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On the run for value: exploring the relevance of consumer goals for consumer relationships on brand flagship platforms

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Abstract

Brand Flagship Platforms (BFPs) serve as a strategic tool for manufacturer brands to strengthen customer relationships by offering digital benefits beyond product purchases. This research advances the emerging literature on BFPs by examining how five consumer goals (commercial exchange, social exchange, self-improvement, epistemic empowerment, and creative empowerment) affect brand attachment and purchase intention in the sports context. The results show that commercial exchange and epistemic empowerment exert significant positive effects on purchase intention. Social exchange, as a higher-order goal, is the only consumer goal that exhibits a substantial mediation effect on purchase intention via brand attachment. Furthermore, the analyses of four leading sports-related BFPs reveal that the consumer goals most effective in fostering brand attachment and purchase intention (epistemic empowerment and social exchange) are also prominently reflected in the platforms' feature sets. By contrast, features supporting self-improvement are widely implemented, despite this goal showing no meaningful impact on brand attachment or purchase intention. These findings provide actionable insights for designing user-oriented BFPs and underscore the importance of aligning platform features with consumer goals. Overall, this research enriches both the theoretical and managerial understanding of BFPs as a marketing instrument.

Keywords Brand flagship platform · Brand attachment · Consumer goals · Brand relationship · Customer relationship · Purchase intention

Introduction

E-commerce sales have experienced consistent growth over the past decade. Between 2014 and 2023, the total value of goods, products, and services sold online more than quadrupled, exceeding US\$ 5.8 trillion in 2023 (Cramer-Flood 2024). This shift in consumer behavior toward online shopping has profoundly influenced the e-commerce strategies of brands. The sector is dominated by major platforms such as Amazon and AliExpress. While the ongoing “platformization” presents growth opportunities for large online retailers, it also poses considerable challenges for manufacturer

brands, including increased dependency on platform retailers and the loss of valuable customer data (Cutolo and Kenney 2021). To mitigate these risks, manufacturer brands can develop their own digital platforms. These Brand Flagship Platforms (BFPs) are defined as “manufacturer-brand-owned digital platforms that mediate versatile interactions between participants within the brand-related category space” (Wichmann et al. 2022, p. 112). By enabling consumers to pursue personal goals, such as fostering social interactions or accessing specialized knowledge, BFPs can strengthen customer-brand relationships and finally increase sales (Keller 2025; Wichmann et al. 2022; Zhang et al. 2025).

While BFPs have been adopted across various industries, they are particularly prevalent in the sports sector. Notable examples include Adidas Running, Nike Run Club, PUMA-TRAC Run, ASICS Runkeeper, and Under Armour's Map My Run. The sport sector also presents substantial market potential, as evidenced by 44% of the EU population aged 15 and older reporting participation in sports at least once per week (European Commission 2019). Given both the

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widespread adoption of BFPs and the market relevance of the sports domain, this research focuses on sports brands as its empirical context. BFPs in the sports domain share similar themes and target audiences, fostering a competitive environment in which brands strive to deliver superior user experiences. As a result, a key managerial challenge lies in designing BFPs that maximize perceived user value, thereby strengthening customer-brand relationships and enhancing purchase intentions for the manufacturer brand's offerings.

Despite the growing relevance of BFPs, academic research on manufacturer brands' engagement with the platform economy remains scarce. To date, only two significant contributions have addressed this topic. Ramaswamy and Ozcan (2018) provide a conceptual framework for understanding the digital platformization of manufacturer brands. Building on this foundation, Wichmann et al. (2022) introduced the term "Brand Flagship Platform," providing a definition, characterization, and a framework that integrates both consumer and brand platform perspectives. However, empirical research remains limited in two key respects: first, regarding how consumers' use and perception of BFPs influence brand-related outcomes, and second, how manufacturer brands actual design BFPs. As a result, managerial guidance grounded in empirical evidence on how to effectively design BFPs remains underdeveloped.

To address this gap, the present research provides the first empirical investigations into this phenomenon. Specifically, our aims are twofold: (1) to examine how consumers' evaluation of a BFP's ability to support their personal goal pursuit affects their relationship with the brand operating the BFP and their intention to purchase the brand's products and services presented on the platform; and (2) to investigate the extent to which features targeting consumer goals are actually implemented in existing sports-related BFPs. By combining consumer perceptions (Study 1: quantitative survey study) with the analyses of platform design (Study 2: case analyses), we provide a comprehensive view of how BFPs function as a brand-building tool.

Our research makes important contributions to both theory and practice. From a theoretical perspective, we advance the emerging literature on BFPs by providing empirical insights into the mechanisms through which BFPs influence brand-related outcomes. By studying personal goal fulfillment as a central driver of consumer-brand relationships, this research highlights a key psychological process. At the same time, our analysis of the actual implementation of consumer-goal-related features sheds light on how management designs BFPs in practice, thus bridging the gap between consumer evaluations and platform design. From a managerial perspective, comparing the results of both studies provides actionable guidance for developing BFPs that enhance

user value and strengthen brand equity, thereby supporting manufacturer brands in navigating the platform economy.

To achieve these objectives, we begin by outlining the theoretical foundations of our research. Established theoretical frameworks such as the uses and gratifications theory (Ruggiero 2000; Severin and Tankard 1997) and the technology acceptance model (Davis et al. 1989; Mathieson 1991) offer valuable insights into why individuals engage with media or adopt new technologies. However, these frameworks fall short in explaining how the use of BFPs influences the relationship between customers and the brand operating the BFP. To address this gap, we draw on the framework proposed by Wichmann et al. (2022), which outlines paths for manufacturer brands to design BFPs in ways that strengthen the customer-brand-relationship. Building on this framework, we introduce the concept of building blocks and consumer goals and further elaborate on it using means-end theory. This framework forms the foundation for both studies. Study 1 addresses the first aim of our research and examines the impact of consumer goal fulfillment on consumer brand relationships and purchase intentions. To analyze the relationship between consumers and brands, we draw on the concept of brand attachment. The methodology outlines the development and validation process for measuring consumer goals addressed by BFPs, incorporating a literature review, qualitative interviews, expert content validation, and a pretest with BFP users. Subsequently, the main survey's sample and procedure are described, followed by results demonstrating the reliability and validity of the measures and testing of the hypotheses. The case analyses in Study 2 complement this perspective by examining the actual implementation of features addressing consumer goals in leading sports-related BFPs, using a large language model to systematically analyze platform features. The paper concludes with a discussion of the empirical findings, theoretical contributions, and practical implications. Finally, we reflect on the limitations and offer directions for future research.

Theoretical framework

The framework proposed by Wichmann et al. (2022) integrates both consumer and manufacturer brand perspectives on BFPs. From a consumer perspective, individuals engage with BFPs to pursue personal goals, while from a brand perspective, these goals are addressed by building blocks which enable consumers' crowdsourcing and crowdsending. More specifically, Wichmann et al. (2022) outline a decision-process-outcome framework. The first stage concerns manufacturer brand decisions about how to assemble building blocks, which are composed of specific



features that enable consumers' activities on the platform. These activities include crowdsourcing, delegating tasks to the community (e.g., seeking marathon training advice) and crowdsending, which refers to contributing services or content that create value for other participants. Together, these activities represent value-creating processes that support the fulfillment of consumer goals.

Consumer goals are defined as "a mental image or other end point representation associated with affect toward which action may be directed" (Pervin 1989, p. 474). Grounded in means-end theory, consumer goals are hierarchically structured, such that the fulfillment of lower-level goals facilitates the achievement of higher-level goals (Bagozzi and Dholakia 1999; Gutman 1997; Pieters et al. 1995). Goals at the highest level are related to consumers' personal values and ideal self-identity, for example, to have a long and healthy life or to feel good about oneself (Pieters et al. 1995; Wichmann et al. 2022). Mid-level goals are more concrete, often taking the form of projects with defined targets, for example, losing 10 kg within a year or finishing a marathon (Wichmann et al. 2022). These high- and mid-level goals motivate the pursuit of subordinate goals, such as going for a run over the weekend or purchasing a pair of running shoes (Bagozzi and Dholakia 1999; Pieters et al. 1995).

Wichmann et al. (2022) identify five consumer goals associated with BFPs: commercial exchange, social exchange, self-improvement, epistemic empowerment, and creative empowerment. Each building block is aligned with a distinct consumer goal. For instance, the community block, with features such as forums and social sharing, enables crowdsourcing and crowdsending activities,

thereby supporting the pursuit of the consumer goal social exchange. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework and highlights the elements addressed in the present research.

