

From Social Media Platform Identification to Brand Evangelism: Unveiling the Mediating Role of Brand Affinity among Fashion Clothing Brands' Followers

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ABSTRACT: Despite the growing popularity of social media in influencing consumer-brand interactions, little is known about the mechanisms through which social media platform identification (SMPI) translates into the most committed degree of consumer advocacy i.e. brand evangelism within the fashion clothing brands. This study addresses this research gap by focusing on the mediating effect of brand affinity in the SMPI-evangelism relationship. Grounded in Social Identity Theory, this research uses a survey of active followers of major fashion clothing brands with the use of PLS-SEM in SmartPLS 4. The findings show that SMPI increases both brand affinity and evangelism, with affinity having a strong direct impact and acting as a complementing mediator. What is critical is the fact that cognitive identification alone does not suffice to produce evangelism; the follower needs to have an emotional connection with the brand. In essence, by expanding Social Identity Theory to the domain of social media platform identity, the study contributes to both theory and management practice.

KEYWORDS: Brand Affinity, Brand Evangelism, Consumer Brand Advocacy, Fashion Marketing, Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM), Social Identity Theory, Social Media Platform Identification (SMPI), Social Commerce

Introduction

In today's digital era, social media platforms are no longer limited to their initial role of communication tools, but have evolved into rich cultural environments where the identity of individuals, their social status, and consumption patterns blend together. People using platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and X take an active part in crafting their digital narratives and creating their desired self-concepts using aesthetics and symbolism in visuals (Avci et al., 2024; Kartika et al., 2025). Among others, the fashion clothing industry holds a significant position within the digital environment. Fashion itself is an expressive tool; a visual representation of lifestyle, cultural affiliation, aesthetic preferences, and socio-economic status of individuals (Fetais et al., 2022). Fashion brand followers on social media platforms are not interested only in buying clothes, but rather they live brands' stories, use brands' symbols in their everyday life, and create their digital personas based on brands' universes (Trzebiński et al., 2025; Wilska et al., 2023).

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Such a transformational landscape has led to a notable increase in the strategic importance of brand evangelism; an advanced type of consumer behavior that is associated with brand advocacy, positive word-of-mouth communication, voluntarily protecting the brand from criticisms, and high consumer enthusiasm (Jam et al., 2025). While the traditional form of consumer loyalty involves repeat purchasing of products and has a more transactional behavior, brand evangelism can be defined as a type of consumer behavior that involves a strong psychological and emotional commitment of a consumer who becomes a brand ambassador without any rewards for free (Sharma, 2023). In an industry like fashion clothing, which is highly competitive and requires innovative marketing communication, brand evangelism is a very important competitive advantage.

Simultaneously, there exist powerful normative and expressive pressures in social media environments which influence the formation of users' social identity in relation to their digital peer groups, culture, and businesses (Van Vuuren & Simpson, 2024; Wilska et al., 2023). Users purposely associate themselves with those platforms whose value system, norms, and visual codes fit well with their self-image. Such alignment results in the formation of social media platform identification (SMPI), which is referred to as a consumer's cognition about the self-resemblance of a particular social platform and its virtual community (Wang, 2017). Nowadays, platforms should not be perceived as merely means for transferring messages but seen rather as virtual reference groups (Mousavi et al., 2017; Whelan, 2025). The choice of platform becomes an integral part of modern self-concept due to the provision of cultural signals and social confirmation by those communities of platforms, which is required for identity projection.

Despite the considerable amount of research on the topic of digital identity formation and usage of platforms in general, a major theoretical and empirical gap exists in marketing literature at present. Previous studies have thoroughly explored the issue of general consumer–brand interaction or engagement with platforms, and even consumer behavior in online transactions, e.g. (Avci et al., 2024; Kanapathipillai et al., 2024; Kujur & Singh, 2019). Yet, the psychological processes underlying the consumer's cognitive identity with a social media platform and resulting proactive and deeply committed actions, such as brand evangelism, in relation to certain identity-based product categories (i.e., fashion clothing) have been ignored by prior research (Whelan, 2025). Also, although researchers recognize the process through which consumers construct their identity on the platform in accordance with its normative framework, there is limited research on the role of brand affinity as the key psychological mediator linking the processes of identity on the platform level with brand loyalty.

