
BRAND AUTHENTICITY AND ADVOCACY LOYALTY IN ONLINE COMMUNITIES: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF BEHAVIORAL ENGAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Social media's growth has motivated companies and communities to build closer ties with their stakeholders through honest conversation. Online communities say that brand authenticity increases members' loyalty and support. However, particularly in Indonesia's self-improvement communities, the mechanisms by which brand authenticity affects advocacy loyalty via behavioral engagement remain mostly unresearched. This study seeks to examine how brand authenticity impacts community advocacy loyalty, with behavioral engagement acting as a mediating factor, in the Woman Choice Community on Instagram. The current research uses a quantitative method, applying an explanatory research framework. The information provided here was gathered by administering a survey to 277 participants from the Woman Choice Community who follow the Instagram handle @womanchoice. The study employed Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) with a bootstrapping method that included 5,000 subsamples to examine both direct and indirect relationships between the variables. The findings show that loyalty towards community advocacy is significantly and favorably influenced by brand authenticity. This study also found that behavioral involvement acts as a mediator, improving the relationship between brand authenticity and loyalty to community support. The findings show that members' views of brand authenticity might improve their behavioral involvement, therefore influencing their willingness to independently support, endorse, and promote the community. This research adds to the current literature on brand authenticity and community-focused marketing by highlighting the significance of behavioral engagement as a means that connects the creation of advocacy loyalty. The findings suggest that members' perceptions of brand authenticity can increase their behavioural engagement, which in turn can drive their willingness to voluntarily recommend, support, and advocate for the community. This study makes a contribution to the existing literature on brand authenticity and community-based marketing by emphasizing the importance of behavioral engagement as a mechanism that bridges the formation of advocacy loyalty. In practice, the research results provide recommendations for community managers to build authentic, transparent, and interactive communication through social media to increase member engagement and strengthen community advocacy loyalty.

Keywords: Brand Authenticity; Behavioral Engagement; Community Advocacy Loyalty; Instagram; Online Community.

INTRODUCTION

When we look at what's happening, we can see that the way people communicate online is changing. Now people mostly talk to each other in messages on the internet. In the contemporary digital era, social media has evolved into a multifaceted platform that extends beyond its original purpose of merely disseminating information. It is evident that these platforms function as spaces in which communities can establish their identity, disseminate core values, and enhance their reputation in the public eye (Zerfass et al., 2018).

This paradigm shift underscores the necessity for organisations and communities to adopt greater agility in the management of their digital footprints and the creation of content that is beneficial to their followers in the context of an overwhelming deluge of information.

Now social media has two functions. First, we need to remember that social media is a way for people to talk to each other. It is also very important for people in a community to feel connected to each other and to trust one another, as (Rodrigues et al., 2024). The way things look on media is important, but it is also important for a company to show that it is real and honest in every message it sends, which is a big part of making strong relationships on social media, as (Ma & Chelliah, 2024). When social media is real, it makes people loyal; it gets people talking to each other in their communities. It helps build trust in social media. Social media helps people in communities to really talk to each other and to trust media.

Instagram has become a big platform in this regard. Instagram is a visual medium. Instagram facilitates the dissemination of visual content, including photographs, videos, and stories. This approach fosters a sense of emotional connection with the customer. (Chu et al., 2022) proposed that audience involvement may be boosted by original social media posts. Constantly producing unique material has been shown to increase the likelihood of developing personal relationships with the audience, expressed as behavioral involvement and audience retention (Rodrigues et al., 2024).

The advent of social media has precipitated a paradigm shift in the manner in which communities are formed. The advent of online communities can be attributed to the convergence of shared interests, values, and objectives among individuals. These individuals establish connections through the utilisation of online platforms, facilitating communication with one another (Alam & Lutfi, 2023). Community members should not be considered passive observers. It is evident that they are now actively involved in the process of community building.

These interactions are instrumental in shaping the community's dynamics (Ingvar et al., 2014). It is imperative to recognise the significance of behavioural engagement in order to comprehend the quality of relationships that exist within a given community. Concrete actions encompassed by the concept of behavioural engagement include content viewing, responding to other members, interacting with other

members, and participating in community events (Alam & Lutfi, 2023). It is evident that an elevated level of behavioural engagement among members fosters heightened loyalty and support for the community. This will have a positive impact on the community in the future (Cheung & To, 2026).

