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Social identity and brand community identification; Influence on eWOM intention in a sports brand

Identidad social e identificación con la comunidad de marca; influencia sobre la intención de eWOM en una marca deportiva

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Abstract

In this article, the relationship between Brand Community Identification (BCI) and positive electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) is analyzed, considering Social Identity (SI) as an explanatory variable. The sports brand CrossFit is used as a case study, a high-intensity functional training modality. To this end, a Likert scale questionnaire consisting of 10 questions was administered to 120 athletes registered in the three affiliated CrossFit boxes in Colombia. The results were analyzed using partial least squares models in structural equation models - PLS-SEM- to validate SI's relationship in the BCI processes and these two constructs with eWOM. Results show a positive and significant relationship between SI and BCI (0.694***) and between BCI and eWOM (0.393**). However, there is no evidence of a significant relationship between SI and BCI (0.163). This research provides evidence about the importance of the Brand Community Identification as a necessary mediator construct between the Social Identity and the eWOM positive intention.

JEL Code: M10, M30, M31
Keywords: community brand identification; eWOM; social identity; crossfit; partial least structural equation modelling –PLS-SEM –

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Resumen

En este artículo se analiza la relación entre Identificación con la Comunidad de Marca (ICB) y la intención de hacer voz a voz electrónico positivo (eWOM) considerando la Identidad Social (IS) como variable explicativa de esta relación, tomando como caso de estudio la marca deportiva CrossFit, una modalidad de entrenamiento funcional de alta intensidad. Para ello, se aplicó un cuestionario en escala Likert compuesto por 10 preguntas a 120 deportistas registrados en los tres boxes de CrossFit afiliados en Colombia. Los resultados fueron analizados utilizando modelación de ecuaciones estructurales con mínimos cuadrados parciales -PLS-SEM- para validar la relación de la IS en los procesos de ICM y estos dos constructos con eWOM. Los resultados muestran una relación positiva y significativa entre IS e ICM (0,694***) y entre ICM y eWOM (0,393**). Sin embargo, no hay evidencia de una relación significativa entre IS e ICM (0,163). Esta investigación proporciona evidencia sobre la importancia de la Identificación de Marca y Comunidad como constructo mediador necesario entre la Identidad Social y la intención positiva eWOM.

Código JEL: M10, M30, M31
Palabras clave: identificación con la comunidad de marca; eWOM; identidad social; crossfit; modelación de ecuaciones estructurales con mínimos cuadrados parciales –PLS-SEM –

Introduction

The rapid evolution of technology and societal changes significantly influences marketing strategies (Wang et al., 2018). Online sales have surged, with a notable 80-point increase in the index from 2018 to 2021; amid the COVID-19 pandemic, online retail sales spiked from 2 to 2.5 trillion USD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development -UNCTAD-, April 25, 2022). Even with eased lockdown restrictions, consumers continued heightened online shopping. Recognizing customer relationships and their impact on digital platforms becomes crucial for contemporary marketing strategies amid this evolving landscape (Wang et al., 2018; Shaw, Eschenbrenner & Baier, 2022; Mehta, Saxena & Purohit, 2020).

Among these new marketing strategies, catalyzed by the increasing competition in global online markets, one of the most promising is online brand communities which combine traditional physical communities with Web 2.0 technologies (Brogi, 2014). An online brand community is "a specialized community, not geographically linked, based on a structured set of social relationships between admirers of a brand" (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001, p.412). These communities differ from conventional communities due to their commercial nature and the high volume of information, knowledge, and social interactions about the brand. Though the brand usually creates them, these communities last and grow because of the interaction between its members, promoting intense brand loyalty and emotional connections (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006).

Besides its emotional connections with the brand, brand communities are essential for marketing strategies due to their involvement in creating content and multimedia resources that can be reproduced several times through social networks. Identified and happy customers who keep consuming the brand are likelier to share their experiences with a new group of potential customers (Stribbell & Duangekanong, 2022). Information regarding a product is one of the most significant factors in the customer choice mix. Thus, Person-to-person communication about a brand, product, organization, or service, known as Word of Mouth (WOM), significantly influences consumer attitudes and behaviors (Harrison-Walker, 2001).

