# Brand Community Motives and Engagement: The Impact of Gender

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## ABSTRACT

Brand communities are of great interest to marketers, and motivating participation in these communities has been explored from many different perspectives. The current study examined how men and women differ in the motives (i.e., entertainment, receiving and sharing information, social integration, self-discovery, and status enhancement) behind their behavior rather than the more often discussed difference between men and women regarding actual behavior and attitudes. A survey sample (N ¼ 195) was collected to explore this, and the data were analyzed with PLS-SEM. The model of participation motives for women was compared to the model for men, and differences (and similarities) were analyzed. The findings indicate that the genders have different motivations to participate in these brand communities. Specifically, the self-discovery and sharing information motives were significantly more important for males, while the social integration motive was significantly more important for females. However, the genders had no differences regarding entertainment, receiving information, and status enhancement motives.

## Introduction

A successful brand usually comprises a unique set of personalities and stories. Essentially, a brand is a mix of functional and emotional attributes realized by consumers as an added value (Grubor & Milovanov, 2017; Kato, 2021) such that consumers associate the brand name with certain product features that provide utility along with more hedonic, emotional associations that are harder for other brands to copy. Nowadays, brand management cannot be limited to one-way traditional mass marketing strategies to raise awareness and sell products. Interactivity is integral to effective communication between brands and consumers (Kharouf et al. 2020). One way that this can be accomplished is by building brand communities where brand community managers and consumers can connect, share, and discuss various brand-related topics, including the history of the brand, brand information, and product development (Bowden & Mirzaei, 2021; Laroche et al. 2012), among others. Based on the social identity theory, individuals aspire to belong to a community and act according to its recognized norms and values. This also applies to brand communities (Heere et al. 2011). To create thriving brand communities with highly engaged

members, it is crucial to understand the motives that drive customers to participate in brand communities. If we know why people participate, we can encourage more of that behavior. Extant research has examined the motives behind participation in different types of brand communities (Madupu & Cooley, 2010a; Wong & Siu, 2015) and the effect of gender-targeting marketing strategies (Azar, Aime, & Ulrich, 2018; Friedmann & Lowengart, 2019). Gender differences have been the focus of research in many marketing-related studies. Researchers have undertaken the task of understanding the differing motives and attitude formation processes for males vs. females in a variety of contexts, including bank marketing (Glavee-Geo, Shaikh & Karjaluoto, 2017), customer service understanding (Mathies & Burford, 2011), online consumer purchase decision-making (Lin et al. 2019), and brand personality (Lee & Kim, 2018) among others. In the banking context, significant gender differences were found to affect social norms on adoption intention, as the effect of social norms on m-banking adoption appeared to be stronger for women than for men (Glavee-Geo, Shaikh & Karjaluoto, 2017). Researchers also discovered that males have a more functional, outcome-oriented interpretation of customer service, while females focus more on the actual service interaction and emotional outcomes (Mathies & Burford, 2011). In the online consumer purchase decision-making context, interactivity and perceived risk induced attitude formation more for males than females, while vividness and diagnosticity affected attitude formation more for females than males (Lin et al. 2019). Regarding brand personality research, the involvement level was higher for females than males (Lee & Kim, 2018). All these findings demonstrate that gender differences are a worthwhile and unique research field in marketing.

There appears to be a relative gap in existing research identifying the perceptual motivational differences between males and females regarding the varying motives for participating in brand communities. Researchers have looked to understand the difference in behavior between males and females in these communities (e.g., Islam, Rahman & Hollebeek, 2018; Islam et al. 2019; Islam & Rahman, 2017) and in terms of participation in Journal of Internet Commerce 91 general (e.g., Kumar, 2021). This is particularly important for brands that target a specific gender instead of being gender-neutral, as research demonstrates that (in general) women were more engaged with feminine brand personalities, and men (to a lesser degree) were more likely to identify with male brand personalities. Prior research in the marketing context has examined whether gender makes a difference in consumer behavior from a variety of perspectives. Some researchers discussed the purchasing

process starting from need recognition through evaluating alternatives to post-purchase behavior, with significant differences found between men and women (Bakshi, 2012). Further, research indicates gender differences among millennials regarding purchase behavior, loyalty, price sensitivity and shopping habits. Women were more sensitive to price and belonged to more loyalty programs than men (Radojka & Filipovic, 2017). As a final example, men and women differ in web navigation behavior, wherein men engage in less exploratory behavior and develop less website involvement than women (Richard et al. 2010). On this basis, it is apparent that the examination of gender differences in the context of brand communities is a worthwhile undertaking. However, motives are relatively unexplored – and understanding the motivation to participate is the first step toward understanding how to encourage more engagement. As such, the current paper aims to understand not necessarily the behavior of men versus women but the psychology behind it – how their motivations to perform specific actions differ. In so doing, community managers can understand what people will do and why (which will help them better encourage the desirable behavior of brand community participation). Based on the above, the main objective of this research is to understand gender differences when it comes to participating in brand communities by focusing on six distinct motives of participation: entertainment, receiving and sharing information, self-discovery, social integration, status enhancement (Madupu & Cooley, 2010a). Hence, the upcoming section provides a thorough literature review of brand communities and their importance to companies and consumers, participation in brand communities, the different motives behind participation, and the differences between genders.

## Literature review

### Brand communities

Brand communities are “non-geographically bound” groups of self-selected consumers who come together in a community. They join based on their liking of a brand and share values, social norms, and feelings of attachment to a brand (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001; Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009). Even though members in a brand community share similar interests and values, 92 M. HAVERILA ET AL. the key identifier of a brand community is that its members share a special bond over their admiration of a particular brand or company. Extant research has gone as far as claiming that greater similarity between the brand community members (i.e., homophily) strengthens members’ attitudes toward the brand community and participation desire, which is rationalized by enhanced respect toward the

community. Consequently, when a community member is unfaithful to the community, regard, attitudes, and willingness to participate may weaken (Hook, Baxter & Kulczynski, 2020). A brand community has three main components: consciousness of kind, rituals and traditions surrounding the brand, and moral responsibility (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). The consciousness of kind refers to the distinctive sense of belonging those members have toward the brand community. Rituals and traditions refer to the brand's specific culture and stories. Finally, moral responsibility refers to members' sense of obligation toward the community (Kuo & Feng, 2013). Four main types of relationships exist in brand communities: the relationship between the customer and the product, the customer and the brand, the customer and the company, and the customer and other customers (Habibi, Laroche, & Richard, 2014). Previous research has found that the relationship between the customer and product, customer and brand, and customer and company can positively influence brand trust. However, the relationship between customers and other customers may negatively impact brand trust (Habibi, Laroche, & Richard, 2014), indicating that members may trust information from the brand less than other customers.

