



Platform Architecture and Consumer Motivation: A Comparative Study of Social Media and Web-Based Brand Communities

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Abstract

Online brand communities are increasingly embedded in firms' digital relationship strategies, yet scholarly understanding of how engagement motivations differ across platform formats remains limited. Drawing on the Uses and Gratifications perspective and the User Generated Media framework, this study explores how and why consumer engagement behaviors vary between social media based and web based brand communities, and how specific platform features influence distinct patterns of participation. A qualitative netnographic methodology was employed to examine naturally occurring interactions within two official PlayStation communities: the PlayStation Facebook page and the PlayStation Blog. User generated posts, comments and discussions were systematically gathered and analyzed through thematic analysis to uncover the motivations driving consumption, participation and production behaviors. The results indicate that content consumption operates as a core motivational foundation across both platforms. However, more advanced engagement motivations differ considerably. The social media based community largely encourages interpersonal communication, emotional sharing and conversational involvement, while the web based community supports knowledge exchange, problem solving and stewardship oriented contributions. Engagement behaviors emerge as interconnected rather than sequential and are significantly shaped by platform governance structures and technological affordances. By offering a comparative and motivation focused perspective, this study contributes to online brand community research by demonstrating that engagement processes are platform contingent rather than uniform. The findings also provide practical insight for managers seeking to align community design and content strategies with platform specific motivational dynamics.

Keywords: consumer engagement, online brand communities, uses and gratifications, user-generated media; platform comparison

1. Introduction

In a digital landscape increasingly marked by saturation and algorithmic volatility, brands are confronting an uncomfortable reality: visibility no longer guarantees engagement. Despite unprecedented reach, interactions on mainstream social media platforms continue to stagnate

or decline, leaving firms uncertain about how to meaningfully connect with their audiences (Liadeli et al., 2022). This growing tension has triggered a strategic reorientation. Rather than relying solely on rented social spaces, brands are turning toward proprietary, brand-owned platforms that offer stability, deeper dialogue, and greater control over community dynamics (Chapman & Dilmeri, 2022). As recent commentary suggests, some firms are even stepping back from high-traffic social media environments altogether, choosing instead to cultivate online spaces where they can more deliberately shape conversation and foster enduring relationships (ADVES, 2025). At the heart of this shift is the Online Brand Community(OBC)—a participatory environment where consumers not only engage with the brand but with each other, forming networks of interaction that extend beyond traditional marketing communication. These communities catalyze co-creation, peer knowledge exchange, and affective attachment, enriching both consumer experience and brand value (Wang et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2025). As brands continue to allocate strategic resources toward such ecosystems, a pressing question emerges: What motivates consumers to participate, contribute, and sustain engagement in these settings? Understanding the motivational architecture of OBC participation has thus become a central concern for contemporary engagement strategy (Willis & Ozuem, 2025; Liu et al., 2022).

Prior research provides useful starting points, categorizing OBCs according to the platforms on which they operate. Social media-based communities—such as Facebook brand pages—offer rapid dissemination, broad visibility, and casual exchanges; in contrast, web-based communities hosted on brand blogs, forums, or support sites cultivate more focused, in-depth, and brand-committed interactions (Martínez-López et al., 2016; Punyatoya & Saini, 2023). These platform types differ not only in their technical affordances but in the tone of interaction, user composition, and strategic purpose they support (Habibi et al., 2014; Zheng et al., 2022). Emerging studies further note that while social media fosters spontaneous conversation and lightweight engagement, web-based communities often attract users who seek problem solving, meaningful dialogue, and sustained brand involvement—behaviors that signal greater investment and long-term loyalty (Gupta et al., 2023; Macca et al., 2024). Yet despite these distinctions, scholarship has not sufficiently examined how motivational drivers might vary between these platforms or why users choose one over the other.

Motivation research within OBCs likewise remains fragmented. Although earlier studies have identified broad categories—such as entertainment, information-seeking, or social interaction (Cheung et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2021)—these frameworks are primarily grounded in retail or service contexts, overlooking product categories where engagement is inherently hedonic or experiential. In such settings, participation is frequently shaped by emotional gratification, identity signalling, and immersive consumption experiences (Kamboj & Rahman, 2017; Moghddam et al., 2025). Compounding this gap is a disproportionate focus on social media communities, leaving underexplored the motivational foundations underpinning the more invested, goal-oriented behaviors commonly observed in brand-owned, web-based platforms (Matute et al., 2019; Secioria et al., 2025). Together, these limitations suggest an urgent need to revisit consumer motivation through a platform-sensitive lens—particularly in hedonic categories where engagement is likely to be multilayered and psychologically rich.

Responding to these gaps, the present study pursues two interrelated objectives:

- (1) To identify the motivational drivers shaping consumer engagement within OBCs; and
- (2) To explore how users' motivations vary between social media-based and web-based brand communities.

To achieve this, the study examines two online communities centered on a globally recognized hedonic brand: the PlayStation Facebook Page, representing a social media brand community, and the PlayStation Blog, the brand's proprietary, web-based community. These contrasting platforms provide an ideal empirical setting for understanding how differing affordances and community structures shape motivational dynamics. By investigating how consumer motivations unfold across these two environments, this study offers meaningful contributions to theory and practice. Theoretically, it extends platform-based typologies of OBCs by integrating motivational perspectives, highlighting that platform affordances not only shape engagement forms but underlie distinct psychological drivers. Practically, the findings offer actionable guidance for marketers seeking to design community strategies that align with user motivations and platform characteristics, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of brand-owned engagement ecosystems.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. The next section reviews the literature on online brand communities and consumer engagement motivations and develops the theoretical framework guiding the study. This is followed by a description of the research methodology, including the research design, data collection, and analytical procedures. The subsequent section presents the empirical findings derived from the netnographic analysis. These findings are then interpreted and discussed in light of the theoretical framework. The paper concludes with managerial implications, theoretical implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Online Brand Community

OBCs reflect a broader evolution in how consumers build relationships with brands in digital environments. Rather than acting simply as information exchange platforms, OBCs represent socially embedded ecosystems where members co-create meaning, negotiate identity, and cultivate emotional and relational bonds. This understanding is grounded in the foundational view that brand communities exhibit three essential markers—consciousness of kind, rituals and traditions, and moral responsibility—complemented by brand emotion and commercial characteristics that together shape the community's social fabric (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). When these elements unfold in digital contexts, OBCs become distinctive arenas for participatory engagement, shared learning, and identity-driven interactions.