As stated, expanding communication and information technologies imply that an impression about a brand is not only transmitted face-to-face, but one single post, online review, recommendation, or opinion can reach thousands of people simultaneously. If compared with traditional WOM, eWOM is more influential because of its speed, impact, and one-to-many reach (Ismagilova, Slade & Dwivedi, 2020; Sun et al., 2006); consequently, companies are increasingly interested in understanding the factors that influence the use of eWOM and how its use can impact them (Akdim, 2021; Serra Cantallops & Salvi, 2014; Verma & Dewani, 2021).

Despite its growing importance, the relationship between BCI and eWOM and the potential elements behind it has been scarcely studied (Anaya-Sánchez, Aguilar-Illescas, Molininillo & Martínez-López; 2020; Bilal et al., 2022; Haikel-Elsabeh, Zhao, Ivens & Brem, 2019; Tan, 2023; Valmohamadi, Taraz & Mehdikhani, 2021), and, as far as authors knowledge, inexistent in the Latin American region (Guevara & Jiménez, 2022). Therefore, this research analyzes the influence of BCI on the intention of positive eWOM, using SI as an explanatory measure.

This research contributes to literature in three ways. First, it analyzes BCI through the lenses of the Social Identity Theory, which gives a psychological foundation to the conformation of this type of community. Second, by establishing the relationship between SI and BCI, presents a model to explain the intention to positive eWOM and discusses the importance of this relationship as a marketing strategy. Finally, it is anchored in the Web 2.0 environment and the increasing emergence of online brand communities.

Theoretical background and hypotheses

Social identity and brand community identification

Bagozzi & Dholakia (2002) assert that virtual communities, like online brand communities, shape individual behavior. Despite individual intentional bases proposed by theories like the Theory of Planned Behavior -TPB- (Ajzen, 2020; Bosnjak, Ajzen & Schmidt, 2020; La Barbera & Ajzen, 2020) and the

Model of Goal-directed Behavior -MGB- (Bagozzi, 1998; Billore, Anisimova & Brontis, 2023), human behavior is significantly influenced by social norms, group feedback, and external locus of control within the collective sphere.

The Social Identity Theory, initiated by Tajfel (1970; 1972) and expanded by Tajfel & Turner (1979) and Turner et al (1987), explores innate human tendencies to distinguish through group memberships. It underscores the desire to simplify nature, leading to categorization and self-identification with groups. Ingroups evoke positive beliefs, fostering belonging and self-concept. However, this inclination can also lead to prejudices and discrimination (Harwood, 2020; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). It explains the innate human desire to distinguish oneself based on group memberships, emphasizing the tendency to simplify and classify nature. Humans not only categorize others into groups but also define themselves in terms of their group affiliations, establishing a social identification with their groups. Belonging to an ingroup prompts individuals to form more positive beliefs about it than outgroups. This natural tendency fosters a sense of belonging and self-concept but can also lead to prejudices and discrimination (Harwood, 2020; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Bagozzi & Dholakia (2002), when discussing virtual communities, point out that belonging to a group affects the behavior of its members through three processes: compliance, the need for approval from significant others; internalization, matching of individual values with the group values; and identification, the idea of being equal to the members of the ingroup and substantially different from the members of outgroups.

The compliance, internalization, and identification processes imply achieving "a SI through self-awareness of one's membership in a group, and the emotional and evaluative significance of this membership" (Bagozzi & Dholaki, 2002, p. 11). Three essential items compose SI. First is the cognitive one, which emphasizes the awareness of participating in a social group or self-classification. Second, the evaluative component on the connotation of positive or negative values related to group participation and self-esteem. Third, the affective (emotional) component stands out, reflecting feelings about the group or emotional commitment to it (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002; Ellemers et al., 1999).

Social Identity theory is now applied to groups formed around specific brands, emphasizing brand-related differentiation. Brogi (2014) notes that as mass media and technology evolved, brands became a means of transcending geographical boundaries and central to collective identity in consumer culture. At the end of the XX century, with the emergence of social networks and the massification of the internet, these communities started to take place in virtual environments with internet-mediated interactions (Bilro & Loureiro, 2023; Brogi, 2014; Kim, Park, Lee & Park, 2018; Kumar & Kumar, 2020; Yeh & Choi, 2011).

