

Brand Evangelism through Social Media Platform Identification and Customer Engagement in Fashion Clothing Brands

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Abstract

Brand evangelism, which consists of consumers' voluntary promotion and defense of a brand, has emerged as an important but highly fragmented outcome in fashion marketing studies, where researchers tend to consider brand-level engagement or loyalty as end outcomes without considering their identity origin. Drawing on Social Identity Theory, this study examines the effect of cognitive social media platform identification on brand evangelism among fashion clothing brand followers, with customer engagement as mediator. Data collected from social media followers of fashion clothing brands were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings show that SMPI significantly enhances customer engagement, while customer engagement strongly predicts brand evangelism. However, SMPI has no significant direct effect on brand evangelism, confirming the indirect-only mediating role of intervening mechanisms. The findings position brand evangelism as a progressive process in which platform identification develops into engagement and brand affinity, ultimately fostering

consumer advocacy. The study extends Social Identity Theory to the digital fashion context and offers practical insights for cultivating sustainable brand evangelism.

Keywords: Brand evangelism, Social identity theory, Social media platform identification, Customer engagement, Brand affinity, Fashion clothing brands, PLS-SEM

1. Introduction

Brand evangelism has evolved into one of the most prominent forms of consumer advocacy in the digital era, extending consumer behavior beyond purchasing and use to the active promotion and recommendation of brands within personal and social networks (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013; Jam et al., 2025). This form of advocacy is particularly relevant to fashion clothing, where brands often become visible expressions of self-identity and social affiliation, making consumers' brand-related behaviors highly social and publicly observable. The rise of social media has further intensified this dynamic by integrating fashion discovery, interaction, and endorsement into consumers' everyday digital experiences, with younger consumers increasingly shaping fashion through social-first and digitally mediated journeys (Boston Consulting Group, 2025). Research in the fashion context indicates that social media engagement can foster brand evangelism (Rungruangjit et al., 2023), while recent evidence identifies customer engagement as an important pathway through which consumers develop stronger advocacy behaviors (Bhandari et al., 2024; Kumar et al., 2025; Mohamed & Liang, 2025). Understanding how consumers move from engaging with fashion brands on social media to actively advocating for them is therefore increasingly important for advancing both marketing theory and practice.

Despite its growing importance, brand evangelism in fashion retailing remains relatively underexplored. Recent literature suggests that empirical research on brand evangelism is fragmented and has focused largely on tourism, hospitality, and masstige contexts, with comparatively limited attention to apparel (Cavadas & Moreira, 2025). The limited fashion-focused research has primarily examined customer-brand engagement and loyalty without examining how these responses may develop into brand advocacy. For example, research on luxury fashion brands shows that social media marketing can strengthen community engagement and loyalty, but does not examine whether such engagement leads to brand evangelism (Fetais et al., 2023). Similarly, research among millennial fashion consumers examines participation and

involvement as outcomes rather than considering their potential role in fostering subsequent advocacy (Samala & Katkam, 2020).

A second gap concerns the antecedents of customer engagement. Much of the existing literature approaches engagement from the brand side, focusing on how brand-related activities stimulate consumer responses while giving limited attention to the consumer's prior identification with the social media platform itself. Wang (2017) demonstrated that the cognitive dimension of social identity has a distinct influence on consumer behavior, suggesting that what consumers think and feel about their membership in a social platform community may shape how they subsequently interact within that environment. In the context of fashion clothing, where social media provides a central space for brand interaction and content consumption, cognitive identification with the platform may therefore provide an important basis for active engagement with brand content, including liking, commenting, sharing, and tagging (Muntinga et al., 2011; van Doorn et al., 2010). Such engagement, in turn, may represent the behavioral pathway through which platform-level identity develops into brand evangelism.

