

Brand Loyalty to Popular Music Group Brands. The Role of Brand Attachment and Brand Community Relationships

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Abstract

This study extends the concept of brand attachment to the context of cultural brands, specifically brands of popular music groups. The author collates the idea of music group brand with branding theories and investigates the impact of attachment to a music group brand on music group brand loyalty. Brand community identification, brand community commitment and perceived community-brand similarity, interpreted in the context of music fan communities, were considered as factors of music brand attachment. The data collected in a survey among members of international fan communities of three popular music groups were used to test the formulated hypotheses. The results show that attachment to a music group brand is positively related to brand loyalty and fully mediates the relationship between brand community identification and brand loyalty, as well as the relationship between the perceived community-brand similarity and brand loyalty. The brand community identification is also shown to positively affect brand community commitment among music fan communities. The outcomes of the study were discussed in relation to their implications for theory and practice.

Keywords: brand loyalty, brand attachment, brand community, artist brand, music marketing.

1. Introduction

Brands are an inherent part of contemporary economies and societies. Looking from a consumer's perspective, a strong brand can facilitate the choice between a variety of goods and services, reduce the perceived risk by acting as a proof of quality and help consumers create their desired identity [Voeth, Herbst, 2008, p. 74]. Branding is applied not only to consumer goods or services and corporate entities but also to places [Hankinson, 2004], events [e.g. Leenders, 2010; Čáslavová, Petrácková,

2011; Walsh, Clavio, Lovell, Blaszk, 2013], people [Thomson, 2006]; non-profit organisations [Stride, Lee, 2007] and public institutions [Gromark, Melin, 2013] as well as artists [Schroeder, 2005] and cultural products [O'Reilly, 2005; O'Reilly, Kerrigan, 2013; Kohli, Melewar, Yen, 2014; Baumgarth, O'Reilly, 2014].

Cultural products, such as books, films, TV series, podcasts, magazines, newspapers, video games, fashion, crafts, architecture, performing arts, photography and music [UNESCO, 2009, p. 24] are categorised as experiential goods [Larce-neux, 2001, p. 3]. This means that symbolic, hedonic and aesthetic aspects prevail over functional aspects of these goods in the act of consumption, in line with Holbrook and Hirschman's [1982] framework. The definition of cultural products by UNESCO [2009, p. 87] also highlights their symbolic nature, stating that such products "convey ideas, symbols and ways of life".

The brand attachment construct, defined by Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich and Iacobucci [2010, p. 4] as "the strength of the bond connecting the brand with the self", is particularly relevant for experiential goods, as both brand attachment and experiential consumption convey emotional aspects of interactions with brands. Although this construct was examined with regard to hotel brands [Li, Lu, Bogicevic, Bujisic, 2019; Peng, Chen, 2019; Liu, Kou, Guan, Hu, Pu, 2020], restaurants [Bahri-Ammari, Van Niekerk, Khelil, Chtioui, 2016], luxury fashion [Kaufmann, Petrovici, Gonçalves Filho, Ayres, 2016] and human brands of individual celebrities [Thomson, 2006; Huang, Lin, Phau, 2015], there is scarce research on brand attachment, its factors and impact on brand loyalty in the context of cultural products, specifically music. Such research concerning music brands has a solid justification, as the global recorded music market has been growing consecutively for six years [IFPI, 2021]. Eighty-nine percent of Internet users aged 16–64 across the world use music streaming services and fifty-four percent admit that they love music [IFPI, 2019, p. 7]. The role of interactions with brand communities (which – in case of brands of music artists – can be described as fan communities and can largely affect the attitude to an artist) in shaping attachment to music brands, as brands of music groups are referred to by Obiegbu, Larsen, Ellis and O'Reilly [2019], is still understudied. Previous studies setting music artists in the theoretical marketing framework examined the general marketing principles for popular music and live music [O'Reilly, 2007; O'Reilly, Larsen, Kubacki, 2016], experiential aspects of brand loyalty in a digital music fandom [Obiegbu et al., 2019], criticism towards a music brand in an online fan community [Obiegbu, Larsen, Ellis, 2019], human branding [Huang et al., 2015], effect of social media interactions with a music artist brand on music sales [Saboo, Kumar, Ramani, 2016], brand community concept applied to music fan communities [Schau, Muñiz, 2007] and nostalgia, brand

trust and brand attachment in live music performance sector [Hidayati, Isabela, Yuwananda, Gunadi, 2021]. However, the brand attachment concept has not been studied yet in the context of brands of music groups (not solo artists); there are also few quantitative studies connecting music brand attachment and loyalty to music consumers' relationships with brand (fan) communities. This study addresses the gap by examining the relationship between brand loyalty, brand attachment and brand community-related constructs – namely brand community commitment, brand community identification and perceived community-brand similarity – with regard to music group brands.

This paper expands upon the branding aspects of music artists and reviews the literature on brand attachment, brand communities and possible relations between them in the context of music group brands. The developed hypotheses are tested in a survey conducted in May – June 2021 on a sample of active members of international music fan communities (participants of online forums and social media groups dedicated to three different popular music groups: U2, Coldplay and Florence + The Machine). These particular music groups have been chosen as they are well-known artists who have engaged and diverse fan communities, gathering people of different ages, professions and regions of the world. The paper is concluded with theoretical and managerial implications of the study as well as possible directions for future research.