Online brand communities are a set of specialized, bounded, closed, and virtual relations between brand admirers (Brogi, 2014; Valmohamadi, Taraz & Mehdikhani, 2021). For McAlexander, Schouten & Koenig (2002), brand communities are structured relationships where consumers are situated similarly. The communities of a brand turn online media into a valuable, effective, and inexpensive communication tool for marketing by offering companies specific virtual (internet sites) or real (events and meetings) aggregation spaces to interact with their customers (Andersen, 2005; Gabrielli & Baghi, 2016). As a result, these communities can increase market penetration, profits, brand reputation, and positive communication about the brand (Thompson & Sinha, 2008; Valmohamadi, Taraz & Mehdikhani, 2021). Brands such as LEGO, Harley Davidson, and Apple, among others, are referents of companies where the customers become the main promoters of the brand (Stokburger-Sauer, 2010).

Due to its growing importance, some research has been focused on understanding the motivations behind the conformation of this type of communities (Dessart, 2017; Gong, 2018; Islam, Rahman & Hollebeek, 2018; McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). To summarize, Laroche et al. (2012) showed that individuals join these communities because they help them to meet their social needs and identify with something bigger than themselves by providing them with identity symbols.

Moura, Reis Monteiro & Gonçalves (2023) showed that brand community engagement is positively related to SI (0.384***) and self-expressiveness (0.380***) but not to BCI (0.067). These results are consistent with Algesheimer, Dholakia, and Herrmann (2005) and Martínez-López et al. (2017) findings.

In the same train of thought, hypothesis 1 proposes: Hypothesis 1: There is a positive influence of SI in BCI.

Social identity and eWOM

SI involves publicly and emotionally signifying one's group membership. Differentiation must be evident to individuals from other groups, requiring identity symbols for clear identification (Laroche et al., 2012). In brand communities, Stratton & Northcote (2016) highlight a unique aspect: the brand as a symbol precedes the brand as a community, indicating that the community forms around the symbol rather than the symbol emerging to represent the community.

Therefore, the promotion known as WOM is one of the most effective and powerful marketing tools developed by brand communities. Mishra & Satish (2016) define WOM as non-commercial communication about a brand or product. Lee & Kang (2013) describe it as informal communication guiding consumers in evaluating products and reducing uncertainty in purchase decisions.

In this way, when considering online brand communities and the massification of Information and Communication Technologies, the traditional WOM has evolved into eWOM. Akdim (2021, p. 239) defines eWOM as "all informal communications directed at consumers, through internet-based technologies, related to the usage or characteristics of particular goods and services.". eWOM can take the form of likes, comments, posts, tweets, and reels. Donthu et al. (2021) show that eWOM has higher credibility than WOM among consumers who usually evaluate online comments before making decisions.

Authors such as Arenas, Rondan & Ramirez (2013) state that from a theoretical point of view, SI is the basis that drives people to issue a message about something specific. Consequently, they confirm the strong precedent of the relationship between SI, eWOM and the references that are generated in a context of social networks services.

In college sports, social media use and eWOM creation correlate positively with perceived college group identity (0.37***), as noted by Kim & Kim (2019). Additionally, Kim et al. (2018) found that consumers engage more with Facebook posts when they share SI with the brand.

In the light of this literature, the second proposed hypothesis is defined as: Hypothesis 2: There is a positive influence of SI in eWOM intention.

Brand community identification and eWOM

As marketing studies have shown, these positive feelings about the ingroup can be translated to positive public expressions about the community to which people belong. For instance, recent literature has documented that people in a brand community frequently promote the brand (Goh, Heng & Lin, 2013; Pinto, Ruão, José & Pessoa, 2022; Thadani, Li & Chan, 2020; Wu, Huang, Leon & Hua, 2015), and mediate in consumer responses to negative brand information (Chang, Hsieh & Tseng, 2013); however, if companies failed in cultivating their relationship with their brand communities properly, regardless their brand identification, consumers can share negative information and destroy companies' value (Frau, Frigau, Cabiddu & Mola, 2023; Herhausen et al., 2019).

Recent literature has studied the determinants of positive eWOM. A recent systematic review and bibliometric analysis (Donthu et al., 2021) identified this field as one of the most extensive fronts in the eWOM studies, representing 35.29% of research in the last three years. Findings showed that the probability of participating in eWOM has been mainly studied from the business side of the process more than from the consumers' side; this is, mechanisms used by companies to encourage positive eWOM. As a result, literature about the relationship between Brand Community Identification, BCI, and eWOM is still scant.