Generally, there are three types of brand communities: small group, network-based, and online brand communities. A small group brand community is an informal group of consumers who share a particular enthusiasm toward a brand as they engage in collective actions or express commitment (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Hao, 2020). It is not controlled by the commercial entity but is facilitated by consumers who love the brand. One of the most notable examples of this type of brand community is the HarleyDavidson community, also called the Harley Owners Group (HOG) (Harley, 2021). In contrast, network-based brand communities are "explicitly commercial," where brand-related activities are practiced much more than social interactions (Lee & Hsieh, 2021; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). On this basis, an online brand community (OBC) can be defined as a specialized online community (often a social-media-based brand community or SMBBC, which is an online brand community hosted within social media) built on interactions within a brand's community that is not bound to a specific location (de Valck, van Bruggen, & Wierenga, 2009). One example of an OBC is the Sephora Beauty Talk, in which members exchange ideas and upload JOURNAL OF INTERNET COMMERCE 93 photos of themselves using Sephora's products. When comparing the results between consumer-run and company-managed brand communities in a notable study, the results indicated that the members of the consumer-run brand showed statistically significantly higher participation scores (3.20 versus 3.10; scale 1-5) (Pedeliento,

Andreini & Veloutsou, 2020). This can be explained by the relatively large sample size (N ¼ 2167), meaning that even relatively small differences become statistically significant (Note: See the discussion related to the effect size in the hypotheses testing section of this paper) but meaningless in practice. Brand community building is becoming an effective marketing tool for companies with many benefits. For example, members establish a long-term emotional attachment to the brand, eventually leading to more favourable brand equity (Chang et al. 2019). Such brand equity will be achieved as community members will be enthused to spread positive word-of-mouth (WOM) about the brand (Demiray & Burnaz, 2019; Ho, 2015). One of the most significant marketing objectives is to "block competition" by enhancing the purchase intentions of existing and new customers. This objective can be achieved through brand communities, as brand community involvement positively influences purchase intention (Demiray & Burnaz, 2019; Liaw, 2011). The usual discussions related to the brand in the community will strengthen the brand's position as "top-of-mind," which, again, positively affects purchase intentions. Additionally, decision-makers can utilize brand community interactions to assess the potential of a brand extension (Chang et al. 2019). This will allow companies to benefit from the overall brand equity by launching products under the same brand. Online brand communities have also been linked with a more positive brand image (Andries, Areros & Pio, 2019), brand commitment (Hsieh & Wei, 2017; Zhou et al. 2012), brand loyalty (Kumar & Kumar Nayak, 2018; Popp, Woratschek & Roth, 2008). Brand communities also provide benefits for their members. For example, community members can expand their networks (Ansari et al. 2018; Chang et al. 2019). Furthermore, consumers who feel lonely may see brand communities as an opportunity to create social connections (Snyder & Newman, 2019). On a more commercial note, being part of a brand community allows members to stay up-to-date with the latest information on the brand and access information on promotions or competitions (Demiray & Burnaz, 2019).

**Brand community participation**

Participation is a critical concept in brand communities as it is about commitment to the brand and interactivity among consumers, thereby leading 94 M. HAVERILA ET AL. to the unique experience of being part of a brand community (Auh, Menguc & Jung, 2019; Kamboj, 2020; Kamboj & Rahman, 2016; Pedeliento, Andreini & Veloutsou, 2020). Brand participation is the state that occurs when consumers emotionally and cognitively relate to a brand during a consumer/brand activity (Hollebeek & Chen, 2014). According to Hollebeek and Chen (2014), consumer-brand participation consists of a process that begins with the

cognitive processing of brand-related information and then progresses to positive feelings that consumers develop toward the community and the brand. Different creative brand activities are necessary to keep consumers engaged and appeal to their tastes or interests. Consumers' emotional and cognitive links (Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2011; Hollebeek & Chen, 2014) with the brand during an activity are crucial for participation. Thus, for this study, consumer brand participation is associated with the emotional and cognitive connection that the consumer experiences during brand-related activities involving two-way interactions with the brand and the brand community. Tsai, Huang and Chiu (2012) discussed brand community participation in-depth. They indicated that brand community participation includes member-to-member interaction and member-activity participation. Member-to-member interaction signifies the degree of communication between community members through repeated social interactions, reciprocal communique, and shared support, which is essential when developing the brand community. On the other hand, member–activity participation denotes the degree to which brand community members dynamically partake in various activities in the brand community. This impacts the advancement of a social system within the brand community, which can also be described as an interconnected group having enduring arrangements of various kinds of scripts, rules, norms, values, and models (Tsai, Huang & Chiu, 2012). Thus, brand communities are uniquely situated to help facilitate the social dimension of brand community participation, as they can encourage consumer-to-consumer interaction – while also providing additional information to promote cognitive loyalty and emotional attachment and facilitate behaviours related to the brand. After all, Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) discussed the rituals and traditions that define brand communities. Previous research has confirmed that participation enhances satisfaction, emotional bonding, commitment, and empowerment, leading to brand trust, word-of-mount behaviors and ultimately sustainable brand loyalty (Kamboj, 2020; Madupu, 2006) and enhanced performance (Auh, Menguc & Jung, 2019). When the brand community succeeds in establishing a connection with and among the members, it will result in community members having a special bond with the brand and making them more loyal to JOURNAL OF INTERNET COMMERCE 95 it. Extant research has also examined the gender-related differences across customer participation (Vohra & Bhardwaj, 2019), including customer purchases, referrals, influence, and knowledge. Vohra and Bhardwaj (2019) proposed that active participation in online communities may lead to engagement, which may induce greater value for the firm through four mechanisms: referrals, influence/word-of-mouth, knowledge (feedback provided to the brand), and customer lifetime value (i.e., the cumulative

value of their purchases). This positive relationship between customer engagement and brand outcomes has been discussed in extant research (e.g., Islam et al. 2019; Islam & Rahman, 2016a; 2016b; 2017; Rather, Hollebeek & Islam, 2019).

Other researchers have aimed to understand what leads to brand community participation. For example, Tsai, Huang and Chiu (2012) identified individual-, group- and relationship-level constructs so that individual-level constructs included extraversion and need for affiliation, group-level constructs included identification and the perceived critical mass, and the relationship-level constructs included relational trust and relationship satisfaction. However, gender combined with motives remains underexplored in brand community participation. Madupu and Cooley (2010a) mention the various motives like entertainment, information, self-discovery, social integration, and status enhancement as antecedents of brand community participation, which will be discussed next.

