



Customer engagement in a Facebook brand community

Facebook brand
community

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Abstract

Purpose – Customer engagement is a concept that has emerged recently to capture customers' total set of behavioral activities toward a firm. The purpose of this paper is to study the effect of customer engagement behaviors on perceived relationship benefits and relationship outcomes.

Design/methodology/approach – An online survey of members of a gaming Facebook brand community, resulting in 276 usable responses from gaming customers.

Findings – Customer engagement was divided into "Community Engagement Behaviors" (CEB) and "Transactional Engagement Behaviors" (TEB). In addition, three relationship benefits were identified: social benefits, entertainment benefits and economic benefits. The engagement behaviors largely influenced the benefits received. Furthermore, the mediation analysis results show that the influence of CEB on satisfaction is partially mediated by social benefits and entertainment benefits, while the effect of TEB on satisfaction is fully mediated through the same benefits. The effect of CEB on loyalty is mediated through entertainment benefits.

Research limitations/implications – The findings are limited to one brand community. The findings have implications for further research on customer engagement.

Practical implications – The paper's findings give ideas about how firms can utilize Facebook communities to enhance satisfaction and loyalty by offering the right kinds of relationship benefits. Managers are encouraged to study customer engagement behaviors on, and perceptions of, all channels and to utilize this information for the development of their social media strategies.

Originality/value – Customer engagement is a newly introduced concept on which scarce empirical research exists, and there is very little evidence of its effect on customer relationships. This is the first paper to study customer engagement empirically on a Facebook brand community, and to relate customer engagement to relationship constructs.

Keywords Consumer behaviour, Social media, Social networking sites, Brands, Communities, Brand community, Facebook, Customer engagement, Relationship benefits, Customer loyalty, Customer satisfaction

Paper type Research paper



Introduction

Brand communities offer both firms and customers new ways to engage with each other. Whilst companies aim at engaging with loyal customers, influencing members' perceptions about the brand, disseminating information, and learning from and about customers (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005), customers gain value through the variety of practices that they perform online and offline (Schau *et al.*, 2009). Although originally,

an online brand community referred to a community on the World Wide Web, recently social media has been added to companies' marketing and brand building activities (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Attracted by the large number of users, companies have created brand communities in social media, such as Facebook, which boasts of having more than 500 million active users (www.Facebook.Com, 2011). Past studies on brand communities have not included, to our knowledge, these new communities.

To date, research has investigated to what extent customers identify with and engage motivationally with the brand and the brand community, the factors that explain this engagement, and how they impact customers' intended behaviors (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005). However, in this paper, we move beyond feelings of brand community engagement and employ the recently introduced concept of customer engagement as a behavioral manifestation (Bolton, 2011; van Doorn *et al.*, 2010). This type of customer engagement is directly related to the emergence of new media and all the new ways in which customers can interact with firms, including purchase and non-purchase behavior (Libai, 2011). It is defined as "a behavioral manifestation toward the brand or firm that goes beyond transactions" (Verhoef *et al.*, 2010, p. 247), and includes all consumer-to-firm interactions and consumer-to-consumer communications about the brand. Customer engagement recognizes that consumers carry out a number of firm-related behaviors of which many did not exist a decade ago and that may have both positive and negative consequences (e.g. positive versus negative reviews) for the firm. Such behaviors include online discussions, commenting, information search and opinion polls. In particular, customer engagement includes all communication through brand communities, blogging and other social media (van Doorn *et al.*, 2010). The present paper chooses to look at one forum for customer engagement, customer behavior in a brand community at the social networking site Facebook.

So far, there are few empirical studies on customer engagement behaviors, in general, and particularly in social media, although customer engagement has been recognized as key research priority of the Marketing Science Institute (Bolton, 2011, p. 272). Consequently, we know very little about the extent to which customers engage in different online behaviors, or about the relationship between customer behavioral engagement and other proximal constructs. Consequences of customers' engagement that have been proposed are, for example, trust, satisfaction, commitment and loyalty (Brodie *et al.*, 2011a; van Doorn *et al.*, 2010).

We suggest that customers, in addition to perhaps becoming more satisfied and loyal, also experience relationship benefits from engaging with the brand community. This assumption is based on the reasoning that customers, by engaging in different behaviors, receive different relationship benefits, for example, entertainment. We will investigate how customer engagement behaviors affect consumer perceived benefits and relationship outcomes, and assume a positive relationship between the constructs. Furthermore, we propose that perceived benefits mediate the effect of customer engagement on satisfaction and loyalty. The empirical study was performed on an online gaming company's Facebook brand community.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we present the main concepts of customer engagement, brand community, relationship constructs, and their hypothesized relationships. Second, the method is presented, followed by an analysis of the findings. We conclude by discussing the results and offering managerial implications, limitations, and future research directions.

