Success factors of brand community management in social media

Vincent Göttel, Bernd W. Wirtz* and Paul F. Langer

Chair for Information and Communication Management, German University of Administrative Sciences Speyer, Freiherr-vom-Stein-Str. 2, 67346 Speyer, Germany
Fax: +49-(0)6232-654-247
Email: goettel@uni-speyer.de
Email: Ls-wirtz@uni-speyer.de
Email: langer@uni-speyer.de
*Corresponding author

Abstract: The rise of social media has significantly altered both consumer behaviour and the possibilities of companies to engage in brand community management. Alongside the operation of conventional brand communities, companies nowadays have the chance to manage communities on social media platforms. While the social media literature has considerably increased in recent years, there is a lack of studies focusing on success factors in terms of a broad range of specific content categories that community managers offer to generate the desired user engagement. Based on the uses and gratifications theory, the study deduces a model that supposes relationships between different content categories and user engagement as well as its effect on users’ brand trust and purchase intention. This model was largely supported by the structural equation model with data gathered from 247 users active in Facebook brand communities. The study finds entertaining, vivid, informative and credible content to have a positive influence on user engagement. In addition, the study confirms the influence of user engagement on brand trust and purchase intention, while brand trust mediates the relationship between user engagement and purchase intention.

Keywords: social networks; brand communities; Facebook; structural equation modelling; social media; success factors; branding.


Biographical notes: Vincent Göttel holds a Doctorate degree from the German University of Administrative Sciences Speyer, Germany and is a researcher at Faculty of Business Administration and Economics, Heinrich Heine University, Düsseldorf. His main research interests are social media, brand management, e-business, business model management and e-government.

Bernd W. Wirtz holds the Chair for Information and Communication Management as a Professor at German University of Administrative Sciences Speyer, Germany. His research interests include e-business, social media and business model management as well as digital and open government. He regularly publishes in peer-reviewed scientific journals, such as Long Range Planning, Public Management Review and Public Administration.
Paul F. Langer works as a Research Associate and is a PhD candidate at the Chair for Information and Communication Management at German University of Administrative Sciences Speyer, Germany. His main research interests are innovation diffusion, platform economics, cloud computing and digital government.

1 Introduction

Globalisation as well as the distribution and constant development of information and communication technologies have caused a change in the way online services are being used (Ma and Agarwal, 2007; Hofacker and Murphy, 2009). Within the broad scientific field of information and communication technologies, recent developments include the rise and increasing popularity of social media for users, which in turn also becomes relevant to companies that seek to present their products and services via social media. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p.61), social media can be defined as “[…] a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content.”

These social media applications range from social networks like Facebook, blogs, blogging platforms like Tumblr, microblogs like Twitter, content-sharing platforms like YouTube and Instagram, encyclopaedias like Wikipedia, instant messaging apps like WhatsApp and Snapchat, recommendation and review platforms like Yelp to social bookmarking platforms like Delicious.

In this context, social media management has developed into a specific information technology (IT) management area, in which different possibilities for companies exist to reach their target groups within these social media platforms. On the one hand, companies have the opportunity to place personalised ads in social media. On the other hand, they can create communities for their brands on various social media platforms (Chi, 2011; Chu, 2011; Naylor et al., 2012; Goh et al., 2013). While both ways hold great potential for companies, brand communities in social media seem to be particularly interesting and attractive due to their innovativeness and the fact that they can almost always be operated free of charge (cf., e.g., Facebook, 2017) (for the following chapters, see also: Göttel, 2018).

Therefore, this study also focuses on examining social media brand communities. While no generally acknowledged definition has been established for these communities in the scientific literature so far. Habibi et al. (2014a, p.125) state the following regarding their comprehension: “At the intersection of brands and social media are groups or communities of brand admirers which we label social media based brand communities.” As to the respective platforms for the creation and management of these communities by companies, social networks, within the broad offer of existing social media (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010), have so far emerged as one of the most effective instruments for the management activities of companies. In particular, Facebook, as the most popular social network with 1.87 billion monthly active users (Statista, 2017), offers companies a broad range of consumer groups that companies can target with their official Facebook pages or brand communities respectively.
Yet, surprisingly there is a lack of comprehensive scientific success factor studies focusing on a broad range of particular content categories that community managers can provide to generate user engagement in these Facebook brand communities (Rishika et al., 2013). In this regard, Rishika et al. (2013, p.125), for example, state that “[…] future research could also extend the current findings by studying whether different types of message postings by firms […] will elicit a different response from customers.” Likewise, Le Roux and Maree (2016, p.9) express a similar research need concerning the subject of social media brand communities: “Examining the influence of content type (entertainment, information […] would also be an informative study.”

Therefore, this study aims to identify comparable success factors of brand community management in social media with regard to relevant content categories and thus to contribute to closing the research gap existing in the scientific literature. Furthermore, in relation to studying the relevance of different contents created by community managers to increase user engagement, there is also a research interest in the value companies can obtain from this engagement: “The literature lacks rigorous quantification of the value of recurring engagement by consumers […] in such a community […]” [Goh et al., (2013), p.89].

In this regard, Solem and Andrine (2016, p.333), for example, also state in their more recent study that still “[…] empirical research on […] the effects of customer brand engagement (CBE) in social media, is lacking.” Accordingly, this study also examines the relationship between user engagement and users’ brand trust and purchase intention regarding the particular brands of the observed communities. In this regard, the study also observes whether users’ brand trust mediates the relationship between user engagement and purchase intention.

The paper is structured as follows: at the start, it includes a research overview regarding scientific studies that focus on the management of social media brand communities. Subsequently, it presents the theoretical background and conceptualisation of our research model. Next, the paper provides a section about our data collection and method, followed by a presentation of the study’s results based on a survey of 247 Facebook brand community users and structural equation modelling. Lastly, the discussion and conclusions sections outline theoretical and managerial implications, the study’s limitations as well as related ideas for future research.

2 Research overview

To illustrate the relevant field of research and identify connecting factors for the study, we illustrate several empirical studies regarding the management of brand communities in social media. In particular, we focus on studies dealing with content categories provided by the responsible community managers which can demonstrate the research potential in this regard and offer relevant constructs for deriving related success factors of brand community management in social media.

In this regard, among the earliest studies that focus on content categories related to the usage of social media brand communities is the one by Airs and Ang (2012). Without consulting any theoretical background, Airs and Ang (2012) can confirm positive effects of a high degree of informative, entertaining and interactive community contents on users’ attitude towards Facebook brand communities.
Furthermore, based on the uses and gratifications theory and the involvement theory, Jahn and Kunz (2012) find that both the functional and entertainment value resulting from the communities’ contents positively influence the usage intensity of fan pages on Facebook.

Also, again without indicating a theoretical foundation for their research model, Kim and Ko (2012) examine brand communities for Louis Vuitton on Facebook and Twitter. The authors can confirm positive effects of the perceived entertainment and interactivity within the community managers’ activities on Facebook and Twitter, on users’ word of mouth, the perceived brand’s value equity for the users, the perceived relationship equity between brand and users as well as brand equity in general.

Vries et al. (2012) also do not apply a theoretical background for their conceptual framework. In their study, they analyse brand communities in social networks, finding that both the interactivity and vividness of the community managers’ contents positively influence the post popularity of the brand.

