

# The Social Influence of Brand Community: Evidence from European Car Clubs

The authors develop and estimate a conceptual model of how different aspects of customers' relationships with the brand community influence their intentions and behaviors. The authors describe how identification with the brand community leads to positive consequences, such as greater community engagement, and negative consequences, such as normative community pressure and (ultimately) reactance. They examine the moderating effects of customers' brand knowledge and the brand community's size and test their hypotheses by estimating a structural equation model with survey data from a sample of European car club members.

**M**arketers have become more interested in learning about, organizing, and facilitating brand communities (e.g., McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002), which are "based on a structured set of relationships among admirers of a brand" (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001, p. 412). Many reasons underlie this interest, including the ability of brand communities to influence members' perceptions and actions, often in persistent and broad-based fashions (e.g., Muniz and Schau 2005); to rapidly disseminate information (e.g., Brown, Kozinets, and Sherry 2003); to learn consumer evaluations of new offerings, competitive actions, and so forth; and to maximize opportunities to engage and collaborate with highly loyal customers (e.g., Franke and Shah 2003). In the present-day cluttered and often hostile marketing environment, many marketers believe that the facilitation of brand communities is both cost effective and powerful.

Harley-Davidson's Harley Owners Group (HOG) is perhaps the prototypical example of a brand community cited in published studies (e.g., Fournier et al. 2001; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). This brand community, as are many others, is actively nurtured by the company. In particular, when customers buy a Harley-Davidson motorcycle, they are courted by the firm to join the local HOG chapter, attend its meetings, and participate in various events. These HOG chapters are usually managed by and meet at local dealerships, and they receive funding from Harley-Davidson.

These overtures are made effective by the ongoing sentiments and satisfaction that community members experi-

ence through frequent social interactions in HOGs. Such interactions provide not only utilitarian support in the form of riding and maintenance tips to members but also intellectual and social support through experiences of learning, social activism, and fellowship. Participation in HOGs has been found to increase members' affection for the Harley brand, making them committed, dependable, and, in many cases, even evangelical consumers (e.g., Fournier et al. 2001).

Furthermore, the HOGs example and other success stories, such as Macintosh user groups (e.g., Belk and Tumbat 2002), *Star Wars* fans (Brown et al. 2003), and Sun's Java center community (Williams and Cothrel 2000), have buttressed the positive aspects of brand communities in marketing managers' minds, leading many firms to make (or to consider making) significant investments in building and facilitating brand communities. At the same time, marketers embarking on such initiatives want to better understand how brand communities create value for their firms. A salient issue is how to measure and evaluate the success of a brand community program in terms that are comparable to other, more established marketing programs, such as image advertising or customer relationship management (Balasubramanian and Mahajan 2001). To accomplish this, it is important to understand how brand communities influence consumers and the conditions that increase this influence.

The purpose of our research is to develop and estimate a conceptual model of how different aspects of customers' relationships with the brand community influence their intentions and behaviors. We describe how the customer's relationship with the brand precedes and contributes to his or her identification with the brand community and loyalty intentions. We also describe how identification with the brand community leads to positive consequences, such as greater community engagement, and negative consequences, such as normative community pressure and (ultimately) reactance. Moreover, we consider the interplay among these three constructs and their effects on customers' intentions and behaviors. We also examine the moderating effects of customers' brand knowledge and the

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brand community's size. For example, we find that the brand community's social influence is greater for knowledgeable customers than for novice customers.

We test our hypotheses by estimating a structural equation model with survey data from a sample of European car club members. We also develop and validate new scales to measure several community-related constructs in the model, such as identification, engagement, and normative pressure, that may be useful in conducting further survey-based brand community research.

## Research Setting

The brand communities we studied are car clubs in German-speaking Europe (Germany, Austria, and Switzerland). We chose cars because they are known to elicit high levels of emotion and involvement in many consumers (e.g., Brown et al. 2003; McAlexander and Schouten 1998), and this is conducive to brand community participation. Indeed, our preliminary research revealed that clubs are associated with virtually every major automobile brand in German-speaking Europe.

The clubs that we studied span various car brands and, in a majority of cases, are individual car clubs that are organized around a particular corporate brand (e.g., Ford, Volkswagen) rather than a specific product family or make. These clubs range from about a dozen members to hundreds of members. Moreover, as do HOGs, most car clubs receive significant financial support from the respective car company and its dealers, which enables them to organize members-only events throughout the year.

Car clubs are social organizations. Within most clubs, members meet face-to-face on a regular basis, often at monthly meetings. They also communicate extensively with one another online (e.g., through e-mail lists, bulletin boards) and engage in various social activities and events (e.g., boat trips; parties; barbecues; drives to distant events, such as concerts) throughout the year. In this respect, car clubs differ from the "Brandfests"—concentrated (approximately) week-long, brand-centered, corporate-sponsored events that are held infrequently—that McAlexander and colleagues study (McAlexander and Schouten 1998; McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002). As in any other voluntary social organization, car club members vary in their level of interest and participation as well as in their knowledge of and attachment to the car brand.

Furthermore, a majority of members join the car club after having purchased and owned their car, often for a long time. This aspect of car club membership is similar to Brandfest participation, because Brandfests also require prior ownership of the brand's products for participation (McAlexander and Schouten 1998). As a result, in our model, the consumer's relationship with his or her car brand precedes and may serve as a basis for joining and participating in the car club. However, we acknowledge that over time, the consumer's relationship with the car brand can be influenced by brand community participation. We provide further details about our respondent sample in the "Method" section.

## Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

Our conceptual framework explicates the bases and consequences of the brand community's influence on consumers. The framework draws on recent marketing studies of brand communities (e.g., McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001), social identification (e.g., Bhattacharya and Sen 2003), and group-based consumer interactions (e.g., Dholakia, Bagozzi, and Pearo 2004), and it adds to these ideas by explicitly including the consumer's relationship with the brand as an antecedent, the negative aspects of community influence, and the conditions that accentuate community influence.

As we show in Figure 1, the model depicts brand community identification as the strength of the consumer's relationship with the community. Identification is influenced by the consumer's relationship with the brand, and it leads to engagement and perceptions of normative pressure and reactance. These consequences influence various community- and brand-related behaviors of managerial relevance. Next, we develop the model in detail.

### *Identification with the Brand Community*

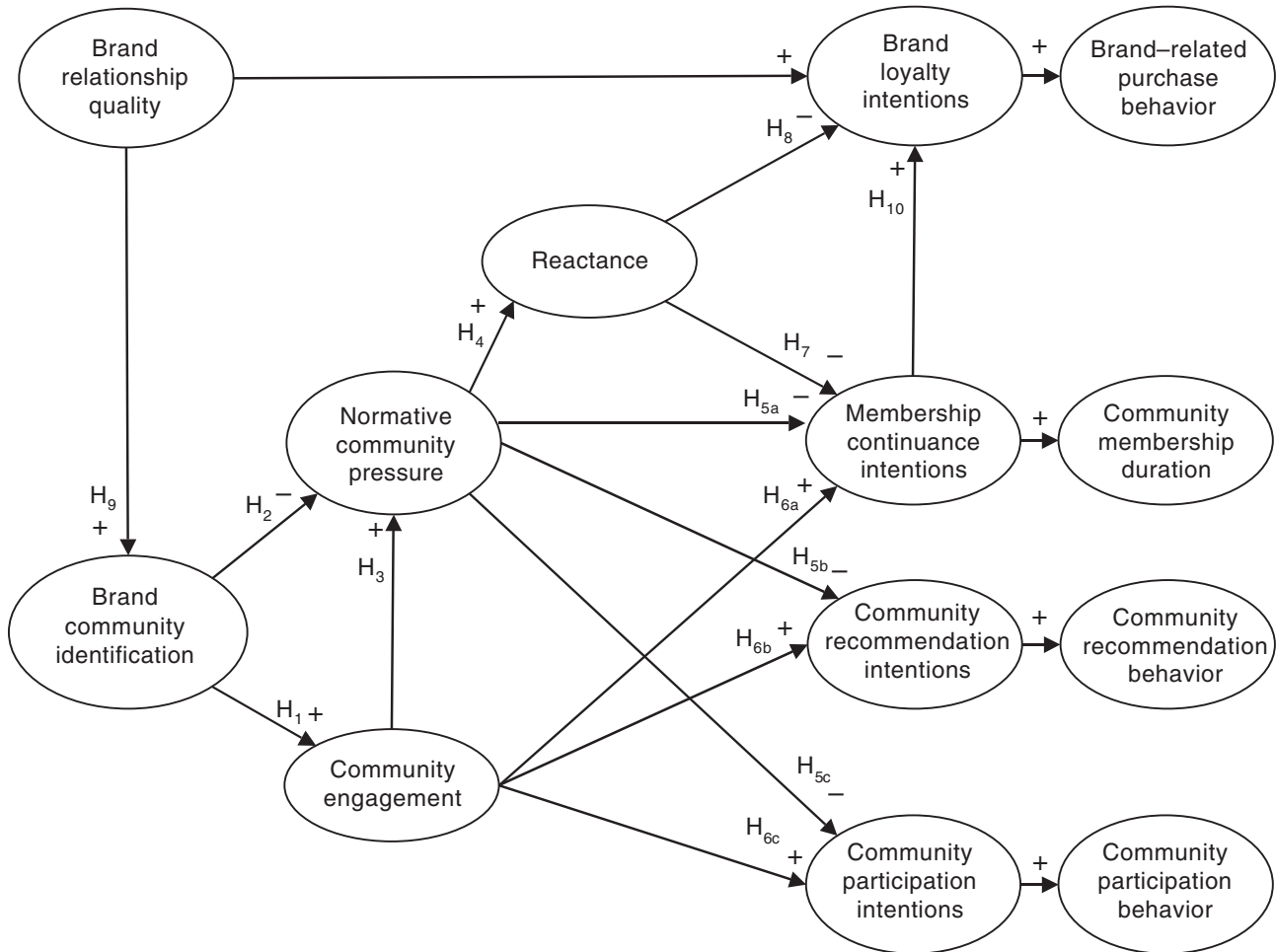
We begin by considering the strength of the consumer's relationship with the brand community, which we characterize through "brand community identification," whereby the person construes himself or herself to be a member—that is, as "belonging" to the brand community. In contrast to other identities, which may render a person unique and separate, this is a shared or collective identity (Bhattacharya, Rao, and Glynn 1995; Tajfel and Turner 1985). Several studies suggest that social identity, defined in terms of a valued group, such as a brand community, involves both cognitive and affective components (e.g., Bergami and Bagozzi 2000; Bhattacharya and Sen 2003).