2. Theoretical background and hypothesis development

2.1. Brand role in the music industry: bands as brands

The music market has changed enormously due to easier access to the Internet and the expansion of streaming services. However, the very idea remains unchanged: being a commercially successful music artist is not only about the talent and inspiration, but also about the hard work of many professionals. These professionals include the artists themselves, songwriters, lyricists, music producers, designers, photographers, A&R (artist & repertoire) departments, salespeople and, finally, marketers [IFPI, 2016, pp. 2–3]. Record companies work in the same way as other businesses, aiming at generating profit. In order to make released music profitable, record labels do not hesitate to invest in marketing. According to IFPI [2016, p. 6], marketing and promotion are the biggest item of spending on them. On the other hand, the Internet offers music artists more independence from record companies [Davis, Delaney, Kettler, 2011, p. 108], giving them the opportunity to present and

promote their work via social media and streaming platforms. Yet, if a music artist – either a world-known star with a record deal or an independent young band – would like to reach a certain audience and enjoy a commercial success in addition to achieving artistic goals, branding can be a useful marketing technique. In the end, “having a band is great, but it’s the brand that pays the bills,” as stated by Strauss [2005, p. 87]. Popular music, which is also a commodity to be marketed or consumed, creates value and is subject to market forces [Frith, 2005, p. 15], and musicians, like any other artists, can be seen as brand managers [Schroeder, 2005].

Let us consider the famous logo of The Rolling Stones, rated as the most iconic design of all time [The Independent, 2018] or the characteristic logos of AC/DC, Iron Maiden and Metallica, which have also earned an important place in the pop culture iconography. They fit the basic definition of a brand: “a name, term, design, symbol or any other feature that identifies one seller’s goods or service as distinct from those of other sellers” [American Marketing Association, 2021]. In the case of brands of music artists, “seller” means simply the artists themselves, and the phrase “goods or service” refers to recorded music. When consumers see the tongue and lips logo on a music album cover, they immediately know that this is The Rolling Stones’ recording. A recognisable brand is definitely an asset that distinguishes one music artist from others, but its role is more compound. The brand concept has evolved over the years, and the application of more complex brand definitions in the context of music group brands provides a much richer perspective.

The focus in academic discussion on brand management has shifted recently from the positivist to constructivist paradigm [Heding, Knudtzen, Bjerre, 2016, p. 21–22]. Brand management approaches evolved from company or brand owner-oriented, to consumer-oriented, to culture- and context-oriented. The latter approach supports the notion that brands are not shaped solely by their owners, they are co-constructed by multiple “authors”: companies (brand owners themselves), popular culture, customers and influencers [Holt, 2003], as well as brand community members [Muñiz, O’Guinn, 2001] and other stakeholders [Preece, Kerrigan, 2015]. In other words, brands are subjects of social construction, apart from managerial construction [O’Reilly, 2005], through meaning-making processes [McCracken, 1986]. Such conclusions lay ground for the concept of cultural branding [Holt, 2004; O’Reilly, 2005; Schroeder, Salzer-Mörling, 2006], focused on the importance of brands in the construction of consumers’ identities and defining brands as “cultural artefacts moving through history” [Holt, 2004, p. 215]. This conceptualisation corresponds with the nature of brands of music artists: they are undoubtedly rooted in culture, their value is co-created by multiple stakeholders (artists, music consumers, fan communities, record companies, critics, media) and

they play a role in the creation of music consumers' identities through their creative work [Frith, 1996; DeNora, 1999; Tarrant, North, Hargreaves, 2002].

Stern [2006] argues on the basis of brand literature review that brands are multi-dimensional constructs that can be assessed in terms of four categories: nature, function, locus and valence. Each category can be described with opposing terms: the brand nature can be either literal or metaphoric, function may be an entity or a process, locus may refer to the mind or world, and valence may be positive or negative. Music group brands, seen as symbols of certain lifestyles or social groups [e.g. Lewis, 1992], consumed in a symbolic way [Larsen, Lawson, Todd, 2012], co-created over time by a wide audience that gives them particular meanings, creating multiple associations in music consumers' minds and having generally positive connotations due to being a part of culture and responding to consumers' needs for aesthetics, tap into the metaphoric-process-mind-positive category of brands.

2.2. Brand attachment, brand communities and their relation to brand loyalty

The marketing theory indicates that consumers are able to develop emotional attachment to brands in a similar way as they develop relationships with people [e.g. Fournier, 1998; Thomson, MacInnis, Park, 2005]. Brand attachment is defined as the strength of the bond connecting the consumer with the brand [Park et al., 2010]. This bond is represented by a rich and accessible memory network that involves thoughts and feelings about the brand in relation to the self. The authors describe brand attachment as a two-dimensional construct, comprising brand-self connection (cognitive and emotional connection between the brand and its user) and brand prominence (ease and frequency of evoking brand-related thoughts and feelings). The constructs resemble Belk's [1988] concept of self-extension, particularly in terms of brands which are parts of consumers' identities; however, brand attachment expands upon the idea of an extended self by adding the dimension of brand prominence. The brand attachment theory can be viewed in relation to the psychology-based attachment theory [Ainsworth, Bowlby, 1991], which suggests that strong emotional attachment to somebody results in higher commitment to them and higher willingness to make sacrifices for them, as cited by Thomson et al. [2005]. Likewise, strong brand attachment may have a positive effect on the constructs that indicate commitment to a brand or willingness to devote resources (i.e. money and time) to a brand, e.g. brand loyalty [Thomson et al., 2005; Park et al., 2010]. Brand loyalty, described by Oliver [1999, p. 34] as a deeply rooted commitment to rebuy or repatronise a preferred brand consistently over time, despite situational factors

