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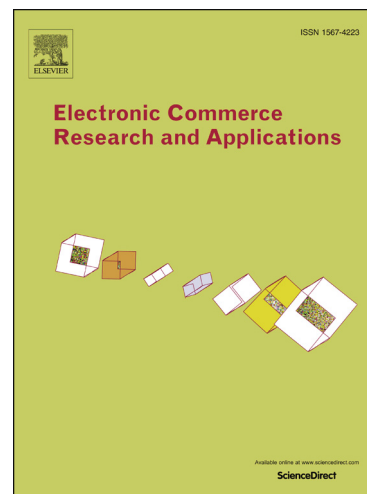
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BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA AND BEHAVIORAL BRAND LOYALTY

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ABSTRACT

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

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

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, companies have devoted considerable effort to the management of social media in order to provide interactive communications between users, build stronger relationships with them, and eventually drive brand loyalty. A key construct in this management is *social media engagement* (SocME), defined as a consumer's behavioral manifestations that have a social media focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers (Dolan et al., 2015; van Doorn et al. 2010). Consumers' brand engagement in the social media context reflects several actions (e.g., sharing, contributing, socializing, advocating, and co-creating) that motivate consumers for the brand-related use of social media (Brodie et al., 2013; Hall-Phillips, et al., 2016; Muntinga et al., 2011). These actions represent behavioral components of SocME (Dolan et al., 2015) and are considered as gradual involvement with brand-related content on social media, ranging from the initial action of consumption (e.g., reading, viewing, and watching) to the advanced actions of contribution (e.g., rating, commenting, and interacting) and creation (e.g., posting, writing, and uploading; Muntinga et al., 2011). Therefore, SocME is a key factor in turning consumers into content-creators.

Despite the advances that have been made regarding SocME, at least three important concerns with previous research limit our understanding. First, a review of the relevant literature reveals that there is no commonly acknowledged conceptualization of SocME. Among scholars, divergent conceptualizations of SocME exist, as SocME has been viewed as a cognitive appraisal, an affective attachment, a behavioral response, or a combination of them (Baldus et al., 2015; Hall-Phillips et al., 2016; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Lim et al., 2015; Schivinski et al., 2016). Because of this diversity, the conceptualization of SocME is an area in need of conceptual clarity and refinement.

Second, another significant gap in the literature concerns the relationship between brand-related SocME and behavioral brand loyalty. Although past research suggests brand-related SocME enhances behavioral brand loyalty (Brodie et al., 2013), evidence for this relationship has been produced primarily for the impact of brand-related SocME on consumer conative loyalty (also called loyalty intentions: Calder et al., 2009; Hollebeek, et al., 2014; Jahn and Kunz, 2012; Lim et al., 2015). The relationship between brand-related SocME and consumer behavioral loyalty toward a brand still remains unclear.

Third, it is uncertain how brand-related SocME is related to other psychological variables in the formation of behavioral brand loyalty. Previous research has examined the impact of content (e.g., social, entertainment, and economic benefits), user (e.g., self-concept value) and dyadic (e.g., social interaction value and brand interaction value) characteristics on SocME (Gummerus et al., 2012; Jahn and Kunz, 2012). However, these studies have focused on the basic norms and values perceived by social media users and have largely ignored other psychological constructs (e.g., social identification) that may enhance the impact of the content, user, and dyadic characteristics on brand-related SocME.

In light of these concerns, a more thorough analysis of the mediating role of SocME and its impact on actual brand consumption is warranted. Such research is crucial because companies spend a lot of time following what consumers say about their brands on social media and eventually seek to increase sales through social media marketing (Brodie et al., 2013; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2016). Therefore, the purposes of this study are to (a) conceptualize brand-related SocME and (b) investigate its' impact on behavioral brand loyalty in relation to theoretically relevant antecedents and mediators. In this study, we focus specifically on three theoretical perspectives in an attempt to contribute to the literature.

First, drawing on the literature on opinion-seeking (Flynn et al., 1996; Goldsmith and Flynn, 2005), self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000), and extant social media research (Dolan et al., 2015; Gummerus et al., 2012; Hall-Phillips et al., 2016), we identify user (i.e., opinion-seeking) and content (i.e., entertainment value) characteristics as antecedents of brand-related SocME. Second, we draw on social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1985) and the brand community literature (Algesheimer, Dholakia, and Herrmann, 2005; Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001; Schau et al., 2009)in order to explain how users' identification with other members of an online brand community influences the level of engagement the users have with the brand-related use of social media. Third, we build on the customer-based brand equity model (Keller, 1993) and customer engagement theory (Harmeling et al., 2017; Pansari and Kumar, 2017; van Doorn et al., 2010) to propose how online brand community identification and brand-related SocME enhance consumers' repeated purchases of a brand.

2. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

2.1. Defining Brand-Related SocME

Table 1 presents a summary review of the relevant literature on SocME. While there are diverse conceptualizations, two main streams of research are identified: (1) behavioral and (2) cognitive/affective/behavioral perspectives. In the following section, we first explain the difference between behavioral and multidimensional approaches in the social media literature. Next, we further present the conceptual development of customer engagement in the marketing literature. This literature review enables us not only to synthesize available evidence in the literature on both electronic commerce and marketing in general, but also to identify the current and ideal conceptualization of social media engagement.

2.1.1. The Behavioral and Multidimensional Approaches

In the social media literature, the most widely supported conceptualization of SocME is a behavior-based model (Calder et al., 2009; Brooks et al., 2014; Dolan et al., 2015; Gummerus et al., 2012). Several researchers define SocME as a behavioral manifestation toward the brand or firm that includes both transactional (e.g., money spent on an internet gaming site) and brand community-related behaviors (e.g., frequency of brand community visits, content liking, posting status updates, and commenting on

friends' updates) on social media (Alloway and Alloway, 2012; Calder et al., 2009; Gummerus et al., 2012). More comprehensively, Muntinga et al. (2011) adopt a multidimensional view and identify three types of SocME that drive the brand-related use of social media: consuming, contributing, and creating. Building on this, Dolan et al. (2015) provide an extensive overview of the social media literature and define brand-related SocME as a consumer's behavioral manifestations toward a brand (i.e., co-creation, positive contribution, consumption, dormancy, detachment, negative contribution, and co-destruction) that are motives driven, focused on social media, and go beyond transactional purchasing behavior. This approach is consistent with that of van Doorn et al. (2010) who define *customer engagement* in terms of non-transactional behavioral manifestations that are brand-focused and driven by specific motives.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Another contemporary view of SocME is based on a combination of cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses. For example, Mollen and Wilson (2010, p. 953) define *consumers' online brand engagement* as "a cognitive and affective commitment to an active relationship with the brand as personified by the website or other computer-mediated entities designed to communicate brand value.". Also, Lim et al. (2015) focus on the affective and behavioral aspects of SocME and include emotional (i.e., affective feelings), functional (i.e., co-creating, conversing and sharing), and communal (i.e., sense of community) dimensions in their conceptualization. In a more comprehensive manner, Hollebeek et al. (2014) conceptualize brand-related SocME as a hybrid construct of cognitive processing, emotional state, and behavioral activation during consumer-brand interactions in social media.