Regarding the cognitive component, identification with the brand community involves categorization processes, whereby the consumer formulates and maintains a self-awareness of his or her membership within the community (e.g., "I see myself as part of the community"), emphasizing the perceived similarities with other community members and dissimilarities with nonmembers. This captures the consciousness-of-kind aspect of brand communities (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). Regarding the affective component, identification implies a sense of emotional involvement with the group, which social psychologists have characterized as an "affective commitment" to the group (Ellemers, Kortekaas, and Ouwerkerk 1999) and which brand community research has characterized as "kinship between members" (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002). Therefore, identification means that the consumer agrees (or strives to agree) with the community's norms, traditions, rituals, and objectives (Bhattacharya, Rao, and Glynn 1995) and promotes its well-being (Wiswede 1998).

### *Consequences of Brand Community Identification*

Brand community identification is posited to have both positive and negative consequences for consumers. Recent studies document many of its positive consequences. For

**FIGURE 1**  
**Hypothesized Model**



example, McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig (2002) find that participation in a Jeep Brandfest event increases consumers' attachment to their vehicles and to the Jeep brand significantly. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) report that Macintosh computer community members help other members by sharing information about ways to enhance their computers' functioning. Muniz and Schau (2005) find that even six years after Apple Computer Inc. had discontinued the Newton product, its brand community members still continued to support one another and advocate the product's use to outsiders.

In our model, "community engagement" refers to the positive influences of identifying with the brand community, which are defined as the consumer's intrinsic motivation to interact and cooperate with community members. Community engagement suggests that members are interested in helping other members, participating in joint activities, and otherwise acting volitionally in ways that the community endorses and that enhance its value for themselves and others.

Community engagement results from the overlaps that members perceive between their own unique self-identity and their group-based identity; group participation is

viewed as congruent to and as an expression of personal values (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003). It is also consistent with the notion of "citizenship" as formulated in the organizational behavior and marketing literature. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

H<sub>1</sub>: Stronger brand community identification leads to greater community engagement.

Furthermore, belonging to any community entails restrictions to act in certain ways. In our framework, "normative community pressure" defines the consumer's perceptions of the brand community's extrinsic demands on a person to interact and cooperate within the community. These demands are attended by sometimes overt but often implicit coercion to conform to the community's norms, rituals, and objectives (e.g., Wellman et al. 1996). Social psychologists have noted that the need for consensual validation by others within the community is perhaps the primary reason normative pressure is effective in regulating members' actions (McMillan and Chavis 1986).

Normative pressure may influence members' actions about recruitment, initiation, and ongoing interactions as well as the representation of the brand community to out-

siders. For example, a Saab car owner may believe that he or she needs to wave to other Saab drivers as a token of fellowship in the Saab brand community (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). Similarly, a HOG member may believe that he or she is obligated to disparage other, particularly Japanese, motorcycle brands and mock their riders (Schouten and McAlexander 1995).

The influence of normative pressure from group members is an important element of attitude-theoretic formulations of behavior as well (e.g., Ajzen 1991). This research suggests that the group's influence on the individual, which is activated through subjective norms, has two distinct and not necessarily coincident aspects: (1) publicly visible compliance with the group's norms and (2) the private acceptance of those norms (e.g., Cialdini and Goldstein 2004). When publicly visible compliance is not accompanied by complete private acceptance, the person experiences normative pressure, which influences behavior significantly (Eagly and Chaiken 1993).

We hypothesize that greater identification with the brand community reduces the consumer's perceptions of normative pressure by increasing the overlap between the community's and the individual's norms, values, and goals. With greater identification, members tend to internalize these norms and view their actions as stemming from this overlap rather than from expectations or requirements of the brand community. Thus:

H<sub>2</sub>: Stronger brand community identification leads to reduced normative community pressure.

In addition, community engagement and normative pressure, two consequences of community identification, are not mutually exclusive for the following reason: Higher levels of engagement, though stemming from positive self-endorsed motives, are likely to be accompanied by greater degrees of conspicuous participation within the community (e.g., Langerak et al. 2003). Highly engaged members may take on leadership roles, become active and vocal recruiters and/or defenders of the community, be more adversarial toward competing brand communities, and so on. In turn, such actions are likely to increase not only the expectations of other members for behavior but also the member's own perceptions of community expectations. This should raise normative pressure. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

H<sub>3</sub>: Greater community engagement leads to greater normative community pressure.

Thus, the consumer experiences constraints and perceives less freedom to act with volition. Psychologists have called such a motivational state in which a person attempts to regain the lost freedom "reactance" (e.g., Brehm 1966). For example, during our preliminary qualitative research, a Fiat car club member told us the following:

On the one hand, the club is like a second family to me, ... finding friends there that trust and support me and with whom I have lots of things in common. On the other hand, I often feel that it is expected of me to participate in all club events, to take on many responsibilities and organizational tasks. Seeing everything through the "Fiat" lens makes me feel sick so that I sometimes feel like I want to leave the club in order to realize more personal freedom.

Perhaps I would then be able to drive an old Austin Healey.

To the extent that belonging to the brand community and participating in it is perceived as entailing compliance and an obligation to think and act in certain ways, the consumer may experience reactance. This is consistent with Brehm's (1966) theory that reactance increases as perceptions of constraints increase. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

H<sub>4</sub>: Higher levels of normative community pressure lead to stronger perceptions of reactance.

We measured reactance using an item from Dowd, Milne, and Wise's (1991) scale.

### ***Behavioral Intentions Regarding the Brand Community***

Next, we consider how normative pressure and community engagement influence three behavioral intentions of members. The first is "membership continuance intentions," which is the member's intentions to maintain membership and ties to the brand community in the future. Such an intention implies willingness to stay committed to the community and to meet any conditions, such as fees, that are required for membership. The second is the person's intentions to recommend the brand community to nonmembers, and the third pertains to the person's level of participation. From a marketing standpoint, these intentions are crucial to perpetuate the brand community, to attain goals, and to create an effective marketing program. For example, management writers have noted that higher participation levels lead to higher levels of involvement with marketer-sponsored communities, "turning visitors into members, members into contributors, and contributors into evangelists" (Langerak et al. 2003, p. 10). These three behavioral intentions likely help marketing managers frame and communicate the brand community's influence on their customers in familiar terms.

Consider the impact of normative community pressure on the behavioral intentions. The greater the pressure on members to conform to the brand community's norms and objectives, the more burdensome is the association with and participation in the brand community. As a result, consumers are less inclined to engage in community-related activities, which leads to the following hypothesis:

H<sub>5</sub>: Stronger normative community pressure leads to weaker (a) membership continuance intentions, (b) community recommendation intentions, and (c) community participation intentions.

