

Efficacy of social media platforms in building brand communities: Strategic insights

Pranab Karmakar

Vinod Gupta School of Management, Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur, West Bengal,
India

*Correspondence: pranabkarmakar728@gmail.com

Abstract

This study explores how different types of social media platforms contribute to the formation and dynamics of brand communities, using McDonald's as a focal brand with a global presence. Employing an eight-month netnographic approach that comprised both participant and non-participant observation, followed by content analysis of the brand's Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) pages, the research investigates how platform-specific features influence community development. The findings indicate that social media can effectively foster brand communities by displaying distinctive characteristics, including community markers, commercial orientation, brand-related emotion, and social identity. These traits varied notably between platforms, prompting an exploration of their underlying causes based on extant literature. The study offers practical implications for brand managers, highlighting how brand communities can be developed without reliance on proprietary digital platforms. It provides strategic guidance for selecting appropriate social media types aligned with brand goals. This research contributes original insights to the fields of brand community and social media strategy by critically examining the interplay between platform characteristics and brand engagement. By establishing links between social media elements and brand community features, the study lays the groundwork for future investigations into the integrated dynamics of brand-driven social interaction in digital environments.

Keywords: Brand, Marketing, Social Media, Netnography, Content Analysis

JEL Classification: M30, M31, M39

1. Introduction

General Motors invested in Facebook as part of its digital advertising strategy, seeking to leverage the platform's extensive reach and social connectivity to influence consumer engagement and purchase behavior. Despite Facebook's widespread popularity and interactive features, the company reported that its advertising efforts generated limited impact on consumer decision-making and did not translate into meaningful engagement outcomes (Firstpost, 2012). A key reason was the misalignment between Facebook's primarily social, low-involvement usage context and the high-involvement nature of automobile purchase decisions. This case illustrates a recurring managerial challenge, i.e., the effectiveness of brand community building depends not only on platform reach or technological novelty, but also on the suitability of the social media type for fostering brand-related social bonds and collective identity.

Community-based engagement has been identified as one of the most significant shifts shaping brand-consumer relationships over the past century (Hill et al., 2018). Accordingly, the concept of "community" has gained prominence across marketing and consumer research (De Loizaga, 2020). A community is commonly characterized by locality, social interaction, and relational bonds (Munasib & Roy, 2017). Locality reflects how relationships become embedded within real or imagined spaces (Nettleingham, 2018), social interaction captures the communicative exchanges among members (Apriani et al., 2023), and bonds generate a sense of belonging and emotional attachment (Beckett et al., 2022). Digital technologies have reconfigured these elements by enabling consumers to mobilize social resources through online networks, giving rise to virtual communities that increasingly shape brand meaning and value creation (Majeed, 2017).

Within this context, social media has become a central mechanism through which firms cultivate online brand communities. Brand communities are defined as specialized, non-geographically bound collectives of consumers who share admiration for a brand and develop social relationships around it (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009). Prior research demonstrates that participation in brand communities strengthens brand authenticity perceptions, trust, loyalty, and advocacy, ultimately enhancing brand equity and relationship marketing performance (Kumar, 2022; Lou et al., 2021; Chavadi et al., 2023). Importantly, even consumers who are not active users of a brand can have their attitudes and brand relationships shaped through community interactions (Kumar & Nayak, 2019).

Despite the recognized strategic importance of social media brand communities, extant research has largely treated social media as a homogeneous environment. In practice, platforms differ markedly in architecture, interaction norms, media capability, and temporal structure, encompassing social networking sites (e.g., Facebook), microblogging platforms (e.g., X), and content communities (e.g., YouTube) (Khatri, 2021). However, the dominant focus of prior brand community research has been on social networking sites, particularly Facebook, while brand communities on microblogging platforms remain comparatively underexamined (Chakraborty &

Biswal, 2023). Scholars have explicitly called for research that examines brand communities across different social media types rather than assuming platform neutrality (Zanini et al., 2019). Emerging evidence suggests that variations in media capability, usage intensity, and interaction design influence the creation and growth of brand communities (Clark et al., 2017; Chang et al., 2020; Thongmak, 2022).

Despite these developments, there is limited empirical understanding of how different social media types, specifically social networking versus microblogging platforms, differentially enable brand community formation and shape core brand community characteristics. In particular, little is known about whether and how community markers, social identity, brand emotion, and commercial orientations manifest differently across platform types, and what factors may explain such variation. This gap is especially salient for brand managers who must allocate resources across platforms without clear guidance on their relative capacity to support community-based brand relationships.

To address this gap, the present study examines brand communities embedded within two distinct social media types, namely social networking and microblogging platforms. Specifically, the study (i) evaluates the capability of different social media types to support brand community formation, (ii) compares the expression and strength of brand community characteristics across platforms, and (iii) explores plausible explanations for observed heterogeneity, advancing platform-contingent propositions. Methodologically, the study adopts a netnographic research design complemented by systematic content analysis, enabling an in-depth examination of naturally occurring brand community interactions.

This study contributes to the brand community and digital branding literature by offering a comparative, platform-sensitive perspective on social media brand communities. By demonstrating that brand community characteristics vary in strength and expression across social networking and microblogging contexts, the study challenges implicit assumptions that brand communities function similarly across platforms. In doing so, it extends brand community theory by incorporating platform architecture and interaction norms as critical contextual determinants. From a managerial standpoint, the findings provide actionable insights for selecting and managing social media platforms in alignment with brand community objectives, rather than relying on platform popularity alone.

Accordingly, the study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1. What are the capabilities of various social media types toward building a brand community?

RQ2. How do brand communities differ in their characteristics when created using various social media types?

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. The next section reviews the relevant literature, followed by the research methodology. Subsequently, the data collection procedure, analysis, and results are presented. The paper concludes with a discussion of theoretical and managerial

implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Online Brand Community

Brand communities are traditionally defined as “specialized, non-geographically bound communities, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand” (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). This foundational definition has been widely adopted and remains central to brand community scholarship because it articulates how collective identity and shared meaning emerge around brands. Building on this work, subsequent research has demonstrated that brand communities represent dynamic social systems through which value is co-created via interaction, engagement, and shared practices (Habibi, 2015).

The seminal framework proposed by Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) identifies three core *community markers*, namely *consciousness of kind*, *shared rituals and traditions*, and *moral responsibility*, which together explain how social bonds and collective identity are sustained within brand communities. While these markers were originally conceptualized in offline or early online environments, recent research confirms their continued relevance in digitally mediated brand communities, albeit with platform-contingent expressions (Habibi et al., 2014 ; Sethi et al., 2023).

Consciousness of kind, the most fundamental marker, refers to members’ awareness of shared affiliation and perceived distinction from non-members (Gusfield, 1978; Bender, 1978). In brand communities, this sense of “we-ness” reflects how individuals cognitively categorize themselves as part of a collective centered on a brand (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). Recent digital brand community research extends this idea by showing that consciousness of kind is increasingly enacted through interactional cues such as shared language, collective humor, public alignment with brand values, and visible engagement metrics (Watts & Halkovic, 2022). In social media environments, platform design can amplify or constrain such expressions, influencing the salience of collective identity.

The second marker, *shared rituals and traditions*, encompasses practices that preserve a community’s history, culture, and meaning system (Yang et al., 2022). Traditions are defined as “social practices which seek to celebrate and inculcate certain behavioral norms and values” (Marshall & Barthel, 2015). In contemporary digital brand communities, rituals often take the form of recurring storytelling, nostalgic brand references, meme circulation, and collective responses to brand-related events (Casaló et al., 2008). Platform-specific interaction structures influence how brand community practices are enacted and diffused in digital environments, underscoring the role of platform design and digital practices in shaping community expression (Veloutsou & Liao, 2022).

The third marker, *moral responsibility*, reflects a sense of obligation toward the community and its members, particularly through helping behaviors, guidance, and the integration of newcomers

(Casaló et al., 2008). In social media brand communities, moral responsibility is increasingly enacted through peer-to-peer assistance, public defense of the brand, and community-driven moderation of norms (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001).

Beyond community markers, perceived membership in brand communities is shaped by *social identity*, defined as “the part of the individuals’ self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Brewer & Pickett, 2014). Social identity comprises cognitive, evaluative, and affective components (Ellemers et al., 1999). The cognitive component relates to self-categorization and awareness of membership (Bagozzi et al., 2007), the evaluative component reflects group-based self-esteem, and the affective component captures emotional attachment to the group (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000).

Two additional features, namely brand emotion and commercial characteristics, further differentiate brand communities from non-commercial communities (Albert et al., 2008). Brand emotion reflects affective attachment and emotional expression toward the brand, while commercial characteristics anchor community interaction in consumption-related discourse. Contemporary research shows that emotional expression and commercial talk are not peripheral but integral to engagement and value co-creation in social media brand communities (Simmons & Durkin, 2023).