2.1.2. Engagement as a Consumer's Voluntary Contribution

While diverse conceptualizations of social media engagement exist in electronic commerce research, marketing scholars have explicitly defined *customer engagement* as a customer's contribution to a company or brand's success (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014; Kumar et al., 2010; Pansari and Kumar, 2017; van Doorn et al., 2010). According to this contribution-based approach, customer engagement is a value-additive function through direct (e.g., purchase) and indirect (e.g., word-of-mouth and knowledge sharing) contribution (Kumar et al., 2010; Pansari and Kumar, 2017). In terms of indirect contribution, customer engagement is voluntary in nature, going beyond a transactional, financial exchange, and adding to a firm's marketing capacity (Harmeling et al., 2017; Verhoef et al., 2010).

Applying this conceptual understanding to the realm of the social media context as well as following the behavioral perspective provided by Muntinga et al. (2011) and Dolan et al. (2015) in social media research, we define *brand-related SocME* as an individual's voluntary contribution to the interaction between his or her favorite brand and other fellow brand users by sharing, activating, and co-creating information related to the brand. We excluded elements such as consuming and learning because they are self-interested tasks. Customer engagement is a customer's voluntary contribution which is brand- and

others-oriented, extra-role behavior (Harmeling et al., 2017; Verhoef et al., 2010).

This behavioral approach is more preferable than the mixture of cognition, affect, and behavior because the behavior-based conceptualization allows psychological constructs (e.g., cognitive evaluations and affective feelings) to fluctuate independently and enables brand-related SocME to relate with psychological constructs (Harmeling et al., 2017; Pansari and Kumar, 2017). In regards to the differing perspectives on dimensionality, Keller's (2003) conceptualization of active engagement utilizes a behavioral approach and operationalizes engagement as a unidimensional construct. On the other hand, Vivek (2009) considers consumer engagement a three-dimensional construct comprised of enthusiasm, conscious participation, and social interaction. It is important to consider the objective of the study when determining dimensionality. This study was a scale development endeavor where the end goal was to map the nomological network of engagement.

Further, Schivinski et al. (2016) illustrated the difficulty in attempting to operationalize SocME as a multi-dimensional construct with the initial measurement model encountering significant issues with discriminant validity. In regards to the current study, we aim to understand how a global measure of SocME operates as a mediating variable among a number of antecedent and outcome variables. Therefore, treating engagement as a multi-dimensional construct with numerous indicators underlying each dimension does not fit with the overall purpose of the study. In the following section, research hypotheses are derived to theorize the role of brand-related SocME in the formation of behavioral brand loyalty and bridge the gap between indirect brand consumption through social media and direct brand consumption.

2.2. Hypothesis Development

Building on relevant theoretical perspectives (e.g., social identity theory and customer engagement theory) developed in several disciplines, the proposed framework highlights the mediating roles of brand-related SocME and online brand community identification in the relationship between the user- and content-characteristics of brand pages and behavioral brand loyalty (see Figure 1). Research hypotheses and the effects of several control variables are developed within this framework.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

2.2.1. User Characteristics: Opinion-seeking

"Opinion-seeking happens when individuals search out advice from others when making a purchase decision (Flynn et al., 1996, p. 138)." Theoretically, the results from previous research provide support for the impact of opinion-seeking on online brand community identification and brand-related SocME. One perspective of opinion-seeking is the prevalence of useful information when consumers make purchase decisions (Goldsmith and Flynn, 2005). According to previous research, the more an individual seeks and obtains information from knowledgeable others in an online community, the more socially connected the person will be to the community (Kang and Johnson, 2013). The underlying rationale

for this is that opinion seekers form social ties with each other (Goldsmith and Flynn, 2005) and prefer to search information from interpersonal sources in order to assume that they make the correct purchase decision (Pornpitakpan, 2004). Therefore, for consumers, opinion-seeking is not only a decision-making process to increase their confidence in making a purchase transaction and reduce perceived risk, but also a socialization process to build a sense of community among members in the same group (Goldsmith and Horowitz, 2006). Accordingly, it is suggested here that opinion-seeking leads to an individuals' identification with an online brand community.

On the basis of the literature reviewed, opinion-seeking will also have a positive effect on brand-related SocME. In order to make the best decision, opinion seekers in computer-mediated virtual environments are striving to seek and gain other users' opinions relevant to their favorite brands (Kang and Johnson, 2013). Active opinion seekers become deeply engaged in informational searches because their web searching behavior requires energy and discretionary effort which are important elements of customer engagement (Brodie et al., 2011). Furthermore, opinion-seeking helps consumers not only achieve their consumption goals, but they also enjoy talking about their favorite brands with other consumers (Goldsmith and Flynn, 2005). These findings together imply that once individuals have pleasant feelings about gathering information through social media, this enjoyable, effort-intensive behavior affects the level of brand engagement in social media. In summary, these arguments lead to:

- **Hypothesis 1 (The Opinion-Seeking Hypotheses):** *Opinion-seeking positively influences (a) online brand community identification, and (b) brand-related SocME.*

2.2.2. Content Characteristics: Entertainment Value

Both utilitarian (e.g., usefulness, convenience, information seeking) and hedonic (e.g., entertainment, enjoyment, relaxation) benefits have been found to be the major determinants of the usage of *information and communication technology* (ICT) (Childers et al., 2001; Dholakia et al., 2004). In this study, we focus on the entertainment value of brand-related posts via social media because hedonic benefits available to social media users are also considered *an intrinsic motivation*, which is defined as the desire to engage in an activity for the pleasure and satisfaction derived from the activity itself (Ryan and Deci, 2000). According to their *self-determination theory*, intrinsic motivation plays a powerful role in exploring novelty, seeking out challenges, and extending one's capacities. Furthermore, intrinsic motivation represents his or her natural inclination toward assimilation, mastery, and spontaneous behavior that is the primary source of vitality. This intrinsic motivational tendency can be expected to occur during the brand-related use of social media.