Theoretical development

Customer engagement in brand communities

Customer engagement is defined as “behaviors [that] go beyond transactions, and may be specifically defined as a customer’s behavioral manifestations that have a brand or firm focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers” (van Doorn *et al.*, 2010, p. 254). It entails the customer’s interactive experiences with the brand, is context-dependent and enhances consumers’ experienced brand value (Brodie *et al.*, 2011a, b). Customer engagement is sometimes used to denote the highest form of loyalty (Bowden, 2009; Roberts and Alpert, 2010), but as behavioral manifestation it includes all kinds of behaviors, not only those that are characteristic of high degrees of loyalty (Libai, 2011; Narayandas, 1998).

van Doorn *et al.* (2010) posit that customer engagement consists of five dimensions. First, customer engagement can be expressed in different ways depending on the customer’s resources (e.g. time). Second, it can result in different types of outcomes for the customer (e.g. improvements in the service). Third, it can vary in scope and be momentary, such as issuing a complaint, or ongoing behavior. Fourth, it has varying impact on the firm and peers (negative/positive), and, fifth, customers may engage in the behaviors for different purposes. Customers engage in a number of behaviors that strengthen their relationship with the brand, which go beyond the traditional customer loyalty measures, such as frequency of visits, purchasing behavior, and intended behaviors. One of the most popular forums in which customers engage behaviorally with firms is social media, referring to “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). Until recently, their potential has been underestimated (Woisetschläger *et al.*, 2008), although social media platforms are considered particularly suitable for developing customer relationships (Kane *et al.*, 2009). Indeed, it is the increased role of social media that has created a need for the concept of customer engagement (Bielski, 2008).

Brand community

Brand communities form one important platform for customers’ engagement behaviors, which firms employ to engage their customers (Brodie *et al.*, 2011b; Dholakia *et al.*, 2004; Kane *et al.*, 2009; McAlexander *et al.*, 2002). An increasing number of firms host online communities for commercial purposes with the intent to build relationships with customers, get feedback, and strengthen the brand (Wiertz and de Ruyter, 2007).

Muniz and O’guinn (2001, p. 412) define brand community as “a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand”. Studies have shown that customer participation in brand communities affects loyalty positively and strengthens relationships. A brand community is a collective of people with a shared interest in a specific brand, creating a subculture around the brand with its own values, myths, hierarchy, rituals and vocabulary (Cova and Pace, 2006). Virtual brand communities used to emerge from consumer initiatives but also companies have started to create communities as part of brand management strategies (Arnone *et al.*, 2010). Porter (2004) differentiated between member- and organization initiated virtual communities. Member-initiated communities can be either socially or professionally oriented, whereas organization-sponsored communities are divided into commercial, nonprofit, and governmental communities.

Regardless of community type, consumers may engage in several types of behaviors in communities, such as helping other customers or sharing experiences with them (Nambisan and Baron, 2009). Furthermore, many consumers engage in non-interactive behaviors such as reading others' comments, or lurk, and Shang *et al.* (2006) found that lurking enhanced customer loyalty even more than commenting did. Online communities have different types of users based on how strong their ties are to the brand and to the other community members. Not all customers engage in the same way with firms. For example, previous research has shown that internet users differ in what they typically do online (Brandtzæg *et al.*, 2011) and in their satisfaction with different types of online community behaviors (De Valck *et al.*, 2009).

Because an increasing amount of people spend time in communities it is meaningful to investigate consumers' engagement in them (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Ouwersloot and Odekerken-Schröder, 2008). We believe that customer engagement leads to perceived relationship benefits of engaging in a brand community. Such benefits are discussed next.

Perceived relationship benefits of customer engagement in brand communities

It is generally agreed upon that in order to create and maintain relationships between two parties both need to feel that they gain something (Gwinner *et al.*, 1998). From a consumer point of view, engagement behaviors may thus be motivated by satisfying needs and gaining benefits from the behavior itself or from the overall brand relationship that is supported by the behaviors.

Brand communities on Facebook are characterized by certain special elements compared with other virtual brand communities that may offer clues to the kind of benefits consumers are seeking. According to a compilation of literature made by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), brand communities in social media share three characteristics. First, they enable social presence in the form of acoustic, visual and physical contact, which emerges between communication partners. Second, according to the theory of media richness, the goal of any communication is avoiding uncertainty and reducing ambiguity. Some media are more effective than others in resolving these concerns, and brand communities in social media are especially well suited for this purpose due to the large amount of information being transmitted at any given time. Third, brand communities in social media are also strongly connected to the concept of self-presentation, meaning that individuals desire to control the impression that other people form of them in all types of social interaction. Self-disclosure is also an important part of relationship development, which often occurs in social media and especially on social networking sites like Facebook. These goals indicate that customers may gain social and practical information benefits (Dholakia *et al.*, 2004) by engaging in community behaviors. It is also likely that consumers experience other types of relationship benefits, such as entertainment benefits, by engaging in the Facebook community.

Drawing upon previous studies, the present study focuses on the following benefits: practical benefits, social benefits, social enhancement, entertainment and economic benefits. Practical benefits include informational and instrumental benefits (Dholakia *et al.*, 2004) that are often achievable through companies' Facebook sites. The community can become a channel for customer feedback and questions, which leads to informational benefits. Recently, Casaló *et al.* (2010/2011) speculated that

consumers would, by participating in an online community, become more knowledgeable and aware of the provider's offering, and thereby gain information benefits, but did not test this. Social benefits are derived from interaction between the company and the customer and refer to recognition or even friendship (Gwinner *et al.*, 1998). Before the existence of Web 2.0, social benefits were not considered important in an online context. For example, customers of air travel and bookstores were found to experience confidence (trust) benefits and special treatment benefits (saving time and receiving extra services) rather than social benefits (Yen and Gwinner, 2003). Furthermore, it was even speculated that the lack of social contact might dilute loyalty (Selnes and Hansen, 2001). However, in virtual brand communities there are several potential sources of social benefits. For example, customers engage in discussions with peers, giving and receiving help. In addition, they can be seen thanking the company for birthday bonuses and gifts. Customers may also seek social enhancement, which derives from the need to feel useful, recognized and needed in the community (Hars and Ou, 2002; Ho and Dempsey, 2010; Nambisan and Baron, 2010).