and competitive marketing efforts that may cause switching behaviours, involves two phases: (1) attitudinal loyalty, which leads to (2) action (or behavioural) loyalty, understood as an act of purchase. However, behavioural loyalty might not be a fully appropriate measure of loyalty in the context of brands of music groups, as purchasing a music album of a band or a ticket to their concert is not necessarily an indicator of loyalty – it might be as well a purchase made out of curiosity or as a status symbol [Obiegbu, Larsen, Ellis, 2020, p. 3]. Hence, the focus in this study was put on attitudinal loyalty, consisting of a cognitive component (preference of a brand over its alternatives), affective component (cognition and affect for a brand) and conative component (behavioural intention to repurchase a brand, which, in the case of experiential goods, could be described as an intention to repeat interactions and experiences with a brand) [Oliver, 1999; Back, Parks, 2003]. Attitudinal brand loyalty indeed highlights the aspect of commitment and willingness for resource engagement, which can be potentially predicted by brand attachment. Thus, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H1. Attachment to a brand of a music group has a positive effect on attitudinal loyalty to this brand.

One of the first studies which contributed to the constitution of the brand attachment phenomenon were studies on brand communities and subcultures of consumption [Schouten, McAlexander, 1995]. The idea of brand communities was expanded by Muñoz and O’Guinn [2001, p. 412], who defined them as “specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand”. Members of brand communities feel connected not only to the brand but also to each other; they distinguish “true” members of the community from the others and define themselves in relation to brands that they do not consume, as opposed to their favourite brand. They have certain community rituals and traditions, celebrate the brand history, share brand stories among themselves, feel a sense of duty to the community and assist other community members in the use of the brand. This description fits the characteristics of music group brand communities or fandoms, as such communities are generally called in the cultural sectors [O’Reilly, Larsen, Kubacki, 2013]. Their members often call themselves “a family”, have their own definition of a “true fan” (e.g. a person who has spent much time as a fan of a music group or experienced some historical moments in a group’s history [Obiegbu et al., 2020]), often show their preference for one group in opposition to other music artists, have their own traditions, such as theme parties with their favourite band music, share facts from the band history and their personal experiences with the band on online forums and social media

groups. They also assist each other in the consumption of a brand, e.g. by sharing new recordings and information about the band plans for concert tours with community members or helping fellow fans get tickets for a concert. Such strong brand communities can shape brand loyalty [Muñiz, O'Guinn, 2001; Jang, Olfman, Ko, Koh, Kim, 2008; Fournier, Lee, 2009]. However, brand communities are different and operate on different levels [McAlexander, Schouten, Koenig, 2002] so the relationship between brand community participation and brand loyalty can be mediated by various mechanisms.

In terms of specific brand community-related concepts, available research indicates a positive effect of brand community identification and commitment on brand loyalty [Jang et al., 2008; Fournier, Lee, 2009]. Brand community identification, based on the social identity theory [Tajfel, Turner, 2004], according to which people, besides their self-identity, define themselves by their group membership [Mael, Ashforth, 1992, p. 104], has been proven to have a positive impact on brand community commitment among Chinese car club members [Zhou, Zhang, Su, Zhou, 2012]. It was also evidenced earlier that members who had a high level of identification with a brand community were more likely to maintain the relationship with this community by engagement in community-based discussions and interaction with other community members [Muñiz, Schau, 2005; Algesheimer, Dholakia, Herrmann, 2005]. After all, those who do not identify with a group would not be generally interested in committing their time and effort to this group. As communities gathered around music group brands are characterised by high member participation and involvement, just like communities gathered around automotive brands [Algesheimer et al., 2005, p. 20], a similar effect can be expected in their case:

H2. Brand community identification is positively related to commitment to brand community of a music group.

Brand community commitment is expressed as a feeling that the continuous relationship between an individual and the brand community they belong to is valuable [Jang et al., 2008]. Community commitment can also be demonstrated as a feeling of loss at the thought of the community no longer existing [Wasko, Faraj, 2005, p. 48] or as a concern for the fate of the community [Mathwick, Wiertz, De Ruyter, 2008, p. 839]. An active, committed participation in brand communities, including music group brand communities, may bring the brand psychologically closer to the consumer-community member [Malär, Krohmer, Hoyer, Nyffenegger, 2011, p. 44] and, therefore, a consumer (or a fan) might develop a stronger bond with the brand, making it a steady part of everyday life that often is on top of the consumer's mind. In recent studies, community commitment among online brand

communities had a positive indirect effect on brand loyalty [Munnukka, Karjaluoto, Tikkanen, 2015] and a positive effect on brand attitude [Wang, Cao, Park, 2019], which is a construct related to brand attachment that can also serve as a predictor of loyalty behaviours, according to Park et al. [2010, pp. 7–11]. Moreover, positive correlation between brand community commitment and brand attachment was confirmed in a study by Zhou et al. [2012]. Hence, it is expected that

H3. Brand community commitment is positively related to attachment to a brand of a music group.

Consumers tend to have a more positive attitude towards the brands whose personalities are similar to the consumers' personality – either their actual or ideal selves. In other words, consumers often buy certain brands or interact with them because these brands allow them to express their identities, which is known in the literature as self-congruence or self-congruity [Aaker, 1997, p. 353]. The self-congruence effect can evolve not only from a perceived similarity between the personality of a consumer and the personality of a brand itself but also from the similarity between a consumer and a typical brand user [Helgeson, Supphellen, 2004], e.g. a fellow brand community member. A study by Malär et al. [2011] indicated a positive effect of actual self-congruence on brand attachment. The similarity between a brand and its community might explain an emotional bond between a consumer-community member and the brand: if brand community members consider a brand similar to the community they belong to, they also consider the brand similar to themselves in a certain sense. Community-brand similarity might then act similarly to actual self-congruence in the studies of Malär et al. [2011] and Rabbane, Roy and Spence [2020], being positively related to brand attachment. It would also support recent findings on the so-called “self-congruity effect of music” [Greenberg, Matz, Schwartz, Fricke, 2020], suggesting that music artist whose public personas are similar to the listener's personality are preferred by the listener. The above considerations result in the following hypothesis:

H4. Perceived community-brand similarity is positively related to attachment to a music group brand.