Another relevant study from Chen et al. (2013) applies the uses and gratifications theory and can prove the existence of a positive influence of the entertainment value of the observed Facebook brand communities on users’ brand experience in the community and on their continuance intention due to their desire to interact with other users (‘we intention’).

Tsai and Men (2013) also draw on the uses and gratifications theory to develop their conceptual framework and are able to confirm positive effects of entertainment, information and remuneration on the usage of Facebook brand communities in the USA. However, they could not find a significant positive effect of perceived credibility of the community managers’ contents on user engagement.

Labrecque (2014) again observes the interactivity of community managers’ contents and proves it as being an influential factor regarding the parasocial interaction between the community managers and the users as well as their brand loyalty based on the parasocial interaction theory. The basis for these results are 185 users active in different brand communities on Facebook, blogs, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest, Foursquare, Google+, etc.

Park and Kim (2014) only examine brand communities on Facebook. Based on the social response theory, the social penetration theory and the reciprocal action theory, they find that the experiential benefit of the respective community managers’ contents positively affects users’ perception of the relationship quality between users and the community, as well as their perception of the community managers’ investment in this relationship. The latter user perception is further influenced by the functional benefit of the community managers’ contents.

Hsu et al. (2015) again apply the uses and gratifications theory in their study about Facebook brand communities, confirming that both perceived news entertainment and news informativeness positively impact users’ attitude toward the news of the observed communities.

Lastly, one can mention the study by Nisar and Whitehead (2016) which draws on the brand equity framework to observe brand community users on different social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter and Google+). The authors find that users trust the informative contents provided by the managers of the observed communities.

In summary, the aforementioned studies include entertaining, entertaining or experiential, informative or functional, vivid, remunerative, interactive and credible contents of the respective community managers which are related to the usage of the
observed social media brand communities or similar constructs. However, these studies only include a few of the mentioned content categories.

Therefore, this study aims to generate more comprehensive results and includes the aforementioned categories of entertaining, informative, vivid, interactive and credible contents as success factors and influential factors of user engagement. This study does not consider remunerative content since it is perceived in the relevant literature as being original within the context of social media (Tsai and Men, 2013). Accordingly, it is beyond dispute that users of social media brand communities at least partly use them in order to obtain coupons, discounts, etc. regarding the respective brands. Therefore, it seems that there is no further urgent research needed concerning this factor.

Apart from that, some of the illustrated studies do not use any theoretical background and the remaining studies also use differing theories for dealing with social media brand communities. Nevertheless, we could identify the uses and gratifications theory as the most frequently applied theory and prevailing theoretical background.

As illustrated in more detail in the following section, the uses and gratifications theory also provides appropriate reference points and support for the research endeavour. Therefore, we chose the uses and gratifications theory as the theoretical background of this study and developed the conceptual model, as outlined in the following sections.

3 Theoretical background and conceptualisation

Examining success factors of brand community management within social media in a complex empirical manner, and in this case, the particular effect of relationships between content categories provided by community managers and user engagement in these communities, requires an adequate theoretical background. Therefore, we introduce the uses and gratifications theory as the basis for the conceptualisation and development of our research model. More specifically, we first theoretically search for relevant influential factors of user engagement in social media brand communities in combination with the relevant literature. Based on the relevant literature, we then identify further relevant relationships of user engagement and their potential consequences for the conceptual model. To verify the conceptualisation based on our theory and the literature, we conduct interviews with users of Facebook brand communities and perform a content analysis of Facebook brand communities.

3.1 Uses and gratifications theory

The uses and gratifications theory provides an approach for understanding the reasons people actively opt for certain media to satisfy specific needs (McQuail, 2010). While earlier research applied the theoretical approach for observing phenomena regarding traditional media like radio (Herzog, 1944) or television (Rubin, 1981), more recent studies also include the uses and gratifications theory to examine the usage of cell phones (Leung and Wei, 2000), the internet in general (Larose et al., 2001; Stafford et al., 2004) as well as social media in particular (Smock et al., 2011; Chen, 2011; Leung, 2013).

Within the mentioned social media-related studies based on the uses and gratifications theory, one can further differentiate between studies about the acceptance
of advertising in social media (Taylor et al., 2011) and studies about social media brand communities (see the research overview of this article).

While the respective authors were already successful in proving several of their proposed relationships based on the uses and gratifications theory, the pertinent literature also stresses its applicability for examining social media-related phenomena: “Based on UG theory, recent studies have explored motivations for using SNSs [Social Networking Sites] in general and reported that […] the key motivators for traditional media usage […] remain applicable to social media” (Tsai and Men, 2013).

Regarding these established motivations or uses and gratifications media consumers seek to obtain, authors dealing with the theory’s development frequently mention entertainment-oriented motivations like diversion and relaxation, escape from routine or problems, excitement or enjoyment. Also, they quite often list rather functionally-oriented motivations like information, education on both general and specific topics, guidance and advice. In addition, particularly social motivations like personal relationships, enhancing connections with family and friends, as well as social interaction and connection with others are frequently mentioned (McQuail, 2010; West and Turner, 2014).

Summarising these motivations, Blanchflower and Watchravesringkan (2014, p.20), for example, state regarding the identification of crucial motivations for using media in general: “The theory of the uses and gratifications is a communication perspective that has been used in a myriad of fields to examine the […] motivations that drive media users’ media selections […] it is suggested that all media satisfy a set of broader motivations (entertainment, information, social integration/interaction).”

In this context, researchers can initially apply the uses and gratifications theory to infer relevant motivations for media usage in general and also for the use of social media brand communities in particular. Yet, there is also a further development of the theory which is even more suitable for the research endeavour of deriving content categories provided by managers of the communities. Concerning this matter, Palmgreen et al. (1985, p.27) state: “[…] media scholars […] stressed the need to distinguish between the motives for media consumption or gratifications sought (GS) and the gratifications perceived to be obtained (GO) from this experience […]”

In this connection, it seems important for the study that alongside with the relevance of users’ initial motivations or gratifications sought through the usage and dependent on the gratifications perceived to be obtained by users from the media and their contents, users either repeatedly make use of the respective medium or switch to competing providers. This is related to another assumption of the uses and gratifications theory according to which the respective media to be chosen also compete against other sources that may be potentially better suited to satisfy user needs (Katz et al., 1973; West and Turner, 2014). Figure 1 illustrates the former thoughts by use of the so-called GS/GO model.

Transferred to the particular research context of social media brand communities, this model implies that their repeated usage is dependent on their contents’ ability to satisfy user needs. As this usage is crucial for the persistence of the communities and is thus to be seen as a desirable goal and success for the respective brands or companies, it is important to consider which contents positively influence usage of social media brand communities. In this regard, it initially comes to mind that those content categories that take into account the illustrated entertainment, information and social motivations
established in the uses and gratifications research concerning the usage of various media are essential.

Figure 1  GS/GO model

Based on the uses and gratifications theory, the following section therefore derives related content categories provided by community managers as success factors of social media brand community management and also adds further content categories to the investigation based on the relevant literature.