Our definition of brand-related SocME (i.e., sharing, activating, and co-creating) implies that such experiences are largely autonomous and supportive in online brand communities. Self-determination theory suggests that a greater feelings of autonomy leads to the assimilation (e.g., social identification)

and spontaneous behavior (e.g., active engagement) among social media users (Ryan and Deci, 2000). We therefore propose that individuals will be more socially connected to each other and engaged in the brand-related use of social media because of its entertainment value:

- **Hypothesis 2 (The Entertainment Value Hypotheses):** *Entertainment value positively influences (a) online brand community identification, and (b) brand-related SocME.*

2.2.3. Online Brand Community Identification

Insights derived from *social identity theory* (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Tajfel and Turner, 1985) and *brand community* (Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001; Schau et al., 2009) constitute the theoretical foundation for the impact of online brand community identification on brand-related SocME. From one perspective, an individual's identification with other followers of brand posts strengthens his or her engagement in the online brand community (Algesheimer et al., 2005). Previous studies have provided a theoretical basis for the impact of online brand community identification on a number of community-related behaviors such as assisting other fellow brand users, participating in brand-related discussions, integrating and retaining other users, and providing feedback to the brand for improving consumer experiences (Dholakia et al., 2004; Schau et al., 2009).

To make the mechanism driving brand-related SocME more concrete, social identity theory offers explanations for this relationship. Identification with a social group helps individuals increase their self-esteem, raise their aspirations, and invest themselves in altruism and unselfish behaviors (Mael and Ashforth, 2001). Furthermore, the literature on brand community suggests that as a consumer's identification with a brand community increases, greater involvement with the brand occurs and reinforces his or her brand commitment (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006). Derived from these arguments, it is proposed here that online brand community identification not only affects its members' engagement in helping and co-creating behaviors in social network settings, but also influences their actual brand consumption behavior. Thus, this logic gives rise to the following hypothesis:

- **Hypothesis 3 (The Brand Community Identification-Brand SocME Hypothesis):** *Online brand community identification positively influences brand-related SocME.*
- **Hypothesis 4 (The Brand Community Identification-Brand Loyalty Hypothesis):** *Online brand community identification positively influences behavioral brand loyalty.*

2.2.4. Behavioral Brand Loyalty

Behavioral loyalty is defined as a consumer's behavioral response to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product or service consistently over time (Jacoby and Kyner, 1973; Oliver, 1999). In the social media marketing literature, the use of *conative loyalty* (also called *loyalty intentions*) as a proxy measure of behavioral consequences has been widespread (Calder et al., 2009; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Jahn and Kunz, 2012; Lim et al., 2015). Yet, this approach is still hypothetical based on consumers' intentions to purchase a particular brand and does not explain their actual purchase frequency over time. While the relationship

between brand-related SocME and behavioral loyalty is amorphous in the literature, the current study attempts to extend previous research by explaining these links.

The emerging *theory of customer engagement* in Marketing (Harmeling et al., 2017; Pansari and Kumar, 2017; van Doorn et al., 2010) posits that customer engagement includes both the direct (transactional) contribution of customer purchases and the indirect (non-transactional) contribution of customer referrals, customer influence, and customer knowledge. Consumers who engage in non-transactional behaviors have greater repeat purchases in transactional exchanges (Brodie et al., 2013) because "engagement marketing may lead to more purchases or enhance customer-brand relationships by increasing customers' trust, commitment, and satisfaction" (Harmeling et al., 2017, p. 319). Similar effects will be observed among social media users because consumers' engagement behavior characterized by sharing, advocating, socializing, and co-developing in online brand communities is a significant non-transactional pathway to brand loyalty (Brodie et al., 2013). Taken together, previous research on customer engagement and loyalty suggests the following:

- **Hypothesis 5 (The Brand-Related SocME Hypothesis):** *Brand-related SocME has a positive effect on behavioral loyalty toward the brand.*

2.2.5. Mediating Effects

The proposed framework suggests that the impact of user- and content-characteristics on consumer behavioral loyalty is mediated by two intervening variables: online brand community identification and brand-related SocME. Our first prediction concerns the mediating role of online brand community identification. The *customer-based brand equity model* (Keller, 1993) and its extended model called the *customer-based brand equity pyramid* (Keller, 2003), offer an interesting suggestion. When consumers' desired experiences (e.g., entertainment and social interactions between social media users) become linked to a brand, they identify not only with the brand, but also with other fellow brand users. In addition, *organizational identification theory* (Ashforth and Mael, 1989) and the *consumer-company identification framework* (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003) argue that users with high levels of online brand community identification are more likely to return a favor to the online community and engage in various supportive behaviors (e.g., knowledge sharing, positive word-of-mouth, and resilience to negative information) for both their favorite brand and other fellow brand users than individuals with low identification. Thus, it is reasonable to believe that individuals' identification toward an online brand community mediates the effects of user- and content-characteristics on brand-related SocME and behavioral brand loyalty.

Second, our framework sheds light on the important indirect effects of user characteristics and content characteristics on behavioral loyalty through brand-related SocME. Previous research suggests that brand knowledge increases a person's confidence to express his or her opinions in brand communities, which leads to greater levels of brand community engagement and loyalty (Algesheimer et al., 2005).

Knowledgeable persons who have rich brand experiences are more likely to engage in various helping behaviors to support the brand and the other brand community members than novice people (Schau et al., 2009). This is because knowledgeable members' information and skills are useful when engaging in voluntary efforts to help other members (Brodie et al., 2013; Füller et al., 2008) and expressing a high degree of loyalty to the brand (Keller, 2003).The reasoning described above suggests indirect effects:

- **Hypothesis 6 (The Online Brand Community Identification Mediation Hypothesis):** *The effects of (a) opinion-seeking and (b) entertainment value on behavioral brand loyalty are mediated by online brand community identification.*

- **Hypothesis 7 (The Brand-Related SocME Mediation Hypotheses):** *The effects of (a) opinion-seeking and (b) entertainment value on behavioral brand loyalty are mediated by brand-related SocME.*

- **Hypothesis 8 (The Online Brand Community Identification and Brand-Related SocME Sequential Mediation Hypotheses):** *The effects of (a) opinion-seeking and (b) entertainment value on behavioral brand loyalty are sequentially mediated by online brand community identification and brand-related SocME.*

2.2.6. Control Variables

For hypothesis testing, we chose the setting of professional sports. In addition to the hypothesized direct and indirect effects, other variables may influence behavioral brand loyalty. For example, the impact of team identification on behavioral outcomes has been reported in the sport management literature. Sutton et al. (1997) conceptualize that fans who strongly identify with a sport team are more likely to be committed to the team, pay higher prices, and become season-ticket holders. Furthermore, due to individuals' psychological commitment to habitual behavior and their desire to minimize monetary and non-monetary costs, consumers prefer to watch their favorite team's games on television at home regularly. Therefore, we control for team identification, television sports viewing, and the length of time as a fan.