In order to bridge this gap in the theory, this study examines the mechanism linking Social Media Platform Identification (cognitive identification) and Brand Evangelism, along with discovering the important mediating effect of Brand Affinity in followers of fashion clothing brands. Based on Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and its modern network variation (Whelan, 2025), it is suggested that when followers cognitively identify with the social media platform, they take its aesthetics and culture into internal perception. It leads to the development of an emotional attachment to fashion brands that match perfectly with that particular platform culture. In turn, it leads to increased brand affinity and eventually to brand evangelism.

Through the conceptualization and empirical validation of this psychological process, this research offers both theoretical and managerial implications to scholars and marketers alike. For theorists, there is enhanced knowledge of how digital platform contexts affect downstream brand relationships through the development of Social Identity Theory in the contemporary era of digitally mediated online communities. From a managerial perspective, especially for those within the fashion clothing industry, there are practical recommendations regarding the formulation of digital brands that are compatible with digital platforms.

Literature Review

Theoretical Underpinning-Social Identity Theory

This research is based on Social Identity Theory (SIT), which was first developed by Tajfel (1974). According to the theory, part of an individual's self-concept comes from one's perception of his or her membership in certain social groups. By using social categorization, people place both themselves and other people into in-group or out-group categories in order to obtain positive self-esteem by associating themselves with those who have high status and desirable values in society. In-group members adopt the norms, values, and symbols shared within such an in-group.

Social identity process in the digital age has been extended from physical or demographical groups to include virtual groups and communities. Contemporary researchers focus on a 'networked' Social Identity Theory (Whelan, 2025), which stresses that the digital environment and digital communities reconfigure social categorizations, comparisons, and group identification. In digital spaces such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook, the lines that separate different social groups are not necessarily geographical but algorithmic. Consumers select and remain on digital platforms that have a digital culture, aesthetic standards, and social interactions that reflect their self-concepts (Kartika et al., 2025; Trzebiński et al., 2025).

The use of SIT on consumer behavior on social media implies that when people have high identification with a certain social media platform, they would regard themselves as a member of the influential in-group of that particular platform community. As such, the brands that are active on such platforms become symbols of the in-group. By developing favorable attitudes toward the brand and advocating for them, consumers enhance their self-concepts and demonstrate their belongingness to the in-group (Wang, 2017). Therefore, SIT offers a clear explanation of the process of transfer from platform identification to positive attitude and behavior.

Conceptualizing key concepts

Social Media Platform Identification

Social media platform identification is defined as the psychological connection where individuals perceive their self-concept as congruent with the self-concept of the social media platform (Wang, 2017). Social Media Platform Identification (SMPI) is defined in this study as a cognitive construct indicating self-category congruency. As per Wang (2017) and Stoner et al. (2011), SMPI is the degree to which an individual consumer experiences cognitive similarity between his/her self-concept and the identity, culture, and users of a particular social media platform. Although the general framework of social identity takes into consideration affective and evaluative aspects as well, confining SMPI purely to its cognitive aspect (self-platform congruency) permits an accurate measurement of the concept without overlapping any affective constructs such as brand preference. High SMPI indicates that "who I am" fits perfectly with "what this platform represents," making the platform a true forum for self-expression (Avci et al., 2024; Muyidi, 2025).