Synthesizing classic and contemporary perspectives, brand communities can be understood as socially constructed systems in which *community markers* represent observable collective practices, *social identity* captures underlying psychological attachment, and *brand emotion* and *commercial characteristics* embed these processes within market relationships. In digitally mediated environments, these elements do not operate independently; rather, their expression and intensity are shaped by platform-specific interaction structures and affordances. This perspective highlights the importance of examining how different social media platforms condition the emergence and strength of brand community characteristics.

2.2 Social media

“Social media” is “a group of internet based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and it allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The utilization of social media has enabled users to transcend geographical barriers and interact within proliferating virtual communities (Helal et al., 2018). By creating a profile, individuals can create, edit, and share content across multiple platform types, including forums, blogs, photo-sharing sites, message applications, and social networking sites (Chugh & Ruhi, 2019).

Social media is commonly characterized by interaction and participation (Shabur & Siddiki, 2024). Participation can take the form of user-to-user and user-to-content interaction, such as

commenting, sharing, liking, disliking, and related engagement behaviors (Tenenboim, 2022). Importantly, social media platforms have evolved into critical brand stakeholders, acting as gatekeepers in an increasingly unbalanced system between providers, marketers, and consumers (Cooper et al., 2023). However, social media is not a single uniform environment. Different platforms (e.g., Facebook, X, Instagram) have distinct architectures, cultures, and norms that shape how users interact and why they participate (Boulianne et al., 2024; Pelletier et al., 2020).

Prior research suggests that users' motivations and needs differ by platform type. Social media sites fulfill user needs in different ways (Alhabash et al., 2024). For instance, people may prefer Facebook over X to fulfill social needs and strengthen close relationships (Lee & Cho, 2011; Pelletier et al., 2020), whereas Instagram combines features of both and is often used for social interaction, individual follow-up, and self-expression (Pelletier et al., 2020). In X, brand-related posts include opinion expression, information seeking, and information provision, with substantial brand-related content that may still not be primarily brand focused (Jansen et al., 2009). X also facilitates real-time exchange of specialized information and stakeholder interaction (Cripps et al., 2020). In contrast, followers on Facebook brand pages are often interested in receiving replies and comments from brand users rather than only corporate messaging (Logan, 2014).

Differences also emerge in user demographics and communication tendencies across platforms. X is reported to be used more by men and is designed to convey more rational messages (Laor, 2022a, 2022b), whereas women use Facebook more frequently (Laor, 2022a). Facebook has also been discussed as capable of reinforcing stereotypical gendered images (Hayat et al., 2017). Hou and Shiau (2019) note migration of younger users toward visually oriented platforms such as Instagram, while educational differences also shape posting behavior, with less educated users reportedly sharing media more frequently (Laor, 2022a). These findings collectively indicate that social media platforms differ in interaction norms, participation patterns, and user composition. Therefore, platforms should be understood as distinct interaction contexts that can differentially shape social relationships, identity expression, and engagement behaviors—conditions that are central for the emergence and strength of brand communities.

2.3 Social Media Brand Community

A social media brand community refers to a specialized, non-geographically bound group of individuals who share a common interest in a brand and engage with it primarily through social media platforms (Heydari & Laroche, 2017). As per Luo et al. (2015), the combination of brand community and social media provides a distinctive platform for consumers who share common interests about brands, differentiating it from traditional brand communities. Social media brand communities are also viewed as potential marketplaces for brands (Meek et al., 2019) because they support multilingual and multi-topic discussion environments that facilitate information flow.

Even when brand communities are formed ostensibly for information sharing rather than commercial reasons, they can influence consumer opinions and purchase decisions (Kamboj, 2019;

Algesheimer et al., 2005). Unlike traditional media, which restricts content consumption to members, social media brand communities enable members to create and circulate content that shapes community characteristics and influences both active users and passive participants (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002). Accordingly, firms increasingly incorporate social media into brand marketing strategies, and social media brand communities have become a vibrant research domain (Cheah et al., 2024).

Importantly, members of social media brand communities make two conscious decisions: joining the social network and then participating in the embedded brand community. This means that the active engagement of customers is central to community success (Shen et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2024). Consumers are more inclined to join a social media brand community when the platform is personally significant to them (Clark et al., 2017). This implies that each social media type may not create an equal level of engagement or community strength because platforms differ in interaction norms, participation patterns, and user composition.

Synthesizing the above literature, social media brand communities can be understood as brand communities whose community markers and social identity processes unfold within platform-specific interaction contexts. Platform differences are therefore expected to influence (i) how strongly community markers are expressed (e.g., shared stories, we-ness, member assistance), (ii) how social identity components manifest (e.g., self-categorization and group-based self-esteem), and (iii) how brand emotion and commercial characteristics surface in community discourse (Albert et al., 2008). As a result, variation in platform type is expected to translate into systematic differences in consumer engagement and the strength of brand community characteristics.

3. Theoretical Background

3.1 Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory explains how individuals derive part of their self-concept from their membership in social groups and the value and emotional significance attached to that membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Ellemers et al., 1999). Social identity comprises cognitive awareness of group membership, evaluative judgments regarding the group, and affective attachment to the collective. When individuals identify strongly with a group, they are more likely to internalize group norms, engage in collective practices, and exhibit commitment toward fellow members (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2007).

In the context of brand communities, social identity manifests through shared identification with the brand, recognition from other members, and emotional investment in community-related interactions (Algesheimer et al., 2005; Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2007). Digitally mediated brand communities facilitate these identity processes through visible interaction cues, shared language, collective storytelling, and peer validation (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Kozinets, 2010; Habibi et al., 2014). Prior research further indicates that stronger social identity is associated with deeper

community embeddedness, sustained participation, and greater expression of community markers such as consciousness of kind and moral responsibility (Algesheimer et al., 2005; Brodie et al., 2013; Casaló et al., 2008). However, the extent to which social identity is reinforced varies across platforms. Social media environments differ in their ability to support prolonged interaction, mutual recognition, and emotional exchange, all of which are central to identity formation (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2007; Habibi et al., 2014). Accordingly, differences in brand community strength across platforms can be understood as differences in the salience and reinforcement of social identity mechanisms, rather than merely variations in engagement volume (Brodie et al., 2013).

3.2 Platform Affordance Theory

Platform Affordance Theory emphasizes that social media platforms are socio-technical systems whose design features enable and constrain particular forms of user behavior (Gibson, 2014; Treem & Leonardi, 2013). Affordances such as interaction persistence, visibility, comment threading, reposting mechanisms, character limits, and interaction tempo shape how users communicate, participate, and form relationships online, giving rise to platform-specific interaction norms and participation expectations (Kietzmann et al., 2011; Treem & Leonardi, 2013). Within social media brand communities, platform affordances influence not only how frequently users engage but also the depth and relational quality of those interactions (Brodie et al., 2013; Habibi et al., 2014). Platforms that support extended discussions, persistent visibility of interactions, and reciprocal communication may facilitate richer social exchange and stronger community embeddedness, whereas platforms optimized for rapid, concise interactions may encourage higher engagement intensity while limiting opportunities for sustained identity reinforcement (Treem & Leonardi, 2013; Kietzmann et al., 2011). Because brand communities are embedded within these platform environments, their formation and expression are partly conditioned by the affordances of the host platform. As a result, differences in brand community characteristics across platforms reflect not only brand-related dynamics but also the broader engagement ecology and interaction structures enabled by platform design.

4. Research Methodology

Due to paucity of time and resources, and keeping in mind the voluminous data that is available, two types of social media, which are social networking and microblogging sites were investigated. The netnographic research approach followed by content analysis was used to address the research questions and the objectives of the study. These tools were chosen as they are well suited to the qualitative approach ideal to investigate the brand community characteristics across various social media types.

Netnography is ethnography for the Internet, and is the best method to conduct research in virtual communities (Kozinets, 2002; Cova & Pace, 2006). It allows access to “spontaneous consumer talk that is more natural and more real; heartfelt data that is more vivid and textured” (Puri, 2007).

Content analysis complements netnography by enabling the systematic comparison of communication content across contexts (Kolbe & Burnett, 1991), making it suitable for identifying and comparing brand community characteristics across platforms with different interaction structures.

4.1 Sample

Being one of the oldest and most widely used social networking sites of the current decade (Brailovskaia & Bierhoff, 2018), Facebook was selected as the representative social networking platform. Facebook supports brand communities primarily through brand-created fan pages and user-created groups. Given the study's focus on firm-managed brand communities, Facebook fan pages created by brands were considered. Consistent with prior research, brand fan pages are widely used by firms to engage consumers, and approximately 85% of Fortune 500 companies maintain official Facebook fan pages (Umassd, 2017).

X was selected as the representative microblogging platform because of its prominence as a real-time information-sharing network and its extensive use by brands to communicate with stakeholders (Jansen et al., 2009; Tankovska, 2021). Although Facebook and X differ in affordances and interaction norms, both platforms enable sustained brand–consumer interaction through publicly visible brand-managed spaces, making them suitable for comparative analysis of embedded brand communities.