Our research examines both the consumer perspective and brand decision-making. Study 1 investigates how consumers' evaluation of a BFP's ability to support their personal goal pursuit influences their relationship with the brand operating the platform. We draw on the concept of brand attachment, defined as "the strength of the bond connecting the consumer with the brand" (Park et al. 2010, p. 2). Consumers may develop attachment either because the brand reflects their self-concept or because it plays a meaningful role in achieving personal goals (Mittal 2006; Park et al. 2010). Brand attachment comprises two dimensions: brand–self connection (the emotional and cognitive link between self-image and the brand) and brand prominence (the salience of the brand in memory, sustained by frequent and vivid experiences). Both dimensions reinforce the emotional bond between consumer and brand and are central predictors of purchase intention (Esch et al. 2006; Fedorikhin et al. 2008; Gul Gilal et al. 2025; Hsiu-Yu and Hao-Te 2018; Vredevel 2018). Accordingly, Study 1 investigates brand attachment as a mediator between consumer goals addressed by BFPs and consumers' intention to purchase the brand's products and services presented on the platform.

Study 2 complements this analysis by examining the actual design of sports-related BFPs, focusing on the extent to which features linked to the building blocks are implemented. Together, the two studies enable a comparison between manufacturer brand decisions in BFP design and consumers' reactions to goal fulfillment, thereby providing

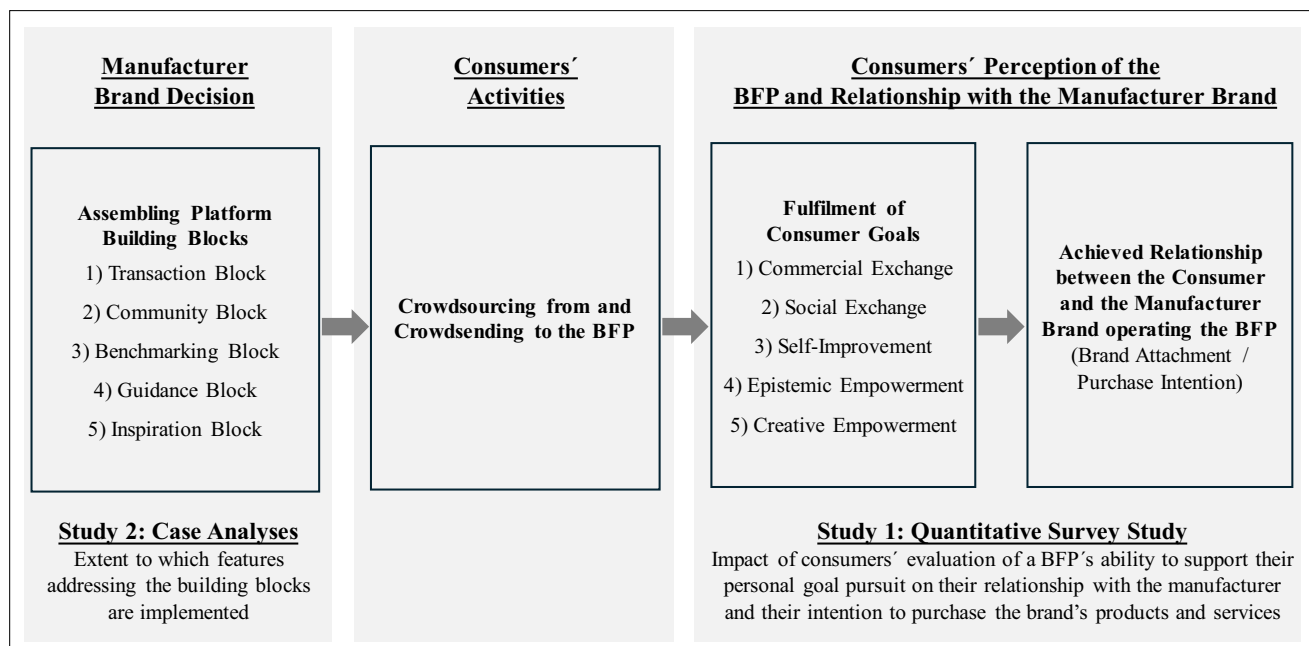


Fig. 1 Conceptual framework and aims of Study 1 and Study 2 (based on Wichmann et al. 2022)



a more comprehensive view of how BFPs function as a brand-building tool.

It is important to note that our empirical focus is deliberately limited. The framework of Wichmann et al. (2022) also addresses the intensity of crowdsourcing and crowdsending activities. While this step of the decision-process-outcome framework represents promising areas for future inquiry, they lie outside the scope of this research. Our focus is restricted to brand decisions (Study 2) and consumer outcomes (Study 1), which correspond to the starting and ending points of the framework.

Study 1: quantitative survey study on consumers' perception of the BFP and relationship with the manufacturer brand

Study 1 examines how consumers' evaluation of a BFP's ability to support their personal goal pursuit influences their relationship with the manufacturer brand and their intention to purchase the brand's products and services. Drawing on the framework of Wichmann et al. (2022) and means-end theory, we derive hypotheses on the relationships between consumer goals, brand attachment, and purchase intention, which we then test in a quantitative study.

Hypotheses study 1

The consumer goal of commercial exchange is defined as "finding the best-matching offering or exchange partner" (Wichmann et al. 2022, p. 115). This goal is closely related to the concepts of customization and personalization (Franke et al. 2009; Miceli et al. 2007; Peppers and Rogers 1997; Wind and Rangaswamy 2001). According to Peppers and Rogers (1997), personalization involves "customizing some feature of a product or service so that the customer enjoys more convenience, lower cost, or some other benefit." Prior research indicates that personalized offerings create greater value for consumers than non-personalized alternatives, as they offer a better fit with individual preferences (Franke et al. 2009).

BFPs support the commercial exchange goal through features such as product marketplaces, personalized recommendations, and customer service tools, elements that constitute the transaction block (Wichmann et al. 2022). These features enable BFP users to identify and access offerings that align closely with their personal needs. For instance, product recommendations based on a user's activity data can facilitate the discovery of running shoes that match their gait, mileage, or surface preferences, thereby directly supporting the goal of commercial exchange. In line with means-end theory, achieving such a subordinate goal

may facilitate the pursuit of higher-level goals (e.g., running regularly, losing weight, or leading healthier lifestyle). When a BFP plays a meaningful role in attaining the goal of commercial exchange and thus contributes to the realization of superordinate personal goals, it can be expected to strengthen consumers' attachment to the brand operating the platform (Park et al. 2010). From this conceptualization, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1a The perceived ability of a BFP to fulfill the consumer goal of commercial exchange positively influences consumers' attachment to the brand operating the BFP.

Prior research has shown that personalized product and service offerings with a high degree of preference-fit positively influence consumers' purchase intentions (Franke et al. 2009; Li 2016). In the context of BFPs, such personalized offerings are often enabled through data-driven recommendation systems and preference-based filtering, which directly support the consumer goal of commercial exchange. By facilitating access to tailored product suggestions that align with users' individual needs, BFPs can reduce search costs and enhance perceived decision quality. The perceived alignment between consumer needs and brand offerings can, in turn, increase the intention to purchase products through the manufacturer brand's own sales channels. Based on this reasoning, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1b The perceived ability of a BFP to fulfill the consumer goal of commercial exchange positively influences the intention of the BFP users to purchase from the manufacturer brand's sales channels.

Social exchange as a consumer goal is defined as "engaging in social interaction" (Wichmann et al. 2022, p. 115). BFPs facilitate such exchange through features like community forums and social sharing functionalities, which constitute the community block (Wichmann et al. 2022). These features enable social interaction among various participants, including peer-to-peer communication as well as exchanges between users and the brand operating the platform. Examples include users sharing their training results with one another or interacting with brand-generated content on the platform. Conceptually, these crowdsourcing and crowdsending activities can be aligned with the dynamics of a brand community (Tekic and Korneva 2025; Wichmann et al. 2022), defined as "a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand" (Muniz and O'Guinn 2011, p. 412). A core element of a community is the development of a consciousness of kind (Muniz and O'Guinn 2011). In the context of BFPs within the sports sector, a



shared commitment to an active lifestyle and athletic pursuits fosters this communal alignment. Prior research on brand communities suggests that interactions with other participants can create a sense of belonging, fosters reputation and self-esteem, and allow users to express their self-image (Holbrook 1999; Nambisan and Baron 2009; Xie et al. 2008). Drawing on means-end theory, these outcomes can be linked to consumers' personal values and ideal self-identity and thus represent high-level goals in the hierarchy. When a BFP plays a meaningful role in helping consumers achieve such goals, it can be expected to strengthen their attachment to the brand operating the platform (Park et al. 2010). Based on this reasoning, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2a The perceived ability of a BFP to fulfill the consumer goal of social exchange positively influences consumers' attachment to the brand operating the BFP.