Brand Evangelism

Brand evangelism refers to customers' voluntary persuasive behavior to passionately promote the brand, encourage others to experience the same brand, and advocate the brand by expressing enthusiasm towards a brand (Jam et al., 2025). Brand Evangelism is the essence of consumer-brand interaction, which involves voluntary and extremely passionate actions on the part of the consumers that involve persuading others to use the brand, promoting the brand through word-of-mouth, and protecting it from any criticism or competition (Rabby et al., 2025). The basis of evangelism is rooted in strong emotional bonding and self-branding, wherein evangelists act as unpaid and very credible brand ambassadors. In the context of fashion clothing, which relies on personal style and peer pressure,

brand evangelism can be seen through the posting of organic UGC (User Generated Content), tagging brands in life posts, recommending clothing to peers, and protecting the brand in comments (Gündüz, 2017).

Brand Affinity

Brand affinity refers to the consumer's favorable attitude or degree of liking of a brand independent of the functional attributes, reflecting a positive disposition toward the brand that connects brand awareness and brand loyalty (Murphy & da Silva, 2017). Brand Affinity is an emotional and affective attitude towards a brand that does not depend on the functional aspects of the product (Oberecker & Diamantopoulos, 2011). In fashion clothing brands, brand affinity extends beyond the assessment of price, material strength, and other functional properties. On the contrary, it demonstrates emotional affinity and resonance with the brand's symbolism and aesthetics. Brand affinity plays an important role as a link between brand awareness and behavioral loyalty to the brand (Musicco, 2021).

Hypotheses Development

Social Media Platform Identification and Brand Affinity

When individuals have high cognitive identification with a social media application, they consider the social culture and aesthetics of the application as extensions of themselves (Wang, 2017; Whelan, 2025). Different social media applications create different virtual cultures such that Instagram is visual, TikTok is all about creativity and authenticity, and Pinterest is centered on curated aspirations (Muyidi, 2025; Wilska et al., 2023). Accordingly, fashion clothing companies which market on these social media platforms adapt their communication accordingly.

According to Social Identity Theory, individuals tend to have a favorable perception of entities that belong to their in-group setting (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). If there is high congruence between a fashion clothing brand and a platform that an individual cognitively associates with, there will be an affective transfer from the individual to the fashion clothing brand. Here, the fashion clothing brand appears as a naturally congruent entity within the individual's social setting. As such, it develops a warm affective connection and liking for the fashion clothing brand; a phenomenon termed brand affinity (Murphy & da Silva, 2017). On the other hand, when cognitive platform identification is low, the platform's commercial content becomes indifferent to the individual. Hence, strong cognitive platform identification leads to an environment that breeds positive brand affinity. Hence, it is hypothesized:

H1: Social Media Platform Identification (cognitive identity) has a significant positive influence on Brand Affinity among fashion clothing brand followers.

Brand Affinity and Brand Evangelism

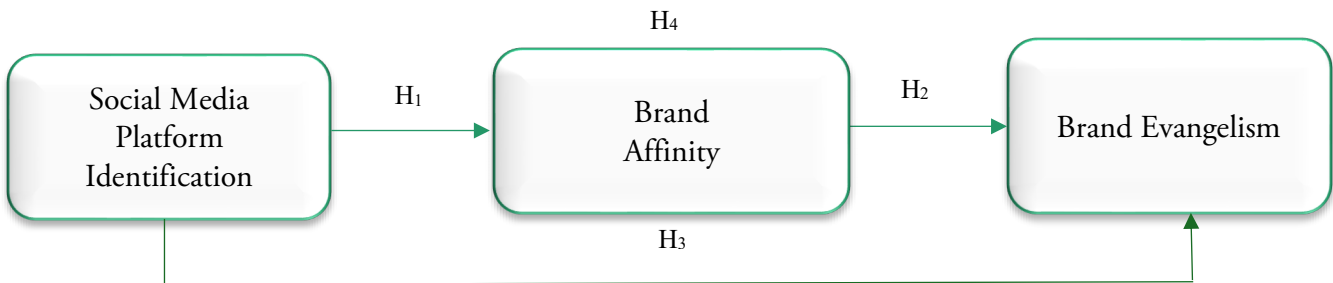
Brand affinity indicates an emotional bond and liking which goes beyond functional value (Oberecker & Diamantopoulos, 2011). In identity-oriented marketplaces such as fashion apparel, affective brand attachment becomes an effective driving factor of expressive consumption. In accordance with the theory of Social Identity, when consumers emotionally bond with certain symbolic objects representing their self-concept, they become motivated to perform behaviors which help to preserve, improve, and project them, since they contribute to maintaining their self-respect and social status (Chahal et al., 2020; Osmanova et al., 2023).