3. Research method and results summary

3.1. Method

Two-hundred seven participants from international music fan communities of three music groups: U2, Coldplay and Florence + The Machine (49.3% females, $M_{\text{age}} = 33$, $SD = 12.3$, $n_{\text{U2}} = 121$, $n_{\text{Coldplay}} = 32$, $n_{\text{FATM}} = 54$), aged 14–67, took part in an online survey in May – June 2021. These particular music groups were chosen for the study because of their worldwide popularity, as well as diverse and vibrant fan communities. Irish rock band U2 began their career in the early 1980s. They have released fourteen studio albums so far, having experienced ups and downs all throughout their long career. In addition, the band is known even among light music listeners due to their famous leader Bono and his philanthropic activities. British band Coldplay is one of the most iconic music groups of the 2000 s with discography covering different genres, from melancholic soft rock songs to pop hits. Florence + The Machine is a British indie band active in the music industry for over ten years, recognisable for a charismatic female leader with a distinctive style.

The data were collected among two groups of respondents: international fan communities and Polish fan communities. The survey was published in two language versions – English and Polish – on both international and local Polish online forums and Facebook groups dedicated to U2, Coldplay and Florence + The Machine. The response rate was higher among Polish fandoms; hence, the majority of respondents (49.8%) were Polish, followed by the Americans (17.4%) and the British (7.7%).

Ninety-six percent of respondents were studying (learning) or/and working. There was one missing entry regarding age, which was substituted by a median of age in the total sample. All demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample demographics

Country of origin	Number of respondents	% of total sample
Australia	3	1.4
Austria	1	0.5
Belgium	2	1.0
Brazil	1	0.5
Canada	6	2.9
China	1	0.5
Croatia	1	0.5

cont. Table 1

Country of origin	Number of respondents	% of total sample
Czech Republic	1	0.5
Denmark	1	0.5
Dominican Republic	1	0.5
Germany	9	4.3
Greece	1	0.5
Ireland	3	1.4
Italy	4	1.9
Kenya	1	0.5
Korea	1	0.5
Mexico	1	0.5
Poland	103	49.8
Slovakia	2	1.0
Slovenia	1	0.5
Spain	3	1.4
The Netherlands	7	3.4
UK	16	7.7
Uruguay	1	0.5
USA	36	17.4
Age		
14–19	12	5.8
20–29	74	35.7
30–39	41	19.8
40–49	52	25.1
50–59	22	10.6
60–67	5	2.4
No data	1	0.5
Occupation		
Studying/learning	54	26.1
Working	134	64.7
Studying/learning and working	11	5.3
None of the above	8	3.9
Gender		
Female	102	49.3
Male	102	49.3
Other	2	1.0
I do not wish to disclose	1	0.5

Source: Author's own data.

All respondents who completed the English version of the questionnaire had at least basic knowledge of English; forty-one percent of them had advanced or fluent knowledge and fifty-one percent were native English speakers. The survey questions were adjusted to each music group brand included in the study, i.e. survey published on U2 forums included questions formulated in direct relation to U2, e.g. “U2 is my first choice when I feel like listening to music.” Participants were informed about the scientific purpose of the study and reassured about the anonymity of their responses. Some of the questions were asked in a projective way to reduce a social desirability bias, e.g. “Some people may feel close to fan communities of their favourite music artists. How is it about you?”

At the beginning of the survey, brand loyalty was measured, using the scale adopted from Back and Parks [2003]; $\alpha = .86$. Then, brand attachment was measured with the scale adopted from Park et al. [2010]; $\alpha = .89$, followed by a five-item scale measuring a perceived community-brand similarity [Zhou et al. 2012]; $\alpha = .88$. Afterwards, scales inspired by Zhou et al. [2012] were used to measure brand community commitment ($\alpha = .92$) and brand community identification ($\alpha = .87$). Each measurement used a seven-point Likert scale coded from 1 to 7. All items used in the study are featured in Table 2.

Table 2. Measurement scales used in the study

Construct	Items used	References	Reliability
Attitudinal brand loyalty*	Even if another music artist that I like offered lower prices for a live show ticket than [Band X] *** and I could only afford one concert per year, I would still go to [Band X] concert. If [Band X] releases a new music album, I intend to buy it. [Band X] is my first choice when I feel like listening to music. I love listening to [Band X]. I feel better when I listen to [Band X]’s music. I like [Band X] more than other music artists. [Band X] records music of a higher quality as compared to any other music artist. No other music artist performs better in live concerts than [Band X]. I believe [Band X]’s music is more valuable than the music from other artists.	Inspired by Back & Parks [2003]	$\alpha = .86$
Brand attachment**	Is [Band X] part of you and who you are? Do you feel personally connected to [Band X]? Are your thoughts and feelings toward [Band X] often automatic, coming to mind seemingly on their own? Do your thoughts and feelings toward [Band X] come to your mind naturally and instantly?	Adopted from Park et al. [2010]	$\alpha = .89$