Prior research suggests that engagement in brand communities fosters peer-generated product recommendations (Wu et al. 2018). In addition, meta-analyses have confirmed the significant impact of word-of-mouth communication on consumer purchase behavior (Babić Rosario et al. 2016; Ismagilova et al. 2020). Accordingly, when a BFP facilitates a brand community that aligns with the consumer goal of social exchange, it is likely to stimulate positive word-of-mouth among BFP users. This, in turn, can positively influence consumers' purchase intentions for the products and services offered on the platform. Based on this line of reasoning, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2b The perceived ability of a BFP to fulfill the consumer goal of social exchange positively influences the intention of the BFP users to purchase from the manufacturer brand's sales channels.

The consumer goal of self-improvement is defined as "competing and comparing to live up to one's full potential" (Wichmann et al. 2022, p. 115). BFPs support consumers in pursuing this goal by integrating self-tracking features with motivational reward mechanisms (Wichmann et al. 2022). For example, the Adidas Running platform enables users to earn credits and achieve badges by reaching specific milestones. These features, constituting the benchmarking block, enable self-quantification, a process whereby individuals monitor, analyze, share, and reflect on personal data through self-tracking technologies (Huh et al. 2023; Jain et al. 2025). The trend of self-quantification is particularly prevalent in the domains of sport, fitness, and health (Etkin 2016; Huh et al. 2023; Jain et al. 2025; Ruckenstein and Pantzar 2017; Wichmann et al. 2022). Prior research

demonstrates that self-quantification enhances users' sense of personal control, which in turn strengthens their goal focus and motivation (Pettinico and Milne 2017). Therefore, it can serve as a pathway to achieving personal goals, such as adopting a healthier lifestyle, improving physical performance, or developing sustainable routines. In such cases, and consistent with Park et al. (2010), consumers are likely to develop attachment to the brand operating the BFP, perceiving it as integral for achieving their personal goals. Based on these considerations, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3a The perceived ability of a BFP to fulfill the consumer goal of self-improvement positively influences consumers' attachment to the brand operating the BFP.

The pursuit of self-improvement via BFPs not only increases users' goal focus and motivation (Pettinico and Milne 2017) but can also heighten their desire to optimize the conditions under which they strive toward their goals. In the context of sports and fitness, this often translates into a preference for using equipment that supports optimal performance (e.g., running shoes that enable longer or more comfortable runs). When such goal-relevant equipment is offered through BFPs, users may perceive the brand as providing a seamless and effective solution ecosystem that supports their progress. This alignment between personal goals and brand offerings can increase the intention to purchase these products via the brand's sales channels. Based on this rationale, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3b The perceived ability of a BFP to fulfill the consumer goal of self-improvement positively influences the intention of the BFP users to purchase from the manufacturer brand's sales channels.

In the framework developed by Wichmann et al. (2022) the consumer goals epistemic empowerment and creative empowerment are derived from the concept of consumer empowerment, defined as "the strengthening of consumers' abilities, rights, or authority to [...] fulfil their objectives [...]" (Kozinets et al. 2021, p. 7). Based on this understanding, epistemic empowerment refers to "spreading and gaining knowledge to make informed decisions" (Wichmann et al. 2022, p. 115). BFPs facilitate epistemic empowerment through features like peer-to-peer route planning, how-to videos, and customer feedback, which constitute the guidance block (Wichmann et al. 2022). These crowdsourcing and crowdsending activities enable BFP users to exchange and acquire knowledge such as training strategies, nutritional advice, or recovery routines. By gaining access to this type of information, BFP users are better equipped



and empowered to make informed decisions that support the pursuit of higher-level personal goals, such as completing a marathon or achieving weight loss. Consequently, when a BFP plays a meaningful role in helping consumers gain knowledge, and therefore, empowers them to achieve higher-level goals, it can be expected to strengthen their attachment to the brand operating the platform, as the brand becomes closely associated with users' progress (Park et al. 2010). Based on this reasoning, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4a The perceived ability of a BFP to fulfill the consumer goal of epistemic empowerment influences consumers' attachment to the brand operating the BFP.

BFPs that facilitate epistemic empowerment help users make informed decisions by providing access to relevant knowledge (Wichmann et al. 2022). This informational support can be further enriched by the manufacturer brand through context-specific product guidance that complements the informational content. For example, Adidas Running integrates insights about optimal daytime for running with advice tailored to beginners on how to identify the right type of running shoe. In doing so, the platform illustrates which Adidas models might be appropriate for different running profiles, thereby linking knowledge with concrete product suggestions. By embedding product recommendations within valuable informational content, BFPs can reduce users' decision complexity and guide them toward offerings. As a result, when users perceive that a BFP effectively empowers them through relevant knowledge and facilitates better-informed purchase decisions, their intention to buy products through the manufacturer brand's sales channels is likely to increase. Based on this reasoning, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4b The perceived ability of a BFP to fulfill the consumer goal of epistemic empowerment positively influences the intention of the BFP users to purchase from the manufacturer brand's sales channels.

The consumer goal of creative empowerment is defined as "inspiring or being inspired by something new or curious" (Wichmann et al. 2022, p. 115). Inspiration is understood as a temporary, intrinsic motivational state that bridges the gap between setting a personal goal and actively striving to achieve it (Böttger et al. 2017). From a process perspective, inspiration comprises two states: (1) an activation state: being inspired by an external source, and (2) an intention state: being inspired to act (Böttger et al. 2017; Thrash and Elliot 2004). Through exploration and experimentation features embedded within the inspiration block (Wichmann et

al. 2022), BFPs can act as external sources of inspiration, thereby activating the first phase of the inspirational process. For example, users of the Nike Run Club may feel inspired by workout videos or music playlists (Wichmann et al. 2022). An additional source of inspiration may be creative running formats such as GPS art, where runners deliberately shape their routes to create recognizable images on the map. Such stimuli may spark the intention state and inspire users of the BFP to *actively* pursue their personal goals (e.g., committing to a regular running schedule or adopting a healthier lifestyle). When a BFP plays a meaningful role in inspiring consumers and empowering them to strive for their personal goals, it can be expected to strengthen their attachment to the brand operating the platform (Park et al. 2010). Based on these considerations, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5a The perceived ability of a BFP to fulfill the consumer goal of creative empowerment influences consumers' attachment to the brand operating the BFP.

Prior research suggests that consumers who are inspired by external sources often experience a desire to emulate the behaviors of those who created the inspiring content (Ki and Kim 2019; Thrash and Elliot 2003). In the context of social media Chung-Wha et al. (2022) demonstrate that consumers inspired by influencers are more likely to imitate their consumption behavior. Transferring this insight to BFPs, users who are inspired by community-generated content may likewise develop the desire to adopt the tools or products featured by those content creators. When such inspirational content showcases products from the brand operating the BFP (e.g., running shoes or apparel worn in a workout video), it can enhance the perceived desirability of those brand offerings. As a result, users may be more inclined to purchase these products through the manufacturer's sales channels. Based on this reasoning, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5b The perceived ability of a BFP to fulfill the consumer goal of creative empowerment positively influences the intention of the BFP users to purchase from the manufacturer brand's sales channels.

Previous research has established a positive relationship between brand attachment and purchase intention (Esch et al. 2006; Fedorikhin et al. 2008; Hsiu-Yu and Hao-Te 2018; Vredevel 2018). Based on this evidence, it can be inferred that the impact of the five consumer goals addressed by BFPs on purchase intention is mediated through brand attachment. Accordingly, the following mediation hypotheses are proposed:



H6 The perceived ability of a BFP to fulfill the consumer goal of (a) commercial exchange, (b) social exchange, (c) self-improvement, (d) epistemic empowerment, and (e) creative empowerment on purchase intention is mediated by brand attachment.

Figure 2 presents a model of the assumed relationships developed in Study 1.

Development of measurement in study 1

To operationalize the consumer goals addressed by BFPs, we adopted the conceptual definitions proposed by Wichmann et al. (2022). As a consequence, the operationalization of consumer goals is intended to be generic beyond the sports context.

Literature review and scale selection

We conducted a literature review to identify existing measurement scales capturing constructs closely related to the five consumer goals. For each goal, multiple established scales from prior studies were examined. We selected those scales with demonstrated validity and reliability and adapted the resulting 33 items only slightly to fit the specific

context of BFPs (e.g. by adding the BFP's name). Adaptations included rephrasing items for contextual relevance.