3.2  Success factors of social media brand community management

Against the background of the uses and gratifications theory, we act on the assumption that certain gratifications perceived to be obtained by users through respective contents provided by managers of social media brand communities positively influence user engagement due to the related underlying usage motivations which are taken into account through these contents. More specifically, we propose that entertaining, vivid, informative, interactive and credible contents provided by community managers have a positive effect on user engagement in social media brand communities, and in this connection, derive these contents as success factors of social media brand community management in this study.

3.3  Entertaining content

The first success factor in this study is called entertaining content. Researchers have already applied this factor or comparable constructs, like perceived news entertainment or simply entertainment, in studies concerning the usage of social media brand communities (Airs and Ang, 2012; Cvijikj and Michahelles, 2013; Kim and Ko, 2012; Hsu et al., 2015). Hsu et al. (2015, p.485), for example, define it “[...] as the degree of the users’ perceived excitement, enjoyment and pleasant from the news posted on the fan page.”

Based on this understanding, we also conceptualise the factor entertaining content in this study, following the uses and gratifications theory’s postulate according to which the satisfaction of user needs through media positively influences media usage. Given the previously confirmed hedonic or entertainment motivation in uses and gratifications research concerning the usage of different media, we also assume that, particularly in the context of social media brand communities, users are interested in entertaining content and have a related need for it.

On the one hand, this can be suggested because of findings of earlier studies with regard to the usage of social media brand communities but also of related media, like
conventional websites, online brand communities and social networks as well as users’ favourable perception of entertaining ads on the internet (Jahn and Kunz, 2012; Hsu et al., 2015). On the other hand, the relevance of the need for entertaining content when using social media brand communities can also be explained in light of peoples’ stressful life in modern society which leads them to look for possibilities of distraction or find emotional release. As social media brand communities can particularly cater to this need by delivering a suitable offer, we suppose that entertaining contents provided by the responsible community managers will contribute to users’ engagement in these communities. Based on the formerly illustrated theoretical considerations, we can also presume that the satisfaction of the need for entertainment through respective contents provided by the community managers has a positive impact on the usage of social media brand communities.

With regard to comparable conceptualisations in earlier studies, Cvijikj and Michahelles (2013), we deduct the construct of entertainment based on the uses and gratifications theory as a driver of user engagement in social media brand communities, proving a positive effect. In addition, both the conducted user interviews and the content analysis of brand communities on Facebook prove the success factor of entertaining content.

Therefore, we conceptualise the entertaining content provided by the community managers as the first success factor in this article, assuming that it positively influences user engagement in the social media brand communities to be observed. Concerning this matter, Hypothesis 1 of the conceptual model of this study is formulated as follows:

Hypothesis 1 (H1) Entertaining content of the community managers positively influences user engagement in social media brand communities.

3.4 Vivid content

Vivid content of community managers represents the second success factor in this study. Comparable factors like vividness, for instance, have previously been investigated by Vries et al. (2012) as well as Cvijikj and Michahelles (2013) with regard to the usage of social media brand communities.

Thereby, the factor is understood in the literature as follows:

“Vividness reflects the richness of a brand post’s formal features; in other words, it is the extent to which a brand post stimulates the different senses […]. Vividness can be achieved by the inclusion of dynamic animations, (contrasting) colors, or pictures […]. The degree of vividness can differ in the way that it stimulates multiple senses […]. For example, a video is more vivid than a picture because the former stimulates not only sight, but also hearing.” (Vries et al., 2012)

This understanding also represents the basis for conceptualising the success factor of vivid content provided by the community managers in this study. In doing so, as with the conceptualisation of entertaining content, we likewise draw on the assumption of the uses and gratifications theory, according to which the satisfaction of user needs through media and their contents is positively related to the usage of these media (McQuail, 2010).

To this effect, users’ need for vivid content particularly appears to be reasonable as, due to the technical possibilities of social media in general, users will most likely expect
quite a diversity of contents in terms of photos, videos, links, livestreams, etc. than mere textual posts (Cvijikj and Michahelles, 2013).

If the responsible community managers then indeed provide a sufficient degree of comparable vivid content, one can expect, in accordance with the uses and gratifications theory, that the related satisfaction of needs through the community managers will positively affect usage of social media brand communities. Furthermore, the conceptualisation of vivid content as a success factor has also been verified by the conducted user interviews and a content analysis of Facebook brand communities.

Accordingly, the vivid content provided by managers of the observed communities is conceptualised as the second success factor of the study’s conceptual model, which is presumed to positively affect user engagement in these communities. Hence, the following second hypothesis in this article reads as follows:

Hypothesis 2 (H2) Vivid content of the community managers positively influences user engagement in social media brand communities.

### 3.5 Informative content

The third success factor in this study refers to informative content of the responsible community managers. In the existing literature, so far, authors have already used it as informative content but also as information or perceived news informativeness (Airs and Ang, 2012; Cvijikj and Michahelles, 2013; Hsu et al., 2015).

Hsu et al. (2015, p.485), for instance, define the respective factor of their study as follows: “Perceived news informativeness refers [to] the users’ perceived quality levels, including relevance, timeliness and accuracy, of the information provided by the news published on fan pages […]”

In this paper, we follow a comparable understanding for conceptualising the success factor of informative content. In this connection, again the uses and gratifications theory offers a suitable approach to explain user engagement in social media brand communities through informative content, especially when thinking of the previously confirmed information motivation of recipients in the uses and gratifications research about different media.

In particular, comparable to the above-illustrated content categories, one can assume based on the theory that informative content by community managers, when satisfying the respective need of users, will also contribute to use of social media brand communities. To this effect, the existence of exactly this need stands to reason when thinking of a brand community’s definition that puts the brand at its centre stage (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). Thus, a general interest of users in information about this brand appears to be self-evident.

In addition, in times of consistent product innovations and commoditisation (van Riel et al., 2005), consumers’ search for information explains itself because in this way they can better compare different brands and thus find the best price-performance ratio before making a purchase decision.

Regarding comparable conceptualisations of the construct of informative content based on the uses and gratifications theory, one can also consult earlier studies. For example, Cvijikj and Michahelles (2013) likewise conceptualise the construct of information based on the theory as an influential factor of user engagement in social media brand communities and can prove an according positive effect.
Besides this, again the conducted user interviews and content analysis of Facebook brand communities support the theoretical development. Therefore, we conceptualise the informative content provided by community managers as the third success factor, which is assumed to positively impact user engagement in social media brand communities. Concerning this content category, we formulate the third hypothesis of the conceptual model as follows:

Hypothesis 3 (H3) Informative content of the community managers positively influences user engagement in social media brand communities.

3.6 Interactive content

Interactive content of community managers represents the fourth success factor in this study. This factor has become established in the relevant literature through several earlier studies that confirm its importance. More specifically, researchers have investigated constructs like interactive content but also interaction or interactivity (Airs and Ang, 2012; Kim and Ko, 2012; Labrecque, 2014; Vries et al., 2012). While there is no consensus in the literature regarding the factor’s definition (Labrecque, 2014), within her study about social media brand communities, Labrecque (2014, p.136) defines it as follows: “Specifically, interactivity is defined as being dependent on the user’s perception of taking part in a two-way communication with a mediated persona. In this context, the term interactivity does not focus on the technological features of the site, but on the content and cues within the message itself, which can be used to create an impression that the persona is listening to and interacting with the viewer in a timely fashion.”