In contrast to normative pressure (experienced as a punishment by participants), community engagement, which represents the positive and self-instigated aspects of the brand community's influence, is likely to be experienced positively. Members should be eager to repeat behaviors that lead to such positive rewards, and they should have higher levels of behavioral intentions as a result. Thus:

H<sub>6</sub>: Stronger community engagement leads to stronger (a) membership continuance intentions, (b) community recommendation intentions, and (c) community participation intentions.



Finally, we consider the influence of reactance on behavioral intentions. For example, the aforementioned Saab driver and Harley-Davidson rider may behave as their respective norms dictate—waving to other Saab drivers and disparaging riders of other motorcycle brands—but these actions may be accompanied with a conscious awareness that they are dictated by the group and that it is not proper to behave in such a way. The primary effect of such reactance is that people who experience it try to reassert their freedom (Brehm 1966), and they are motivated “to move in the direction opposite from the influence effort” (Clee and Wicklund 1980, p. 390). As the previously quoted car club member suggests, one way to reassert freedom is to discontinue membership in the brand community. Thus:

H<sub>7</sub>: Higher levels of reactance lead to weaker membership continuance intentions.

Reactance is also likely to have a negative effect on the person’s future use of the brand. Because brand communities, by definition, advocate the brand’s use and often strongly dissuade members from trying or using competing brands, another upshot of reactance should be to motivate the consumer to disobey this directive to regain his or her lost freedom. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

H<sub>8</sub>: Higher levels of reactance lead to weaker brand loyalty intentions.

### ***Impact of Brand Relationship on Brand Community–Related Constructs***

Brand loyalty offers a useful way to examine the interplay between the consumer’s relationship with the brand and the brand community. Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) emphasize these two relationships implicitly by positioning their conceptualization of brand community as involving a triadic consumer–brand–consumer relationship. McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig (2002) go a step further and show that the consumer’s integration within a brand community is a function of his or her perceived relationships not only with the brand and other community members but also with the product and the company.

A key construct in our conceptual framework is the consumer’s relationship with the brand, which we characterize as “brand relationship quality” (see Figure 1). Consistent with existing consumer-centric views of brand relationships (e.g., Fournier 1998), we define brand relationship quality as the degree to which the consumer views the brand as a satisfactory partner in an ongoing relationship. In our model, it is the consumer’s overall assessment of the strength of his or her relationship with the brand (e.g., DeWulf, Odekerken-Schröder, and Iacobucci 2001). This meaning is also consistent with research showing that consumers frequently view brands in human terms, often assigning animate characteristics to them (e.g., Aaker 1997), and they often take the perspective of a brand (as if it were a person) to articulate their own perceptions of their relationships with it (Fournier 1998). Such a view is also informed by recent brand community research (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002), which indicates that the consumer’s ties to the brand can encompass the entire firm

(e.g., Ford and its specific products that the consumer owns, such as a Ford Explorer).

In our framework, brand relationship quality is based on the extent to which the consumer identifies with his or her car brand or views his or her self-image as close to and overlapping with the car’s image (Hogg and Abrams 1988). As a result, our definition seems more consistent with McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig’s (2002) view of consumer ties to specific products. In addition, and in line with existing research (e.g., Fournier 1994), we include cognitive (a self-awareness of the closeness of the relationship) and evaluative (the positive evaluation of self-worth that stems from a relationship with the brand) aspects of the consumer’s perceptions in the operationalization of brand relationship quality. It is consistent with the conceptualization of consumer-brand identification (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003); we measure this using items from Fournier’s (1994) and Aaker’s (1997) studies.

From our perspective, the consumer’s relationship with the brand precedes and contributes to his or her relationship with the brand community. Many consumers first discover and value the brand for the functional and symbolic benefits it provides. A harmonious relationship with the brand can lead consumers to seek out and interact with like-minded consumers who share their enthusiasm. Moreover, an existing identification with the brand is likely to facilitate integration and identification with the brand community. For example, even when traditions, such as greeting other brand users, appear peculiar to the consumer, a strong relationship with the brand may help the person accept them and intrinsically endorse these practices. Thus:

H<sub>9</sub>: Higher levels of brand relationship quality lead to a stronger brand community identification.

Membership and participation in the brand community should also have an impact on the consumer’s brand-related behaviors. In particular, we expect that members’ intentions to remain engaged with the brand community have a positive impact on their loyalty toward the brand because a key marker of community membership is ongoing purchase and use of the brand. Thus:

H<sub>10</sub>: Higher levels of membership continuance intentions lead to stronger brand loyalty intentions.

Finally, consistent with attitude-theoretic formulations of goal-directed behavior (e.g., Ajzen 1991; Eagly and Chaiken 1993), we also expect that (1) higher levels of brand relationship quality lead to greater brand loyalty intentions and (2) behavioral intentions lead to corresponding behaviors. These paths are not stated formally as hypotheses, because they have been well documented in the literature, but they are included in our model for the sake of completeness (see Figure 1).

### ***Moderating Effects of Consumers’ Brand Knowledge and Brand Community Size***

From a managerial standpoint, it is important to consider what consumer and community characteristics accentuate the brand community’s influence on its members. We consider one consumer characteristic, the person’s brand

knowledge, and one community characteristic, its size (as defined by membership count). Both these characteristics are not only managerially significant in the sense of being observable but also actionable in the sense that they provide specific guidance to managers on actions they can take (e.g., organize communities of a certain size).

First, consider the consumer's brand knowledge. Broadly speaking, we predict that the brand community exerts more influence on its knowledgeable members because brand knowledge captures both the aspects of interest in the brand and the consumer's previous experience level with it, suggesting that knowledgeable consumers are more engaged with the brand and the community. Such consumers are also more likely to take on leadership roles in brand community activities (Schouten and McAlexander 1995). Conversely, novice consumers are more likely to be the brand community's newer members and may still be in the process of learning about the brand and the community as well as forming relationships within it. Furthermore, the more participants know about the brand, the more confident they are when expressing their (positive or negative) opinions within the community, which leads to greater opportunities both for engagement and for experiencing normative pressure. Thus, we hypothesize that the average levels of key constructs in our conceptual model (i.e., community identification, engagement, normative pressure, and brand relationship quality) are significantly higher, and the strengths of the paths between them are much greater for knowledgeable consumers than for novice ones. We articulate these predictions subsequently in  $H_{11}$ – $H_{15}$ .

Second, consider the brand community's size. In larger brand communities (defined in our empirical study as those that have 50 active members or more), members are more likely to identify with the community as a whole rather than with specific people in it (Dholakia, Bagozzi, and Pearo 2004). Sociological research has also shown that membership in larger communities often serves functional purposes—for example, to find an expert who is capable of solving a particular problem with a car (e.g., Wellman et al. 1996). In contrast, people join smaller communities more often for friendship and socialization motives. Therefore, we expect that members are less connected to larger brand communities because of the relatively tenuous and functional relationships therein.

In smaller communities (those with fewer than 50 members), "everybody knows everybody else," which results in stronger and multifaceted interpersonal relationships between consumers and a greater interest in engaging in social activities (Dholakia, Bagozzi, and Pearo 2004). Thus, members of small communities are likely to be more connected to the brand community, which results in significantly higher levels of community identification, engagement, normative pressure, and brand relationship quality perceptions.

Furthermore, recent research on virtual communities (those not organized around particular brands) also suggests that members of larger communities participate for more specific, well-defined reasons that are closely related to the community's primary purpose (Dholakia, Bagozzi, and Pearo 2004). For example, in a chatroom devoted to the

online game Everquest, most of the conversation centers on aspects of playing the game successfully. In contrast, members of smaller communities participate to accomplish broader, more abstract goals, such as catching up with friends or having a good time. In certain cases, it is also possible that small communities are small simply because the topic is of interest to few people, which results in a greater variance in engagement in the brand. Such possibilities imply that in larger communities, brand relationship quality is likely to drive community identification, identification is likely to influence engagement and normative pressure, and, in turn, these are likely to influence behavioral intentions to a greater extent than in smaller brand communities. In general, we expect that though the levels of these key constructs in the model are lower, the strengths of the paths between constructs are greater for members of large brand communities than for members of small brand communities.

The following five hypotheses summarize this discussion regarding the moderating roles of the consumer's brand knowledge and the brand community's size in our proposed conceptual model:

- $H_{11}$ : Community identification, community engagement, normative community pressure, and brand relationship quality are greater (a) for knowledgeable than for novice consumers and (b) for members of small brand communities than for members of large brand communities.
- $H_{12}$ : The positive impact of brand relationship quality on community identification is stronger (a) for knowledgeable consumers than for novice consumers and (b) for members of large brand communities than for members of small brand communities.
- $H_{13}$ : The impacts of community identification on community engagement (positive) and on normative community pressure (negative) are stronger (a) for knowledgeable consumers than for novice consumers and (b) for members of large brand communities than for members of small brand communities.
- $H_{14}$ : The negative impact of normative community pressure on community-oriented behavioral intentions is stronger (a) for knowledgeable consumers than for novice consumers and (b) for members of large brand communities than for members of small brand communities.
- $H_{15}$ : The negative impact of reactance on membership continuance intentions and brand loyalty intentions is stronger (a) for knowledgeable consumers than for novice consumers and (b) for members of large brand communities than for members of small brand communities.