A rationale for the selection of each scale and its adaptations is discussed in the following:

The scale developed by Bock et al. (2016) for measuring service offering adaptation was adopted to represent commercial exchange. The authors examine how the individualization of services influences customer satisfaction and loyalty. This topic is closely related to the present research context, which centers on the targeted adaptation of offerings to individual customer needs within commercial exchange processes. Specifically, service offering adaptation is described as the deliberate adjustment of service offerings to the specific desires and preferences of individual customers. This concept aligns directly with the understanding of commercial exchange, where personalization plays a key role in enhancing the customer experience and fostering long-term customer relationships. The four items proposed by Bock et al. (2016) were retained in their original form without any modifications.

For measuring social exchange 10 items measuring community, socializing, and participating belonging to the factor social-interactive engagement were adapted from Calder et al. (2009). The factor social-interactive engagement aligns well with the concept of social exchange, as it emphasizes active participation in social interactions that

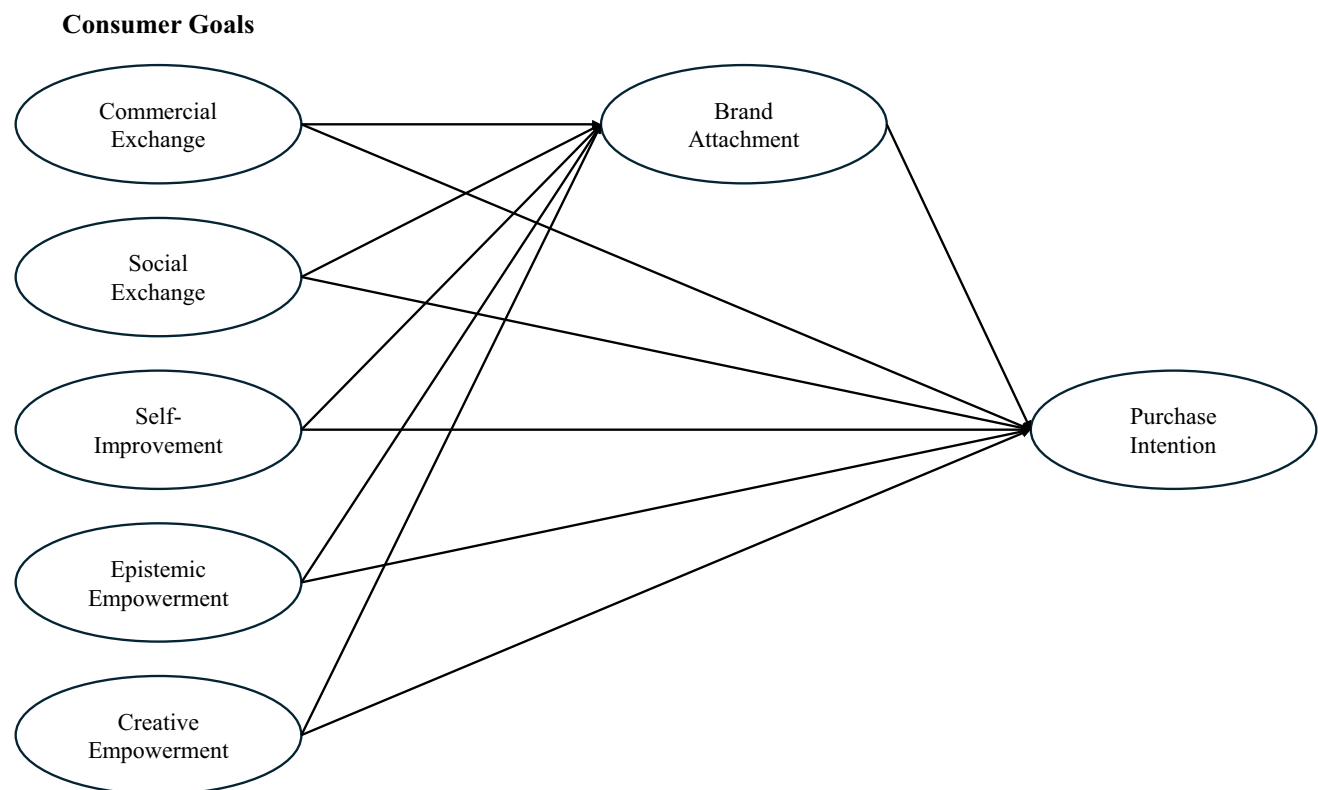


Fig. 2 Model of the assumed relationships in Study 1



are characteristic of online environments. Specifically, it encompasses behaviors such as engaging in discussions and socializing with others through a platform, which are core aspects of social exchange defined as engaging in social interactions.

For self-improvement the scale by Helgeson and Mickelson (1995) with the same name containing 5 items was adopted. The authors investigate motives for social comparison. The factor aligns with the concept of self-improvement in this study as it embodies the process of gaining insight into ineffective behaviors, effectively enabling individuals what to do to foster continuous progress toward achieving one's highest capabilities.

Epistemic empowerment was adapted from the knowledge acquisition and sharing scale containing 10 items developed by Al-Emran and Teo (2020). Defined as the process of spreading and gaining knowledge to support informed decision-making, epistemic empowerment inherently involves both acquiring new information and disseminating it. This corresponds closely with the constructs measured by the knowledge acquisition and sharing scale. Knowledge acquisition pertains to obtaining new information and integrating it with existing knowledge, thereby enhancing an individual's capacity for well-informed decisions—a fundamental aspect of epistemic empowerment. Conversely, knowledge sharing refers to the distribution of knowledge and resources among participants, promoting collective understanding and enabling others to also achieve epistemic empowerment. Together, these processes represent the dynamic exchange of knowledge central to epistemic empowerment, encompassing both individual learning and collaborative information flow.

Creative empowerment is measured using the inspiration scale developed by Thrash and Elliot (2003). This scale is well-suited for assessing creative empowerment defined as "inspiring or being inspired by something new or curious" because it captures the motivational and emotional dimensions that fuel creativity. Inspiration reflects a heightened state of awareness or excitement that promotes innovative thinking and exploration, which are fundamental elements of creative empowerment. The original four items of the scale were retained without modification.

Qualitative interviews and quantitative pretest

To enrich the pool of 33 items and ensure content relevance, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 16 active users of BFPs. Interviews aimed to explore how users perceive and interpret the consumer goals in relation to their experiences with BFPs. The qualitative insights informed the generation of one additional item ("using [BFP] motivates me"—self-improvement goal) and helped refine

existing ones to improve clarity and resonance with the target population.

Four academic experts in marketing, branding, and brand management evaluated the pool of 34 items for content validity. Each expert was provided with conceptual definitions of the five consumer goals and requested to assess the degree to which each item represented its intended construct. The experts also identified potential conceptual overlap across goals to ensure discriminant validity. Based on their feedback, 3 items of the measurement of social exchange with ambiguous alignment or conceptual redundancy were removed.

We administered a quantitative pretest to a separate sample of 46 BFP users. The pretest focused on assessing the clarity, relevance, and perceived congruence of each item with its assigned consumer goal. Participants rated each of the 31 items, and we analyzed the data for item performance and internal consistency. Feedback from this pretest led to further item refinement, including minor wording changes and the removal of 6 items that performed poorly or were confusing to respondents. For social exchange one item was dropped due to low performance ("[BFP] does a good job of getting its users to contribute or provide feedback"). Two items of self-improvement were removed ("On [brand flagship platform] I can learn what to do or what not to do" and "Other users on [brand flagship platform] serve as role models"). Three items of epistemic empowerment showing a strong conceptual overlap with the social exchange construct were removed ("Sharing my knowledge on [brand flagship platform] strengthens the relationship with other users," "[brand flagship platform] enables me to share different types of resources with other users," and "[brand flagship platform] facilitates collaboration among the users.>").

Following these development steps, the final measurement instrument consists of 25 items representing the five consumer goals. This scale demonstrates strong alignment with conceptual definitions and satisfies criteria for content validity, reliability, and relevance to the BFP context.

Measures for brand attachment and purchase intention were adopted from established research. Brand attachment was measured using four items from Park et al. (2010) ($\alpha=0.925$), while purchase intention was assessed using three items from Grewal et al. (1998) ($\alpha=0.895$). The full item pool is presented in Table 1.