Entertainment benefits are derived from relaxation and fun (Dholakia *et al.*, 2004) and could be motivating community participation. Entertainment is also an experiential value that customers derive from using online services (Mathwick *et al.*, 2001; Nambisan and Baron, 2009; Nonnecke *et al.*, 2006). In a brand community context, entertainment can be expected to be even more important than on electronic commerce sites. People spend their time browsing the community pages and applications such as games can be incorporated to a Facebook site. Economic benefits (Gwinner *et al.*, 1998) refer to people joining brand communities in order to gain discounts and time savings, or to take part in raffles and competitions.

Based on the above, we expect a positive relationship between customer engagement behaviors and perceived relationship benefits, so that higher customer engagement leads to higher perceived benefits. To date, there are no studies on this particular relationship:

H₁. Customer behavioral engagement in a brand community will have a positive effect on perceived relationship benefits.

Relationship outcomes

Customer engagement is believed to be directly and positively related to a number of brand relationship outcomes, such as satisfaction, trust, affective commitment, and loyalty (Brodie *et al.*, 2011b). Consumers are likely to join a brand community because of having both feelings of loyalty and being customers of the brand. Customers who take part in brand communities are believed to already have a baseline relationship with the brand, which is further influenced by community participation (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005). Loyalty is regarded as a fundamental reason for brand community participation, i.e. consumers join brand communities because they like the brand and feel loyal to it (McAlexander *et al.*, 2002). Thus, by engaging in the community, loyalty can be further strengthened. Consumer satisfaction is likewise positively influenced by customers' affective responses such as their enjoyment, excitement and pleasure of using the service (Lynch *et al.*, 2001; Wolfinbarger and Gilly, 2001), and these may be experienced due to customer engagement. Customer satisfaction can be seen as a measure of the quality of the relationship between the customer and the firm (De Wulf and Odekerken-Schröder, 2001). There are numerous studies within different fields, demonstrating the importance

of satisfaction and loyalty (Anderson, 1998; Bansal *et al.*, 2004; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Garbarino and Johnson, 1999; Gummrus *et al.*, 2004; Papadopoulou *et al.*, 2001). Although a baseline of satisfaction and loyalty can be expected from community members, engagement behaviors reinforce the brand relationship. The more engaged customers are, the higher we expect their satisfaction, and loyalty to be (Brodie *et al.*, 2011b). To date, however, there are no studies on how customer engagement relates to these constructs. Since perceived benefits are believed to precede relationship outcome constructs (Gwinner *et al.*, 1998; Zeithaml, 1988) and because previous research has demonstrated that relationship benefits mediate the effect of customer evaluations on loyalty (Yen and Gwinner, 2003), we assume that perceived benefits will mediate the effect of customer engagement on relationship outcomes:

*H*_{2a}. Relationship benefits mediate the effect of customer engagement on satisfaction.

*H*_{2b}. Relationship benefits mediate the effect of customer engagement on loyalty.

Method

A survey was constructed and administered to the users of the Facebook brand community of an online gaming provider. The gaming operator (here called Game) which wishes to remain anonymous, was created more than 40 years ago, and has currently about 70,000 active internet customers.

Description of the brand community

Game Club is a free-of-charge member club for all customers. Game Club offers customers activities both offline and online. In the past, the main focus has been in organizing trips and events for the customers to socialize in person in different parts of the world. Recently, socializing opportunities have been extended into the digital world. In 2009 Game created a brand community on the social network site Facebook. In January 2011 the community had close to 7,000 members. No specific marketing campaigns have been organized to recruit members to the community. Customers find the Game Club Facebook site either through recommendation of others or by clicking on a Facebook icon on the Game web site.

The front page of the community consists of a wall where everyone can post their own messages and comment other members' postings. In line with the event driven role of Game Club, much of the content on member's postings is related to trips and events, and comments on the photos and stories about what happened during these trips. Hence, even those customers that did not participate in events can read about others' experiences. All news, including uploaded pictures and videos, appear on the wall. In addition, the community includes: Info, Photos, Events, Video, Discussion, Links and a game. At the time of the study, the discussions were not active and included only a few posts.

Messages are posted daily by Game Club. They have an informal tone and include raffles, pictures, comments on daily events, and updates from Club trips abroad organized for the customers. These posts are often commented upon by members and receive "likes" from them. "Likes" is a specialty of Facebook and means that one gives a thumb up for a comment, picture, video, etc. More recently, the content has evolved into being more interactive including also blog style posting of participants.

Since anyone who is a Facebook member can take part in the Game Club Facebook activities, a control question was used to make sure that the respondents were in fact customers of the focal company, excluding other visitors. Thereby it was assured that customer engagement was measured, rather than the momentary engagement of occasional, non-customer visitors.

