility of future research studies. The results provide managers with new insight in the motivations for and impact of interacting in online brand communities.

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1. Introduction

Brands as disparate as the Boston Red Sox, Salesforce.com, Starbucks Coffee, Dell, General Motors, and Procter & Gamble are making significant investments in online brand communities in an effort to cultivate stronger relationships with their consumers. Often, these communities began as simple text forums where consumers share thoughts and questions about a brand, but over the past 15 years these communities have evolved and some have even blossomed into strategic marketing investments designed to offer unique brand experiences in rich interactive multimedia environments. This increased sophistication not only offers consumers a new array of opportunities within these communities, but also carries a substantial cost for the brands.

For example, General Motors recently announced that they invest $30 million annually to simply generate content for their community on Facebook and are planning to continue this investment, despite cutting their $10 million Facebook advertising budget (Barkholz & Rechtin, 2012).

While each brand community has a unique purpose, the one universal is that they represent an explicit marketing investment on behalf of the firm to develop long term connections with their current and potential consumers (Zaglia, 2013). In order to increase returns on these substantial investments, marketing managers require better consumer insights into the motivations to participate in brand communities and the resulting attitudinal and financial benefits to the brand. Improved measurement of these motivations can also assist in the development of operational standards of excellence for this maturing medium of brand communication. Despite this practical need, academic research on the consumer motivations to participate in online brand communities has struggled to keep pace with the changing landscape of the industry (e.g., Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2013). While early investigations in brand communities provide us with operational definitions of these investments: “Online brand communities represent a network of relationships between consumers and the brand, product, fellow consumers, and the marketer” (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2006, p. 39) and insight into early motivations for community engagement (e.g., Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Pears, 2008) they fail to capture the complexity of motivations driving consumer engagement in communities for three reasons (e.g., Cova & Pace, 2006). First, these initial investigations are now a decade old and these initial conceptualizations don’t account for the new possibilities of interaction due to recent technological innovations and substantial investments in these communities by their brands.

Second, early investigations were necessarily limited to extreme lead users. Brand communities now have moved into the mainstream and it is common to find as many early and late majority consumers interacting in these communities as lead users. The increased diversity in online brand communities challenges community managers to increase participation rates and necessitate a broader set of marketing tools to reach the diverse types of community members.

Third, no prior study has undertaken a dedicated effort to understand the unique dimensions of engagement for online brand communities. Several studies have examined channels, in general Calder, Malthouse, and Schaedel (2009), brand channels (Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014) and C2C communication (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, &
but very few have examined communities centered on brands in the online domain. As a result, our paper is the first to truly capture the unique engagement dimensions for these communities that must capture motivations tied to the channel, other consumers, and the brand simultaneously. Without considering all these elements, our understanding is incomplete and overly generic. While these broader conceptualizations certainly have a lot of value to the literature, they must be complemented with context-specific investigations that provide actionable insights at a very granular level. This is particularly important from an area of marketing investment as important as online brand communities.

We attempt to close this gap by conducting a comprehensive examination of consumer motivations to participate in a broad variety of brand communities and developing a measure of online brand community engagement following a grounded theory approach. In doing so, this research contributes to the marketing literature by providing a platform for future investigations into how these motivations influence consumer behavior in online brand communities and in the marketplace following interactions in the community. Accordingly, our primary research question is what motivations do consumers have for interacting with an online brand community?

Results of the scale development process and subsequent nomological net testing suggest that online brand community engagement is not unidimensional, but multidimensional. Therefore, extant measures of engagement are too narrow to capture online brand community members’ diverse motivations. Ultimately this research enables both researchers and managers to better understand consumer motivations for participating in brand communities and provides a widely-applicable platform for future research on brand communities. In the following section, we briefly review the evolution of brand communities, current research on brand communities, review the scale development process, and discuss the implications of this research.