Brand community motives While ample research investigates the motives behind participation in brand communities, fewer studies investigate if there are differences in participation motives between genders. Hence, this study explores the differences in participation motives between males and females. This study aspires to examine the difference in participation levels between males and females of the six actual motives after joining the brand community (entertainment, receiving information, sharing information, social integration, self-discovery, and status enhancement) that were summarized by Madupu and Cooley (2010a) as they are commonly accepted in literature. McLaughlin and Haverila (2023) conducted a series of exploratory focus groups to determine if any novel online community motives could be identified. However, the qualitative study's findings aligned with the motives identified by Madupu and Cooley (2010a). Thus, these motives were utilized in the current study. Consumers feel encouraged to join and participate in brand communities when they achieve emotional or cognitive benefits (Laroche et al. 2012). Madupu & Cooley (2010b) studied brand community motives and 96 M. HAVERILA ET AL. explained that consumers learn about consumption habits and information related to the brand by posting comments and reading other people's thoughts. The motive of sharing and receiving information can be more evident in online brand communities (Kamboj, 2020). This may be because the internet "evolved" from a mere medium for information storage to an interactive environment that allows information sharing (Baldus, Voorhees, & Calantone, 2014). Thus, allowing and encouraging members to share information relevant to their interests is essential to creating a sense of belonging - which will lead to achieving the marketing goals of a brand community. Besides information, Madupu and Cooley (2010b)

suggested additional motives such as social integration, self-discovery, status enhancement, and entertainment. Self-discovery refers to the individuals' motive to better understand themselves through interactions with other members. They can delineate personal values and find model behaviors they would like to adopt (Coelho, Bairrada, & Peres, 2019). Through the brand community, the brand will indirectly accompany the consumer through their journey of "self-discovery," making the brand part of a memorable experience for the individual. Members also appreciate brand communities as they add value to their social lives through the ties they develop with other members (Ozboluk € & Dursun, 2017). Research has found that some consumers have a greater desire than others to become involved with more socially oriented brand communities (Snyder & Newman, 2019). Such findings leave us wondering about these consumers' characteristics (such as gender). Do females more than males have the desire to join brand communities to socialize? It is crucial to fill such gaps in the literature to help brands that target males or females create brand communities that appeal to them. Moreover, the entertainment motive has emerged in the literature as a significant predictor of participation in brand communities. Some consumers use brand communities to access entertaining content or discuss witty topics about their favourite technologies (Coelho, Rita, & Santos, 2018). Other studies confirm that members are more concerned with hedonic rewards (fun and entertaining) when posting comments than gaining utilitarian rewards (Baldus, 2013; Loureiro & Kaufmann, 2018). The literature recognizes these as motives that community participation fulfills – but the question of gender's impact on these relationships remains. We know that men and women behave differently in these communities – the current study aims to understand the motives behind the differing behaviours. Before this exploration, though, we must explore what is already known about gender's impact on how people participate in brand communities.

**Gender impact**

It is essential to distinguish between gender and sex. According to gender theory, sex signifies the biologically prominent features of the human body, female and male or intersex. In contrast, gender refers to social expectations, roles, and behaviors, which can be either feminine or masculine. Thus, gender can be described as socially constructed and learned (Michalos, 2014). Based on the previous discussion, gender is a social identity. Based on self-categorization (Turner et al. 1987) and social identity theories (Heere et al. 2011), it can be said that social categories are a crucial part of self-definition and self-esteem (Schmader & Block, 2015), which point to differences between genders in social contexts. Since an

emotional connection is a crucial factor affecting participation in brand communities, it is necessary to examine the different motives that encourage participation for each gender. “It’s not for women” was an advertising campaign launched in 2011 by Dr. Pepper, a product of an American multinational soft drink company (Vong, 2011). Over the years, marketers from numerous industries have targeted one gender in their advertising campaigns. Even though research claims that marketers should gender-neutralize their communications due to sentiment changes in global societies (Ratten, 2017), genders have psychological differences that are visible in consumption and shopping behavior (El Hedhli, Zourrig, & Chebat, 2016; Enav & Daphna, 2018; Sohail, 2015). These findings are further supported by Kumar (2021), who found that female consumers had more positive reactions to feminine brand personalities, while male consumers had more positive responses to masculine brand personalities. Although gender neutrality can be appropriate in certain circumstances, it is clear that gender still affects brand reactions. In online contexts, women tend to be more emotionally invested than men (Shi, Chen, & Chow, 2016). The research findings have indicated that females display higher customer purchases, influence, and knowledge but not referrals (Gligor et al. 2022). Also, these same authors found that perceived fairness acted differently for women than men in their relationship with the brand. Furthermore, extant research has examined the role of gender as a moderating variable between perceived benefits, costs, and active participation. The results indicated that gender indeed moderated the relationship between perceived benefits and active participation so that the influence of perceived benefits was much more substantial for males and than females, and the relationship between perceived costs and active participation so that the influence of perceived costs was much more vital for males and than for females (Kamboj & Rahman, 2016). Finally, extant research also used gender as a control variable for the central constructs in a study and discovered that gender differently affected brand community participation when consumer-run and company-managed brand communities were compared (Pedeliento, Andreini & Veloutsou, 2020). Consequently, gender appears to be an essential concept to explore in consumer participation – but motives for behavior remain largely unexplored. Avery (2012) suggested that male consumers were angered when male-gendered brands (such as Porsche) targeted females in response to the postmodern society where gender lines have blurred. Hence, marketers continued implementing gender-targeted marketing strategies despite the blurring lines between genders (Avery, 2012). Men and women have bio-logical, attitudinal, behavioral, and psychological differences (Bakshi, 2012; El Hedhli, Zourrig & Chebat, 2016). In the consumer behavior context, literature found a difference between