Sample and procedure

For the main survey, cross-sectional primary data were collected through a German panel provider, resulting in a total sample of 791 participants. To ensure relevance, only actual users of a Brand Platform (BFP) who used it at least monthly were included. Participants were asked to select the



Table 1 Final scales for measuring consumer goals addressed by BFPs

Consumer goals addressed by BFPs	Definition (based on Wichmann et al. 2022)	Items	Sources	Cronbach's Alpha in the survey study
Commercial exchange	"Finding the best-matching offering or exchange partner"	1. The products and services on [BFP] are "tailor-made" for me 2. The products and services on [BFP] are tailored to my needs 3. The products and services on [BFP] are customized for me 4. The products and services on [BFP] are adapted to my individual needs	Bock et al. (2016)	$\alpha=0.887$
Social exchange	"Engaging in social interaction"	1. I spend a lot of time socially interacting on [BFP] 2. I actively participate in conversations on [BFP] 3. I am just as interested in other users' posts as I am in the regular content on [BFP] 4. A major reason why I like [BFP] is what I get from other users 5. I would like to meet other people who regularly use [BFP] 6. Other users on [BFP] have sparked my interest in topics I wouldn't have discovered otherwise	Calder et al. (2009)	$\alpha=0.924$
Self-improvement	"Competing and comparing to live up to one's full potential"	1. Using [BFP] helps me become better 2. Using [BFP] gives me a sense of purpose 3. Using [BFP] allows me to improve my own situation 4. Using [BFP] motivates me*	Helgeson and Mickelson (1995)	$\alpha=0.847$
Epistemic empowerment	"Spreading and gaining knowledge to make informed decisions"	1. [BFP] facilitates the process of knowledge exchange anytime and anywhere 2. [BFP] supports discussions with other users 3. [BFP] facilitates the process of acquiring knowledge 4. [BFP] enables me to generate new knowledge based on my existing knowledge 5. [BFP] allows me to acquire knowledge from various sources 6. [BFP] supports me in acquiring the knowledge that matches my needs 7. [BFP] can assist me in acquiring knowledge more effectively	Al-Emran and Teo (2020)	$\alpha=0.919$
Creative empowerment	"Inspiring or being inspired by something new or curious"	1. I have experienced inspiration on [BFP] 2. Something I encountered or experienced on [BFP] has inspired me 3. I have been inspired to do something because of [BFP] 4. I have felt inspired on [BFP]	Thrash and Elliot (2003)	$\alpha=0.898$

*Own item based on user interviews

BFP from the sports sector they were most familiar with from a list of five platforms available in Germany: Adidas Running, Nike Run Club, PUMATRAC Run, ASICS Runkeeper, and Under Armour's Map My Run. These platforms share similar features and target groups, thus addressing comparable consumer goals. Each participant was presented with the items related to all five consumer goals addressed by BFPs, along with items measuring the dependent variables. Responses were captured using a five-point Likert

scale, where 1 indicated 'strongly disagree' and 5 indicated 'strongly agree'.

The sample demographics were as follows: 50.5% female ($n=399$), 48.9% male ($n=387$), 0.5% non-binary ($n=4$), and 0.1% gave no gender indication ($n=1$). The average age of the respondents was 39.92 years ($SD=15.77$). All participants provided written consent and were compensated for their participation through the panel provider.



Results of study 1

Validity and reliability tests

Before testing the hypotheses, the validity and reliability of the constructs were assessed following the methodology outlined by Lambert and Newman (2023). A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to evaluate both convergent and discriminant validity. For acceptable convergent and discriminant validity, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) should exceed 0.40 (Floyd and Widaman 1995), and Composite Reliability (CR) should be greater than 0.60 (Bagozzi and Yi 1988). In this study, AVE values ranged from 0.58 to 0.69, and CR values ranged from 0.85 to 0.93, indicating that both metrics were within acceptable limits.

Discriminant validity was further confirmed by comparing the square root of the AVE values with the inter-construct correlation estimates. The square root of the AVE for each construct exceeded the corresponding inter-construct correlations, thus supporting discriminant validity. Table 2 provides details on the means, standard deviations, CR, AVE, square root of AVE (on the diagonal), and correlation values. Reliability coefficients ranged from 0.85 to 0.92, confirming the reliability and validity of the proposed consumer goals addressed by BFPs. Additionally, regression analyses were conducted to assess multicollinearity. The variance inflation factor (VIF) values ranged from 1.67 to 2.42, and tolerance values ranged from 0.41 to 0.60, suggesting that multicollinearity was not a concern in the analyses.

Hypotheses testing of study 1

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed using SPSS AMOS 28 to test the hypotheses. The model demonstrated an acceptable model fit with $\chi^2=812.61$; $df=441$; $p=0.00$; $\chi^2/df=1.84$; IFI=0.98, TLI=0.98, and CFI=0.98; RMSEA=0.03.

The influence of *commercial exchange* on brand attachment ($\beta=0.111$, $p=0.019$) and purchase intention ($\beta=0.111$, $p=0.042$) is significant, confirming H1a and H1b. As

hypothesized in H2a *social exchange* positively influences brand attachment ($\beta=0.431$, $p<0.001$) but does not significantly affect purchase intention ($\beta=-0.104$, $p=0.086$), leading to the rejection of H2b. *Self-improvement* is not significantly associated with either brand attachment ($\beta=-0.067$, $p=0.158$) or purchase intention ($\beta=0.058$, $p=0.285$) in the context of sports BFPs, resulting in the rejection of H3a and H3b. The consumer goal of *epistemic empowerment* is positively related to brand attachment ($\beta=0.143$, $p=0.006$) and purchase intention ($\beta=0.207$, $p<0.001$), confirming H4a and H4b. Finally, *creative empowerment* significantly influences brand attachment ($\beta=0.172$, $p=0.003$) but has no effect on purchase intention ($\beta=0.047$, $p=0.484$), confirming H5a and rejecting H5b. Moreover, brand attachment is positively associated with purchase intention ($\beta=0.372$, $p<0.001$). The five consumer goals addressed by BFPs explain 52% of the variance in brand attachment and, in combination with brand attachment, accounted for 35% of the variance in purchase intention.

To test the mediation hypothesis, we followed the procedure recommended by Hayes et al. (2017). The proposed mediations were modeled within a structural equation framework (Gaskin et al. 2020), and the interpretation of indirect effects was guided by the approaches outlined by Zhao et al. (2010), Rucker et al. (2011), and Hayes (2022). Bootstrapping sample size was $N=2,000$ and the bias corrected confidence level was 90. Our findings indicate that brand attachment mediates the relationships between commercial exchange ($\beta=0.041$, *BCa CI* [0.010; 0.076]; $p=0.031$; $v^2=0.002$), social exchange ($\beta=0.160$, *BCa CI* [0.117; 0.220]; $p<0.001$; $v^2=0.026$), epistemic empowerment ($\beta=0.053$, *BCa CI* [0.014; 0.098]; $p=0.026$; $v^2=0.003$), and creative empowerment ($\beta=0.064$, *BCa CI* [0.024; 0.113]; $p=0.009$; $v^2=0.004$) and purchase intention, confirming the hypotheses 6a,b,d, and e. Taking the effect sizes into consideration, it can be concluded that only the mediation from social exchange via brand attachment has a small to medium effect, while the other effects are rather negligibly small ($v^2<0.01$). The mediation effect of brand attachment on the relationship between self-improvement and purchase intention was not significant ($\beta=-0.025$, *BCa*

Table 2 Summary statistics and correlations among research variables

Construct	Mean (SD)	CR (>0.60)	AVE (>0.40)	square root of AVE (on the diagonal) and correlation values						
				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Commercial exchange	3.45 (0.83)	0.89	0.67	0.82						
2. Social exchange	3.85 (0.79)	0.92	0.67	0.57	0.82					
3. Self-improvement	3.45 (0.85)	0.85	0.58	0.59	0.36	0.76				
4. Epistemic empowerment	2.73 (1.09)	0.92	0.62	0.66	0.67	0.58	0.79			
5. Creative empowerment	3.39 (1.00)	0.90	0.69	0.66	0.67	0.64	0.71	0.83		
6. Brand attachment	3.07 (1.13)	0.93	0.76	0.52	0.68	0.35	0.58	0.59	0.87	
7. Purchase intention	3.73 (0.95)	0.89	0.74	0.45	0.40	0.37	0.50	0.46	0.52	0.86

SD standard deviation, CR construct reliability, AVE average variance extracted



$CI [-0.060; 0.008]$; $p=0.216$; $v^2=0.001$), rejecting H6c. Table 3 summarizes the standardized direct, indirect, and total effects of each consumer goal on brand attachment and purchase intention.

Discussion of the results of study 1

Our findings of Study 1 reveal that the consumer goal of *commercial exchange* and *epistemic empowerment* are the only ones to have significant positive effects on purchase intention. These subordinate consumer goals facilitate users higher level goals (like finishing a marathon or improving physical performance), as they provide essential sports-related knowledge and recommend suitable products that enable users to achieve their objectives. Additionally, features of BFPs supporting the fulfilment of commercial exchange and epistemic empowerment can be inherently linked with a presentation and recommendation of products.

