



# The influence of the number of brand community memberships on customer centric measures

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Revised: 15 September 2021 / Accepted: 3 January 2022  
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## Abstract

Drawing upon the cognitive appraisal and attachment theories, the purpose of this research paper is to examine how the number of brand communities a member belongs to impacts customer centric measures such as satisfaction, delight, loyalty, and promotion. This understanding will help brand managers to understand how individuals who are heavy users of a variety of brand communities will be different from individuals who are more focused in their individual brand community membership. The study used a cross-sectional survey that was conducted among the members of various brand communities (N=503) from Canada and the United States. Partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was used to examine the strength, effect, and significance of the relationships. The results of the paper confirm the impact of the number of brand communities a person is a part of on brand community satisfaction, attitudinal loyalty, and behavioral loyalty—but not on social and physical promotion. Furthermore, brand community satisfaction was significantly related to the delight construct. The delight construct also had a significant relationship with attitudinal and behavioral loyalty. Finally, attitudinal, and behavioral loyalty were significantly related to social and physical promotion. Extant research has examined the behavior of the individual member in a brand community, but the impact of the number of brand community memberships on customer centric measures has been an under researched area. This research is aiming to fill this void.

**Keywords** Brand community membership · Satisfaction · Delight · Attitudinal and behavioral loyalty · Social and physical promotion

## Introduction

A brand community is a relational network that connects a brand and its members (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). A brand community tends to be identified based on a perceived similarity amongst members, be it their environment, occupation, hobbies, or devotion to a brand. In a brand community, members feel connected to each other. Members of a brand community gain benefits through information sharing, a stronger feeling of brand history and culture, and assistance for consumption (McAlexander et al. 2003).

As the importance of constructs such as satisfaction, delight, social and physical promotion, attitudinal and behavioral loyalty have been recognized in the extant research (Zhang et al. 2017), but not necessarily so much in the terms of how the number of brand communities someone belongs to, the purpose of this paper is to examine how the number of brand communities a member belongs to impacts the relevant customer centric measures. Prior research has revealed that positive acknowledgements related a consumer experience may contribute to customer centric measures (e.g., satisfaction). This relationship may be further strengthened if there have been multiple positive experiences (Anderson and Srinivasan 2003; Ha and Janda 2008). This research extends on this by expanding the scope of experiences with a single product or service, to multiple experiences in various brand community platforms. This is important as it expands the knowledge base about the impact of consumers belonging to several brand communities and the impact on customer centric measures, and it may help brand community managers in getting new ideas in managing the brand community.

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Discerning the relevant information about brand community memberships may thus become vital.

The objectives of this paper are first, based on an extensive literature review, to discuss the focal customer centric constructs present in brand communities; second, to determine the relationships between key constructs based on relevant research; third, to build a conceptual model based on the relevant constructs, and the proposed relationships; fourth, assess the strength, effect size, and significance of the relationships using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM); and fifth, to discuss the theoretical and practical implications of the research.

This paper proceeds as follows. First, in the literature review section, the relevant brand community constructs are identified and reviewed. Second, the methodology of the research paper will be described including the statistical methods employed. Third, the results of the research paper will be presented. This is followed by a discussion, including implications, limitations, and future research ideas.

## Literature review

### Brand communities

Brand community is a relational network that consists of a group of customers who are more invested in a brand than a regular buyer of a brand (Stokburger-Sauer et al. 2012). These customers want to become an essential part of the brand itself. In this case, the personal investment takes the form of emotional bonds when customers devote their time, thoughts, opinions, and interest for the brand instead of simply exchanging their money for the product or service (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). These interactions, regardless of how they are formed, shape the relationships that form the brand community. Based on previous research, a brand community is made up of information created by marketers, information generated by consumers, its entities such as customers, and platforms, and the customer's relationship between these entities. As a result, the core of the brand community is knowledge and consumer relationships with other relevant entities (Zhao 2019).

The distinguishing feature of a brand community is its members' ability to engage in immersive communication with relevant stakeholders, i.e., other brand community members, the employees of the company, other relevant stakeholders (e.g., marketing research companies), the product, and the brand. In general, consumers who participate in the brand communities share their enthusiasm for brands by sharing information and expertise or simply expressing their enthusiasm, and these social experiences influence the brand's relationship with its customers (Brogi 2014). These communities cannot reduce the reliance on advertising, but

they can contribute to achievement of long-term, sustainable growth through repeat purchases from high-value customers. By communicating effectively with brand members, community brand-enhancement activities can augment customer involvement in product and/or service development activities (Constantin et al. 2014).

Some customers belong to a variety of brand communities, and obviously this may have an impact on their brand community experiences. Examples of brand communities include the Gym Shark and Lululemon Athletica, which have joined like-minded consumers by offering a place to share information, and anecdotes with fellow brand community members (Peckover 2019). Also, the Harley Owners Groups has been frequently mentioned in extant research (Felix 2012) as an excellent example of an effective brand community which gained prominence even before the emergence of the Internet. In terms of the benefits for the brands, brand communities offer supplementary marketing communication channels, distributed customer service, content creation, product use experience sharing, improvement of brand loyalty, knowledge sharing and co-creation, as well as a platform for innovation (Pfortmüller 2018).

The joint experiences affect the interactions of the members and uses/perceptions of the brand community, which may then be reflected in customer centric measures. Belonginess refers to the quality or state of being an essential or important part of something (Dictionary.com 2021). In this study, however, belonginess relates to how many different brand communities a member belongs to Brodie et al. (2013). A claim could be made that brand community members who belong to a variety of brand communities may feel more strongly connected to them because brand communities may be a more important part of their life. An individual may participate more in a brand community and search for more information when he/she is involved in various brand communities. This is not solely based on interest but instead is formed by many ways such as visiting the brand community, posting questions, or writing comments. Belonging to a brand community may be directly related to a member's inherent needs, values, and interests, which reflects a personal sensation that expresses a member's beliefs and feelings about an object in a specific situation.

To ensure that brand community members are satisfied, community need to show its members the value of belonging to the group. Knowing what the members care for invites more members to join the brand community, which is why it's so important to understand what is important to different types of members.

### Brand community satisfaction

Customer satisfaction refers to the end state of a process during which the customer evaluates subjectively the perceived



benefits attained from using a service like a brand community (Royo-Vela and Casamassima, 2011). To be satisfied, a customer needs to get more value for his money so that they feel like the purchase/experience has added value to their life. Simply, when perceived value is enhanced, satisfaction should also improve. This has been proven to be the case in many different contexts including services (McDougall and Levesque 2000), green products (Lam et al. 2016), restaurants (Konuk 2019), and tourism (Kim and Park 2017).