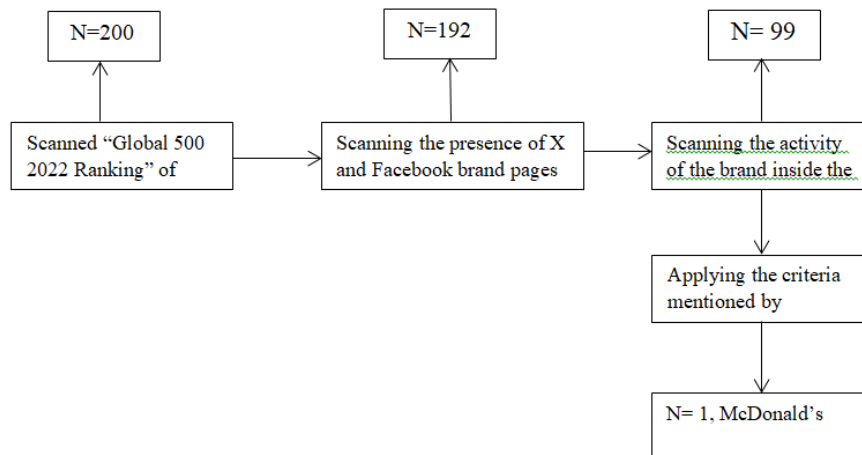
To identify suitable brand communities, the authors initially scanned the top 200 brands listed in the *Global 500 (2022)* ranking. Official Facebook fan pages and X brand accounts existed for all brands except one (“Chanel”). To ensure analytical richness and sustained interaction, brand communities with fewer than 50,000 followers on either platform were excluded. After applying this criterion, seven brands were removed from the initial pool.

Although multiple brand communities met the selection criteria, the study deliberately focused on a single brand (McDonald's) to allow for in-depth, contextually grounded comparison across platforms while controlling for brand-specific factors such as brand heritage, category effects, and brand meaning. This approach is consistent with netnographic research, which privileges immersion, interpretive depth, and analytic generalization over statistical representativeness (Kozinets, 2002, 2010). McDonald's was selected because it exhibits exceptionally high levels of consumer interaction on both Facebook and X, ensuring comparability across platforms and providing a rich empirical setting to examine how platform characteristics shape brand community expression.

Following Kozinets' (2002) criteria, the selected communities were evaluated based on relevance to the research questions, activity level, and data richness. Initial screening indicated that the McDonald's Facebook fan page and the McDonald's X account were the most suitable cases. At

the time of data collection, the McDonald's Facebook fan page had approximately 81.8 million followers, while the McDonald's X account had approximately 4.6 million followers.

Figure 1. Flow diagram for the selection of brand community



4.2 Data Collection

Data were collected in accordance with the netnographic procedures outlined by Kozinets (2010), including prolonged observation, familiarity with the brand, and active engagement with the community environment. Two types of data were collected:

(i) scraped data comprising computer-mediated communications (Facebook comments and X replies), and (ii) observational data derived from the authors' immersion in the community, focusing on interaction patterns, norms, and meaning construction. A total of 33 matched brand posts (discussion threads), where the same McDonald's posts were published on both Facebook and X, were collected over the eight-month period (May 2023 to December 2023). Thread selection was guided by interaction intensity and relevance, with all selected threads generating between 1,500 and 12,000 comments or replies. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was reached, defined as the point at which additional threads no longer yielded new codes related to brand community characteristics, social identity expressions, or interaction patterns (Saunders et al., 2018). Saturation was indicated by codebook stabilization, as no new codes emerged during the final set of discussion threads and later threads only reinforced previously identified categories (Hennink et al., 2017).

Ethical considerations were strictly followed. The purpose of the researchers' presence was disclosed, and permission to scrape comments was obtained from page administrators, despite the

public nature of Facebook comments and X replies. Participants were informed that the data would be used solely for academic purposes and deleted after completion of the study.

In addition to the matched discussion threads, a comprehensive platform-level dataset was compiled consisting of all McDonald's brand posts published during the same eight-month period (May–December 2023). This resulted in 89 Facebook posts and 109 X posts, along with their associated likes, comments/replies, and shares/reposts. This second dataset was collected to enable a broader comparison of overall consumer engagement and content characteristics across platforms and included both the matched posts and additional posts beyond the matched subset.

4.3 Data Analysis

To contextualize the data, and to expedite coding and content analysis, the qualitative data analysis tool MAXQDA; VERBI GmbH, Berlin, Germany was used. The deductive coding approach with predefined codes based on the brand community characteristics categories mentioned by Muniz & O'Guinn (2001) were applied (See Table 1). Categories, such as community markers (Consciousness of kind, Rituals and tradition, Moral responsibility), brand emotions, and commercial characteristics acted as determinants of the presence of brand community on both the platforms. Moreover, categories on the different components of social identity that is (i) self-categorization, which is related to cognitive component; and (ii) group self-esteem, which is related to evaluative component (Ellemers et al., 1999), allowed for the identification of the presence of social identity and thereby perceived membership in both the groups.

Two complementary datasets were analyzed. The first consisted of 33 matched brand posts, where the same McDonald's post was published on both Facebook and X and each post generated a corresponding discussion thread of comments and replies on each platform. These comment threads were the basis for coding brand community characteristics, and social identity, which were aggregated at the post (thread) level for cross-platform comparison. The second dataset comprised all posts published by McDonald's during the eight-month period (May–December 2023), including 89 Facebook posts and 109 X posts. This full-platform dataset was used to examine overall consumer engagement, as well as the effects of post form (text, image, video) and post nature (rational vs emotional).

Each comment within the 33 matched discussion threads was coded using a binary coding scheme, in which 1 indicated the presence of a specific brand community characteristic and 0 indicated its absence. For the matched-thread dataset, the number of comments exhibiting each coded characteristic was aggregated for each thread. These aggregated comment counts per thread served as quantitative indicators of community markers, social identity, brand emotion, and commercial character, allowing computation of means and standard deviations for statistical comparison between Facebook and X.

For the full-platform dataset, consumer engagement was operationalized using likes, comments/replies, and shares/reposts following the Unmetric (2016) engagement formula ($\text{Interactions} \times 10000 / \text{Fan}^{0.8}$) used in previous study by Jayasingh (2019). In addition, all brand posts were classified by post form (text, image, video) and by post nature. Drawing on established content strategy frameworks, posts were coded as rational (informational and remunerative content) or emotional (entertaining and relational content) following the coding sheet of the study by Dolan et al. (2019) (See Table 2).

Two independent coders coded all data simultaneously. In content analysis, the inter-coder agreement ratio is widely employed to assess the degree to which independent judges arrive at identical coding decisions when evaluating message characteristics (Lombard et al., 2002). To evaluate the reliability of the coding process, the agreement ratio was calculated using the following formula $R = A/T$ where R represents the agreement ratio, A denotes the total number of units on which the two coders agreed, and T refers to the total number of coded units. The overall reliability reached 90%, exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 80% (Lombard et al., 2002). Furthermore, Cohen's kappa coefficient was computed to account for the possibility of agreement occurring by chance. The obtained kappa value of 0.87 demonstrates a strong level of intercoder reliability, reflecting substantial agreement between the coders (Landis & Koch, 1977). Following multiple rounds of coding, iterative readings, and discussions between the two coders, certain interpretations and coding decisions were refined and modified.

Because all dependent variables (e.g., number of comments per category per thread, likes, replies, and shares) were count variables, their distributions showed high skewness and kurtosis and did not meet normality assumptions. To address this, a logarithmic transformation $\ln(x+1)$ was applied prior to t-tests and ANOVA, a standard approach for non-normal social media count data.

To manage researcher reflexivity and influence, coding decisions were anchored strictly in theoretically defined constructs and observable interactional cues. Regular coder discussions and iterative readings were used to minimize subjective interpretation. Additionally, limited member checks were conducted by sharing selected interpretations with community participants via chat, providing confirmatory feedback and enhancing interpretive credibility. Although Facebook fan pages and X brand accounts differ in affordances (e.g., comment threading, character limits, interaction tempo), they were treated as comparable analytical units because both represent official, brand-managed community spaces that enable recurring brand-related interaction among consumers. The comparative focus of the study lies not in assuming functional equivalence, but in examining how these differing affordances shape the strength and expression of brand community characteristics across platforms.

Table 1. Coding scheme of comments related to brand community characteristics

Category	Operationalization
Consciousness of kind	Presence of ‘we’ inside the comments.
Legitimacy	Differentiate between true members and those are not.
Oppositional brand loyalty	Oppositions to competing brand
Brand history	Inculcation of History
Brand stories	Experience discussion about product placement, advertisement and use for special occasions.
Moral Responsibilities	Helping others
Self-Categorization	Presence of ‘we’ inside the comments.
Group Self-esteem	Receiving recognition from peers
Brand Emotion	Emotional expression regarding brand

Commercial Character Discussion about price, discount, offer.