High brand affinity customers do not simply stand passively as observers; their emotional attachment transforms into behavioral commitment (Jam et al., 2025). There is a strong psychological need in them to make others feel good about the brand as well; they influence their friends and followers to buy the brand, post their testimonials,

and also counter any criticism on behalf of the brand (Gündüz, 2017; Swimberghe et al., 2018). The need for passion for making this kind of commitment is driven by brand affinity. Thus, it is hypothesized:

H2: Brand Affinity has a significant positive influence on Brand Evangelism among fashion clothing brand followers.

Figure 1
Theoretical Framework



Social Media Platform Identification and Brand Evangelism

Cognitive Platform Identification gives the consumer a feeling of psychological ownership, comfort, and social skills in the digital environment (Kartika et al., 2025; Wang, 2017). Individuals with high platform identification feel very empowered and motivated to participate in communication, content creation, and self-representation activities on that platform (Trzebiński et al., 2025).

Consumers with a high perception of self-congruence with the platform are more likely to employ the symbolic elements available in the platform context, such as fashion clothing brands, and communicate their identities to others (Wilska et al., 2023). With the high cognitive embeddedness in the platform community, the individuals are motivated to express their views about brands in public, create promotional content organically, and enthusiastically advocate for the brands that succeed in the platform ecosystem. Consequently, cognitive platform identification motivates individuals' advocacy actions and brand evangelism (Jam et al., 2025). Hence, it is proposed that:

H3: Social Media Platform Identification (cognitive identity) has a significant positive direct influence on Brand Evangelism among fashion clothing brand followers.

The mediating role of Brand Affinity

Synthesis of the theoretical relationships described above produces the hypothesis of the proposed study. According to this study, there is an indirect psychological process by which Social Media Platform Identification affects Brand Evangelism via Brand Affinity. Cognitive platform identification defines self-categorization and the context of the use of social media (Wang, 2017); however, cognitive identification alone may not be enough to evoke high energy and persuasive actions such as brand evangelism.

The Social Identity Theory suggests that cognitive categorization (platform identification) leads to affective responses (brand affinity for the congruent brands) and eventually results in behavioral expressions (brand evangelism) (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Whelan, 2025). The role of brand affinity as an affective process is vital: cognitive platform identification results in the formation of affective states necessary to increase the emotional connection (affinity) with fashion brands in that environment. Then increased affinity serves as a fuel to motivate consumers to perform brand promotion activities (Jam et al., 2025; Murphy & da Silva, 2017). Thus, brand affinity is the mediator in the relationship between social media platform identification and brand evangelical behavior. Thus, it is proposed that:

H4: Brand Affinity significantly mediates the relationship between Social Media Platform Identification (cognitive identity) and Brand Evangelism among fashion clothing brand followers.

Methodology

Research Philosophy and Design

To investigate these proposed relationships, this research takes the positivist research paradigm along with a deductive research approach (Neuman, 2014). The positivist approach assumes that social reality is objective, observable, and follows some laws of causality. A deductive approach is applicable for this study as it proposes certain hypotheses based on some well-developed theory, that is, Social Identity Theory, which are tested using empirical data. In this research, the research design is of the causal/explanatory and cross-sectional type, in which quantitative data is collected in one time period to examine the proposed structural relationships.

Research Methodology

This study adopts an explanatory design that adopts a quantitative research paradigm based on positivist philosophy and deductive reasoning to study the causal relationships between individual fashion clothing brand followers on social media. Data were gathered using a cross-sectional and non-probabilistic purposive sampling technique aimed at active consumers in order to test the theoretical model. The software used in analyzing the data is IBM SPSS software and Smart PLS 4.0. Table 1 presents the summary of the core components of the adopted methodology for this study.