Satisfaction is a measure of how well expectations set on earlier occasions are met. That is, brand community satisfaction is the outcome of an individual's belief that the benefits received from participation in the brand community are equal (or greater) than the projected benefits (McAlexander et al. 2003). As a result, it is apparent that satisfaction is a critical antecedent of continued presence in the brand community. Satisfaction has a strong affective component that develops over time because of the pleasant encounters with a product or service. Satisfaction tends to evolve over time as a person has different experiences or has more time between the experiences (Zhu et al. 2016). Therefore, it is why it's important to monitor satisfaction on a regular basis.

The social impact of brand communities helps in developing long-term relationships with customers, which persuades them to repeatedly engage with them—thus resulting in loyalty (Naidoo and Potgieter 2017). Even though the brand community members who responded to the Naidoo and Potgier (2017) survey were highly educated, it can be claimed that this may be a good reason to aim for a level of customer experience that exceeds rather than simply meets expectations (Komaromi 2003). When a person is satisfied with their experience, they are more likely to continue that behaviour. Consequently, when members are satisfied with a brand community experience, they are likely to join others.

Offering benefits to customers is likely an influential factor for brand community success and survival over a longer period of time. Customers join brand communities in the search for functional, psychological, social, entertainment, and social benefits that may affect customers satisfaction

(Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). Although the respondents in the Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) study came from a medium-sized Midwestern town in United States, it is likely that these benefits are present in all sorts of brand communities; however, their relative importance may vary by the industry type of the brand community.

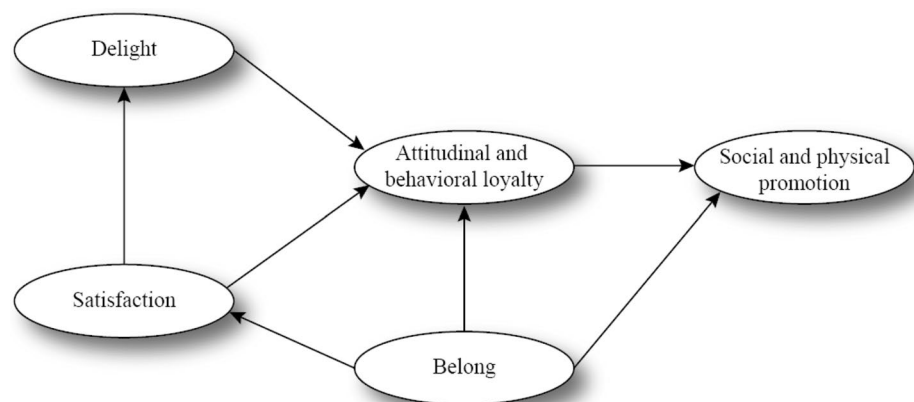
The brand communities also provide consumers with experience benefits. Brand communities try to offer customers various experiences through community events, workshops, and games where customers feel warmth, pleasure, excitement, and fun (Kumar and Kumar 2020) for example in travel related brand communities (Wanga and Fesenmaier 2004). Because brands are linked to an individual's self-image, members join specific brand communities that are congruent with the self-image (Wade et al. 2020). An individual may belong to a brand community and search for information when he/she is involved in a particular brand or product. Brand communities exist and are meaningful to customers because of the overall experience they provide—not just because of their experience with the brand itself (Naidoo and Potgieter 2017). Extant research has indicated that positive attributions related a consumer behavioral experience may result in customer satisfaction, especially if there have been multiple positive experiences (Anderson and Srinivasan 2003; Ha and Janda 2008). It is likely that this same logic is valid in the context of brand communities, and thus the positive experiences with the brand communities may enhance brand community satisfaction, particularly so if there have been several positive involvements with the brand communities. Based on the previous discussion, the following hypothesis is set (see Fig. 1).

**Hypothesis 1:** The number of brand communities a member belongs to is significantly and positively related to brand community satisfaction.

### Brand community delight

Another relevant customer centric construct presented in extant research is delight, which acts separately but in

**Fig. 1** The conceptual and structural model of the research



parallel with customer satisfaction and may produce loyalty among service customers (Ahrholdt et al. 2017) in online context (Bartl et al. 2013) including brand communities (Ball and Barnes 2017). It is likely that the hedonic context of Ball and Barnes (2017) study might have an impact on these findings (Lee et al. 2014), but similar results have been discovered in other contexts like automotive (Niedermeier et al. 2019; Priya 2020), and retailing (Cooper et al. 2019).

Drawing upon the cognitive appraisal theory, which describes how a person may assess an emotional situation, and how it may affect him/her, makes an interpretation of the different facets of the situation, and responds to it on the basis on his/her interpretation (Smith and Kirby 2001), customer delight is a highly optimistic emotional state that occurs when one's hopes are met (and exceeded) to an unexpected degree (Ball and Barnes 2017). Many researchers have acknowledged the value of delight since it may not suffice to have customers that are merely satisfied (Rust and Oliver 2000). Delight requires out of the ordinary service or product performance (Bartl et al. 2013) which may appear, for example, in the form of an unexpected and exciting service experience, high standards of service efficiency, and creative services.

Delight is described as the result of a combination of joy and surprise. Extant research has verified that delight had a strong and direct effect on positive affect with excitement serving as a direct antecedent of affect, and a driver of satisfaction (Oliver 1999). As a result, excitement is thought to have an activating role in the emotional process, which may result in delight and satisfaction. Hence, brand community members with the highest levels of surprise and joy should be more satisfied than others (Finn 2005). Brand community satisfaction is linked to fulfilling expectations, but member delight is linked to exceeding expectations, which may result in sentiments of happiness, ecstasy, victory, intense satisfaction, or optimism. The fulfilment of customer wants is defined as satisfaction, whereas delight is defined as the fulfilment of higher order wants, such as self-esteem (Finn 2005). Delighting customers might, however, lead to increased future expectations and higher loyalty toward the brand community.

Extant research has also proposed that delightful experiences are more memorable than satisfying experiences and therefore are more likely to be remembered (Fournier and Lee 2009). Brand community members feel delighted when they perceive a surprising and positive level of service performance, and therefore it is distinct from satisfaction (Ahrholdt et al. 2017; Rust and Oliver 2000). Although meeting expectations can be satisfying, it is the emotional response to a surprise-delight that has a real impact on brand community loyalty.