Building on these two gaps, this study proposes and tests a parsimonious model in which social media platform identification (SMPI), conceptualized through the cognitive dimension of social identity, serves as an indirect antecedent of brand evangelism among fashion clothing brand followers, with customer engagement representing the behavioral mechanism linking the two. The model draws on Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which suggests that self-categorization within a social group, such as a platform user community, can shape identity-consistent behaviors toward objects that become salient within that social context. By focusing specifically on the cognitive dimension of platform identification and tracing its relationship with brand evangelism through customer engagement, this study provides a theoretically grounded explanation of how identification with a social media platform can extend beyond the platform itself to influence advocacy toward fashion brands.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Underpinning: Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory (SIT) provides this study's theoretical foundation. Tajfel and Turner (1979) proposed that individuals derive part of their self-concept from perceived group membership

through three stages: social categorization, social identification, and social comparison. Researchers have extended SIT to social media, showing that consumers categorize themselves as members of a platform's user base, with the same identity-consistent consequences observed offline (Wang, 2017). The social identity is further operationalized into cognitive, affective, and evaluative dimensions and found that the cognitive dimension exerts a distinct influence on use and purchase behavior (Wang, 2017); it is this dimension that provides the foundation of the present study's conceptualization of SMPI. SIT therefore supplies the causal logic linking platform identification to engagement, and engagement to evangelism. A consumer who cognitively identifies with a platform community is motivated to engage visibly with brands salient in that community, and sustained, identity-consistent engagement subsequently motivates public advocacy for those brands.

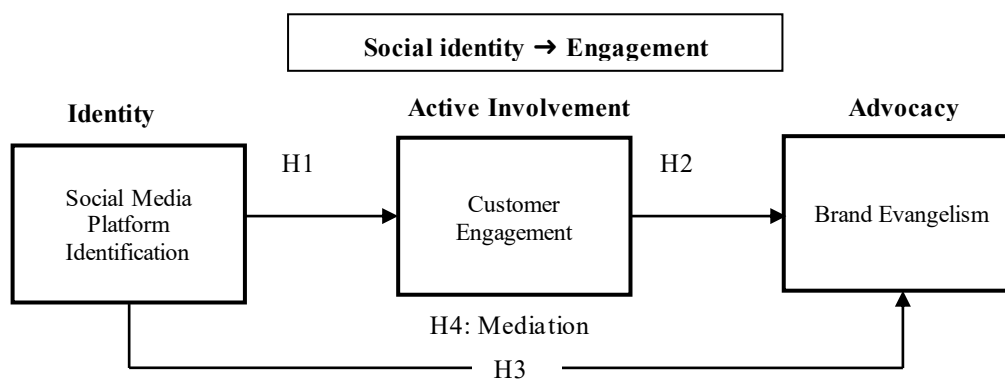


Figure 1 Theoretical Framework

2.2. Conceptualizing key concepts

2.2.1. Social Media Platform Identification

SMPI is defined as the psychological connection through which individuals perceive their self-concept as congruent with that of the social media platform they use (Wang, 2017). Consistent with Wang (2017) tripartite model, this study conceptualizes SMPI purely in cognitive terms, as belief-based self-categorization as a platform member rather than as affective attachment or evaluative judgment of the platform's status. This narrower conceptualization is purposeful; cognitive identity is a stable, belief-based self-categorization that is theoretically prior to the affective and evaluative reactions a consumer later forms toward brand content encountered on that platform. For fashion consumers, whose platform choice is often itself an identity statement,

this cognitive self-categorization is treated as the antecedent, platform-level identity foundation that facilitates the brand-directed engagement and advocacy behaviors.

2.2.2. Customer Engagement

Customer engagement (CE) is defined as the self-initiated behaviors that customers demonstrate while engaging in activities on social media with brands, involving actions such as likes, comments, shares, and tags of the brand-related content (Muntinga et al., 2011; van Doorn et al., 2010). This behavior extends beyond buying into word-of-mouth communication and co-creation of the brand-related content (van Doorn et al., 2010). According to Muntinga et al., (2011), CE is defined on a continuum ranging from passively consuming content to actively contributing and creating content, thus aligning with the SIT predictions of increasingly intense identity-driven behavior. In a similar manner, in a review of social media engagement research, engagement has been defined as an intermediary construct between upstream identity and downstream relational consequences like loyalty and advocacy (Lim & Rasul, 2022). Specifically in the context of fashion, CE appears to be a highly relevant concept, as engagement affects brand loyalty in millennials (Samala & Katkam, 2020) and mediates the impact of social media marketing practices on the performance of communities of followers of luxury fashion brands (Fetais et al., 2023).