Table 2. Coding Scheme of Posts Related to Nature

Nature	Variables	Definition
Rational	Informational content	Informational content is extent to which content provides useful information
	Remunerative content	Content provides monetary or incentive reward
Emotional	Entertaining content	Content is fun and entertaining to media users
	Relational content	Content meets the consumer's need for integration, social interaction and desire for social benefits

5. Results

5.1 Embedded brand community on Facebook

To address the first research question, based on the brand community characteristics, all the three community markers were found to be present on the Facebook McDonald's fan page (See Table 3). Members of the fan page frequently used the terms like "we" and "us," which are indicative of the sense of *belonging* to the community, and the presence of the cognitive component of social identity (Ellemers *et al.*, 1999). For example, one of the members said "McDonald's listen to the people!!! Bring back the STEAK EGG AND CHEESE!!! We promise you will sell out of it sooo fast!!!" The usage of the term "we," is indicative that the members were considering themselves to belong to a community. Also, the statement reveals that the person is aware of the other members' choices as well, which is again indicative of belonging to a community. This is also demonstrative of the member's cognitive ability of *self-categorization*. In another example, one of the members stated, "Give us what we really want. THE SNACK WRAP". The comment is again illustrative of the fact that the person is considering himself to be a part of the community, and the appeal is being issued on the behalf of the community, since he appears to be well aware of the preferences of other members. This leads to a sense of belonging and is reflective of the cognitive component of social identity, which is self-categorization.

Another component of *consciousness* of kind is *legitimacy*, which is found in the discussions in the group. For example, in one of the comments, a member says: "For those who don't like them,

to each their own but for those that do love them like me, high fives.” In this comment, the member is seen, trying to differentiate between the members in the community, as those who are true lovers of the brand, and those are not. Similarly, in another instance, one of the members states, “You are exactly the kind of soldier we need in the fight!”. Here, the member is trying to demarcate between members who are truly committed in the group and those who are not.

Finally, *oppositional brand loyalty* is another component of consciousness of kind expressed by members in several situations, mainly as the classical opposition between Wendy’s and KFC. In this context one of the members stated, “One day, I ordered a Happy Meal at KFC and I don’t remember how to call a Happy Meal set at KFC.” Similarly, in another context, one of the members opposed to Wendy’s stated, “I regret cheating on you with Wendy’s yesterday. Their chicken sandwich was amateur. I had to eat a burger with a piece of hard chicken, 1 piece of lettuce, and a slab of mayo.”

Second, *rituals and traditions*, which are components of community markers were found to be present in the community, and brand-related story discussions were widespread. In this context, one of the members narrated a story, “when I was almost forced to get one a few days ago. Story: Nearly every Saturday night we order through the McApp a 6 piece nugget MEAL (medium fries, medium drink) for my son..... When I got to the register to order, and stated 6 piece nugget meal, medium, the manager informed me they did not have... item..... It would be nice if the management of the location was aware of the choices offered there through the McApp..... Oh and I stepped back from the counter, ordered the 6 piece meal on the app FOR PICKUP, and he himself handed the order to me”. Similarly, in another example one of the members narrated; “I’m in my forties and let me tell you this is one of my favorite sandwiches left at McDonald’s. As far as I can remember this sandwich comes out seasonal.....It’s either the Big Mac, quarter pounder, fish sandwich (horrible), chicken nuggets and a type of a chicken sandwich..... Long ago you had the big and tasty that was a great sandwich but disappeared..... It may be a sloppy sandwich but it sure is good.” In other words, recalling the history of the brand was found to be very common in the group. In this context one of the members stated, “I was just remembering when I was little and we used these buckets to go trick or treating wish that my little ones could experience this, Awesome.” Similarly in another example, a member narrates an incident: “One day we played on the outdoor playground after having a birthday party in the party room not knowing it was the last time..... My Grandkids will never experience McDonald’s like i did.” Another aspect of rituals and traditions is *common sets of values and behavior*. Members follow certain community rules and regulations and force compliance on those who violate such rules and regulations. For example, as one of the members reminded another about community standards, “you’re breaking community standards with that subpar sentence.”

Finally, the sense of *moral responsibility* was found to be another ingredient of a community marker. Integration and retention of members, as well as assistance were found to be regular behaviors in the community. Members also tried to retain others in the community. For example, when one member says: “Bring snack wrap back or I’m switching to Wendy’s,” another replies, “no you’re not.” Members often assisted others in obtaining products, describing product features, and special offers. In this context, one of them stated that “if you need help finding any, let me know.” Similarly, in another example, one of the members was found to assist others regarding product features: “It was salad in a cup with a lid. You put the dressing on the salad, put the lid on and shake it to get the dressing coated on the salad. It was good.” Most of the respondents’ replies were based on their experience. Another member narrated his experience to help others: “Don’t order the adult happy meals from Ubereats. Doesn’t come with anything. No box, no toy. It actually rather upset me since I made my order for the promotion.” The presence of *commercial characters* and *brand emotions* distinguishes the group from other consumer communities. Both of these characteristics were found to be present in the group, with the latter expressed as a comment: “The McRib sandwich is so good that I chose it over my now ex-wife.” Similarly, in another example one of the members stated thus: “I just smashed 2 of them after waiting 3 years and it was heavenly. The clouds parted and the sun shined down on my for those few moment.” The presence of commercial character was also noticed in numerous discussions. For example, one of the comments runs thus: “McDonald’s use to be reasonably priced and is getting expensive for a family with kids.” Another person agrees: “The prices these days at McDonalds you’ll have to take out a loan to buy one.” Finally, the group provided many examples of the presence of all the three components of *social identity* (Ellemers et al., 1999). *Perceived membership*, which is the cognitive component of social identity, presented itself in the conversation of the community members. In numerous situations members used the terms “we” and “us.” They often derived self-esteem from the group, which is indicative of the presence of the evaluative component of social identity. They also often received recognition from peers, such as “appreciate your service and sacrifice to this mission.” Similarly, one of the members remarked, “the most important comment here.”

A general observation was that some of the comments unite people. For example, a comment regarding the McFlurry product elicited 412 replies. According to authors’ observations, this product was a failure by McDonalds, as they were not able to maintain it properly. Consequently, customers began making humorous comments about the product, even to the extent of joking with others, and also showed their severe disappointment. The discussions sometimes went beyond brand-related topics. A member started a discussion on the topic of McDonalds sponsorship on “The National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing” and it led to a long discussion.

5.2 Embedded brand community in X

To address the first research question, when the brand community in X was considered, it was found that all the three community markers were present in McDonald's X account (See Table 3). Starting with *consciousness of kind*, members often used the notions "we" and "us," which described their perceived membership and sense of belonging. In this context, one of the members said, "McDonald's admin are you flirting with us?". Similarly, another member says: "No one wants Taylor, we just need snack wraps."

Oppositional brand loyalty is one of the components of consciousness of kind which was found to be present in the discussions of the community members. A member says, "Shots fired today at McDonald's from Arby's. I'll be honest McRib not tasting the same." Similarly, another member responds: "But who actually eats at arbys? Bro how are they even in business." Finally, legitimacy, which is another component of consciousness of kind, which differentiates between those who are true members and those who are not, was not observed in the discussion of the community.

The second component of community markers, which is *rituals and traditions* was found to exist in the community. Members were found to be often involved in brand-related stories with each other. A member narrated thus: "It was cactus plant flea market inspired. Their brand chose to make their exclusive meal a happy meal for adults. McDonald's themselves had very little control over them designing it." Similarly, another member said: "They made one, a long time ago. It was a training simulator for new employees. It was considered lost media until someone who acquired one shared it to the world." The inculcation of the history of brand is very common in the group: "I did a whole essay about how McDonalds was founded.....The history of big macs, happy meals..... so much fun to learn." Similarly, a member says: "Or if it's real as the rumors say, bring back the Halloween pails! Omg... those were epic."

Finally, the sense of *moral responsibility*, which is another component of community marker was also found to exist in the discussions of the community. Members often assist each other regarding product features, product availability, and service related issues in the restaurant. In this context, one of the members was observed suggesting a solution to another on how to address a problem: "Safest bet, contact customer service via phone or email. They'll probably refund and compensate you in some way." In a similar example, a member said: "You get email confirmations as well, so check your email and there should be an order number or a code somewhere."

Additionally, the existence of *brand emotion* and *commercial character* was found to distinguish the group from other consumer communities, and members expressed their emotions regarding the brand. A member stated that "you know in the all knowing universe, you @McDonalds YOU are the only one I love." Similarly, another member remarked: "PLEASE BRING THEM BACK I AM BEGGING YOU MCDONALDS." Regarding the commercial character, a member was found to complain thus: "But your prices are too high to buy one." Another example is the statement,

“Don't worry. You saved yourself money. Don't waste your money, it wasn't worth it to get a toy with 4 eyes.”

Finally, the existence of all the three components of social identity were observed in the community. In this context, a member stated, “You really thought we were going to agree with you, huh, Ethan?” Through this comment the person was found to convey the belief that the other members in the community also thought similarly and they could categorize themselves as a group.