This happens in the Woman Choice Community, a group for women's self-development. They often use their Instagram account @womanchoice to interact and learn from each other. With many followers, 25,153 to be exact, it's hard to get people engaged. They post content regularly, but not many followers participate by commenting or sharing the content. It seems like people are not connecting with the content on a level. The Woman Choice Community posts are not sparking the desired conversation.

An investigation of account performance statistics reveals that the involvement rate for the @womanchoice account is estimated at 0.59%. Though it is quite desirable to have audience growth, it is quite important to guarantee that it includes more active user engagement. Only then will we be able to increase long-term support and community loyalty (Cheung & To, 2026). But it's interesting to note that audience members who interact with the material show a lot of significant and meaningful behavior. This result points to a high desire to be active, but this has not yet been extrapolated to the entire following. At the "Community Advocacy Loyalty" stage, a deeper degree of connection is formed among a small group of audience members. This

shows the greatest degree of loyalty, as members are ready to promote and recommend their neighborhood (Cheung & To, 2026).

The strange thing is that even though people are not really engaging with things, some people are really good at supporting the things they care about, like the online brands they care about. This shows that when an online brand is authentic, people are more likely to be loyal to the brand. This is because of how people behave when they are engaged with the brand, and this is something that (Ma & Chelliah, 2024) found, and it is still true for online brands. The present study aims to analyse the influence of brand authenticity on community support loyalty through behavioural participation in the Woman Choice Self-Development Community.

METODE

Using a quantitative approach with an explanatory approach, the current study looks at the cause-and-effect relationship among brand authenticity, behavioural involvement, and community advocacy loyalty within the Instagram Woman Choice Community. The employment of a quantitative method was necessitated by the study's objective to test hypotheses derived from theoretical frameworks and to undertake an objective measurement of the relationships between variables through statistical analysis (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

The study group comprises everyone following the @womanchoice Instagram account who actively interact with the

material posted by the community. Non-probability sampling using targeted sampling, which is the choosing of participants depending on particular requirements consistent with the goals of the study, was the sampling approach used. The following criteria are applied in order to determine the respondent: In order to participate in this study, it is necessary to follow the @womanchoice Instagram account, be at least 17 years of age, and have interacted with content posted by the @womanchoice account. Interactions can involve liking, sharing, or commenting on material as well as taking part in community events. Participants also have to be ready to fill out the study questionnaire.

The 10-times rule, which in Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) research, the minimum sample size may be estimated depending on guidelines (Hair et al., 2022), helped to guide the sample size determination. The study gathered information from 277 participants, therefore fulfilling the minimum sample size for PLS-SEM analysis. This is to say, the sample size should be determined by multiplying the number of indicators used in the research model by ten. The study utilised a total of 27 indicators, thereby necessitating a minimum sample size of 270 respondents (27×10). The study gathered information from 277 participants, therefore fulfilling the minimal sample size for PLS-SEM analysis.

The research data were collected through the administration of an online questionnaire, utilising a semantic differential scale ranging

from 1 to 7. In this scale, each pair of bipolar words was employed to assess respondents' views on each research variable indicator. The independent variable in this study was brand authenticity, the mediating variable was behavioural engagement, and the dependent variable was community advocacy loyalty.

The analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) with the SmartPLS 4 software. The SEM-PLS method was selected due to its capacity to assess causal relationships among latent constructs concurrently, encompassing models that incorporate mediator variables, and it does not necessitate data to be normally distributed (Hair et al., 2022).

The sample size estimate was guided by the 10-times rule, that in Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) studies, the minimum sample size might be calculated based on rules (Hair et al., 2022). The study gathered data from 277 people, meeting the minimum sample size for PLS-SEM analysis. A hypothesis was deemed to have been accepted if it exhibited a t-statistic value greater than 1.96 and a p-value less than 0.05 at a 5% significance level (Hair et al., 2022).

RESEARCH FINDINGS

1. Respondent Characteristics

The present study involved 277 participants who were followers of the Instagram account @womanchoice and met the study criteria. The demographic details of the respondents are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