genders regarding spreading word-of-mouth (WOM) messages and purchase intentions toward a brand (Munnukka, Karjaluoto, & Tikkanen, 2015). Such differences may also exist in male and female consumers' motives when participating in brand communities. Since many studies recognize the importance of gender targeting, it is crucial to explore the triggers (or motives) that each gender has to participate in brand communities, thereby enabling managers to maximize the benefits of brand communities for firms and consumers (Coelho, Bairrada, & Peres, 2019; Munnukka, Karjaluoto, & Tikkanen, 2015). Previous research confirms that hedonic rewards (such as entertainment) are critical motives for members to enjoy when participating and engaging within a brand community (Loureiro & Kaufmann, 2018). Different genders have diverse means of entertainment. For example, research has discovered that men's entertainment preferences are directed toward video games, sports, and action genres across various media platforms. In contrast, women's entertainment preference is directed toward romantic genres (Vorderer & Klimmt, 2021). Another study shows that women read more for entertainment, but men read more to obtain information (Thums, Artelt, & Wolter, 2020). Furthermore, previous research has discovered conflicting results for the entertainment motive regarding Internet usage, as earlier studies indicated that the entertainment motive was more important for men (Wolfradt & Doll, 2001). Still, there is evidence that the gender gap may have later disappeared (Soh et al. 2013). Subsequent studies indicate that the entertainment motive may be more important for females than males on social networking sites (Haferkamp et al. 2012). There appears to be a gap in literature identifying the difference between men and women regarding their entertainment preference that triggers their participation in brand communities specifically. The following hypothesis is set as the results in previous related research indicate conflicting results.

> **Hypothesis 1**: There is no significant difference between the genders on the relationship between the entertainment motive and participation in the context of brand communities.

Even though some research studies show that the gender gap in online settings may be disappearing (Islam & Rahman, 2017), earlier research regarding Internet usage has found that there may be differences between genders in Internet usage. However, no gender differences were discovered regarding the information motive (Wolfradt & Doll, 2001), including social media usage (Karayigit, Groter, & Thompson, 2021). Despite this, research has discovered that gender differences in motives might trigger their online participation; for

example, gender may significantly impact the perception of information gathering and sharing (Lin & Wang, 2020). The literature indicates that women place more importance on privacy risks and social ties in their information-sharing decisions than men (Lin & Wang, 2020). Also, when gathering information before purchasing, males make faster decisions and need less information than females (Kim & Park, 2013). Such differences between genders on methods of accessing information can help decision-makers know how to implement strategies to encourage active participation among male or female members. Still, insufficient research explores whether the motives for receiving and sharing information differ between male and female members participating in brand communities. As the results in previous research indicate conflicting results, the following hypotheses are set.

> **Hypothesis 2:** There are no differences between genders in the relationship between the receiving information motive and participation in the context of brand communities.

> **Hypothesis 3:** There are no differences between genders on the relationship between the sharing information motive and participation in the context of brand communities.

Self-developing activities are among the most common participation and engagement triggers (Hook, Baxter, & Kulczynski, 2018; Luo, Ratchford, & Yang, 2013). Credibly, different genders appear to have different definitions of self-identifying activities (Luo, Ratchford, & Yang, 2013). However, previous research found no differences in perceptions between males and females (Sharp, Coatsworth, Darling, Cumsille, & Ranieri, 2007). Despite this, prior research has claimed that the self-discovery motive is more evident for women than men due to women's focus on social interdependence, which should make interpersonal connectivity more apparent for women than men (Paftalika & Hananto, 2018). Therefore, the following hypothesis is set:

> **Hypothesis 4:** The relationship between the self-discovery motive and participation in the context of brand communities is stronger for females and it is for males.

There appear to be differences between males and females in social media interactions. Research findings show that males are more influenced 100 M. HAVERILA ET AL. by social pressures from a group of associates, making them more loyal to the

community and the brand (Rialti et al. 2017). In fact, in online brand communities, males appear to be more aware of real-life events when they participate in online activities, whereas female members care more about participating in activities that impact their perceptions (Boccardi, Ciappei, Zollo, & Laudano, 2016; Rialti et al. 2017). While some studies suggest that collective groups and combined efforts are essential for men to achieve specific goals (Laroche, Habibi, Richard, & Sankaranarayanan, 2012) during online interactions, females were found to be more relationship-oriented than men (Richard, Chebat, Yang, & Putrevud, 2010). This may be because females tend to pay more attention to building loyalty with group members even if they do not have a common objective (Melnyk, Van Osselaer, & Bijmolt, 2009). On this basis, the following hypothesis is set.

**Hypothesis 5:** The relationship between the social integration motive and participation in the context of brand communities is stronger for females and for males.

Status enhancement is an advantage achieved by using symbolic qualities to communicate symbols of position to others (Rintamaki et al. 2006). While men were often conferred higher social status throughout history than women (McClean et al. 2018; Tarko, and Z Benko,} 2018), such ideologies have changed. Both genders perceive social enhancing status affecting qualities differently. For example, previous research has discovered that boys' athletic abilities were more related to same-gender likeability, whereas girls' athletic abilities were more about cross-gender likeability (Dijkstra et al. 2010). Previous research has concluded that status enhancement is an essential motive for participation and engagement in brand communities; however, it has been observed that it is more critical for some community members than others (Haverila et al. 2020). Similarly, the type of community may impact the degree of motivation men or women have to enhance their status. Previous research has not, however, discovered significant differences between genders in terms of the status enhancement motive in various contexts like department store shopping (Rintamaki et al. 2006). Henceforth, focusing on brand communities, this study proposes the last hypothesis as follows:

**Hypothesis 6:** There are no significant differences between genders on the relationship between the status enhancement motive and participation in the context of brand communities.

**Methodology**

**Sample and respondent characteristics**

Responses for this research were collected among undergraduate and graduate students from a mid-sized university in Canada. This sample selection considers students as suitable respondents because students can be deemed to be more "tech-savvy" (Kamboj, 2020; Nadeem et al. 2015) and use the Internet regularly (Bolton, et al. 2013). The respondents were not reimbursed for their responses. For screening criteria, the respondents were expected to be members of at least one brand community, and, at the minimum, they needed to be at least lurking (i.e., browsing brand community pages with or without engaging with other members) within the brand community page during the week before participation in the survey. This participation could have taken the form of viewing a post, visiting the brand community, or posting a comment in the brand community. Of the 195 respondents, 90 were males, 104 were females, and one respondent declared their gender as "Other." As the number of respondents in the "Other" category was so small, it was dropped from further analysis. The respondents were members of various brand communities, including automotive, consumer electronics, computer software, travel, motorcycles, household, entertainment, food and beverage, and shoes. To determine the sufficiency of the sample size, Cochran's formula for continuous data was used (Cochran, 1977). Based on the desired alpha level of 0.025 in each tail of 1.96, an estimated standard deviation on a 5-point scale of 0.8, and an acceptable margin of error of 0.15, a sample size of 137 was needed. As the statistical method to be used was PLS-SEM, the adequacy of the sample size must be assessed for this purpose. Extant research has indicated that if the desired significance level is 5%, the predictive power R2 is 0.50, the maximum number of arrows pointing to any construct (Figure 1) is 5, then the sample size recommendation to achieve a statistical power of 80% is 20 (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2022). As the sample size was 195, it was adequate.