Table 1

Research Methodology Summary

Methodological Dimension	Choice and Operationalization for Present Study
Research Philosophy	Positivism
Research Approach	Deductive Approach
Research Method	Quantitative Survey Method
Type of Investigation	Causal / Explanatory Research
Sampling Technique	Non-probability Purposive Sampling
Unit of Analysis	Individual Consumers (Active social media users who follow fashion clothing brands)
Time Horizon	Cross-sectional Study
Data Analysis Strategy	SPSS (Preliminary data screening & descriptive statistics) & PLS-SEM (SmartPLS 4 for structural equation modeling)

Sampling Strategy and Data Collection

The study population includes individual consumers who actively engage on social media platforms (such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and X), and who follow at least one fashion clothing brand page. The non-probability purposive sampling strategy was used because the respondents should have firsthand experience of the phenomenon being studied (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The inclusion criteria included the fact that the participants needed to (1) having at least one account in social media platform, (2) actively follow official fashion clothing brand pages, and (3) actively engage with fashion-related content. A final sample of 650 valid responses was attained. The sample size satisfies the statistical power requirements of Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), more than satisfying the 'ten-times rule'. The data will be collected using an online questionnaire.

Research Instrument and Measurement Scales

The construct measures were all borrowed from valid measures that have been used before in past literature in order to make sure of the content and construct validity of the constructs. The only adaptations made in them was in terms of language that suited fashion clothing brands’ followers on social media. All the survey questions were measured on a 5-point Likert Scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). To measure the social media platform identification (cognitive identity), 3 items were adapted from Wang (2017), brand affinity was measures using 7 items adapted from Oberecker & Diamantopoulos (2011) and brand evangelism was measured using the brand evangelism scale adapted from Jam et al. (2025).

Data Analysis Strategy and Common Method Bias

The data analysis process comprises a scientific two-step approach using IBM SPSS and SmartPLS 4 for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The SPSS software is used for testing for missing values, outliers, demographics and checking for normal distribution. On the other hand, PLS-SEM is utilized for hypothesis testing because of its better ability in dealing with complex models including indirect mediations, non-normal distribution, and composite constructs.

Since the measurement of all constructs was done by individual respondents in one time period, Common Method Bias (CMB) becomes a threat. Measures to control CMB have been implemented in this study through procedural and statistical controls. First, the privacy of the respondents is ensured, proper instructions are given that there are no correct or incorrect answers, and the questions in the scales are randomly ordered and separated into sections to reduce the effect of evaluation apprehension and consistency motivation. Secondly, in PLS-SEM, a complete collinearity test was conducted. The values of Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) were checked for all constructs. A VIF value of less than 3.3 indicates that the structural model is not biased by common methods.

Results

Demographic Analysis

The demographic analysis of 650 respondents of the survey is listed below in table 2 in terms of gender, age, level of education, monthly income, and brand being followed through social media.

Table 2
Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	255	39%
	Female	395	61%
Age	18–24 years	209	32%
	25–34 years	250	39%
	35–44 years	47	17%
	45 years and above	37	12%
Education	Intermediate/A-Level	62	9%
	Bachelor's degree	370	57%
	Master's degree or higher	218	34%
Monthly Income (PKR)	Below 100,000	388	60%
	1000,000–250,000	164	25%
	Above 250,000	98	15%

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Focal Brand Followed	Khaadi	207	32%
	Sapphire	158	24%
	Sana Safinaz	124	19%
	Gul Ahmed	96	14%
	Nishat Linen	39	6%
	Other	33	5%
Platform Used Most	Instagram	299	46%
	Facebook	208	32%
	TikTok	139	21%
	Other	4	1%

The survey conducted for this study involved 650 customers in total and showed a high percentage of female consumers at 61%, as well as youth consumers at 71% of people aged 18-34. This sample was highly educated with 91% holding a degree or higher education and more than 60% earning less than PKR 100,000 per month. Khaadi turned out to be the key brand among those surveyed (32%), while Instagram (46%) and Facebook (32%) were used for communication on social networks.