3. METHOD

3.1. Research Setting

In order to achieve our objectives, the setting we chose was Japanese professional sport. In Japan, there are two major professional sports leagues: the Japan Professional Football League (J. League) and Nippon Professional Baseball (NPB). We attempted to examine the psychology and behavior of users of social media sites that were formally managed by teams of both leagues. We selected this context because (1) professional sports teams are excellent illustrations of strong brands with a high reputation, (2) sport fans have a rich cultural world and share their own stories and experiences on social media, and (3) all study constructs are readily identified and assessed in this setting.

3.2. Data Collection and Sample

This study was conducted at the end of the professional football and baseball seasons in Japan in

November 2013. We collected data from panel registrants of an online research panel service provided by Macromill, Inc. (previously named Yahoo Japan Value Insight Corporation), one of the most popular internet service firms in Japan. The research panel included a wide range of subpanels based on their favorite sports, leagues, and teams. To identify our target participants, we asked several screening questions. First, the internet research company randomly sent an invitation email entitled "Sports Fan Survey" to panel registrants. The survey continued until 300 subjects who were interested in the following six teams completed the questionnaire: Urawa Red Diamonds (football), Sanfrecce Hiroshima (football), Shimizu S-PULSE (football), Hanshin Tigers (baseball), Fukuoka Softbank Hawks (baseball), and Tohoku Rakuten Golden Eagles (baseball). These teams were included in this study because they had official accounts of both Facebook and Twitter and their official Facebook pages were the top three sites in terms of the number of "likes" in each league. Altogether, 1,800 questionnaires were returned in several days. Second, we eliminated subjects who had never visited their favorite teams' official social media sites. Through this procedure, we gathered data on 309 subjects. Table 2 shows the geographic characteristics and sample size of each team.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Of the total sample, 58.9 % of the respondents were male. Age was measured in years and transformed into a categorical variable. Approximately, one-fourth of the subjects were in the 30-39 (25.9%) and 40-49 (26.9%) age ranges, 20.1% were 50 and 59 years old, 13.6% were 60 years old and above, 12.0% were 20 and 29 years old, and 1.6% were 18 and 19 years old. With respect to the most frequently used social media site to follow their favorite team, 38.5% were Facebook, 26.9% were Twitter, and 34.6% were others.

3.3. Measures

We adapted items from previous research to measure opinion-seeking (Schreier et al., 2007), entertainment value (Chandon et al., 2000), and online brand community identification (Keller, 2003). The wording was modified to reflect the current context. Behavioral brand loyalty can be measured by aggregating the purchase frequency of consumers over a particular period which is consistent with Bolton et al. (2000) and Seiders et al. (2005). In our case, we measured behavioral brand loyalty by asking the number of games attended by each respondent in the last eight months (Fisher and Wakefield, 1998; Yoshida et al., 2015).

To measure brand-related SocME, we refined conceptually-relevant items through content analyses with three researchers. While recent studies have validated scales to measure SocME as a multidimensional construct (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Schivinski et al., 2016), a global measure based on the behavioral conceptualization (e.g., contribution and co-creation) of SocME has yet to be developed (Dolan et al., 2015; Muntinga et al., 2011; Kumar et al., 2010; van Doorn et al., 2010). In this study, brand-related

SocME should be measured at an aggregate level because we aimed at examining it as a complex mediating variable with multiple antecedent and outcome variables. Therefore, an initial pool of seven items was generated (see Table 3) on the basis of the construct definition. In order to assess content validity, three researchers from three different universities were asked to rate each statement as being "Not Representative (0)," "Somewhat Representative (1)," and "Clearly Representative (2)" of the construct definition (Tian, Bearden, and Hunter, 2001). Items evaluated as clearly representative by two reviewers, and as no worse than somewhat representative by a third reviewer were retained. This process kept all seven items for further analysis.

Finally, we included three control variables: team identification, television sports viewing, and the length of time as a fan. Team identification was measured with a three-item scale used by Trail and James (2001). Television sports viewing was measured by the number of games watched on television for each consumer's favorite sports team in the current season (Funk et al., 2002). A person's length of time as a fan was measured by the number of years being a fan of a favorite sports team (Yoshida et al., 2015).

3.4. Back Translation

To assess the degree of meaning equivalence between the original English instrument and the translated Japanese instrument, the survey items were first translated into Japanese by one of the authors and then back-translated into English by another native of Japan who is also fluent in English. To ensure the accuracy of the translation, a U.S.-born American citizen assessed differences in meaning between the original and back-translated instruments. The comparison of the two forms indicated both instruments reflected the domain.

3.5. Remedies for Common Method Variance (CMV) Biases

Our survey data containing both independent and dependent variables were collected from the same source at a single point in time. Therefore, concerns about common method variance (CMV) biases were alleviated through procedural remedies (Podsakoff et al., 2003). We addressed procedural remedies (1) by measuring the predictor (opinion-seeking and entertainment value) and mediator (online brand community identification and brand-related SocME) variables with a different measurement scale (7-point scale) from that used for the outcome variable (the actual number of games attended in the current season ranging from 0 to 40) and (2) by administrating the items for the outcome and control variables before the items for the predictor and mediator variables in order to control possible item-order effects (Schimmack and Oishi, 2005).

4. RESULTS

4.1. Assessment of the Measurement Model

The psychometric properties of the items were assessed through a *confirmatory factor analysis*

(CFA) using LISREL 8.8. The *comparative fit index* (CFI) and *non-normed fit index* (NNFI) were .97 and .97, respectively. The value of the *root mean square error of approximation* (RMSEA) was .099 and the *standardized root mean square residual* (SRMR) value was .050. Although the RMSEA value slightly exceeded the acceptable threshold (.05-.08), it indicated a mediocre fit (.08-.10; Browne and Cudeck, 1993). The overall assessment of the fit indices indicated the measurement model was an acceptable fit to the data (Hu and Bentler, 1999).