Differences in how OBCs originate and are governed play a significant role in shaping participation. Communities formed and managed by firms often operate within structured environments designed to guide interaction, facilitate customer support, and maintain coherent brand narratives. Research shows that firm-hosted communities strengthen engagement by leveraging technology design, service support, and brand-led communication strategies (Punyatoya & Saini, 2023). Organizational contributions—such as employee-generated content—can meaningfully influence user behavior and steer the direction of communal discourse, revealing the moderated and reciprocal nature of firm-managed spaces (Yan et al., 2021).

In contrast, user-generated communities emerge organically from consumer enthusiasm, shared interests, or collective problem-solving needs. These spaces often carry a perception of authenticity and voluntariness, providing peer-driven guidance, product evaluations, and emotionally grounded support. Within such environments, participation tends to be heterogeneous, with distinct user groups characterized by varying functional or hedonic motivations (Ge et al., 2022). Even without formal control, brands may still shape these

spaces indirectly; studies show that firm feedback can influence the emotional tone and linguistic style of user-generated contributions (Liu et al., 2022), illustrating subtle but meaningful organizational presence.

Beyond governance, the platform architecture on which OBCs are built represents another fundamental basis for classification. Web-based OBCs—hosted on brand-owned forums, blogs, or support sites—and social media OBCs—embedded within platforms such as Facebook, Instagram or Twitter—offer distinct affordances that shape user experience (Zaglia, 2013). Social media communities benefit from immediacy, accessibility, and large built-in audiences. Their interaction patterns are typically spontaneous, fast-paced, and heavily driven by user-generated multimedia content (Jibril et al., 2019; Lee & Hsieh, 2021). However, because these communities operate within third-party systems, brands face constraints in moderating content, navigating algorithmic changes, and ensuring message consistency (Hoang et al., 2019).

Conversely, web-based communities require deliberate user entry into a dedicated platform, resulting in smaller but more intentional participation (Fernandes & Castro, 2020). These communities often support structured, topic-focused discussions and encourage deeper, more expertise-oriented engagement among members. Their brand-controlled nature enables firms to shape community guidelines, regulate interaction, and maintain coherent narrative alignment (Chavadi et al., 2023; Fernandes & Castro, 2020). This governance results in a more stable environment where long-form dialogue and specialized knowledge exchange can flourish.

Together, these classifications reveal that OBCs differ meaningfully across governance logics, platform structures, and interactional norms. Such variation suggests that the motivations driving user participation are unlikely to be uniform across community types. Empirical findings support this view, showing that motivational drivers differ between firm-hosted and user-generated communities due to their contrasting affordances and relational dynamics (Raichur et al., 2023). Despite these insights, there remains limited understanding of whether similar motivational differences exist across platform-based categories—particularly between social media and web-based OBCs—representing a notable gap in the literature.

2.2 Consumer Motivations to Engage in Online Brand Community

Understanding why consumers engage with OBCs requires attention to the internal and external psychological forces that shape participation. Motivation influences whether users seek information, co-create content, maintain relationships, or participate in identity-building activities. Various theoretical frameworks have been applied to explain these drivers, each offering a distinct perspective on how and why consumers engage within branded spaces.

Uses and gratifications theory (UGT) (Katz et al., 1974) positions consumers as active agents who select digital platforms to meet psychological or social needs. In the context of OBCs, this framework highlights motivations such as information acquisition, entertainment, social interaction, and identity-related gratifications (Dolan et al., 2019; Cheung et al., 2022; Haverila et al., 2024). UGT helps explain why users move toward particular types of communities—particularly social media platforms that offer immediacy, convenience, and rapid feedback.

Where UGT emphasizes purposeful media selection, self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985) deepens understanding by highlighting intrinsic motivations. The psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness remain central in OBCs and

manifest through behaviors such as self-expression, problem-solving, and forming meaningful peer relationships (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Kumar, 2022; Wei, 2024). This framework is particularly relevant in web-based OBCs, where the environment supports more focused interaction and encourages long-term engagement rooted in mastery and community belonging.

Social identity theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) further expands the motivational landscape by emphasizing that OBC participation can reinforce personal identity and group belonging. In hedonic or symbolic brand categories—such as fashion, gaming or beauty—community involvement becomes an expression of identity and affiliation (Sung et al., 2010; Van Heerden & Wiese, 2021). Although identity processes clearly shape OBC engagement, little research examines how these dynamics differ across platform types, despite the likelihood that stable, brand-owned forums foster stronger identity reinforcement than transient social media interactions. Cognitive perspectives contribute additional nuance. Expectancy-based motivations highlight the role of anticipated outcomes such as recognition, rewards, reputation, or approval in driving engagement (Cheung et al., 2022; Dolan et al., 2019). Social cognitive theory underscores the importance of observational learning and feedback cycles, where users model behaviors based on peer actions or validate brand-related choices through communal interactions (Bandura, 1986; Thomas et al., 2021). These processes may be especially salient in social media OBCs, where visibility and social comparison occur in real time.