This research follows the conceptualisation of Labrecque (2014) as opposed to understanding interactivity in social media brand communities as technical functionality of the underlying social media platform. Referring to this, one can again assume based on the uses and gratifications theory that also the satisfaction of the users’ need for interactive content by the community managers will positively influence the use of social media brand communities, given the formerly proved importance of a social motivation in uses and gratifications research with regard to the usage of various media.

The need for interactive content as well as the according gratification as an influential factor for using the medium generally appears to be comprehensible in the context of social media and brand communities in which exchange and interaction take centre stage (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Pongsakomrungsip and Schroeder, 2011). Also, when thinking of the specific definition of a brand community according to which the brand itself is at the centre of the community (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001), it stands to reason to assume that there is a user need for interacting with the representatives of the brand in the community, that is with the community managers.

Concerning this matter, one can further expect that particularly a timely interaction or responsiveness of the community managers mentioned in the above-illustrated definition is of importance for users due to a general lack of time in current society and the fact that they are used to real-time communication in social media. The findings of earlier studies concerning interactive content of social media brand communities further support the previously addressed connection based on the uses and gratifications theory. For example, Vries et al. (2012) have already established a positive relationship between community managers’ interactive content and user engagement in social media brand communities. Furthermore, the conducted user interviews and content analysis of
Facebook brand communities confirm the interactive content of community managers as a relevant success factor.

Thus, we conceptualise the interactive content of community managers as the fourth success factor in this study, proposing that it will positively influence user engagement in social media brand communities. Therefore, we formulate the following fourth hypothesis of the conceptual model:

Hypothesis 4 (H4) Interactive content of the community managers positively influences user engagement in social media brand communities.

3.7 Credible content

The last success factor in this study refers to credible content of the community managers. Similar factors like perceived credibility or authenticity have been investigated by researchers in earlier studies regarding the usage of social media brand communities (Tsai and Men, 2013; Pronschinske et al., 2012). Pertinent literature regards the construct of credibility in terms of the particular single credibility or authenticity of content which is provided by community managers as opposed to the credibility of the communicators themselves (Kang, 2013). The study at hand follows this understanding in conceptualising the credible content of the community managers since in the case of observing official brand communities on Facebook, the credibility of the community managers as actual representatives of the respective companies is already guaranteed and demonstrated by Facebook.

Just with the conceptualisation of the preceding success factors, one can again draw on the assumption of the uses and gratifications theory according to which the gratification of user needs leads to further usage of this media (McQuail, 2010). In this regard, one can also argue for the meaningfulness of users’ need for credible content of the community managers and thus its respective fulfilment as a driver of usage of social media brand community.

Against the backdrop of recent corporate scandals and the development of the savvy consumers, that is very well-informed and critical consumers (Scott, 2011), one should expect that those consumers demand transparency and credibility across all communication channels and thus also in social media brand communities. As these users would probably notice wrong or non-credible content in the community due to their already distinct knowledge about the respective brands, it seems therefore essential for the responsible community managers to take users seriously and not to try to deceive them in any kind of way.

The findings of earlier studies about social media brand communities further prove the formerly mentioned relationship derived from the uses and gratifications theory. Pronschinske et al. (2012), for instance, confirm that the semantically similar construct of authenticity of the respective communities and their contents positively influences user participation.

Furthermore, the conducted user interviews support the success factor of credible content by the community managers. Therefore, we conceptualise the credible content of community managers as the last success factor of the conceptual model of this study, assuming that it will positively affect user engagement in social media brand communities. Thus, the following fifth hypothesis for this study reads as follows:
Hypothesis 5 (H5) Credible content of the community managers positively influences user engagement in the social media brand community.

3.8 User engagement

After having introduced the success factors of social media brand community in the previous subsections, the following introduces the construct of user engagement as the first dependent variable of this study. This construct is already established in the literature concerning the use of social media brand communities. For example, earlier studies have conceptualised constructs like community engagement behaviour, fan page engagement, community engagement practices and customer engagement (Jahn and Kunz, 2012; Lee et al., 2011; Laroche et al., 2012; Chan et al., 2014).

Jahn and Kunz (2012, p.349), for example, define the construct of user engagement as follows: “Transferring the engagement construct to the context of a fan page, we define fan-page engagement as an interactive and integrative participation in the fan-page community and would differentiate this from the solely usage intensity of a member.”

This definition of the construct that goes beyond a mere usage intensity and rather focuses on the actual participation of users in the community is also adopted in this study. Thus, we conceptualise the construct of user engagement in social media brand communities based on this understanding.

To this effect, we first draw on a further reference point of the uses and gratifications theory, according to which the usage of media in general and thus also the mere usage of social media brand communities in particular for reasons of customer retention may already represent a form of success for the providing companies.

This is the case, since the uses and gratifications theory postulates that existing media generally compete with other content providers or sources which can either be better or worse suited to satisfy user needs. One can also transfer this aspect to brand communities in social media as competing brands are also present on the relevant social media platforms trying to win over consumers.

Given this connection between usage and the related success for the providing companies, we can initially derive user engagement in social media brand communities as the first dependent variable of this study and examine the aforementioned direct impact of success factors thereon.

This can be justified both in the context of social media and brand communities which are both made for giving users a voice, as well as because of the surplus companies can generate from such user engagement. In more detail, user engagement can strengthen the relationship between the respective brands and users.

These considerations are also in line with an earlier definition of the consumer engagement concept in conventional online brand communities which, in light of achieving the mentioned surplus, emphasises the crucial role of user engagement for the prosperity of the relationship between brand and consumer, both in terms of the exchange between users and the brand but also among users (Brodie et al., 2013). The following section about the effects of user engagement illustrates further constructs that appear to play a significant role in this regard.
### 3.9 Effects of user engagement

Within the aforementioned context of conventional online brand communities, Brodie et al. (2013) suggest that the addressed engagement of users or consumers is connected to further important concepts which are relevant for community management.

Concerning other concepts as consequences of user engagement in online brand communities, Brodie et al. (2013) suggest a positive effect on users’ brand trust which researchers also already proved in studies on the usage of social media brand communities (Kang et al., 2015).

This effect relationship particularly appears to be reasonable as users can gain additional knowledge about the brand through their active engagement in the community and the related exchange with community managers and other users which ultimately can increase trust (Kang et al., 2015).

Furthermore, with regard to potential consequences of customer engagement, van Doorn et al. (2010, p.259) name in their framework “[…] financial consequences for the firm”, which comparably have already been confirmed in relation to the usage of social media brand communities in terms of the construct of purchase intention (Chan et al., 2014). One can also plausibly explain the assumption of this effect relationship as users may develop a desire for products or services of the brand and thus a purchase intention through their engagement and related consumption of photos and videos about the brand but also due to hints of other users, for example, about certain discounts in particular shops.

**Figure 2** Conceptual model

Based on the previous considerations, we can summarise that both brand trust and purchase intention are further conceptualised as consequences of user engagement in social media brand communities and in this way further enhance the conceptual model. Put differently, we propose that user engagement positively influences both brand trust and purchase intention, which is formulated in the following Hypotheses 6 and 7 of this study. Likewise, concerning these constructs, we investigate whether and how brand trust mediates the above-mentioned positive relationship between user engagement and purchase intention, as depicted in Hypothesis 8. Figure 2 illustrates all of the developed hypotheses within the conceptual model of this study.
Hypothesis 6 (H6)  User engagement in the social media brand community positively influences users’ brand trust.