Characteristics	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Male	0	0%
Female	277	100%
Age		
17 – 21 years	90	32,5%
22 – 26 years	121	43,7%
27 – 31 years	42	15,2%
32 – 36 years	15	5,4%
> 36 years	9	3,2%
Occupation		
Student	138	49,8%
Private Employee	90	32,5%
Self – Employed/Freelance	24	8,7%
Civil Servant	9	3,2%
Other	16	5,8%
Last Education		
Elementary/Junior High/High School	172	62,1%
Diploma 3/Diploma 4/ S1 /Master's/ Doctoral	105	37,9%
Income		
< Rp 1.000.000	57	20,6%
Rp 1.500.000 - Rp 2.500.000	115	41,5%
Rp 2.500.000 - Rp 5.000.000	76	27,4%
> Rp 5.000.000	29	10,5%
Domicile		
Jakarta	80	28,9%
Makassar	78	28,2%
Bandung	45	16,2%
Surabaya	28	10,1%
Yogyakarta	19	6,9%
Other cities	27	9,7%
Amount	277	100%

Source: Data Obtained by Researchers, 2026

As demonstrated in Table 1, the study's participants were exclusively female, with a 100% representation of the female demographic. The majority of respondents were aged between 22 and 26 years (43.7%), with the 17–21 age group accounting for 32.5% of the

sample. With regard to the respondents' occupations, the majority were students (49.8%) and private-sector employees (32.5%). With respect to educational attainment, the majority of respondents (62.1%) had completed high school or an equivalent

qualification. From an economic perspective, the majority of respondents (41.5%) reported a monthly income of approximately Rp1,500,000 to Rp2,500,000. Furthermore, the respondents were drawn from a multitude of regions across Indonesia, with the largest proportions hailing from Jakarta (28.9%), Makassar (28.2%), and Bandung (16.2%).

This profile suggests that the majority of Woman Choice Community members are women of working age who frequently use social media and possess characteristics that align with the target audience for a self-development community.

2. Looking at the Model of Assessment (Outer Model)

We need to test the model to make sure it is working correctly. The outer model testing is used to check things before we start doing structural equation modelling. We want to know if the model is valid and if it is measuring what it is supposed to measure. So we start by looking at the loading values for each thing we are measuring. This is a step in the evaluation process of the Model of Assessment or the outer model.

The findings of the analysis suggest that several indicators did not meet the outer loading threshold of ≥ 0.70 . Consequently, indicators BA9, BA11, BE3, BE4, BE5, BE6, and CAL7 were eliminated. Following the elimination process, it was established that all indicators that remained met the standards for convergent validity.

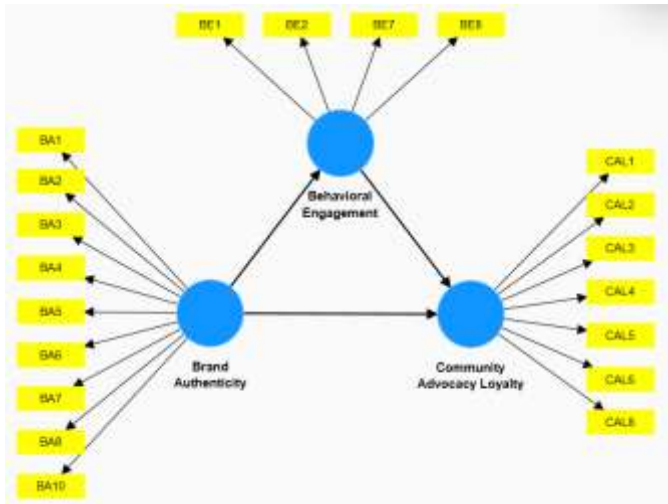


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study
Source: Processed primary data (2026)

a. Convergent Validity and Reliability

The results of the measurement model evaluation are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of the Measurement Model Evaluation

Variables / Indicators	Outer Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (rho_a)	Composite Reliability (rho_c)	Average variance

				extracte d (AVE)
Brand Authenticity	0.960	0.961	0.966	0.759
BA1	0.873			
BA2	0.882			
BA3	0.864			
BA4	0.866			
BA5	0.858			
BA6	0.889			
BA7	0.859			
BA8	0.885			
BA10	0.863			
Behavioral Engagement	0.903	0.912	0.932	0.773
BE1	0.889			
BE2	0.885			
BE7	0.844			
BE8	0.899			
Community Advocacy Loyalty	0.946	0.950	0.956	0.755
CAL1	0.889			
CAL2	0.885			
CAL3	0.844			
CAL4	0.899			
CAL5	0.889			
CAL6	0.885			
CAL8	0.844			

Source: SmartPLS Data Analysis, 2026

As demonstrated in Table 2, the outer loading values for each indicator exceed 0.70, thereby meeting the criteria for convergent validity. All constructs clearly have Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values more than 0.50, which suggests that every construct explains more than half of the variance in its indicators.