Despite the richness of existing theoretical work, several patterns in the literature indicate persistent blind spots. Motivational studies often rely on a single theoretical lens, limiting the ability to capture the interplay between extrinsic, intrinsic, and identity-related motivations. Research also tends to privilege social media communities, overlooking web-based platforms where motivations may be rooted in deeper involvement, mastery, or long-term affiliation (Gupta et al., 2023; Macca et al., 2024). In addition, evidence derived predominantly from utilitarian or service-based brands neglects hedonic categories where emotional gratification, playfulness, and identity expression may be more influential (Baldus et al., 2015; Wu et al., 2015; Dineva et al., 2024; Hollebeek et al., 2014).

These patterns reveal a clear conceptual gap. Motivational drivers have rarely been examined from a platform-sensitive perspective, despite extensive evidence that platform affordances—such as accessibility, interaction pace, governance structure, and content formats—shape the depth, purpose, and style of engagement. Without examining how motivational forces vary across social media and web-based OBCs, theoretical accounts remain incomplete and managerial strategies risk misalignment with user expectations.

Accordingly, the study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: What motivates consumers to engage in online brand communities across different platform types?

RQ2: How do the consumers' motives of engagement in social media brand communities differ from those in web-based brand communities?

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the Uses and Gratifications (U&G) perspective, extended through the User-Generated Media (UGM) framework proposed by Shao (2009). U&G theory conceptualizes media users as active agents who purposefully select media platforms and engagement modes to satisfy specific psychological and social needs (Katz et al., 1974). This perspective is particularly appropriate for examining OBCs, where consumers are not passive

recipients of brand communication but active participants who shape content, interaction, and meaning through their engagement choices.

Shao's (2009) UGM framework advances traditional U&G theory by explicitly accounting for the interactive and participatory nature of contemporary digital platforms. Rather than treating media use as a single, undifferentiated activity, the framework conceptualizes user engagement as comprising three analytically distinct but interdependent modes—consuming, participating, and producing user-generated content. Each mode is associated with a specific set of motivational gratifications, while collectively they explain the appeal and sustainability of user-generated environments.

Within this framework, content consumption is primarily driven by information-seeking and entertainment gratifications, reflecting users' desire to acquire knowledge, remain updated, experience enjoyment, regulate mood, and engage in hedonic experiences (McQuail, 1983; Shao, 2009). In online brand communities, such consumption-oriented engagement includes reading posts, viewing videos, and browsing discussions without direct interaction. These motivations are especially salient in hedonic product categories, where experiential enjoyment and emotional immersion play a central role in shaping engagement behavior.

Beyond consumption, users may engage through participatory behaviors, such as commenting, liking, sharing, rating content, and interacting with other community members. According to the UGM framework, participation is motivated by social interaction and community development needs, as users seek affiliation, belongingness, interpersonal connection, and a sense of shared identity within digital spaces (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Shao, 2009). In the context of OBCs, participatory engagement sustains community vitality by reinforcing reciprocal interaction, peer recognition, and collective meaning-making around the brand.

At the highest level of engagement intensity, users may contribute original content, reflecting production-oriented behaviors. Shao (2009) argues that content production is driven by self-expression and self-actualization gratifications, as individuals seek to articulate identity, manage impressions, gain recognition, and experience personal efficacy (Goffman, 1959; Bandura, 1995). In brand communities—particularly those centered on experiential and identity-relevant brands—such behaviors allow consumers to position themselves as knowledgeable insiders, enthusiasts, or opinion leaders, thereby strengthening both personal and communal value creation.

A key insight of the UGM framework is that these engagement modes are interdependent rather than sequentially fixed. While users may progress from consumption to participation and, eventually, production, not all users follow this trajectory, resulting in participation inequality within communities (Nielsen, 2006; Shao, 2009). Engagement behaviors reinforce one another: participation and feedback encourage further production, while production generates content that sustains consumption and interaction.

The framework further emphasizes that user gratifications are shaped by platform-level usability attributes, particularly ease of use and user control, which enhance users' ability to consume, participate, and produce efficiently and autonomously (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Shao, 2009). These attributes vary systematically across platform types, suggesting that motivational structures are not platform-neutral but contingent on technological affordances and governance mechanisms.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore consumer engagement within OBCs, particularly suited for understanding behaviours and interactions in naturally occurring digital settings such as forums and blogs (Kozinets, 2002). The analysis was conducted using a codebook (see Appendix-A) thematic analysis approach embedded within a netnographic research design. Netnography has been widely acknowledged as a trustworthy and adaptable method for examining online social behaviour, allowing for flexible methodological adaptations to suit specific research contexts (Kozinets et al., 2018; Reid & Duffy, 2018). This study followed the five recommended stages of netnographic research—entrée, data collection and analysis, trustworthy interpretation, research ethics, and member checks—originally proposed by Kozinets (2002).

4.2 Sample

This study selected two genres of brand communities; one formed on social media, while the other on a brand's web page (e.g. blog). For brand community on social media, this study chose Facebook as a primary medium, owing to its ability to facilitate group creation by both users and brands (Gummerus et al., 2012; Luarn et al., 2015). Facebook has approximately 3.07 billion monthly active users globally, with India leading at about 581.6 million users, followed by the United States with roughly 279.8 million users (DemandSage, 2025). Brand pages within Facebook represent social media brand communities, and blogs on brands' websites represent web-based brand communities that exhibit a defining criterion of online brand communities (Willi et al., 2013; Zaglia, 2013).

The OBCs chosen for this study satisfy the selection criteria outlined by Kozinets (2009), especially in terms of the appropriateness of conducting netnography. Kozinets (2009) believed that the essential characteristics of good online communities include relevance, activity, interactivity, substance, heterogeneity, and data richness. Additionally, the author proposed that trustworthy interpretation is one of the requirements of netnography (Kozinets, 2002). As this study focused on the brand communities of less-studied brands, particularly hedonic brands, to explore any additional motivational factors, the authors began by examining the brand communities of the top 10 gaming console brands. Following the criteria outlined by Kozinets (2009), the authors chose the PlayStation's official Facebook page to represent a social media brand community, while the PlayStation blog on PlayStation's website was selected to represent a web-based brand community. Both groups exhibit the brand community characteristics identified by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001).

