

Community Engagement and Community Identification in Social Community: Collective Efficacy as a Mediator

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Abstract

We examined the relationship between how the engaging in social community and how the members identify themselves with their communities. In addition, we also investigated that how collective efficacy, belief in group capacity, emerged from community engagement mediate the relationship. Analysis by using data from various fan communities of celebrities (N=333) showed that community engagement is positively associated with community identification. More importantly, collective efficacy partially mediated the relationship. Our finding contributes to social community literature as it revealed an underlying mechanism of how community engagement increases community identification by strengthening a sense of collective efficacy. In addition, it would be worthwhile if further studies examine other mediators or moderators in order to provide deeper understanding how community engagement leads community identification.

Keywords: social community, online community, community engagement, community identification, collective efficacy

1. Introduction

Social community refers to affiliative groups of individuals who share similar interests, knowledge, and enthusiasm [1]. Since the members of the same community have shared interests, they tend to engage in group behavior with other community members. For example, [2] found that even six years after Apple Computer Inc. had discontinued the Newton product, its brand community members still supported one another in order to continuously use the

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product they liked.

This engaging behavior of a community member can positively affect the members. Previous studies showed that the participating in communities enables members to express their identity as group members [3, 4, 5, 6]. This suggests that engaging in social community is likely to help members develop community identification. As the previous studies suggested, we aimed to examine the relationship between how the engaging in social community and how the members identify themselves with their communities. In doing so, we proposed that collective efficacy, belief in group capacity, emerged from community engagement and plays an important role to mediate the relationship.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Community engagement is defined as the individual's intrinsic motivation to cooperate and interact with other members of the same social community [7]. That is, members with high community engagement are likely to try to help other members and to participate in joint activities with other community members. As members engage in the social community, they develop social ties to other members [8]. In this regard, a previous study found that members of the Macintosh computer community voluntarily share information about the computer to help other community members [2]. This group-based behavior of the community members results from the congruency between personal identity and group-based social identity [9]. This is consistent with another study demonstrating that interactions between members in social communities increase group-based behavior with other community members [10].

As community members get more involved in joint group activities with other members, it is likely that they develop strong social identities as community members. It is expected that the strong social identities in turn lead the members to feel community identification which is the strength of the member's relationship with the community [7, 11]. This is because the community identification is based on group-based collective identity and belonging to the community [7, 9].

As community engagement leads members to identify themselves with their community, it is expected that collective efficacy plays an important role in the relationship. Collective efficacy refers to groups' or organizations' beliefs about collective capacities in a specific domain [12, 13, 14]. Collective efficacy is likely to emerge from group-based behaviors of community members [12]. This is also evidenced from Bandura's argument that "perceived collective

efficacy is an emergent group-level attribute rather than simply the sum of members' perceived personal efficacies." [12]. Moreover, as [8]'s study showed, individuals tend to show inter-group stereotypes, which evaluate their community members more competent than others who are not part of the community. This results in that the members of community tend to perceive their performance as a group is better than other communities. This perceived group performance is positively associated with collective efficacy [15], and the experience of successful performance is the most powerful source to raise efficacy belief [16]. In this light, engaging in group activities is expected to strengthen a sense of collective efficacy and thus, in turn, lead strong community identification by strengthening a member's social identity. Based on the arguments, we propose that collective efficacy acts as a mediator in the relationship between community engagement and community identification. Thus, we hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis 1: Community engagement will be positively associated with community identification.

Hypothesis 2: Collective efficacy will mediate the relationship between community engagement and community identification.

3. Method

3.1 Participants and procedure

We collected panel samples from various fan communities of celebrities. Panel samples who are not current members of fan communities were screened out by asking a question 'Are you currently a member of any fan communities of famous people?' in the beginning of the survey. As a result, a total of 350 samples were collected. After removing 17 unusable samples, 333 were compiled for analysis. The samples demographics are as follows: 52.0% were male and 48.0% were female.

3.2 Measures

The measurement items for the current study were based on well-established previous studies and all of the constructs were measured using seven-point likert scales anchored by "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree." In the beginning of the survey, participants were asked to write down whose fan community they belong to and duration of their membership in months.

Community engagement. The question items used to measure the community engagement were “I benefit from following the fan community’s rule”, “I am motivated to participate in the fan community’s activities because I feel better afterwards”, “I am motivated to participate in the fan community’s activities because I am able to support other members” [7]. The Cronbach’s α of the construct was .88.

Collective efficacy. Questionaries of collective efficacy were “This fan community has above average ability”, “This fan community is better compared to other fan community doing similar work”, “The members of this fan community have excellent skills” [17]. The Cronbach’s α of the construct was .91.

Community identification. Last, questionaries of community identification were “ I am very attached to the fan community”, “Other fan community members and I share the same objectives”, “The friendships I have with other fan community members mean a lot to me” [7]. The Cronbach’s α of the construct was .90.

3.3 Data Analysis

SPSS 22.0 and PROCESS software were used to analyze the data. First, we conducted Pearson correlation analysis to investigate the correlations among engagement, collective efficacy, and community identification. Then, we examined the relationship between community engagement and community identification using regression analysis. Last, we applied the [18] method for mediation analysis which is bootstrapping method to test the significance of the mediation effect. In the bootstrap analysis, 5,000 bootstrap samples were drawn from the original dataset to construct a bias-corrected 95% confidence interval (CI; [19]).