Measures

The constructs were measured with multiple items. Customer engagement extends beyond transactional behaviors to include all behaviors with the firm, in this case on the brand community. Consequently, customer engagement was measured with a combination of brand community and transactional behaviors, including frequency of brand community visits, content liking, commenting, and news reading, as well as frequency of playing, and money spent on the internet gaming site. It should be observed that ordinal scales were used since pure interval scales would have fitted ill with the measures. Each scale consisted of five options, ranging from highest frequency/spending to lowest frequency/spending (Table I). The frequency of behaviors in the brand community site was fairly well spread among the answer options, demonstrating a variation of customer behaviors.

Practical, social, social enhancement and entertainment benefits were measured with items borrowed from Dholakia *et al.* (2004). Economic benefits include special treatment and were based on Gwinner and colleagues' work (Gwinner *et al.*, 1998; Yen and Gwinner, 2003). The construct of satisfaction was based on Oliver (1981), and customer loyalty was combined from two sources (Ouwersloot and Odekerken-Schröder, 2008; Punniyamoorthy and Raj, 2007). The statements were measured on seven-point scales with the anchors "completely disagree"- "completely agree".

The constructs were factor analyzed with IBM SPSS Statistics 19 to explore the factor structure of engagement behaviors and to check for construct validity of the relationship measures. Two engagement behavior factors were found, one for community behavior and one for transactional behavior. The variable measuring how often customers visit the site was dropped, because it loaded equally on both factors. This seems logical, since visiting the site is a prerequisite for any type of engagement. Further, the analyses revealed that some items should be dropped from the relationship constructs. Practical benefits, social enhancement and social benefits loaded together, demonstrating that they all capture customers' social interaction on the site. Hence, the three original constructs were combined into one social benefits construct. Economic and entertainment benefits loaded separately. The final items that were used in the analyses are presented in the Appendix together with their respective factor loadings and Cronbach's α reliability statistics for all constructs containing at least three items. The mediation model to be tested is shown in Figure 1.

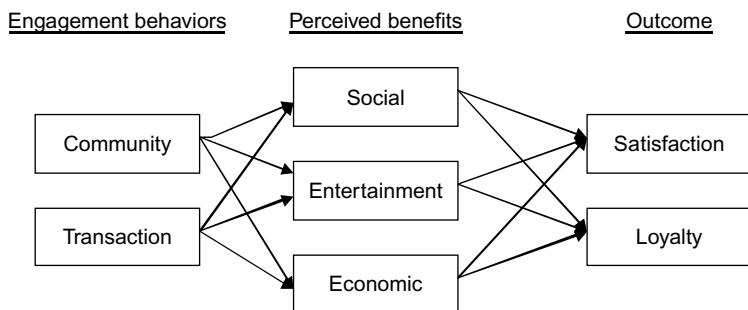
Sample characteristic

The data were collected by posting an invitation for five days on the online community site in November 2010. All in all, 659 members opened the questionnaire and of these 289 answered it. 12 respondents were deleted because they were not official members of the brand community Game Club ($n = 7$), or did not complete the questions on the central constructs ($n = 5$). Missing values were allowed for the background characteristics of age and gender. Skewness and kurtosis of the relationship constructs were analyzed and were within the recommended limits (Hair *et al.*, 2006).

Table I.
Customer engagement behaviors: Facebook brand community behavior, playing and spending behavior

	<i>n</i>	%
<i>Visit community (n = 276)</i>		
Daily	74	26.8
4-6 times per week	59	21.4
1-3 times per week	88	31.9
2-3 times per month	37	13.4
Once a month or more seldom	18	6.3
<i>Reads Game Club messages (n = 276)</i>		
Regularly	103	37.3
Often	104	37.7
Sometimes	61	22.1
Very seldom	6	2.2
No, I ignore them	2	0.7
<i>"Likes" messages (n = 276)</i>		
Regularly	27	9.8
Often	57	20.7
Sometimes	87	31.5
Very seldom	58	21.0
No	47	17.0
<i>Writes comments (n = 276)</i>		
Regularly	12	4.3
Often	15	5.4
Sometimes	61	22.1
Very seldom	84	30.4
No	105	37.7
<i>Playing (n = 276)</i>		
Daily	25	9.1
4-6 times per week	45	16.3
1-3 times per week	74	26.8
2-3 times per month	82	29.7
Once a month or more seldom	60	18.2
<i>Money spent (n = 276)</i>		
Over €200	36	13.0
€100-€200	38	13.8
€50-€100	61	22.1
€20-€50	69	25.0
€0-€20	72	26.1

Figure 1.
Mediation model



There was a slight negative skewness for satisfaction and loyalty, which is common in surveys of current customers of one brand. Data were checked for outliers and none were detected. The sample consists of about one-quarter female (25.8 percent) and three-quarter male (74.2 percent) respondents, aged 18-66 ($M = 32$).

The descriptive statistics of customer engagement behaviors (Table I) show that the respondents were frequent customers of the brand community site. When summed up, close to 80 percent visited the site at least once a week, and out of these 27 percent visited the site daily. Spending per month was about equally divided between the three lowest alternatives: less than €20 (27 percent), €20-50 (25 percent), and €50-100 (22 percent), and between the two highest: €100-200 (13.8 percent) and above €200 (13 percent).