4.3 Data Collection

Data collection was conducted over a six-month period (January to June 2025), following a netnographic approach consistent with Kozinets (2002). Customer comments were extracted using the MAXQDA Web Collector from 180 discussion threads on the PlayStation Facebook page and 220 discussion threads on the PlayStation Blog. In total, approximately 46,800 comments were collected from Facebook and approximately 4,400 comments from the PlayStation Blog. The collection period concluded at six months due to the attainment of theoretical saturation (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), at which point no new insights were emerging from the data. The PlayStation Facebook threads generated extensive interaction, averaging approximately 260 comments per post, whereas the PlayStation Blog received an average of 20 comments per thread. Throughout the data collection process, appropriate research ethics were upheld. Although comments on both platforms are publicly accessible and generally permissible for research use, explicit permission was nonetheless sought from

the page administrator to scrape comments. This step was taken to underscore a commitment to using the data solely for the purposes of this study and to ensure that all data would be permanently deleted upon the study's completion.

4.4 Data Analysis

A codebook thematic analysis approach was employed, grounded in a directed content analysis strategy (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). Initial codes were derived deductively from prior literature and refined inductively through iterative immersion in the data. Analysis was conducted using MAXQDA, and followed open and axial coding procedures as outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994), allowing us to identify relationships between categories and uncover underlying themes (see Table 1).

Two independent coders concurrently analyzed the entire dataset. In content analysis, the inter-coder agreement ratio is a commonly used indicator for determining the extent to which independent judges make consistent coding decisions when assessing message characteristics (Lombard et al., 2002). The reliability of the coding procedure was assessed by calculating the agreement ratio using the formula $R = A/T$, where R denotes the agreement ratio, A represents the number of coding units on which both coders reached agreement, and T indicates the total number of units coded. The resulting overall reliability was 90%, which exceeds the widely accepted benchmark of 80% (Lombard et al., 2002). In addition, Cohen's kappa coefficient was calculated to account for agreement occurring by chance. The resulting kappa value was 0.87, indicating a strong level of intercoder reliability and substantial agreement between the coders (Landis & Koch, 1977). After several rounds of coding, repeated reviews, and in-depth discussions between the two coders, selected interpretations and coding categories were further clarified and revised.

To address researcher reflexivity and potential influence, coding decisions were grounded exclusively in theoretically defined constructs and clearly observable interactional cues. Ongoing discussions between coders and multiple iterative readings were employed to reduce subjective interpretation. Furthermore, limited member checks were undertaken by sharing selected interpretations with community participants through chat, allowing for confirmatory feedback and thereby strengthening interpretive credibility.

Table 1: Codes of comments related to engagement motives

Open Codes	Definition	Themes
Information sharing, Spreading awareness	Sharing brand related information, and any awareness about brand.	Producing brand content
Information seeking, Seeking help, Surveillance	Asking brand related question, conducting survey, and asking help regarding brand use.	Consuming brand content
Disappointment, Complaining, Eagerness, Excitation, Pleasure, Criticizing, Offering compliment, Suggesting brand, Expectation, Preferences, Opinion	Communicating with brand	Participating with brand content
Making fun of, Advocacy, Recommendation, Answering others, Image enhancement, Opposing competitor, Experience, Advicing, Validating, Casual interaction, Entertainment	Communicating with others	Participating with others

5. Results

5.1 Motivational Factors of Consumer Engagement in Both the Communities (PlayStation Facebook brand Page and PlayStation blog):

A set of twenty-seven codes for the PlayStation Facebook page (See Figure 1) and twenty-four codes for the PlayStation blog (See Figure 2) were established, yielding four distinct themes. These codes were derived by analysing posts and comments from both the communities and extant literature. These themes demonstrate not only the variety of reasons consumers participate in online brand communities but also reveal platform-specific behavioural nuances and underexplored sub-motives that enrich existing theoretical perspectives.

5.1.1 Producing Brand Content Motivations

Users frequently generated new informational value by sharing tips, compiling promotional updates, warning others about risks such as scams, or elaborating on changes in platform policies and their consequences. For instance, one user asked, *“Is there a way to transfer save data from PS4 to PS5 without internet or PS+? (I’m asking here in case someone else wondering the same thing),”* signaling both personal curiosity and peer service. These contributions extend beyond mere information dissemination; they constitute reciprocal knowledge production in which members assume a custodial role over community welfare. Notably, a form of vigilant behavior emerged as members warned each other against scams or corporate mistreatment: *“Scammers, stole \$27 from my card and suspended my account... Now they tell me give them \$27 to get my account back lmao! Scammmmmm.”* The emergence of protective behaviors—flagging predatory practices, highlighting account vulnerabilities, or alerting peers to potential losses—suggests that the brand community operates as a collective oversight mechanism, wherein users participate in safeguarding the integrity of shared brand experiences. In this sense, production behaviors reflect not only informational motives but also community stewardship, a dimension less visible in the original UGM conceptualization but highly salient within firm-managed digital spaces.

5.1.2 Consuming Brand Content Motivations

Across both communities, consumption emerged as the foundational mode of engagement. Users actively sought information on product use, features, pricing, promotional offers, and forthcoming updates. Requests for assistance—such as troubleshooting technical issues, seeking clarification on billing discrepancies, or asking about compatibility concerns—demonstrate that consumption often served as a means to reduce uncertainty and enhance functional literacy about the brand ecosystem: *“Please help me, I don’t have 2-step verification and backup code... I tried to connect with Sony support, but no answer.”* Surveillance of other users’ experiences (e.g., inquiries about difficult levels, game preferences, or performance issues) further illustrates that consumption also fulfilled socially oriented knowledge needs, whereby participants monitored community discourse to gain insight into shared concerns or emerging trends: *“What’s the scariest horror games you have ever played?”*. These behaviors highlight how consumption functions as an early motivational anchor that orients users toward more participatory forms of engagement.