Furthermore, each construct demonstrated a Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability value greater than 0.70. This indicates that the research instrument is highly reliable.

b. Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) approach.

Table 3. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	Behavioral Engagement	Brand Authenticity	Community Advocacy Loyalty
Behavioral Engagement			

Brand Authenticity	0.603	
Community Advocacy Loyalty	0.554	0.619

Source: SmartPLS Data Analysis, 2026

A lower HTMT ratio, falling short of the upper cut-off limit of 0.90, signifies that the construct fulfils this discriminant validity criterion. The analysis indicates that the construct can be utilised to measure different concepts, thereby demonstrating that the constructs being measured are distinct.

3. Evaluation of the Structural Model (Inner Model)

Prior to the testing of the hypotheses, the structural model was subjected to a series of evaluations. These comprised tests of multicollinearity, the coefficient of determination, and model fit.

a. Multicollinearity Test

Table 4 Results of the Multicollinearity Test (Inner VIF Values)

Variable	VIF
Behavioral Engagement → Community Advocacy Loyalty	1.477
Brand Authenticity → Behavioral Engagement	1.000
Brand Authenticity → Community Advocacy Loyalty	1.477

Source: SmartPLS Data Analysis, 2026

It is evident from the data presented in Table 5 that all Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values are below 5.00, thus indicating that the

research model does not suffer from multicollinearity.

b. Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

Table 5 R-square

	R-square	R-square adjusted
Behavioral Engagement	0.323	0.320
Community Advocacy Loyalty	0.403	0.399

Source: SmartPLS Data Analysis, 2026

The R^2 value for the behavioural engagement variable is 0.323, indicating that approximately 32.3% of the variation in behavioural engagement can be attributed to brand authenticity. Conversely, the R^2 value for Community Advocacy Loyalty is 0.403, indicating that 40.3%

of the variation in community advocacy loyalty can be attributed to the combined influence of Brand Authenticity and Behavioral Engagement. The remainder is influenced by other factors not included in this research model.

c. Model Fit

Table 6 Goodness of Fit

FIT Index	Value	Criteria (Cut-off)
SRMR	0.044	0.044

NFI 0.940 0.940

Source: SmartPLS Data Analysis, 2026

The research model has an SRMR of 0.044, which is clearly less than the 0.08 cutoff. The NFI value of 0.940 is way above the minimum limit of 0.90. Here, the model we are looking at seems to be a choice, and it

should work well with the process of testing a hypothesis.

4. Hypothesis Testing

The study used SmartPLS's method of bootstrapping to take a look, at the hypothesis that the researchers wanted to test.

Table 7 Results of Hypothesis Testing (Path Coefficients)

Path	Original Sample (O)	t - statistics	p - value
Brand Authenticity → Community Advocacy Loyalty	0.445	6.325	0.000
Brand Authenticity → Behavioral Engagement	0.568	8.729	0.000
Behavioral Engagement → Community Advocacy Loyalty	0.266	3.932	0.000
Brand Authenticity → Behavioral Engagement → Community Advocacy Loyalty	0.151	3.245	0.001

Source: SmartPLS Data Analysis, 2026

The findings of this study are supported by the results of the experimental tests.

Firstly, the results indicate that Brand Authenticity exerts a significant positive effect on Community Advocacy Loyalty ($\beta = 0.445$; $t = 6.325$; $p < 0.001$), thereby supporting Hypothesis 1.

Secondly, Brand Authenticity has been demonstrated to exert a positive and significant effect on Behavioral Engagement ($\beta = 0.568$; $t = 8.729$; $p < 0.001$), thus supporting the second hypothesis.

Thirdly, the positive and significant effect of Behavioral Engagement on Community Advocacy Loyalty ($\beta = 0.266$; $t = 3.932$; $p < 0.001$) supports Hypothesis 3.

The results of the test that looks at the effect show that Behavioral Engagement is really important in the relationship between Brand Authenticity and Community Advocacy Loyalty. To be specific, the numbers are: $\beta = 0.151$, $t = 3.245$, and $p = 0.001$. This means that our idea, which we called Hypothesis 4 is correct.

The study found that Brand Authenticity has an impact on Community Advocacy Loyalty. This is still true when we add Behavioral Engagement to the mix. So what does this mean? It means that Behavioral Engagement plays a role. Behavioral Engagement is not the thing that matters. Brand Authenticity still has an effect on Community Advocacy Loyalty, with Behavioral

Engagement included. This tells us that Behavioral Engagement is part of the story. Behavioral Engagement is a mediator of the relationship between Brand Authenticity and Community Advocacy Loyalty.