## Method

### *Development of Measures*

We derived measures for several constructs in our framework from existing scales or studies in the literature (as we described previously), and we adapted them to suit the context of our study. For community identification, engagement, and normative pressure, we developed new scales. Briefly, we used the following procedure that Churchill (1979) advocates. We conducted in-depth interviews with four car club presidents in Germany and held a focus group with 13 car club members in Switzerland to better under-

stand how these experts perceived and described the constructs. We generated an initial set of items from this exploratory research.

Next, to enhance the constructs' face validity, we had 13 other experts evaluate this initial item set. We provided construct definitions and asked the experts to evaluate each item with respect to wording, fit with construct, completeness, and uniqueness. We rephrased improperly worded items and deleted those that did not fit the construct definition. In the final step, 46 graduate marketing students who belonged to one or more brand communities participated in a quantitative pretest of the modified items. They responded to the items, described their understanding of each one, provided an explanation for their responses, and indicated any problems they encountered while responding. We made several minor changes in wording based on this feedback and finalized the items to be used for the main study (provided in the Appendix). We note that some of our items for community identification are similar in content to Mael and Ashforth's (1992) identification scale.

### **Participant Recruitment**

In recruiting participants for our study, we identified and targeted all German-speaking car clubs located in Germany and the German-speaking regions of Switzerland and Austria; there were a total of 282 such clubs.<sup>1</sup> For each car club, we contacted its president or organizer and requested him or her either to provide us with a list of the club's members or to forward our survey to the club's membership. We reached approximately 2440 existing car club members through this procedure.<sup>2</sup>

We completed the study in two waves. We invited the car club members to participate in a Web-based survey in exchange for entering them into a raffle for valuable coupons. We made the first wave of the survey available online for four weeks in early 2003; we introduced it to participants as an "opinion survey regarding car clubs in Germany, Switzerland, and Austria." Participants completed the survey in approximately 15 minutes. After approximately ten weeks, we contacted all participants again by e-mail and asked them to respond to five additional questions pertaining to their brand- and brand community-related behaviors during the intervening period. These responses constitute the terminal dependent variables in our structural model. Of the participants who completed both waves of the survey, we randomly chose five to receive automotive services coupons worth €100 each (approximately \$125 at the time we collected the data).

### **Sample Characteristics and Measures**

Of the 2440 car club members that we contacted, a total of 824 completed the first wave of the survey (a response rate

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<sup>1</sup>We used two Web sites (in March 2003) to identify these car clubs: <http://auto.degwi.de> and <http://www.allesklar.de/s.php?jump=100-30609-31175>.

<sup>2</sup>This calculation is based on the total number of members that we individually contacted in addition to counts provided by car club organizers who forwarded our request to their club's members.

of 33.8%), and a total of 529 completed both waves, resulting in a usable response rate of 21.7%. The analysis that follows is based on these 529 respondents, who belong to a total of 101 different car clubs.

The sample's demographics are as follows: 86.9% were male and 13.1% were female. Respondents ranged in age from 16 to 59 years, with a mean age of 32 years (median = 35, standard deviation = .71). By nationality, 87.4% were German, 5.3% were Swiss, and 5.8% were Austrian; 1.3% did not disclose their nationality. By duration of membership, 108 (or 20.6%) had belonged to their respective car club for less than a year, 219 (or 41.7%) had belonged between one and three years, and 198 (or 37.7%) had belonged for more than three years. The most represented car brands in the sample were Ford ( $n = 137$ ), Volkswagen ( $n = 88$ ), Mercedes ( $n = 53$ ), Opel ( $n = 52$ ), and BMW ( $n = 41$ ). Other brands that were represented by fewer respondents included Porsche, Smart, Audi, Mini, Volvo, Renault, and Citroen.

### **Classification of Respondents**

*Brand knowledge.* We used the following multivariate normal mixture model to classify participants on the basis of their brand knowledge: Let  $y_1, y_2, \dots, y_n$  denote an observed three-dimensional sample of size  $n$ . The three dimensions correspond to the three measures of brand knowledge from the survey (see the Appendix). Therefore, each data point is assumed to be a realization of the random three-dimensional vector  $Y$  with the  $g$ -segment mixture probability density function:  $f(y; \Psi) = \sum_{i=1}^g \pi_i \phi_i(y; \mu_i, \Sigma_i)$ , where the mixing proportions  $\pi_i$  are nonnegative,  $\sum_{i=1}^g \pi_i = 1$ , and  $\Psi = (\pi_1, \dots, \pi_{g-1}, \mu_1, \Sigma_1)$ . Furthermore, the multivariate normal probability density function has a mean (vector)  $\mu_i$  and covariance matrix  $\Sigma_i$ .

We estimated the number of segments ( $g$ ) and the mixing proportions  $\pi_i$  with the EMMIX software program (McLachlan et al. 1999), which uses the E-M algorithm (Dempster, Laird, and Rubin 1977). This analysis revealed two segments of participants, which we labeled as "novice" and "knowledgeable." The novice segment constituted 21% of the sample ( $n = 111$ ) and had a mean score of 4.27 on the three brand knowledge measures (on ten-point scales). The knowledgeable segment constituted 79% of the sample ( $n = 418$ ) and had a mean score of 8.45 on the three measures (which was significantly higher than the novice group,  $p < .001$ ).

*Brand community size.* We classified respondents as belonging to either small or large car clubs. We defined small car clubs as those with fewer than 50 members and large clubs as those with 50 or more members. On the basis of responses to our survey question about car club size (see the Appendix), we classified 288 participants (54.3%) as belonging to small car clubs and 236 (44.5%) as belonging to larger car clubs; 5 members did not indicate their car club's size.

### **Preliminary Analysis**

Our full-sample structural equation model included all survey respondents, and we used it to test  $H_{1-10}$ ; we used the

knowledgeable/novice and small/large subsamples to test the moderation hypotheses ( $H_{11-15}$ ). We ran all the models that we describe subsequently using the LISREL 8.54 program (Jöreskog and Sörbom 1999). We assessed the goodness-of-fit of the models with chi-square tests, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), the non-normed fit index (NNFI), and the comparative fit index (CFI). Discussions of these indexes can be found in the work of Bentler (1990), Marsh and Hocevar (1985), and Marsh, Balla, and Hau (1996). Satisfactory model fits are indicated by nonsignificant chi-square tests, SRMR and RMSEA values  $\leq .08$ , and NNFI and CFI values  $\geq .90$ .

When they were available, we used two indicators to operationalize each latent construct. Using the partial disaggregation model (Bagozzi and Edwards 1998), we combined latent constructs for which more than two items were available (i.e., community identification, community engagement, membership continuance intentions, brand relationship quality, and brand loyalty intentions) to produce two indicators. Compared with models in which each item is a separate indicator, such an approach results in models with fewer parameters to estimate and reasonable ratios of cases to parameters, and it smoothes out measurement error to a certain extent. We performed all analyses using covariance matrices (Cudeck 1989).

## Results

### Measurement Model Evaluation

*Internal consistency.* We used two measures to evaluate the internal consistency of constructs. The composite reliability ( $\rho_c$ ) is a measure analogous to coefficient  $\alpha$  (Fornell and Larcker 1981, Eq. 10), whereas the average variance extracted ( $\rho_{VC(\xi)}$ ) estimates the amount of variance captured by a construct's measure relative to random measurement error (Fornell and Larcker 1981, Eq. 11). Estimates of  $\rho_c$  greater than .60 and  $\rho_{VC(\xi)}$  greater than .50 are usually considered to support internal consistency (Bagozzi and Yi

1988). As Table 1 shows, all values are significantly greater than these stipulated criteria and therefore are indicative of good internal consistency.

*Discriminant validity.* We evaluated discriminant validity of the model constructs using two different approaches. We built a confirmatory factor analysis model with 12 latent constructs and a total of 20 measures. The results show that the model fit the data well. The goodness-of-fit statistics for the model are as follows:  $\chi^2(108) = 417.49$ ,  $p \approx .00$ , RMSEA = .07, SRMR = .03, NNFI = .95, and CFI = .97. The  $\phi$  matrix (correlations between constructs, corrected for attenuation) appears in Table 2. As a first test of discriminant validity, we checked whether the correlations among the latent constructs were significantly less than one. Because none of the confidence intervals of the  $\phi$  values ( $\pm$  two standard errors) included the value of one (Bagozzi and Yi 1988), this test provides evidence of discriminant validity.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, for each pair of factors, we compared the chi-square value for a measurement model and constrained the correlation to equal one to a baseline model without this constraint. We performed a chi-square difference test for each pair of factors (a total of 66 tests in all), and every case resulted in a significant difference, again suggesting that all the measures of constructs in the measurement model achieve discriminant validity.