cont. Table 2

Construct	Items used	References	Reliability
Perceived community-brand similarity*	If [Band X] brand (their visual identification, image and reputation, differentiation, values and ways of communication) was imagined as a person, that person would have a personality similar to personalities of [Band X] fans. There is a similarity between values of [Band X] fans and values represented by [Band X]. There is a similarity between the style of [Band X] fans and the style of [Band X]. There is a similarity between what I feel when I think about [Band X] fans and what I feel when I think about [Band X]. There is nothing similar between [Band X] fans and [Band X]. (R)	Inspired by Zhou et al. [2012]	$\alpha = .88$
Brand community commitment*	I would feel a loss if social media groups or forums dedicated to [Band X] were no longer available. I care about the future of [Band X] fan community. I feel a great deal of loyalty to [Band X] fan community. I intend to maintain the relationship I have with [Band X] fan community indefinitely. The relationships I have with other fans of [Band X] are important to me.	Adopted from Zhou et al. [2012]	$\alpha = .92$
Brand community identification*	When I think about [Band X] fan community: I usually say "we" rather than "they" I see myself as a part of this community I enjoy the successes of [Band X] fan community almost as much as I enjoy my successes If someone praises [Band X] fan community, it feels to me like a personal compliment If someone criticises [Band X] fan community, it feels to me like a personal insult I am interested in what others think about [Band X] fan community	Adopted from Zhou et al [2012]	$\alpha = .87$

* Anchored by (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree).

** Anchored by (1 = not at all and 7 = very much).

*** Band X = U2/Coldplay/Florence + The Machine.

Source: Author's own elaboration based on Back & Parks [2003], Park et al. [2010] and Zhou et al. [2012].

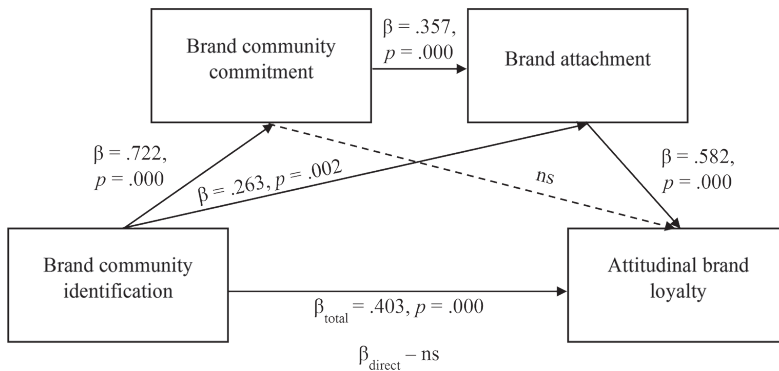
3.2. Results

Attitudinal brand loyalty served as a dependent variable in both tested mediation models. The first tested model used brand community identification as an independent variable; brand community commitment and brand attachment served as sequential mediators. The second model included brand attachment as the only mediator. Taking into account the overrepresentation of Polish respondents in the sample, the moderation effect of being a Polish citizen was examined with regard to the considered theoretical models (PROCESS, Hayes model 85 and 59). However, the interaction effect with all the considered variables was insignificant in both models (CI95%_{index of moderated mediation_Model 1} [-.021, .026; CI95%_{index of moderated media-}

tion_Model 2 [-.166,.203], meaning that the overrepresentation of Polish respondents does not affect the results.

As expected in H2, there was a positive effect of brand community identification on community commitment in the first model (PROCESS, Hayes model 6, Figure 1; $\beta = .722, p = .000$). Community identification was also positively related to brand attachment ($\beta = .263, p = .002$). Next, brand community commitment had a positive impact on brand attachment ($\beta = .357, p = .000$), providing support for H3. Brand attachment demonstrated a positive effect on attitudinal brand loyalty ($\beta = .582, p = .000$), supporting H1. The total and indirect effect of mediation were positive and statistically significant (total effect: $\beta = .403, p = .000$; indirect effect: CI95% [.207,.470]), while the direct effect of brand community identification on attitudinal brand loyalty was not significant ($p > .4$). Such results suggest a full mediation through brand community commitment and brand attachment. However, the indirect effect was also significant for brand attachment as the only mediator, with the exclusion of brand community commitment (CI95% [.043, .272]). Apart from that, the positive direct effect of brand community identification on brand attachment suggests a partial mediation through brand community commitment.

Figure 1. Brand community commitment and brand attachment as mediators between brand community identification and attitudinal loyalty to a music group brand

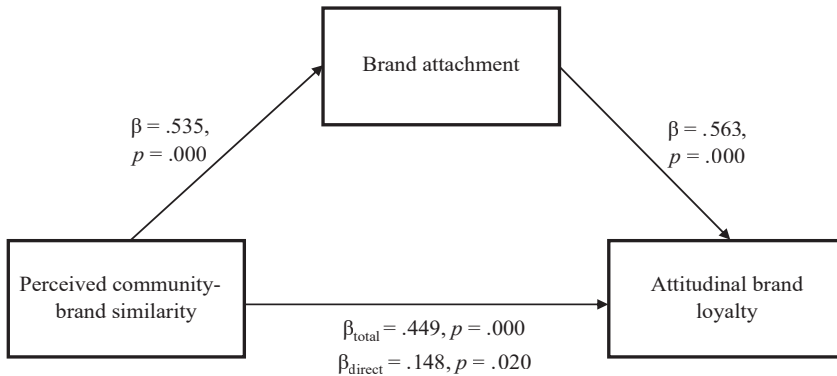


Source: Author's own data.