Assessment of Common Method Bias (CMB)

Table 3 presents the entire collinearity VIF values calculated for all the structural paths of the hypothesized model. As can be seen from Table 3, all the VIF values are between 1.539 and 2.345, which falls well within the conservative limit of 3.3 as well as the conventionally acceptable limit of 5.0 suggested for diagnosing collinearity (Hair et al., 2019). The largest VIF value calculated is for the path from brand affinity to customer evangelism (VIF = 2.345).

Table 3
Full Collinearity Assessment

Structural Path	VIF	< 3.3 (Conservative Threshold)
Brand Affinity → Brand Evangelism	2.345	Yes
Cognitive Identity → Brand Affinity	1.539	Yes

Measurement Model

Before conducting structural path testing, the measurement model was first tested for reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity using accepted PLS-SEM procedures (Hair et al., 2019). All outer loadings of all indicators met the required level of .70 (ranging from .79 to .88, $ps < .001$), suggesting item reliability. As evident from Table 1, all seven constructs' Cronbach's alpha (α) and composite reliability (ρ_a , ρ_c) coefficients were higher than the standard of .70, and the average variance extracted (AVE) values were higher than .50.

Table 4
Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	α	ρ_a	ρ_c	AVE
Brand Affinity	.920	.921	.936	.677
Brand Evangelism	.835	.835	.901	.752
SMPI (Cognitive Identity)	.797	.799	.881	.712

Note: α = Cronbach's alpha; ρ_a = composite reliability (rho_a); ρ_c = composite reliability (rho_c); AVE = average variance extracted. N = 650.

Discriminant validity was tested through the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) analysis. The HTMT for the correlation between brand evangelism and brand affinity is 0.761, between Social media platform identification and brand affinity is 0.655, and between Social media platform identification and brand affinity is 0.467. All HTMT values were less than the conservative threshold of .90 (Henseler et al., 2015); the highest value of HTMT (.761) was reported for the correlation between brand evangelism and brand affinity. Fornell-Larcker criterion supported this conclusion since the square roots of AVEs for each construct were greater than their correlations with all other constructs. In general, an acceptable fit was found for the entire model (SRMR = .036), which was below the recommended threshold of .08 for PLS path model (Henseler et al., 2015).

Structural Equation Model

Structural modeling was conducted using the percentile bootstrap procedure of 5,000 samples in SmartPLS 4 (Ringle et al., 2024). There were no issues of collinearity among variables since the inner model VIF values ranged between 1.54 and 2.90, which was less than the more stringent value of 5.0 (Hair et al., 2019). A large portion of variance in the endogenous constructs was explained by the structural model with brand affinity ($R^2 = .655$, adjusted $R^2 = .651$) and brand evangelism ($R^2 = .540$, adjusted $R^2 = .538$). Additionally, the predictive relevance of the structural model was supported by PLS predict where Q^2 predict for brand affinity (.646) and brand evangelism (.389) were greater than zero and lower than prediction errors in naïve linear models (CVPAT, $ps < .001$).

Consistent with H1, social media platform identification had a statistically significant and positive effect on brand affinity ($\beta = .271$, $t = 9.11$, $p < .001$, $f^2 = .138$), and H₁ was accepted. In support of H2, brand affinity had a statistically significant and positive effect on brand evangelism ($\beta = .313$, $t = 7.88$, $p < .001$, $f^2 = .091$), and H₂ was accepted. In support of H₃, the effect of social media platform identification on brand evangelism was significant and positive ($\beta = .210$, $t = 9.31$, $p < .001$), and H₃ was supported.