2.2.3. Brand Evangelism

Brand evangelism refers to a consumer's proactive and persuasive promotion of a brand through actively recommending others to use it and defending it when faced with criticism (Jam et al., 2025). This is differentiated by virtue of being outwardly directed and other-directed. A systematic review identified converging antecedent streams: brand-centric evangelism driven by trust and happiness, and social-media-based evangelism driven by community engagement and digital participation (Cavadas & Moreira, 2025). Within these streams, engagement and value co-creation have repeatedly predicted evangelistic outcomes (Harrigan et al., 2021; Nkoulou Mvondo et al., 2021), while relational and emotional benefits, such as brand happiness or felt community, translate into advocacy (Mansoor & Paul, 2022; Sharma et al., 2021), with evangelism sustained even after brand transgressions when consumers are willing to forgive (Nobi et al., 2022). In the context of fashion micro-content, follower engagement has been shown to directly and substantially predict evangelism (Rungruangjit et al., 2023). Together, this literature suggests that brand evangelism in the fashion clothing context is best understood not as a direct consequence of

platform-level identity alone, but as the culmination of a process that begins with cognitive self-categorization and is carried forward through active engagement.

3. Hypotheses Development

Drawing on Social Identity Theory, this study argues that a consumer's cognitive identification with a social media platform is the psychological starting point of a process that culminates in brand evangelism, operating substantially through customer engagement. Once an individual categorizes the self as a member of a platform's community (SMPI), that individual is motivated to enact behaviors that affirm this categorization (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Because liking, commenting, sharing, and tagging fashion brand content are precisely such identity-consistent behaviors, individuals with stronger cognitive SMPI should exhibit higher customer engagement with fashion brands salient within that platform community.

H1: Social media platform identification (cognitive identity) has a significant positive influence on customer engagement with fashion clothing brands on social media.

In addition to that, SIT suggests that identity-consistent behavioral enactment contributes to an increase in psychological investment and motivation towards seeking positive distinctiveness by individuals (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Engagement in a voluntary manner with content provided by a fashion brand can be viewed as one of distinctiveness-seeking behaviors; in other words, when people engage with the brand's content, they are more likely to continue engaging in advocacy on behalf of the brand within their social circles. This conclusion has already been made based on previous research (Harrigan et al., 2021; Nkoulou Mvondo et al., 2021; Sharma et al., 2021; Harrigan et al., 2021; Nkoulou Mvondo et al., 2021; Sharma et al., 2021).

H2: Customer engagement has a significant positive influence on brand evangelism among fashion clothing brand followers on social media.

Furthermore, since cognitive platform identification provides the identity foundation from which identity-consistent behavior is derived, the implications of SIT theory are that the impact of SMPI on brand evangelism could occur independently of the actual engagement behavior created by SMPI, in that platform self-categorization primes a general willingness to support entities salient within the platform community.

H3: Social media platform identification (Cognitive Identity) has a significant positive influence on brand evangelism among fashion clothing brand followers on social media.

From the perspective of Social Identity Theory (SIT), when consumers perceive a social media platform as an important part of their social identity, they are more likely to participate actively in platform-based interactions and invest greater cognitive, emotional, and behavioral resources in relevant brand-related activities (Wang, 2017). Such engagement provides opportunities to express and reinforce their identity through interaction with fashion brands and other members of the social community. As identification becomes behaviorally enacted through engagement, consumers are more likely to develop stronger attachment and commitment toward the brand, which can subsequently motivate brand-supportive behaviors such as recommending, promoting, and defending the brand. It means that SIT implies that the relationship between SMPI and brand evangelism is not necessarily a direct one; instead, customer engagement is the mediating variable which helps to transform the effect of platform-based social identification into brand evangelism. The mediating effect is proposed formally and is claimed to represent an important part of the effect of SMPI on BE in addition to the direct effect in H3.