The delight construct has recently received attention from researchers and practitioners, but the research is still

quite limited as the extant literature is still inconclusive in describing consumer joy while the concept of satisfaction is more established. Some of the previous research done does not clearly distinguish between delight and satisfaction, as delight has been perceived to be just a higher level of satisfaction (Kim et al. 2015) and maybe more present in hedonic contexts (Ball and Barnes 2017). The research done by Ahrholdt et al. (2017), however, makes a clear distinction between these constructs by claiming that delight is relatively emotional in nature while satisfaction is more a cognitive nature, and this makes them separate constructs. Furthermore, satisfaction may be a hygiene factor, and therefore, necessary for loyalty. At the same time, delight is a positive emotional condition that stems from an exceedingly positive experience that surpasses expectations greatly (Oliver et al. 1997). To support these claims, Ahrholdt et al. (2017) proved that delight and satisfaction affect loyalty in a nonlinear way, but these ways are very different.

So, in the case of a brand community, when it meets expectations of a member then customer satisfaction is achieved, but delight involves surpassing it and taking the entire experience to an emotional plane (Brodie et al. 2013). Hence, an increase in brand community satisfaction should lead to an increase in customer delight. Based on the previous discussion, the following hypothesis is set (see Fig. 1).

**Hypothesis 2:** Customer satisfaction is significantly and positively related to customer delight in the context of brand communities.

### Attitudinal and behavioral loyalty

Customer loyalty is a “deeply held commitment to re-buy and re-patronize a preferred product or service constantly in the future” (Oliver 1999). Brand community loyalty implies both a consistent pattern of continued visiting of brand communities over time and a favorable attitude towards the brand communities (Martell and Bandyopadhyay 2007). It develops when the brand communities fit the personality or self-image of the member (Wade et al. 2020).

Attitudes are evaluative judgements about an entity that summarize cognition and affect experience, resulting in an individual's internal assessment of the object (in this case, the brand community) (Spears and Singh 2004). Drawing upon the attachment theory, which describes the relationships between humans from the psychological, evolutionary, and ethological point of view (Richards and Schat 2011), attitudinal loyalty includes emotional attachment to the brand community and often leads to strong membership in the brand community. Behavioural loyalty, on the other hand, results in actual behaviors beyond mere emotional attachment (Jang et al. 2008). Behavioral intentions refer to a member's willingness and plans to remain committed to their brand communities (Hur et al. 2011), which



may drive brand recommendation and member retention. However, Appel et al. (2020) found that loyalty may be more dynamic and complex than expected due to social aspects.

In research conducted in more than 50 Spanish virtual communities, Flavian et al. (2007) looked at how brand community members' loyalty is influenced by various customer centric measures (Flavian et al. 2007). On this basis, it is likely that delight and satisfaction may be essential preconditions for loyalty. Satisfaction and delight, as determinants of attitudinal and behavioral loyalty, arise from an evaluative process, which draws on experience-based beliefs and needs (Kim et al. 2015). When members are satisfied, they may show commitment towards the brand community and become loyal members; however, satisfaction alone may not be sufficient precondition for loyalty (Mingquan 2016). A loyal brand community member may become emotionally invested in the success of the brand if he/she feels satisfied and delighted with the brand community. Therefore, they may be less likely to engage in brand switching behavior. Once a member feels satisfied with a brand community, it is likely she/he will develop a positive attitude and behavioral loyalty toward the brand community. Extant research has not investigated the impact of multiple positive (or negative) brand community experiences on customer centric measures, but consumer behavior related research has claimed that positive acknowledgements and the resulting satisfaction, particularly because of multiple positive experiences, may contribute towards loyalty (Anderson and Srinivasan 2003) also in online contexts (Ha and Janda 2008). Based on the previous discussion, the following hypotheses are set (see Fig. 1).

**Hypothesis 3:** The number of brand communities a member belongs to is significantly and positively related to attitudinal and behavioral loyalty in the context of brand communities.

**Hypothesis 4:** Brand community satisfaction is significantly and positively related to attitudinal and behavioral loyalty in the context of brand communities.

Though customer loyalty is a top priority for brand communities, satisfied customers may not always be loyal. Therefore, brand community member delight could be critical. Brand community member delight entails going beyond satisfaction and offering a pleasant experience for a customer. As a result, participants who are delighted may show more positive behavioral results, such as loyalty (Bartl et al. 2013). Based on the previous discussion, the following hypothesis is set (see Fig. 1).

**Hypothesis 5:** Brand community delight is significantly and positively related to attitudinal and behavioral loyalty in the context of brand communities.

## Social and physical promotion

Technology-assisted branding initiatives reinforce the brand promise with greater consumer empowerment, authenticity, and transparency. Rapid technological advancements have greatly altered connectivity standards among people of all ages. Famous social networking sites, blogs, text messages, and YouTube video posts have all mirrored these shifting perceptions. Brand awareness and interaction can range from simple salience (brand identity or acknowledgement) to resonance (an intense, involved, and loyal relationship). Using current technology to communicate brand messages on a regular basis may greatly improve brand loyalty, leading to brand resonance (Judson et al. 2012). When loyalty is supported by a favorable emotional experience or satisfaction, customers are more likely to engage in positive word of mouth (WOM) (Sweeney et al. 2005) also in the context of brand communities (Karjaluo et al. 2016).

Promotion of a brand community may be defined as the member's intentions to recommend the brand community to non-members (Herrmann et al. 2005). Brand community promotion, more specifically, involves actions such as endorsing the brand community to others. This includes discussing the benefits of membership, inviting non-members to join the brand community, and emphasizing the positive parts of the community (Casaló et al. 2010). Brand communities are interactive communities that appeal to a particular group of people where people with common interests come together to connect, exchange contact information, create relationships, and share and discuss ideas. However, as the technology advances, social media is increasingly playing an important role in people's everyday lives—and the communities developing within them shift as well.

WOM is a type of physical promotion in which friends or individuals communicate with others about the many beneficial aspects of a brand. With the evolution of the Internet, WOM has progressed into electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) (Ardyan et al. 2018). E-WOM refers to positive or negative statements made on the internet by future, current, or previous customers of a product or firm (Bataneh 2015). E-WOM generally includes complete comments, clear and transparent information, and an openness to all opinions. When someone wants to acquire a product or service, they frequently go to the information available on the Internet. Furthermore, in the social media context, the role of e-WOM may play a much larger role as it could be seen by a wider range of people (VanMeter et al. 2018). Furthermore, consumers are more likely to believe individuals who have posted on a particular community's website in the context of an online brand community (Brodie et al. 2013).