### Structural Model Estimation

With respect to the fit statistics for the full model ( $\chi^2[147] = 747.7$ ,  $p \approx .00$ , RMSEA = .08, NNFI = .93, and CFI = .94), the chi-square is significant ( $p < .05$ ), which is usually the case for large sample sizes. All the other statistics are within the acceptable ranges, which indicates a good model fit. We found that the impact of brand community identification on community engagement is strong and positive ( $\beta = .99$ ,

<sup>3</sup>Note that because the  $\phi$  values in Table 2 have been corrected for attenuation, the corresponding product-moment correlations between constructs are actually lower than these values.

**TABLE 1**  
Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities, and Internal Consistency Statistics for Construct Measures

Construct	Number of Measures	Mean	Standard Deviation	$\rho_c$	$\rho_{VC(\xi)}$
Community identification	5	8.13	1.85	.92	.70
Community engagement	4	7.49	2.02	.88	.64
Normative community pressure	2	3.47	2.31	.81	.68
Reactance	1	4.46	2.85	—	—
Membership continuance intentions	3	8.05	1.97	.84	.64
Community recommendation intentions	2	7.12	2.39	.78	.64
Community participation intentions	1	8.53	1.90	—	—
Community membership behavior	1	2.35	.85	—	—
Community recommendation behavior	1	2.39	.91	—	—
Community participation behavior	1	2.30	.70	—	—
Brand relationship quality	3	6.54	2.54	.81	.66
Brand recommendation intentions	3	7.36	2.35	.90	.75
Brand-related purchase behavior	1	1.28	.54	—	—
Brand knowledge	3	7.57	2.08	.89	.75



**TABLE 2**  
**ϕ Matrix of Latent Constructs for Full Sample**

	CI	CP	CE	RE	MCI	CRI	CPI	BLI	BP	CRB	CPB	BRQ
CI	1											
CP	.03	1										
CE	.77*	.23*	1									
RE	.09*	.33*	.05	1								
MCI	.81*	.02*	.72*	-.15*	1							
CRI	.62*	.02	.64*	-.09*	.75*	1						
CPI	.33*	.02	.35*	-.15*	.34*	.68*	1					
BLI	.35*	-.26*	.28*	-.11*	.46*	.41*	.17*	1				
BP	.19*	.06	.12*	.06	.32*	.32*	.14*	.24*	1			
CRB	.42*	.03	.28	.14*	.34*	.25*	.40*	.18*	.20*	1		
CPB	.40*	.05	.31*	.02	.33*	.20*	.42*	.09	.37*	.37*	1	
BRQ	.28*	.07	.28*	.20*	.36*	.34*	.33*	.59*	.26*	.32*	.18*	1

\*Significant at  $\alpha = .05$ ; all correlations are significantly less than 1.00.

Notes: CI = community identification, CP = normative community pressure, CE = community engagement, RE = reactance, MCI = membership continuance intentions, CRI = community recommendation intentions, CPI = community participation intentions, BLI = brand loyalty intentions, BP = brand-related purchase behavior, CRB = community recommendation behavior, CPB = community participation behavior, and BRQ = brand relationship quality.

standard error [s.e.] = .06), in support of H<sub>1</sub>, and its impact on normative community pressure is significant and negative ( $\beta = -1.99$ , s.e. = .32), in support of H<sub>2</sub>. Figure 2 summarizes these and other results.

Furthermore, as we predicted, community engagement influences normative pressure positively ( $\beta = 2.06$ , s.e. = .31), in support of H<sub>3</sub>. Antecedents explain 81% of the variance in community engagement and 31% of the variance in normative pressure. We found that the impact of normative pressure on reactance is positive and significant ( $\beta = .38$ , s.e. = .05), as we expected. In addition, H<sub>4</sub> receives support, and 34% of the variance in reactance is explained.

The impact of community pressure on a member's behavioral intentions is addressed in H<sub>5</sub>. As we expected, community pressure has significant, negative effects on both recommendation ( $\beta = -.13$ , s.e. = .03) and participation ( $\beta = -.14$ , s.e. = .02) intentions, but its effect on membership continuance intentions is not significant. Thus, H<sub>5b</sub> and H<sub>5c</sub> are supported, but H<sub>5a</sub> is not. For H<sub>6</sub>, we found support for all three (i.e., H<sub>6a-c</sub>) because the effects of community engagement on all three behavioral intentions—membership continuance ( $\beta = 1.12$ , s.e. = .07), recommendation ( $\beta = .91$ , s.e. = .07), and participation ( $\beta = .87$ , s.e. = .06)—are significant. Moreover, reactance has a negative impact on membership continuance intentions ( $\beta = -.26$ , s.e. = .08), in support of H<sub>7</sub>. These results suggest that the negative effects of normative community pressure on membership continuance intentions are fully mediated by reactance. The percentages of variance in membership continuance intentions, community recommendation intentions, and community participation intentions, as explained by their respective antecedents, were 76%, 62%, and 86%, respectively.

The remaining three main effect hypotheses address the interplay between brand- and brand community-related constructs. In H<sub>8</sub>, we predicted a negative impact of reactance on brand loyalty intentions; the results support this prediction ( $\beta = -.55$ , s.e. = .09). With respect to H<sub>9</sub>, we found that brand relationship quality influences brand com-

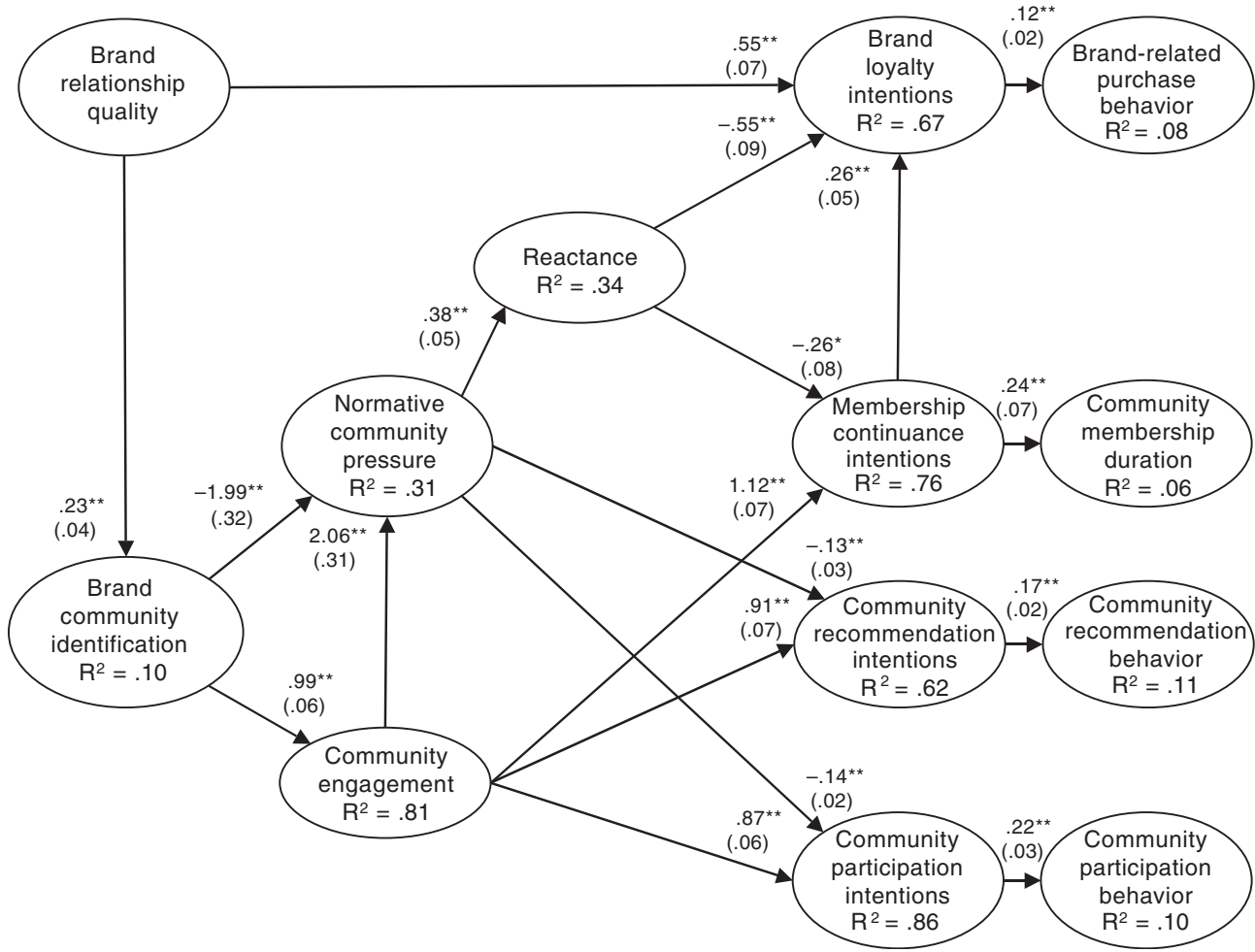
munity identification significantly ( $\gamma = .23$ , s.e. = .04), in support of H<sub>9</sub>. Brand relationship quality explains 10% of the variance in community identification. Finally, membership continuance intentions influence brand loyalty intentions significantly ( $\beta = .26$ , s.e. = .05), in support of H<sub>10</sub>. The antecedents of brand loyalty intentions explain 67% of the variance. This path is consistent with McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig's (2002) finding that integration with the brand community can have a positive impact on the consumer's perceptions of the brand. Furthermore, we also found support for the other expected relationships, such as a positive impact of brand relationship quality on brand loyalty intentions (for details, see Figure 2).