H4: Customer engagement mediates the relationship between social media platform identification (Cognitive Identity) and brand evangelism among fashion clothing brand followers on social media.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design

This study adopts a positivist research philosophy and a deductive approach, testing a priori hypotheses derived from Social Identity Theory rather than generating theory inductively. A quantitative, causal-explanatory design is used to statistically estimate the strength and significance of the hypothesized relationships among SMPI, customer engagement, and brand evangelism. Data were collected from social media users who follow fashion clothing brands, using non-probability purposive sampling, since a probability-based sampling frame of platform followers who also follow fashion brands is not practically obtainable. The study follows a cross-sectional time horizon, appropriate given its explanatory rather than developmental objective. A total sample size of 823 respondents is targeted, comfortably exceeding conventional minimum

thresholds for structural equation modelling given the number of predictors specified. Data are analyzed in two stages: preliminary screening, reliability, and descriptive analysis in SPSS, followed by structural testing. This included testing the hypothesized mediating role of customer engagement using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS, selected for its suitability to prediction-oriented research with the moderate sample size and reflective measurement structure employed in the present study.

4.2. Research Instrument

The three constructs were assessed through established multi-item measurement scales, which were adapted to suit the fashion clothing context and measured using a Likert-type response scale. SMPI was assessed with three items derived from the social identity scale from (Wang, 2017), focusing specifically on its cognitive dimension. Customer engagement was operationalized through behavioral indicators identified by Muntinga et al., (2011) and van Doorn et al., (2010), including liking, commenting, sharing, and tagging brand-related content and measured through customer engagement scale by Busalim et al., (2021). Brand evangelism was measured using three items adapted from the scale developed by Jam et al. (2025), reflecting consumers' voluntary advocacy and promotional behaviors toward their most closely followed fashion clothing brand.

Table 1: Sources of the Adapted Instrument

Variable	Source Scale	No. of Items
Social Media Platform Identification	Wang (2017) Social Identity Scale (adapted; cognitive identity)	3
Customer Engagement	Busalim et al., (2021) Customer Engagement Scale (adapted)	5
Brand Evangelism	Jam et al., (2025) Brand Evangelism Scale (adapted)	3

Before conducting any data collection, the adapted instrument was tested to verify whether its items are clear, have high levels of consistency (both Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability >0.70) and convergent validity (AVE >0.50) as required by existing literature on reflective measurement models in PLS-SEM. Since the sample frame is limited to social media users who follow fashion clothing brands rather than the general population, preliminary screening questions that establish their qualifications to answer the SMPI, customer engagement, and brand evangelism items were asked at the beginning of the survey. Common method bias, a recognized concern in

single-source, cross-sectional survey research, was assessed statistically using the full collinearity variance inflation factor test in SmartPLS, alongside procedural remedies such as item reordering and assurance of respondent anonymity.

5. Results

The model was estimated using PLS-SEM in SmartPLS 4, with significance assessed via bootstrapping (5,000 subsamples, two-tailed, 95% CI). Measurement model quality was assessed using composite reliability, AVE, and HTMT, while the structural model was evaluated using R^2 and f^2 . The model fit was assessed using SRMR. The results, obtained from the PLS-SEM analysis, along with the bootstrapping-based significance tests.

5.1. Measurement Model

All indicators loaded above .70 and were significant at $p < .001$ (Table 2), supporting adequate indicator reliability across the seven reflective constructs.

Table 2: Outer Loadings Summary

Construct	Items	Loading range	t-range	p
SMPI (Cognitive Identity)	3	.840–.847	56.47–63.04	< .001
Customer Engagement	5	.814–.849	52.41–72.72	< .001
Brand Evangelism	3	.855–.875	76.29–92.43	< .001

Internal consistency reliability and convergent validity were assessed for the reflective constructs (Table 3). Composite reliability (ρ_C) ranged from .879 to .936, and Cronbach's alpha from .797 to .920, exceeding the recommended .70 minimum; average variance extracted (AVE) ranged from .644 to .752, exceeding the .50 minimum. All constructs therefore meet established reliability and convergent validity criteria (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2018).

Table 3: Construct Reliability and Validity

Construct	Cronbach's α	ρ_A	ρ_C	AVE
Brand Evangelism	0.835	0.835	0.901	0.752
SMPI (Cognitive Identity)	0.797	0.798	0.881	0.712
Customer Engagement	0.888	0.888	0.918	0.690

Discriminant validity was evaluated using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT; Table 4) among the substantive reflective constructs, excluding the three PBPA interaction terms used to model the moderating effect, since these product-indicator constructs are not themselves subject to discriminant validity assessment. All HTMT values fell well below the conservative .85 threshold, with the highest observed between brand affinity and customer engagement (HTMT = .838) and between brand evangelism and customer engagement (HTMT = .819), both still under the more liberal .90 cut-off recommended for conceptually distinct constructs. Discriminant validity is therefore supported for all seven constructs (Henseler et al., 2015).