The long-term existence of a brand community may be negatively affected if its members' needs are not addressed. If the members are not satisfied, there would not be any



incentive for the members to promote the brand community. As a result, brand community satisfaction may aid in the development of behaviours like positive WOM communications. Brand community satisfaction may also have a positive influence on the member's intentions to belong to different brand communities, as they will expect to have similar satisfying experiences in other communities. Highly satisfied members are also likely to tell friends and family about their experiences and to promote a brand community, and the membership in general (Hsieh et al. 2022). A highly positive experience with a brand community is much more likely to turn customers into real promoters than a simple interaction that simply gets the job done.

Member satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) is associated with positive (or negative) WOM communications and increased (or decreased) loyalty (Jham 2018). Hence, when members experience a high level of satisfaction and delight, they may decide to promote socially and physically their brand community.

Based on the previous discussion, the following hypotheses are set (see Fig. 1).

**Hypothesis 6:** Attitudinal and behavioral loyalty is significantly and positively related to social and physical promotion in the context of brand communities.

**Hypothesis 7:** The number of brand communities a brand community member belongs to is significantly and positively related to social and physical promotion.

## Methodology

### Sample and respondent descriptions

Upon reception of ethical approval from the university, a cross-sectional study was conducted utilizing an Internet survey based on a sample purchased from the Qualtrics market research firm. All respondents were compensated according to Qualtrics guidelines with the level of incentive commensurate with the length of the survey. A pre-survey ( $N=50$ ) was initiated with Qualtrics with the aim of detecting potential issues with the survey instrument. Consequently, minor changes were made. In the original version of the questionnaire, a condition for responding to the survey was set so that the respondents had to belong to one or more brand communities. In the testing phase, however, it was discovered that this was not an adequate condition as it did not necessitate any kind of activity in the brand community. Therefore, a supplementary condition was added so that the respondents needed to have at least viewed their brand community pages during the week before replying to the survey instrument.

The respondents ( $N=503$ ) inhabited Canada and the United States. They were asked to rate their level of

agreement with a series of 5-point Likert-type scale questions (e.g., 1 = completely disagree, 5 = completely agree). The measurement of the number of brand communities respondents belong to was done with a scale 1, 2–5, 6–10, and more than 10 brand communities. These participants represented an extensive variety of brand communities comprising of automotive, consumer electronics, computer software, travel, motorcycle, and entertainment brand communities, among others.

Canadian respondents represented 50.3% ( $N=253$ ) of the sample and the U.S. respondents represented the other 49.7% ( $N=250$ ) (Table 1). The examination of the path coefficients with the multigroup analysis available in PLS-SEM in the whole dataset between the two countries did not show significant differences in the model and therefore all consequent analysis in this research paper used a pooled sample of the two countries.

Based on a visual inspection of the data set, no systematic response patterns directly related to the question content were detected (Bachman and O'Malley 1984) and for that reason, none of the responses had to be eliminated ( $N=503$ ). The adequacy of the sample size was tested with Cochran's formula for continuous data (Cochran 1977). Using the selected alpha level of 0.025 in each tail of 1.96, an estimated standard deviation in a 5-point scale of 0.8, and an acceptable margin of error of 0.15 (number of points on primary scale  $\times$  margin of error =  $5 \times 0.03$ ), a sample size of 137 was needed. As the sample consisted of 503 responses, the sample size was considered adequate.

As the statistical method was PLS-SEM, it was necessary to examine the sample size's adequacy for PLS-SEM. Extant literature has established that if the minimum  $R^2$  is 0.50, the significance level is 5% and the maximum number of arrows pointing to a construct is three, sixteen responses are needed to attain statistical power of 80%. Therefore, the minimum sample size requirement was achieved for the use of PLS-SEM as well (Hair et al. 2017).

### Measurement and questionnaire development

The key constructs identified in the literature review were attitudinal and behavioral loyalty (4 items), social and physical promotion (6 items), delight (3 items), satisfaction (2 items) and number of brand communities (1 item). Table 2 indicates the measurement of the constructs in this research paper.

Before the evaluation and formation of the structural model, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was completed for the indicator variables separately for the antecedent (exogenous) constructs and dependent (endogenous) constructs based on the principles established by Hair et al. (2010, p. 103). The results of the EFA are presented in Tables 3 and 4.



**Table 1** Sample characteristics in terms of gender, age and type of brand community

Gender	Canadian respondents <i>N</i> (%)	U.S. respondents <i>N</i> (%)	Total
# of male respondents	116 (45.8%)	133 (53.2%)	249
# of female respondents	136 (53.8%)	116 (46.4%)	252
# of other respondents	1 (0.4%)	1 (0.4%)	2
# of respondents	253	250	503
Age category	Canadian respondents <i>N</i> (%)	U.S. respondents <i>N</i> (%)	Total
19–24	34 (13.4%)	55 (22.0%)	89
25–28	24 (9.5%)	27 (10.8%)	51
29–34	38 (15.0%)	38 (15.2%)	76
35–40	38 (15.0%)	36 (14.4%)	74
41–45	21 (8.3%)	26 (10.4%)	47
46–54	37 (14.6%)	34 (13.6%)	71
55–65	41 (16.2%)	16 (6.4%)	57
+ 65	20 (8.0%)	18 (7.2%)	38
Type	<i>N</i> (%)	Type	<i>N</i> (%)
Automotive	30 (6.0)	Household	40 (8.0)
Consumer electronics	41 (8.1)	Entertainment	91 (18.1)
Computer software	24 (4.8)	Food and beverage	70 (13.9)
Travel	59 (11.7)	Shoes	80 (15.9)
Motorcycles	13 (2.6)	Other, please specify	55 (10.9)
Number of brand communities	Canadian respondents <i>N</i> (%)	U.S. respondents <i>N</i> (%)	Total
1	77 (30.4%)	77 (30.8%)	154 (30.6%)
2–5	124 (49.0%)	127 (50.8%)	251 (49.9%)
6–10	34 (13.5%)	28 (11.2%)	62 (12.3%)
More than 10	18 (7.1%)	18 (7.2%)	36 (7.2%)