**Measurement and questionnaire development**

The survey instrument was developed using previously developed scales described in Table 1. It should be noted that the motives in the survey instrument were based on the actual motives after joining the brand community rather than the motive intentions before joining it. Each question asked the respondent's level of agreement with a statement, with responses ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree" on a 5-point Likert-type scale.

Brand community structural model A predictive model was created based on the literature review (Figure 1). The model includes entertainment, information (receiving and

giving), social integration, self-discovery, status enhancement motives, and the endogenous participation construct. The model is also an illustrative demonstration of the study's hypotheses (Ben-Shaul & Reichel, 2018) so that the arrows pointing from the motives to the participation construct reflect each relationship under inquiry.

Figure 1. The structural and measurement model of the research.

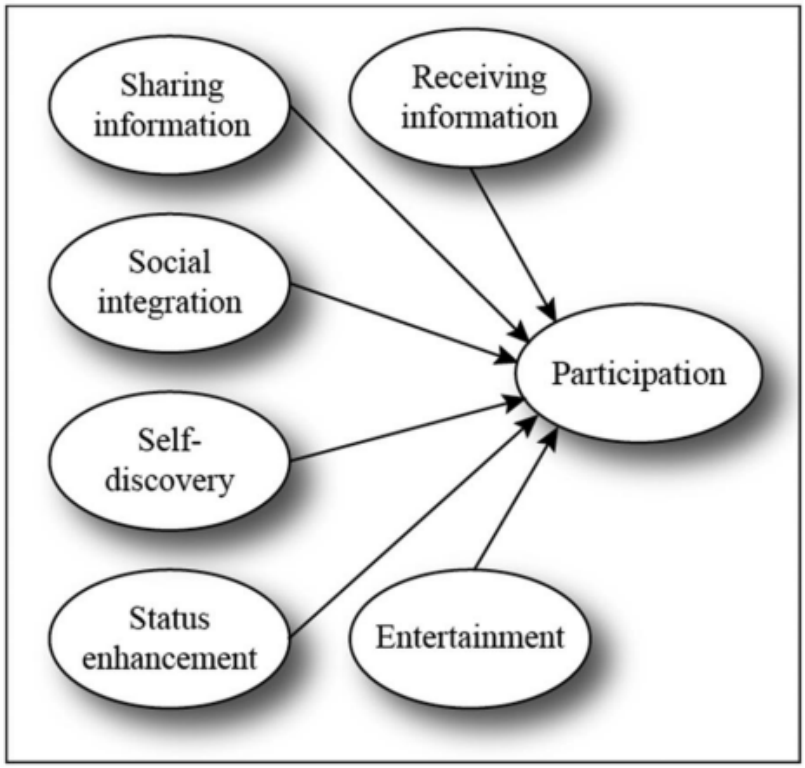

**Table 1.** Measurement of the target constructs.

| Construct | Motive | Source |
|---|---|---|
| Entertainment | • Being a member of the brand community brings me pleasure.<br>• Being part of the brand community is fun.<br>• Enjoy being part of the brand community. | • (Madupu & Cooley, 2010a)<br>• (Madupu & Cooley, 2010b)<br>• (Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Klein, 2004)<br>• (Flanagin & Metzger, 2001) |
| Receive information | • To get information<br>• To learn how to do things | |
| Share information | • To provide others with information<br>• To contribute to a pool of information | |
| Self-discovery | • To learn about myself and others<br>• To gain insight into myself | |
| Status enhancement | • To impress people in the brand community<br>• To feel important in the brand community<br>• To gain prestige in the brand community<br>• To attain status in the brand community | |
| Social integration | • To stay in touch<br>• To meet people with my interests<br>• To build relationships with others | |
| Brand community participation | • Passionate about visiting the brand community.<br>• Continue visiting the brand community for very long periods.<br>• Enthusiastic when interacting with the brand community.<br>• Proud of the brand community.<br>• Getting carried away when interacting with brand community.<br>• Happy when interacting with the brand community. | • (Madupu & Cooley, 2010a)<br>• (Madupu & Cooley, 2010b) |

## Method of Statistical Analysis

The extant literature acknowledges two alternative methods to assess structural models in social sciences. The second-generation methods are partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) and covariance-based structural equation modelling (CB-SEM). Researchers have extensively discussed both methods' advantages and disadvantages (e.g., Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011). Many researchers have acknowledged that if the primary goal of the research is prediction (Sarstedt, Ringle, & Hair, 2014), like in this case, the preferred method is PLS-SEM - which also produces the same or higher statistical power as CB-SEM (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2022; Reinartz, Haenlein, & Henseler, 2009). In addition, prior research has stated that if the intention is to estimate a factor model, CB-SEM should be used. Still, if the purpose is to evaluate a composite model (as is the case in the current research), PLS-SEM should be used (Rigdon, Sarstedt, & Ringle, 2017). It is also to be noted that CB-SEM requires using normally distributed data, while the PLS-SEM method works with both normally and non-normally distributed data. Based on these arguments, the decision was made to use PLS-SEM as the statistical method and, more specifically, the

Multi-Group Analysis (MGA) module available in PLS-SEM. The first step is the assessment of the measurement model. As the measurement model was reflective, the indicator reliability must be established first. This research will be done separately for both genders. This is followed by the assessment of internal consistency validity, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The second stage is structural model assessment, which involves an evaluation of collinearity, predictive relevance, and significance of applicability of the path coefficients (i.e., research question testing) (Ringle et al. 2018).