Epistemic empowerment, creative empowerment, and commercial exchange exhibit statistically detectable indirect effects on purchase intention via brand attachment; however, the effect sizes are too small to be considered practically meaningful. By contrast, *social exchange* is the only consumer goal that exhibits a substantial mediation effect on purchase intention via brand attachment. Unlike the other goals, it does not serve as a means to achieve a higher-order goal but constitutes a higher-order goal in itself. Its lack of a direct effect on purchase intention can be attributed to the nature of BFP discussions, which largely revolve around training and performance topics (e.g., training strategies, nutrition, recovery) rather than specific product recommendations.

The consumer goals of *creative empowerment* and *self-improvement* show neither direct effects on purchase intention nor meaningful indirect effects through brand attachment, as the statistically detectable mediation effects are not significant or the effect size is negligibly small. Both serve primarily as pathways toward higher-order goals rather than representing such goals themselves, and the features supporting them are not inherently product-centric. Instead, they emphasize the athletic experience as a whole

without explicitly linking it to product promotion. Furthermore, creative empowerment may not be as strongly associated with the sports domain as it is with other areas, such as toys and games (e.g., Lego Ideas). The non-significant effects of self-improvement are somewhat surprising, as it can be assumed to be a central motive for using BFPs. Prior research links self-improvement goals to enhanced personal control, focus, and motivation (Pettinico and Milne 2017). However, several factors may attenuate their potential to foster consumer-brand relationships. First, the inward focus inherent in self-improvement may shift attention away from the brand operating the BFP, thereby weakening the effect of this consumer goal on brand attachment (Pettinico and Milne 2017). Second, self-tracking, a common feature of self-improvement, can alter the experience of the activity. While it may increase behavioral frequency (e.g., running more often), it can simultaneously reduce intrinsic enjoyment by turning pleasurable activities into instrumental tasks (Etkin 2016), thereby disrupting flow experiences (Huh et al. 2023). Finally, self-improvement goals may negatively affect consumer well-being; for instance, constant self-monitoring can impair body image and self-esteem, leading to stress or dissatisfaction (Jain et al. 2025). In such cases, the brand may become associated with these negative emotional outcomes, further diminishing its potential to enhance brand attachment and purchase intention.

Study 2: case analyses on the market exploration of the implementation of features on BFPs in the sports sector

The case analyses investigate the extent to which features linked to the building blocks derived from Wichmann et al.'s (2022) framework are implemented in existing BFPs. Specifically, we analyze four platforms from the sports sector: adidas Running, Nike Run Club, PUMATRAC, and ASICS Runkeeper, all of which were also included in Study 1.

Table 3 Summary of standardized direct, indirect, and total effects

	Direct effect on brand attachment	Direct effect on purchase intention	Indirect effect via brand attachment on purchase intention	Total effect
Commercial exchange	0.111 (0.019)*	0.111 (0.042)*	0.041 (0.031)*	0.152 (0.046)*
Social exchange	0.431 (<0.001)***	-0.104 (0.086)	0.160 (<0.001)***	0.056 (0.398)
Self-improvement	-0.067 (0.158)	0.058 (0.285)	-0.025 (0.216)	0.033 (0.617)
Epistemic empowerment	0.143 (0.006)**	0.207 (<0.001)***	0.053 (0.026)*	0.260 (0.005)**
Creative empowerment	0.172 (0.003)**	0.047 (0.484)	0.064 (0.009)**	0.111 (0.183)

* $p<0.05$; ** $p<0.01$;
*** $p<0.001$, exact p values are provided in parentheses



Methods of study 2

To analyze the four selected BFPs, we employed the large language model Perplexity AI (standard version of August 2025). First, we provided Perplexity AI with a definition of BFPs and an explanation of the building block concept. We then supplied the names of the five building blocks, examples of corresponding features, and the related consumer goals with their respective definitions. Based on this input, Perplexity AI was asked to evaluate the extent to which each of the four BFPs implemented the five building blocks and to list the features that could be mapped onto them. The full prompt is presented in “Appendix 1”.

Perplexity AI’s output consisted of feature lists associated with the building blocks for each BFP. The authors of this paper subsequently verified whether the identified features were indeed present in the BFPs by downloading the apps and manually navigating through them. Features incorrectly specified by Perplexity AI were either removed or corrected. Furthermore, additional features not identified by Perplexity AI were manually added to the list (e.g., audio guides for guidance block). This revised list was then returned to Perplexity AI, which was prompted to classify the degree of implementation of each building block (low, medium, or high), with the explicit instruction to assess implementation only within each respective BFP and not in comparison to other BFPs or applications (e.g., social networks). The corresponding prompt is also provided in “Appendix 1”.

Results of study 2

Based on the procedure outlined above, Perplexity AI generated a table that links the features of each BFP to the respective building blocks and consumer goals, as well as an assessment of the degree of implementation. This table is provided in “Appendix 2”.

Across all four sports-focused BFPs, the *benchmarking block* is implemented to a high degree. Related features focus on enhancing users’ athletic performance and include multi-sport activity tracking, goal setting, progress dashboards, personal records, and motivational tools such as challenges and badges.

The *community block* is strongly embedded in adidas Running and Nike Run Club but only moderately implemented in PUMATRAC and ASICS Runkeeper. Community-related features foster social exchange by enabling users to connect with friends, participate in group challenges, and share completed activities. All platforms also integrate events (online and offline). Notably, adidas Running and Nike Run Club further include live friend-tracking and cheering functionalities, allowing users to locate friends

during an activity and trigger supportive sounds or visual effects.

The *guidance block* shows high implementation in Nike Run Club and PUMATRAC, but is less pronounced in adidas Running and ASICS Runkeeper. All platforms provide training plans tailored to different ability levels. Guidance is delivered through blogs (adidas Running), videos (Nike Run Club, PUMATRAC), and audio (Nike Run Club, PUMATRAC). Nike Run Club and PUMATRAC additionally feature human coaches who offer tips and instructions in video format.

The *inspiration block* is implemented only to a low-to-medium degree. Adidas Running, Nike Run Club, and PUMATRAC reach a medium level of implementation, while ASICS Runkeeper scores low. Features that support creative empowerment include Story Runs (adidas Running, Nike Run Club, PUMATRAC), which combine running with audio narratives or guided meditations. Additional inspirational elements include a selectable Power Song (adidas Running, Nike Run Club), as well as music and playlist recommendations (Nike Run Club, PUMATRAC). For ASICS Runkeeper, no meaningful features addressing creative empowerment were identified.

The *transaction block* exhibits a consistently low degree of implementation across platforms. While all apps link to brand-owned online shops and offer either personalized product recommendations (adidas Running, Nike Run Club) or exclusive offers (adidas Running, PUMATRAC, ASICS Runkeeper), these features remain peripheral to the user experience. Adidas Running is the only platform with an integrated in-app shop, but it is hidden within the FAQ section rather than being prominently featured.

Figure 3 illustrates the degree of implementation of the five building blocks across the four BFPs and the size of the building blocks represent the three degrees of implementation: low, medium, high.

Discussion of the results of study 2

The results of the case analyses show that all five building blocks are implemented to some extent across the analyzed BFPs, with the only exception being the absence of inspiration-related features in ASICS Runkeeper. This finding lends validity to the conceptual framework of Wichmann et al. (2022), demonstrating that the proposed building blocks are not only theoretically grounded but also observable in real-world BFP design. Overall, the degree of implementation appears relatively homogeneous across the four platforms, suggesting that providers converge on a broadly similar design logic in structuring the user experience. Nevertheless, differences in emphasis become visible when