**Table 2** Measurement of the key constructs in the structural model

Construct	Indicator variables	Adapted from
Attitudinal and behavioral loyalty	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How likely would you be to visit your brand community again?</li> <li>2. How likely would you remain loyal to your brand community (i.e., continue visiting, posting etc.)?</li> <li>3. How likely would you be to recommend your brand community to others?</li> <li>4. I am committed to my brand community</li> </ol>	Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001), Marzocchi et al. (2013)
Social and physical promotion	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I try to convince my friends and acquaintances of the quality of the brand community</li> <li>2. I often speak positively about the brand community</li> <li>3. I show my happiness to the visitors of my brand community</li> <li>4. I'm very happy when a friend or acquaintance decides to visit my brand community</li> <li>5. I try to convince friends or acquaintances to visit the brand community</li> <li>6. I often wear clothing with the logo of my brand</li> </ol>	Bhattacharya and Sen (2003), Marzocchi et al. (2013)
Delight	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I am delighted by the brand community</li> <li>2. I gleefully talk about the brand community</li> <li>3. I am elated by the brand community</li> </ol>	Ahrholdt et al. (2017)
Satisfaction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How would you rate your overall satisfaction with your brand community?</li> <li>2. Considering the overall performance of your brand community, would you say that it has?</li> </ol>	Haverila et al. (2021)
# of brand communities	1. Please indicate to how many brand communities you belong?	–



**Table 3** The EFA results on the variables of the exogenous (independent) constructs

Indicator variable	Delight	Satisfaction
Gleefully talk about the brand community	0.830	
Elated by the brand community	0.820	
Delighted by the brand community	0.653	
Overall performance		0.782
Overall satisfaction		0.673

The exogeneous factor solution explained 64.79% of the variance and the endogenous factor solution explained 60.96%. Therefore, they both exceeded the threshold level of 60% (Hair et al., 2010). In the factor solution for the endogenous constructs, the commitment variable experienced a high cross loading to both factors, and therefore it was removed. After the removal of the commitment variable, the factor solution explained 60.66% of the variance for the endogenous constructs. This factor solution was used as the basis for the structural model was created (Fig. 1).

### The structural model

Based on the literature review and the EFA (Tables 3 and 4), the structural model for the research.

### Method of statistical analysis

The analysis tool for the model examination was partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). The two main approaches in structural equation modelling are covariance based (CB-SEM) and partial least squares (PLS-SEM). Based on the research goals, the suitability of these methods was assessed. As the theory is less developed regarding brand communities, and as the goal of the research

is prediction and explanation, PLS-SEM was chosen (Hair et al. 2017; Reinartz et al. 2009). It is also noteworthy that earlier research has indicated that the use of PLS-SEM results in higher composite reliability and convergent validity values, and the variance explained in the dependent indicators have been discovered to be substantially higher than with CB-SEM (Hair et al. 2017).

## Data analysis

### Background data

The whole data set ( $N = 503$ ) consisted of Canadian ( $N = 253$ ) and US respondents ( $N = 250$ ). There were 249 male respondents and 252 female respondents. The respondents who responded “Other” to the gender question were excluded as there were only two of them and thus the final  $N$  was 501. The mean values and standard deviations for the variables are presented in Table 5.

### Testing of the outer and inner models

The loading for the variable “I often wear clothing with the logo of my brand” was lower than the threshold level of 0.700, and therefore it was removed from further analysis. All other indicators exhibited values higher than 0.700 (Table 5), which is the criteria for indicator reliability (Hair et al. 2017).

The internal consistency reliability assessment, which is usually established with Cronbach’s alpha and composite reliability assessment, indicated that all constructs exceeded the threshold value of 0.700 for both criteria. In addition, extant literature has indicated that Cronbach alpha is a conservative measure of reliability resulting in relatively low reliability values. At the same time, composite reliability assessment

**Table 4** The EFA results on the indicator variables of the endogenous (dependent) constructs

Indicator variable	Social and physical promotion	Attitudinal and behavioral loyalty
I try to convince my friends and acquaintances of the quality of the brand community	0.788	
I try to convince friends or acquaintances to visit the brand community	0.755	
I show my happiness to the visitors of my brand community	0.697	
I often speak positively about the brand community	0.677	
I’m very happy when a friend or acquaintance decides to visit my brand community	0.661	
I often wear clothing with the logo of my brand	0.600	
How likely would you be to visit your brand community again?		0.800
How likely would you remain loyal to your brand community (i.e., continue visiting, posting etc.)?		0.796
How likely would you be to recommend your brand community to others?		0.717
I am committed to my brand community	0.531	0.594





**Table 5** Mean values, standard deviations, outer loadings of the indicator variables, and internal reliability of the constructs

Construct	Variable	Mean	Std. dev	Loading	p-value
Attitudinal and behavioral loyalty (CA=0.848, CR=0.908, AVE=0.766)	Likelihood to visit the brand community again?	4.11	0.83	0.852	0.000
	Likelihood to remain loyal to the brand community (i.e., continue visiting, posting etc.)?	4.02	0.82	0.893	0.000
	Likelihood to recommend the brand community to others?	3.99	0.85	0.880	0.000
Social and physical promotion (CA=0.890, CR=0.919, AVE=0.695)	Convince my friends and acquaintances of the quality of the brand community	3.58	1.11	0.842	0.000
	I often speak positively about the brand community	3.92	1.01	0.830	0.000
	I show my happiness to the visitors of my brand community	3.74	1.05	0.845	0.000
	Happy when a friend or acquaintance decides to visit my brand community	3.85	0.98	0.826	0.000
	Convince friends or acquaintances to visit the brand community	3.59	1.10	0.813	0.000
	I often wear clothing with the logo of my brand	3.26	1.35	0.594	0.000
Delight (CA=0.856, CR=0.913 AVE=0.777)	Delighted by the brand community	3.93	0.98	0.855	0.000
	I gleefully talk about the brand community	3.61	1.10	0.893	0.000
	I am elated by the brand community	3.57	1.09	0.896	0.000
Satisfaction (CA=0.745, CR=0.887, AVE=0.797)	Overall satisfaction with the brand community	4.09	0.78	0.900	0.000
	Overall performance of the brand community	3.59	0.86	0.885	0.000

tends to overestimate the internal consistency reliability resulting in relatively high reliability estimates. For these reasons, both estimates need to be contemplated as the true reliability is somewhere in between of these two measures (Hair et al. 2017). On this basis, acceptable internal consistency reliability in the data set was achieved (Table 5). The convergent validity assessment is typically recognised with the average variance extracted (AVE) so that the AVE values should exceed 0.500, meaning that the construct explains an average of at least 50% of the variance in its items (Chin 1998). Convergent validity was established as all AVE values exceeded the threshold value of 0.500 (Table 5).

