

Online brand advocacy and video game consumers

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to examine how video game brand communities express online brand advocacy, revealing distinct patterns of consumer engagement that challenge traditional marketing approaches. By drawing on social identity theory, authentic brand advocacy behaviours in *Call of Duty* and *Battlefield* video game brand communities were explored to understand how consumers support their preferred brands.

Design/methodology/approach – Over 23,000 *Call of Duty* and *Battlefield* brand community discussions from Reddit were analysed using advanced computational methods to discover how brand advocacy naturally emerges from consumer discourse. Rather than relying on traditional surveys, this approach captures real advocacy behaviours as they occur in video game communities to reveal authentic language and expressions consumers use to support their favourite brands.

Findings – Six distinct dimensions of brand advocacy emerged: Brand Positivity, Brand Defence, Virtual Positive Expression, Brand Zest, Brand Knowledge and Brand Appraisal. The analysis revealed two distinct advocacy orientations: *Call of Duty* communities focus on narrative experiences and storytelling, while *Battlefield* communities emphasise technical expertise and mechanical complexity, yet both generate equally intense brand advocacy through different emotional pathways.

Originality/value – This research contributes to the research of authentic online brand advocacy in consumer communities by demonstrating that genuine advocacy emerges from consumer experiences, rather than promotional activities. This research examines video game brand communities as a context for understanding modern brand relationships, showing how narrative immersion and technical expertise create different forms of consumer advocacy with important implications for brand management.

Keywords Video games, Brand advocacy, Brand attachment, Brand communities, Natural language processing

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

The global video game market is a commercially significant sector generating \$183.9bn in 2023 and is expected to reach \$207.0bn by 2026 (Newzoo, 2024). This high-tech industry features dedicated fans and online communities across the globe. More than 90% of community members refer to information shared online by others for insights on new games, reviews, tips and recommendations (Miller, 2019). Strong word of mouth, evangelism and advocacy are prevalent among video game brand communities, where passionate players frequently engage in brand advocacy behaviours by sharing their positive experiences and tips with others (Burgess and Jones, 2020). Brand advocacy involves actively promoting and defending favoured brands through engagement behaviours like detailed reviews, endorsements and community support (Marticotte et al., 2016). Essentially, the concept refers to the level of support and recommendation behaviours that customers exhibit (Wallace et al., 2012) and involves positive

word of mouth, brand defence and information sharing (Wilk et al., 2020).

Recent reviews demonstrate brand advocacy research is evolving towards online, peer-driven communities, with a continued focus on surveys and experiments (Shimul et al., 2026; Suban, 2025). This shift highlights the growing impact of online environments as consumers increasingly engage in Brand Defence (standing up for the brand), Brand Appraisal (balanced comparisons), Brand Knowledge (tips, fixes and links), Virtual Positive Expression (emojis, badges and memes), Brand Positivity and Brand Zest (enthusiastic endorsement) (Aksoy and Yazici, 2023; Sweeney et al., 2020; Wilk et al., 2020), which has led to the emergence of the concept of “online brand advocacy” (Sweeney et al., 2020). Online brand advocacy is defined as a “strong, influential, purposeful and non-incentivised online representation of a

The current issue and full text archive of this journal is available on Emerald Insight at: <https://www.emerald.com/insight/1061-0421.htm>



Journal of Product & Brand Management
35/7 (2026) 996–1015
Emerald Publishing Limited [ISSN 1061-0421]
[DOI 10.1108/JPBM-03-2025-5866]

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Received 18 March 2025
Revised 26 September 2025
17 March 2026
Accepted 18 March 2026

brand and that brand's best interest by the brand-experienced customer including 'standing up for' and speaking on behalf of the brand" (Wilk *et al.*, 2020, p. 419). This definition separates consumer-driven advocacy, which arises organically from customer experiences, from employee-driven advocacy programmes that rely on organisational incentives and formal motivational structures (Kim *et al.*, 2023).

The literature indicates that brand advocacy and brand loyalty are mutually reinforcing (Wilk *et al.*, 2021), and brands that reflect a consumer's inner identity or desired social image can stimulate brand advocacy on social media (Wallace *et al.*, 2012). Recent studies highlight several key drivers of brand advocacy, such as the desire for self-expression, a sense of belonging within communities and signals that enhance a brand's legitimacy (Mishra and Gupta, 2025). While Wilk *et al.* (2020) successfully operationalised online brand advocacy as a parsimonious four-dimensional construct (brand defence, information sharing, positivity and virtual expression) for general consumer contexts, this reductionist approach may overlook the nuances of high-involvement digital goods. Prior to their final scale refinement, broader advocacy conceptualisations included Brand Appraisal (critical evaluation) and Brand Zest (energetic enthusiasm) (Sweeney *et al.*, 2020). While these dimensions were statistically redundant in general retail, they are theoretically vital in sectors like video games, where the product has experiential aspects.