2. Scale development and validation procedure

To develop measures for online brand community engagement, we began with a review of the engagement literature (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005; Calder et al., 2009; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Sprott, Czellar, & Spangenberg, 2009) followed by a grounded theory approach to establish baseline dimensions of engagement in online brand communities and then proceeded with a modified scale development processes. Table 2 provides an overview of the entire process, which entailed two qualitative data collections, item generation, expert review, an exploratory data collection, and two validation studies. In the following sections, we provide details on the entire process and criteria used at each stage of the development. (See Table 1.)

2.1. Identification of engagement dimensions

Because there has been limited research into online brand community engagement, we follow a grounded theory approach (Spiggle, 1994) to explore the domain of engagement to develop the scale for online brand community engagement. Specifically, we began the process using a series of qualitative research efforts (focus groups and qualitative surveys) to identify consumer motivations for interacting with brand communities. Consistent with our earlier definition, these motivations served as our primary engagement dimensions. When these dimensions aligned with prior literature, we labeled them accordingly and for dimensions that were unique, we created new labels and
operational definitions that captured the essence of the motivation. Details on the focus groups and the open-ended survey are provided next.

2.1.1. Study 1 — focus groups

Focus group participants were recruited from a large Midwestern university's undergraduate marketing courses. Thirty students volunteered to participate in the focus groups for extra credit. 11 students (6 male and 5 female, median age 21 years old) were identified as active members of online brand communities and included in this phase of the research process. Focus group sessions were conducted based on a questioning route developed specifically for this study (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Following the focus group sessions, the researchers and assistant moderators (two research assistants not aware of the theoretical background) met to discuss the transcripts. The researchers and assistant moderators reviewed the transcripts and identified preliminary themes related to brand community engagement. In order to refine the initial listing of motivational themes, a follow-up qualitative survey was administered.

2.1.2. Study 2 — open-ended surveys

An online panel company was then used to collect a sample of very active (i.e., participate in an online brand community more than 2–3 times a week) online brand community members. Of the 70 completed surveys returned, 44 surveys were screened because they were not very active members of online brand communities (i.e., participate in an online brand community more than 2–3 times a week). In addition, 2 surveys were dropped for data quality concerns (e.g., lack of elaboration on qualitative questions and speed). The remaining 24 responses were analyzed for themes surrounding the motivations. Brand community members have to interact with the brand community (11 male and 13 female, median age 40 years old). Open-ended survey questions based on the focus group questioning route were used to assess the motivations of respondents. The responses were analyzed for themes surrounding brand community members' motivations to interact with the community. Following this analysis, the research team met and reconciled the results of both qualitative research efforts and developed a preliminary listing of 11 dimensions of online brand community engagement. Following Rossiter (2002), tentative construct definitions were created for each dimension. Table 3 provides an overview of the 11 engagement dimensions and operational definitions.
and nonmembers of brand communities). 285 responses were screened because the respondents were not active members of brand communities. This data collection effort resulted in a usable sample of 344 of online brand community members (38% of respondents were male, median age 47 years old and median education 2 year college degree). To analyze the results, we adopted Gerbing and Anderson (1988) updated approach to the Churchill (1979) paradigm that leverages the benefits of structural equation modeling as opposed to item-to-total correlation analysis. In line with similar scale development efforts in marketing (Brocato, Voorhees, & Baker, 2012; Seiders, Voss, Godfrey, & Grewal, 2007), we conceptualize brand community engagement as a second order formative construct making SEM an ideal method to examine the loadings of the reflective dimensions at the first level.

Specifically, we iteratively estimated a series of measurement models where the 11 engagement dimensions were estimated as first order reflective scales. In these models, “bad” items were removed and then the entire model was re-estimated and re-assessed. During this process, items with large standardized residuals were removed as they negatively affected the unidimensionality of each dimension (Gerbing & Anderson, 1988). In order to enhance the rigor of this initial investigation, we include measures for two related variables: expectations for community member behavior (e.g., I think that regular participation is necessary to be an active member of this brand community) and intentions to share information from the community with others (e.g., I encourage my friends and family to participate in the brand community). These variables were included to provide a more rigorous assessment of discriminant validity and ensure that items for the engagement dimensions were strictly measuring engagement and not expectations or outcomes of brand community participation.