**Data Analysis**

**Assessment of the measurement model**

As indicated in the methodology section, the PLS-SEM process starts with assessing the measurement model; thus, the first step is the assessment of indicator reliability. All indicators exceeded the threshold loading level of 104 M. HAVERILA ET AL. 0.70 both for the male and female respondents and were significant as measured with the bias-corrected confidence interval level of 5% The internal consistency reliability is usually assessed with Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values (Table 2). The threshold for Cronbach's alpha values is 0.70, and the composite reliability range is between 0.70 and 0.95. Prior research has indicated that Cronbach's alpha is a conservative criterion, whereas composite reliability is a liberal one (Ringle et al. 2018). Based on Table 2, it can be concluded that the criteria for indicator reliability have been met. Convergent validity assessment protocols state that AVE values should exceed the threshold level of 0.50 (Hair, Hult, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2022) - which was the case for male and female respondents (Table 2). The next step is the assessment of discriminant validity, which indicates the degree of the uniqueness of the constructs (Hair et al. 2022). A traditional measure to assess discriminant validity is the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Hair et al. 2022). Recent research has, however, suggested an alternative method for assessing discriminant validity: the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. Although newer and less established, this criterion is considered more reliable in discerning discriminant validity (Hair et al. 2022). The HTMT is the ratio of the between-trait correlations to the within-trait correlations (Hair et al. 2022). For HTMT, the value of 0.90 should not be exceeded (Table 3). One of the HTMT values (Social integration! Receive information) among the male respondents was marginally above the threshold of 0.90. However, it is to be noted that the specific threshold value of 0.90 has been questioned (Hair et al. 2022). Thus, to further investigate the results, the bootstrapping method was utilized to determine if the HTMT values were all significantly different from 1 (Hair et al. 2022),

which was the case. As none of the confidence intervals include the value of 1, discriminant validity has been established for both gender samples.

**Table 2.** Construct reliability and validity (M = males/F = females).

| | Cronbach's Alpha | | Composite Reliability | | Average Variance Extracted (AVE) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Construct | M | F | M | F | M | F |
| Participation | 0.877 | 0.893 | 0.908 | 0.918 | 0.622 | 0.652 |
| Entertainment | 0.855 | 0.819 | 0.911 | 0.891 | 0.774 | 0.732 |
| Receive information | 0.735 | 0.622 | 0.883 | 0.840 | 0.790 | 0.725 |
| Share information | 0.774 | 0.867 | 0.898 | 0.938 | 0.816 | 0.883 |
| Self-discovery | 0.914 | 0.812 | 0.959 | 0.914 | 0.921 | 0.841 |
| Social integration | 0.857 | 0.784 | 0.913 | 0.875 | 0.779 | 0.702 |
| Status enhancement | 0.940 | 0.926 | 0.957 | 0.948 | 0.847 | 0.819 |

### Assessment of the structural model

Following the assessment of the measurement model, the evaluation of the structural model was conducted. This process begins with the collinearity assessment utilizing the variance inflation (VIF) values. The results indicate a lack of collinearity (Table 4), even with the recently confirmed strict threshold value of 3 that should not be exceeded (Hair et al. 2019). The next step in assessing the structural model is the examination of the R2 of the endogenous construct, which measures the model's explanatory power or predictive relevance (Table 5). Extant literature has established that R2 values of 0.75, 0.50 and 0.25 reflect substantial, moderate, and weak predictive relevance for the endogenous construct. In addition to the R2 values, the Stone-Geisser Q2 values can be used to assess the predictive relevance (Table 5). For Q2, recent research has established threshold values so that values larger than 0.25 and 0.50 represent medium and large predictive relevance (Hair, Howard, & Nitzl, 2020). The R2 and Q2 values show that the model has nearly substantial predictive relevance.

**Table 3.** The Heterotrait-Monotrait values for the respondents (males/females).

| | | 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 | | 6 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| # | Construct | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F |
| 1 | Entertainment | 0.759 | 0.799 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | Receive information | 0.621 | 0.505 | 0.628 | 0.629 | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | Share information | 0.893 | 0.741 | 0.590 | 0.461 | 0.467 | 0.304 | | | | | | |
| 4 | Self-discovery | 0.628 | 0.580 | 0.387 | 0.525 | 0.511 | 0.432 | 0.588 | 0.462 | | | | |
| 5 | Social integration | 0.712 | 0.858 | 0.544 | 0.592 | 0.535 | 0.516 | 0.901 | 0.871 | 0.620 | 0.668 | | |
| 6 | Status enhancement | 0.376 | 0.650 | 0.247 | 0.464 | 0.064 | 0.131 | 0.562 | 0.710 | 0.426 | 0.613 | 0.502 | 0.703 |

**Table 4.** The collinearity variance inflation (VIF) values in the structural model.

| Construct | Male respondents | Female respondents |
|---|---|---|
| Entertainment | 1.578 | 1.613 |
| Receive information | 1.580 | 1.441 |
| Share information | 2.521 | 2.454 |
| Self-discovery | 1.646 | 1.690 |
| Social integration | 2.644 | 2.700 |
| Status enhancement | 1.479 | 2.239 |

**Table 5.** The predictive relevance of the endogenous constructs.

| | Male respondents | | | Female respondents | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Endogenous construct | $R^2$ | $R^2$ Adjusted | $Q^2$ | $R^2$ | $R^2$ Adjusted | $Q^2$ |
| Participation | 0.713 | 0.692 | 0.423 | 0.707 | 0.689 | 0.444 |

### Hypotheses testing

The last step in assessing the structural model is the significance and relevance of path coefficients, which, in this research, coincides with research question testing (Table 6). Prior research has increasingly noted that testing relationships' significance is insufficient, as statistical significance does not necessarily lead to practical and applicable results. Thus, the relationship's effect size must also be assessed (Cohen, 1992; Kline, 2004). Some researchers claim that effect size should be the main finding of the research (Sullivan & Feinn, 2012). The advantage of effect size is its independence of sample size – which is not the case for significance. Table 7 and Figure 2 indicate the effect sizes in the various relationships in the structural model. Extant literature has shown that f 2 values of 0.02, 0.15 and 0.35 indicate small, medium, and large effect sizes, respectively (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2022).

Table 6. The significance and relevance of path coefficients.

| # | Hypothesis motive | Path coefficient/ Males | p- value | Path coefficient/ Females | p-value | Difference between the path coefficients (Males – Females) | p-value Males vs. Females | Signifi-cance | Hypothesis acceptance |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Entertainment | 0.338 | 0.000 | 0.400 | 0.000 | −0.062 | 0.581 | No | Yes |
| 2. | Receive information | 0.093 | 0.208 | 0.031 | 0.659 | 0.062 | 0.523 | No | Yes |
| 3. | Share information | 0.475 | 0.000 | 0.186 | 0.046 | 0.191 | 0.064 | No | Yes |
| 4. | Self-discovery | 0.204 | 0.012 | 0.013 | 0.838 | 0.290 | 0.023 | Yes | No |
| 5. | Social integration | −0.023 | 0.829 | 0.302 | 0.002 | −0.325 | 0.023 | Yes | Yes |
| 6. | Status enhancement | −0.038 | 0.579 | 0.120 | 0.181 | −0.158 | 0.156 | No | Yes |