Scale statistics, including *factor loadings* (λ), *composite reliability* (CR), and *average variance extracted* (AVE) are presented in Table 3. All items loaded on their respective factors and factor loadings ranged from .72 to .96. The CR values for all constructs were greater than the recommended cutoff point of .60 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). A further assessment of convergent and discriminant validity was conducted by an examination of AVE values. The AVE values for the proposed constructs ranged from .65 to 91, providing evidence of *convergent validity* (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). *Discriminant validity* was assessed by comparing the AVE estimate for each construct with the squared correlations between the respective constructs (see Table 4). In a total of ten correlations between the five latent constructs (opinion-seeking, entertainment value, online brand community identification, brand-related SocME, and team identification), the AVE values were considerably greater than any squared correlations between all pairs of the constructs. Therefore, discriminant validity was indicated (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

INSERT TABLES 3 AND 4 ABOUT HERE

4.2. Assessment of the Structural Model

4.2.1. Model Comparison

Using LISREL 8.8, *structural equation modeling* (SEM) was next employed as a test of the predictive power of the antecedents hypothesized to influence behavioral brand loyalty. While our hypothesized model tests the effects of online brand community identification and brand-related SocME on behavioral brand loyalty, it does not allow us to assess possible direct effects of opinion-seeking and entertainment value on behavioral brand loyalty. In order to fully test the direct impact of the exogenous variables, we compared the hypothesized model (Model 1) with a competing nested SEM model (Model 2) which included the direct paths from opinion-seeking and entertainment value to behavioral brand loyalty. We conducted a chi-square difference test in order to compare the fits of the two different structural models (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988) and found there was no significant improvement between Model 1 and Model 2 ($\Delta\chi^2[\Delta df]$ = .71 (2), n.s.). Furthermore, none of the added paths from opinion-seeking and entertainment value to behavioral brand loyalty were significant (see Table 5). These findings indicate the addition of the direct effects of opinion-seeking and entertainment value on behavioral brand loyalty is not necessary. Collectively, Model 1 is the final SEM model for assessing the relationships between the proposed constructs.

4.2.2. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing was conducted using SEM (see Table 5). The fit indices for the hypothesized model were χ^2/df = 3.36, CFI = .97, NNFI = .97, RMSEA = .088, and SRMR = .047, indicating that the fit measures were acceptable. With respect to hypothesis testing, opinion-seeking had positive effects on online brand community identification (γ = .20, p < .01) and brand-related SocME (γ = .26, p < .01). Also, the effect of entertainment value on online brand community identification (γ = .71, p < .01) was positive and significant. Therefore, evidence provided support for the Opinion-Seeking Hypotheses (H1a, H1b), and the Entertainment Value Hypothesis for *online brand community identification* (H2a) were supported, whereas the Entertainment Value Hypothesis for brand-related SocME (H2b) was rejected. Furthermore, the path identified between online brand community identification and brand-related SocME was positive and significant (γ = .55, p < .01), in support of the Brand Community Identification-Brand SocME Hypothesis (H3).

Also, we examined the antecedents of behavioral brand loyalty. While the impact of online brand community identification on behavioral brand loyalty did not reach the statistical significance level, brand-related SocME had positive impact on behavioral brand loyalty (β = .23, p < .01). We thus found support for the Brand-Related SocME Hypothesis (H5), while the Brand Community Identification-Brand Loyalty Hypothesis (H4) was not supported.

INSERT TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE

In order to check the robustness of the hypothesized effects, we examined whether the inclusion of the three control variables influenced these findings (see Table 5). The results indicated that the impact of team identification on behavioral brand loyalty was the only positive and significant path (β = .33, p < .01). Therefore, the impact of brand-related SocME on behavioral brand loyalty endured the inclusion of these control variables. More importantly, it should be noted that behavioral brand loyalty is a function not only of team identification, but also of brand-related SocME. The ability of the exogenous variables to explain variations in the endogenous variables was assessed by R^2 values. The R^2 values for online brand community identification, brand-related SocME, and behavioral brand loyalty were .66, .54, and .14, respectively.

In order to test the indirect effects of opinion-seeking and entertainment value on behavioral brand loyalty through the two mediator variables, we used the bootstrapping method recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2008). The mediation analysis was performed using Mplus Version 7.31 (see Table 6). A bootstrap estimation using 5,000 resamples revealed that the 95% confidence interval (CI) was wholly greater than zero for the indirect effect of opinion-seeking (95% CI: .09-.61) on behavioral brand loyalty through brand-related SocME. The results also indicated that the effects of opinion-seeking (95% CI: .04-.31) and entertainment value (95% CI: .17-.97) on behavioral brand loyalty were sequentially me-

diated by online brand community identification and brand-related SocME. Given these findings, the Online Brand Community Identification Mediation Hypothesis (H6a), the Brand-Related SocME Mediation Hypotheses for opinion-seeking (H7a) and for entertainment value (H7b) – both on behavioral brand *loyalty* – were supported. Although the 95% CIs for the indirect effects of opinion-seeking and entertainment value on behavioral brand loyalty through online brand community identification excluded zero H6a, H6b), these effects were not statistically significant because of their large standard errors.

INSERT TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE

5. DISCUSSION

While consumers engage in both company-initiated and consumer-initiated social media sites, the focus of the current study was on consumers who participated in company-initiated social media sites. In order to examine the psychology and behavior of these consumers, we tested the proposed model by collecting data from users of the official social media sites of six professional sports teams in Japan. Since little effort has been made to (1) synthesize the conceptual development of customer engagement in marketing (e.g., Kumar et al., 2010; Pansari and Kumar, 2017 ; van Doorn et al., 2010) and electronic commerce research (e.g., Dolan et al., 2015; Gummerus et al., 2012; Muntinga et al., 2011) and (2) bridge the gap between consumer activities in social media and actual brand loyalty, this study makes a significant contribution to the literature and practice in several ways.

First, we refined the conceptualization and measurement of consumer engagement in the brand-related use of social media. As suggested by Brodie et al. (2011), the expression of specific cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses varies considerably across engagement objects and contexts. While past studies have built a large knowledge base regarding brand-related SocME (see Table 1), this study extends the social media literature by synthesizing the behavioral conceptualization of customer engagement in marketing (Kumar et al., 2010; Pansari and Kumar, 2017; van Doorn et al., 2010) and the defining attributes of social media engagement behavior (Dolan et al., 2015; Muntinga et al., 2011). In the literature over the last decade, the concept of brand-related SocME has been considered both self-directed (consuming) and others-oriented (contributing and co-creating) behaviors (Dolan et al., 2015; Muntinga et al., 2011). However, given that customer engagement is a customer's voluntary contribution to tasks that benefit his or her favorite brand or other fellow brand users (Harmeling et al., 2017; van Doorn et al., 2010; Verhoef et al., 2010), we excluded the self-directed dimension (consuming) from the idea of brand-related SocME and included sharing, activating, and co-creating behaviors in its defining elements. In this study, scale items to measure brand-related items were refined with consumers who used the official social media sites of six professional sports teams. The factor analysis was supportive of the convergent and discriminant validity of the proposed scale (see Table 3 and 4).