Initial overall model fit for the CFA was modest ($\chi^2 = 12,380$, df = 5916; CFI = 0.844; SRMR = 0.075; RMSEA = 0.056). Through a series of inspections and iterative model estimations, we removed a total of 23 items due to large standardized residuals (> 25) (Gerbing & Anderson, 1988, p. 189), lambdas below .707 (lambda’s below .707 indicate that random error determines more variation in the item than what is determined by the latent construct), and significant cross-loadings as detected through an examination of Lagrange Multiplier indices. After deleting these items, a final measurement model was estimated that offered improved fit ($\chi^2 = 7168$, df = 3662; CFI = 0.897; SRMR = 0.054; RMSEA = 0.053).

Moreover, using the results of this final CFA, we assessed validity and reliability based on the recommendations for Fornell and Larcker (1981). The results provided support for convergent validity as each of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct was greater than 0.50. Discriminant validity was also supported as the AVE for each scale exceeded the squared correlation between the construct and all other constructs in the measurement model. Finally, all construct reliabilities for the constructs exceeded 0.70, providing evidence of reliability.

### 2.4. Study 4 — validation and establishment of a short-form scale

#### 2.4.1. Validation of the measurement model

A validation dataset was collected to confirm the measurement model and establish a short-form version of the scale. This dataset was collected through Amazon’s Mechanical Turk service and all respondents were screened to ensure that they were active participants in online brand communities. Of the 376 completed surveys returned, 19 respondents indicated that they were not members of brand communities and were screened immediately from the study. 151 of the remaining responses were screened for speeding through initial survey questions and data quality (e.g., straight-lining, lack of elaboration and glibberish responses to open-ended questions). Two independent raters coded whether or not the remaining respondents were actually members of a brand community (90% agreement on classifying members and nonmembers of brand communities). 45 responses were screened because the respondents were not active members of brand communities. In total, 198 respondents (49% of respondents were male, median age 31 years old, and median education 4 year college degree) provided data suitable for analysis.

Once again, we assessed the scales by iteratively estimating models to identify any items that may be negatively affecting the scale for each dimension by assessing standardized residuals, lambda loadings, and cross-loadings. The initial measurement model provided good fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 4487$, df = 2429; CFI = 0.85; SRMR = 0.07; RMSEA = 0.07). As a result of the final screening 5 items were removed. Following the removal of these items, the measurement model offered good fit ($\chi^2 = 3764$, df = 2089; CFI = 0.87; SRMR = 0.06; RMSEA = 0.06). Moreover, we found evidence for the validity and reliability of each scale based on Fornell and Larcker (1981) criteria.

#### 2.4.2. Development of a short-form scale

Following the final validation of the scale, we had identified 11 dimensions that were measured using 67 items. The original goal of this research was to develop a short-form scale that adequately measured all dimensions in a manner that both future researchers and managers could use in practice. As a result, we undertook one final assessment and revision to the measurement model with the goal of identifying an ideal subset of the best three to four indicators for each dimension that would serve as the final items in the short-form version of this scale. In order to accomplish this, for dimensions with more than four items retained, we selected the four items with the highest lambda loadings and if a construct had four or fewer items remaining, we retained all items. The measurement model for the short form version of the scale had offered excellent fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 1248$, df = 764; CFI = 0.94; SRMR = 0.05; RMSEA = 0.06). Once again, all dimensions