Table 4: Discriminant Validity: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	BE	SMPI (CI)	CE
Brand Evangelism (BE)	--		
SMPI / Cognitive Identity (CI)	0.467	--	
Customer Engagement (CE)	0.819	0.578	--

Note. BE = Brand Evangelism; SMPI (CI) = Social Media Platform Identification (Cognitive Identity); CE = Customer Engagement.

5.2. Model Fit

Overall model fit was assessed using the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR; Table 5). The SRMR was .036 for the saturated model and .037 for the estimated model, both comfortably below the .08 threshold recommended for PLS path models, indicating a good fit between the model-implied and empirical correlation matrices (Henseler et al., 2016).

Table 5: Model Fit Summary

Fit Index	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.036	0.037
d_ ULS	0.690	0.721
d_ G	0.296	0.298
Chi-square	1130.248	1135.056
NFI	0.908	0.908

Note. SRMR= Standardized Root Mean Square Residual, d_ ULS= Unweighted Least Squares Discrepancy, d_ G= Geodesic Discrepancy, NFI=Normed Fit Index

6. Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

Table 6 depicts the direct structural path coefficients associated with cognitive identity, customer engagement, and brand evangelism. Cognitive identity was found to be a significant predictor of customer engagement ($\beta = .141$, $t = 4.48$, $p < .001$), which supports the hypothesis relating to the connection between identity and engagement behavior at the platform level. However, cognitive identity was not found to be a significant predictor of brand evangelism ($\beta = -.037$, $t = 1.06$, $p = .291$). This suggests that cognitive identity by itself cannot lead to advocacy. On the other hand, customer engagement was found to be a significant predictor of brand evangelism ($\beta = .471$, $t = 11.97$, $p < .001$). This is the strongest path coefficient in the model.

Table 6: Structural Path Coefficients (Direct Effects)

Path	β	t	p	Decision
Cognitive Identity $\rightarrow$ Customer Engagement	0.141	4.48	< .001	Supported
Cognitive Identity $\rightarrow$ Brand Evangelism	−0.037	1.06	.291	Not supported
Customer Engagement $\rightarrow$ Brand Evangelism	0.471	11.97	< .001	Supported

The model explained a moderate-to-substantial share of variance in the three endogenous constructs (Table 7); $R^2 = .635$ for customer engagement, and $.542$ for brand evangelism (R^2 adjusted = $.630$, and $.538$, respectively), consistent with a moderate-to-substantial explanatory model (Hair et al., 2018).

Table 7: R-Square and R-Square Adjusted

Endogenous Construct	R^2	R^2 Adjusted
Customer Engagement	0.635	0.630
Brand Evangelism	0.542	0.538

Effect sizes f^2 have been provided in Table 8 as measures of the practical importance of the impact that predictors have made on the explained variances of the endogenous constructs. The effect size of SMPI (cognitive identity) on brand evangelism ($f^2 = .002$) and customer engagement ($f^2 = .031$) was negligible, suggesting very little practical significance even though the relationship was

statistically significant. Customer engagement had a moderate effect size (.203) on brand evangelism, making it clear that it is the most practically significant predictor in the model.

Table 8: f-Square Effect Sizes

Predictor	→ Brand Evangelism	→ Customer Engagement
SMPI (Cognitive Identity)	0.002	0.031
Customer Engagement	0.203	--

6.1. Mediation Analysis

Table 9 illustrates the total effect of cognitive identity (SMPI) on brand evangelism into its direct and indirect components. The direct effect was non-significant ($\beta = -.037$, ns), while the indirect effect, transmitted through customer engagement, was significant and substantial ($\beta = .213$, $p < .001$), yielding a significant total effect ($\beta = .176$, $p < .001$). This pattern indicates indirect-only mediation, confirming that cognitive identity influences brand evangelism entirely through its effect on customer engagement rather than through any direct pathway. This result emphasizes the importance of customer engagement in bridging the behavioral gap between identity at the platform level and evangelical outcomes. This is consistent with the mediation logic presented in the theoretical framework of the study.