Hypothesis 7 (H7)  User engagement in the social media brand community positively influences users’ purchase intention.

Hypothesis 8 (H8)  Users’ brand trust mediates the relationship between user engagement in the social media brand community and purchase intention.

4 Data and method

Within social and economic research, structural equation modelling has proven to be an appropriate method to analyse complex model structures with latent variables (Hair et al., 2010; Kline, 2011). As the complexity of the research model also necessitates an according research method, we likewise apply structural equation modelling in this study. To this effect, we follow a methodological confirmatory explicative approach by examining pre-specified relationships between different variables through observations in reality (Hair et al., 2010; Bhattacharjee, 2012).

Structural equation modelling can be differentiated into variance and covariance-based structural analysis. While each approach has certain advantages and disadvantages, before using either one, researchers have to cautiously test in advance which approach suits best respective research endeavours (Chin and Newsted, 1999). While the variance-based approach has the goal of reproducing the actual data structure and is used for prognosis, covariance-based structural analysis aims at explaining empirical data structures (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). “If the research objective is theory testing and confirmation, then the appropriate method is CB-SEM. In contrast, if the research objective is prediction and theory development, then the appropriate method is PLS-SEM” [Hair et al., (2011), p.140]. Since this study has a confirmatory, hypothesis-testing character, we opted for the covariance-based structural analysis to examine the conceptual model of this study. Therefore, we estimated the model by means of maximum likelihood estimation in AMOS 22.0.

4.1 Data collection and sample

For this study, we conducted a quantitative user survey and tested the conceptual model by use of primary data gathered from German-speaking users of brand communities on Facebook. In more detail, as researchers recommend to focus on a particular industry regarding social media brand communities (Jahn and Kunz, 2012; Habibi et al., 2014b; Hsu et al., 2015), we exclusively focused on surveying users of brand communities of sporting goods manufacturers on Facebook (Adidas, Nike, Puma, Asics, New Balance, Reebok, Under Armour, Diadora, Vans, Converse, Brooks, Salomon, Atomic, Billabong and Garmin). The survey was carried out from November 2016 till January 2017 and generated a sample of 247 valid responses and thus exceeds the requirements of the N:q rule of 20:1 as recommended by Kline (2016, p.16) and Jackson (2003). Considering our model with eight latent construct, the sample size should be at least at N = 160. As an incentive to participate, the contributors were given the opportunity to participate in a raffle of sneakers.
The population for studying the success factors of social media brand community management with a particular focus on the sporting goods industry on Facebook would be the totality of all users of Facebook brand communities of sports brands. Yet, as the user numbers of the relevant brand communities on Facebook are extraordinarily high [e.g., Adidas with above 26 million users, cf. Adidas (2017)], addressing every user and potential survey participant was simply not accomplishable. In this regard, we approached users both via personal messages and posts in the respective brand communities. While it stands to reason why not every single user of this mass could be contacted via personal message on Facebook within a reasonable time frame, there are some further characteristics of Facebook brand communities that prevent us from calculating an exact response rate for the data collection procedure. First, while the survey link was posted on a regular basis within the aforementioned communities, it was impossible to identify the actual number of users exposed to the survey link. This is the case because many registered users may not regularly visit the actual page of the Facebook brand community and thus may have missed the survey link. Further, while users are also able to view contents of the communities on their newsfeed, they would have likewise missed the respective posts about the survey if they have generally chosen not to receive community updates. Besides, as there is a multitude of posts in these communities that only remain visible on the page for a certain amount of time, a significant amount of the community users may also simply have overlooked the links (cf. Pöyry et al., 2013).

Regarding the characteristics of the sample, 67.46% of the respondents were men and 33.54% were women. While the vast majority is younger than 35 years (88.09%), the participants’ age was on average 26.32 years. Respondents largely use Facebook between two and ten hours per week (48.80%), whereas also a notable part uses it even more than ten hours per week (40.50%). Concerning the respondents’ activities on Facebook, the largest proportion of respondents post, like, comment and share content more than ten times per week (46.80%), whereas at least also 35.70% of the respondents do so between two and ten times per week and only a comparably small percentage does so less than two times per week (17.50%). Regarding the number of Facebook friends, the large majority of 73.00% has more than 200 friends, 22.20% of the respondents have between 50 and 200 friends and only a very small part has less than 50 friends (4.80%). Further, concerning the particular usage of Facebook brand communities, 59.90% indicate a usage of less than two hours a week, whereas the rest of the respondents use the respective Facebook brand communities two hours and more (40.10%). Lastly, concerning the respondents’ activities within the Facebook brand communities, while 55.20% post, like, comment or share less than two times per week, there is still a percentage of 44.80% of the respondents who do so two times and more per week of which even 21.00% post, like, comment or share more than five times per week within the communities.

Summarising, the sample indicates that the survey participants are familiar with and well-versed in the use of Facebook and Facebook brand communities and therefore can also be regarded as active users. Thus, they seem suitable for the investigation of success factors in social media brand community management in terms of influential factors of user engagement. Table 1 provides an overview of the sample characteristics.
Table 1  Sample characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Sample (N = 247)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>67.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>32.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13–17 years</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18–24 years</td>
<td>38.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25–34 years</td>
<td>42.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35–44 years</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45–54 years</td>
<td>2.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 years and older</td>
<td>0.79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook usage per week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 2 hours</td>
<td>10.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2–10 hours</td>
<td>48.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 10 hours</td>
<td>40.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook posts/likes/comments/shares per week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 2</td>
<td>17.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2–10</td>
<td>35.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 10</td>
<td>46.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Facebook friends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 50 friends</td>
<td>4.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50–200 friends</td>
<td>22.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 200 friends</td>
<td>73.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook brand community usage per week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 2 hours</td>
<td>59.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2–5 hours</td>
<td>28.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 5 hours</td>
<td>11.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook brand community posts/likes/comments/shares per week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 2</td>
<td>55.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3–5</td>
<td>23.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 5</td>
<td>21.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As with the particular population of German-speaking users of Facebook brand communities of the sporting goods industry for this study, there is the problem that comprehensive corresponding statistics that list users’ demographic or structural characteristics do simply not exist. Therefore, one needs to look for an alternative way to check for the sample’s representativeness. Concerning this matter, the sample can be compared to the population of Facebook users in Germany in general by means of the structural characteristics of age and gender (Statista, 2014; allfacebook.de, 2013). In this regard, we conducted chi²-homogeneity tests. First, concerning the surveyed age of the users, the chi²-homogeneity test results in a value of 3.455. Compared to the
95%-quantile of a chi²-distribution with df = 5 (Hair et al., 2010), there is no significant difference between the sample and the population mentioned. Secondly, regarding the gender of the survey participants, the chi²-homogeneity test results in a value of 6.023. Compared to the 99%-quantile of a chi²-distribution with df = 1 (Hair et al., 2010), there is also no significant difference between the sample and the population.

