



# Identify with community or company? An investigation on the consumer behavior in Facebook brand community



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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to consider simultaneously identification with the community and the company and to investigate the behavioral implications from the Facebook community members' perspective. This research also provided further insight into the mediating effect on Facebook Company's brand community and consumer citizenship behaviors by considering consumer–community identification and consumer–company identification. A questionnaire survey with consumers was carried out in this research for examining five proposed hypotheses. The results of this study indicated that the interaction on the Facebook community can enhance both C–C identifications and consumer citizenship behaviors. Also this study focused on the  $2 \times 2$  relationship with C–C identifications and consumer citizenship behaviors are all significant and positive but with slightly different effects.

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## 1. Introduction

Over the past years, the idea of consumer identification with companies has been examined and discussed in the literature within the context of marketing, consumer behavior, and psychology (Marzocchi et al., 2013). Consumers can also identify with what have been called “brand communities” (Cova, 1997). Muniz and O'Guinn (2001, p. 413) suggested that these “become a common understanding of a shared identity”, whereas McAlexander et al. (2002, p. 38) expanded the concept in arguing that “communities tend to be identified on the basis of commonality or identification among their members”. Some researchers have examined single and specific targets of identification, but still these studies are very few, e.g. Marzocchi et al. (2013). None has considered the likelihood that consumer–community identification and consumer–company identification exert independent and equivalent impacts on relevant consumer behaviors-related outcomes, particularly customers' discretionary behaviors.

Customers with high identification are more prone to contribute to the organization various desirable and voluntary behaviors, such as helping other customers or providing valuable feedback and references (Dutton et al., 1994; Feng and Morrison, 2007; Gruen et al., 2000; Qu and Lee, 2011). These discretionary behaviors can be considered as citizenship behaviors (Chen et al., 2010). In agreement with organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) theories, citizenship behaviors can be classified into in-role and ex-role behavior. Customer in-role behaviors indicate the formal part of the consumer's activity, e.g. purchasing the brand's products (Ahearne et al., 2005; van Dyne et al., 1995). On the other hand, extra-role behaviors specify voluntary and discretionary behavior that is not expected or rewarded (Groth, 2005), for example, making recommendations to others, and engaging in positive word of mouth about that brand (Lii and Lee, 2012). Accordingly, this

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research explores how identification with the community and identification with the company influence consumer citizenship behaviors respectively.

Furthermore, with the increasing development and popularity of social media recently, the brand community operating in the social media has become extremely fashionable (Trusov et al., 2009), particularly in Asia. Currently, almost 90% of Asian brands use social networks as a marketing platform, and 75% of these brands have developed social networking strategies that have been in place for over one year (Pon and Wang, 2012). However, empirical studies on Facebook Company's brand communities and its role for citizenship behaviors is in its infancy. The current empirical study enhances the knowledge about the relationships between company's brand community on Facebook and consumer identification with community and company. It then hypothesizes that the more a consumer identifies himself or herself as one of the brand community members on Facebook, the more likely he or she identifies with being part of this company and then exhibits both in-role and extra-role behaviors that will benefit the brand. An understanding of this process is a crucial contribution to strategic decisions concerning the relative allocation of effort to the fostering of consumers' identification with the company, with a brand community or with both.

This research begins with developing a framework to describe how a company's brand community on Facebook affects consumer–community and consumer–company identification and how customer citizenship behaviors are influenced by both C–C identifications. Further, it tests the model and hypotheses using structural equation modeling with survey data. Finally, this paper concludes with a discussion of marketing significance, theoretical and practical implications, and limitations for future research.

## 2. Literatures and hypotheses development

### 2.1. Facebook brand community

Facebook brand community can be considered a kind of brand community based on the social media platform, which is composed of social media and brand community (Laroche et al., 2013). Of all the social networks, Facebook is the most popular and claims to have attracted over 751 million active monthly users (as of March 2013) since starting in February 2004 ([www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)). Facebook has become the top social networking site by number of users and volume of access or use (Hsu, 2012). More and more companies find that it is necessary to have a brand presence on Facebook where companies can create brand posts containing anecdotes, photographs, videos, or other materials, and then brand fans can interact with these brand posts by liking or commenting on them (De Vries et al., 2012).

Regarding the concept of brand community, Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) defined the brand community as “a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand” (p. 412). A brand community is made up of its entities, including its members, their relationships, and the sharing of essential resources either emotional or material (Laroche et al., 2013). Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) list the benefits of brand communities as facilitating information sharing, strengthening the history and the culture of a brand, providing assistance to consumers, and positively influencing brand loyalty. As the conception of social media and brand communities have come closer to each other, the intersection of brand communities and social media has led to a concept called the social media based brand community (Laroche et al., 2013), such as that represented by Facebook brand community (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

According to Hsu (2012), the Facebook brand community includes the following features: sharing company, product or service information, communicating and sharing marketing messages, expanding networks, and getting feedback updates. Brand fans can share their enthusiasm about the brand on these dedicated pages and be united by their common interest in the brand (Kozinets, 1999; De Vries et al., 2012). Facebook brand community reflects part of the relationship with the company (McAlexander et al., 2002) and expands the customer–brand owner relationship (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). Consumers who become fans of these companies' brand community tend to be loyal and committed and are more open to receiving information about the brand (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006). Besides, brand fans tend to visit the store more, generate more positive word-of-mouth, and are more emotionally attached to the company than non-brand fans (Dholakia and Durham, 2010). Furthermore, people join Facebook brand communities to fulfill their need to be identified with groups or organizations with which they wish to associate or that are desirable to them (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998; Grayson and Martinec, 2004; Schembri et al., 2010). Therefore, this research aims to investigate company brand community on Facebook and how to affect consumer identification with community and company.

### 2.2. Consumer–community identification

According to Mael and Ashforth (1992), social identification has been defined as the individual perception of actual or symbolic belongingness to a group. Lembke and Wilson (1998) also argued that identification exists when a member feels, thinks, and behaves like a member of the group, which means that the member distinguishes a group identity from a self identity. By the process of social identification, individuals perceive themselves not only in terms of idiosyncratic characteristics that differentiate them from other individuals, but also in terms of the characteristics they share with other members of their in-group (Hogg and Abrams, 1988).

Recent studies begin by considering the strength of the consumer's relationship with the brand community, which can be illustrated as consumer–community identification (Huang and Chang, 2007). As stated by Algesheimer et al. (2005), consumer–community identification relates to whether an individual considers himself or herself a member, namely, as

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