**Table 7.** Effect sizes (f2) in the structural model.

| | Male respondents | | Female respondents | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Relationship | $f^2$ | Description | $f^2$ | Description |
| Entertainment → Participation | 0.252 | Large to medium | 0.338 | Large |
| Receive information → Participation | 0.019 | Small | 0.002 | – |
| Share information → Participation | 0.312 | Large | 0.048 | Small |
| Self-discovery → Participation | 0.088 | Small | 0.000 | – |
| Social integration → Participation | 0.001 | – | 0.115 | Medium to small |
| Status enhancement → Participation | 0.003 | – | 0.022 | Small |

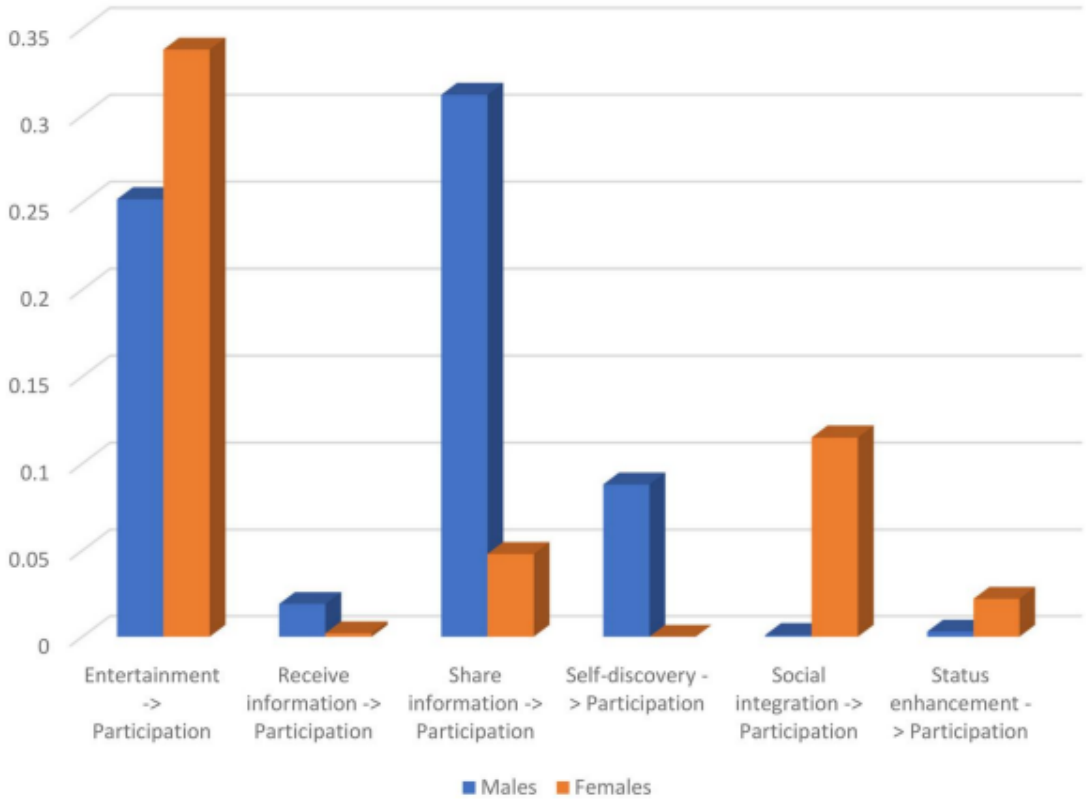


**Figure 2.** A Graphical illustration of the effect sizes for the male and female respondents.

Some exciting differences emerge in the results between the two groups. For both males and females, entertainment and sharing information are significant predictors of participation. However, males are also motivated Table 7. Effect sizes (f2) in the structural model. Relationship Male respondents Female respondents f 2 Description f 2 Description

Entertainment! Participation 0.252 Large to medium 0.338 Large Receive information! Participation 0.019 Small 0.002 – Share information! Participation 0.312 Large 0.048 Small Self-discovery! Participation 0.088 Small 0.000 – Social integration! Participation 0.001 – 0.115 Medium to small Status enhancement! Participation 0.003 – 0.022 Small Figure 2. A Graphical illustration of the effect sizes for the male and female respondents. 108 M. HAVERILA ET AL. to participate based on self-discovery, while females are not. For female respondents, social integration was the third most significant predictor of participation. When comparing the effect sizes, sharing information and entertainment seem to be the primary motivators for males. For females, the primary motivators seem to be entertainment and social integration. Overall, comparing the two groups utilizing significance tests and effect sizes indicates some critical differences between the groups that marketers should consider while building relationships within brand communities.

**Discussion and academic implications**

While some studies suggest that gender-bending consumption is becoming more common (Avery, 2012), there are still many differences between males and females regarding factors such as personality, motivation, and consumption. For example, when it comes to grocery shopping, male shoppers consider convenience and efficiency of product arrangement. In contrast, women feel that the cleanliness and quality of displayed products are the most critical issues (Ramprabha, 2017). Such gender differences were also clearly visible in the results of this study when examining the motives for participation in brand communities. While previous researchers have studied how male and female behaviors and attitudes differ in the context of online brand communities (e.g., Islam et al. 2019; Rahman & Hollebeek, 2018; Shi, Chen, & Chow, 2016), the motivation behind these differences remains largely undiscussed. The six motives in this study for participation in brand communities were entertainment, receiving information, sharing information, self-discovery, social integration, and status enhancement (Madupu & Cooley, 2010a). Based on the analysis in this research, the entertainment motive is essential for both genders for participation in brand communities, as demonstrated by the significance of the relationship to the participation construct and the medium to large effect sizes. This finding is supported by previous research, which has found entertainment to be a functional motive to engage in brand communities (Loureiro & Kaufmann, 2018) and to participate in other online behaviours (Leung, 2013). The sense of entertainment may be related to different motives, such as social integration. Other studies have suggested additional motives for participation in brand