The assessment of discriminant validity has usually been done with the Fornell and Larcker criterion (Fornell and Larcker 1981) in previous research. Recent research has indicated, however, that the Fornell and Larcker criterion is not reliably capable of detecting discriminant validity issues, and therefore a new HTMT (Heterotrait-Monotrait) measure for the assessment of discriminant validity has been introduced (Henseler et al. 2015). The value for the HTMT should not exceed the threshold of 0.900. However, when constructs are more distinct, a lower, more conservative threshold value of 0.850 has been suggested (Hair et al. 2017). As all HTMT values were below the strict threshold value of 0.85, the constructs are conceptually distinct, and thus it can be said that discriminant validity has been established (Table 6).

Before significance testing, various combinations of the number of brand communities the respondents belonged to were examined. On that basis, it became clear that “less or equal than five” versus “more than five” brand communities

**Table 6** The assessment of discriminant validity with the Heterotrait-Monotrait criterion

	1	2	3	4
1. Attitudinal and behavioral loyalty	0.000			
2. Belong (# of brand communities)	0.333	0.000		
3. Delight	0.545	0.195	0.000	
4. Satisfaction	0.844	0.375	0.648	0.000
5. Social and physical promotion	0.666	0.217	0.768	0.713

was most effective at discriminating between the two groups by creating unique path coefficients.

When using reflective measurement, the collinearity values for the structural (inner) model need to be examined. Recent extant research has set the upper threshold value of 3.00. As all collinearity values in the structural model were below 1.5, the threshold value was not exceeded, and therefore there are no collinearity issues in structural model (Hair et al. 2019; Ringle et al. 2018).

Guidelines indicate  $R^2$  thresholds of 0.25 (weak), 0.50 (moderate), and 0.75 (high) for endogenous constructs' in-sample predictive power. From Table 7, the  $R^2$  values represent weak to moderate predictive relevance in the data set (Hair, et al., 2011). Recent research has also established criteria for the Stone–Geisser  $Q^2$  values so that values larger than 0.25 and 0.50 represent medium and large predictive relevance (Hair et al. 2020). The  $Q^2$  results in Table 7 confirm the existence of weak to moderate predictive relevance.



## Testing of the hypotheses

All relationships, except for “Belong (# of brand communities) Social and physical promotion” relationship, were significant (Table 8). Extant research has indicated that conventional significance testing is not enough, however, and that effect size is a critical finding of a quantitative study (Sullivan and Feinn 2012). The  $p$ -value can confirm whether an effect exists, but not the size of the effect, and therefore it is important to report both the significance of a relationship as well as the actual effect size (Sullivan and Feinn 2012). For that reason, the effect size as well as its description is included in Table 8. Extant literature has indicated that effect sizes of 0.02, 0.15 and 0.35 indicate an endogenous construct’s small, medium, or large effect size (Hair et al. 2017). The significance of the relationships and summary of the hypotheses testing is presented in Table 8.

Again, all hypotheses are supported with the exception of hypothesis 4 “Belong (# of brand communities) Social and physical promotion”. Figure 2 visually illustrates the relative strength and significance of the relationships in the structural model.

## Discussion

In this study, the customer centric relationships based on the relevant theoretical framework in the context of brand communities were examined—more specifically, how the number of brand communities a member belongs to relates to these critical customer centric measures. The findings indicate that number of brand communities a member belongs to is significantly and positively related to brand community

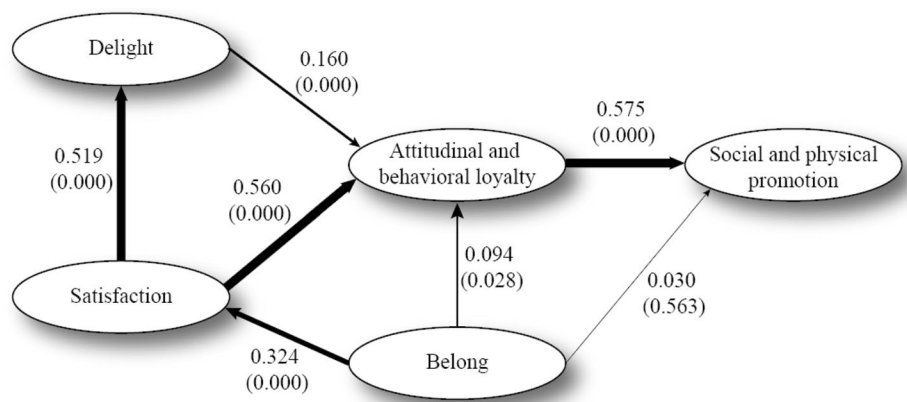
**Table 7** The  $R^2$  and  $Q^2$  predictive values for the endogenous constructs

Construct	$R$ square	$R$ square adjusted	Stone & Geisser $Q^2$
Attitudinal and behavioral loyalty	0.480	0.477	0.362
Delight	0.269	0.268	0.204
Satisfaction	0.105	0.103	0.081
Social and physical promotion	0.342	0.340	0.233

**Table 8** Path coefficients, significance, and effect sizes in the structural model

Relationship	Path coefficient	$p$ -value	Hypothesis acceptance	$f^2$	Description of the effect size
Attitudinal and behavioral loyalty Social and physical promotion	0.575	0.000	Yes	0.457	Large
Belong (# of brand communities) Attitudinal and behavioral loyalty	0.094	0.024	Yes	0.015	Small
Belong (# of brand communities) Satisfaction	0.324	0.000	Yes	0.117	Medium to small
Belong (# of brand communities) Social and physical promotion	0.030	0.572	No	0.001	–
Delight Attitudinal and behavioral loyalty	0.160	0.000	Yes	0.036	Small
Satisfaction Attitudinal and behavioral loyalty	0.560	0.000	Yes	0.408	Large
Satisfaction Delight	0.519	0.000	Yes	0.368	Large

**Fig. 2** The relative strength of the relationships, path coefficients and their significance in visual form in the data set (The thicker the line, the stronger the relationship)



satisfaction, attitudinal loyalty, and behavioral loyalty—but not to social and physical promotion.

First, the number of brand communities a member belongs to is significantly and positively related to brand community satisfaction. Members choose to join brand communities for a variety of reasons, such as feeling a sense of belonging and wanting to learn more about the brand or product. Hence, customers are likely to join a greater number of brand communities if they feel the sense of belonging and satisfaction towards a brand community based on their previous experiences within the brand communities. Satisfaction will lead to people seeking out the experience all over again.