Results

Mediation analysis was carried out according to the instructions of Zhou *et al.* (2010), using the Hayes and Preacher (2011) macro for mediation analysis (www.afhayes.com), which allows using multiple independent and mediating variables. Mediation requires discriminant validity between the mediator, the independent and the dependent variables. Lack of discriminant validity may result in full mediation being found, when the mediating variable is, in fact, a manipulation check of the independent or dependent variable. In our case, factor analysis supports the constructs as separate measures and the correlation table (Table II) shows that the highest correlations are found between constructs within the mediating and outcome variables, rather than between the mediator and the independent or dependent variables. The results of the mediation analyses are presented for satisfaction as dependent variable in Table III, and for loyalty as dependent variable in Table IV (Hayes, 2009).

The mediation analysis reveals three main types of results:

- (1) the relationship between independent variables, i.e. community engagement behaviors (CEB) and transactional engagement behaviors (TEB) and mediators (the so-called Path A's);
- (2) the indirect effects of independent variables on dependent variables through mediators (noted by "a \times b"); and
- (3) the direct effects from the mediators and independent variables on dependent variables (Path B's and C's).

$n = 276$	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
(1) Community engagement	1						
(2) Transactional engagement	0.280 **	1					
(3) Social benefits	0.532 **	0.263 **	0.1				
(4) Entertainment benefits	0.371 **	0.216 **	0.489 **	1			
(5) Economic benefits	0.189 **	0.071	0.210 **	0.317 **	1		
(6) Satisfaction	0.232 **	0.089	0.105	0.335 *	0.192 **	1	
(7) Loyalty	0.083	0.141 *	0.087	0.226 **	0.111	0.654 **	1
Mean	3.01	2.66	2.90	4.51	5.02	5.83	5.81

Note: * $p < 0.05$ and ** $p < 0.01$

Table II.
Pearson correlation and
mean values of constructs

	<i>Indirect effects (a × b)</i>	<i>Effect</i>	<i>LLCI</i>	<i>ULCI</i>	<i>Findings</i>
Economic benefits as mediator					
TEB-economic benefits-satisfaction	0.002	−0.015	0.018		
CEB-economic benefits-satisfaction	0.024	−0.010	0.079		
Omnibus test	0.002	−0.001	0.012	No indirect effect of engagement behaviors through economic benefits on satisfaction	
Social benefits as mediator					
TEB-social benefits-satisfaction	−0.028	−0.062	−0.004		
CEB-social benefits-satisfaction	−0.122	−0.218	−0.032		
Omnibus test	−0.043	−0.081	−0.012	Indirect effect of engagement behaviors through social benefits on satisfaction	
Entertainment benefits as mediator					
TEB-entertainment benefits-satisfaction	0.043	0.002	0.097		
CEB-entertainment benefits-satisfaction	0.155	0.073	0.256		
Omnibus test	0.035	0.014	0.070	Indirect effect of engagement behaviors through entertainment benefits on satisfaction	
<i>Direct effects (Path B's and C's)</i>	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>		
Constant	3.911	11.310	0.000		
TEB-satisfaction	0.015	0.238	0.812	No direct effect from TEB on satisfaction	
CEB-satisfaction	0.265	2.718	0.007	Direct effect from CEB on Satisfaction	
Economic benefits-satisfaction	0.081	1.546	0.123	No effect of economic benefits on satisfaction	
Social benefits-satisfaction	−0.143	−2.383	0.018	Negative effect of social benefits on satisfaction	
Entertainment benefits-satisfaction	0.241	4.729	0.000	Positive effect of entertainment benefits on satisfaction	
<i>Independent variables-mediators (Path A's)</i>	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>		
Engagement behaviors-economic benefits					
Constant	4.048	12.414	0.000		
TEB-economic benefits	0.028	0.369	0.713	No effect of TEB on economic benefits	
CEB-economic benefits	0.300	2.976	0.003	Positive effect of CEB on economic benefits	
Engagement behaviors-social benefits					
Constant	−0.182	−0.619	0.537		
TEB-social benefits	0.195	2.890	0.004	Positive effect of TEB on Social Benefits	
CEB-social benefits	0.853	9.404	0.000	Positive effect of CEB on Social Benefits	
Engagement behaviors-entertainment benefits					
Constant	2.105	5.935	0.000		
TEB-entertainment benefits	0.179	2.200	0.029	Positive effect of TEB on entertainment benefits	
CEB-entertainment benefits	0.642	5.856	0.000	Positive effect of CEB on entertainment benefits	

Table III.