Our second major finding is that opinion-seeking and online brand community identification are the dominant factors in enhancing brand-related SocME (see Table 5). Opinion-seeking was found to be a significant predictor of brand-related SocME. However, it is worth noting that online brand community identification had a stronger effect on brand-related SocME than opinion-seeking. Moreover, the effect of entertainment value on brand-related SocME was not significant. These results provide evidence that online brand community identification plays an important role in increasing consumers' engagement in the brand-related use of social media. This is consistent with previous studies that found building, main-taining, and broadening relationships with others in online brand communities were the major motivations for social media engagement (Jahn and Kunz, 2012; Mollen and Wilson, 2010). Therefore, it seems rea-sonable to believe that brand-related SocME is fostered if users of company-initiated social media sites are socially connected with each other and have a sense of community.

Third, the growing interest in social media marketing favors an examination of its marketing ef-fectiveness. In this study, the hypothesized model accounted for 14% of the variance in behavioral brand loyalty. In terms of the impact of each predictor variable, we found that the effect of brand-related SocME on behavioral brand loyalty was positive and significant (β = .21, p < .01) and this impact was as large as that of team identification (β = .31, p < .01). These results indicate that brand-related SocME is closer to behavioral brand loyalty than online brand community identification. This paper provides the initial evi-dence for Brodie et al.'s (2013) conceptual framework that links consumer engagement in virtual brand communities with actual brand purchase behavior. To enhance behavioral brand loyalty, fostering identi-fication with other users of online brand communities is not enough. Individuals' engagement in the brand-related use of social media is an important prerequisite of actual purchase behavior. In line with this thinking, this study adds to the existing literature by testing the simultaneous effects of brand-related SocME and consumer-company identification on behavioral brand loyalty, while previous research inves-tigated these effects separately.

Fourth, this research highlights the important mediating roles of online brand community identi-fication and brand-related SocME in the development of behavioral brand loyalty. As shown in Table 6, the mediation analysis demonstrated that the coefficient for the indirect effect of opinion-seeking on be-havioral brand loyalty through brand-related SocME was positive and significant (OS → brand-related SocME → BBL). Also, the indirect effects of opinion-seeking and entertainment value on behavioral brand loyalty through online brand community identification and brand-related SocME were statistically significant (OS and EV → OBCI → brand-related SocME → BBL). Among these effects, the strongest indirect effect was found in the impact of entertainment value on behavioral brand loyalty through online brand community identification and brand-related SocME (EV → OBCI → brand-related SocME → BBL).

These findings suggest that the entertainment value of company-initiated social media sites is sequentially related to behavioral brand loyalty, first through online brand community identification, and then through brand-related SocME. These sequential relationships align with previous studies that suggest (1) entertaining content enhances individuals' identification with the virtual community (Dholakia et al., 2004) and (2) individuals who are high in online brand community identification are more likely to engage in various supportive behaviors and express greater brand loyalty (Bagozzi et al., 2006; Dholakia et al., 2004). From a practical standpoint, a company needs to create the psychological identification between the brand and the consumer by satisfying intrinsic needs for enjoyment and then can expect the consumer to engage in the brand-related use of social media before implementing a commercial transaction for repeated purchases of the brand.

Although we did not anticipate that the direct impact of entertainment value on brand-related SocME would be insignificant, this finding is also consistent with previous research. According to the nature of customer value (Holbrook, 1994), the entertainment value of reading, viewing, and watching social media content is similar to the idea of aesthetics which arises from a reactive appreciation and can be considered as self-oriented, passive pleasure. In contrast, consumers' engagement behavior is more active, effort-intensive, and others-oriented. Thus, one possible explanation is that the passive consumption of entertaining content in social media does not directly influence active behavioral responses such as brand-related SocME.

Also, another unexpected result was the insignificant impact of online brand community identification on behavioral brand loyalty. Previous research has suggested that social ties in virtual brand communities are a significant antecedent of Internet-specific brand loyalty such as we-intentions in the virtual community (Dholakia et al., 2004), social TV loyalty intention (Lim et al., 2015), and social media usage intention (Hollebeek et al., 2014). However, our findings suggest the predictive power of online brand community identification on actual brand purchase behavior is negligible because the significant effect found in previous research might be largely attributable to the shared method variance between social ties and behavioral intentions in the social media context. This limitation reinforces the need to bridge the gap between consumers' social media activities and their actual purchases of brands.

Moreover, the findings provide a practical explanation of why online brand community identification and brand-related SocME are crucial in the development of behavioral brand loyalty. In particular, the study results suggest that brand-related SocME is a consumer's active contribution to company success and is not enhanced by the passive consumption of entertaining content, but more strongly related to the social ties created by online brand community members. Therefore, companies need to create social interaction opportunities that involve highly elaborated thinking (e.g., intellectual brand knowledge) and passionate behaviors (e.g., self-defining expressions).

For example, Nike stimulates its online brand communities by advocating for consumers to share their brand experiences with a content specific hashtag such as their #betterforit campaign targeted toward female empowerment: "Nike turns can't into can" AdWeek, 2015). The effectiveness of this approach lies in the fact that while Nike is advocating for the use of these hashtag campaigns, it is the online user that customizes the message, actively connects with other online community members and aids in the spreading activation of the content across social platforms. This is crucial since social media users welcome marketers only if they are perceived as non-commercially motivated entities (Brodie et al., 2013). Thus, marketers' non-commercial brand posting, writing, and sharing will be effective for fostering brand-related SocME and eventually for increasing direct brand consumption.

6. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

This study has several limitations that can be overcome in future research. First, we did not measure behavioral brand loyalty with longitudinal behavioral data. Although we asked the respondents to report the aggregated number of games attended in the current season (past eight months), an important question arises as to whether brand-related SocME can predict future behavioral brand loyalty over a longer period of time. Future research can be advanced by longitudinal studies that relate consumers' subjective evaluations of social media activities to longitudinal behavioral data in order to demonstrate a more precise effect of brand-related SocME on behavioral brand loyalty over time.

Second, the current study only explained 14% of the variance in behavioral brand loyalty. While we examined the impact of three control variables (team identification, television sports viewing, and the length of time as a fan) on behavioral brand loyalty, we did not include other variables that might influence behavioral brand loyalty. Psychological constructs such as customer commitment (Bansal et al., 2004) and customer-based brand equity (Keller, 1993) may have impacted the study results. Future research should test the simultaneous effects of brand-related SocME and additional psychological variables on behavioral brand loyalty.

Third, another limitation might be the omission of important variables. For example, we only examined behavioral brand loyalty and did not include additional behavioral consequences. Consumer behavior contains a variety of transactional activities (e.g., purchase volume, cross-buying, and willingness to pay a price premium). Future research should address the relationship between brand-related SocME and various behavioral consequences.