### Comparison with a Rival Model

One important criterion of a model's success is its performance compared with that of rival models (Bagozzi and Yi 1988). Our proposed model is based on an elaborate theory that hypothesizes a specific nomological network of constructs. For example, our model allows no direct paths from antecedents, such as brand relationship quality and community identification, to community-related behavioral intentions, and therefore it assumes that engagement and normative pressure mediate all the effects. A nonparsimonious rival model would hypothesize direct paths from these antecedent constructs to reactance and the four behavioral intentions constructs (see Figure 3). Such a model imposes relatively little nomological structure on the constructs.

We compared our hypothesized model with the rival model using the following criteria: overall fit, percentage of the model's statistically significant parameters, theoretical interpretation of the paths, and explained variance of the endogenous constructs. The overall fit for the rival model was about equal to that of our proposed model ( $\chi^2[94] = 564.53$ ,  $p \approx .00$ , RMSEA = .09, NNFI = .93, and CFI = .95), but it was accompanied by reduced parsimony. In our proposed model, 94.7% (or 18 of 19) of the paths were significant, whereas only 75% (15 of 20) of the paths were significant in the rival model. Even more problematic, many of

**FIGURE 2**  
Estimated Model



\* $p < .01$ .

\*\* $p < .001$ .

Notes: Unstandardized coefficients and standard errors are in parentheses; insignificant paths are omitted for ease of exposition.

the paths in the rival model did not make theoretical sense. For example, the path from community identification to membership continuance intentions ( $\gamma = -.69$ , s.e. = .24) and to recommendation intentions ( $\gamma = -.65$ , s.e. = .22) were both significant and negative.<sup>4</sup> Finally, except for participation intentions ( $R^2_{\text{rival}} = .91$  versus  $R^2_{\text{proposed}} = .86$ ), the explained variances for all other endogenous constructs were much lower in the rival model (brand loyalty intentions:  $R^2_{\text{rival}} = .49$  versus  $R^2_{\text{proposed}} = .67$ ; membership continuance intentions:  $R^2_{\text{rival}} = .75$  versus  $R^2_{\text{proposed}} = .76$ ; recommendation intentions:  $R^2_{\text{rival}} = .52$  versus  $R^2_{\text{proposed}} = .62$ ; and reactance:  $R^2_{\text{rival}} = .27$  versus  $R^2_{\text{proposed}} = .34$ ). On the basis of these findings, we acknowledge that this com-

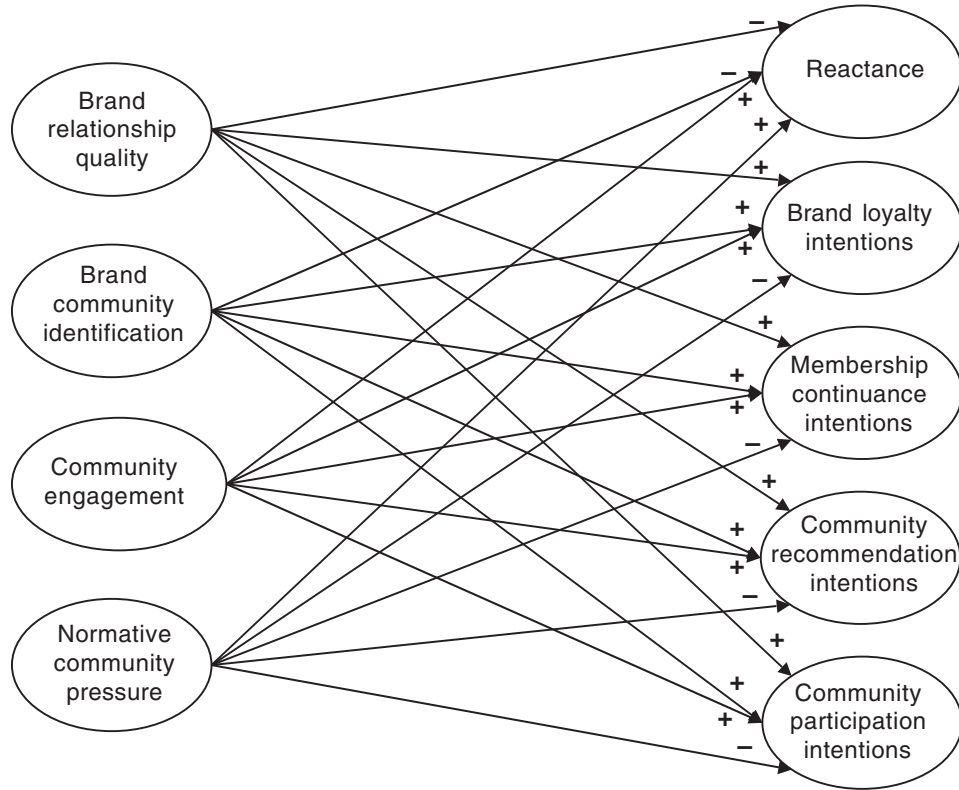
<sup>4</sup>Detailed results for the rival model are available on request. We also tested two other rival models that were more parsimonious and reflected current conventional wisdom about the value of brand communities. Our hypothesized model out-performed both models. The detailed comparisons for these two additional models are also available on request.

parison provided added confidence to the nomological network in our conceptual model.

### **Moderating Influences of Brand Knowledge and Brand Community Size**

We conducted multiple sample analyses (Jöreskog and Sörbom 1999) for the knowledgeable/novice and small/large brand community subsamples to test our hypotheses regarding the role of moderating variables. In  $H_{11}$ , we posited that the community identification, engagement, pressure, and brand relationship quality would be greater for knowledgeable and small community subsamples than for novice and large community subsamples. To test this hypothesis, we conducted a structured means analysis in LISREL, using the following model of means structures (Jöreskog and Sörbom 1999):  $x_{(g)} = \tau_x + \Pi_x \xi_{(g)} + \delta_{(g)}$ , where  $g$  refers to the respective subsample,  $x_{(g)}$  is a vector of input variables,  $\tau_x$  is a vector of constant intercept terms,  $\Pi_x$  is a matrix of coefficients of the regression of  $x$  on  $\xi$ ,  $\xi$  is a vector of latent

**FIGURE 3**  
**Rival Model**



independent variables,  $\delta$  is a vector of measurement errors in  $x$ , and the means of the  $\xi_{(g)}$  equal  $\kappa_{(g)}$ .

For the two moderating variables, we set the  $\kappa_{\text{Knowledgeable}}$  and  $\kappa_{\text{Small}}$  equal to zero to define the origin and units of measurement of the  $\xi$  factors; then, we computed  $\kappa_{\text{Novice}}$  and  $\kappa_{\text{Large}}$  and determined whether the differences in the factor means between the groups were significantly different from each other. Table 3 provides the results.

The top panel of Table 3 shows that when novice consumers are compared with knowledgeable consumers, the factor means for all four constructs are significantly lower for novice consumers, as we hypothesized. In the lower panel of Table 3, we find mixed results. Furthermore, as we predicted, when large communities are compared with small communities, factor means of community identification and normative pressure are significantly lower for large communities. However, factor means of community engagement and brand relationship quality are not significantly different for the two subsamples. On the whole, these results support  $H_{11}$ .