### Table 3

Online brand community engagement dimensions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engagement dimensions</th>
<th>Definitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand influence</td>
<td>The degree to which a community member wants to influence the brand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand passion</td>
<td>The ardent affection a community member has for the brand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting</td>
<td>The extent to which a community member feels that being a member of the brand community connects them to some good thing bigger than themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping</td>
<td>The degree to which a community member wants to help fellow community members by sharing knowledge, experience, or time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like-minded discussion</td>
<td>The extent to which a community member is interested in talking with people similar to themselves about the brand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rewards (hedonic)</td>
<td>The degree to which the community member wants to gain hedonic rewards (e.g., fun, enjoyment, entertainment, friendly environment, and social status) through their participation in the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rewards (utilitarian)</td>
<td>The degree to which the community member wants to gain utilitarian rewards (e.g., monetary rewards, time savings, deals or incentives, merchandise, and prizes) through their participation in the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking assistance</td>
<td>The degree to which a community member wants to receive help from fellow community members who share their knowledge, experience, or time with them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-expression</td>
<td>The degree to which a community member feels that the community provides them with a forum where they can express their true interests and opinions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up-to-date information</td>
<td>The degree to which a community member feels that the brand community helps them to stay informed or keep up-to-date with brand and product related information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validation</td>
<td>A community member’s feeling of the extent to which other community members affirm the importance of their opinions, ideas, and interests.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
exhibited construct reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity based on Fornell and Larcker’s (1981) criteria (AVE’s ranged from 0.82 to 0.89). In Table 4 we provide a complete listing of all items retained for the short-form version of the scale as well as their respective ranges, means, standard deviations, and lambda loadings to assist in the establishment of scale norms.

### Table 4
Scale items, descriptive statistics, and factor loadings for the short form version of the scale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor item</th>
<th>Study 4 — establishing scale</th>
<th>Study 5 — validating scale</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Range</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Brand Influence (Study 4: CR = .87; Study 5: CR = .84)
1. I am motivated to participate in this brand community because I can help improve the brand and its products
2. I like to know that my comments and suggestions can influence the brand and its products
3. Increasing the influence I have on the brand and its products makes me want to participate more in this brand community
4. I hope to improve the brand or product through my participation and expression in this brand community

#### Brand Passion (Study 4: CR = .87; Study 5: CR = .88)
1. I am motivated to participate in this brand community because I am passionate about the brand
2. I participate in this brand community because I care about the brand
3. I would not belong to a brand community if I did not have passion for the brand
4. My passion for this brand's products makes me want to participate in this brand community

#### Connecting (Study 4: CR = .78; Study 5: CR = .82)
1. Increasing the strength of the connection I have with this brand community makes me want to participate more in the community
2. Being part of this brand community makes me feel more connected to the brand
3. Being part of this brand community makes me feel more connected to other consumers of the brand

#### Helping (Study 4: CR = .86; Study 5: CR = .84)
1. I like participating in the brand community because I can use my experience to help other people
2. I like to share my experience and knowledge with others in this brand community to help them be more educated about the brand
3. I really like helping other community members with their questions
4. I feel good when I can help answer other community member’s questions

#### Like-minded Discussion (Study 4: CR = .86; Study 5: CR = .85)
1. I look forward to discussing my opinions about the brand with others who share the same interest as me
2. I enjoy conversing with people similar to myself in this brand community
3. I look to this brand community when I want to discuss a topic with people who have similar interests
4. Having conversations with people in this brand community who share the same views about this brand is important to me

#### Rewards (Hedonic) (Study 4: CR = .87; Study 5: CR = .87)
1. I like participating in this brand community because it is entertaining
2. Having fun is my main reason for participating in this brand community
3. I participate in this brand community because I think it is fun
4. I find participating in this brand community to be very entertaining

#### Rewards (Utilitarian) (Study 4: CR = .82; Study 5: CR = .78)
1. I am motivated to participate in this brand community because I can earn money
2. If it weren’t for the money, I wouldn’t participate in this brand community
3. Receiving more money makes me want to participate more in this brand community

#### Seeking Assistance (Study 4: CR = .88; Study 5: CR = .89)
1. I am motivated to participate in this brand community because I can receive help from other community members
2. I am motivated to participate in this brand community because community members can use their knowledge to help me
3. I like participating in this brand community because it gives me an opportunity to receive help from other community members
4. It is important to me to be able to use this community to find answers to my questions about the brand

