3 Framework of the Study

The aim of this chapter is to develop a research model that allows investigating the impact of selected behavioral attributes on the customer retention of brand-community members.

Section 3.1 provides an overview of the framework’s conceptualization. Based on the literature review presented in Chapter 2, indicators of brand-community members' behavior are selected and drawn together to develop a behavioral profile that considers members’ reasons for joining and participating in the community.

In Section 3.2, the conceptualized model will be further developed. With regard to the economic impact of brand-community participation, a set of hypotheses is formulated that allows investigating the behavioral effects on sales-oriented measures as purchase intention and intent to recommend the brand. The phrasing of the hypotheses reflects the comparison between brand-community members and non-members.

Section 3.3 provides an overview on the constructs’ operationalization. The aim of this section is to turn the developed hypotheses into observable and measurable quantities. This process covers the scale selection for each of the behavioral and performance factors.

Finally, Section 3.4 provides information about the development and implementation of the questionnaire.

3.1 Conceptualization of the Research Framework

As mentioned in Section 1.2, the aim of this study is to develop and to validate a behavioral profile of those consumers participating in official FMCG brand communities and to examine whether these behavioral attributes have an impact on the economic success of the brand.
The literature review on the brand-community phenomenon indicates that the following aspects seem to have high importance for members and should therefore be reflected in the behavioral profile:

- The emotional relationship to the brand and company,
- The social identity through the brand-community membership,
- The social interaction and moral responsibility with other brand admirers.

These three aspects are elaborated in the following sections.

3.1.1 Emotional Relationship to Brand and Company

Brand communities represent a refuge of admirers and heavy users of the respective brand,\(^{342}\), who share the same values, rituals, and experiences.\(^{343}\) Furthermore, this study includes only brand communities whose members have subscribed actively as members, and log-in with their user-ID and password. The decision to sign-in is a conscious process and can therefore be understood as a confession to the brand community as well as to the brand.

These facts indicate that community members seem to feel highly involved in the brand. Involvement in this context means the perceived value of a brand that manifests as interest in the respective brand.\(^{344}\) According to Laurent and Kapferer, the main antecedents of *brand involvement* are the perceived importance and the personal meaning of the product, as well as the symbolic or sign-value attributed by the consumers to the product, its consumption, and its hedonic value and emotional appeal.\(^{345}\) Beatty, Kahle, and Homer share this point of view. They also emphasize the hedonic, as


\(^{345}\) Cf. Laurent / Kapferer (1985), p. 43.