5.1.3 Participating with Brand Content Motivations

Participation manifested in emotional, evaluative, and propositional responses to brand communications. Expressions of disappointment (e.g., product malfunction, inadequate customer support): *“Inzone H7 headphone falling apart after just 3 months of light use... the lack of customer service astounding...”* or delight (e.g., nostalgia, excitement about new releases): *“You have no idea the sheer excitement I felt when I saw the Droidekas. Feels like I’m seven years old all over again”* reveal that brand-related stimuli often evoke affective engagement. These emotional responses were not merely cathartic; they frequently invited further discussion, encouraged brand responsiveness, or signaled loyalty expectations. Users also critiqued product design, articulated unmet expectations, and suggested improvements—behaviors that exemplify co-reflective participation, where consumers engage dialogically with brand decisions and envision alternative futures for the product or service. Such interactions illustrate that participation in brand content extends beyond reaction; it embodies an interpretive and evaluative stance through which users negotiate meaning and value in the brand relationship.

5.1.4 Participating with Others Motivations

Interpersonal engagement formed a vibrant dimension of participation, especially within the social media-embedded PlayStation Facebook page. Members shared personal gaming experiences, exchanged practical advice, and debated product performance: *“It is ridiculously and the most polished game in years. Please give it a try, you’ll love it”*. This peer-to-peer interaction facilitated the creation of micro-affiliations—informal groupings based on shared preferences, frustrations, or game-specific identities. In some cases, users engaged in playful banter or defensive advocacy, reinforcing community identity and loyalty: *“Well I have been playing SF6 for hours without a problem... so it’s clearly not a PlayStation problem, rather it’s your problem”*. These interactions demonstrate that participation with others is motivated not only by informational needs but also by social bonding, conversational enjoyment, and reputation signaling, each shaped by the communicative affordances of the platform.

5.2 Heterogeneity of Two Communities Based on Motivations by Type of User

To further contextualize these motivational patterns, user behaviors were interpreted through Li’s (2010) Social Technographics typology—creators, collectors, communicators, and conversationalists—mapped onto the UGM-based structure (see Figures 1–2). This dual lens reveals how user motivations translate into distinct behavioral roles, and how these roles materialize differently across the two brand community categories.

Creators, who generate original content, constituted the smallest group in both communities. Their contributions require higher effort and deeper product knowledge, which may explain their limited prevalence.

Collectors, oriented toward systematically gathering brand information, were especially evident on the PlayStation Blog, where content is more structured, topic-specific, and conducive to systematic knowledge accumulation.

Communicators—users who engage primarily with brand-originated posts through reactions, evaluations, and emotional expressions—were the dominant group on the PlayStation Blog, reflecting the platform’s editorial curation and informational richness.

Conversationalists, by contrast, were more prevalent on Facebook, where the affordances of visibility, comment threading, and social interactivity encourage users to respond to one another, create ongoing dialogues, and form relational micro-communities.

Together, these patterns reveal that motivation and user roles are co-constructed by platform design, with each environment selectively amplifying different forms of engagement.

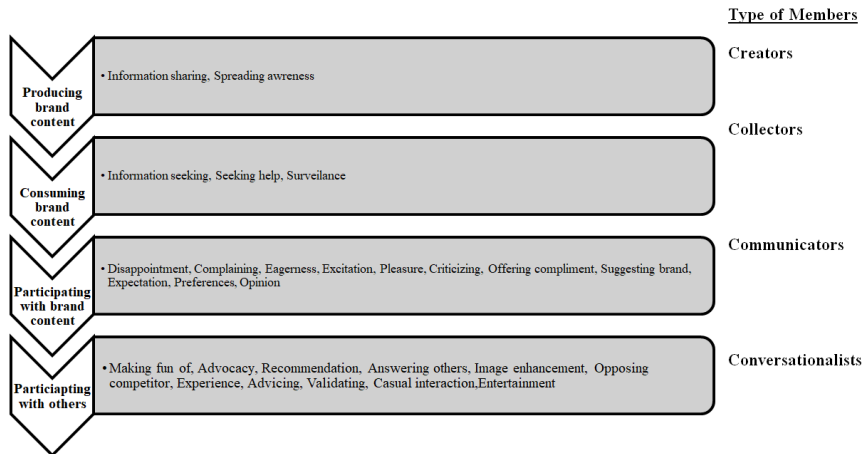


Figure 1: Motivations of members to engage in online brand communities (PlayStation Facebook brand page)

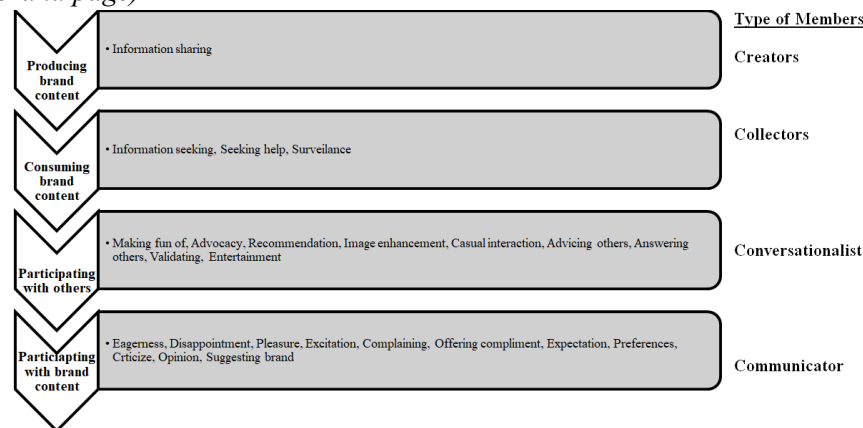


Figure 2: Motivations of members to engage in online brand communities (PlayStation blog)

6. Discussion

The findings of this study provide insight into how consumer engagement motivations in online brand communities are shaped by platform characteristics rather than being uniform across digital environments. Across both the PlayStation Facebook page and the PlayStation Blog, content consumption emerged as the most prevalent engagement mode, reinforcing the central premise of Uses and Gratifications theory that media users are goal-oriented and actively seek platforms that satisfy informational and experiential needs (Katz et al., 1974). In a hedonic brand context such as gaming, consumption motivations extended beyond functional information seeking to include emotional immersion, entertainment, and surveillance of peer experiences, consistent with prior research emphasizing experiential and

affective gratifications in symbolic product categories (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Kamboj & Rahman, 2017).