DISCUSSION

Research has found that having an authentic brand can have extremely positive effects for businesses and how much loyalty they receive from their customers. This also applies to the perception of Woman Choice's community brand by its members. The stronger the members' perception of the community brand's authenticity, the more they will recommend, support, and even defend the community to others. This phenomenon seems logical enough because a community with shared values and strong identity that functions well and has good communication with its members will establish members' trust. The deeper feeling of connection to the community that this establishes is more than just the members' positive feelings towards the community.

This finding is consistent with the observations reported by (Morhart et al., 2014), who asserted that brand authenticity is a pivotal factor in fostering loyalty. The phenomenon can be explained by the following rationale: consumers demonstrate a propensity to exhibit brand loyalty towards entities they perceive as acting with integrity, consistency, and in accordance with their held values. In the event of such a discrepancy, the trust that underpins the relationship may rapidly erode. Within the paradigm of the Woman Choice Community,

the persistent communication via Instagram, coupled with the congruence between the values espoused and the community's endeavours, fosters a sense of loyalty among members. This commitment is evidenced not solely through active engagement but also through the readiness to offer recommendations and provide support to the community.

People have done studies. Found out that when you actually use a website, it can make people like the brand more. This really helps with people being loyal to the brand community. The studies show that if you do not think about what people do with the brand, you cannot tell if they will really support it. When a brand is really genuine, people want to join in and share what they are doing with others. So when people get involved, it makes them more committed to supporting the brand community. Loyalty to a brand community is important. Being genuine and true to the brand helps with that.

The findings of this study lend support to Social Identity Theory, which states that individuals tend to have a greater commitment to groups they perceive as representing their identity.

When people think Woman Choice is a community that shares their values, they want to get involved. They start to participate. This leads to them really caring about Woman Choice. They tell others about Woman Choice. Stand up for it.

In terms of the people who run Woman Choice need to make sure they are honest and clear in what they say. They have to share things that're

true, consistent, and match what Woman Choice is all about. This way, Woman Choice stays a community that people trust and want to be part of. Furthermore, interactive chats, Q&A sessions, community challenges, user-generated content, and internet and offline group activities help to strengthen member loyalty.

CONCLUSION

The present study demonstrates that brand authenticity exerts a positive and significant effect on community advocacy loyalty within the Woman Choice Community on Instagram. In addition, it was established that brand authenticity has a direct impact on behavioural engagement. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that increased behavioural engagement positively influences community advocacy loyalty. The findings of the mediation test suggest that behavioural engagement functions as a partial mediator in the relationship between brand authenticity and community advocacy loyalty. The findings of this study indicate that members' perceptions of brand authenticity do not merely directly increase advocacy loyalty but also trigger tangible member engagement, which in turn strengthens advocacy actions within the community.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the existing discourse on brand authenticity within the context of online communities by substantiating the notion that behavioural engagement serves as the pivotal factor in the emergence of community advocacy loyalty. The findings suggest that in order to

engender long-term advocacy loyalty, brand authenticity must be conveyed through communication that stimulates member activity.

In practice, the administrators of the Woman Choice Community are advised to maintain authentic, consistent, and open brand communication, as well as to organise activities that increase member engagement. Such activities may include lively discussions, member experience-sharing sessions, promotions via user-generated content, and community participation initiatives. It is anticipated that these approaches will enhance members' advocacy loyalty and contribute to the enhancement of the community's sustainability.

It is recommended that future studies expand the research scope to other digital communities, incorporating factors such as brand trust, a sense of community ownership, or psychological ownership. Mixed-methods approaches should be employed to gain a much more comprehensive understanding of the factors that build advocacy loyalty within online communities.

A follow-up study has shown that involvement with a website might favorably affect brand community loyalty. This in turn acts as a partial mediator in the connection between brand community authenticity and brand community loyalty. The results of the analysis showed that without considering participants' brand behavior, their advocacy loyalty varies randomly when NBV is assessed. It has been shown that authentic brands motivate people to

share their activities with other members as well as to participate more in group projects. Therefore, activism helps to strengthen the community's commitment to advocacy. The results of this study support Social Identity Theory, which holds that people often have a stronger loyalty to organizations they think reflect their identity.

When members perceive Woman Choice as an authentic community with values that align with their own, they are motivated to participate actively. This engagement subsequently evolves into advocacy loyalty, manifesting in the form of recommendations, defence, and

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