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Community-Driven Engagement Framework: Explaining the Path from Participation to Brand Advocacy

Ilman Ansori[1]*

***Corresponding Mail:**
ilmanansori@mayasaribakti.ac.id

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Abstract

The growing prominence of digital communities has transformed contemporary marketing by shifting value creation from firm-centered exchanges toward collaborative engagement ecosystems involving consumers, brands, and platforms. Despite extensive research on brand communities, customer engagement, value co-creation, and advocacy behavior, existing scholarship remains fragmented in explaining how ordinary community members evolve into committed brand advocates. This article addresses this theoretical gap by developing the Community-Driven Engagement Framework (CDEF), an integrative conceptual model that synthesizes Brand Community Theory, Social Identity Theory, Service-Dominant Logic, and Psychological Ownership Theory. Through a systematic conceptual synthesis of the relevant literature, the framework proposes a sequential transformation process in which shared values foster community interaction, interaction stimulates participation intensity, participation cultivates consumer engagement, engagement generates psychological ownership, and ownership ultimately drives brand advocacy. The framework advances current knowledge by positioning psychological ownership as a critical intervening mechanism linking engagement and advocacy, thereby offering a more comprehensive explanation of community-driven consumer transformation. The study contributes to marketing theory by integrating previously fragmented perspectives into a unified process-oriented framework and provides a foundation for future empirical research examining engagement ecosystems, digital communities, and advocacy formation in increasingly interconnected marketplace environments

Keywords

community-driven engagement; brand advocacy; customer engagement; psychological ownership; service ecosystems; brand communities

[1] Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Mayasari Bakti, Tasikmalaya, Indonesia

1. Introduction

Marketing scholarship has undergone a substantial transformation from a transactional paradigm toward a relational and ecosystem-oriented perspective. Early marketing theories primarily emphasized exchange efficiency, customer acquisition, and sales performance as key indicators of organizational success. Such approaches assumed that firms acted as primary value creators while consumers functioned largely as passive recipients of products and marketing communications. However, increasing market complexity, digital connectivity, and the growing empowerment of consumers have challenged these assumptions, leading scholars to reconsider the nature of value creation and customer-firm relationships (Fournier, 1998; Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Payne *et al.*, 2008). Contemporary marketing increasingly recognizes that consumers actively participate in shaping brand meanings, influencing marketplace conversations, and co-creating value through continuous interactions with firms and other consumers.

The emergence of relationship marketing represented an important milestone in this transformation by emphasizing long-term interactions, trust development, and mutual value creation rather than isolated transactions. Sustainable competitive advantage is increasingly derived from relational resources, customer knowledge, and network-based assets that competitors find difficult to replicate (Verhoef *et al.*, 2010; Kumar & Pansari, 2016). Parallel developments within Service-Dominant Logic (S-D Logic) further shifted attention from firm-centric production toward collaborative value creation, positioning customers as operant resources who actively integrate knowledge, skills, and experiences within broader service ecosystems (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008; Grönroos, 2008). Consequently, marketing relationships are now understood as dynamic processes involving multiple actors whose interactions collectively influence value creation outcomes.

Digital transformation has accelerated this shift by enabling consumers to participate in highly interconnected networks characterized by continuous communication and collaboration. Social media platforms, online forums, brand-sponsored communities, and peer-to-peer interaction spaces have created environments in which consumers engage not only with firms but also with one another (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann *et al.*, 2011). These developments have contributed to the emergence of consumer engagement ecosystems, where value is generated through ongoing interactions among customers, brands, communities, and digital platforms. Recent studies suggest that such ecosystems represent strategic relational assets because they facilitate knowledge exchange, collective learning, social influence, and network effects that extend organizational reach beyond traditional marketing channels (Harrigan *et al.*, 2018).

One of the most visible manifestations of these developments is the growing importance of consumer communities. Advances in digital technologies have enabled consumers to self-organize around brands, lifestyles, products, causes, and shared interests, creating collective environments that influence attitudes and behaviors at scale (Kozinets, 1999; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Zaglia, 2013). These communities increasingly function as strategic assets because they facilitate customer interaction, emotional bonding, information sharing, and collaborative value creation (McAlexander *et al.*, 2002; Schau *et al.*, 2009). Rather than relying exclusively on firm-generated communication, consumers increasingly depend on fellow community members for recommendations, validation, and experiential knowledge, thereby strengthening the role of communities in contemporary marketplace dynamics.

Brand communities have emerged as one of the most extensively studied forms of consumer collectives. Research demonstrates that communities foster shared consciousness, collective rituals, social norms, and moral responsibility among members, all of which contribute to stronger relational outcomes (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander *et al.*, 2002; Schau *et al.*, 2009). Community participation has been linked to enhanced emotional attachment, trust, loyalty, and advocacy behavior, suggesting that communities create value for both consumers and organizations (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005; Carlson *et al.*, 2008; Thompson & Sinha, 2008). More recent studies further indicate that online communities contribute to community resilience and customer-to-customer value creation by enabling members to collaboratively solve problems, share expertise, and support one another during periods of uncertainty (Rosado-Pinto *et al.*, 2020; Kaur *et al.*, 2023).

Within these community environments, customer engagement has become a central concept for understanding how relationships develop and generate value. Customer engagement extends beyond traditional loyalty by encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral investments that consumers direct toward brands, organizations, and communities (Brodie *et al.*, 2011). Engaged consumers actively participate in discussions, create content, share experiences, provide feedback, and contribute resources that strengthen collective value creation processes (van Doorn *et al.*, 2010; Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014). As a result, engagement has become one of the most influential constructs in contemporary marketing literature because it captures the multidimensional nature of modern consumer-firm interactions.

A growing body of research suggests that engagement is particularly powerful within community contexts. Through repeated interaction, consumers develop stronger social ties, increase their identification with the community, and become more deeply involved in collaborative value creation processes (Nambisan & Baron, 2009; Brodie *et al.*, 2013; Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014). Recent scholarship further argues that community-driven engagement generates relational outcomes that extend beyond individual transactions by fostering collective participation, community resilience, and long-term advocacy behaviors (Santos *et al.*, 2022). These findings suggest that engagement functions not merely as a behavioral outcome but as a relational mechanism that transforms community participation into broader value-generating activities.

Despite substantial advances in understanding communities and engagement, important theoretical gaps remain. Existing research has frequently examined community participation, customer engagement, psychological attachment, and advocacy behavior as separate constructs or within isolated theoretical streams. Although empirical evidence supports relationships among these concepts, there remains limited theoretical integration explaining how community participation systematically transforms ordinary members into committed brand advocates (Baldus *et al.*, 2015; Harmeling *et al.*, 2017; Kumar *et al.*, 2020). Consequently, the mechanisms linking community experiences to advocacy outcomes remain fragmented and insufficiently explained.

A second limitation concerns the role of psychological ownership within community-driven engagement processes. Psychological ownership refers to the feeling that a target object, organization, or community is perceived as “mine” despite the absence of legal ownership rights (Pierce *et al.*, 2001). Emerging studies indicate that active participation, contribution, and engagement can foster feelings of ownership, responsibility, and stewardship among community members (Marbach *et al.*, 2019). However, the position of psychological ownership within broader engagement processes remains theoretically underdeveloped. Existing research rarely examines how community interaction and participation intensity contribute to ownership perceptions that subsequently stimulate advocacy behavior, leaving a significant conceptual gap in contemporary marketing scholarship.