communities, such as hedonic rewards, utilitarian rewards, and self-expression (Baldus, 2013). Such motives may eventually lead the community members to achieve pleasurable or entertaining feelings. Thus, the entertainment motive having a large effect size and a significant relationship with the participation construct suggests that consuming engaging content in a brand community may be an everyday leisure activity for both male and female members. Entertainment is essential for both genders – and that makes sense, given previous research. Contrary to the findings in previous research (Kamboj, 2020), the entertainment construct overall was considerably more critical than the receiving information construct in this research. The reasons for this might stem from the differences in the sample, as the sample in this study were students from a Canadian university, and the Kamboj (2020) study was from an Indian university. In addition, for the screening criteria in this study, the respondents were expected to be members of at least one brand community, and, at the minimum, they needed to be at least lurking. In contrast, the Kamboj study had less stringent requirements. Interestingly, both genders seemed motivated more by sharing rather than receiving information. It should be noted, however, that the effect size of the information-sharing motive was much larger for males (large; 0.312) than for females (small; 0.048). Thus, males were more likely to be motivated by sharing their knowledge and expertise. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) stated that members of brand communities should feel a shared sense of responsibility toward the brand and the community. This shared sense of responsibility likely results in a desire to support the brand and other members by sharing what the members know. Self-discovery appeared to be a significant motive for males but not for females. So, contrary to expectations, the relevant hypothesis was rejected as the direction of the hypothesis was opposite to expectations. Previous research has found that people tend to engage in activities during adolescence that aid in self-discovery (Hook, Baxter, & Kulczynski, 2018; Sharp et al. 2007). Since this study was conducted among students in a university, respondents may already be a part of educational, athletic, or social communities that tend to naturally exist in universities that allow them to discover their personalities and capabilities better. Surprisingly, the hypothesis was rejected as the relationship was significant for male respondents with a small effect size but not significant for female respondents. Additionally, the items for self-discovery were 'to learn about myself' and 'to gain insight into myself.' These items are personal and context-dependent and could relate to relatively high-level goals; therefore, the small effect size is unsurprising. The motive of self-discovery may become more significant as the members become more experienced and knowledgeable about the brand and the community. When individuals initially join brand

communities, ideas of self-discovery may not be on the minds of these prospective members, and self-discovery is not likely to offer much value for the female respondents in the sample population of this research. Therefore, this motive merits further exploration in a different sample to understand the role of self-discovery in motivating participation for people not in a context that already enables self-discovery in so many ways. Social integration was significantly related to participation for females but not males. Such a finding is supported by literature as multiple studies have suggested that females, more than males, prefer to engage in activities enhancing social integration (Boccardi et al. 2016; Rialti et al. 2017). Additionally, previous research suggests that females invest more time and effort than males in building loyalty with other members of brand communities (Richard et al. 2010). Female respondents want to connect with other members – not just share information – and need to be provided with a space that allows them to do so. This illustrates how specific brand communities could find success by highlighting feminine qualities with a preference for cooperation, harmony, creating relationships and caring for others in their content and interactions. Furthermore, encouraging conversations among members will benefit brand communities, hoping to promote participation among female members. Lastly, the results concluded that the sixth motive, status enhancement, was essential for neither gender's participation in brand communities. Popularity and social enhancement can be achieved based on physical attractiveness or athletic talents (Dijkstra et al. 2010). It could be argued that it would be unlikely for young adults or adolescents to feel like gaining a sense of status in a brand community is essential. Instead, it could be that the university context may have rendered brand communities unnecessary in building this sense of status enhancement, as classroom performance, athletic events, and social participation likely provide many university students with the opportunity for status enhancement. Thus, future research should explore this motive outside of the context of a university to learn how status enhancement influences individuals who cannot gain status in their everyday lives. Furthermore, it is essential to note that the prioritization of branded content within online brand communities makes it more difficult for members to gain attention – and therefore, consumers may have learned not to search for status enhancement in this context because it is difficult to garner it.

**Practical implications**

The current study contributes to the academic literature by shedding light on the gender differences regarding motives for participation in brand communities. The study highlights the importance of segmenting customers' reasons, not just behaviours, in many

ways - including gender. Furthermore, brand managers need to determine the gender profile of their brand community members to meet the needs of their primary demographic.

Brand community managers should encourage members to share their experiences by asking questions to members and encouraging other members to reach out when they need help – especially for a product or community aimed primarily at men. Brand community managers can tackle this by applying a strategy to trigger members to share information and their personal experiences, which might enable the brand community managers to discover the customers' unmet needs, which might be further developed through co-creation activities. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of creating a space that allows people to share their knowledge on brand-related topics. Online brand communities often prioritize the brand's content rather than the consumers' content, which may make it more difficult for members to find questions and share their expertise. Given how vital sharing expertise is for both genders, this may make it more difficult for brand communities to engage their members. Furthermore, managers should find ways to entertain the brand community by sharing amusing or interesting content or utilizing games, gamification, and competitions. In addition, the brand community managers might consider organizing special events around a specific brand-related theme (e.g., anniversaries, promotions, brand fests, networking events and social activities). Social integration becomes more critical for brand communities with many female members. While most communities do not have a discussion forum, this could help increase the community's entertainment value and opportunities for members to interact and connect – while enabling members to have a space that prioritizes their contributions over the brand's content. This will increase participation and positive outcomes for the brand. Finally, knowing how vital entertainment and social integration are to the members of these communities, it would make sense for brands to create communities on social media platforms that easily allow for interactive participation, such as comments, replies and content creation. The more accessible for members to participate in the community, the more benefits will be generated for the firm and the community. In conclusion, brand community managers should allocate more time and resources to examining what causes the members to feel included in brand communities by paying attention to the gender-specific motives of the members.

## Limitations and future research

Like with any research, this study has its limitations. As mentioned, the sample population was derived from a student population in a Canadian university. Therefore, the motives for participation in brand communities must be investigated in the overall brand community population, brand-specific communities and different geographical settings to increase generalizability. In addition, the effect of culture, for example, between individualistic and collectivistic countries, might be an exciting research venue. Another intriguing avenue of research could come from investigating and assessing the impact that a member's level of experience with brand communities has on the motives of participation. Examining the differences between new and relatively experienced members in brand communities and comparing the importance of motives across these groups could yield relevant findings for community managers. Moreover, there may be room for further research to investigate the detailed differences in perceptions of each motive between genders to understand them better. For example, entertainment was essential for both genders – but the entertainment motive may have different meanings for each gender. Therefore, while males and females engage in brand communities for entertainment, their more profound perceptions of what entertainment means may differ.

## Conclusions

This paper discussed the difference between men's and women's motives when choosing to participate in online brand communities, focusing on six motives: entertainment, receiving and sharing information, self-discovery, social integration, and status enhancement, utilizing a survey sample of university students. Results indicate that the entertainment and information-sharing motives are essential for both genders. In contrast, both genders perceived the motive of receiving information and the motive of status enhancement as unimportant. Furthermore, males were more motivated than females to share information and chose to participate to achieve self-discovery. Females, on the other hand, were more motivated by social integration.

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