Table 3. Brand Community Characteristics

Characteristics	Facebook Comment	X Replies	Existence of Characteristics
COMMUNITY MARKER			
Consciousness of Kind: We-ness	“Give us what we really want. THE SNACK WRAP”.	“mcdonald’s admin are you fltering with us?”.	In both
Legitimacy: Differentiate between true members and those are not.	“For those who don't like them, to each their own But for those that do love them like me, high fives.”	NA	Only Facebook
Oppositional Brand Loyalty: Oppositions to competing brand	“One day, I ordered a Happy Meal at KFC and I don’t remember how to call a Happy Meal set at KFC.”	“But who actually eats at arbys? Bro how are they even in business.”	In both
Rituals and Traditions:			
Celebrating Brand History: Inculcation of History	“I was just remembering when I was little and we used these buckets.... that my little ones could	“I did a whole essay about how McDonalds was founded.....The history of big macs,	In both

	experience this, Awesome.”	happy meals.....	
Sharing Brand Related Stories: Experience discussion about product placement, advertisement and use for special occasions.	“when I was almost forced to get one a few days ago. Story: Nearly every Saturday night we order through the McApp a 6 piece nugget MEAL (medium fries, medium drink) for my son.....	“It was cactus plant flea market inspired. Their brand chose to make their exclusive meal a happy meal for adults. McDonald’s themselves had very little control over them designing it.”	In both
Moral Responsibility:			
. Helping others	“if you need help finding any, let me know.”	“Safest bet, contact customer service via phone or email. They'll probably refund and compensate you in some way.”	In both
SOCIAL IDENTITY			
Self- Categorization: Cognitive awareness of one’s membership in the group.	Use of We-ness in the discussions	Use of We-ness in the discussions	In both
Group Self- esteem: Receiving recognition from peers	“the most important comment here.”	“I really appreciate your thought”	In both
BRAND EMOTION			

Emotional expression regarding brand	“The McRib sandwich is so good that I chose it over my now ex-wife.”	“you know in the all knowing universe, you @McDonalds YOU are the only one I love.”	In both
--------------------------------------	--	---	---------

COMMERCIAL CHARACTER

Discussion about price, discount, offer.	“The prices these days at McDonalds you’ll have to take out a loan to buy one.”	“But your prices are too high to buy one.”	In both
--	---	--	---------

5.3 Heterogeneity of two communities

To examine heterogeneity between McDonald’s brand communities on Facebook and X, two complementary analytical strategies were employed. Differences in brand community characteristics were assessed using the 33 matched brand posts (discussion threads), where identical McDonald’s posts were published on both platforms and the resulting comment streams were coded and aggregated at the post level. These results are reported in Table 4. Differences in consumer engagement and post effects were examined using the full eight-month dataset (89 Facebook posts; 109 X posts), with detailed statistics reported in Table 5.

Using the full eight-month dataset (See Table 5), significant differences were observed in overall consumer engagement between Facebook and X. Engagement, calculated using the Unmetric (2016) formula [$\text{Interactions} \times 10000 / \text{Fan}^{0.8}$] based on likes, comments/replies, and shares/reposts, was significantly higher on X ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 1.36$) than on Facebook ($M = 1.28$, $SD = 1.53$), $t(196) = -12.69$, $p < .001$. This indicates that while both platforms host active brand communities, the intensity of interaction differs across platforms.

Proposition 1. Consumer engagement in a social media brand community varies based on the type of social media in which the community is built.

Based on the full-platform dataset (See Table 5), post forms were classified as text, image, or video. On Facebook, a one-way ANOVA revealed significant differences in engagement across post forms, $F(2, 86) = 16.08$, $p < .001$. Post-hoc analysis showed that text-based posts ($M = 2.56$, $SD = 1.24$) generated significantly higher engagement than image ($M = .86$, $SD = 1.38$) and video posts ($M = .23$, $SD = .83$).

On X, where only text and image posts were observed, no significant difference was found between text-based ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 1.40$) and image-based posts ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 1.27$), $t(107) = -.907$, $p = .366$.

Proposition 2. The impact of post form on consumer engagement depends on the type of social media in which the community is built.

Using the same full-platform dataset (See Table 5), posts were coded as rational or emotional. On Facebook, emotional posts ($M = 2.17$, $SD = 1.26$) generated significantly higher engagement than rational posts ($M = .32$, $SD = 1.19$), $t(87) = -7.1$, $p < .001$.

On X, no significant difference was observed between rational ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.47$) and emotional posts ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 1.31$), $t(107) = 1.61$, $p = .109$.

Proposition 3. The impact of post nature on consumer engagement depends on the type of social media in which the community is built.

Differences in the strength of brand community characteristics were examined using the 33 matched brand posts, where each post's comment stream was coded and aggregated for each construct. These results are summarized in Table 4. Significant differences were found across all four dimensions. The average number of comments per post reflecting *community markers* was significantly higher on Facebook ($M = 2.01$, $SD = .41$) than on X ($M = .78$, $SD = .52$), $t(32) = 11.25$, $p < .001$.

Similarly, *commercial character* was stronger on Facebook ($M = .66$, $SD = .39$) than on X ($M = 0.33$, $SD = .35$), $t(32) = 3.59$, $p = .001$.

Brand emotion was also higher on Facebook ($M = .50$, $SD = .41$) than on X ($M = .16$, $SD = .30$), $t(32) = 3.46$, $p = .002$.

Finally, *social identity* was significantly stronger on Facebook ($M = 1.52$, $SD = .41$) than on X ($M = .58$, $SD = .45$), $t(32) = 8.13$, $p < .001$.

These results demonstrate that although both platforms support brand communities, Facebook exhibits stronger and more deeply embedded brand community characteristics than X.

Proposition 4. The strength of the brand community characteristics differs across various social media types.

Table 4. Differences in brand community characteristics

Variables	Facebook	X	t	p value
Community Marker	N=33, m=2.01, SD=.41	N=33, m=.78, SD=.52	11.25	p<.001
Commercial Character	N=33, m= .66, SD =.39	N=33, m= .33, SD= .35	3.59	p =.001
Brand Emotion	N=33, m= .50, SD = .41	N=33, m= .16, SD= .30	3.46	p =.002
Social Identity	N=33, m= 1.52, SD = .41	N=33, m= .58, SD= .45	8.13	p<.001

Table 5. Differences in general characteristics

Variables	Facebook	X	t/F value	P value	Proposition
Consumer engagement	N=89, m= 1.28, SD = 1.53	N= 109, m= 3.90, SD= 1.36	t(196) = - 12.69	p <.001	Consumer engagement in a social media brand community varies based on the type of social media in which the community was built.
Consumer engagement across post types (Facebook)			F(2,86) = 16.08	p<.001	
Text	N=24, m=2.56, SD = 1.24				

Image	N = 59, m = 0.86, SD = 1.38			
Video	N = 6, m = 0.23, SD = 0.83			
Consumer engagement across post types (X)				
Text	N=76, m= 3.82, SD = 1.40	t(107) = -.907	p = .366	The impact of the forms of posts on consumer engagement in a social media brand community depends on the type of social media in which the community was built.
Image	N =33, m= 4.08, SD = 1.27			
Consumer engagement across nature of posts (Facebook)				
Rational	N =43, m = .32, SD = 1.19	t(87) = -7.1 p<.001		
Emotional	N = 46, m = 2.17, SD = 1.26			

Consumer
engagement
across
nature of
posts (X)

Rational N= 25,
m= 3.51,
SD = 1.47

$t(107)=1.61$ $p = .109$

Emotional N = 84, m
=4.01, SD
= 1.31

The impact of the nature of posts on consumer engagement in a social media brand community depends on the type of social media in which the community was built.

6. Discussion

This study examined (i) whether different types of social media can support brand community formation, (ii) whether brand communities differ across platform types, and (iii) why such differences emerge. While McDonald's brand communities were found to exist on both Facebook and X, the Facebook community demonstrated stronger brand community characteristics and deeper community embeddedness, whereas X exhibited higher overall engagement intensity. These differences can be explained by platform-level factors related to engagement norms, demographic composition, social influence structures, and user-generated content dynamics. Unlike generic virtual brand communities, participation in social media brand communities requires two sequential decisions: first, to join the social media platform itself, and second, to engage with the embedded brand community within that platform (Zaglia, 2012). Consequently, differences across social media types are likely to shape the formation, expression, and strength of brand communities.

First, heterogeneity in brand communities can be attributed to differences in baseline platform engagement rates. Social media platforms vary substantially in their typical engagement levels, which shape users' expectations and participation intensity. Industry data indicate clear differences in average engagement per post across platforms (Statista, 2021). Because brand communities are embedded within these broader platform environments, engagement within brand communities is partly conditioned by the interaction norms and participation intensity of the host platform. Accordingly, brand community engagement reflects not only brand-related factors but also the broader engagement ecology of the platform.

Proposition 5. Consumer engagement in a social media brand community is influenced by the

engagement rate of the social media platform in which it is formed.