The second model (Figure 2) included perceived community-brand similarity as an independent variable. Brand attachment served as a mediator. Perceived community brand-similarity was positively related to brand attachment, in support of H4 ($\beta = .535, p = .000$), and brand attachment had a positive effect on attitudinal brand loyalty ($\beta = .563, p = .000$). Both total and direct effect of brand-community similarity on attitudinal brand loyalty were positive and statistically significant

(total effect: $\beta = .449, p = .000$; direct effect: $\beta = .148, p = .020$), indicating a partial mediation through brand attachment.

Figure 2. Brand attachment as a mediator between perceived community-brand similarity and attitudinal loyalty to a music group brand

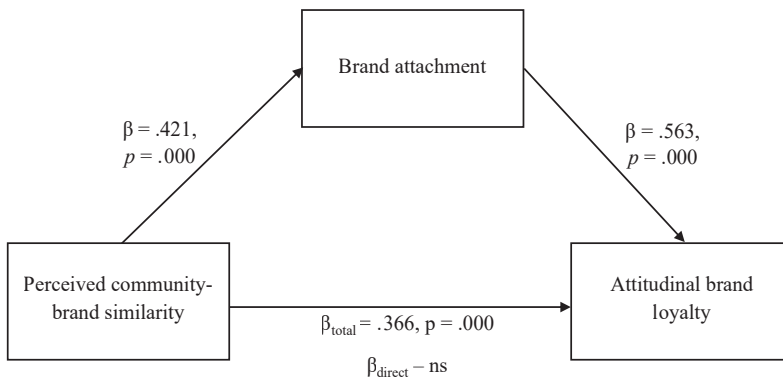
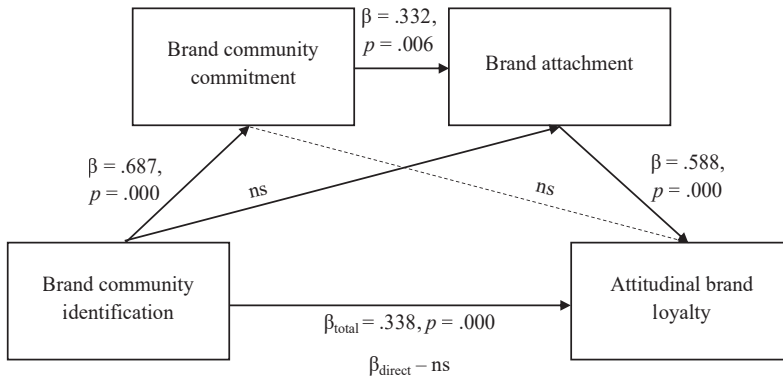


Source: Author's own data.

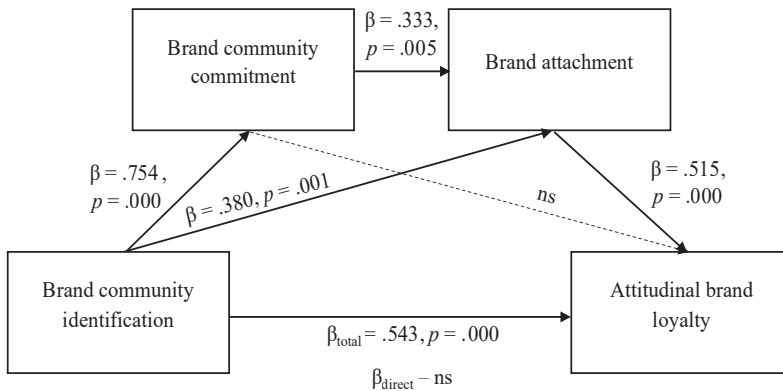
In order to control for potentially distorting effects of personal variables such as age or nationality, the above models were tested in four subgroups: respondents aged below 33 or precisely 33 (median of age in total sample) vs. respondents aged above 33 and respondents from developed countries vs. respondents from developing countries, grouped according to International Monetary Fund classification (Figure 3). The mechanisms confirmed in the total sample were also present in each analysed subgroup. However, contrary to the total sample, there was no direct effect of brand community identification on brand attachment in the sequential mediation model among younger respondents, which suggests a full mediation between community identification and brand attachment through community commitment. The indirect effect of community identification on attitudinal brand loyalty through brand attachment only, with the exclusion of community commitment, was not confirmed either. There also occurred a full mediation between perceived community-brand similarity and attitudinal brand loyalty through brand attachment in this subgroup. In the subgroup of respondents from developing countries, the mediation between brand community identification and attitudinal brand loyalty through brand community commitment and brand attachment was only partial, suggesting the role of some other factors in shaping this relationship. Unlike in the total sample, there was also a full mediation between community-brand similarity and attitudinal brand loyalty through brand attachment among respondents from developing countries.

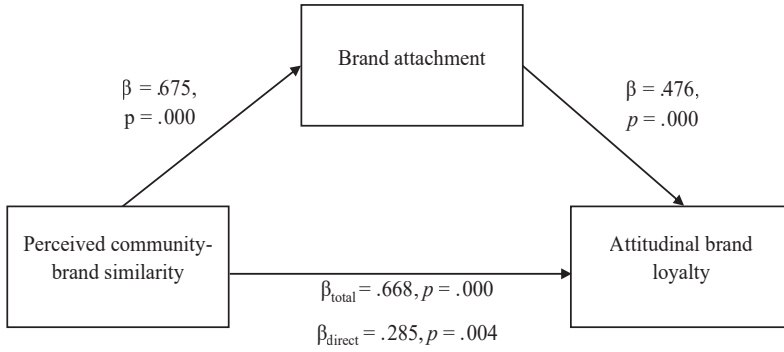
Figure 3. Intermediate mechanisms between brand community identification, perceived community-brand similarity and attitudinal loyalty to a music group brand among age groups (age below median vs. age above median) and nationality groups (developed vs. developing countries)