4.2 Checking for biases

Concerns about biases in data collection arise with any survey. Therefore, the data collected has to be checked for systematic biases (Groves, 2004). To this effect, as a first measure we tested for non-response bias. The non-response bias can occur due to a lack of information from the population’s non-responding test persons (Ruxton, 2006). Referring to this, there is one established approach in the literature that compares the earliest-responding survey participants with the latest-responding participants, which are supposed to represent the responding and non-responding participants respectively (Armstrong and Overton, 1977; Lindner et al., 2001). This procedure rests upon the assumption that the latest-responding participants are most similar to the non-respondents (Kanuk and Berenson, 1975).

In line with this understanding, we conducted a Mann-Whitney-U-test to check for non-response bias by comparing earliest and latest-responding participants. As a result, we could not detect any relevant non-response bias for this study since the analysis reveals that only approximately 9.6% of the indicators show a significant deviation.

Furthermore, several remedies have been applied to avoid and test for common method bias. Before conducting the survey, we followed the recommendation of Chang et al. (2010) according to which the operationalisation of the exogenous and the endogenous variables is to be conducted based on different sources. Based on further recommendations from the methodical literature, we suggested on the starting page that the anonymity of the participants and the confidential treatment of their data within the analysis were ensured to avoid a potential common method bias due to social desirable answers of the participants. We also emphasised that this study is an independent scientific research endeavour for which the truthful contribution of every single participant is of great importance (Salkind, 2010).

Furthermore, we performed a Harman-one-factor test and calculated the Guttman-split-half coefficient after conducting the survey. By means of the Harman-one-factor test, we analysed all indicators of the study via an exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation. As a result, the conducted analysis extracts 54 factors in total, of which 8 show a value of above 1. Since the factor that explains the highest variance of those eight factors only explains 11.542% and no factor explains 50% or more of the variance of all indicators, one can assume that a common method bias or variance is not present in this study (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986; McFarlin and Sweeney, 1992).

In addition, we controlled for common method bias by determining the Guttman-split-half-reliability. Thereby, two halves of the study results are compared by means of their correlation with each other. Since authors in the relevant methodical literature state a lower limit of 0.6 for proving the respective reliability (Crocker and Algina, 2009), a value of 0.846 for this study lies well above the demanded threshold, thus also arguing against a common method bias.
At this point, also no common source bias seems to apply for this study, since researchers predominantly discuss this methodical problem and according remedies with regard to key informant designs and the related organisational research (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986; Podsakoff et al., 2003; Homburg et al., 2012) in companies or other organisations and most frequently not for user surveys and the related perceptional constructs of individuals, like in the study at hand.

Furthermore, the influence of common method bias is controversial in the methodical literature in general. For example, based on their meta-study, Homburg et al. (2012, p.606) suggest that not necessarily every measurement of different variables has to be biased just because it is measured with the same method: “Our results support Spector’s (2006) claim that it is an urban legend that everything measured with the same method automatically shares common method variance.”

4.3 Operationalisation of the constructs

To take care of the reliability and validity of the study results, we already followed a multi-stage process during the development of the survey instrument, as recommended by DeVellis (2012). In this regard, the starting point for the operationalisation of the study’s constructs has been the analysis of the relevant literature. In a second step, scales have been discussed with experts from research in semi-structured interviews. Further, we performed Anderson and Gerbing’s (1982) item sorting-test which mainly serves to evaluate the indicators’ performance within a confirmatory factor analysis. As the final step in the development of the survey instrument, we conducted a pretest. In this connection, we used 43 completed questionnaires to test the validity and reliability of the instrument by calculating Cronbach’s alpha and the item-to-total correlations (ITK), as well as executing an exploratory factor analysis. As all three criteria were fulfilled, the main survey could be conducted as it was.

The measures for the formerly illustrated latent constructs are based on the following references from the literature. Concerning the exogenous variables of this study, we measured entertaining content by combining the scales from Jahn and Kunz (2012), Chen et al. (2013) and Hsu et al. (2015). Moreover, we included one self-developed indicator in the questionnaire which was also verified through the previously described expert interviews and the tests of the survey development. In this way, the final scale for the construct entertaining content consisted of seven indicators of which we retained four after assessing the measurement model, which is illustrated in the following results section. The operationalisation of vivid content was based on the scales by Vries et al. (2012) and Cvijikj and Michahelles (2013). Here, we added two further self-developed indicators, leading to a final scale of six indicators which had to be reduced to three indicators after assessment. For the measurement of informative content, we combined indicators from Chi (2011), Almeida et al. (2013), Kuo and Feng (2013) and Hsu et al. (2015) with one self-developed indicator, resulting in a final scale of seven indicators. After assessing the measurement model, we could retain four indicators. While we measured the construct of interactive content by means of a combination of indicators from Jang et al. (2008), Kuo and Feng (2013) and Labrecque (2014) with a final scale of seven indicators, we used indicators from Chi (2011) and Tsai and Men (2013) as well as one further indicator we developed ourselves to measure credible content, leading to a total of seven indicators. Regarding interactive and credible content, we retained four indicators for each.
The measurement of the endogenous variable user engagement was based on the operationalisation of Vries et al. (2012) and Tsai and Men (2013) and thus seven indicators of which we preserved three indicators in the end. The endogenous variable brand trust was operationalised based on Kang (2011), Laroche et al. (2012) and Habibi et al. (2014b) with seven indicators. Here, we could retain even six indicators after assessing reliability and validity of the measurement model of brand trust. Lastly, the measurement of the construct of purchase intention rested upon the scales of Gupta et al. (2010), Kim and Ko (2012), Hutter et al. (2013) and Algesheimer et al. (2005), resulting in a final scale of six indicators of which four indicators passed the assessment of the measurement model.

Of course, all of the indicators mentioned had to undergo some changes with regard to the particular research subject of this study and the related investigation of users of particular brand communities on Facebook.

5 Results

The following section illustrates the empirical results of the study. In this regard, we first present the results with regard to the measurement models. All constructs in the research model were specified reflective [for the distinction between reflective and formative indicators, see Bollen and Lennox (1991), Edwards and Bagozzi (2000)], thus making according validity and reliability tests necessary to check for the measurement quality.

Concerning this matter, we first calculated the factor loadings Cronbach’s alpha, the ITK and the explained variance on the construct level. The respective threshold values for the different criteria are based on the suggestions of Anderson and Gerbing (1982) and Bagozzi and Yi (1988). According to the suggestion of Anderson and Gerbing (1988) regarding the purification of measurement models, some indicators also have to be removed from further investigation.

Furthermore, the criteria of CFI, TLI, GFI and AGFI as well as the SRMR and RMSEA are of importance concerning the overall model fit (Hair et al., 2010). Further evaluation criteria include an exploratory factor analysis, a confirmatory factor analysis and the Fornell/Larcker criterion (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2010; Kline, 2011). Afterwards, the hypotheses of the conceptual model are tested as part of the structural model’s analysis.

5.1 Measurement models

First, the analysis of the measurement models shows that all the exogenous constructs of entertaining, vivid, informative, interactive and credible content are in line with the criteria of the first generation. Secondly, also the endogenous constructs of user engagement, brand trust and purchase intention fulfil the threshold values of the first generation criteria (see Appendix for details). In addition, we conducted further complementary tests to evaluate the measurement models. We began by executing an exploratory factor analysis with the residual 19 items of the five exogenous constructs, and subsequently, with the remaining 13 items of the three endogenous constructs. The results show that the analyses identify the proposed structures. Also, we performed confirmatory factor analyses of both all exogenous and endogenous constructs
respectively, which further prove that the data reflects the indicators’ assignment to the respective constructs (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). In addition, we found the average variances extracted to be higher than the respective squared correlations between the constructs, which supports the assumption that the used constructs are discriminant valid according to the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion.