Addressing these gaps is increasingly important in markets characterized by consumer empowerment, declining trust in traditional advertising, and growing dependence on peer-generated information. Advocacy has become one of the most valuable outcomes in modern marketing because advocates not only remain loyal customers but also influence customer acquisition, reputation building, and value co-creation processes through their participation within community ecosystems (Kumar *et al.*, 2010; Wirtz *et al.*, 2013; Kumar *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, this article develops the Community-Driven Engagement Framework (CDEF), integrating Brand Community Theory, Social Identity Theory, Service-Dominant Logic, and Psychological Ownership Theory to explain how shared values stimulate community interaction, interaction encourages participation intensity, participation generates consumer engagement, engagement cultivates psychological ownership, and ownership ultimately drives brand advocacy. By integrating previously fragmented streams of literature into a unified framework, this study contributes to contemporary marketing scholarship by offering a more comprehensive explanation of how digital communities transform consumers into committed advocates within increasingly interconnected engagement ecosystems.

2. Theoretical Foundations

2.1 Brand Community Theory

Brand Community Theory constitutes one of the most influential theoretical foundations for understanding contemporary consumer collectives. Traditional marketing perspectives largely conceptualized consumers as independent decision makers whose primary interactions occurred with firms. Subsequent research challenged this assumption by demonstrating that consumers frequently establish social relationships with one another through shared brand experiences, thereby creating collective structures that significantly influence marketplace behaviors and relational outcomes (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander *et al*., 2002).

The theory emerged from the recognition that brands function not only as market offerings but also as social organizing mechanisms capable of connecting consumers through shared meanings, values, and experiences. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) defined brand communities as specialized, non-geographically bound communities based on structured social relationships among brand admirers. Their seminal work identified consciousness of kind, shared rituals and traditions, and moral responsibility as the defining markers of community formation. These characteristics create social bonds that extend beyond transactional exchanges and contribute to the development of collective identities.

Subsequent scholarship expanded Brand Community Theory by emphasizing the broader network of relationships among consumers, brands, products, and organizations (McAlexander *et al*., 2002). This relational perspective suggests that communities operate as interconnected systems in which value emerges through interactions among multiple actors rather than through direct firm-customer exchanges alone. Such interactions contribute to shared meanings, collective memories, emotional attachment, and social support that strengthen community sustainability (Schau *et al*., 2009; Carlson *et al*., 2008).

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has significantly transformed the nature of brand communities. Online platforms enable continuous interaction regardless of geographical boundaries, facilitating the emergence of highly scalable and dynamic communities characterized by persistent communication, knowledge exchange, and collaborative participation (Kozinets, 1999; Zaglia, 2013). More recent studies suggest that platform-based communities increasingly function as strategic relational infrastructures where consumers co-create value, generate user-generated content, and contribute to collective learning processes (Rosado-Pinto *et al*., 2020; Kaur *et al*., 2023).

Contemporary research further highlights the concepts of community resilience and customer-to-customer value creation. Community resilience refers to a community's ability to maintain engagement, collective identity, and collaborative activities despite environmental changes and disruptions. Customer-to-customer value creation emphasizes that consumers derive substantial value not only from firms but also from interactions with fellow members through information sharing, emotional support, and collaborative problem-solving activities. These developments extend traditional Brand Community Theory beyond relational attachment toward broader ecosystem-level value creation processes.

Within the context of the Community-Driven Engagement Framework (CDEF), Brand Community Theory provides the structural foundation explaining how shared values and collective identities create conditions that facilitate interaction, participation, and engagement. The theory supports the argument that communities function as social infrastructures capable of transforming individual consumers into collaborative actors within broader value-creation ecosystems.

2.2 Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory provides an important explanation for why individuals participate in communities and develop enduring attachments to collective entities. Originally proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), the theory suggests that individuals derive part of their self-concept from their membership in social groups. Group affiliation provides meaning, belongingness, and self-definition, enabling individuals to construct identities that extend beyond personal characteristics.

Within marketing contexts, brands and communities frequently function as symbolic resources for identity construction. Consumers often affiliate with communities because such membership communicates who they are, what they value, and how they wish to be perceived by others (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Carlson *et al.*, 2008). Community participation therefore becomes a mechanism through which consumers express identity, reinforce self-concepts, and establish social distinctiveness.

The concept of consciousness of kind closely aligns with Social Identity Theory because it reflects members' awareness of belonging to a distinctive collective. This awareness differentiates insiders from outsiders and strengthens emotional bonds among members (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005). Through repeated interactions, consumers internalize community values and norms, resulting in stronger identification and increased willingness to contribute to collective goals.

Recent developments have expanded Social Identity Theory through concepts such as identity signaling, self-categorization, and digital belonging. Identity signaling refers to consumers' use of community participation as a means of communicating desired identities to others. Self-categorization processes explain how individuals cognitively classify themselves as members of particular groups, thereby reinforcing behavioral alignment with community norms. Digital belonging highlights the increasing importance of online environments in fostering perceptions of inclusion, recognition, and social connectedness within virtual communities.

Contemporary research further suggests that community identification contributes to advocacy behavior through perceived collective efficacy. When consumers strongly identify with a community, they increasingly believe that collective actions can generate meaningful outcomes. Such perceptions strengthen commitment, participation, and willingness to support community objectives, thereby increasing the likelihood of advocacy behaviors directed toward both the community and associated brands.

Within the CDEF framework, Social Identity Theory explains why shared values stimulate interaction and participation. The theory provides a psychological mechanism through which collective identities emerge and motivate consumers to engage in community activities that ultimately contribute to engagement and advocacy outcomes.

2.3 Service-Dominant Logic

Service-Dominant Logic (S-D Logic) represents one of the most influential paradigms in contemporary marketing scholarship. Introduced by Vargo and Lusch (2004), the perspective challenged traditional goods-dominant assumptions by proposing that value is co-created through interactions among multiple actors rather than embedded within products themselves.

A central premise of S-D Logic is that customers are active participants in value creation rather than passive recipients of firm-generated outputs. Consumers integrate resources such as knowledge, skills, experiences, and relationships to generate value through use and interaction (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008). This perspective fundamentally alters the understanding of customer relationships by positioning consumers as collaborative partners within broader value creation processes.

Communities provide ideal environments for the application of S-D Logic because they facilitate resource integration among multiple actors. Through interaction and participation, consumers exchange information, expertise, emotional support, and experiential knowledge that collectively contribute to value creation (Payne *et al.*, 2008; Grönroos, 2008). These exchanges generate benefits not only for individual participants but also for the broader community ecosystem.

Recent developments in S-D Logic have introduced the concepts of service ecosystems, institutional arrangements, and actor engagement. Service ecosystems refer to self-adjusting systems of resource-integrating actors connected through shared institutions and mutual value creation processes (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). Institutional arrangements include the norms, rules, and shared understandings that coordinate interactions within ecosystems. Actor engagement emphasizes the active role of multiple stakeholders in shaping ecosystem outcomes through ongoing participation and collaboration.

Contemporary SDL scholarship increasingly recognizes that digital communities function as service ecosystems where consumers, brands, platforms, and other stakeholders continuously co-create value. These ecosystems generate network effects whereby participation by one actor increases value for others, reinforcing engagement and ecosystem sustainability. Such perspectives are particularly relevant for understanding community-driven marketing environments characterized by continuous interaction and collaborative value creation.

Within the proposed framework, S-D Logic explains how community interaction translates into participation intensity and engagement. The theory provides a process-oriented explanation of how collaborative activities create value and foster deeper relational outcomes within community ecosystems.

2.4 Psychological Ownership Theory

While Social Identity Theory explains belongingness and S-D Logic explains value co-creation, Psychological Ownership Theory provides insight into how community experiences become internalized by consumers. Psychological ownership refers to the feeling that a target object is perceived as “mine” regardless of formal ownership rights (Pierce *et al.*, 2001).