Despite this shared motivational foundation, the way consumption motivations were enacted differed meaningfully across platforms(see Figures 3–4). On the social media–based Facebook community, consumption was closely tied to real-time awareness of community sentiment and trending discussions, reflecting the platform’s immediacy and algorithmic visibility (Jibril et al., 2019; Lee & Hsieh, 2021). In contrast, consumption within the web-based PlayStation Blog was more deliberate and goal-oriented, focusing on structured knowledge acquisition and problem resolution. This distinction aligns with prior work suggesting that web-based brand communities attract users with stronger cognitive and competence-oriented motivations, whereas social media communities facilitate lightweight and spontaneous engagement (Fernandes & Castro, 2020; Gupta et al., 2023).

Participation motivations further revealed pronounced heterogeneity between the two communities(see Figures 3–4). Interpersonal interaction, emotional expression, and conversational exchange were more prominent on Facebook, where users frequently responded to one another rather than solely to the brand. This pattern can be attributed to the platform’s social affordances, which lower barriers to interaction and reward visibility, peer recognition, and rapid feedback (Hoang et al., 2019; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). These conditions amplify motivations related to social connection, belongingness, and conversational enjoyment, supporting earlier findings that social media environments are particularly conducive to socially driven participation (Habibi et al., 2014; Raichur et al., 2023).

In contrast, participatory engagement on the PlayStation Blog was more strongly oriented toward brand-related discourse (see Figures 3–4), including evaluations of updates, clarification of policies, and issue-focused discussions. The brand-owned and editorially structured nature of the platform appears to shape expectations of interaction, encouraging users to engage in a more focused and instrumental manner (Chavadi et al., 2023; Zaglia, 2013). These findings resonate with self-determination theory, which emphasizes the role of autonomy and competence in sustaining engagement within environments that support mastery and meaningful contribution (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Wei, 2024).

Production-oriented engagement occurred less frequently across both platforms (see Figures 3–4), reflecting well-documented participation inequality in online communities (Nielsen, 2006; Shao, 2009). However, the nature of production differed in ways that illuminate platform-specific motivational dynamics. On the PlayStation Blog, production behaviors often took the form of detailed explanations, warnings about scams, and guidance for other users, indicating a sense of responsibility toward community welfare. Such custodial and protective behaviors suggest that production motivations in brand-owned environments may extend beyond self-expression or recognition to include stewardship and collective oversight, particularly where platform legitimacy and informational accuracy are salient (Liu et al., 2022; Yan et al., 2021).

On Facebook, production was more episodic and socially embedded, frequently emerging within conversational threads rather than as standalone informational contributions. The fast-paced and socially saturated nature of the platform appears to favor reactive and expressive content creation over sustained knowledge production. This contrast underscores the role of governance and perceived authority in shaping not only the likelihood of production but also its underlying motivational logic (Punyatoya & Saini, 2023; Raichur et al., 2023).

Emotional and identity-related motivations were evident across both communities, reflecting the symbolic and experiential meaning attached to gaming brands. Users expressed excitement, nostalgia, frustration, and loyalty, indicating that OBC participation functions as an extension of the consumption experience itself. However, identity expression varied by platform. On Facebook, identity was enacted relationally through alignment with peers, public defense of opinions, and shared emotional responses. On the PlayStation Blog, identity expression was more competence-based, reflected in demonstrations of expertise and insider knowledge. This divergence is consistent with social identity theory, which suggests that group identification may be reinforced either through social affiliation or through role-based differentiation, depending on contextual cues and interaction norms (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Van Heerden & Wiese, 2021).

The distribution of user roles across the two communities further illustrates how motivation and behavior are co-shaped by platform design. Conversationalists were more prevalent on Facebook, where interactional visibility and peer engagement are structurally encouraged, whereas collectors and communicators were more prominent on the PlayStation Blog, where informational depth and content organization support systematic engagement (Li, 2010; Shao, 2009). These patterns reinforce the view that engagement does not follow a linear progression from consumption to production. Instead, user roles reflect an alignment between individual motivations and platform affordances, resulting in differentiated participation structures across OBC types.

Taken together, the findings suggest that motivational heterogeneity in online brand communities is structurally embedded. Shared psychological needs—such as information seeking, social connection, and identity expression—are filtered through platform-specific affordances, governance mechanisms, and interaction norms, producing distinct patterns of engagement across social media-based and web-based brand communities.

6.1 Theoretical Implications

This study advances theoretical understanding of OBC engagement by extending the UGT through the UGM framework in a platform-sensitive context. By examining consumer engagement across social media-based and web-based brand communities, the findings demonstrate that user gratifications are not only individually driven but are also systematically shaped by platform characteristics that condition how engagement modes are enacted.

First, the findings refine UGT by demonstrating that gratifications such as information seeking, entertainment, and social interaction are contextually enacted rather than universally expressed. While UGT conceptualizes users as active agents who select media to satisfy

specific needs (Katz et al., 1974), the present study shows that the same underlying gratifications manifest differently depending on whether the community is embedded in a social media platform or hosted on a brand-owned website. This suggests that gratifications should be theorized as *platform-contingent*, where technological affordances and interaction norms shape how and to what extent particular gratifications are realized.