4. Results

To test the reliability and validity of the model constructs, Cronbach’s Alpha test and Exploratory factor analysis were first conducted. All Cronbach’s Alpha values are greater than .70, indicating that the construct measures embody internal consistency. As shown in table 1, the results of exploratory factor analysis show that the construct measures have validity.

[Table 1] The Results of the Reliability and Validity Test

	Factor 1 Community Engagement			Factor 2 Collective Efficacy			Factor 3 Community Identification		
	E1	E2	E3	CE1	CE2	CE3	CI1	CI2	CI3
Factor Loading	.810	.758	.651	.837	.831	.809	.821	.758	.720
Cronbach's α	0.884			0.915			0.901		

In order to investigate the relationship among the study variables, we carried out the correlation analysis. Table 2 presents the correlation coefficients and their significance levels between constructs. The study was able to confirm a meaningful positive correlation of constructs. It was confirmed that engagement has positive correlation with collective efficacy ($r=.705$, $p=.01$) and community identification ($r=.803$, $p=.01$). Also, collective efficacy has positive correlation with community identification ($r=.721$, $p=.01$).

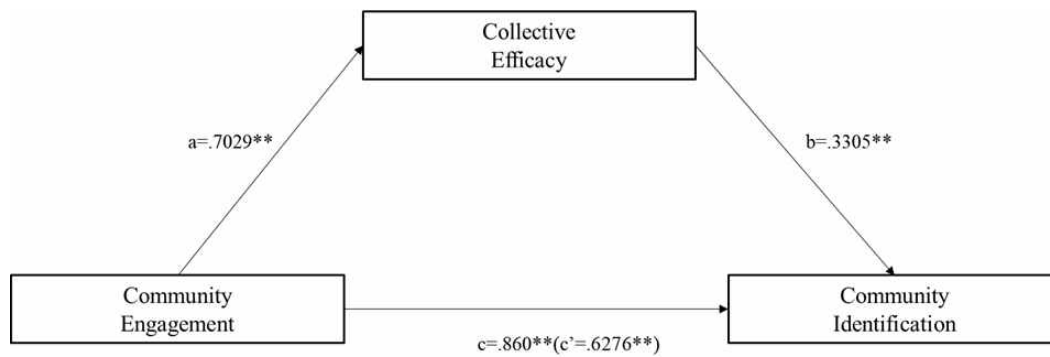
[Table 2] Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among the Variables

	M	SD	Community Engagement	Collective Efficacy
Community Engagement	4.533	1.141		
Collective Efficacy	4.744	1.138	.705**	
Community Identification	4.637	1.222	.803**	.721**

correlation is significant at $p < .01$

We conducted regression analysis to test the hypothesis 1. The analysis showed a strong positive relationship between community engagement and community identification ($\beta=.803$, $t=24.536$, $p=.000$), in support of H1.

Then, we conducted a mediation analysis to test whether collective efficacy mediated the influence of community engagement on community identification. Following [18], we performed a bootstrapping mediation analysis using 5,000 samples. As shown in figure 1, the total effect of engagement on community identification was significant ($\beta =.860$, $p<.01$) and the direct effect of engagement on community identification was significant ($\beta =.627$, $p<.01$).



[Fig. 1] Mediating Effect of Collective Efficacy

Note. Total effect (c)=direct effect (c') +indirect effect (a*b)

The mediating effect value of .232, 95% CI [.1483, .3226] was computed by the bias-corrected bootstrapping method, indicating that the mediating effect was significantly different from zero at $p < .05$, as the CI did not contain zero [19]. The results revealed that collective efficacy partially mediated the effect of community engagement on community identification ($c' < c$). Therefore, hypothesis 2 was thus supported.

[Table 3] Results of Mediation Analysis

Dependent Variable	Independent variable	Mediating Variable	Indirect Effect	SD	Confidence Interval 95%	
					LLCI	ULCI
Community Identification	Community Engagement	Collective Efficacy	.2323	.0440	.1483	.3226

5. Discussion

Our study examined the relationship between community engagement and community identification. In addition, we also examined collective efficacy as a mediator between the relationship. Analysis by using data from fan communities of celebrities showed that community engagement is positively associated with community identification. More importantly, collective efficacy partially mediated the relationship. This result indicates that, as the community members engage in community activities, they feel a sense of collective efficacy, which in turn increase identification with their social community. This finding is significant in that it reveals an underlying mechanism of how community engagement increases community

identification by strengthening a sense of collective efficacy. As a previous study suggested, substantiality of the social community is a challenge because people are able to easily switch their membership to other social communities [20]. In this regard, our findings can provide useful insights on how the social community should be managed to sustain.

Another important contribution is that this study focused on the collective efficacy in social community. Previous studies regarding social communities focused on belongingness and social interaction [7, 21] when collective efficacy also plays a significant role in influencing members of social communities.

Although this study made contributions, it has some limitations that further research should address. First, this study relied on the survey method. Further study may want to employ experimental or qualitative methods. In particular, qualitative research methods such as in-depth interview with social community members will help further studies understand the dynamics in social community more deeply. In addition, it would be worthwhile if further studies examine other mediators or moderators in order to provide deeper understanding how community engagement leads community identification.

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