Table 9: Direct, Indirect and Total effects on brand Evangelism

Antecedent	Direct	Indirect	Total	Mediation
SMPI (Cognitive Identity)	-0.037 (ns)	0.213***	0.176***	Full

Note. ns = not significant; *** $p < .001$.

7. Discussion

The findings offer strong empirical evidence to support the key proposition in this study that social media platform identification (SMPI), which is used in the form of cognitive identity, influences brand evangelism indirectly, not directly. As expected in the proposed model, cognitive identity had a significant effect on customer engagement ($\beta = .141$, $p < .001$), implying that the consumers' cognitive identification with the community on the social media platform leads them to engage in the consumption of brand-related content by liking, commenting, sharing, and tagging. These results are in line with the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) where categorization of oneself into a group leads to the performance of identity-based actions towards relevant entities

within the group and extend the study of Wang (2017) that showed a unique effect of cognitive aspects of platform identity on consumers' actions to the particular domain of fashion clothing brands.

While cognitive identity had no significant direct influence on brand evangelism ($\beta = -.037$, $p = .291$), however. This lack of direct connection is an important point from the theoretical perspective, rather than just a statistical observation, because it suggests that platform-based self-categorization by itself cannot lead to the occurrence of advocacy behavior. The consumer might identify oneself as belonging to a certain community of the platform without ever engaging in evangelism behavior through promoting the brand publicly. This finding should be taken into account when applying Social Identity Theory in practice, because it suggests that identification is not behaviorally sufficient in itself.

Customer engagement plays a vital part in this context, as shown by its classification as the strongest path in the model ($\beta = .471$, $p < .001$) and the sole predictor achieving medium effect size ($f^2 = .203$), in contrast to negligible effect sizes of the two paths of cognitive identity ($f^2 = .002$ and $.031$, respectively). This implies that while cognitive identity statistically influences both engagement and the latter's evangelical effect indirectly, it does not achieve much in practice in terms of explained variance when compared with the vital role played by engagement in that respect. Essentially, this means that engagement should be viewed as a crucial behavioral mediator of upstream identity resources' influence on brand advocacy rather than as a secondary outcome of the former's impact. Such an understanding of the role of engagement coincides with Lim and Rasul (2022) interpretation of engagement as an intermediary variable connecting upstream identity to downstream relational outcomes such as loyalty and evangelism, as well as with findings about the role of follower engagement as a proximate driver of evangelism in fashion (Rungruangjit et al., 2023).

The mediation analysis results are consistent with and formally substantiate this interpretation through a conventional mediation pathway. The absence of a significant direct effect of cognitive identity on evangelism, combined with a significant and sizeable indirect effect through customer engagement ($\beta = .213$, $p < .001$) and a significant total effect ($\beta = .176$, $p < .001$), indicates a textbook example of full, indirect-only mediation. From the perspective of Social Identity Theory's three-phase approach, social categorization and social identity formation (reflected in

this analysis through the cognitive identity) seem to necessitate transitioning into an intermediate behavioral phase, customer engagement, in order to enable the final social comparison and associated preference for in-group in evangelizing one's brand preference to others.

The explanatory power of the model adds to the confirmation of this interpretation. The explanatory power was quite high for customer engagement and brand evangelism with R^2 values of .635 and .542 and R^2 adjusted of .630 and .538. Therefore, it can be said that even though the theory is parsimonious, it captures a significant portion of variance in customer engagement and brand evangelism. Along with the good psychometric characteristics of the measurement model including proper loadings on indicators, reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity using HTMT, and adequate model fit using SRMR (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2018; Henseler et al., 2015, 2016), this result ensures that the identified relationships reflect the true process.

Taken together, these findings indicate that brand evangelism behavior by fashion clothing brands' followers should not be seen as a result of platform identification only but as a psychological process whereby platform identification creates motivation to engage, and engagement in turn becomes the decisive behavioral path that transforms the identity asset into brand advocacy.

8. Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the brand evangelism and social identity literatures in different ways. First, it addresses the conceptual fragmentation noted by Cavadas and Moreira (2025) by relocating the origin of evangelism upstream of the brand, in a consumer's cognitive identification with the social media platform community, tracing a complete pathway from platform-level identity through engagement to advocacy rather than treating engagement and loyalty as terminal outcomes (Fetais et al., 2023; Samala & Katkam, 2020). Second, it shows, through Wang (2017) conceptualization that cognitive identity shape engagement but reach evangelism only indirectly through engagement, qualifying single-dimension accounts of platform identity and affirming the value of Wang's structure when advocacy is the outcome of interest. Third, it resolves the seemingly competing brand-centric (trust and happiness) and social-media-based (community engagement and digital participation) evangelism logic (Cavadas & Moreira, 2025) by showing them to be sequential rather than rival, with platform-level identity motivating engagement that builds brand evangelism. This sustains evangelism positioning customer engagement, consistent with Lim and Rasul (2022), as the pivotal intermediary linking upstream identity to downstream

relational outcomes and extending Social Identity Theory from platform-level self-categorization to advocacy for brands.

9. Practical Implications

For fashion marketers, evangelism cannot be generated through brand-level engagement campaigns alone but must be cultivated further upstream, at the level of the platform community with which consumers already identify, meaning brands should tailor content formats, tone, and visual conventions to the norms of each specific platform rather than porting a single strategy across platforms; because customer engagement was the strongest predictor of evangelism and fully carried the effect of platform identity, marketers should prioritize engagement-generating tactics including prompts to like, comment, share, and tag over one-off brand-awareness content, and recurring community rituals rather than transactional promotions.

10. Limitations and Future Research Directions

Several limitations qualify these conclusions and point to opportunities for future research. First, the cross-sectional design cannot establish the temporal precedence implied by the proposed identity-to-engagement-to-evangelism sequence, calling for longitudinal or panel designs. Second, reliance on single-source, self-reported survey data raises the possibility of common method bias that statistical controls (e.g., the full collinearity VIF test) cannot fully rule out, suggesting future studies pair self-reported measures with platform-recorded behavioral trace data. Third, the non-probability, purposive sampling strategy limits generalizability beyond the sampled population and platform contexts, favoring probability-based or platform-partnered sampling where feasible. Fifth, the study is focussed on Facebook and Instagram fashion brands' followers in Pakistan, this leaves it unclear whether the identity-to-evangelism pathway generalizes across platforms with different affordances or across individualist and collectivist cultural settings. Building on these limitations, future research should pursue longitudinal or experimental designs to test the mediation model's causal ordering (e.g., by manipulating exposure to platform-community content); examine the relative and joint explanatory power of brand affinity and customer engagement across product categories differing in visibility and social significance; conduct cross-platform and cross-cultural replications to test whether the full-mediation pattern generalizes; incorporate additional constructs such as self-brand connection, parasocial relationships, and brand

community identification to test the platform-to-brand identity transfer against stronger brand-specific identity resources; and use qualitative or mixed-methods approaches to illuminate how consumers themselves experience and narrate the shift from platform member to brand engager to brand evangelist.

11. Conclusion

This study set out to address two gaps in the brand evangelism literature: its conceptual fragmentation outside fashion clothing contexts, and its tendency to treat brand-level engagement as the starting point of the evangelism process rather than as an outcome of a prior, platform-level identity resource. Drawing from Social Identity Theory, the results indicate that social media platform identification does not contribute to brand evangelism directly but indirectly through customer engagement as an alternative and indirect-only mediator. Meanwhile, perceived brand page agility serves to magnify the aforementioned identity-based paths instead of being an independent predictor of advocacy behavior. Overall, the findings suggest that brand evangelism of fashion clothing brands among their followers should be viewed not as an independent phenomenon but as a final step in a multistage process whereby a consumer first identifies with a social media community, then connects with a brand and engages with it, and advocates publicly as the end result of these processes. From an academic perspective, this research provides an enhanced theoretical explanation of how platform-level social identity can be transformed into brand-level advocacy; from the marketing perspective, it delivers a practical lesson that brand evangelism among fashion brands' followers cannot be achieved through persuasion directly, but requires engaging with the relevant platform communities and the corresponding interactions with the brand.

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