This study represents an initial effort to provide practitioners with information pertaining to the relationship between social media activities and behavioral brand loyalty toward frequently purchased consumer services. By investigating the proposed framework across six teams in the two major professional sports leagues in Japan and examining the impact of brand-related SocME on behavioral brand

loyalty, the current study extended previous research that has focused primarily on the SocME-intention relationship. The developed scale to measure brand-related SocME provides a basis for advancing our knowledge of the process in which social media users enhance and maintain their actual purchase loyalty toward brands.

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Figure 1. Hypothesized Model
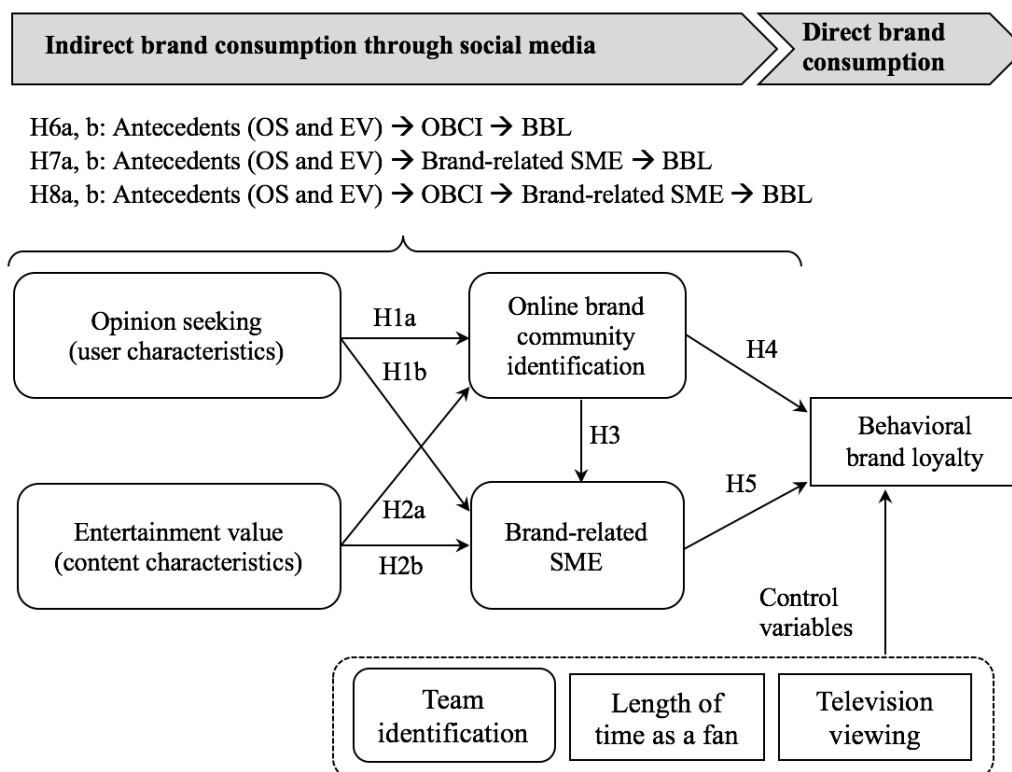
Note. OS = opinion seeking; EV = entertainment value; OBCI = online community identification; Brand-related SocME = brand-related social media engagement; BBL = behavioral brand loyalty

Table 1. Literature on Consumer Engagement in Brand-Related Social Media and Online Content

Authors	Construct	Definition
Calder et al. (2009)	Consumer engagement with a website	A collection of "the different experiences that consumers have in connecting with the site" (p. 322).
Mollen and Wilson (2010)	Online engagement	"A cognitive and affective commitment to an active relationship with the brand as personified by the website or other computer-mediated entities designed to communicate brand value" (p. 923).
Muntinga et al. (2011)	Motivations to engage in consumer online brand-related activities (COBRAs)	The three major incentives (i.e., consuming, contributing, and creating) that drive consumers' engagement in brand-related use of social media. These incentives are considered as gradual involvement with brand-related content on social media.
Alloway and Alloway (2012)	SNS engagement	The degree to which consumers participate in various activities (e.g., posting status updates, commenting on friends' updates, etc.) on social networking sites.
Gummerus et al. (2012)	Customer engagement in Facebook brand community	A behavioral manifestation toward the brand or firm that | includes both transactional (e.g., money spent on the Internet gaming site) and brand community-related behaviors (e.g., frequency of brand community visits, content liking, commenting, and news reading, frequency of playing).
Hollebeek et al. (2014)	Consumer brand engagement in social media	"A consumer's positively valenced cognitive, emotional and behavioral brand-related activity during, or related to, specific consumer/brand interactions" (p. 154).
Brooks et al. (2014)	Facebook engagement	"The extent to which Facebook users engage in social grooming and attempt to respond to requests from their Facebook network, which may in turn signal that ego is paying attention to alter" (p. 6).
Baldus et al. (2015)	Online brand community engagement	"The compelling, intrinsic motivations to continue interacting with an online brand community" (p. 979).
Lim et al. (2015)	Functional, emotional, and communal social media engagement	The functional dimension: "a social media user's interactions with other users in the process of co-creating, conversing and sharing the content" (p. 159). The emotional dimension: the emotional state that a social media user "has with the commentators as well as with other viewers on the social media streamline" (p. 159). The communal dimension: a social media user's involvement with fostering a sense of community within the virtual community.
Dolan et al. (2015)	Consumer engagement	A consumer's behavioral manifestations (i.e., co-creation, positive contribution, consumption, dormancy, detachment, negative contribution, and co-destruction) "that have a social media focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers" (p. 5).
Hall-Phillips et al. (2016)	Social media engagement	"The degree to which a person participates in and relates to an organization, the organization's offerings, and active ties through social media sites, which goes beyond service encounters and transactions." (p. 485).