Age below or equal to median

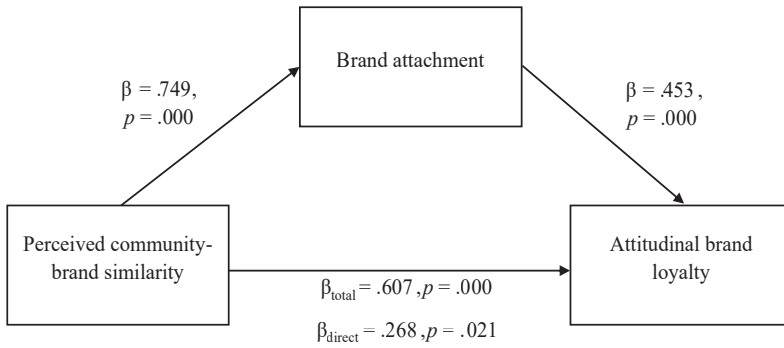
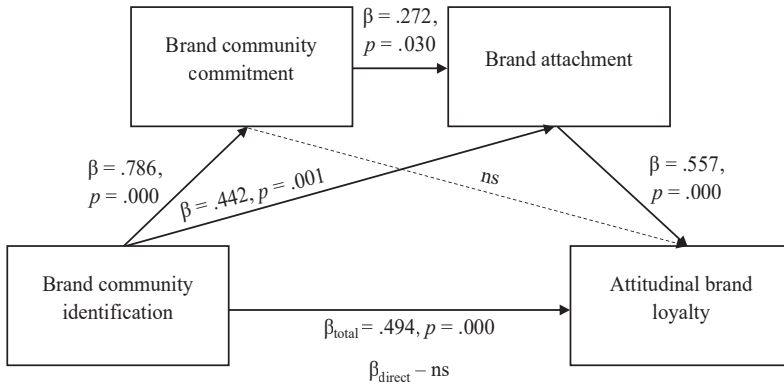


Age above median

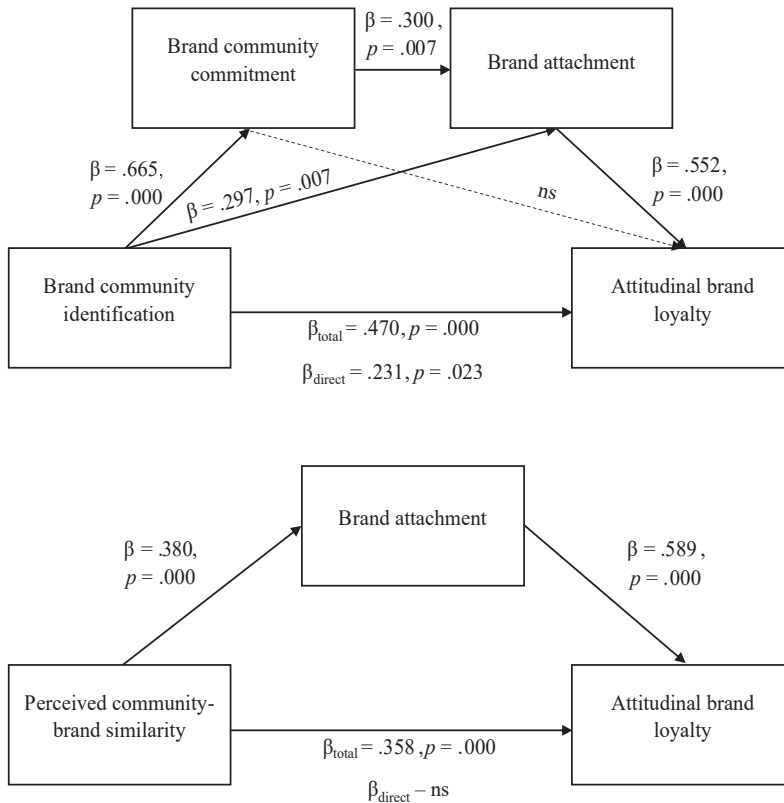




Developed countries*



Developing countries**



* Developed countries: USA, UK, Canada, Australia, Germany, The Netherlands, Belgium, Austria, Denmark, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Spain, Slovenia, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Korea.

** Developing countries: Poland, Croatia, Brazil, Mexico, Uruguay, China, Kenya, Dominican Republic.

Source: Author's own data.

4. Discussion, implications and limitations

This paper contributes to the branding theory by assessing for the first time the intermediate mechanisms between brand community-related constructs, brand attachment and brand loyalty with regard to brands of music groups in an international context. The conducted study confirms mechanisms evidenced in previous studies on examples of other categories of brands (Jang et al., 2008 – mobile phone and automotive brands; Algesheimer et al., 2005, Zhou et al., 2012 – car brands; Malär et al. 2011 – FMCGs, durable consumer goods, services and retailing brands; Munnukka et al., 2015 – home décor and footwear brands; Rabbanee et al., 2020 – sportswear brands) in a new context of experiential, symbolic brands. This