Table 5
Structural Model Results for the Focal Hypotheses

Path	β	SE	t	p	95% CI	Decision
H ₁ : SMPI → Brand Affinity	.271	.030	9.11	<.001	[.213, .331]	Supported
H ₂ : Brand Affinity → Brand Evangelism	.313	.040	7.88	<.001	[.235, .389]	Supported
H ₃ : SMPI → Brand Evangelism	.210	.023	9.31	<.001	[.166, .256]	Supported

Note: β = standardized coefficient; bootstrapping based on 5,000 subsamples; 95% CI = bias-corrected percentile bootstrap confidence interval; SMPI=Social Media Platform Identification.

Mediation Analysis

Hypothesis H₄ proposed that brand affinity is the mediating variable linking social media platform identification to brand evangelism. The indirect effect of social media platform identification on brand evangelism via brand affinity was computed with the bootstrapping technique utilizing 5,000 samples (Table 6). The indirect effect turned out to be positive and significant ($\beta = .085$, $SE = .014$, $t = 5.94$, $p < .001$), and the bias-corrected 95% bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect did not include zero [.059, .114].

Table 6
Bootstrapped Specific Indirect Effect (Mediation Test)

Indirect Path	β	SE	t	p	95% CI
H ₄ : SMPI → Brand Affinity → Brand Evangelism	.085	.014	5.94	<.001	[.059, .114]

Note: β = standardized indirect effect; bootstrapping based on 5,000 subsamples; 95% CI = bias-corrected percentile bootstrap confidence interval; SMPI=Social Media Platform Identification.

This indirect influence accounted for approximately 40% of the overall effect of social media platform identification on brand evangelism (.085/.210). Because the structural model also included a direct path (H3) that was statistically significant, the result is consistent with the concept of partial mediation (Zhao et al., 2010). In partial mediation, the independent variable affects the dependent variable both directly and indirectly through the mediator. In this case, brand affinity serves as a crucial mediator, transmitting a substantial portion of the effect while the direct path remains significant. This highlights the importance of brand affinity in converting social media platform identification into brand evangelism, while also recognizing that part of the influence flows directly without mediation.

Discussion

This research investigates the extent to which followers' social media platform identification of a fashion clothing brand leads to brand affinity and brand evangelism using the theoretical framework of social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). According to SIT, a person derives his or her self-concept from the groups he or she belongs to, and such belonging creates motivation for attitudes and behavior in support of the group membership (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Within the branded social media environment, social media platform identification operates as a categorization process in which the brand is included in the follower's social identity, resulting in psychological effects similar to those known in the case of organizational and consumer-company identification (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003).

Consistent with H₁, social media platform identification had a statistically significant and positive effect on brand affinity. Thus, it can be determined that individuals who categorize themselves cognitively as members of the community of a particular brand on social media have high levels of affective attachment to the brand. The results are consistent with the basic assumption of the SIT that self-categorization is followed by affective evaluation (Tajfel & Turner, 1986); when a consumer finds that he or she is a member of a particular brand community, that identity becomes important for the consumer, and positive affect towards the brand comes as a consequence of positive self-affect. This result is also similar to that found by Li (2025) and McGowan et al. (2017) in terms of the fact that identification with brand communities has positive relational and affective consequences.

The important path from brand affinity to brand evangelism (H₂) represents an extension of the same theoretical logic to the most behaviorally relevant result in the study. Evangelism, defined as actively promoting the brand and defending against other brands, aligns with the predicted outcomes of in-group favoritism once people base self-esteem on the membership of certain groups (Tajfel, 1974). As the follower feels stronger affective connection with the brand through affinity, the follower becomes emotionally invested in its success and, as Becerra & Badrinarayanan, (2013) argue, this emotional investment is necessary to make the transition from brand identification to brand evangelism possible. The importance of the path from affinity to evangelism indicates that it is not the cognitive element of social identity, but rather affective connection that drives voluntary behavior, which corresponds to the predictions of SIT research that focuses on three components of social identity: cognitive, affective and evaluative (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