Kim, Sung & Kang (2014) studied how Korean consumers' relationship with the brand influences their engagement in sharing company-produced information on the microblogging social network Twitter showing that brand identification (0.79) and community commitment (0.76) are the two strongest positively correlated factors with retweeting brand information. These findings are consistent with reports from Valmohammadi, Taraz & Mehdikhani (2021), who found a positive relation between BCI and eWOM (0.434***).

However, Anaya-Sánchez, Aguilar-Illescas, Molininillo & Martínez-López (2020) question if brand identification is sufficient for engaging in eWOM activities. They evaluate what other elements may lie behind the relationship between online brand communities and positive eWOM, finding that trust is one of the most relevant aspects of eWOM. Brand trust (0.254***) and online brand community trust (0.213***) are positively correlated to positive eWOM intention. Tan (2023) corroborated these results, finding that Online Brand Community trust positively correlates to positive eWOM -peWomi- (0.401***). In contrast, Haikel-Elsabeh, et al. (2019), studying the Facebook case, did not find evidence to support the hypothesis that brand community involvement impacts eWOM (0.066, pvalue=0.488).

On the other hand, Bilal et al. (2022) refer to brand love, which is defined as "the level of feelings and dedicated connection that a satisfied consumer has to a specific brand." (p. 3), as a significant predictor of positive eWOM. Findings show a strong effect (0.54***) of brand love on positive eWOM. To summarize, despite the importance of online brand communities and their relationship with eWOM, there is little research about how BCI influences positive eWOM. Consequently, the following hypotheses are proposed: Hypothesis 3: There is a positive influence of BCI in eWOM intention.

The theoretical model used for evaluating the hypotheses is presented in Figure 1.

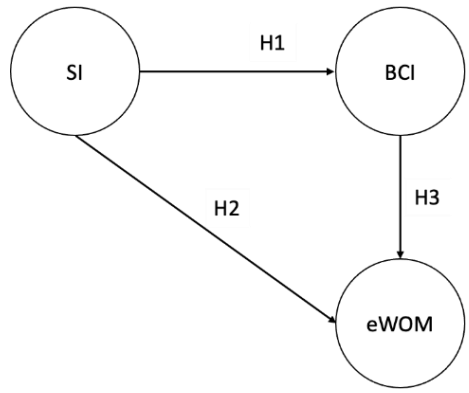

Figure 1. Theorical model of the relationship between SI, BCI, and eWOM.
Source: Author`s own

Method

Case study; CrossFit

CrossFit started in 2001 in the garage of its creator and currently has about 14,000 affiliated owners worldwide (CrossFit, 2019a). One of its differentiators is the training place, which is still an industrial-style space, like a garage, called a "box". There are no significant accessories or interior architecture but painted walls and an unpolished floor (Woolf & Lawrence, 2017). The success of this brand has not been long in coming, generating investigations into aspects of injuries due to the intensity of training (Meyer, Morrison & Zuñiga, 2017; Moran, Booker, Staines & Williams, 2017), the benefits of their practice (Dexheimer et al., 2019) and brand community aspects (Dawson, 2017; Powers & Greenwell, 2017; Woolf & Lawrence, 2017).

In this last aspect, the community of practitioners and franchisors of the brand has come to be related to a "cult" (Simpson et al, 2017). Because, despite the vigorous intensity in training, athletes share the routines performed, even if they do not know each other. On the website, there is a new daily exercise routine to be performed (WOD: work of the day). There are also meal plans according to the age ranges of the brand's enthusiasts. Coaches are seen as people who fulfill the role of "coach" and care about reaching their sporting goals; they are not seen as instructors. The training place lacks machines, devices, and televisions, generating greater visual and physical integration among the practitioners and encouraging them to achieve the WOD (Dawson, 2017).

Consequently, the fitness community, whose object is the CrossFit-type physical training modality, has gained importance, relevance, recognition, and prestige with more than 15,000 affiliates worldwide (CrossFit, 2019b). It has become a lifestyle characterized by safe, effective exercise and good nutrition. According to the CrossFit publication (2019b), people are interested in being part of the community because they practice and learn about this type of physical training.