Second, demographic heterogeneity across platforms provides an important explanation for variation in brand community characteristics. Previous studies demonstrate clear differences in demographic characteristics like age, gender and personal status across various social media types (Jaidka et al., 2018; Laor, 2022a). Women tend to use Facebook and Instagram more often than men who are frequent users of X (Laor, 2022a). Similarly, younger users use Instagram more, followed by Facebook and X (Laor, 2022a). An existing study has shown that singles use Instagram and Facebook more actively and frequently than the married (Laor, 2022a). Finding of another study reveal that individuals with lower educational levels post messages, videos and images more frequently on Facebook than those with higher levels of educational attainment (Laor, 2022a). Moreover, individuals experiencing higher stress levels are less likely to post on Facebook than X, and stress is strongly related to negative emotion and gross happiness (Jaidka et al., 2018). Therefore, there is diversity in demographic characteristics and, correspondingly, users' attitudes and behaviors across various social media types and their corresponding brand communities. Existing research further indicates that demographic attributes influence individuals' sense of community and collective attachment (Francis et al., 2012), suggesting that platform-level demographic composition contributes to heterogeneity in brand community strength.

Proposition 6. Demographic characteristics influence brand community characteristics across various social media types.

Third, social influence and social capital structures differ across platforms and further explain community heterogeneity. Different social media yield different levels of peer influence. For example, the use of Facebook has been found to be more influenced by social factors as compared to X (Lee & Cho, 2011). Studies show that different social media users derive different levels of bridging and bonding social capital from their social media use (Phua et al., 2017). X users have been found to derive the highest bridging social capital as compared to users of any other social media types (Phua et al., 2017). They perceive weaker ties with others (Ellison et al., 2014) and consider themselves a part of a larger community (Williams, 2006). Similarly, Snapchat users derive the highest bonding social capital followed by Facebook and Instagram because the connections formed on Snapchat involve higher trust and stronger emotional bonds (Phua et al., 2017). Because brand communities rely on repeated interaction, mutual recognition, and shared norms, platforms that foster bonding social capital are more conducive to sustaining stronger brand community characteristics.

Proposition 7. Social factors influence brand community characteristics across various social media types.

Finally, heterogeneity in brand communities is shaped by differences in user-generated content dynamics across platforms. Prior studies demonstrate that brand-related user-generated content varies systematically by platform (Smith et al., 2012). Facebook interactions tend to be more

collective and relational, whereas X interactions are more individualistic and opinion-oriented (Kwon & Sung, 2011). Brand-related content on X has been found to be less positive overall than on Facebook or YouTube (Logan, 2014), with users focusing more on direct brand communication, complaints, and opinion expression. In contrast, Facebook users are more inclined to engage with other users' brand experiences and emotional narratives, reinforcing shared meaning and collective identity (Logan, 2014; Jaidka et al., 2018). These differences in content orientation shape how brand community characteristics are communicated and sustained across platforms.

Proposition 8. The nature of user-generated content influences brand community characteristics across various social media types.

Taken together, these findings underscore that brand communities are not platform-neutral phenomena. While multiple social media platforms can host brand communities, their ability to sustain collective identity, emotional attachment, and moral responsibility depends on platform-specific engagement norms, demographic composition, social capital structures, and content dynamics. Consequently, managers should align platform choice with the desired form and depth of brand community engagement rather than assuming functional equivalence across social media environments.

6.1 Theoretical Implications

This study makes several important theoretical contributions to the literature on brand communities by integrating social identity-based explanations of community formation with platform affordance-based perspectives on digital interaction. In doing so, it moves beyond the platform-neutral assumptions that characterize much of prior brand community research, which has predominantly examined single-platform contexts—most often Facebook—while implicitly assuming generalizability across social media environments (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Brodie et al., 2013).

First, the study demonstrates that brand community characteristics are platform-contingent rather than uniform across digital environments. While earlier studies conceptualize brand communities as socially constructed collectives anchored in shared identity, rituals, and moral responsibility (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Algesheimer et al., 2005), the present findings show that the strength and expression of these markers vary systematically across platforms. By comparing a social networking site (Facebook) and a microblogging platform (X), this study challenges the implicit assumption that brand communities function similarly across platforms with different architectures and interaction norms (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

A key theoretical contribution lies in distinguishing between engagement intensity and community embeddedness. Prior research often treats engagement volume as a proxy for community strength (Brodie et al., 2013). However, the present findings reveal that X generates higher engagement

intensity, whereas Facebook fosters stronger expressions of consciousness of kind, rituals, moral responsibility, and social identity. This distinction refines engagement-centered frameworks by demonstrating that frequent interaction does not necessarily translate into deep collective bonds, extending earlier work that links engagement to community outcomes without sufficiently differentiating its qualitative dimensions (Casaló et al., 2008).

From a social identity perspective, this study advances theory by demonstrating that the salience and reinforcement of social identity mechanisms vary across platforms. Social identity research has established that self-categorization, group-based self-esteem, and emotional attachment underpin sustained participation in brand communities (Algesheimer et al., 2005; Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2007). However, these processes have typically been examined without adequate attention to the technological contexts in which identity enactment occurs.

The present findings extend this literature by showing that platforms differ in their capacity to support identity-relevant interaction. Facebook's affordances, such as prolonged discussions, reciprocal exchanges, and the persistent visibility of interactions, reinforce both the cognitive and affective components of social identity, resulting in deeper community embeddedness and stronger community markers. In contrast, X facilitates rapid, episodic alignment around brand-related content but offers fewer opportunities for sustained mutual recognition and emotional exchange, thereby constraining identity reinforcement. This contribution refines social identity-based explanations by demonstrating that identity formation in brand communities is not solely a social-psychological process but is structurally enabled or constrained by platform interaction environments (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2007; Habibi et al., 2014).

The study also advances platform affordance-based explanations by empirically linking platform design features to variations in brand community strength, rather than engagement volume alone. Prior research highlights that social media platforms differ in affordances such as visibility, persistence, and association, which shape user communication and participation (Treem & Leonardi, 2013; Kietzmann et al., 2011). This study extends that logic to brand community research by showing that these affordances directly condition the enactment of community practices, including storytelling, helping behaviors, and norm enforcement.

Platforms that support persistent interaction histories and extended discussions facilitate richer social exchange and stronger community embeddedness. In contrast, platforms optimized for brevity and immediacy encourage fast-paced participation while limiting opportunities for sustained collective meaning-making. By empirically distinguishing between how often users engage and how communities are socially organized, this study contributes a more nuanced affordance-based understanding of digital brand communities.

Taken together, the study offers an integrative theoretical contribution by bridging social identity mechanisms with platform affordance structures. Rather than treating brand community characteristics as transferable across platforms, the findings suggest that community strength

emerges from the alignment between identity-relevant social processes and the affordances that enable their repeated enactment. This integration reconciles mixed findings in prior research, where high engagement does not always correspond to strong communities, and positions platform architecture as a central contextual condition shaping digital brand community formation.

Finally, the study extends brand community theory by conceptualizing social media-based brand communities as embedded within broader platform ecologies, where consumers first adapt to platform-specific interaction norms and only subsequently enact brand-related collective practices (Zaglia, 2012). This layered understanding advances existing frameworks by explicitly accounting for how differences in platform design shape the social foundations of brand communities over time.

6.2 Managerial Implications

Managers can tailor their engagement strategies within social media brand communities based on the specific platform they are using. By understanding that consumer engagement varies depending on the platform, managers can optimize their approach through different types of posts, content formats, or interaction styles. The impact of various forms and natures of posts on consumer engagement differs across social media platforms. With this insight, managers can refine their content strategy, focusing on the types of posts that resonate most with their audience on each platform, thereby maximizing engagement and interaction. Recognizing that the strength of brand community characteristics differs across various social media types, managers can assess and compare the strength of their brand communities across different platforms. This understanding would enable them to allocate resources effectively, prioritize platforms with stronger community characteristics, and identify areas for improvement in weaker communities. Understanding that consumer engagement in a social media brand community is influenced by the engagement rate on the platform where it was formed, managers can incorporate platform-specific engagement metrics into their performance measurement framework. This allows for a more accurate assessment and benchmarking of community engagement levels across different social media platforms. Recognizing that demographic characteristics influence brand community characteristics across various social media types, managers can use demographic insights to refine their targeting strategies. By understanding the demographics of their audience on each platform, managers can tailor their messaging, content, and engagement tactics to better resonate with specific demographic segments. Considering that social factors influence brand community characteristics across various social media types, managers can integrate social factors into their community-building efforts. This may involve fostering a sense of belonging, facilitating meaningful interactions, and leveraging social connections to strengthen the brand community across different platforms. Since the nature of user-generated content influences brand community characteristics across various social media types, managers can optimize their approach to user-generated content (UGC). This may involve encouraging and facilitating UGC that aligns with the

brand's values and resonates with the target audience on each platform, thereby enhancing community engagement and cohesion. By leveraging these insights, managers can develop more effective strategies for building and nurturing social media brand communities, ultimately driving greater consumer engagement, brand loyalty, and advocacy across different platforms.