Table 2. Team Characteristics and Sample Size

Team Name	Type of Sports	Location of Home Stadium		Sample Size	
		Prefecture	Region	N	%
Urawa Red Diamonds	Football	Saitama	East Japan	58	18.8
Sanfrecce Hiroshima	Football	Hiroshima	West Japan	57	18.4
Shimizu S-PULSE	Football	Shizuoka	East Japan	47	15.2
Hanshin Tigers	Baseball	Hyogo	West Japan	54	17.5
Fukuoka Softbank Hawks	Baseball	Fukuoka	West Japan	44	14.2
Tohoku Rakuten Golden Eagles	Baseball	Miyagi	East Japan	49	15.9
Total				309	100

Table 3. CFA Results (*N* = 309)

Construct	Item	λ	CR	AVE
Opinion-seeking (Flynn et al., 1996; Schreier et al., 2007)			.85	.65
1.	When I follow (team name), I ask other people for advice.	.83		
2.	I ask other people how to follow (team name).	.86		
3.	I feel more comfortable following (team name) when I have gotten other people's opinions on it.	.72		
Entertainment value (Chandon et al., 2000)			.97	.91
1.	(team name) official social media sites is enjoyable.	.95		
2.	(team name) official social media sites is fun.	.96		
3.	(team name) official social media sites is entertaining.	.95		
Online brand community identification (Keller, 2003)			.95	.87
1.	I feel a deep connection with others who follow (team name)'s official social media sites.	.95		
2.	I really identify with people who follow (team name) official social media sites.	.96		
3.	I feel like I belong to a club with other fans of (team name)'s official social media sites.	.89		
Brand-related SocME (new items generated in this study)			.96	.79
1.	In order to support the information (team name) provides on their official social media sites, I often click share buttons (e.g., like and retweet).	.87		
2.	In order to support other people's comments and photos on (team name)'s official social media sites, I often share their content (e.g., like and retweet).	.90		
3.	On (team name)'s official social media sites, I often respond to the comments made by other members.	.93		
4.	On (team name)'s official social media sites, I often interact with other members to share information related to the team.	.92		
5.	I often post my opinions about (team name) on my social media sites.	.81		
6.	I often post photos related to (team name) on my social media sites.	.85		
7.	On (team name)'s official social media sites, I often post my comments about the information provided by the team.	.92		
Team identification (Trail and James, 2001)			.92	.80
1.	I consider myself to be a "real" fan of (team name).	.84		
2.	I would experience a loss if I had to stop being a fan of (team name).	.89		
3.	Being a fan of (team name) is very important to me.	.95		

Note. χ^2(df) = 566.14 (142); χ^2/df = 3.99; CFI = .97; NNFI .97; RMSEA = .099; SRMR = .050

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics, ϕ Matrix, and AVE

Construct	ϕ Matrix ($N = 309$)							
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	6	7	8
1. Opinion-seeking	***.65***	.14	.22	.29	NA	.12	NA	NA
2. Entertainment value	.37**	***.91***	.62	.32	NA	.27	NA	NA
3. Online brand community identification	.47**	.79**	***.87***	.49	NA	.21	NA	NA
4. Brand-related SocME	.54**	.57**	.70**	***.79***	NA	.08	NA	NA
5. Behavioral brand loyalty	.18**	.17**	.16**	.22**	NA	NA	NA	NA
6. Team identification (control)	.35**	.52**	.46**	.29**	.33**	***.81***	NA	NA
7. Length of time as a fan (control)	-.15*	.04	.00	-.05	.08	.22**	NA	NA
8. Television sports viewing (control)	-.01	.06	.06	.05	.02	.13*	.22**	NA
Mean	3.65	4.54	4.31	3.48	3.72	4.85	13.43	5.45
SD	1.40	1.26	1.38	1.54	6.22	1.52	10.39	6.23

Note. Correlations are taken from ϕ matrix using LISREL 8.8 and are reported in the lower triangle of the ϕ matrix. Squared correlations are depicted in the upper triangle of the ϕ matrix. The average variance extracted values for the five latent constructs are shown in boldface italic on the diagonal. Mean scores and standard deviations for proposed constructs and control variables were calculated via IBM SPSS Statistics 20.0. NA = not applicable. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Table 5. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path	Model 1 γ/β (*t*-value)	Model 2 γ/β (*t*-value)
H1a	Opinion-seeking → Online brand community identification	.20** (4.65)	.20** (4.66)
H1b	Opinion-seeking → Brand-related SocME	.26** (4.96)	.26** (4.96)
H2a	Entertainment value → Online brand community identification	.71** (14.18)	.71** (14.18)
H2b	Entertainment value → Brand-related SocME	.03 (.52)	.04 (.53)
H3	Online brand community identification → Brand-related SocME	.55** (6.89)	.55** (6.89)
H4	Online brand community identification → Behavioral loyalty	-.15 (-1.86)	-.15 (-1.33)
H5	Brand-related SocME → Behavioral loyalty	.23** (2.91)	.22** (2.60)
Control	Team identification → Behavioral loyalty	.33** (4.97)	.32** (4.51)
Control	Length of time as a fan → Behavioral loyalty	.03 (.48)	.03 (.57)
Control	Frequency of watching games on TV → Behavioral loyalty	-.03 (-.60)	-.03 (-.59)
	Opinion-seeking → Behavioral loyalty		.03 (.41)
	Entertainment value → Behavioral loyalty		-.01 (-.13)
R^2	Online brand community identification	.66	.66
	Brand-related SocME	.54	.55
	Behavioral brand loyalty	.14	.14
Fit indices	χ^2	645.49	644.78
	df	192	190
	χ^2/df	3.36	3.39
	CFI	.97	.97
	NNFI	.96	.96
	RMSEA	.088	.088
	SRMR	.047	.047
Model comparison between Model 1 and Model 2: $\Delta\chi^2$(Δdf)		.71(2) n.s.	

Note. The critical values for $\Delta\chi^2$ with Δdf = 2 are 5.99 at the .05 level and 9.21 at the .01 level; * p < .05; ** p < .01; n.s. = not significant

Table 6. Indirect Effects of Antecedents on Behavioral Loyalty Using Bootstrapping Procedures

Hyp	Indirect Effect	Bootstrap estimate				95% Confidence Interval	
		Standardized Path Coefficient	Unstandardized Path Coefficient	S.E.	*t*-val	Lower	Upper
H6a	OS → OBCI → BBL	-.03	-.15	.09	-1.72	-.39	-.01
H6b	EV → OBCI → BBL	-.11	-.55	.30	-1.91	-1.22	-.03
H7a	OS → Brand-related SocME → BBL	.06*	.29*	.13	2.34	.09	.61
H7b	EV → Brand-related SocME → BBL	.01	.04	.08	.52	-.10	.25
H8a	OS → OBCI → Brand-related SocME → BBL	.03*	.12*	.06	2.08	.04	.31
H8b	EV → OBCI → Brand-related SocME → BBL	.09*	.46*	.19	2.52	.17	.97

Note. OS = opinion-seeking; EV = entertainment value; OBCI = online brand community identification; Brand-related SocME = brand-related social media engagement; BBL = behavioral brand loyalty; * *p* < .05.

Highlights

This study examined the relationship between consumer responses in social media networks and behavioral brand loyalty in the context of Japanese professional sports.

Data were collected from 309 panel registrants of an online research panel service.

Users' characteristics as an opinion seeker and the entertainment value of social media pages were found to positively influence online brand community identification which in turn had a positive effect on brand-related social media engagement.

The effect of brand-related social media engagement on behavioral loyalty was positive and significant.