Survey instrument and participants

Considering the fitness community as a case study, the data used in this research was collected from a survey of people who practice CrossFit and are members of a box registered with the CrossFit brand. Notably, by the time the data was collected, there were only three boxes affiliated with the Crossfit trademark in Bogotá and four in Colombia. Currently, there are seven registered boxes in the country (Crossfit, March 05, 2024). The survey was applied to 120 athletes in the three existing boxes in Bogotá

who accepted to participate in the study. This process was carried out face to face since the registered boxes were reluctant to share databases with information about their affiliates, so it was necessary to approach them directly at the boxes.

The first version of the questionnaire comprised 15 questions (Table 1). However, because of a pilot analysis of the data, it was identified that there were no differences in the perception of the respondents of some of the questions due to their similarity in wording; for this reason, the questionnaire was adjusted with what was conserved ten items, measured on a Likert scale from 1 to 7.

Table 1
Constructs and items for their measurement

Construct	Items	Authors
Social Identity (SI)	Cognitive SI: X1: Indicate the extent to which your self-image overlaps with the identity of the group of friends as you perceive it. (Seven-point scale going from "Not at all" to "A lot"). X2: How would you express the degree of overlap between your personal identity and the identity of the group that you mentioned earlier, when in fact you are part of the group and participate in group activities?* Affective SI: X3: How attached are you to the group you mentioned earlier?* X4: How strong would you say your feelings of belonging to the group you mentioned above are? Evaluative SI: X5: I am a valued member of the group. X6: I am an important member of the group*.	Taken and adapted from: Dholakia, Bagozzi & Pearo (2004) and Shen, et al. (2011)
Brand Community Identification (BCI)	X7: CrossFit brand successes are my successes. X8: I am interested in what others think about the CrossFit brand. * X9: When I talk about the CrossFit brand, I generally say "we" instead of "them." X10: When someone praises the CrossFit brand, it feels like a personal compliment. X11: When someone criticizes the CrossFit brand, it feels like a personal insult.	Taken and adapted from: Zhou et al. (2012).
Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)	X18: I would recommend CrossFit to other potential users who are not members of the brand community. X19: I would recommend this brand community to other people X20: I would pass on information about CrossFit that I get from the brand's community site to other websites.	Taken and adapted from: Yeh & Choi (2012).

	X21: I would pass on information about CrossFit that I get from the brand community to other people who are not members of the brand community. *

Items identified with * were eliminated from the instrument final version
Source: Author`s own

When the fieldwork was conducted, only two boxes were, certified by the CrossFit trademark in Bogotá - Colombia; therefore, one was randomly selected, and all affiliated practitioners were surveyed. One hundred twenty people answered the questionnaire; 52% were women, 75% were in the age range between 23 and 34 years, and 70% of the individuals sampled had a professional educational level.

The first estimation suggested eliminating items x2, x3, x6, x8, and x14 due to the existence of perfect correlations with other items included in the questionnaire, for which it was decided to keep those items with a higher factor load. Once this adjustment was made, the multicollinearity problems were solved (determinant = 0.00025), and the relevance of advancing the EFA was validated through the Bartlett test (454.631***, df = 45), whose null hypothesis is that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix (Field, Miles & Field, 2013).

Next, the relevance of the sample size was validated through the KMO test, which yielded a result of 0.86, considered “Very good”. Likewise, the commonality criterion was validated, yielding an average of 0.80, higher than the 0.60 required for cases of small samples (Field, Miles & Field, 2013)

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of the items and latent variables included in the analysis.

Table 2
Descriptive statistics

Factor	Code	Mean variable	Standard deviation variable	Mean factor	Standard deviation - factor
SI	X1	5	0.82	13	2.07
	X4	5	0.90		
	X5	4	0.87		
BCI	X7	4	0.98	17	3.63
	X9	5	1.16		
	X10	4	1.00		
	X11	4	0.98		
eWOM	X18	4	1.00	16	2.58
	X19	5	0.87		
	X20	5	0.93		

Source: Author`s own

Data analysis

A partial least structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was selected to test the proposed hypotheses. PLS-SEM models (Sarstedt, Ringle & Hair, 2021) have become very popular in marketing sciences as an analysis technique that allows testing theories in an exploratory phase. Besides, this type of modeling is non-parametric; therefore, it is highly recommended for studies with non-random small sample sizes from which a normal distribution is not expected (Hair, Ringle & Sarstedt., 2011).