The empirical evidence provides compelling proof of H₃, proving that social media platform identification has a direct and statistically significant positive effect on Brand Evangelism. This means that when people feel aligned cognitively and identify with particular social media (Basri et al., 2025) platforms, the chances of them taking up defensive actions, spreading positive word-of-mouth, and promoting the brand proactively increase significantly even before any intermediary evaluations of the brand based on emotions are performed. The results show an

extension of the Social Identity Theory (SIT) into the online environment by showing that the social media platform serves as an identity ecosystem where the users' feeling of belonging to the platform contributes to their heightened engagement that automatically spills over to the brands residing within the platform. The findings are consistent with empirical evidence provided by Chen et al. (2023) according to whom user-platform identification plays a decisive role in behavior and engagement in digital environments, as well as with empirical results by Basri et al. (2025) showing how brand identification contribute to pro-consumer behaviors towards embedded brands.

In addition, the significant mediating effect of cognitive identity on brand evangelism (H_4) also support the identity-driven conceptualization of the process under investigation; importantly, the presence of complete mediation carries independent theoretical significance. The mediation analysis (H_4) provides empirical support for this explanation. social media platform identification's significant indirect effect on brand evangelism via brand affinity, which represents nearly 40% of the total effect, suggests that brand affinity acts as a critical psychological channel, or an identity-driven bridge, between categorization and advocacy. This result is in line with the idea of Bhattacharya & Sen, (2003), who suggested that identification fulfills self-defining needs that then emerge as devoted, pro-brand behavior, and it expands this idea by showing its application on the digital social media platform. Since the rest of the total effect works through customer engagement and sequential affinity-to-engagement effect, the findings further imply that different interrelated identity-based channels simultaneously transmit the effects of platform identification to evangelism, which is also in line with the multiple-channel view of social identity as proposed by SIT theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

In sum, all of the above findings represent an extension of social identity theory to the increasingly relevant domain of branded social media sites, illustrating that the platform level identification of followers with fashion clothing brands serves as an actual process of social identity, which affects brand evaluations at the affective level, transmits via affect and engagement and not through direct behavioral impact, and finally results in evangelism, which can be described as the most devoted behavior of consumer support for a brand. With regard to fashion brands, which work in image-sensitive and community-driven environments like Pakistan, the current study implies that developing a feeling of belongingness within the social media platform can be viewed as a strategy to achieve evangelism.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This paper adds to the body of literature on social media marketing and consumer behavior by taking the concept of Social Identity Theory further from its application to brand identity to show that consumer identity at a social media level leads to brand-level outcomes. In addition, by establishing Brand Affinity as an important complementing mediator, the results have shown that consumer identity at the social media level translates to brand evangelism through emotional connections and affiliations.

For fashion retail marketers, the above discussion is important in emphasizing the need for developing strategies for the platforms that are native in nature. In order to do that, fashion brands need to understand that Brand Affinity has a huge impact on brand evangelism and thus needs to focus more on developing emotional narratives and building communities rather than focusing solely on hard-sell marketing. Lastly, fashion brands need to identify and involve these brand evangelists in their marketing activities.

Limitations and Future Research

Even though this study contributes to the body of knowledge in several ways, there are certain limitations with this research which can provide opportunities for further research. First, since the research design is cross-sectional in

nature, it provides data at one point in time and thus is limited to drawing inferences on causality over a longer period of time; future research may use longitudinal or experimental designs to do so. Secondly, since data was obtained through non-probability sampling from Pakistani fashion consumers only, testing this model in various geographic regions and products may lead to more generalized results.

Conclusion

The empirical evidence from this study shows that the relationship between Social Media Platform Identification and Brand Evangelism is direct and indirect via Brand Affinity for active fashion fans. The central mediating variable in this process is Brand Affinity, explaining more than half of the impact of social media platform identification on consumers' brand advocacy. The successful creation of brand advocates out of regular social media users requires marketers to focus on platform identities and build strong brand affiliation.

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