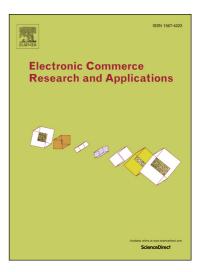
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BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA AND BEHAVIORAL BRAND LOYALTY

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ABSTRACT

Integrating several streams of theoretical reasoning such as social identity theory and customer engagement theory, this study examines the relationship between consumer responses in social media networks and behavioral brand loyalty in the context of Japanese professional sports: football and baseball. Data were collected from 309 panel registrants of an online research panel service. Based on the analysis, user characteristics as an opinion seeker and the entertainment value of social media pages were found to positively influence online brand community identification which in turn had a positive effect on brand-related social media engagement. Further, brand-related social media engagement and team identification, a type of consumer-brand identification, simultaneously affected behavioral brand loyalty. The theoretical model and results reinforced the importance of brand-related social media engagement toward behavioral brand loyalty, and added new insights into the antecedents of consumer engagement in the brand-related use of social media.

Keywords: Brand loyalty; customer engagement; online brand community identification; professional sports; social media engagement; sports fan; sports marketing

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