To test  $H_{12}$ – $H_{15}$ , we built separate structural models for the knowledgeable/novice consumer and the small/large community subsamples, and we conducted tests of moderation to determine whether the respective path coefficients differed. Table 4 summarizes the analyses and results. The procedure that we used was as follows for each test: We constructed two multiple-sample models. In the first model, all paths were unconstrained between the two groups. This is the “no constraints” or baseline model in Table 4. In the

second model, we constrained the relevant path (e.g., brand relationship quality to community identification for  $H_{12}$ ) to be equal for both subsamples. This is the “equal paths” model. The difference in chi-square values between the two models provides a test for the equality of the path for the two groups.

Consider the first row of Table 4 in light of this procedure. For knowledgeable versus novice consumers, the results indicate that the path from brand relationship quality to community identification is stronger for the knowledgeable group ( $\gamma = .19$ , *s.e.* = .04) than for the novice group ( $\gamma = .13$ , *s.e.* = .23,  $p < .001$ ), in support of  $H_{12}$ . Similarly, the path is stronger for the large community subsample ( $\gamma = .26$ , *s.e.* = .07) than for the small community subsample ( $\gamma = .11$ , *s.e.* = .04,  $p \approx .06$ ). Thus,  $H_{12}$  is supported for both moderator variables.

With respect to the remaining hypotheses, the paths from community integration to engagement and normative pressure are stronger for knowledgeable consumers than for novice consumers ( $p < .10$ ), but the paths are not different for large and small communities. Thus,  $H_{13}$  is partly supported. In  $H_{14}$ , we predicted stronger paths from normative pressure to the three intentions, but this is not supported for either moderator. Finally, in  $H_{15}$ , we predicted that the path from reactance to membership continuance intentions and brand loyalty intentions would be more negative; this is supported for knowledgeable consumers but not for novice consumers ( $p < .10$ ), and it is supported for large communities but not for small communities. On the whole, we found

**TABLE 3**  
**Test of Factor Mean Differences Between Knowledgeable/Novice Consumer and Small/Large Community Subsamples**

Construct			
Knowledgeable/Novice Consumer Subsamples	Knowledgeable Consumer Subsample Factor Mean ( $\kappa_{\text{Knowledgeable}}$ )	Novice Consumer Subsample Factor Mean ( $\kappa_{\text{Novice}}$ )	t-Value, $p$ -Value
Community identification	0	-.96	-5.17, $p < .001$
Community engagement	0	-.52	-1.94, $p \approx .05$
Normative community pressure	0	-.63	-2.77, $p < .01$
Brand relationship quality	0	-2.01	-8.09, $p < .001$
Small/Large Community Subsamples	Small Community Subsample Factor Mean ( $\kappa_{\text{Small}}$ )	Large Community Subsample Factor Mean ( $\kappa_{\text{Large}}$ )	t-Value, $p$ -Value
Community identification	0	-.76	-5.50, $p < .001$
Community engagement	0	-.14	-.56, not significant
Normative community pressure	0	-.86	-4.78, $p < .001$
Brand relationship quality	0	-.31	-1.45, not significant

evidence that brand community's social influence is accentuated more for knowledgeable consumers than for novice consumers and more for large communities than for small communities.

## Discussion and Implications

In the current research, we studied the social influence of brand community on consumers. We found support for our conceptual framework in a large sample of German-speaking car club members. Broadly speaking, this example points to the importance of purposely selecting, initiating, managing, and controlling interactions among customers when facilitating brand communities. In particular, our study contributes to existing brand community research in several ways.

First, our model found that the consumer's relationship with the car brand was an influential antecedent to his or her identification with the brand community. This finding provides useful insights into current practice. Specifically, when soliciting members for their brand communities, many firms tend to target new or potential customers. For example, the Audi club of North America promotes driving schools for new drivers who have not yet purchased a car in the hope that they will buy an Audi. National Instruments targets membership in its LabVIEW Zone community toward customers who have recently purchased the LabVIEW software. Their goal is for the community to help new users install and learn to use the software. Our finding suggests that such approaches toward new member acquisition do not work well if the firm's goals are to enlist engaged, active community members and to create a vibrant, self-sustaining brand community. Instead, the impact of brand relationship quality on community identifi-

cation suggests that it is more effective for a firm to solicit and enroll its existing, long-tenured customers who already have an affirmative relationship with the brand. In managerial parlance, brand community membership is more useful as a customer retention device than as a customer acquisition tool.

Second, it is noteworthy that a majority of the car clubs we studied were "corporate" brand communities (i.e., organized around brands such as Ford or Volkswagen). However, as we noted previously, most consumers have a relationship with a specific car brand, such as the Ford Explorer or the Volkswagen Passat. This difference raises the possibility that though identification with the car club is influenced by the customer's relationship with his or her car brand, it may also help foster a connection between the customer and the car company as a whole (e.g., Bhattacharya and Sen 2003), thus strengthening the customer's relationship at this level and keeping him or her in the folds of the firm (see also McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002).

Third, by using a second-wave survey that elicited respondents' self-reported behaviors, we show that members' various behavioral intentions, including membership continuance, recommendation, active participation, and loyalty to the brand, all translate into corresponding subsequent behaviors. This finding has considerable managerial value because it links the brand community's influence to customer behaviors that affect profitability and provides grist to the mill of marketing managers who advocate building brand communities for their customers.

Fourth, we found that brand communities can influence their members in negative ways; this finding contributes to existing studies that have focused on the positive aspects of brand communities. Normative pressure, an extrinsic obligation to abide by the community's norms, results in reac-



**TABLE 4**  
**Results of Analyses to Test H<sub>12</sub>–H<sub>15</sub>**

Hypothesis	Knowledgeable Versus Novice Consumer Subsamples		Small Versus Large Community Subsamples	
	Path Coefficients in Unconstrained Model	$\chi^2$ Test Results	Path Coefficients in Unconstrained Model	$\chi^2$ Test Results
Baseline model		No constraints model: $\chi^2(210) = 447.7$		No constraints model: $\chi^2(210) = 455.3$
<i>H<sub>12</sub></i> BRQ → CI is greater for knowledgeable/large than for novice/small subsamples, respectively.	$\gamma_{(K)}^a = .19^{***b} (.04)^c$ $\gamma_{(N)} = .13 (.23)$	Equal paths model: $\chi^2(211) = 468.84$ Test of H <sub>1</sub> : $\chi_d^2(1) = 21.14$ , $p < .001$ H <sub>12</sub> is supported.	$\gamma_{(S)}^d = .11^{**} (.04)$ $\gamma_{(L)} = .26^{***} (.07)$	Equal paths model: $\chi^2(211) = 458.90$ Test of H <sub>1</sub> : $\chi_d^2(1) = 3.6$ , $p \approx .06$ H <sub>12</sub> is supported.
<i>H<sub>13</sub></i> CI → CE and CI → CP are greater for knowledgeable/large than for novice/small subsamples, respectively.	BCI → CE $\beta_{(K)} = 1.07^{***} (.07)$ $\beta_{(N)} = .88^{***} (.10)$ BCI → NCP $\beta_{(K)} = -2.17^{***} (.30)$ $\beta_{(N)} = -1.11^{**} (.33)$	Equal paths model: $\chi^2(212) = 453.16$ Test of H <sub>1</sub> : $\chi_d^2(2) = 5.46$ , $p \approx .06$ H <sub>13</sub> is supported.	BCI → CE $\beta_{(S)} = 1.03^{***} (.08)$ $\beta_{(L)} = .94^{***} (.08)$ BCI → NCP $\beta_{(S)} = -1.38^{***} (.31)$ $\beta_{(L)} = -2.04^{**} (.34)$	Equal paths model: $\chi^2(212) = 458.89$ Test of H <sub>1</sub> : $\chi_d^2(2) = 3.59$ , $p > .16$ H <sub>13</sub> is not supported.
<i>H<sub>14</sub></i> CP → MCI, CP → CRI, and CP → CPI are greater for knowledgeable/large than for novice/small subsamples, respectively.	NCP → MCI $\beta_{(K)} = -.23^{***} (.05)$ $\beta_{(N)} = -.26 (.14)$ NCP → CRI $\beta_{(K)} = -.13^{**} (.04)$ $\beta_{(N)} = .07 (.10)$ NCP → CPI $\beta_{(K)} = -.22^{***} (.04)$ $\beta_{(N)} = -.16 (.08)$	Equal paths model: $\chi^2(213) = 451.54$ Test of H <sub>1</sub> : $\chi_d^2(3) = 3.8$ , $p > .28$ H <sub>14</sub> is not supported.	NCP → MCI $\beta_{(S)} = -.18^{**} (.06)$ $\beta_{(L)} = -.25^{***} (.07)$ NCP → CRI $\beta_{(S)} = -.03 (.05)$ $\beta_{(L)} = -.14^* (.07)$ NCP → CPI $\beta_{(S)} = -.13^{***} (.04)$ $\beta_{(L)} = -.24^{***} (.06)$	Equal paths model: $\chi^2(213) = 458.39$ Test of H <sub>1</sub> : $\chi_d^2(3) = 3.09$ , $p > .37$ H <sub>14</sub> is not supported.
<i>H<sub>15</sub></i> RE → MCI and RE → BLI are greater for knowledgeable/large than for novice/small subsamples, respectively.	R → MCI $\beta_{(K)} = -.04^* (.02)$ $\beta_{(N)} = .04 (.07)$ R → BLI $\beta_{(K)} = -.05^* (.02)$ $\beta_{(N)} = .10 (.09)$	Equal paths model: $\chi^2(212) = 452.90$ Test of H <sub>1</sub> : $\chi_d^2(2) = 5.2$ , $p \approx .07$ H <sub>15</sub> is supported.	R → MCI $\beta_{(S)} = -.00 (.03)$ $\beta_{(L)} = -.14^{***} (.03)$ R → BLI $\beta_{(S)} = -.00 (.04)$ $\beta_{(L)} = -.19^{***} (.04)$	Equal paths model: $\chi^2(212) = 461.11$ Test of H <sub>1</sub> : $\chi_d^2(2) = 5.2$ , $p \approx .054$ H <sub>15</sub> is supported.