7. Conclusion

This study examined whether different social media platforms can support brand community formation, how brand communities differ across platform types, and why such differences arise. Using a netnographic and content-analytic comparison of McDonald's brand communities on Facebook and X, the study analyzed community markers, social identity expressions, brand emotion, commercial characteristics, and engagement patterns across platforms. The findings show that brand communities exist on both platforms, but with distinct dynamics. Facebook fosters stronger brand community characteristics and deeper community embeddedness, whereas X generates higher engagement intensity without equivalent community depth. This distinction highlights that engagement volume and community strength are not synonymous. The study further demonstrates that the effects of post form and post nature on engagement are platform-contingent, underscoring the limitations of platform-neutral content strategies. Theoretically, the study contributes to brand community research by integrating social identity and platform affordance perspectives to explain platform-based heterogeneity. It shows that community markers and identity reinforcement are shaped by platform architectures and interaction norms, challenging assumptions that brand communities function similarly across social media environments. Overall, the study underscores the importance of adopting a platform-sensitive view of digital brand communities. By linking platform affordances to variations in community strength and engagement, it advances understanding of how brand communities operate in contemporary social media contexts and offers relevant insights for both scholarship and practice.

7.1 Limitations and Future Research

This study has been conducted on only one brand and with eight months of data; therefore, generalizing the findings is a challenge. For broader generalization, research can be conducted on more brand communities in different social media platforms with larger data sets. Additionally, the study has ignored the impact of brand types. The current results should be compared with the findings of future research that considers the brand communities of other types of brands. The study is restricted to Facebook, a social networking site, and X, a microblogging site. Future studies can be conducted in other social networking and microblogging sites, and the comparisons drawn. Moreover, this study has ignored the differences within a particular social media type, for example, the differences between the microblogging sites X and Tumblr. Ultimately, this study opens a new direction of research to test the impact of demographic characteristics, social factors, architectures, features, and content of communication in social media on brand community characteristics. Finally, a long-term empirical study can be conducted to investigate the building

of brand community in social networking sites, considering the different stages of such a community.

Acknowledgement

AI assisted tools, including Quillbot and Grammarly, were used to enhance grammar and language clarity during manuscript preparation. All conceptualization, analysis, and interpretation of the research were conducted solely by the author.

References

- Albert, N., Merunka, D., & Valette-Florence, P. (2008). When consumers love their brands: Exploring the concept and its dimensions. *Journal of Business Research*, 61(10), 1062–1075.
- Algesheimer, R., Dholakia, U. M., & Herrmann, A. (2005). The social influence of brand community: Evidence from European car clubs. *Journal of Marketing*, 69(3), 19–34.
- Alhabash, S., Smischney, T. M., Suneja, A., Nimmagadda, A., & White, L. R. (2024). So similar, yet so different: how motivations to use Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok predict problematic use and use continuance intentions. *SAGE Open*, 14(2).
- Apriani, T. N., Subiyakto, B., Mutiani, M., Ilhami, M. R., & Putra, M. A. H. (2023). Community social interaction on the Miai Riverbank. *The Innovation of Social Studies Journal*, 4(2), 178.
- Bagozzi, R. P., & Dholakia, U. M. (2002). Intentional social action in virtual communities. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 16(2), 2–21.
- Bagozzi, R. P., Dholakia, U. M., & Pearo, L. R. K. (2007). Antecedents and consequences of online social interactions. *Media Psychology*, 9(1), 77–114.
- Bagozzi, R. P., & Dholakia, U. M. (2007). Antecedents and purchase consequences of customer participation in small group brand communities. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 24(1), 45–61.
- Beckett, L. K., Lu, F., & Sabati, S. (2022). Beyond inclusion: Cultivating a critical sense of belonging through community-engaged research. *Social Sciences*, 11(3), 132.

- Bender, T. (1978). *Community and social change in America*. Rutgers University Press.
- Bergami, M., & Bagozzi, R. P. (2000). Self-categorization, affective commitment and group self-esteem as distinct aspects of social identity in the organization. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 39(4), 555–577.
- Boulianne, S., Hoffmann, C. P., & Bossetta, M. (2024). Social media platforms for politics: A comparison of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Reddit, Snapchat, and WhatsApp. *New Media & Society*, 27(11), 6006–6037.
- Brailovskaia, J., & Bierhoff, H.-W. (2018). The narcissistic millennial generation: A study of personality traits and online behavior on Facebook. *Journal of Adult Development*, 27(1), 23–35.
- Brewer, M. B., & Pickett, C. L. (2014). The social self and group identification: Inclusion and distinctiveness motives in interpersonal and collective identities. In J. T. Jost & J. Sidanius (Eds.), *Political psychology: Key readings* (pp. 281–298). Psychology Press.
- Brodie, R. J., Ilic, A., Juric, B., & Hollebeek, L. (2013). Consumer engagement in a virtual brand community: An exploratory analysis. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(1), 105–114.
- Casaló, L. V., Flavián, C., & Guinalíu, M. (2008). Promoting consumer's participation in virtual brand communities: A new paradigm in branding strategy. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 14(1), 19–36.
- Chakraborty, U., & Biswal, S. K. (2023). Is digital social communication effective for social relationships? A study of online brand communities. *Journal of Relationship Marketing*, 1–25.
- Chavadi, C. A., Sirothiya, M., Menon, S. R., & R, V. M. (2023). Modelling the effects of social media-based brand communities on brand trust, brand equity and consumer response. *Vikalpa*, 48(2), 114–141.
- Chugh, R., & Ruhi, U. (2019). Social media for tertiary education. In A. Tatnall (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Education and Information Technologies* (pp. 1–6). Springer.
- Chang, C.-M., Hsu, M.-H., Huang, E., & Yang, Y.-H. (2020). Measuring social media brand community success: The roles of media capability and organisational support. *Total Quality Management & Business Excellence*, 31(13–14), 1454–1466.
- Cheah, C. W., Koay, K. Y., & Lim, W. M. (2024). Social media influencer over-endorsement: Implications from a moderated-mediation analysis. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 79, 103831.

- Clark, M., Black, H. G., & Judson, K. (2017). Brand community integration and satisfaction with social media sites: A comparative study. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 11(1), 39–55
- Cooper, T., Stavros, C., & Dobeles, A. R. (2023). The impact of social media evolution on practitioner-stakeholder relationships in brand management. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*.
- Cova, B., & Pace, S. (2006). Brand community of convenience products: New forms of customer empowerment – The case ‘my Nutella The Community’. *European Journal of Marketing*, 40(9/10), 1087–1105.
- Cripps, H., Singh, A., Mejtoft, T., & Salo, J. (2020). The use of Twitter for innovation in business markets. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 38(5), 587–601.
- De Loizaga, M. Z. R. (2020). La comunidad del siglo XXI. Un marco interpretativo desde la perspectiva del Trabajo Social. *Cuadernos De Trabajo Social*, 33(2), 197–219.
- Dolan, R., Conduit, J., Frethey-Bentham, C., Fahy, J., & Goodman, S. (2019). Social media engagement behavior. *European Journal of Marketing*, 53(10), 2213–2243.
- Douglas, M., Wilk, R., & Isherwood, B. (2021). *The world of goods*. Routledge.
- Ellemers, N., Kortekaas, P., & Ouwerkerk, J. W. (1999). Self-categorisation, commitment to the group and group self-esteem as related but distinct aspects of social identity. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 29(2–3), 371–389.
- Ellison, N. B., Vitak, J., Gray, R., & Lampe, C. (2014). Cultivating social resources on social network sites: Facebook relationship maintenance behaviors and their role in social capital processes. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 19(4), 855–870.
- Francis, J., Giles-Corti, B., Wood, L., & Knuiman, M. (2012). Creating sense of community: The role of public space. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 32(4), 401–409.
- Gibson, J. J. (2014). The ecological approach to visual Perception. In Psychology Press eBooks. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315740218>.
- GM to drop Facebook ads due to low consumer impact (2012, May). Firstpost. April 5, 2026, from <https://www.firstpost.com/fwire/gm-to-drop-facebook-ads-due-to-low-consumer-impact-310495.html>.
- Gusfield, J. R. (1978). *Community: A critical response*. Harper & Row.
- Habibi, M. R., Laroche, M., & Richard, M. (2014). Brand communities based in social media: How unique are they? Evidence from two exemplary brand communities. *International Journal of Information Management*, 34(2), 123–132.