Psychological ownership emerges through three primary mechanisms: control over a target, intimate knowledge of the target, and personal investment within the target. Individuals develop ownership perceptions when they devote time, effort, knowledge, and emotional energy toward an object, organization, or community. These investments create psychological bonds that strengthen attachment and responsibility.

Community environments provide fertile conditions for ownership development because participation frequently requires substantial resource investment. Consumers contribute knowledge, create content, support fellow members, and participate in collaborative activities that enhance community welfare. Through repeated participation and engagement, members increasingly perceive the community as part of themselves, thereby fostering ownership perceptions.

Recent scholarship has extended Psychological Ownership Theory into digital contexts by examining digital psychological ownership, virtual community ownership, and platform-based ownership perceptions. Studies suggest that ownership can emerge toward digital brands, online communities, virtual environments, and social media platforms despite the absence of physical possession. Digital participation, content creation, and collaborative interaction have been identified as important antecedents of ownership perceptions in virtual settings.

Research further demonstrates that psychological ownership contributes to stewardship behavior, commitment, advocacy, and voluntary contribution. Individuals who feel ownership are more likely to protect, support, and promote the target because its success becomes personally meaningful. Consequently, ownership represents a deeper level of attachment than engagement alone and may function as a critical mechanism linking engagement with advocacy outcomes.

Within the CDEF framework, Psychological Ownership Theory provides the key explanatory mechanism connecting engagement and advocacy. The theory explains how active participation and engagement become internalized into enduring feelings of responsibility and attachment that motivate consumers to voluntarily advocate for brands and communities.

The proposed framework draws upon four complementary theoretical traditions that explain different stages of community-driven consumer transformation. Rather than operating independently, these theories contribute distinct explanatory mechanisms that collectively support the emergence of engagement, psychological ownership, and advocacy. Mapping their respective roles clarifies the theoretical positioning of the framework and demonstrates how previously fragmented perspectives are integrated into a coherent conceptual architecture.

Figure 1. Theoretical Integration Underlying the Community-Driven Engagement Framework
Source: Author's conceptualization

Figure 1 reorients the analysis toward the theoretical foundations that collectively support the proposed framework. Brand Community Theory provides the social infrastructure of communities, Social Identity Theory explains identification and belongingness processes, Service-Dominant Logic clarifies value co-creation and participation mechanisms, and Psychological Ownership Theory explains how engagement becomes internalized into stewardship-oriented behavior. By integrating these complementary perspectives within a single architecture, Figure 3 demonstrates the framework's theoretical positioning and clarifies how disparate streams of marketing literature converge to explain the transformation from community participation to brand advocacy.

3. Literature Synthesis

3.1 Shared Values as the Foundation of Community Formation

The sustainability and effectiveness of contemporary marketing communities fundamentally depend on the existence of shared values among members. While communities may initially emerge around products, brands, lifestyles, services, or social causes, their long-term viability is largely determined by the extent to which members perceive common beliefs, aspirations, identities, and collective purposes. Shared values function as the social glue that transforms disconnected individuals into cohesive communities capable of generating meaningful interactions and collaborative outcomes (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander *et al.*, 2002).

Brand Community Theory suggests that communities are not merely aggregations of consumers but social systems built upon common understandings and collective commitments. Consciousness of kind, one of the defining characteristics of brand communities, reflects members' recognition that they share meaningful connections with others who support similar brands, interests, or values (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Such recognition fosters social cohesion and establishes the psychological foundations necessary for sustained community development.

The importance of shared values can also be understood through Social Identity Theory. Individuals are more likely to join and remain active in communities when community values align with their self-concepts and desired identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Value congruence facilitates self-categorization processes that strengthen identification with the collective and increase emotional attachment toward fellow members (Carlson *et al.*, 2008; Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005). As a result, shared values function not only as social connectors but also as psychological mechanisms that reinforce belongingness and commitment.

Recent research suggests that value alignment has become increasingly important within digital communities because participation is largely voluntary and members can easily migrate across platforms and communities. Consumers remain engaged when communities provide identity-relevant meanings, social recognition, and opportunities to pursue collectively valued goals (Harrigan *et al.*, 2018; Santos *et al.*, 2022). Consequently, shared values serve as a critical antecedent of community resilience by maintaining cohesion despite changing technological environments and competitive distractions.

The service ecosystem perspective further suggests that shared values operate as institutional arrangements that coordinate interactions among actors within communities. Shared norms, expectations, and collective understandings reduce uncertainty and facilitate collaborative value creation among participants (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). Communities characterized by strong value congruence are therefore more likely to sustain interaction, encourage participation, and generate collective outcomes.

Taken together, the literature suggests that shared values represent the foundational condition upon which community formation, identity development, and collaborative engagement are built. Without shared values, communities struggle to generate meaningful interaction and collective commitment. Therefore, shared values are conceptualized as the primary antecedent that initiates the community-driven engagement process.

3.2 Community Interaction as a Mechanism of Relationship Development

While shared values create the foundation of communities, interaction serves as the mechanism through which community relationships are activated, strengthened, and sustained. Communities become socially meaningful because members engage in communication, exchange experiences, provide support, and participate in collective activities. Without interaction, shared values remain latent and cannot generate relational or behavioral outcomes.

Community interaction encompasses a broad range of activities, including information exchange, storytelling, collaborative problem solving, peer support, content sharing, feedback provision, and social communication (Dholakia *et al.*, 2004; Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006). In online brand communities, such customer-to-customer interactions serve as important sources of social influence and marketplace information that shape consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions, often exerting greater persuasive power than firm-generated communications (Adjei *et al.*, 2010). Through these interactions, members develop trust, reciprocity, familiarity, and social cohesion that reinforce community integration. Repeated interaction also contributes to the emergence of shared norms and collective expectations regarding participation and cooperation.

Research on online brand communities consistently demonstrates that interaction contributes significantly to relationship quality, trust development, community commitment, and customer behavioral outcomes (Casaló *et al.*, 2010; Gummerus *et al.*, 2012). Customer-to-customer communications within online communities have also been shown to influence purchase-related behaviors by enhancing information credibility and reducing perceived uncertainty during decision-making processes (Adjei *et al.*, 2010). Interaction transforms brands from commercial objects into socially meaningful symbols by embedding them within collective experiences and social relationships. Consequently, interaction functions as a critical mechanism linking community structures with relational outcomes.

The Service-Dominant Logic perspective further emphasizes that interaction constitutes the primary medium through which value is co-created among actors. Consumers exchange operant resources such as knowledge, skills, expertise, and experiences that generate value not only for individual participants but also for the broader community ecosystem (Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Payne *et al.*, 2008). Community interaction therefore represents a value-generating process rather than merely a communication activity.

Recent studies highlight that digital communities increasingly operate as interaction ecosystems characterized by continuous connectivity and network effects (Lim *et al.*, 2022). Each additional interaction potentially increases value for other participants by expanding collective knowledge, enhancing social capital, and strengthening relational bonds. Such network effects contribute to community growth and long-term sustainability.

The literature therefore indicates that community interaction functions as a pivotal mechanism through which shared values are translated into social relationships, collective learning, and collaborative value creation. Interaction represents the first active stage of community engagement and provides the foundation for deeper participation and involvement.

3.3 Participation Intensity as an Indicator of Community Involvement

Although interaction is necessary for community functioning, it does not fully capture the depth of consumer involvement. Community members vary considerably in their willingness to contribute resources, participate in activities, and support collective objectives. These differences highlight the importance of participation intensity as a distinct construct within community engagement processes.

Participation intensity refers to the degree of effort, involvement, and resource investment that consumers dedicate to community activities. It reflects not only how frequently consumers participate but also the extent to which they contribute meaningful knowledge, experiences, creativity, and support to the community (Etgar, 2008; Nambisan & Baron, 2009).