The PLS path models are composed of two elements. The structural model, also called the inner model, represents the latent or composite variables (circles) and the measurement model (outer model) shows the relationships between the latent and indicator variables (rectangles) (Hair, et al. 2011; Sarstedt & Cheah, 2019).

Regarding the measurement model, it is essential to consider how the latent variables are measured. Two approaches can be identified here. On the one hand, the reflective measurement models assume that the composite variable causes the covariation of the indicator variables; therefore, each variable has an error term. In this model, indicator variables are highly correlated, so they are interchangeable, and any of them can be deleted without affecting the construct (Hair, et al. 2017; Sarstedt & Cheah, 2019).

On the other hand, the formative measurement models assume that the indicator variables form the composite variables through linear combinations. In this case, indicator variables are not interchangeable since each indicator captures a determinate aspect of the latent variable (Hair, et al. 2011; Sarstedt & Cheah, 2019).

Considering the above, in this design, the exogenous variable, SI is measured with the formative approach since, as shown in Table 1, each indicator variable measures one dimension of the latent variable. The mediator variable BCI and the endogenous variable eWOM are measured with the reflective approach.

The validation process was carried out once the structural and measurement models were established. First, the model was tested to identify the presence of the "common method bias". This kind of bias refers to a phenomenon where the common variance in the indicators is related to the measurement method and not the relationship between the latent variables, increasing the probability of type I and II errors; for example, in cases when the type of questionnaire or a sense of desirability can influence the responses (Kock, 2017). Kock & Lynn (2012) recommended the random variable technique (RDV) to identify this bias by explaining the variance attributed to chance instead of the relationship between the variables. In the test, the values of the Variance Influence Factor -VIF- over 3.33 would indicate the presence of the bias. As shown in Table 3, there is no evidence of bias.

Table 3
Results of the common method bias technique RDV

Factors	Random variables
BCI	1.52
SI	1.32
eWOM	1.33

Source: Author`s own

Secondly, the factor loadings of the indicators were evaluated, and following Guzmán et al. (2023), values over 0.70 were considered reliable. The internal consistency was assessed through Cronbach's Alpha (1951) statistic and Jöreskog's (1971) composite reliability method. In both cases, values over 0.70 are acceptable, and over 0.90 are satisfactory. The content validity was evaluated from the literature review and previous studies. Convergent validity was assessed using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), with results over 0.50 considered acceptable (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The discriminant validity was tested through the cross-loadings matrix, where the cross-loadings indicate the strength of the relationship between the latent and observable variables (Hair et al., 2011).

The structural model's accuracy was evaluated with the Standardized Root Mean Square (SRMS), acceptable when values are lower than 0.10 (Sarstedt et al., 2021). Hypothesis analysis was performed considering the standardized values of the path coefficients, which were considered statistically significant when the p-value was lower than 0.05. Finally, the R2 was used to validate the model's predictive capacity, values below 0.25 were considered low, between 0.25 and 0.5 medium, and high above 0.5 (Guzmán et al., 2023).

Results

The following results are split into two sections: the measurement model and the structural model. Figure 2 shows the Structural Equation Modelling.