#### Self-expression (Study 4: CR = .86; Study 5: CR = .85)
1. I feel that I can freely share my interests in the brand community
2. I would express any opinion or idea I had about this brand in this brand community
3. I can always be myself when interacting with others in this community
4. This community makes it easy for me to express my true beliefs about the brand

#### Up-to-date Information (Study 4: CR = .86; Study 5: CR = .84)
1. This brand community is my critical connection for new and important information about the brand and its products
2. When I want up-to-date information about this brand, I look to this brand community
3. This community keeps me on the leading edge of information about the brand
4. This community is the best way to stay informed about new developments with this brand

#### Validation (Study 4: CR = .85; Study 5: CR = .85)
1. Receiving more affirmation of the value of my comments, makes me want to participate more in the brand community
2. I feel good about myself when other community members share my ideas
3. I appreciate when others agree with the ideas I express in this brand community
4. When others support my ideas and opinions in this brand community, I feel better about myself

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Note: All scales measured on a 0–10 Likert-type scale with anchors 0 = Strongly Disagree and 10 = Strongly Agree. Prior to analysis all values were recoded to a 1–11 range, which is presented in all results tables. CR = Construct Reliability.
2.5. Study 5 — final validation of the short-form scale and nomological validity testing

2.5.1. Validation of the short form scale
A final validation dataset was collected to confirm the measurement model for the short-form version of the scale and assess the predictive validity or nomological net properties of the short-form scale. The data for this study was gathered through a partnership with a consulting firm specializing in the creation and management of online brand communities and eight of their clients. Due to survey length requirements set by the data collection partner, three items were used to measure each dimension of engagement. A link to our survey was posted in each community and community members were offered gift card sweepstakes calibrated to community norms in exchange for their participation in the survey effort. Ultimately, this process resulted in an average response rate of 21% across the eight communities, providing us with 620 usable responses (47% of respondents were male, median age 41 years old, and median education some college).

In this phase of the scale development process, we conducted one final measurement model where all items from the short-form version of the scale were allowed to load on their respective constructs. The measurement model provided good fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 1153$, df = 440; CFI = 0.97; SRMR = 0.06; RMSEA = 0.05). Moreover, all items loaded highly and significantly on their respective constructs and the model results provided evidence of both convergent and discriminant validity based on Fornell and Larcker’s (1981) criteria. Table 5 presents the correlations and scale statistics for the data collected as part of Study 5.

2.5.2. Assessing the nomological net
Once the measurement model was confirmed, we assessed the ability of the 11 dimensions of online brand community engagement to predict intentions to participate in the brand community (Algesheimer et al., 2005). According to regulatory engagement theory, higher levels of engagement should lead to higher value perceptions of the community (Higgins & Scholer, 2009). Therefore, we expect that online brand community engagement should be positively related to participation intentions. At a basic level, all engagement dimensions correlated significantly with participation intentions. To extend this assessment further, we regressed participation intentions on the 11 engagement dimensions and dummy variables developed to reflect community membership for the eight brands.

The independent variables explained 44% of the variance in participation intentions and 8 of the 11 dimensions had a significant impact on the dependent variable. Specifically, Brand Passion, Utilitarian Rewards, and Validation were not drivers of participation intentions in this sample. Complete results of the regression analysis are presented in Table 6. Ultimately, the results suggest that the online brand community engagement dimensions do an excellent job predicting consumer motivations for participating in online brand communities.