Second, customer satisfaction is significantly and positively related to customer delight with a large effect size in the context of brand communities. Satisfaction is the fulfilment of certain basic needs like security or justice, whereas delight is the fulfilment of higher order needs like self-esteem. As brand community members are more invested in a brand than a regular buyer of a brand, overall brand community satisfaction appears to result in members also being delighted and elated by the brand community. Former research has examined the impact of service quality on customer delight and discovered positive and significant relationships between these constructs in the context of sporting events (Ahrholdt et al., 2017) as well as between customer delight and repurchase intentions in the context of website satisfaction (Bartl et al. 2013; Finn 2005, 2006; Oliver et al. 1997). Finn (2012) also found a positive relationship between satisfaction and delight indicating that once customer satisfaction reaches above average levels, resources should be used to increase customer delight rather than customer satisfaction. Prior research has indicated that the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty on one hand, and delight and loyalty on the other is negative quadratic and negative cubic, respectively (Ahrholdt et al. 2017). The results of this research indicate, however, somewhat different nature of the relationships in the brand community context (Appendix 1) so that the key relationships (in terms of the effect size) appear to be linear or somewhat positive quadratic. The results of this research are consistent with the findings of Ahrholdt et al. (2017) as there appears to be a threshold level of about 3.00, which needs to be exceeded before the effects on the resulting endogenous construct start to unfold (Ha and Janda 2008).

The findings of this research perhaps somewhat contradict with the findings in previous research as it has been claimed that exceeding utilitarian expectations induces customer satisfaction, while exceeding hedonic expectations leads to customer delight (Chitturi et al., 2008). As the sample in this research consisted of a wide variety of brand communities likely providing both utilitarian and hedonic benefits, the conclusions of Chitturi et al. (2008) may be questioned.

Third, the number of brand communities a member belongs to is significantly related to attitudinal and behavioral loyalty in the context of brand communities. When it

comes to loyalty, Oliver (1999) defined it as “a deeply held commitment to repurchase or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, resulting in repetitive same brand or same brand set purchase, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviour”. This concept emphasises the significance of two key aspects of loyalty: the attitudinal and behavioural components. Brand community members’ psychological ties and advocacy towards a particular brand community are reflected in the attitudinal component of loyalty (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001). Our findings suggest that the two forms of loyalty to a brand community can help understand whether or not members will be motivated to seek out membership in several brand communities.

Fourth, brand community satisfaction is significantly related to attitudinal and behavioral loyalty in the context of brand communities. As perceived satisfaction and delight from the brand community experience appear to further contribute positively to attitudinal and behavioral loyalty, results indicate that positive feelings lead to greater loyalty—as expected. It is also to be noted that the nature of the relationship between satisfaction and attitudinal and behavioral loyalty appears to be positive quadratic (Appendix 1) so that a threshold level of about 3 must be exceeded before the effects satisfaction start to unfold.

Fifth, brand community delight is also significantly related to attitudinal and behavioral loyalty in the context of brand communities—but with a small effect size. Consistent with previous research, brand community delight is a function of its predicted constituents like surprise consumption and positive affect and loyalty (Finn 2006, 2012). This suggests that brand community member delight implies going beyond satisfaction and providing a member a pleasant experience. Somewhat unexpectedly, however, the effect size between the delight and attitudinal and behavioral loyalty constructs (0.036) was quite a bit lower in comparison to the effect size between satisfaction and attitudinal and behavioral loyalty constructs (0.408). In other words, for the brand community members the brand community satisfaction is much more important than being delighted.

Sixth, it appears that attitudinal and behavioral loyalty are significantly and positively related to social and physical promotion with a very large effect size. Extant research has identified attitudinal and behavioral loyalty to be different and unique constructs (Bilgihan et al. 2016; Cheng 2011; Park 1966) but the exploratory factor analysis done in this research indicated that these factors merged into one factor only (Table 4). Thus, a member who is loyal to the brand community appears to be likely not only to have positive attitude towards the brand community but also to promote their brand community by, for example, convincing their friends and family to join the brand community. Thus, loyal brand community members not only create a more vibrant and relevant



community in terms of content, and they may also help to recruit other members. It is again to be noted that the nature of the relationship between attitudinal and behavioral loyalty and social and physical promotion appears to be linear or slightly positive quadratic (Appendix 1) so that a threshold level of about 3 must be exceeded before the effects attitudinal and behavioral loyalty start to unfold. As the theoretical relationships in the model (Fig. 1) start with satisfaction, proceed via attitudinal and behavioral loyalty to social and physical promotion, the impact of this discovery is quite remarkable. First, a satisfaction level of about three must be exceeded before the effect on attitudinal and behavioral loyalty starts unfolding, and then a threshold level of about three must be exceeded before the effect on social and physical promotion starts unfolding.

Finally, the number of brand communities a brand community member belongs to is not significantly related to social and physical promotion. The literature on the social and physical promotion indicates that brand community members try to convince their friends and acquaintances to join, to speak positively about brand community, and to show happiness to the visitors of the brand community. Based on the findings of this research, it appears that the number of brand community's members belong to is related to satisfaction, attitudinal and behavioral loyalty, but this does not extend to social and physical promotion. Furthermore, it is possible that as the brand communities are, indeed, Internet based where the interaction is based on the use of technology rather than face-to-face communication, the members belonging to multiple brand communities are not supportive of social and physical promotion. In fact, a further analysis revealed that the relationship between the number of brand communities to which a member belongs and social and physical promotion is fully mediated by attitudinal and behavioral loyalty. Thus, all effects are indirect.

## Implications

It is not surprising that most of the Fortune 100 companies have established their own brand communities (Haverila et al. 2020) and thereby see them as important elements not only of their marketing communications but supportive of other elements of marketing strategy as well like branding and product development. It is also not unexpected that consumers belong to more than one brand community. The results of our research indicate that almost 70% of the respondents in this study (Table 1) belong to more than one brand community. For that reason, it is interesting to examine whether or not the number of brand communities to which a member belongs is having an impact on customer centric measures.

Interestingly, the results indicate that attitudinal and behavioral loyalty emerged as one factor only, contrary to the findings in previous research. The same was the case

with social and physical promotion. Perhaps these are distinct in terms of their definition, but so closely intertwined in members' minds and behaviours that they were not perceived to be distinct in this research.