Existing literature suggests that participation occurs along a continuum ranging from passive observation to active contribution. At lower levels, consumers primarily consume information generated by others. At higher levels, they become active contributors who create content, solve problems, mentor newcomers, organize activities, and facilitate community development (Füller *et al.*, 2008; Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014). Active participation therefore requires significantly greater cognitive, emotional, and behavioral investments.

The value co-creation literature indicates that participation intensity influences the quality of consumer experiences and relational outcomes. Consumers who actively contribute are more likely to perceive personal relevance, social recognition, and collective efficacy, all of which strengthen attachment toward the community (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Payne *et al.*, 2008). Participation transforms consumers from observers into stakeholders whose contributions shape community outcomes.

Recent studies further suggest that participation intensity contributes to community resilience by expanding the pool of active contributors capable of sustaining community activities during periods of disruption or uncertainty (Rosado-Pinto *et al.*, 2020). Communities characterized by high participation intensity tend to exhibit stronger social capital, greater adaptability, and more sustainable engagement patterns.

Consequently, participation intensity is conceptualized as an intermediate stage that transforms interaction into deeper forms of involvement and investment. As consumers contribute increasing levels of resources to community activities, they become progressively more connected to collective outcomes and more likely to develop stronger relational bonds.

3.4 Consumer Engagement as the Core Relational Mechanism

Consumer engagement has emerged as one of the most influential constructs in contemporary marketing literature because it captures the multidimensional investments that consumers direct toward brands, organizations, and communities (Brodie *et al.*, 2011; Hollebeek, 2011). Unlike traditional loyalty constructs, engagement reflects active and ongoing involvement that extends beyond purchasing behavior.

Most engagement scholars conceptualize engagement as a multidimensional construct comprising cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014; Dessart *et al.*, 2015). Cognitive engagement reflects attention, concentration, and mental involvement. Emotional engagement captures enthusiasm, attachment, passion, and excitement. Behavioral engagement encompasses participation, contribution, advocacy, and collaborative actions.

Community environments provide particularly fertile conditions for engagement development because they facilitate repeated interaction, social identification, and collaborative participation (Brodie *et al.*, 2013; Gummerus *et al.*, 2012). Through continuous involvement, consumers become emotionally connected to fellow members and increasingly invested in collective success. Such experiences foster stronger engagement than traditional transactional relationships.

Recent engagement ecosystem research suggests that engagement should not be viewed solely as an individual-level phenomenon. Rather, engagement emerges through interconnected interactions among consumers, brands, communities, and platforms (Harrigan *et al.*, 2018; Lim *et al.*, 2022). This perspective positions engagement as a relational resource capable of generating network effects and enhancing ecosystem-level value creation.

The customer engagement literature consistently demonstrates positive associations between engagement and desirable outcomes such as trust, loyalty, commitment, co-creation, and advocacy (van Doorn *et al.*, 2010; Kumar & Pansari, 2016; Pansari & Kumar, 2017). However, engagement also serves an important psychological function by facilitating the internalization of community experiences.

Accordingly, engagement is conceptualized as the core relational mechanism within the Community-Driven Engagement Framework. Engagement transforms participation experiences into meaningful cognitive and emotional investments that prepare consumers for deeper psychological attachment and ownership perceptions.

3.5 Psychological Ownership as an Internalization Process

While engagement reflects strong relational investment, not all engaged consumers develop equivalent levels of attachment toward communities and brands. Some consumers move beyond engagement and begin to perceive the community as part of themselves. This transition can be explained through Psychological Ownership Theory.

Psychological ownership refers to the feeling that a target object is psychologically experienced as “mine” regardless of legal ownership status (Pierce *et al.*, 2001). Such perceptions emerge when individuals invest personal resources, acquire intimate knowledge, and develop a sense of influence over a target. These conditions are frequently present within community environments characterized by active participation and engagement.

Community members often dedicate substantial time, effort, expertise, and emotional energy to collective activities. Through repeated contributions, they begin to perceive themselves as stakeholders whose actions influence community success (Marbach *et al.*, 2019). Consequently, communities become extensions of personal identity rather than external social structures.

Recent studies on digital psychological ownership suggest that ownership perceptions can emerge toward online communities, digital platforms, and virtual brands despite the absence of physical possession. Content creation, community participation, social recognition, and collaborative interaction have been identified as key antecedents of ownership development within digital environments. These findings highlight the growing relevance of ownership perceptions in increasingly virtual consumer experiences.

Psychological ownership also contributes to stewardship behaviors, voluntary contribution, and long-term commitment. Consumers who feel ownership are more likely to protect community interests, support fellow members, and contribute to collective development because community success becomes personally meaningful (Peck & Luangrath, 2023). Ownership therefore represents a deeper form of attachment than engagement alone.

The literature consequently suggests that psychological ownership functions as an internalization process through which engagement experiences become enduring psychological bonds. This process provides a critical explanation for how active participation ultimately generates stronger forms of commitment and advocacy.

3.6 Brand Advocacy as the Ultimate Relational Outcome

Brand advocacy represents one of the most valuable outcomes in contemporary marketing because advocates voluntarily promote brands, influence marketplace perceptions, and contribute to customer acquisition. Unlike traditional loyalty, advocacy involves proactive behaviors that extend beyond personal consumption and generate value for both organizations and communities.

Advocacy behaviors include recommending brands, generating positive word-of-mouth communication, sharing experiences, defending brands against criticism, and encouraging adoption among potential consumers (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004; Kumar *et al.*, 2010).

These activities are particularly influential within digital environments where peer-generated information frequently carries greater credibility than firm-generated communication.

Existing research consistently demonstrates that advocacy is associated with strong emotional attachment, commitment, trust, and engagement (Wirtz *et al.*, 2013; Kumar *et al.*, 2020). However, advocacy often requires deeper psychological investment than engagement alone because advocates voluntarily devote resources to promoting and defending brands without direct compensation.

Psychological ownership provides a compelling explanation for this transition. Consumers who perceive communities and brands as extensions of themselves are motivated to protect, support, and promote them because their success becomes personally relevant. Advocacy behaviors therefore emerge not merely from satisfaction but from perceived responsibility and emotional investment.

Recent developments in social commerce and digital influence environments have further expanded the importance of advocacy. Community members increasingly function as influencer-like actors who shape marketplace conversations, create user-generated content, and influence purchasing decisions within their social networks. Such developments elevate advocacy from an individual behavior to a strategic community asset capable of generating substantial network effects.

Taken together, the literature suggests a progressive transformation process in which shared values facilitate interaction, interaction stimulates participation intensity, participation generates engagement, engagement cultivates psychological ownership, and ownership ultimately drives advocacy behavior. Despite substantial evidence supporting individual relationships among these constructs, the literature lacks a comprehensive framework integrating them into a unified explanation of community-driven consumer transformation. This gap provides the conceptual foundation for the framework developed in the following section.

The conceptual framework relies on a sequence of interrelated constructs, each performing a distinct analytical function within the transformation process from community participation to brand advocacy. A consolidated construct table improves conceptual clarity by specifying the meaning, theoretical origin, and role of each construct within the proposed framework.

Table 1. Core Constructs of the Community-Driven Engagement Framework

Construct	Definition	Primary Theoretical Source	Role in the Framework
Shared Values	The degree to which community members perceive common beliefs, norms, goals, and meanings that create collective alignment.	Brand Community Theory; Social Identity Theory	Foundational antecedent initiating community formation and social cohesion.
Community Interaction	Ongoing communication, knowledge exchange, collaboration, support, and social exchange among community members.	Brand Community Theory; Service-Dominant Logic	Mechanism through which shared values are translated into active social relationships.
Participation Intensity	The extent of behavioral involvement, effort, contribution, and resource investment in community activities.	Value Co-Creation Literature; Service-Dominant Logic	Indicator of active community involvement that transforms interaction into deeper participation.
Consumer Engagement	A multidimensional state comprising cognitive, emotional, and behavioral investment directed toward the community and associated brand.	Customer Engagement Theory	Core relational mechanism linking participation experiences to psychological attachment.