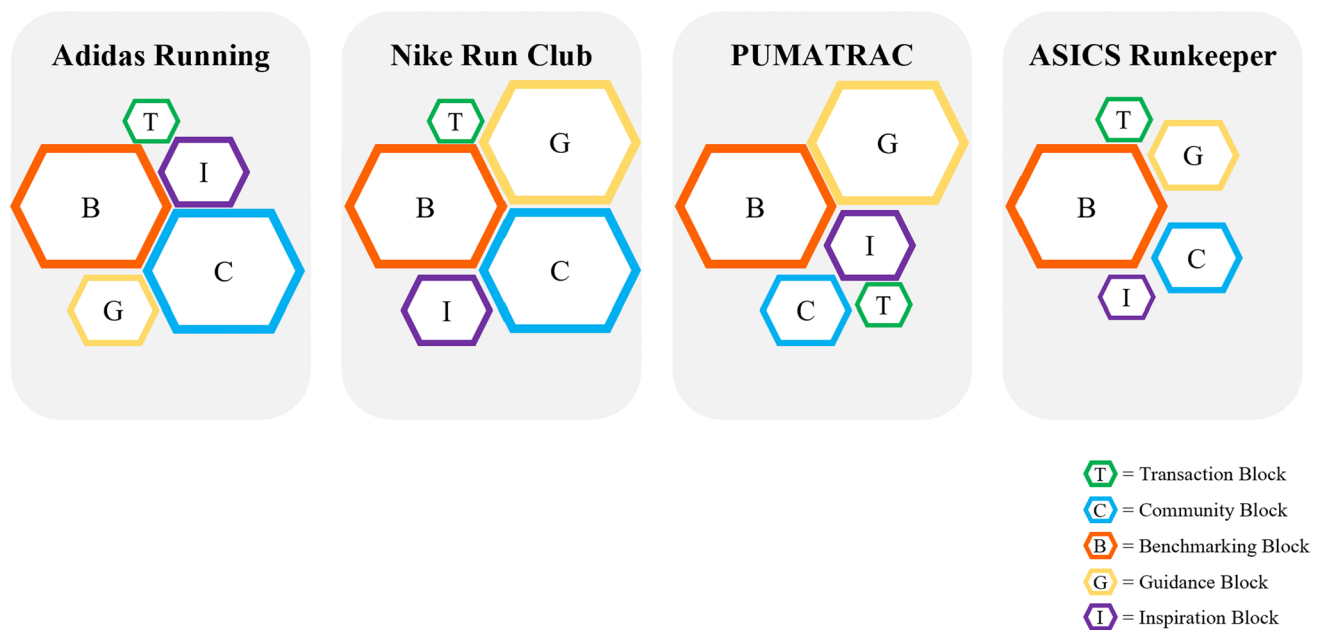


Fig. 3 Degrees of the implementation of building blocks across sports-related BFPs (illustration based on Wichmann et al. 2022)

looking more closely at the relative prominence of the individual blocks.

Benchmarking emerges as the most consistently and comprehensively integrated block across all platforms. Performance tracking, goal setting, dashboards, and challenges represent the backbone of BFP functionality and provide users with the essential means to monitor and improve their athletic performance.

Community and guidance features are also well represented but show greater heterogeneity. Adidas Running and Nike Run Club place a strong emphasis on building a community, whereas PUMATRAC and ASICS Runkeeper incorporate these elements to a more moderate extent. At the same time, Nike Run Club and PUMATRAC stand out for their particularly strong focus on guidance features by integrating human coaches.

Inspiration-related features are comparatively underrepresented across platforms and tend to serve as peripheral add-ons rather than core elements. Creative empowerment through story runs, music, or playlist recommendations remains an ancillary feature set, and the complete absence of such elements in ASICS Runkeeper illustrates the marginal role this block currently plays in BFP design.

Finally, the transaction block shows the lowest level of implementation. While all platforms offer at least some connection to brand shops, personalized product recommendations, or exclusive offers, these features are consistently de-emphasized within the app architecture. Product sales appear secondary to the primary goal of strengthening customer-brand relationships, indicating that BFP providers prioritize engagement over commercialization.

Taken together, the case analyses reveal that BFPs systematically emphasize certain building blocks (benchmarking, community, guidance), while creative and transactional features remain underutilized. Table 4 provides an integrated overview of the key findings of Study 1 and Study 2 to facilitate comparison.

General discussion

The present empirical research complements the existing theoretical literature on BFPs by identifying the consumer goals most relevant for fostering customer relationships and driving sales, as well as by analyzing the extent to which these goals are addressed through the implementation of building blocks in existing sports-related BFPs.

From a theoretical perspective, Study 1 advances our understanding of how consumer goals, grounded in means-end theory, interact with brand attachment as a mediator. The empirical findings from the sports sector highlight the central role of higher-order goals, particularly social exchange, in building brand attachment. This suggests that the mediating role of brand attachment is highly contingent on the type of consumer goal. In contrast, when the manufacturer's objective is to increase purchase intention directly, goals tied to product use and functionality (commercial exchange and epistemic empowerment) become more salient. This highlights the need to consider the heterogeneous role of consumer goals when theorizing about BFPs and their effects.



Table 4 Key findings of Study 1 and Study 2

Consumer goal/building block	Study 1: quantitative survey study		Study 2: case analyses	
	Direct impact of consumer goal on purchase intention*	Mediation from consumer goal via brand attachment on purchase intention**	Extent to which features addressing the building block are implemented (low/medium/high)	
Commercial exchange/transaction block	+	0	Low (4×)	
Social exchange/community block	0	+	Medium (2×)	
			High (2×)	
Self-improvement/benchmarking block	0	0	High (4×)	
Epistemic empowerment/guidance block	+	0	Medium (2×)	
			High (2×)	
Creative empowerment/inspiration block	0	0	Low (1×)	
			Medium (3×)	

*+Significant impact ($p < 0.05$)

**+Mediation with at least small effect size

The case analyses in Study 2 show that manufacturer brands in the sports sector design their BFPs according to a broadly similar logic. The most strongly emphasized building blocks are those with a clear connection to the sports and fitness domain (benchmarking and guidance) or to brand community-building (community block). By contrast, building blocks with weaker links to the domain (inspiration) are implemented far less consistently. Furthermore, the results suggest that manufacturers primarily use BFPs to cultivate long-term customer relationships rather than to drive immediate product sales, as reflected in the limited implementation of the transaction block.

A comparison of the findings from Study 1 and Study 2 reveals partial alignment between consumer perspectives and manufacturer brand decisions. The strong implementation of community and guidance blocks is consistent with the consumer goals that most effectively foster brand attachment and purchase intention. However, this alignment does not extend to all building blocks. The benchmarking block is prominently implemented across all platforms, even though its associated consumer goal of self-improvement appears to motivate platform usage without meaningfully influencing brand attachment or purchase intention. This likely reflects user expectations within the sports app domain, where benchmarking functionalities are viewed as basic hygiene factors rather than differentiating value drivers. Moreover, while sales may not be the primary focus of BFPs, manufacturers should not underestimate the potential of transaction-related features to strengthen purchase intention.

Taken together, the two studies lend further support to the conceptual framework of Wichmann et al. (2022). The proposed building blocks are observable in real-world BFP design, while the measurements of the respective consumer goals demonstrate acceptable convergent and discriminant validity. Building on this conceptual foundation, our research provides a robust empirical basis for both academic inquiry and managerial practice, enabling the future evolution of BFPs in increasingly competitive environments.

Management implications

The findings of this research suggest that BFPs have significant potential to enhance brand attachment and purchase intention. Consistent with the framework proposed by Wichmann et al. (2022), our results confirm that BFPs primarily aim to address consumer goals beyond the mere purchase of products. Consequently, the primary objective of a brand in developing its own BFP should focus on strengthening the customer-brand relationship rather than pursuing immediate monetary gains, even though BFPs can positively influence purchase intention. Strengthening the brand relationship can



best be achieved by addressing consumer goals on a higher level in the means-end hierarchy.

A consumer goal that should be addressed to strengthen customer relationships is social exchange. To serve this consumer goal BFPs should implement features related to the community block and enable users to interact with brand content, such as by commenting on interactive Q&A live streams with sports professionals or sharing their own experiences and expertise. This can be achieved through dedicated forums where users exchange tips or success stories. For example, social features allowing users to comment on or rate others' content and enabling networking opportunities similar to social media platforms but with a specific thematic focus can foster a sense of community (Zhao and Balagué 2015). Live events, such as the "Virtual New Year's Eve Run" hosted on Adidas Running, provide additional opportunities for users to connect and engage with other enthusiasts.

To stimulate purchase intention, managers must identify platform related features associated with their product category. In the sports context, these features should be related to the consumer goals commercial exchange and epistemic empowerment. For example, this could involve leveraging personalized algorithms based on user data for recommending the best-matching products and providing individualized information on workout plans or recovery exercises. In other industries the addressed consumer goals might vary in terms of their relevance for the brand outcomes, e.g. on the platform Lego Ideas the consumer goal creative empowerment might facilitate purchase intention (as the product itself is inherently relevant for the realization of a creative project) while epistemic empowerment might be of less relevance.

Limitations and future research

The primary objective of this research was to investigate the effects of consumer goals on brand attachment and purchase intention within the sports context. As the study of BFPs remains a nascent area, there are numerous opportunities for further exploration. One promising avenue would be to examine consumer goals addressed by BFPs in contexts beyond sports. Different industries or sectors might reveal unique dynamics in the relative importance and strength of these consumer goals. For instance, creative empowerment, which was found to have moderate importance in the sports context, could play a more substantial role in a highly creative sector, such as the Lego Ideas platform, where users actively contribute innovative ideas and designs.