study acknowledges that brands of music groups are also subjects to already known mechanisms shaping brand loyalty among brand communities. The results show that the relation between identification with a community formed around a music group brand and attitudinal loyalty to this group is fully mediated by attachment to this group. As there is a partial mediation through brand community commitment between brand community identification and brand attachment, commitment to the community can be considered as an additional mediating variable between community identification and attitudinal brand loyalty. However, community commitment is not necessary for the mediating effect to occur among older music fans. A person who identifies with the community around the preferred music group brand is more likely to develop emotional attachment to the brand and, as a result, display a higher level of loyalty to it, even without being committed to the fan community. On the other hand, young fans have stronger need to maintain relationships with fandoms built around their idols, as it helps them build their individual as well as collective identity as fans [Lacasa, de la Fuente, García-Pernía, Cortés, 2017, p. 52]. Younger fans are also more avid Internet users, which gives them more opportunities to interact with online fan communities and, consequently, build commitment to them; as a result, brand community commitment becomes a necessary variable, along with brand attachment, in the mediation mechanism between brand community identification and brand loyalty. A partial mediation between community identification and brand attachment among older members of fan communities suggests that there might be additional mediating factors, other than community commitment. These might be particularly factors concerning older fans, such as familiarity with the community, positive image of the community or time spent as a community member. Those fans of music groups who have identified with the fan community for a long time, perceive it in a positive way, know the community well, have met numerous fellow fans and have even become friends with some of them; they might be more inclined to feel attached to the community and to the music group itself, as the group is the thing that puts community members together. With regard to the fans from developing countries, the mediation between brand community identification and brand loyalty is partial, which indicates that there might be other mediating factors, on top of community commitment and brand attachment. Perhaps, these factors may involve temporal and spatial distance. All bands included in the study are Western European, they play concerts more often in the developed than developing countries; as a consequence, fans in the developed countries have more opportunities for personal interactions with them.

Perceived community-brand similarity serves in the context of music group brands as a factor with a positive effect on brand attachment. If a member of

a music group fan community finds the community and the group alike, they may be attached and loyal to this music group. However, partial mediation between perceived community-brand similarity and attitudinal brand loyalty, particularly among older fans and fans from developed countries, suggests that there might be more factors mediating the relationship, e.g. brand attitude (music groups which have much in common with their fans might be assessed more positively, which may translate into brand loyalty [Alhaddad, 2015]) or brand trust (people may be inclined to trust brands that have a personality similar to them [Pentina, Zhang, Basmanova, 2013], and brand trust demonstrates positive impact on brand loyalty [Zehir, Şahin, Kitapçı, Özşahin, 2011; Laroche, Habibi, Richard, Sankaranarayanan, 2012; Chinomona, 2016]).

From the managerial standpoint, identification with a fan community of a music group is not sufficient to build loyalty to the music group brand. Attachment to the brand of a music group is essential to shape loyalty to the group among fan community members. One of the factors that have a positive effect on brand attachment in the context of music fan communities, especially among younger community members, is community commitment. Even though fan communities are usually member-initiated communities, managers of music bands who would like to maintain a loyal fanbase could take some actions that engage fans and make them want to remain within the community. For instance, they may give their fan community a distinct name related to the band work which would give fans a sense of unity, e.g. Lady Gaga named her fan community “*Little Monsters*,” which refers back to the name of her second album [VICE 2017]. The name even appears on the official merchandise. Community commitment might be also enhanced by music groups expressing interest in their fan communities and appreciation for them, e.g. by sharing fans’ experiences related not only to the artist and their music but also to the fan community. Furthermore, as similarity between a music group and its fan community also induces attachment and loyalty, music bands may appeal to the characteristics shared with their fans. For example, the artist-initiated contest for the best styling for Florence + The Machine fans who follow Florence Welch’s style at concerts and festivals, wearing wreaths of flowers and glitter make-up, would probably positively affect their attachment to the band.

This study is not free of limitations. Although the sample included fans of three various music groups, all of them represent popular rock-pop-indie music. The mechanisms considered in the study may differ between music groups representing different genres, including more niche genres, such as heavy metal, hip-hop, electronic music or jazz. A similar study on a larger sample could also prove the obtained results. Furthermore, the research on the same mechanisms extended

to other categories of cultural goods, e.g. book series, films or TV series, would provide a valuable perspective. Apart from that, scholars may take into consideration other constructs applicable to cultural brands, apart from brand attachment and brand loyalty; for instance, brand love, brand religiosity and brand trust could be examined in the context of cultural brands and fan communities.

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Lojalność wobec marek popularnych grup muzycznych: rola przywiązania do marki i relacji ze społecznością wokół marki

Streszczenie

W rozdziale poddano analizie koncepcję przywiązania do marki w kontekście sektora kultury, posługując się przykładem marek zespołów muzycznych. Zestawiono ideę marki grupy muzycznej z teoretycznymi koncepcjami marki oraz zbadano wpływ przywiązania do marki zespołu muzycznego na lojalność wobec niej. Identyfikacja ze społecznością wokół marki, zaangażowanie w społeczność oraz postrzegane podobieństwo pomiędzy społecznością a marką, interpretowane w kontekście społeczności fanów, rozpatrywano jako czynniki kształtujące przywiązanie do marki. Dane zebrane w ankiecie przeprowadzonej wśród członków międzynarodowych społeczności fanów trzech popularnych zespołów posłużyły do testowania postawionych hipotez. Wyniki potwierdzają pozytywną zależność pomiędzy przywiązaniem do marki zespołu a lojalnością wobec marki i mediacyjną rolę przywiązania do marki w relacjach między identyfikacją ze społecznością wokół marki i podobieństwem społeczności do marki a lojalnością wobec marki. Potwierdzono także identyfikację ze społecznością wokół marki zespołu jako czynnik kształtujący zaangażowanie w społeczność. Omówiono ponadto znaczenie wyników badania dla teorii i praktyki.

Słowa kluczowe: lojalność wobec marki, przywiązanie do marki, społeczność wokół marki, marka artysty, marketing muzyki