Mediation results with satisfaction as dependent variable

Notes: Model summary: $R^2 = 0.3873$, adj. $R^2 = 0.1342$; omnibus test: $R^2 = 0.0244$; $F = 3.8701$; $p = 0.0220$; LLCI – lower level of confidence interval; ULCI – upper level of confidence interval

<i>Indirect effects (a × b)</i>	<i>Effect</i>	<i>LLCI</i>	<i>ULCI</i>	<i>Findings</i>
Economic benefits as mediator				
TEB-economic benefits-loyalty	0.0012	-0.0127	0.0158	
CEB-economic benefits-loyalty	0.0133	-0.0322	0.0619	
Omnibus test	0.0013	-0.0042	0.0089	No indirect effect of engagement behaviors through economic benefits on loyalty
Social benefits as mediator				
TEB-social benefits-loyalty	-0.0097	-0.041	0.0175	
CEB-social benefits-loyalty	-0.0423	-0.1523	0.0744	
Omnibus test	-0.0148	-0.0546	0.0275	No indirect effect of engagement behaviors through social benefits on loyalty
Entertainment benefits as mediator				
TEB-entertainment benefits-loyalty	0.0315	0.0013	0.0762	
CEB-entertainment benefits-loyalty	0.1125	0.0344	0.2024	
Omnibus test	0.0257	0.0075	0.0527	Indirect effect of engagement behaviors through entertainment benefits on loyalty
Direct effects (Path B's and C's)	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Findings</i>
Constant	4.635	12.003	0.000	
TEB-satisfaction	0.122	1.729	0.085	No direct effect of TEB on loyalty
CEB-satisfaction	-0.008	-0.076	0.940	No direct effect of CEB on loyalty
Economic benefits-loyalty	0.045	0.762	0.447	No effect of economic benefits on loyalty
Social benefits-loyalty	-0.050	-0.743	0.458	No effect of Social Benefits on loyalty
Entertainment benefits-loyalty	0.175	3.081	0.002	Positive effect of entertainment benefits on loyalty

Notes: Model summary: $R^2 = 0.2534$, adj. $R^2 = 0.0469$; omnibus test: $R^2 = 0.0104$; $F = 1.5054$; $p = 0.2238$

Table IV.
Mediation results with
loyalty as dependent
variable

Notably, the relationship between independent variables and mediators (Path A's) are the same regardless of the dependent variable, and are therefore presented solely in Table III.

The results regarding Path A's presented in Table III show that CEB have a positive influence on all three types of relationship benefits (social, entertainment, and economic benefits), whilst TEB have a positive effect on social and entertainment benefits, but not on economic benefits. Based on these results, we find partial support for hypothesis H_1 , i.e. customer behavioral engagement has a positive effect on perceived relationship benefits, except for the insignificant path between TEB and economic benefits.

The mediation analysis results ("a × b") in Table III further reveal that CEB and TEB have a positive influence on satisfaction through entertainment benefits, and a negative influence on satisfaction through social benefits, as the confidence intervals do not include zero (Zhou *et al.*, 2010). However, economic benefits do not act as mediators

between CEB/TEB and satisfaction, as indicated by the confidence intervals including zero. The omnibus test results (under Path B's and C's) confirm that CEB also has a direct effect on satisfaction, beside the indirect ones (omnibus test $R^2 = 0.0244$; $F = 3.8701$; $p = 0.022$), whilst TEB does not have a direct influence on satisfaction.

Regarding loyalty, the mediation analysis results (see Table IV, indirect effects “ $a \times b$ ”) reveal that CEB and TEB have a positive influence on loyalty through entertainment benefits, as the confidence interval does not include zero (Zhou *et al.*, 2010). However, social and economic benefits do not act as mediators between CEB/TEB and loyalty, as indicated by the confidence intervals including zero. The omnibus test results (under Path B's and C's) show that there are no direct effects of CEB/TEB on loyalty (omnibus test $R^2 = 0.0104$; $F = 1.5054$; $p = 0.2238$). These findings show only partial support for H_{2a} and H_{2b} , that relationship benefits mediate the effect of customer behavioral engagement on satisfaction and loyalty.

Summary and conclusions

First, the main findings are summarized and discussed. We then present managerial implications of the results and conclude with future research directions and limitations.

Discussion of results

This article contributes to marketing literature by shedding light on the relationship between customer behavioral engagement, relationship benefits, and satisfaction and loyalty in the context of a Facebook brand community. Our findings are summarized in Table V.

The findings support by large that customer behavioral engagement has a positive effect on relationship benefits, in that CEB such as liking content, writing comments and

Relationship	Dependent variable (DV)	
	Satisfaction	Loyalty
Path A \times B _(CEB-economic benefits-DV)	n.s.	n.s.
Path A \times B _(TEB-economic benefits-DV)	n.s.	n.s.
Path A \times B _(CEB-social benefits-DV)	Negative	n.s.
Path A \times B _(TEB-social benefits-DV)	Negative	n.s.
Path A \times B _(CEB-entertainment benefits-DV)	Positive	Positive
Path A \times B _(TEB-entertainment benefits-DV)	Positive	Positive
Path A _{TEB-economic benefits}	n.s.	n.s.
Path A _{CEB-economic benefits}	Positive	Positive
Path A _{TEB-social benefits}	Positive	Positive
Path A _{CEB-social benefits}	Positive	Positive
Path A _{TEB-entertainment benefits}	Positive	Positive
Path A _{CEB-entertainment benefits}	Positive	Positive
Path B _{economic benefits-DV}	n.s.	n.s.
Path B _{social benefits-DV}	Negative	n.s.
Path B _{entertainment benefits-DV}	Positive	Positive
Path C _{TEB-DV}	n.s.	n.s.
Path C _{CEB-DV}	Positive	n.s.