The data collection was conducted exclusively in Germany, which presents a limitation in terms of cultural

generalizability. Future research could expand on these findings through cross-cultural validation to determine whether the observed effects hold in diverse cultural settings. Cultural dimensions, such as individualism versus collectivism (Hofstede 2011), could influence how users perceive and prioritize consumer goals like social exchange. For example, collectivistic cultures may place greater emphasis on community interactions and shared achievements, potentially amplifying the impact of social exchange on brand attachment and purchase intention. Such investigations could provide actionable insights for tailoring BFP strategies to align with the cultural values and preferences of different regions.

One limitation of our research concerns the cross-sectional approach prohibiting causal inferences. An experimental design would benefit the identification of causal patterns. Furthermore, BFPs are inherently dynamic platforms, undergoing continual development and adaptation. Longitudinal studies would be particularly valuable for understanding the long-term effects of BFPs on brand attachment and purchase behavior. Examining how updates, feature enhancements, or shifts in user preferences influence the relevance of consumer goals addressed by BFPs over time could shed light on the evolving role of BFPs in brand strategy.

This research adopted the definitions and conceptualizations of consumer goals from the framework provided by Wichmann et al. (2022), prioritizing conceptual clarity and consistency with established approaches. By adhering closely to this framework, we ensured theoretical alignment and depth within this conceptualization. However, this focus on a single framework may not capture the full complexity of consumer goals as a construct. The multifaceted and dynamic nature of such constructs, spanning cognitive, behavioral, motivational, and relational dimensions, continues to pose challenges for clear conceptualization and precise measurement, even when employing a scale development process with multiple pre-studies. The potential for overlap and ambiguity among these dimensions can complicate both the development of valid measurement instruments and the interpretation of empirical results.

To advance construct validity and provide a more comprehensive representation of consumer goals, future research should consider alternative conceptualizations and operationalizations, for example by integrating additional data sources such as text analyses of user reviews from app stores. Developing refined theoretical frameworks and measurement tools that account for the nuanced distinctions and interrelations among the different goal dimensions can further enhance the alignment between theory and empirical indicators. In particular, balancing individual versus social components or aspects of knowledge acquisition versus dissemination may yield deeper insights and support theoretical



refinement. Sustained scholarly attention to these conceptual and operational challenges will ultimately contribute to greater clarity and a more holistic understanding of the phenomena under study.

This research deliberately focused on brand decisions (Study 2) and consumer outcomes (Study 1), thereby addressing the starting and ending points of Wichmann et al.'s (2022) framework. As such, we did not empirically examine the intensity of crowdsourcing and crowdsending activities, which represent an intermediate dimension in the framework. Future studies could investigate how varying levels of intensity in these activities influence the impact of consumer goal pursuit on the strength of consumer-brand relationships. Exploring the moderating role of intensity of crowdsourcing and crowdsending would provide a more nuanced understanding of how BFPs generate value and could help brands optimize the design of features that foster sustained consumer engagement.

Finally, this research was conducted in a competitive environment where multiple BFPs vie for the same target audience with similar offerings. An intriguing direction for future research would be to explore how competing flagship platforms differentiate in the market. Investigating the strategies brands employ to capture user attention and market share, particularly in saturated sectors, could offer deeper insights into competitive positioning and user retention in the context of BFPs.

Appendix 1

Study 2: First Perplexity AI Prompt

"We are writing a scientific paper about Brand Flagship Platforms ("manufacturer-brand-owned digital platforms that mediate versatile interactions between participants within the brand-related category space"), for example, Adidas Running in the sports industry. Brand Flagship Platforms consist of five building blocks, which are formed by various features. These building blocks reflect the overall functionality of the platform. The building blocks enable users to fulfill specific consumer goals. Below, the five building blocks are presented with example features and the consumer goals associated with each building block.

- Building Block: Transaction Block; Example Features: Product Marketplace, Personalized Product Recommendation; Consumer Goal: Commercial Exchange (Definition: "Finding the best-matching offering or exchange partner")

- Building Block: Community Block; Example Features: Community Forums, Social Sharing Function, Community Events; Consumer Goal: Social Exchange (Definition: "Engaging in social interaction")
- Building Block: Benchmarking Block; Example Features: Tracking, Measurement, Benchmarking, Reward Mechanism; Consumer Goal: Self-improvement (Definition: "Competing and comparing to live up to one's full potential")
- Building Block: Guidance Block; Example Features: Route Planning, How-To Blogs, FAQ; Consumer Goal: Epistemic Empowerment (Definition: "Spreading and gaining knowledge to make informed decisions")
- Building Block: Inspiration Block; Example Features: Exploration and Experimentation Features, GPS Art, Music Recommendation, Story Runs; Consumer Goal: Creative Empowerment (Definition: "Inspiring or being inspired by something new or curious")

We would now like to ask you to evaluate platforms from the sports industry regarding the extent to which the various building blocks and their associated consumer goals have already been implemented in each respective platform. It is important to us that you list all functions and features of the respective platform that constitute the respective building block. We would like the output in the form of a table. The table should include the following columns: 1. Platform, 2. Building Block, 3. All Features, 4. Consumer Goal, 5. Degree of Implementation, 6. Short Explanation, which are contained in the respective platform. Please assess the version of each platform offered in Germany. The platforms to be evaluated are Adidas Running, Nike Run Club, PUMA-TRAC, ASICS Runkeeper."

Study 2: Second Perplexity AI Prompt:

"I have reviewed your evaluation and adjusted and supplemented the feature list. Now please assess the degree of implementation as low, medium, or high. When assessing the implementation degree, please refer to the building blocks within each respective platform and not in comparison to other platforms or other apps (e.g., social networks)."

Appendix 2

Final output with features addressing the building blocks and Perplexity's evaluation of the degree of implementation of the building blocks.



Platform (specified by the authors)	Building Block (pro- vided by the authors)	Features (revised by the authors)	Consumer Goal (provided by the authors)	Degree of implementation (evaluation by Perplexity)
Adidas Running	Transaction Block	In-app shop (very hidden) Product links to Adidas app shop (Exclusive) offers for Adidas products Personalized product recommendations	Commercial Exchange	Low
	Community Block	Community challenges Social sharing Community events Live tracking, cheers from followers Find friends Groups	Social Exchange	High
	Benchmark- ing Block	Tracking of various activities Activity analysis Leaderboards Personal challenges Prize offers (birthday gifts, premium, special offers, personalization processes) Training goals Personal records Reward system (badges and points)	Self-improvement	High
	Guidance Block	Training plans Blog articles FAQ	Epistemic Empowerment	Medium
	Inspiration Block	Story runs Power song selection Inspirational success stories in groups and on linked YouTube channel	Creative Empowerment	Medium
Nike Run Club	Transaction Block	Product links to the Nike shop Offers via push notification Personalized product recommendations	Commercial Exchange	Low
	Community Block	Friend challenges/group challenges Social sharing (but no interaction possible) Live tracking, cheers from followers Events	Social Exchange	High
	Benchmark- ing Block	Leaderboards for challenges and friends Personal records Activity analyses Badges/running levels Challenges	Self-improvement	High
	Guidance Block	Instructional videos Training plans Coach Podcasts/audio instructions (extensive offering) FAQ	Epistemic Empowerment	High
	Inspiration Block	Story runs (audio) (extensive offering with collaboration with Headspace) Music recommendations Power song selection	Creative Empowerment	Medium



Table (continued)

Platform (specified by the authors)	Building Block (pro- vided by the authors)	Features (revised by the authors)	Consumer Goal (provided by the authors)	Degree of implementation (evaluation by Perplexity)
PUMATRAC	Transaction Block	Direct links in the app feed to the shop website Promotions for Puma products	Commercial Exchange	Low
	Community Block	Community challenges Social sharing in the feed Live training events nearby Invite friends	Social Exchange	Medium
	Benchmark- ing Block	Tracking (various activities) Activity analyses Leaderboards Fitness goal (e.g., slim and fit) Challenges Badges/points	Self-improvement	High
	Guidance Block	Training plans with calendar overview Coach Personalized workout tips (redirects to browser) Integrated workout videos FAQ link Audio guide	Epistemic Empowerment	High
	Inspiration Block	Music suggestions Coach profiles with individual music recommendations, information, and workouts Varied training suggestions	Creative Empowerment	Medium
ASICS Runkeeper	Transaction Block	Store link to the ASICS website Offers (e.g., birthday promo code) for members	Commercial Exchange	Low
	Community Block	Community challenges/group challenges Social sharing Events	Social Exchange	Medium
	Benchmark- ing Block	Tracking of various activities Group leaderboards Personal achievements Challenges Badges/achievements/streaks Split analyses Training goals	Self-improvement	High
	Guidance Block	Training plans (personalized with calendar actions)	Epistemic Empowerment	Medium
	Inspiration Block		Creative Empowerment	Low

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