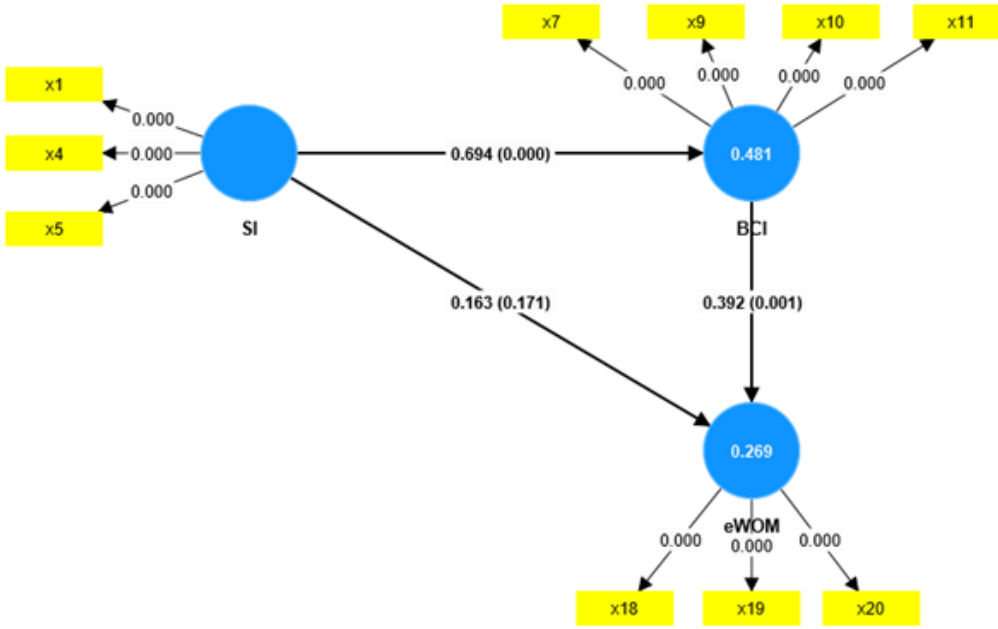

Figure 2. Structural model of the relationship between SI, BCI, and e WOM.
Source: Author`s own

Measurement model

As shown in Table 4, the factor loadings were higher than 0.70 and statistically significant at 0.001. Internal consistency, assessed through Cronbach's alpha and CR, showed results over 0.90, being satisfactory. The AVE shows that the evaluated items explained more than 75% of the latent variables' extracted variance, a result higher than the 0.60 criteria.

Table 4
Convergent validity

Factor	Indicator	Factor loadings (Sample mean)	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
	X1	0.768***	0.717		
SI	X4	0.780***		0.720	0.639
	X5	0.840***			
BCI	X7	0.902***	0.906	0.906	0.781

	X9	0.804***			
	X10	0.898***			
	X11	0.925***			
	X18	0.945***	0.953		
eWOM	X19	0.965***		0.958	0.913
	X20	0.957***			

Note: Chi2 (45) = 99.316***; NFI = 0.896; SRMR (90%CI) = 0.045 = p<0.01; CR=Composite Reliability (rho_a); AVE=Average Variance Extracted

Source: Author`s own

In the case of the discriminant validity, Table 5 presents the cross-loadings matrix, which shows adequate results according to the criteria established by Guzmán et al. (2023).

Table 5
Cross loadings matrix

Item	SI	BCI	eWOM
x1	0.759	0.517	0.345
x4	0.791	0.568	0.313
x5	0.845	0.577	0.382
x7	0.567	0.902	0,450
x9	0.636	0.805	0,434
x10	0.613	0.900	0,422
x11	0.631	0.925	0,476
x18	0.409	0.439	0,945
x19	0.446	0.521	0,965
x20	0.387	0.483	0,957

Source: Author`s own

Structural model

Finally, once the model's validity was evaluated, the working hypotheses were contrasted through a model of structural equations. The results indicated the existence of a statistically significant and direct relationship between BCI and SI (H1) and a statistically significant and direct relationship between BCI and eWOM (H3). In contrast, it was not possible to find sufficient evidence to validate the existence of a statistically significant and direct relationship between SI and eWOM (H2). The detailed results are described in Table 6.

Figure 1 shows the determination coefficient. Results show that SI is correlated to 48.2% BCI variance. On the other hand, BCI is correlated with 26.9% of the eWOM's variance. In both cases, results

can be considered as medium. Effect sizes were calculated using these R2 (Lenhardt & Lenhardt, 2022), and values above 0.5 were obtained, which is evidence of an intermediate effect for the relation between SI and BCI (r=0.441) and a small effect for the relation between BCI and eWOM (r=0.213) (Cohen, 1988).