Construct	Definition	Primary Theoretical Source	Role in the Framework
Psychological Ownership	The feeling that the community or brand is perceived as “mine” despite the absence of legal ownership.	Psychological Ownership Theory	Internalization mechanism transforming engagement into responsibility, stewardship, and commitment.
Brand Advocacy	Voluntary behaviors aimed at supporting, recommending, defending, and promoting the brand to others.	Advocacy and Relationship Marketing Literature	Ultimate relational outcome representing the culmination of community-driven consumer transformation.

Source: Author’s synthesis based on Brand Community Theory, Social Identity Theory, Service-Dominant Logic, Customer Engagement Literature, and Psychological Ownership Theory.

Table 1 provides a concise overview of the conceptual building blocks underpinning the Community-Driven Engagement Framework. By distinguishing the definition, theoretical origin, and analytical role of each construct, Table 1 clarifies how the framework progresses from social alignment and interaction toward psychological internalization and ultimately advocacy behavior. This structured presentation supports theoretical transparency and facilitates future empirical operationalization of the proposed model.

4. Development of the Community-Driven Engagement Framework

4.1 Conceptual Foundation of the Framework

The literature synthesis presented in the preceding sections suggests that community-driven engagement emerges through a progressive relational process rather than through isolated interactions. Existing studies have demonstrated the importance of community participation, customer engagement, psychological attachment, and advocacy behavior in shaping consumer-firm relationships. However, these constructs have frequently been examined within separate theoretical traditions, resulting in fragmented explanations regarding how consumers evolve from ordinary community participants into committed brand advocates (Brodie *et al.*, 2011; Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014; Pansari & Kumar, 2017; Santos *et al.*, 2022).

The present study addresses this fragmentation by proposing the Community-Driven Engagement Framework (CDEF), an integrative conceptual model that combines insights from Brand Community Theory, Social Identity Theory, Service-Dominant Logic, and Psychological Ownership Theory. The framework conceptualizes advocacy as the culmination of a sequential process beginning with shared values and progressing through interaction, participation, engagement, and ownership.

Unlike traditional relationship marketing models that emphasize direct relationships between engagement and behavioral outcomes, the proposed framework argues that advocacy emerges through multiple interconnected relational and psychological mechanisms. Community participation alone is insufficient to generate advocacy. Rather, advocacy develops when participation becomes internalized through engagement and ultimately transformed into psychological ownership.

The framework consists of six core constructs: shared values, community interaction, participation intensity, consumer engagement, psychological ownership, and brand advocacy. These constructs are positioned as sequential stages within a developmental process that explains how communities transform individual consumers into voluntary advocates.

The conceptual framework developed in this study explains how community participation evolves into brand advocacy through a sequential process of social alignment, relational development, and psychological internalization. The model integrates the article's six core constructs into a unified causal pathway and positions psychological ownership as the critical mechanism linking engagement to advocacy.

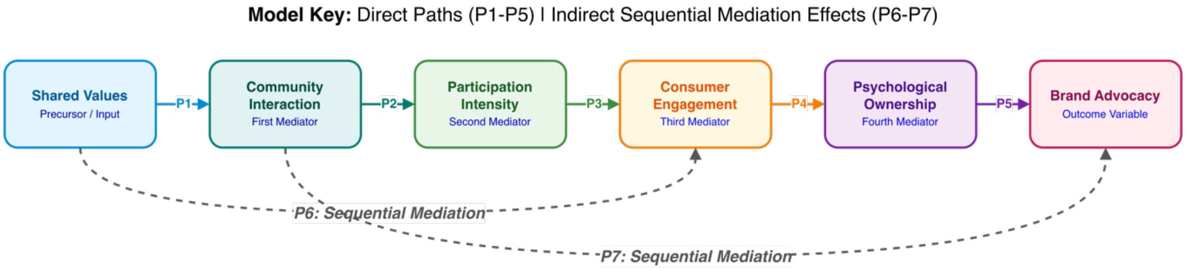

Figure 2. Community-Driven Engagement Framework
Source: Author's conceptualization

The framework articulated in Figure 2 clarifies the developmental logic through which consumers progress from social alignment to voluntary advocacy behavior. Shared values initiate community interaction, interaction stimulates participation intensity, participation cultivates consumer engagement, engagement generates psychological ownership, and ownership ultimately motivates brand advocacy.

This architecture reflects the assumption that community relationships evolve progressively from social alignment toward deeper psychological commitment and voluntary promotional behavior.

4.2 Theoretical Architecture of Community-Driven Engagement

The Community-Driven Engagement Framework is grounded in a multilevel theoretical architecture consisting of three interconnected layers.

The first layer represents the social foundation, comprising shared values and community interaction. This layer explains how communities emerge and maintain cohesion through collective meanings, social identification, and relational exchanges. Shared values create alignment among members, while interaction transforms this alignment into social relationships and collaborative experiences.

The second layer represents the engagement formation process, comprising participation intensity and consumer engagement. Participation reflects behavioral involvement in community activities, whereas engagement reflects the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral investments that arise from such involvement. This layer explains how consumers transition from passive observers to active contributors within community ecosystems.

The third layer represents the psychological transformation process, comprising psychological ownership and brand advocacy. Psychological ownership captures the internalization of community experiences into feelings of responsibility, attachment, and personal relevance. Advocacy emerges when these ownership perceptions motivate consumers to voluntarily support, promote, and defend the community and associated brand.

The framework is not limited to a simple causal chain; it is built upon a multilevel theoretical architecture that explains how community-driven engagement develops across distinct stages. Organizing the model into social, relational, and psychological layers clarifies the mechanisms through which community experiences progressively evolve into advocacy behavior and highlights the distinct role played by each construct within the transformation process.

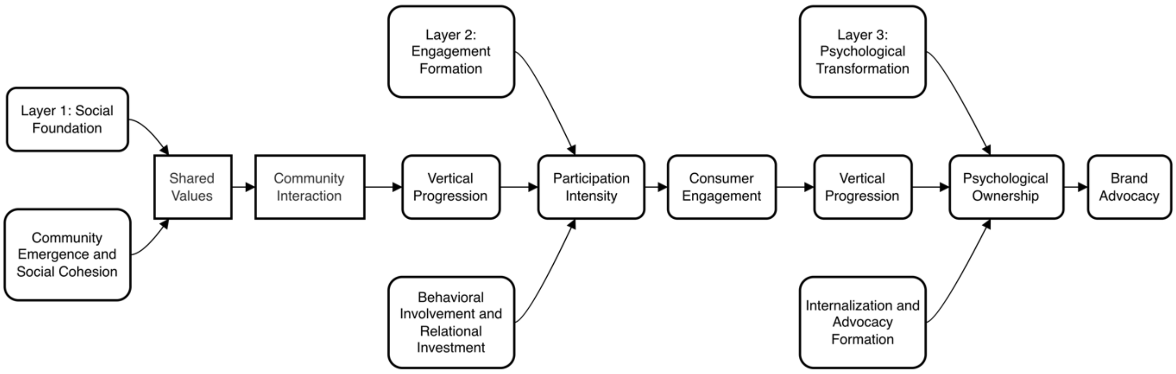

Figure 3. Three-Layer Architecture of the Community-Driven Engagement Framework
Source: Author's conceptualization

As illustrated in Figure 3, the framework is organized into three interconnected analytical layers that collectively explain the progression from community membership to advocacy behavior. The first layer establishes the social conditions required for community formation through shared values and interaction. The second layer captures the development of active involvement through participation and engagement. The third layer explains how engagement becomes internalized through psychological ownership and ultimately generates advocacy. By distinguishing these layers, Figure 2 clarifies the multilevel logic underpinning the Community-Driven Engagement Framework and demonstrates that advocacy emerges from a cumulative process of social, relational, and psychological development rather than from a single behavioral event.