5.2 Structural model

In this section, we further estimate the formerly conceptualised model by use of structural equation modelling. Concerning the particular results, the individual path coefficients of the exogenous constructs reflect the importance of each construct for user engagement, implying that the higher the coefficient, the stronger is the particular construct’s influence. Besides, we also examine the effects of user engagement on both brand trust and purchase intention as well as the influence of brand trust on purchase intention within the research model of this study. Concerning the latter effect, we further investigate whether brand trust acts as a mediator in the relationship between user engagement and purchase intention. Figure 3 depicts the respective structural equation modelling results and the relevant fit statistics.

![Diagram](image_url)

**Figure 3** Structural model

|x2 = 796,090  CFI = 0.955  AGFI = 0.960  RMSEA = 0.056  X^2/df = 1.785  n = 247 | n.s. = non-significant |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|df = 446  TLI = 0.949  GFI = 0.966  SRMR = 0.068 |

All results of the local and global fit measures fulfil the respective thresholds and largely point to a good overall model fit. First, the model indicates that there are four significant success factors influencing user engagement and two significant positive effects of user engagement on brand trust and purchase intention, while brand trust also positively impacts purchase intention. Entertaining content has the highest positive effect (0.438) on user engagement, followed by credible content (0.273), informative content (0.139) and vivid content (0.123). Only interactive content shows no significant effect.

Overall, the success factors investigated in this study explain 69% of the variance of the endogenous construct of user engagement, which is a ‘substantial’ result according to the relevant methodical literature (Chin, 1998). Moreover, we found a significant positive effect of user engagement on both brand trust (0.614) and purchase intention (0.266). In addition, brand trust positively influences purchase intention on a significant level (0.461) and also mediates the relationship between user engagement and purchase intention.
Discussion and conclusions

Within the broader field of information systems management, the particular goal of this study has been to investigate relevant success factors of social media brand community management in terms of the content categories that community managers can provide to foster user engagement in the respective communities, as well as the consequences of this engagement regarding users’ brand trust and purchase intention. Resting upon the uses and gratifications theory and the relevant literature, we developed a conceptual model comprised by the exogenous constructs or success factors of entertaining, vivid, informative, interactive and credible content as well as the endogenous constructs of user engagement, brand trust and purchase intention.

Based on the conducted empirical study, we initially tested the effects of the above-mentioned success factors on user engagement in the observed brand communities of sports brands on Facebook. Our findings show that four out of the five initially proposed success factors positively influence user engagement on a significant level. In this connection, entertaining content has the strongest impact. This result initially appears to be plausible as entertaining content or the entertainment motivation of users has earlier been proven as one of the key reasons for media usage in general within uses and gratifications research (McQuail, 2010; West and Turner, 2014). Also, individuals’ need for entertainment and the related distraction from daily routines seems comprehensible in today’s challenging and stressful everyday life. Therefore, if users are supposed to actively engage in these communities, representatives of the brand in the community should first of all give them the possibility to consume entertaining content, as social media brand communities offer a great opportunity to provide various kinds of entertaining content in a multifaceted nature. This finding regarding the meaningfulness of the factor of entertaining content or more generally entertainment has also been confirmed in earlier studies about the usage of social media brand communities (Airs and Ang, 2012; Cvijikj and Michahelles, 2013; Kim and Ko, 2012; Hsu et al., 2015).

Furthermore, credible content has the second highest effect on user engagement in this study which can be explained by the fact that the users of the communities or consumers respectively nowadays are less naive with regard to the management activities of companies than in earlier times. They are thus already well-informed about the particular products or services of a brand when joining the respective community, as also illustrated by the term of the ‘savvy consumer’ (Scott, 2011). Therefore, users will regard the contents provided by the community managers with scrutiny and expect transparency, authenticity and thus credible content from the community managers in order to engage in the respective communities. The finding regarding credible content also substantiates earlier studies about social media brand communities that prove comparable constructs like ‘perceived authenticity’ as influential for user participation (Pronschinske et al., 2012) or studies about the usage of social media in general which, for example, confirm the importance of the credibility of the authors of contents in social media as a relevant driver of usage (Ismail and Latif, 2013).
Moreover, the results show that informative content also plays a meaningful role for user engagement. This is because it stands to reason that users of a brand community will always want to be informed about the brand which is at the centre of the particular community. In line with the definition of a brand community (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001), the users are also predominantly united in this community due to the same interest in and admiration for the brand. The importance of informative content or more generally information in social media brand communities has also been demonstrated by Airs and Ang (2012), Cvijikj and Michahelles (2013) and Hsu et al. (2015). Moreover, the vivid content provided by community managers shows a significant positive effect on user engagement. This particular success factor again seems understandable since users are already aware of the technical functionalities of social media in general through their former usage. The users therefore also expect vividness of the contents by managers of social media brand communities through the application of a diversity of contents in the form of photos, videos, links, livestreams, etc., which then teases them to make use of these functionalities, thus leading to their active user engagement. This finding regarding the meaningfulness of the factor of vivid content or more generally vividness has also been confirmed by Vries et al. (2012) as well as Cvijikj and Michahelles (2013) regarding the usage of social media brand communities.

Regarding the remaining proposed success factor of interactive content in this study, the rejected hypothesis leaves room for interpretation. On the one hand, it may be that despite the fact that according to the definition of a brand community the brand itself is at the centre of it (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001), and thus it stands to reason that there is a user need for interacting with the representatives of the brand in the community or the community managers, while the need for users to interact with other users may be even more important for their actual user engagement in the community. This would support the statement that social media as a platform for the respective brand communities is made for users (Fournier and Avery, 2011), and thus also the interactions about the brand should mainly happen between users. On the other hand, the finding can also be interpreted in the way that users indeed want to interact with the brand representatives and want quick answers to their questions and ideas but are then fully satisfied through the respective answers, thus not leading to a new engagement of them in the communities. While this finding is somewhat counterintuitive and bears potential for further investigating the factor of interactive content in future studies, managers should still try not to neglect providing timely feedback to community users in order to not upset them.