2.6. Study 6 — test–retest reliability assessment
In the final study, we assess the test–retest reliability of the scales. Specifically, a few weeks after the original survey administered in Study 5, 651 community members were re-contacted and asked to complete a brief follow-up survey. This survey included single items for each dimension of engagement measured in Study 5. In total, 160 respondents completed the survey for a 25% response rate. To assess test–retest reliability, we conducted a number of tests. Specifically, we conducted paired sample t-tests to assess changes in means across time as well as correlations and Cronbach’s alpha estimates for each dimension. The results of the paired t-tests revealed relative stability in community member motivations over time. Specifically, with the exception of Brand Influence, Seeking Assistance, Self-Expression, and Up-to-date Information all other engagement dimensions did not significantly differ across time periods. Moreover, the average test–retest correlation across all 11 dimensions was .60. Estimates for Cronbach’s alpha calculated using scores from each time period ranged from .65 (Validation) to .84 (Helping) with an average value of .74 across all dimensions. Taken together, the results suggest that engagement is relatively stable over time.

3. Discussion
There is some productive overlap between our study and extant literature, but the vast majority of our factors are completely distinct and advance these early discussions. First, we found similarities with the broader conceptualizations of motivations to interact with an online brand community. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) and Nambisan and Baron (2007) found that there are different types of engagement that propel people to interact with an online community. Broadly, these factors are social status enhancement, social interaction, learning more about using the product and having fun. Research in this stream places an overly strong emphasis on the uses and gratification paradigm which viewed online communities from a one-way (i.e., marketer to consumer) point of view. These studies offered important insight into the motivations of community members as the internet evolved from an information storage and retrieval system to an interactive environment.

Our research is the first dedicated effort to develop a multi-dimensional measure of online brand community engagement and the first substantial investigation into online brand community engagement since significant advances in online communities such as the launch of Facebook, YouTube, and a litany of other Internet-based technologies and applications revolutionized online brand communities. Across six studies, we developed and validated a short-form scale for online brand community engagement across a variety of communities and...
contexts. Moreover, in the fifth study, we demonstrated that these engagement dimensions predict intentions to participate in a brand community. Finally, in Study 6, the results reveal that these motivations are relatively stable over time.

3.1. Theoretical implications

Our findings extend initial studies on online brand community engagement (e.g., Algesheimer et al., 2005; Dholakia et al., 2004; Madupu, 2006) by providing an updated and comprehensive investigation into engagement in online brand communities. Without an updated examination into the motivations of online brand community users, marketing researchers must rely on dated operationalizations that were vetted by lead users and may no longer apply to the current landscape. Many of the prominent studies into brand communities to date have focused on relatively few highly visible and very unique communities (e.g., Harley Owners Group). As brand communities are being created around an increasing variety of brands and continue to migrate online, a more comprehensive investigation of online brand communities is needed to account for the technological leaps that have occurred as well as the shifts in the membership in online brand communities. For example, utilitarian rewards were primarily viewed as time savings or giving and receiving information in the past (e.g., Dholakia et al., 2004), with the evolution of the internet from an informational to a transactional medium, utilitarian rewards also include monetary rewards, deals or incentives, merchandise, and prizes. The short form scales developed in this manuscript provide marketing researchers with a versatile set of motivations that are suitable for future investigation.

Another important contribution of this study is to delineate the domain of engagement. It is important to note that the engagement dimensions developed here represent a comprehensive set of motivations across a wide range of online brand communities and consumers. Prior research exploring few communities to varying levels of depth has failed to capture the domain of engagement that we were able to in this study.

Finally, the provision of a complete battery of engagement dimensions that have been validated across a range of brand communities and consumers allows marketing researchers to extend the work on offline brand communities to the online realm. This is an important advancement as given the tremendous cost savings and scalability firms are quickly shifting their focus and investments to harvesting these online brand communities. By better understanding the motivations for using online communities, better parallels can be drawn to prior studies on brand communities, customer to customer interactions, and brand attachment that were derived in offline contexts.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variables</th>
<th>β</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand influence</td>
<td>0.24***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand passion</td>
<td>−0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting</td>
<td>0.13***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping</td>
<td>0.14***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like-minded discussion</td>
<td>0.09***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rewards (hedonic)</td>
<td>0.20***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rewards (utilitarian)</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking assistance</td>
<td>−0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-expression</td>
<td>0.13***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up-to-date information</td>
<td>−0.10***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validation</td>
<td>−0.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:
* p < .10.
** p < .05.
*** p < .01.