This three-layer architecture extends existing engagement literature by positioning engagement as part of a broader developmental sequence rather than as a terminal outcome. The framework therefore explains not only how engagement emerges but also how engagement evolves into stronger forms of relational commitment.

4.3 Shared Values as the Catalyst of Community Interaction

Shared values are proposed as the initial catalyst within the framework because communities require common meanings and collective purposes to facilitate meaningful interaction. Consumers are more likely to communicate, collaborate, and establish relationships when they perceive value congruence with other community members.

Social Identity Theory suggests that value congruence strengthens self-categorization processes and encourages individuals to identify with collective entities (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Similarly, Brand Community Theory argues that shared consciousness develops when consumers recognize common beliefs and interests that distinguish community members from outsiders (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

Recent studies further indicate that value alignment reduces uncertainty, strengthens trust, and enhances relational willingness among digital community participants (Harrigan *et al.*, 2018; Santos *et al.*, 2022). Consequently, shared values create favorable conditions for communication, cooperation, and relationship formation.

From a service ecosystem perspective, shared values also function as institutional arrangements that coordinate behavior among actors and facilitate collaborative value creation (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). Therefore, shared values are expected to positively influence community interaction.

Proposition 1
P1: *Shared values positively influence community interaction.*

4.4 Community Interaction as a Driver of Participation Intensity

Community interaction represents the primary mechanism through which social relationships are developed and maintained. Through interaction, consumers exchange information, provide support, solve problems, and participate in collective activities that strengthen community integration.

Repeated interaction exposes members to community norms, collective goals, and opportunities for contribution. As familiarity and trust increase, consumers become more willing to invest resources such as time, knowledge, expertise, and emotional energy into community activities (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Casaló *et al.*, 2010).

Service-Dominant Logic suggests that interaction serves as the central mechanism through which actors integrate resources and co-create value (Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Payne *et al.*, 2008). Increased interaction therefore generates greater opportunities for participation and collaborative contribution.

Recent engagement ecosystem research also suggests that interaction generates cumulative network effects. As consumers become increasingly connected through communication activities, participation opportunities expand and collective value creation intensifies (Lim *et al.*, 2022).

Accordingly, community interaction is expected to stimulate higher levels of participation intensity.

Proposition 2
P2: *Community interaction positively influences participation intensity.*

4.5 Participation Intensity as an Antecedent of Consumer Engagement

Participation intensity reflects the extent to which consumers actively contribute resources to community activities. Active contributors invest greater cognitive effort, emotional energy, and behavioral commitment than passive observers.

The engagement literature consistently demonstrates that engagement develops through active involvement rather than passive exposure (Brodie *et al.*, 2011; Hollebeek, 2011). Participation enables consumers to experience social recognition, collective achievement, and personal relevance, all of which contribute to engagement development.

Higher participation intensity also increases consumers' perceptions that they play meaningful roles within the community. Such perceptions strengthen emotional attachment and cognitive involvement, thereby fostering stronger engagement (Dessart *et al.*, 2015; Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014).

Moreover, participation contributes to the development of community competence and collective efficacy, reinforcing consumers' motivation to remain involved and continue contributing.

Consequently, participation intensity is expected to positively influence consumer engagement.

Proposition 3
P3: *Participation intensity positively influences consumer engagement.*

4.6 Consumer Engagement as a Mechanism of Psychological Internalization

Consumer engagement represents a multidimensional investment encompassing cognitive attention, emotional attachment, and behavioral involvement. These investments create favorable conditions for the emergence of psychological ownership.

Psychological Ownership Theory proposes that ownership perceptions arise through personal investment, intimate knowledge, and perceived influence over a target object (Pierce *et al.*, 2001). Highly engaged consumers possess these characteristics because they contribute resources, acquire community knowledge, and participate in shaping collective outcomes.

Engagement therefore facilitates the internalization of community experiences. Through repeated involvement, consumers increasingly perceive the community as part of their identity and develop feelings of responsibility toward its success.

Recent studies on digital psychological ownership suggest that engagement behaviors such as content creation, collaboration, and community contribution are important antecedents of ownership perceptions within virtual environments (Marbach *et al.*, 2019; Peck & Luangrath, 2023).

Consequently, consumer engagement is expected to positively influence psychological ownership.

Proposition 4
P4: *Consumer engagement positively influences psychological ownership.*

4.7 Psychological Ownership as a Driver of Brand Advocacy

The framework proposes that psychological ownership constitutes the immediate antecedent of advocacy behavior. While engagement strengthens attachment, ownership creates deeper feelings of responsibility, stewardship, and personal relevance.

Consumers who perceive communities and brands as "theirs" are more likely to support, defend, and promote them because their success becomes personally meaningful. Ownership perceptions therefore generate stronger motivational foundations for advocacy than satisfaction or engagement alone.

The advocacy literature consistently demonstrates that consumers who experience strong emotional and psychological attachment are more likely to engage in positive word-of-mouth communication, referrals, recommendations, and community leadership behaviors (Kumar *et al.*, 2010; Wirtz *et al.*, 2013).

Within contemporary digital environments, advocacy increasingly extends beyond traditional recommendation behaviors. Community members frequently function as influencer-like actors who create content, shape public conversations, and influence purchasing decisions within their networks. Such behaviors reflect the strategic importance of psychological ownership in generating community-driven advocacy.

Therefore, psychological ownership is expected to positively influence brand advocacy.

Proposition 5
P5: *Psychological ownership positively influences brand advocacy.*

4.8 Sequential Mediation Mechanisms

Beyond direct effects, the framework proposes two critical mediating mechanisms that explain the transformation of participation into advocacy.

First, consumer engagement is expected to mediate the relationship between participation intensity and psychological ownership. Participation alone does not automatically create ownership perceptions. Instead, participation must first be transformed into meaningful cognitive and emotional experiences through engagement processes.

Proposition 6
P6: *Consumer engagement mediates the relationship between participation intensity and psychological ownership.*

Second, psychological ownership is expected to mediate the relationship between consumer engagement and brand advocacy. Although engagement encourages supportive behaviors, advocacy is more likely to emerge when engagement develops into ownership perceptions that generate stronger personal commitment and stewardship motivations.

Proposition 7
P7: *Psychological ownership mediates the relationship between consumer engagement and brand advocacy.*

Taken together, these mediating mechanisms suggest that advocacy is not an immediate consequence of participation or engagement. Rather, advocacy emerges through a sequential process of relational development and psychological internalization.

The Community-Driven Engagement Framework is operationalized through a set of theoretically derived propositions that specify the causal relationships among the six core constructs. Consolidating these propositions into a single table enhances analytical transparency and provides a clear roadmap for future empirical validation of the framework.