Table V.
Relationship benefits as a mediator of customer engagement on relationship outcomes

Notes: CEB – community engagement behaviors; TEB – transactional engagement behaviors; DV – dependent variable

reading messages influenced positively all relationship benefits, whereas TEB (gaming and spending money) had a positive impact on social benefits and entertainment benefits, but not on economic benefits. This may be due to the fact that those, who already play games frequently and spend most money on these games, do not find the economic benefits of a Facebook community (bonuses, lotteries, better service and fast responses) that relevant.

The mediation analysis for satisfaction revealed some unexpected results, as the mediated effects of community engagement behaviors (CEB and TEB) on satisfaction through social benefits were negative. This kind of finding with negative indirect paths, along with the direct positive effect from CEB to satisfaction represents competitive mediation and is potentially a sign of an omitted mediator in the direct path (Zhou *et al.*, 2010). For example, it is possible that CEB lead to higher expectations on the firm, and therein to negative influence on satisfaction. It is also possible that the community engagement entails writing or reading negative comments which would logically be related to lower satisfaction levels. Another plausible explanation for this finding relates to the low mean value of social benefits (Table II). The activity level on the Facebook community is perhaps not high enough for those customers who are seeking social recognition or affiliation (Odekerken-Schröder *et al.*, 2003), thereby leading to reduced satisfaction with increasing engagement levels.

Entertainment benefits in turn mediated the influence of both community and transactional behaviors on satisfaction and loyalty, whereas economic benefits such as bonuses or lotteries had no influence on either satisfaction or loyalty. This is interesting result, because many Facebook communities focus on competitions and lotteries as the main attraction to the site. Based on this result, those activities do not increase satisfaction or loyalty towards a firm.

Furthermore, being entertained in the community was more important for the brand relationship outcome than the social activities of, for example, getting to know other community members, staying in touch with or helping community members. Such member-to-member activities have been shown to be very important in other online communities (De Valck *et al.*, 2009). The nature of the product, gaming, is such that it aims to entertain, and achieving this goal should increase customer satisfaction and loyalty (Mathwick *et al.*, 2001). On the other hand, the gaming that customers participated in was to a large extent games that are performed alone rather than social games (not revealed due to confidentiality reasons). Social support may not be of paramount importance to these gamers. Other types of online communities, for example, role plays that require social interaction with others, might show a higher importance of social benefits. In addition, the personal nature of Facebook may make members prefer to turn to their own peer network within Facebook for social support, rather than seeking social benefits within Facebook brand communities.

Our findings also shed light on the nature of customer participation. Previous research has suggested that reading discussions (e.g. information seeking) is a form of passive participation, whereas posting comments is active (Shang *et al.*, 2006). Based on our results, we suggest that the customer engagement behaviors (reading discussions, posting comments, and liking content) may refer to different forms of activity, and that activity versus passivity should rather be defined based on the frequency of activity. Furthermore, studies should differentiate between positive and negative behaviors (e.g. positive “liking” versus negative commenting).

Based on our findings, we can further state that only a small portion of customers actively interact with the content and with other members, while most customers use the brand community mainly as a source of information, reading messages rather than contributing with “likes” or comments.

The results support the notion that even if a community is made up of its members and the relationships between the community elements (McAlexander *et al.*, 2002), the members are more interested in the brand than in each other. Furthermore, the results indicate that a Facebook brand community, although situated in a social networking site, connects the members to the brand rather than to each other. It may also be that members of an online gaming site are more reluctant to leave traces of themselves on the community than members of less controversial sites (e.g. a phone or sports brand community).

Managerial implications

Our findings have several implications for social media strategies, and help marketers to understand customer participation (Casaló *et al.*, 2008) and customer engagement (van Doorn *et al.*, 2010), which is important to fight the increasing consumer immunity towards commercial media (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006).

In line with the findings, brand community providers should focus on offering entertainment and social benefits to their visitors. These were found most important in enhancing satisfaction and loyalty towards the firm. The lack of importance of economic benefits indicates that current business practices of using Facebook sites to attract new customers with economic benefits may not be productive in the long run. The visitors who are attracted by lotteries and competitions are not necessarily loyal to the Facebook brand community provider in their buying behaviors, possibly not even in their CEB. Therefore, ensuring long term engagement behaviors both in the form of community actions and purchase behavior requires strategies that emphasize entertaining content and possibilities for socialization within the Facebook community.

Entertainment benefits are likely to be an essential attraction for all types of gaming sites, but also other sites are encouraged to offer entertaining elements, such as comic strips, videos, or photos, to put customers in a good mood and to encourage them to return to the site. By offering daily entertainment, customers can be attracted to visit a site more often, thereby also increasing their likelihood of reading up on new products and other company information, as well as engaging in other activities.

Likewise, social benefits may be paramount in some communities while being unimportant in others. Previous research has found social interaction with others in online communities to be an important source of content creation as well as paramount in attracting new visitors. For example, a baby and pregnancy magazine’s online social network web site relies solely on customer created content and its’ online discussion forum is very popular (Ellonen and Kuivalainen, 2008). Social benefits can be developed by providing more opportunities for member-to-member interactions and by adding social features that are valued by the members.

Customer engagement behaviors are essential for the success of any community, without active commentators and likers there will not be much to read or lurk about. Therefore, companies need to track and encourage customer engagement behaviors in such a way that it not solely leads to more commenting and liking, but also to purchase behavior. Firms may want to encourage and reward consumers to become more active on the site to receive maximal relationship benefits from the community.