Table 6
Hypothesis validation through the Structural Equations Model

		Original Sample	Sample Mean	SD	Standardized Betas	T value	IC [95%]
H1	SI -->BCI	0.392	0.391	0.120	0.694***	14.567	[0.152; 0.628]
H2	SI-->eWOM	0.694	0.694	0.048	0.163 (0.171)	1.369	[0.152; 0.779]
H3	BCI-->eWOM	0.163	0.167	0.119	0.393***	3.278	[0.152; 0.397]

pvalue <.10*; pvalue <.05**; pvalue <.01***
Source: Author`s own

Conclusions

This research aimed to analyze the influence of BCI on the intention of positive eWOM, using SI as an explanatory construct. Three hypotheses were tested in this research: 1. There is a positive influence of SI in BCI, 2. There is a positive influence of SI in the eWOM intention, 3. There is a positive influence of BCI on eWOM intention. The findings of this study lead to the conclusion that SI influences BCI and this last one positively affects eWOM intention; however, evidence about the relationship between SI and eWOM was inconclusive.

Findings related to the first hypothesis differ from reviewed literature (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005; Martínez-López et al., 2017; Moura, Reis Monteiro, & Gonçalves, 2023), which did not find evidence of a correlation between SI and BCI. Therefore, this study contributes to identifying the role of affective, cognitive and evaluative components of SI to understand its influences on BCI (Bagozzi & Dholaki, 2002).

Regarding the second hypothesis, it could not be confirmed. This finding implies that having a high SI with a consumer identifying herself with a brand would be possible, but developing positive feelings that catalyze eWOM positive intention requires having a profound experience with the brand (Arenas, Rondan & Ramirez, 2013) or an intensive use frequency in online contexts (Kim & Kim, 2019; Kim et al., 2018). Therefore, it would be necessary to introduce in the model a mediator variable that accounts for brand satisfaction and use experience to evaluate the relationship between SI and eWOM appropriately.

The evaluation of the third hypothesis about the relationship between BCI and eWOM goes in line with previous findings showing that group identification implies developing positive feelings about that group, and these feelings are expressed through brand promotion and positive opinions in social media (Anaya-Sánchez, Aguilar-llescas, Molininillo & Martínez-López, 2020; Gho, Heng & Lin, 2013; Pinto, Ruão, José & Pessoa, 2022; Thadani, Li & Chan, 2020; Wu, Huang, Leon & Hua, 2015; Valmohammadi, Taraz, and Mehdikhani, 2021).

This study makes a valuable contribution to the literature on new marketing models by considering the role of communication and information technologies in brand management. For instance, in this research novel empirical exploration oriented to evaluate the theoretical idea that SI is at the basis of the development of BCI is carried out. This contribution is helpful to understand in a better way the relationship between this theoretical category and its implication for marketing.

Furthermore, a second contribution is related to exploring a new category to understand the eWOM emergence in online environments. Literature has traditionally explored elements such as trust, attitude, experience on the web sites (Guevara & Jiménez, 2022); however, this research points out to a different construct with a strong theoretical background, i.e.: BCI. The idea that BCI can influence eWOM is very promising because it makes it possible for brands, through the creation of these brand communities, to promote the eWOM intention.

This research contributes to the Latin American literature on marketing by studying a subject that so far has been mostly approached in the Global North countries, China and India. Besides, findings of this research are based on the analysis of a pioneer brand that characterizes because it created a community instead of offering a single product or service. For instance, CrossFit created an ecosystem of products, services and alliances to satisfy the needs of its users and, in this way, the brand presence in people's life is total.

Regarding this study´s limitations, it is important to point out the difficulties accessing information of CrossFit practitioners. It is difficult, particularly in the developing world, to establish a difference between practicing CrossFit as a sport practice and doing this in a registered "box" by CrossFit. Consequently, when the fieldwork was carried out, in Bogotá there were only two CrossFit registered boxes impacting on the final sample size.

In addition, the boxes are reluctant to share information about the affiliates because there was a strong mistrust that this information was used for other purposes, such as marketing campaigns or attracting them to different gyms. As a result, it was impossible to do an online survey, limiting the sample size and the possibility of contrasting results with people who practiced CrossFit but in unregistered boxes or who did not belong to the brand community. Also, this could have had implications for the answers the

surveyed people provided because of differences in their online self-representation (De la Iglesia & Castro, 2024).

Finally, in future lines of research, it would be interesting to study eWOM objectives measures in such a way that it would be possible to evaluate if and how the eWOM intention expresses itself in real eWOM and purchase intention. Also, it is important to enhance the analysis of social and psychological theories to understand marketing strategic planning.

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