Second, by applying the UGM framework to OBCs operating on different platform types, the study extends Shao's (2009) conceptualization of consumption, participation, and production as analytically distinct yet interdependent engagement modes. The findings indicate that these engagement modes are not solely the outcome of individual motivation but are selectively enabled or constrained by platform design. For example, consumption-oriented gratifications were foundational across both communities, yet participation and production gratifications were amplified differently depending on platform architecture. This underscores the importance of incorporating platform-level conditions into UGM-based theorization of user engagement.

Third, the study deepens understanding of participation inequality within the UGM framework by demonstrating that uneven distribution of engagement modes is structurally reinforced rather than merely preference-driven. While UGM acknowledges that not all users transition from consumption to production (Shao, 2009), the present findings show that platform affordances and governance expectations play a decisive role in shaping which engagement modes are most accessible and rewarding. As a result, participation inequality should be understood as an emergent property of user–platform interaction rather than a linear engagement deficit.

Fourth, the findings extend UGM-based interpretations of production gratifications by identifying forms of content creation oriented toward community maintenance and protection. In the web-based brand community, users produced content not only to express opinions or gain recognition but also to warn peers, clarify policies, and safeguard shared brand experiences. These behaviors suggest that production gratifications in brand-owned environments encompass collective-oriented motives alongside individual gratifications, expanding the explanatory scope of UGM within firm-managed digital contexts.

Fifth, the study contributes to UGT–UGM scholarship by demonstrating the relevance of these frameworks within hedonic brand communities, where experiential enjoyment and emotional immersion are central. Consumption gratifications related to entertainment and experiential exploration emerged as foundational across platforms, while participation and production gratifications were shaped by how each platform supported interaction and content creation. This highlights the flexibility of the UGT–UGM perspective in explaining engagement motivations beyond utilitarian or service-focused settings.

Finally, by integrating UGT and UGM into a platform-sensitive explanation of OBC engagement, the study emphasizes that user gratifications, engagement modes, and observed behaviors are jointly shaped by psychological needs and platform affordances. Rather than treating platforms as neutral containers of interaction, the findings suggest that platforms actively structure the motivational pathways through which users consume, participate, and

produce content. Future UGT–UGM research on OBCs may therefore benefit from explicitly theorizing the interaction between user gratifications and platform design features.

6.2 Managerial Implications

The findings of this study offer several actionable insights for brand managers responsible for designing, managing, and optimizing OBCs. By demonstrating that consumer motivations and engagement behaviors vary systematically between social media–based and web-based communities, the study highlights the importance of aligning community strategy with platform-specific user gratifications and engagement modes.

First, brand managers should recognize that different platforms serve different engagement purposes and should avoid applying uniform engagement strategies across all digital touchpoints. Social media brand communities, such as Facebook pages, are particularly effective for stimulating participation-oriented behaviors, including conversation, emotional expression, peer interaction, and community visibility. Managers can leverage these affordances by posting discussion prompts, opinion-based questions, and emotionally engaging content that encourages users to comment, react, and interact with one another. In contrast, web-based brand communities are better suited for consumption- and production-oriented engagement, where users seek structured information, authoritative guidance, and in-depth discussion. Managers should therefore design web-based communities as knowledge hubs, prioritizing clarity, navigability, and content depth rather than social virality.

Second, the study suggests that content strategies should be tailored to dominant engagement modes identified by the UGM framework. For consumption-oriented users, managers should ensure a steady flow of high-quality, up-to-date informational and experiential content, such as tutorials, product updates, release announcements, and behind-the-scenes materials. For participation-oriented users, particularly on social media platforms, managers can encourage interaction by acknowledging user comments, highlighting community discussions, and responding visibly to user feedback. Such practices reinforce the gratification of social interaction and sustain ongoing engagement.

Third, the identification of production behaviors related to community maintenance and protection has important implications for brand-managed platforms. Users who contribute detailed explanations, warnings, or corrective information act as informal community stewards. Brand managers can support these behaviors by recognizing knowledgeable contributors, endorsing accurate user-generated content, and providing tools that make content creation easier, such as pinned threads, FAQs, or contributor badges. Encouraging these forms of production not only reduces the burden on official support channels but also strengthens community trust and self-regulation.

Fourth, the findings highlight the importance of lowering participation barriers while maintaining interaction quality. On social media platforms, ease of participation naturally encourages conversational engagement; however, managers must actively moderate discussions to prevent misinformation, toxicity, or off-topic drift. On web-based platforms, where participation requires greater effort, managers can reduce friction by simplifying login processes, organizing content clearly, and signaling acceptable participation norms. Doing so

helps sustain engagement without compromising informational quality or community standards.

Fifth, the study underscores the value of role-sensitive community management. Different users contribute value in different ways—as consumers, participants, or producers of content. Rather than focusing solely on highly visible contributors, brand managers should design engagement metrics and incentives that acknowledge quieter but equally important behaviors such as content consumption and evaluative participation. For example, tracking frequently viewed posts, commonly referenced threads, or highly reacted-to content can provide insight into silent but engaged community members.

Finally, the findings suggest that brand managers should strategically integrate social media and web-based communities rather than treating them as substitutes. Social media platforms can function as entry points that attract broad audiences and stimulate initial engagement, while web-based communities can serve as destinations for deeper involvement and sustained interaction. By clearly signaling pathways between these platforms—such as directing social media users to blog discussions or knowledge repositories—managers can guide users toward engagement modes that align with their motivations and the brand’s long-term relationship goals.

Overall, the study indicates that effective OBC management requires an understanding of how user gratifications interact with platform design to shape engagement behavior. By aligning content, interaction practices, and governance mechanisms with platform-specific motivational structures, brand managers can foster more meaningful, sustainable, and value-generating online brand communities.