Table 2. Summary of Research Propositions in the Community-Driven Engagement Framework

Proposition & Proposed Relationship		Theoretical Justification
P1	Shared Values → Community Interaction	Shared values create collective alignment, social identification, and relational willingness, thereby facilitating interaction among community members.
P2	Community Interaction → Participation Intensity	Repeated interaction strengthens trust, familiarity, and collaborative opportunities, encouraging greater resource investment and participation.
P3	Participation Intensity → Consumer Engagement	Active contribution increases cognitive involvement, emotional attachment, and behavioral commitment, thereby fostering engagement.
P4	Consumer Engagement → Psychological Ownership	Engagement generates personal investment, intimate knowledge, and perceived influence, which are key antecedents of ownership perceptions.
P5	Psychological Ownership → Brand Advocacy	Feelings of ownership create stewardship, responsibility, and personal relevance that motivate voluntary advocacy behaviors.
P6	Participation Intensity → Consumer Engagement → Psychological Ownership	Engagement mediates the relationship between participation intensity and psychological ownership by transforming behavioral involvement into psychological attachment.
P7	Consumer Engagement → Psychological Ownership → Brand Advocacy	Psychological ownership mediates the relationship between engagement and advocacy by converting relational investment into stewardship-oriented promotional behavior.

Source: Author's conceptualization based on the literature synthesis and theoretical integration.

By consolidating all proposed relationships within a single analytical structure, Table 2 clarifies the causal architecture of the Community-Driven Engagement Framework. The table highlights that advocacy is not treated as an immediate consequence of participation or engagement but rather as the outcome of a sequential process involving both relational development and psychological internalization. Consequently, Table 2 serves as a foundation for future empirical studies seeking to test the framework through mediation analysis, structural equation modeling, or longitudinal research designs.

4.9 Boundary Conditions and Future Extensions of the Framework

While the proposed framework is expected to operate across a variety of community contexts, its effectiveness may vary depending on several boundary conditions. Factors such as community type, product involvement, platform characteristics, consumer expertise, cultural orientation, and technological affordances may strengthen or weaken the proposed relationships.

For example, communities characterized by high symbolic value may generate stronger identity formation and ownership perceptions than communities focused primarily on functional benefits. Similarly, platform features that facilitate interaction and visibility may strengthen engagement development and advocacy outcomes.

Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, social commerce infrastructures, and algorithmic recommendation systems may also influence how community-driven engagement develops within future digital ecosystems. AI-enabled communities increasingly shape interaction patterns, content visibility, and consumer participation opportunities, potentially altering traditional engagement processes.

These considerations suggest that the Community-Driven Engagement Framework should be viewed as a foundational architecture that can be expanded and refined as community environments continue to evolve. Nevertheless, the framework provides a comprehensive explanation of how contemporary communities transform consumers into advocates through interconnected social, relational, and psychological mechanisms.

5. Discussion

5.1 Reframing Community-Driven Consumer Transformation

The Community-Driven Engagement Framework (CDEF) advances contemporary marketing scholarship by proposing that advocacy emerges through a progressive transformation process rather than through isolated behavioral responses. Existing studies have frequently examined community participation, engagement, attachment, and advocacy as separate constructs or direct relationships. The present framework instead conceptualizes these constructs as interconnected stages within a developmental sequence through which consumers evolve from passive community members into committed advocates.

This perspective contributes to an emerging shift in marketing scholarship from outcome-oriented explanations toward process-oriented explanations of consumer behavior. Rather than viewing advocacy as a direct consequence of satisfaction or loyalty, the framework proposes that advocacy develops through cumulative social, relational, and psychological experiences. Such a perspective aligns with contemporary ecosystem-based views of marketing in which value creation occurs through ongoing interactions among multiple actors rather than through discrete transactions.

The framework further suggests that community participation should not be interpreted merely as a behavioral outcome. Participation represents the beginning of a transformation process that progressively strengthens consumer attachment, engagement, ownership, and advocacy. Consequently, community-driven engagement emerges as a dynamic capability capable of generating sustainable relational advantages for organizations.

5.2 Extending Brand Community Theory

The proposed framework contributes to Brand Community Theory by extending its explanatory scope beyond community characteristics and social structures. Previous studies primarily emphasized consciousness of kind, rituals, traditions, and moral responsibility as defining features of brand communities (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Schau *et al.*, 2009).

Although these constructs explain how communities form and maintain cohesion, they provide limited insight into how communities generate long-term behavioral outcomes.

The CDEF addresses this limitation by positioning community structures as the starting point of a broader relational development process. Shared values and interaction create the social infrastructure necessary for participation and engagement, which subsequently generate deeper psychological consequences. This perspective shifts attention from static community characteristics toward dynamic community processes.

The framework also incorporates recent discussions concerning community resilience, customer-to-customer value creation, and platform-based communities. These developments suggest that communities increasingly function as adaptive relational ecosystems capable of sustaining engagement through collective participation and collaborative value creation. Consequently, communities should be viewed not merely as consumer groups but as strategic social infrastructures that facilitate consumer transformation.

5.3 Advancing Customer Engagement Theory

Customer engagement has become one of the most influential constructs in modern marketing literature. Existing studies consistently demonstrate that engagement contributes to loyalty, commitment, trust, and co-creation behaviors. However, engagement research frequently treats engagement as either a dependent variable or a final relational outcome.

The present framework challenges this assumption by positioning engagement as an intermediary mechanism rather than a terminal state. Engagement functions as a bridge connecting participation experiences with deeper psychological processes. This reconceptualization provides a more comprehensive explanation of why some highly engaged consumers become advocates while others remain active participants without assuming promotional roles.

The framework also contributes to the growing literature on engagement ecosystems. Contemporary engagement increasingly occurs within interconnected networks involving consumers, brands, communities, platforms, and digital technologies. The proposed model suggests that engagement should be understood as an ecosystem-level relational resource capable of generating network effects and facilitating value creation beyond individual customer-brand relationships.

This perspective is particularly relevant in contemporary digital environments where engagement often occurs through community interactions rather than direct firm-consumer exchanges. Consequently, the framework extends engagement theory by highlighting its role within broader community ecosystems.

5.4 Positioning Psychological Ownership as a Missing Mechanism

Perhaps the most significant theoretical contribution of the framework lies in identifying psychological ownership as the missing mechanism connecting engagement and advocacy. Although engagement has been widely recognized as a predictor of favorable outcomes, prior literature provides limited explanation regarding how engagement translates into proactive advocacy behavior.

Psychological Ownership Theory offers an important explanation because ownership perceptions create feelings of responsibility, stewardship, and personal relevance. Consumers who perceive communities and brands as extensions of themselves become motivated to protect and promote them. Ownership therefore provides a stronger motivational foundation for advocacy than engagement alone.

The framework positions psychological ownership as a process of psychological internalization through which community experiences become personally meaningful. This perspective extends previous research by integrating ownership into a broader relational framework rather than treating it as an isolated outcome.

Furthermore, the increasing prevalence of digital participation suggests that ownership perceptions may become increasingly important in virtual environments where consumers contribute resources without possessing physical assets. The concept of digital psychological ownership therefore offers promising opportunities for future marketing scholarship.

5.5 Implications for Service Ecosystems and Platform-Based Marketing

The framework contributes to Service-Dominant Logic by illustrating how community participation generates ecosystem-level value creation. Existing SDL research emphasizes resource integration, actor engagement, and service ecosystems as foundations of value co-creation. The proposed framework extends these arguments by demonstrating how ecosystem participation gradually evolves into ownership and advocacy.

This extension suggests that advocacy should be viewed as an ecosystem outcome rather than merely an individual behavioral response. Advocates contribute resources that strengthen ecosystem sustainability by attracting new participants, generating content, and facilitating knowledge exchange. Consequently, advocacy represents an important mechanism through which service ecosystems reproduce and expand themselves.

The framework is also relevant to platform-based marketing environments. Digital platforms increasingly mediate interactions among consumers, brands, and communities. Platform design, governance structures, algorithmic visibility, and participation affordances may significantly influence engagement development and ownership formation. Managers should therefore recognize that platform architecture can shape relational outcomes indirectly through its influence on community processes.

The emergence of social commerce ecosystems further strengthens the relevance of this perspective. Community interactions increasingly influence purchasing decisions, product evaluations, and marketplace conversations. Community-driven advocacy therefore represents a strategic asset capable of generating substantial network effects across digital platforms.