\* $p < .05$ .

\*\* $p < .01$ .

\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

<sup>a</sup>The subscript "K" refers to the knowledgeable subsample, and "N" refers to the novice subsample.

<sup>b</sup>Unstandardized coefficient.

<sup>c</sup>Standard error.

<sup>d</sup>The subscript "S" refers to small community subsample, and "L" refers to the large community subsample.

Notes: BRQ = brand relationship quality, CI = community identification, CE = community engagement, CP = normative community pressure, RE = reactance, MCI = membership continuance intentions, CRI = community recommendation intentions, CPI = community participation intentions, and BLI = brand loyalty intentions.

tance, a motivational state of resistance, and both are found to influence the consumer's behavioral intentions negatively. Notably, the source of normative pressure and reactance in our model was the consumer's engagement in the community, indicating that the community's positive influences give birth to its negative influences. We suggest that such a finding should not be taken as a final conclusion but rather as a preliminary finding that provokes further thought.

One question that arises from this finding is the composition of community engagement. It is possible that engagement comprises multiple components, with some leading to wholly positive outcomes and others to negative states. For example, it could be that private aspects of community engagement lead to positive outcomes, whereas perceptions of pressure and reactance stem mainly from the conspicuous public behaviors that highly engaged consumers fre-

quently perform (e.g., Cialdini and Goldstein 2004). Further research is necessary to study this issue.

Another question is understanding how the firm's role in sponsoring the brand community leads to negative community influences. In the current study, the car companies visibly supported most of the respective car clubs. However, many other successful brand communities are organized and facilitated entirely by enthusiastic customers with little or no firm involvement. For example, National Instruments' LabVIEW product has several active customer communities, such as OpenG ([www.openg.org](http://www.openg.org)) and LAVA ([www.lavausergroup.org](http://www.lavausergroup.org)), that were begun and are operated by LabVIEW enthusiasts. Although this issue remains to be studied, we conjecture that participation in enthusiast-organized communities may be less susceptible to the negative influences that our study reveals. If this is the case, firms may be well advised to adopt a passive, "behind-the-scenes" approach when facilitating brand communities.

Fifth, we found that both the consumer's brand knowledge and the community size moderate the brand community's influence on its members (see Tables 3 and 4). Consumers who are knowledgeable about the brand not only experience higher levels of identification, engagement, and pressure but also reveal stronger paths in our model than do novices. This further reinforces the importance of firms' recruiting seasoned customers rather than novices into brand communities if their goal is to influence customers.

Furthermore, we found that the moderating impact of brand community size was more nuanced. Smaller car clubs engendered higher levels of identification and normative

pressure, perhaps because of the richer and multifaceted nature of interpersonal relationships therein (Dholakia, Bagozzi, and Pearo 2004). However, we found that the strengths of the paths in the conceptual model were greater for larger car clubs, suggesting that when firms plan venues for enabling consumer interactions, larger sizes are more appropriate if their goal is to have greater community influence on key behaviors.

Despite these contributions, we acknowledge the limitations of this research. The survey method that we used collected all the measures except self-reported behaviors only once. As a result, although we took various precautions during analysis, such as establishing discriminant validity of constructs and comparing the performance of our proposed model against that of rival models, the results must still be interpreted with caution. In addition, care must also be taken when extrapolating our findings to other types of brand communities, such as those that predominate virtual, enthusiast-run communities (e.g., Dholakia, Bagozzi, and Pearo 2004) or those that consist of brand-centered events that are organized infrequently by the firm, such as Brand-fests (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002).

In conclusion, it seems appropriate to echo the optimism of brand community researchers such as McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig (2002) and Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) and to suggest that brand communities offer a fresh, effective, and viral approach to building brands in the present-day, unresponsive marketing environment. Marketers may do well to take advantage of the opportunities that brand communities present.

## APPENDIX

### Summary of Measures

Construct	Measures <sup>a</sup> (Item Loading) <sup>b</sup>
<b>Constructs in Conceptual Model</b>	
Community identification	1. I am very attached to the community. (.80*) 2. Other brand community members and I share the same objectives. (.67*) 3. The friendships I have with other brand community members mean a lot to me. (.83*) 4. If brand community members planned something, I'd think of it as something "we" would do rather than something "they" would do. (.80*) 5. I see myself as a part of the brand community. (.82*)
Community engagement	1. I benefit from following the brand community's rules. (.61*) 2. I am motivated to participate in the brand community's activities because I feel better afterwards. (.81*) 3. I am motivated to participate in the brand community's activities because I am able to support other members. (.82*) 4. I am motivated to participate in the brand community's activities because I am able to reach personal goals. (.70*)
Normative community pressure	1. In order to be accepted, I feel like I must behave as other brand community members expect me to behave. (.74*) 2. My actions are often influenced by how other brand community members want me to behave. (.73*)
Reactance	1. Since I joined the brand community, I have felt a desire to preserve my personal freedom. (1.0*)
Membership continuance intentions	1. It would be very difficult for me to leave this brand community. (.77*) 2. I am willing to pay more money to be a member of this brand community than I would for membership in other brand communities. (.64*) 3. I intend to stay on as a brand community member. (.72*)

**APPENDIX**  
**Continued**

Construct	Measures <sup>a</sup> (Item Loading) <sup>b</sup>
Community recommendation intentions	1. I never miss an opportunity to recommend this brand community to others. (.65*) 2. If friends or relatives were to search for an automobile brand community, I would definitely recommend this one. (.70*)
Community participation intentions	1. I intend to actively participate in the brand community's activities. (1.0*)
Community membership behavior <sup>d</sup>	1. How often did you think about leaving this brand community within the last ten weeks? <sup>c</sup> (1.0*)
Community recommendation behavior <sup>d</sup>	1. How often did you recommend this brand community within the last ten weeks? (1.0*)
Community participation behavior <sup>d</sup>	1. How often did you participate in activities of this brand community within the last ten weeks? (1.0*)
Brand relationship quality	1. This brand says a lot about the kind of person I am. (.50*) 2. This brand's image and my self-image are similar in many respects. (.72*) 3. This brand plays an important role in my life. (.73*)
Brand loyalty intentions	1. I intend to buy this brand in the near future. (.89*) 2. I would actively search for this brand in order to buy it. (.84*) 3. I intend to buy other products of this brand. (.64*)
Brand-related purchase behavior <sup>d</sup>	1. How often did you buy products of this brand within the last ten weeks? (1.0*)
<b>Moderating Variables</b>	
Brand knowledge	1. When compared to other people, I know a lot about this brand. (.82*) 2. My friends consider me an expert regarding this brand. (.82*) 3. I consider myself very experienced with this brand. (.82*)
Brand community size	1. How many members does your car club have? <sup>e</sup>

\* $p < .001$ .

<sup>a</sup>Unless indicated otherwise, we obtained responses using ten-point Likert scales, anchored by 1 = "strongly disagree" and 10 = "strongly agree."

<sup>b</sup>We report standardized item loadings.

<sup>c</sup>We reverse coded these items.

<sup>d</sup>This construct contains a single item and was elicited as a frequency through an open-ended question; we then recoded it into the following four categories: never, one to five times, six to ten times, and more than ten times.

<sup>e</sup>The choices for this question were (1) less than 50 members, (2) 50–199 members, (3) 200–499 members, (4) 500–999 members, and (5) 1000 members or more.

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