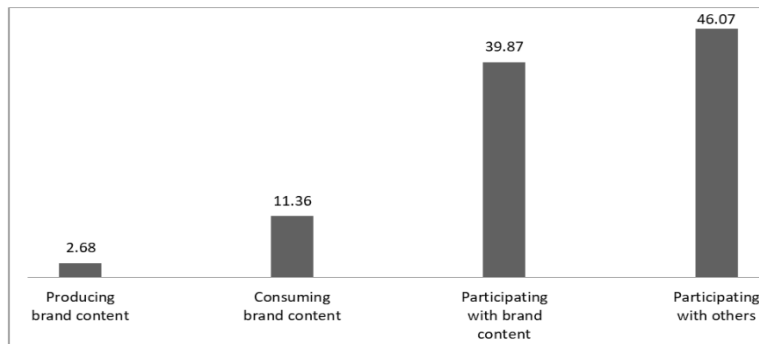


Figure 3: Percentage of comments related to motivational activities (PlayStation Facebook brand page)

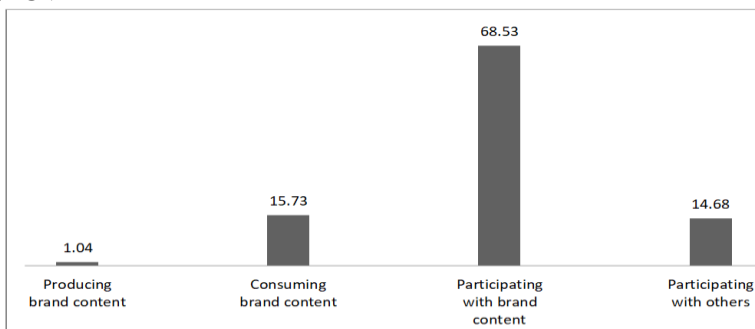


Figure 4: Percentage of comments related to motivational activities (PlayStation blog)

7. Conclusion

This study set out to examine consumer engagement motivations within online brand communities and to understand how these motivations differ between social media-based and web-based platforms. Using a netnographic approach, the research analyzed two brand communities associated with a hedonic brand—PlayStation’s Facebook page and its proprietary blog—to capture naturally occurring engagement behaviors across contrasting digital environments. By grounding the analysis in the Uses and Gratifications perspective and the User-Generated Media framework, the study provides a structured understanding of how consumers consume, participate in, and produce brand-related content within online communities.

The findings indicate that content consumption represents the foundational mode of engagement across both community types, driven by users’ desire for information, entertainment, and experiential immersion. However, participation and production behaviors varied meaningfully between platforms. Social media-based communities encouraged interpersonal interaction, emotional expression, and conversational engagement, while web-based brand communities supported more focused, knowledge-oriented participation and production behaviors. These differences highlight that engagement motivations are not uniform but are shaped by platform architecture, governance mechanisms, and interaction norms.

The study further demonstrates that engagement modes within online brand communities are interdependent rather than sequential. While some users contribute original content, many remain active through consumption and participation, collectively sustaining community vitality. The presence of protective and community-oriented production behaviors in the web-based community underscores the role of brand-owned platforms in fostering responsibility and long-term involvement among users.

By revealing how motivational drivers unfold differently across platform types, the study emphasizes the importance of viewing online brand communities as heterogeneous ecosystems rather than interchangeable engagement channels. Understanding these differences allows for a more nuanced interpretation of consumer engagement and provides a foundation for developing platform-appropriate community strategies.

7.1 Limitations and Future Research

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that open avenues for future research. First, the analysis focuses on a single hedonic brand within the gaming industry, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other product categories or cultural contexts. Future studies could examine utilitarian brands or compare multiple industries to assess whether similar motivational patterns emerge. Second, the qualitative and netnographic nature of the study prioritizes depth over breadth. Quantitative or mixed-methods research could complement these insights by testing the relative strength of different motivations across platforms. Finally, future research may explore how motivational patterns evolve over time as platform features and community norms change, offering a longitudinal perspective on engagement dynamics within online brand communities.

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Appendix: A

Sample Code-book for study

Codes	Comments
Disappointment	When is Sony planning to address the left/right controller not working in games issue?..... Sadly, this is truly a stain on Sony's reputation.
Eagerness	I want it all. I want it all. And I want it now!!!!
Excitation	So excited to finally be able to play VR games again
Exclamation	Amazing news! Thank you sony!
Pleasure	I am happy with lot of changes is the game.....
Brand curiosity	Also curious about reprojection.....
Advocacy	I see a whole lot of garbage complaints in this thread and in others around the web
Recommendation	If you like challenging games and have ps plus, then you should definitely check it out.....
Complaining	Got my PSVR2 today and having issues with the Sense controllers in games.....
Expectation	Now, please fix GT7's horrible force feedback so we can have the best immersion possible in PSVR 2.....
Preferences	I think this game will rock, but also, I preferred more turn based rpg's.....
Offering compliment	Great stuff Sony, we're all behind you!
Passion	Really looking forward to this one.....
Criticize	This show was crap except for spider man 2..... Sony is not what they were anymore
Opinion	This is going to be a great game to play in VR, especially with friends.....
Suggesting brand	They should add a football in rangrok.....
Entertainment	
Information seeking	When will psvr 2 be available in other retail
Information sharing	The ps4 version has a free upgrade to ps5. If you get yourself a ps5, you can just pop the ps4 in.....
Seeking help	I bought the Vr 2 horizon call of the mountain bundle but the game code is not working, any helps???
Surveillance	Does anyone else think this game would be spectacular in VR?
Image enhancement	Runs great on my ps5, and i platinumed it prior on ps4.
Advising others	If you are struggling with motion sickness playing for short session is a good idea.....
Answering others	No this is for vr2 only and will not be available for flat tvs.....
Validating	Congrats on your achievement..... A true ps fan.....