R² = 0.44

3.2. Managerial implications

The online brand community engagement scale is a reliable and valid tool for measuring consumer motivations for interacting with an online brand community. Our results reveal that the engagement dimensions can explain up to 44% of the variance in participation intentions. However, the directionality of the effects reveals a more complex story. Specifically, two of the engagement dimensions (Seeking Assistance and Up-to-Date Information) had significant, negative effects on participation. Ultimately, it appears that consumers primarily motivated by a need for information are less inclined to participate, suggesting that they may only log in to answer a question. This suggests that community managers may need to find new ways to engage their information seekers to increase their connections with the brand if they want to draw them into becoming more active community members. In the following three sections, we will highlight three important potential applications of the engagement scale.

3.2.1. Profiling of community members

The scales introduced in this research would allow firms to profile their current and potential community members. Armed with an improved understanding of what compels consumers to actions within their specific community, they could develop strategic marketing actions to best engage their community base. For example, a community that is comprised of members primarily motivated by influencing the brand should place an emphasis on providing feedback on how suggestions from the community are shaping the trajectory for the brand. Alternatively, if members are driven by hedonic rewards, the community should offer members special recognition and access to exclusive events.

Moreover, consumers could be pre-screened and recruited for community interaction based on their motivational profiles. For example, if a firm sought to develop a sub-group within their community focused on idea generation for new products, they could productively isolate consumers who are driven by a need for up-to-date information and brand influence and likely experience stronger involvement, improved idea generation, and better results overall than if they just pulled community members or their customers at random.

3.2.2. Targeted communication efforts

As we started this project, it was clear that the landscape for online brand communities had changed drastically since the initial investigations into this phenomenon, but the results of our research revealed an even more complex set of engagement dimensions than we had anticipated. As communities have evolved so has the membership base. Communities are no longer comprised of lead users who can be activated exclusively by product information and access to new products. With a more heterogeneous audience with a range of motivations, firms must better understand the motivational composition of their communities before launching communication efforts within the community (e.g., Kozinets, de Valck, Wojnicki, & Wilner, 2010). Specifically, it appears prudent for community manager to micro-segment their community members or their customers at random.

3.2.3. Lead user campaigns

Finally, while members of brand communities are certainly more heterogeneous than the initial forums launched in the late 1990s, there are still many lead users who actively participate in more mainstream communities. The online brand community engagement scale introduced in this research can help managers identify these individuals within their community and activate them for specialized marketing efforts that rely on lead users as seeds for their messages (e.g., Kozinets...
et al., 2010). For example, online campaigns like the Fiesta Movement launched by Ford required significant investments in recruiting and screening agents to participate in this program. Leveraging the measures introduced in this research, firms like Ford could better identify their own community members who are passionate about the brand, want to help others understand the brand, want to connect with something bigger than themselves, and ultimately shape the future of the brand to immediately activate them as part of this movement. In doing so, they would experience significant cost savings associated with independent recruiting efforts and would likely experience less selection errors as brand community members have established histories with brand and the community as opposed to individuals recruited “off the street.”

3.3. Limitations and future research

This research makes a substantial departure from the dominant paradigm of small sample case analysis pervasive in the brand community research by sampling from as large and broad a pool of online brand community members as possible. In capturing such a broad view of online brand community members caution needs to be used when attempting to apply the norms from brand community engagement scales to individual online brand communities. Similar to Zaglia (2013), future research should work to categorize the diverse subtypes of brand communities (e.g., research oriented online brand communities, fan sponsored online brand communities) to better understand how these motivational profiles are across different brands and types of communities. Moreover, researchers could examine situations in which certain motivations dominate participation intentions and if certain engagement dimensions are stronger under different situational circumstances. In addition, future research should explore the mechanisms through which online brand community engagement affects loyalty to the brand outside of the community and if marketing actions that are calibrated based on brand community engagement can provide better results than incongruent tactics.

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References