The results also show that the number of brand communities a member belongs to is related to brand community satisfaction and (attitudinal and behavioral) loyalty. At the same time, it also appears that the impact of membership in more brand communities only indirectly impacts promotion via loyalty and satisfaction. Thus, people who are members of more brand communities are likely to promote these communities more, but only because these members are likely to be more satisfied and loyal.

Prior research has paid a lot of attention to brand community members' frequency and depth of visitations (i.e., lurking or commenting) (Casaló et al. 2010; Madupy and Cooley 2010; Nonnecke et al. 2006). The findings of this research indicate that brand community managers not only need to be aware of the frequency and depth of brand community visitations, but also if the members belong to multiple brand communities because this may have an impact on members' behavior in brand communities and critical customer centric measures. Thus, it is likely that the "heavy users" of brand communities are critical for the existence and long-term well-being of brand communities. Social media allows marketers to target users based on a variety of characteristics—so perhaps brand community managers need to begin targeting these heavy users of brand communities more often, along with other typical targeting variables.

## Limitations of the study and future research

Like any research, this paper comes with limitations. First, the sample used in this research was drawn from Canada and United States. Testing the approach of this research in other cultural and country settings will most certainly be an interesting research venue. Second, the model used in this research paper used 5 constructs and 7 theoretically meaningful relationships. As the  $R^2$  value was (expectedly) quite low in the case of the satisfaction construct (as it was only explained by the number of brand communities a member belongs to), maybe adding another relevant construct(s) (e.g., involvement, identification, or engagement) would make an interesting theoretical contribution. Based on the results of this research, it can be expected, however, that the higher levels of involvement, identification, or engagement would also likely have a positive relationship to the number of brand communities a member belongs to. The investigation of the model and the relevant relationships present in this research across different product categories (e.g., travel versus automotive brand communities) will probably lead to interesting research venues as well. Similarly, investigating the impact of the demographic variables (e.g., gender, and age) on the strength and effect of the relationships would be an interesting research venue.



Finally, as brand community members belong to multiple brand communities, it would be interesting to examine the similarity of the brand communities and the similarity of the benefits brand community members are seeking from these brand communities in terms of functional, psychological, social, and entertainment benefits. Also, in this context, a study on congruity with self-image between the brand and the member could be a promising research venue.

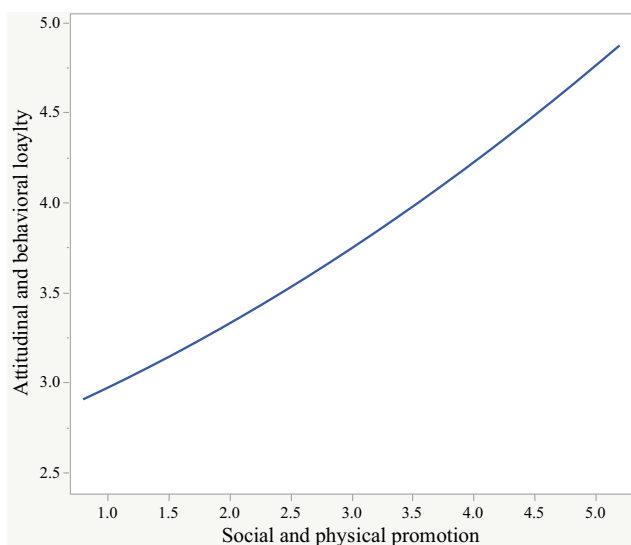
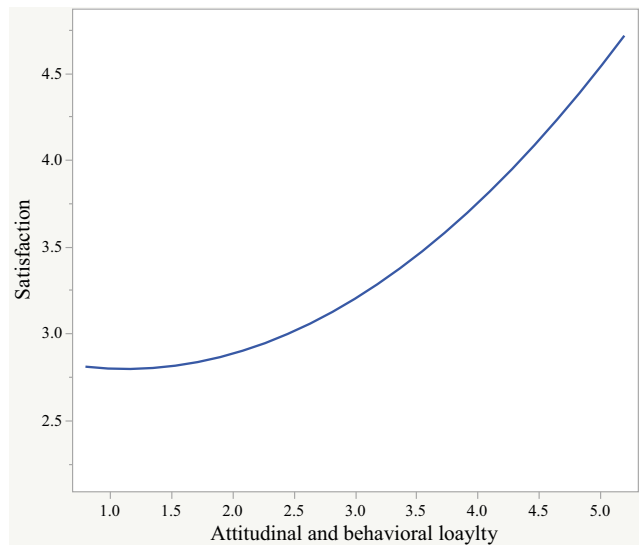
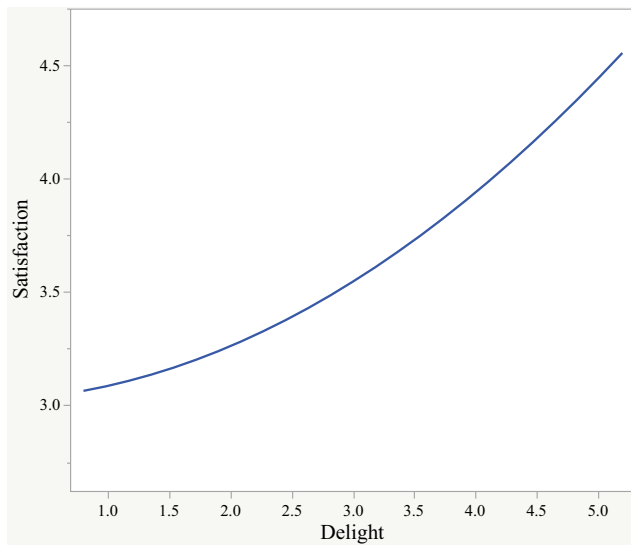
## Conclusions

The purpose of this research was to examine if the number of brand communities a member belongs to is related to critical customer centric measures. Using partial least squares

structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM), and a sample drawn from Canada and United States, the results indicate that this, indeed, was the case as the higher number of brand communities a member belongs to appears to be related to higher levels of brand community satisfaction and attitudinal and behavioral loyalty with the brand community—but not to social and physical promotion of the brand community. Also, in the context of brand communities, the relationship between brand community satisfaction and delight was highly significant with a large effect size.

## Appendix

The nature of the relationships between the key constructs in terms of the effect size



**Funding** Funding was supported by SSHRC (Grant No. 430-2018-00816).

## Declarations

**Conflict of interest** The authors whose names are listed certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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