5.6 Managerial Implications

The framework offers several important implications for marketing practitioners. First, organizations should move beyond audience acquisition metrics and focus on cultivating meaningful community relationships. Large audiences do not necessarily generate strong engagement or advocacy. Communities characterized by shared values and active participation may create greater long-term value than large but passive follower bases.

Second, managers should actively facilitate community interaction. Opportunities for discussion, collaboration, mentoring, and peer support strengthen participation intensity and engagement development. Community management strategies should therefore prioritize interaction quality rather than communication volume alone.

Third, organizations should design participation opportunities that encourage resource contribution. Consumers are more likely to develop ownership perceptions when they invest knowledge, creativity, and effort into community activities. Participation programs should therefore enable meaningful consumer involvement rather than passive content consumption.

Fourth, managers should recognize psychological ownership as a strategic objective. Marketing initiatives frequently emphasize awareness and engagement while overlooking ownership development. Creating opportunities for influence, contribution, and co-creation may generate stronger advocacy outcomes than traditional promotional activities.

Finally, organizations should view advocates as ecosystem partners rather than merely loyal customers. Community advocates contribute value through content creation, recommendation behavior, social influence, and reputation management. Such contributions extend organizational capabilities beyond firm-controlled marketing activities.

5.7 Future Research Agenda

The Community-Driven Engagement Framework provides several opportunities for future research. First, empirical studies should test the proposed relationships using covariance-based and variance-based structural equation modeling approaches. Such investigations would provide evidence regarding the validity and strength of the proposed mechanisms.

Second, future research should explore moderators that influence community-driven engagement processes. Variables such as product involvement, community type, platform characteristics, consumer expertise, and cultural orientation may affect the relationships proposed in the framework.

Third, longitudinal studies are needed to examine how engagement and ownership evolve over time. The framework conceptualizes advocacy as the outcome of a developmental process, making longitudinal approaches particularly appropriate for examining causal relationships.

Fourth, future scholars should investigate emerging forms of AI-enabled communities. Artificial intelligence increasingly influences interaction visibility, content creation, recommendation systems, and community governance. These developments may alter traditional engagement mechanisms and create new pathways toward ownership and advocacy.

Finally, future research should examine whether the framework operates similarly across commercial communities, educational communities, nonprofit organizations, professional associations, creator communities, and social movements. Comparative investigations would significantly enhance understanding regarding the generalizability of community-driven engagement processes across diverse contexts.

6. Conclusion

The growing strategic importance of consumer communities has fundamentally transformed how marketing scholars and practitioners understand relationship development, value creation, and advocacy behavior in contemporary markets. Despite extensive research on brand communities, customer engagement, value co-creation, and advocacy, existing scholarship has remained fragmented, often examining these constructs in isolation and providing limited explanation regarding how ordinary community members evolve into committed brand advocates. This fragmentation has created an important knowledge gap in understanding the sequential mechanisms through which community participation generates enduring relational outcomes. Addressing this gap, the present study developed the Community-Driven Engagement Framework (CDEF), an integrative conceptual model that explains how shared values stimulate community interaction, interaction fosters participation intensity, participation cultivates consumer engagement, engagement generates psychological ownership, and ownership ultimately drives brand advocacy. By integrating Brand Community Theory, Social Identity Theory, Service-Dominant Logic, and Psychological Ownership Theory into a unified explanatory architecture, this study advances a process-oriented understanding of community-driven consumer transformation that extends beyond traditional transactional and engagement-based perspectives.

The primary novelty of this study lies in its reconceptualization of advocacy as the outcome of a progressive social, relational, and psychological development process rather than a direct consequence of satisfaction, loyalty, or engagement alone. While previous studies have recognized the importance of engagement in generating favorable consumer outcomes, they have offered limited insight into the mechanisms through which engagement evolves into active advocacy. The proposed framework addresses this limitation by positioning psychological ownership as a critical intervening mechanism that transforms engagement into stewardship, responsibility, and voluntary promotional behavior. This contribution advances contemporary marketing literature by introducing a more comprehensive explanation of how community experiences become internalized and translated into advocacy actions. Furthermore, the framework extends Brand Community Theory by shifting attention from static community characteristics toward dynamic developmental processes, advances customer engagement literature by positioning engagement as a transitional mechanism rather than a terminal outcome, enriches Service-Dominant Logic by illustrating how community participation produces ecosystem-level relational consequences, and broadens Psychological Ownership Theory by embedding ownership within a larger community-driven engagement process.

Beyond its theoretical contributions, the framework offers important implications for organizations operating in increasingly digital and community-oriented environments. The findings suggest that sustainable competitive advantage may no longer depend solely on customer acquisition or transactional performance but increasingly on an organization's ability to cultivate meaningful communities characterized by shared values, active interaction, and collaborative participation. The framework highlights the strategic importance of designing community environments that encourage resource contribution, facilitate customer-to-customer value creation, and strengthen ownership perceptions among members. Such efforts may generate advocacy ecosystems in which consumers voluntarily promote brands, influence marketplace conversations, support fellow members, and contribute to long-term organizational resilience. These implications are particularly relevant in social commerce environments, platform-based business models, creator economies, and digitally mediated communities where peer influence frequently exerts greater impact than firm-generated communication. The framework also suggests that managers should view advocates not merely as loyal customers but as strategic relational partners who actively participate in value creation, reputation building, and community growth.

At the same time, several limitations should be acknowledged. As a conceptual study, the proposed framework has not yet been empirically validated across different community contexts, industries, and cultural environments. The relationships proposed in the model remain theoretically grounded but require empirical examination using quantitative, qualitative, and longitudinal research designs. In addition, the framework focuses primarily on positive relational mechanisms and does not explicitly account for potentially negative dynamics such as community conflict, disengagement, psychological reactance, or advocacy fatigue. Furthermore, while the framework incorporates contemporary perspectives on digital communities, it does not fully explore the influence of rapidly evolving technological factors such as artificial intelligence, algorithmic governance, immersive virtual environments, and automated content generation systems that increasingly shape community interactions and engagement experiences.

These limitations provide fertile opportunities for future research. Empirical studies should examine the validity of the proposed relationships across diverse contexts, including commercial brands, nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, professional communities, creator ecosystems, and social movements. Future investigations may also explore boundary conditions and moderating variables such as platform affordances, cultural orientations, community governance structures, consumer expertise, and product involvement. Longitudinal research would be particularly valuable for examining how engagement and ownership evolve over time and how advocacy behaviors emerge throughout different stages of community participation. Additional attention should be directed toward AI-enabled communities, human-AI collaborative ecosystems, social commerce networks, and digitally mediated ownership experiences, as these emerging phenomena may fundamentally reshape traditional engagement processes. Integrating community-driven engagement with broader ecosystem perspectives may also provide new insights into how advocacy contributes to the sustainability, resilience, and growth of contemporary service ecosystems.

In conclusion, this study argues that the future of marketing increasingly resides not in managing customers as isolated buyers but in cultivating communities as collaborative ecosystems of value creation, identity formation, and collective advocacy. The Community-Driven Engagement Framework provides a theoretically grounded explanation of how community participation evolves into engagement, ownership, and advocacy, offering a more comprehensive understanding of consumer transformation within contemporary digital environments. As organizations continue to navigate increasingly interconnected and participatory marketplaces, understanding the mechanisms through which communities generate enduring relational value will become both a theoretical imperative and a strategic necessity. The framework proposed in this study therefore provides not only a foundation for future scholarly inquiry but also a pathway toward reimagining marketing as a community-centered process capable of transforming consumers from passive recipients of value into active architects of sustainable brand ecosystems.

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