Taken together, while not neglecting the formerly discussed factor of interactive content, community managers should particularly focus on applying the four proven success factors of entertaining, vivid, informative and credible content systematically as a whole and alternate between them with regard to the order of importance as presented in this study. In this regard, it seems that the highest degree of user engagement can be achieved. As also confirmed in this study, this engagement can then lead to further important outcomes for the respective companies like trust of users in the brand and their purchase intention. While, in this regard, the results show a stronger influence of user engagement on brand trust than on purchase intention, which is also related to the finding that brand trust similarly has a significant positive impact on purchase intention. Thereby, brand trust acts as a partial but not full mediator in the relationship between user engagement and purchase intention. These findings can be explained as follows: initially, the stronger
Effect on brand trust can be accounted for since users most likely develop trust through the exchange with other users and the community managers when engaging in the communities. Thus, the exchange with other users may even be more important for trust building due to the fact that users will not expect other users to euphemise anything about the brand. Even though community managers cannot directly control this communication, they can at least foster it and make a plea concerning the exchange among users within the community. Also, the community managers themselves should be open in their communication, particularly in their responses towards user engagement since, as the results show, its positive influence on brand trust is worthwhile. In this connection, the finding that brand trust partially mediates the relationship between user engagement and purchase intention is of further interest. While there is indeed also a weaker direct effect of user engagement on purchase intention that may be caused by pictures or videos of the brand or related hints regarding discounts or special offers from others which users are confronted with in their engagement, thus influencing them to buy the brand, it seems to be even more important that members develop brand trust before they consider buying the brand. This seems plausible as, even if users have a general interest in the brand because of the appearance of the products, for instance, their engagement within their community still does not contribute to their trust in the brand or even worse leads to their distrust, which means that they would most likely not buy the product. Therefore, while community managers of course should still try to directly raise the interest of the users to buy the brand, the focus should lie on building brand trust among users, which will then pay-off in the long run and finally lead to users’ purchase intention. Besides the implications for brand community managers, there are also implications of this study for the providers of the respective social media applications as a subcategory of information systems providers in general. More specifically, our findings suggest that the more the providers support the community managers in offering the right content for users, e.g., offering more creative options for providing vivid content like Facebook does via livestreams, the more the providers can also benefit from increasing user engagement since this way users are more exposed to ads in the respective social media, which can then lead to greater advertising revenue if users click on these ads. Furthermore, this study also has suggestions for theory and research. Since this study followed a confirmatory empirical approach, the goal was to confirm theory through empirical results (cf., Hair et al., 2010; Gravetter and Forzano, 2011; Bryman, 2012; Gravetter and Forzano, 2011; Hair et al., 2010; Zikmund, 2013). In this regard, the results indicate that the uses and gratifications theory is applicable within the context of social media brand communities since we could confirm four out of five theoretically derived success factors. Therefore, the study contributes to the established uses and gratifications research about a wide range of media and specifically expands it by social media brand communities. Also, particularly regarding the research area of social media brand communities, this is, to the best of our knowledge, the first comprehensive scientific study on success factors focusing on a broad range of five particular content categories that community managers can provide to generate user engagement in Facebook brand communities. In spite of the application of a well-established theory as well as the powerful method of structural equation modelling, almost every study is subject to certain limitations. From the limitations of this study, however, further ideas for future research arise. First, since this study only focuses on a certain period, researchers are encouraged to conduct perennial and replication studies to guarantee a better
generalisation of the study results. This seems to be particularly important in the field of social media, in which user needs and requirements with regard to the specific social media applications and thus also the therein existing brand communities change rapidly. In more detail, if users believe over time that other social media applications are better suited to provide them with information or entertainment, companies should also adapt their social media strategy accordingly and offer their brand communities within those social media applications that are fashionable at the time. Secondly, future studies should test the results with regard to other nationalities and origins of the surveyed users, as for this study only German-speaking Facebook brand community users were surveyed. Thirdly, while this study focused on Facebook brand communities of the sporting goods industry and thus is not necessarily representative for other industries, future research should also try to verify these findings with regard to other industries. Lastly, researchers should also test the study results with regard to brand communities in other social networks or also other social media applications, as this study only focused on the particular social network Facebook. Overall, as this study represents one of the first confirmatory empirical research papers about success factors of social media brand community management in terms of content categories provided by community managers which positively influence user engagement, it can serve as a basis for future related conceptual and empirical research.

References
Success factors of brand community management in social media


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>ITK-corr</th>
<th>Factor load</th>
<th>Cronb. alpha</th>
<th>Expl. var (%)</th>
<th>Factors extr.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entertaining</td>
<td>The content which [the sports brand] posts in the community is fun</td>
<td>0.871</td>
<td>0.915</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vivid content</td>
<td>The content which [the sports brand] posts in the community is exciting</td>
<td>0.834</td>
<td>0.870</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The content which [the sports brand] posts in the community brings me pleasure</td>
<td>0.850</td>
<td>0.890</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overall, [the sports brand] posts entertaining content in the community</td>
<td>0.824</td>
<td>0.858</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informative</td>
<td>The content which [the sports brand] posts in the community includes videos</td>
<td>0.638</td>
<td>0.809</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The content which [the sports brand] posts in the community includes livestreams</td>
<td>0.537</td>
<td>0.622</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overall, [the sports brand] posts vivid content in the community (e.g., fotos/pictures, videos, links, livestreams)</td>
<td>0.598</td>
<td>0.725</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive</td>
<td>Through its interactivity in the community [the sports brand] gives users the feeling that they are listened to</td>
<td>0.900</td>
<td>0.921</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[The sports brand] intensely interacts with the users in the community</td>
<td>0.906</td>
<td>0.928</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[The sports brand] provides quick feedback to the users' posts in the community</td>
<td>0.916</td>
<td>0.939</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overall, through the content which [the sports brand] posts in the community, it shows a high degree of interactivity in exchange with users</td>
<td>0.915</td>
<td>0.939</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credible</td>
<td>The content which [the sports brand] posts in the community is convincing</td>
<td>0.775</td>
<td>0.795</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The content which [the sports brand] posts in the community is reliable</td>
<td>0.894</td>
<td>0.935</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The content which [the sports brand] posts in the community is truthful</td>
<td>0.888</td>
<td>0.928</td>
<td>0.942</td>
<td>80.665</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overall, [the sports brand] posts credible content in the community</td>
<td>0.889</td>
<td>0.927</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table A1  Scale reliability and validity of the exogenous and endogenous constructs (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Factor load</th>
<th>Cronb. alpha</th>
<th>Expl. var. (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>User engagement</strong></td>
<td>I like to watch videos in the community of [the sports brand]</td>
<td>0.578</td>
<td>0.669</td>
<td>57.482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I like to like posts in the community of [the sports brand]</td>
<td>0.572</td>
<td>0.661</td>
<td>57.482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I like to post myself in the community of [the sports brand]</td>
<td>0.537</td>
<td>0.594</td>
<td>57.482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand trust</strong></td>
<td>[The sports brand] is reliable</td>
<td>0.869</td>
<td>0.891</td>
<td>79.504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[The sports brand] meets its promises</td>
<td>0.846</td>
<td>0.867</td>
<td>79.504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I can rely on the [the sports brand]</td>
<td>0.845</td>
<td>0.857</td>
<td>79.504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[The sports brand] does not disappoint me</td>
<td>0.837</td>
<td>0.857</td>
<td>79.504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purchase intention</strong></td>
<td>Overall, I trust [the sports brand]</td>
<td>0.844</td>
<td>0.865</td>
<td>79.504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overall, I would like to purchase products of [the sports brand] in order to buy them</td>
<td>0.894</td>
<td>0.915</td>
<td>79.504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My willingness to buy products from [the sports brand] is high</td>
<td>0.700</td>
<td>0.788</td>
<td>79.504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overall, the likelihood of me purchasing products from [the sports brand] is high</td>
<td>0.902</td>
<td>0.949</td>
<td>79.504</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: ITK-corr. = Indicator-Total-Kronbach correlation; Cronb. = Cronbach's alpha.