As noted by Libai (2011), customer engagement behaviors can be collected unobtrusively by analyzing social networking sites, brand communities and other sources, which enables companies to detect highly engaged customers, who may be engaged further in developing services, spreading word of mouth, or performing other marketing activities. However, Libai (2011) also warns against placing too much importance on highly engaged customers, who usually form a tiny minority of brand community users.

Companies need to create content that keeps customers visiting the Facebook site and encourages them to engage also in transactional behaviors. By combining customers' interactive, transactional, and word of mouth behaviors with a customer profitability analysis, customer segments can be created that may be better and more profitably managed (Ryals, 2008; Storbacka, 1997). For this purpose, the construct of engagement is helpful in estimating which customer segments to focus on while designing the strategy and content of the Facebook site.

Future research directions and limitations

There is a paucity of research on customer engagement behaviors and our study is one of the first empirical studies to identify types of engagement behaviors in an online community and to study their effect on brand relationships. In the future, more studies are needed on different types of brand communities to identify similar as well as other engagement behaviors, or engagement behavior dimensions. We agree with Brodie and Hollebeek (2011) that there is a need for both theoretical and empirical studies on the nature of customer engagement. Although market research agencies have already created measures for customer engagement (van Doorn, 2011), more research is needed before we have widely accepted, valid and reliable measures of this concept.

Another question relates to the way customer engagement and its proximal constructs should be modeled. In an ongoing relationship it is difficult to separate antecedents of customer engagement from its moderators and consequences, since it is likely that there exists a circular logic in these. On one hand, engagement behaviors may affect relationship outcomes and perceived benefits (Brodie *et al.*, 2011b), as assumed here, whereas on the other hand, these constructs may influence engagement behaviors (van Doorn *et al.*, 2010). These relationships require further research.

In particular, it is necessary to investigate further the relationship between CEB and satisfaction. As the results of this study showed, it is possible that there is an unidentified mediator between CEB and satisfaction. Future studies should investigate whether those customers being active on the community have higher expectations towards the firm.

In addition, the emergence of brand communities in social media raises several questions on customer behavior towards multiple community sites. Research is needed on whether customers are shifting from the World Wide Web towards social media brand communities, and what that means in terms of who joins these communities and why. What are the differences, from customers' point of view between Facebook brand communities and other online brand communities? Do customers engage in both, or do they prefer using one over the other? Do customers engage in different behaviors in these communities and what are their expectations on the communities? As Malthouse and Calder (2011) suggest, customer engagement can only be understood through customer experiences, which are context-dependent.

There is also a need to study customer engagement behaviors across all the channels that customers use to engage with a firm. Our study was limited to the engagement behavior in a Facebook brand community, while customers also engage with the brand in other ways. Future studies should investigate customer engagement types based on all their brand related behaviors and to study their effect on brand related outcomes.

The study has some limitations that need to be considered. First, self-selection of respondents affects the results and may have led to, for example, a lower number of passive customers than the real proportion among all community users. A passive community user may also be less likely to take part in survey.

Second, the behavioral measures were reported by the customers, and we had no way of corroborating the answers with actual spending or frequency patterns. Therefore, future studies should look into the possibility of gathering behavioral information directly from the company and combine it with customer profitability measures and/or customer self-reported relationship measures.

Third, because the findings are based on one industry they are not directly applicable to other industries or brand communities, and more research is needed to generalize the results. Furthermore, the community under study is a new community that has not yet reached its full potential and it would be desirable to study customer engagement in other, more mature and active communities.

Finally, future studies should look into relationship benefits and relationship outcomes resulting from company versus community interactions, and the role of customer engagement in these interactions.

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Further reading

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Appendix

	Factor loading
<i>Customer engagement behaviors</i>	
Community engagement behaviors (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.679$)	
Reads Game Club messages	0.756
"Likes" messages	0.716
Writes comments	0.667
Transaction engagement behaviors (Pearson correlation coeff., $r = 0.536$)	
Plays	0.817
Spends money	0.848
<i>Relationship benefits</i>	
Statements began with: I am a facebook brand community club member of Game	
Social benefits (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.882$)	
Because I want to get to know other community members	0.829
To help other community members	0.844
To feel needed by Game or other community members	0.782
To get help from other community members	0.811
To provide information to other community members	0.689
To share my ideas with other community members	0.737
Because I want to stay in touch with other community members	0.508
Entertainment benefits (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.876$)	
To get entertained	0.847
To relax	0.831
To pass time when I am bored	0.813
Economic benefits (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.778$)	
To get bonuses	0.793
To participate in lotteries	0.802
To get better service	0.747
To get fast responses	0.689
<i>Relationship outcomes</i>	
Satisfaction (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.901$)	
I am satisfied with my decision to become a member/fan of the Club Game Facebook group	0.860
I think that I did the right thing when I decided to become a Club Game Facebook group member/fan	0.899
I am satisfied with my decision to become a Game customer	0.797
I am satisfied with Game	0.645
Loyalty (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.875$)	
I consider Game as my number one choice of online game provider	0.840
I say positive things about Game to other people	0.816
I would recommend Game to my friends	0.843

Table AI.

Final measures of the constructs and factor loadings

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