- Habibi, M. R., Laroche, M., & Richard, M.-O. (2014). The roles of brand community and community engagement in building brand trust on social media. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 37, 152–161.
- Habibi, M. R. (2015). *Three essays on social media-based brand communities* [Doctoral dissertation, Concordia University].
- Hayat, T., Lesser, O., & Samuel-Azran, T. (2017). Gendered discourse patterns on online social networks: A social network analysis perspective. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 77, 132–139.
- Helal, G., Ozuem, W., & Lancaster, G. (2018). Social media brand perceptions of millennials. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 46(10), 977–998.
- Hennink, M. M., Kaiser, B. N., & Marconi, V. C. (2017). Code saturation versus meaning saturation. *Qualitative Health Research*, 27(4), 591–608.
- Heydari, A., & Laroche, M. (2017). Cross-cultural study of social media-based brand communities: An abstract. In *Developments in Marketing Science: Proceedings of the Academy of Marketing Science* (pp. 331–332).
- Hill, A., Mellon, L., & Goddard, J. (2018). *How winning organizations last 100 years* [White paper].
- Hou, A. C. Y., & Shiau, W.-L. (2019). Understanding Facebook to Instagram migration: A push-pull migration model perspective. *Information Technology & People*, 33(1), 272–295.
- Jaidka, K., Guntuku, S. C., & Ungar, L. H. (2018). Facebook versus Twitter: Cross-platform differences in self-disclosure and trait prediction. In *12th International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media* (pp. 141–150).
- Jansen, B. J., Zhang, M., Sobel, K., & Chowdury, A. (2009). Twitter power: Tweets as electronic word of mouth. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 60(11), 2169–2188.
- Jayasingh, S. (2019). Consumer brand engagement in social networking sites and its effect on brand loyalty. *Cogent Business & Management*, 6(1).
- Kamboj, S. (2019). Applying uses and gratifications theory to understand customer participation in social media brand communities. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 32(1), 205–231.
- Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business Horizons*, 53(1), 59–68.
- Khatri, D. (2021). Use of social media information sources: A systematic literature review. *Online Information Review*, 45(6), 1039–1063.

- Kietzmann, J. H., Hermkens, K., McCarthy, I. P., & Silvestre, B. S. (2011). *Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media*. *Business Horizons*, 54(3), 241–251.
- Kolbe, R. H., & Burnett, M. S. (1991). Content-analysis research: An examination of applications with directives for improving research reliability and objectivity. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 18(2), 243–250.
- Kozinets, R. V. (2010). *Netnography: Doing ethnographic research online*. SAGE Publications.
- Kozinets, R. V. (2002). The field behind the screen: Using netnography for marketing research in online communities. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 39(1), 61–72.
- Kumar, J., & Nayak, J. K. (2019). Brand engagement without brand ownership: A case of non-brand owner community members. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 28(2), 216–230.
- Kumar, V. (2022). Enhancing participation intentions in online brand communities. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 40(7), 898–913.
- Kwon, E. S., & Sung, Y. (2011). Follow me! Global marketers' Twitter use. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 12(1), 4–16.
- Landis, J. R., & Koch, G. G. (1977). The measurement of observer agreement for categorical data. *Biometrics*, 33(1), 159–174.
- Laor, T. (2022a). My social network: Group differences in frequency of use, active use, and interactive use on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. *Technology in Society*, 68, 101922.
- Laor, T. (2022b). Twitter as a clique: Journalists' patterns of Twitter use in Israel. *Online Information Review*, 46(1), 40–58.
- Lee, S., & Cho, M. (2011). Social media use in a mobile broadband environment: Examination of determinants of Twitter and Facebook use. *Mobile Marketing Association*, 6(2), 71–87.
- Logan, K. (2014). Why isn't everyone doing it? A comparison of antecedents to following brands on Twitter and Facebook. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 14(2), 60–72.
- Lombard, M., Snyder Duch, J., & Bracken, C. C. (2002). Content analysis in mass communication: Assessment and reporting of intercoder reliability. *Human Communication Research*, 28(4), 587–604.
- Lou, L., Jiao, Y., & Koh, J. (2021). Determinants of fan engagement in social media-based brand communities: A brand relationship quality perspective. *Sustainability*, 13(11), 6117.

- Luo, N., Zhang, M., & Liu, W. (2015). The effects of value co-creation practices on building harmonious brand community and achieving brand loyalty on social media in China. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 48, 492–499.
- Marshall, G., & Barthel, D. L. (2015). *The concise Oxford dictionary of sociology* (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Majeed, A. (2017). Technology diffusion and virtualisation of virtual communities. In *Proceedings of the 8th International Conference on E-Education, E-Business, E-Management and E-Learning* (pp. 81–85).
- Meek, S., Ogilvie, M., Lambert, C., & Ryan, M. M. (2019). Contextualising social capital in online brand communities. *Journal of Brand Management*, 26(4), 426–444.
- Muniz, A. M., & O’Guinn, T. C. (2001). Brand community. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 27(4), 412–432.
- Munasib, A., & Roy, D. (2017). Interactions and social attitudes in American communities. *Journal of Mathematical Sociology*, 41(2), 63–83.
- Nettleingham, D. (2018). Community, locality and social(ist) transformation. *Sociological Review*, 66(3), 593–607.
- Pelletier, M. J., Krallman, A., Adams, F. G., & Hancock, T. (2020). One size doesn’t fit all: A uses and gratifications analysis of social media platforms. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 14(2), 269–284.
- Phua, J., Jin, S. V., & Kim, J. (Jay). (2017). Gratifications of using Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or Snapchat to follow brands. *Telematics and Informatics*, 34(1), 412–424.
- Puri, A. (2007). The web of insights: The art and practice of webnography. *International Journal of Market Research*, 49(3), 387–408.
- Saunders, B., Sim, J., Kingstone, T., Baker, S., Waterfield, J., Bartlam, B., Burroughs, H., & Jinks, C. (2018). Saturation in qualitative research: exploring its conceptualization and operationalization. *Quality & Quantity*, 52(4), 1893–1907.
- Sethi, A. R., Dash, S., Mishra, A., & Cyr, D. (2023). Role of community trust in driving brand loyalty in large online B2B communities. *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing*, 39(2), 256–272.
- Shabur, M. A., & Siddiki, M. R. (2024). Investigating social media’s impact on the new era of interactive learning: A case study of Bangladesh. *Heliyon*, 10(4), e26234.
- Shen, X.-L., Li, Y.-J., Sun, Y., & Zhou, Y. (2018). Person-environment fit, commitment, and customer contribution in online brand community: A nonlinear model. *Journal of Business Research*, 85, 117–126.

- Simmons, G., & Durkin, M. (2023). Expanding understanding of brand value co-creation on social media from an S-D logic perspective: Introducing structuration theory. *Marketing Theory*, 23(4), 607–629.
- Smith, A. N., Fischer, E., & Yongjian, C. (2012). How does brand-related user-generated content differ across YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter? *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 26(2), 102–113.
- Smith, W. P., & Kidder, D. L. (2010). You've been tagged! (Then again, maybe not): Employers and Facebook. *Business Horizons*, 53(5), 491–499.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1986). The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. In S. Worchel, & W. G. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 7–24). Chicago: Nelson-Hall
- Tankovska, H. (2021). Countries with the most Twitter users 2021. *Statista*. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/242606/number-of-active-twitter-users-in-selected-countries/>.
- Tenenboim, O. (2022). Comments, shares, or likes: What makes news posts engaging in different ways. *Social Media + Society*, 8(4).
- Thuy, D. (2026). *Social media post engagement 2021-2025*. Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1274133/engagement-rate-per-post-social-media/>
- Thongmak, M. (2022). Influence of post types on Facebook engagement: The moderating roles of brand category and brand internationalisation. *International Journal of Internet Marketing and Advertising*, 17(3/4), 231–250.
- Treem, J. W., & Leonardi, P. M. (2013). Social media use in organizations: Exploring the affordances of visibility, editability, persistence, and association. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 36(1), 143–189.
- (Umassd, 2017). The report on “The 2017 fortune 500 go visual and increase use of Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube”. Retrieved (November 20, 2023).
- Unmetric (2016). The report on “Industry standard engagement score by Unmetric” Retrieved (October 20, 2023).
- Veloutsou, C., & Moutinho, L. (2009). Brand relationships through brand reputation and brand tribalism. *Journal of Business Research*, 62(3), 314–322.
- Veloutsou, C., & Liao, J. (2022). Mapping brand community research from 2001 to 2021: Assessing the field's stage of development and a research agenda. *Psychology and Marketing*, 40(3), 431–454.

- Watts, R. J., & Halkovic, A. (2022). Sociopolitical development and social identities. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 32(4), 1270–1279.
- Williams, D. (2006). On and off the 'Net: Scales for social capital in an online era. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 11(2), 593–628.
- Yang, S., Tang, J., Cai, J., & Guo, G. (2022). Effects of online brand community rituals on customer citizenship behavior: Exploring the sequential mediation mechanism. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 32(3), 393–405.
- Yang, X., Su, X., Lin, J., Liu, J., Miao, M., & Jiang, Y. (2024). How do we engage customers in official activity in the virtual brand community? The effects of Enterprise-Generated Contents on customer engagement behaviors. *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research*, 19(4), 3520–3546.
- Zaglia, M. E. (2012). Brand communities embedded in social networks. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(2), 216–223.
- Zanini, M. T., De Moraes, F. C., Lima, V., Migueles, C., Lourenco, C., & Irigaray, H. A. R. (2019). Soccer and Twitter: Virtual brand community engagement practices. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 37(7), 791–805.