According to social identity theory, consumers are significantly influenced by the opinions and behaviours of others within their social networks (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Hogg, 2016; Roy and Rabbanee, 2015; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Signalling, verification and identification processes within these social networks create pathways through which corporate communications generate brand loyalty and defensive advocacy behaviours (Park and Jiang, 2023). Consequently, social ties and homophily play a major role in online brand advocacy behaviours (Wallace *et al.*, 2012). Indeed, opinions can be considered social forces, which create change and groups that organise around sharing a collective opinion, often anonymously as online communities, can result in powerful social influence (O'Reilly *et al.*, 2022).

Recent studies have explored online brand advocacy in specific contexts, such as tourism (Wilk *et al.*, 2024) and social causes (Campbell *et al.*, 2024). While this previous literature has provided valuable insights into the drivers of online brand advocacy, several areas remain underexplored, particularly regarding the unique dynamics of online brand advocacy in video game brand communities. Contemporary digital marketing research emphasises the need to understand how consumer behaviour patterns evolve within specific platform ecosystems, particularly in contexts characterised by strong community engagement and technical expertise (Campbell *et al.*, 2024). Video game communities represent a theoretically distinct advocacy environment that challenges existing online brand advocacy models.

Unlike standard consumer goods, the boundary between the product and the brand in the case of video games is indistinguishable (Burgess and Jones, 2020). The narrative and technical gameplay aspects of each video game series are how consumers identify these brands, form intense relationships with them and are prompted to advocate for or against them

(Burgess, 2026). In this context, advocacy is not merely about "positivity" but involves deep Appraisal (critiquing mechanics and lore to improve the game) and Zest (high-arousal excitement). Therefore, applying generalist online brand advocacy scales (e.g. Wilk *et al.*, 2020) without critical adaptation risks ignoring the complex, participatory nature of video game players' advocacy.

Video game brand communities often exhibit high levels of engagement, interaction and strong connections between players and their favourite game brands, consoles and developers (Cheung *et al.*, 2008). Recent case study evidence from esports organisations demonstrates how video game brand communities develop exceptional brand loyalty and advocacy with community members and show readiness to advocate for their organisations (Wong and Hung, 2023). As narrative brands, video games create emotional attachments through immersive storytelling and interactive engagement, making them legitimate subjects for brand management research and requiring context-specific branding strategies (Burgess, 2026). Due to this immersive nature of video game brands, such connections can foster deep emotional attachments, heightened loyalty and strong advocacy intentions (Whang and Chang, 2004). Thus, video games represent a distinct category of hedonic brands that require specialised brand management approaches due to their unique characteristics of narrative immersion, technical complexity and community-driven engagement (Burgess and Jones, 2020).

The emotional dimensions of brand advocacy have also gained increased attention with recent research demonstrating how brand happiness and emotional satisfaction drive advocacy behaviours in service contexts (Purohit *et al.*, 2024). This emotional component is particularly relevant in video game brand communities where immersive experiences create strong emotional connections (Kumar *et al.*, 2024). The combined influence of social values and deep emotional investment in the video game sector creates an ideal context for researching brand advocacy (Hamari and Keronen, 2017). This research, therefore, contributes to brand management theory by examining advocacy dynamics within this distinct hedonic brand category, and findings applicable to any brands characterised by deep emotional engagement, technical complexity and passionate community involvement.

This research addresses these research gaps through four aligned contributions. Firstly, it critically integrates and extends the online brand advocacy literature by challenging the sufficiency of the four-dimensional model in the video game player context. This research demonstrates that the full six-dimension structure (i.e. restoring Brand Appraisal and Brand Zest) is necessary to capture the spectrum of video game player advocacy. By showing that dimensions previously discarded in general retail (Wilk *et al.*, 2020) are actively expressed in video game player communities, this research provides empirical evidence that high-engagement brand entities require a more detailed advocacy framework than traditional goods.

Secondly, this research identified two advocacy orientations, narrative-focused (story, immersion and emotional resonance) and technical-focused (mechanics, performance and system mastery), that operate as parallel pathways producing comparable advocacy intensity through different cognitive and affective routes. Thirdly, large first-person shooter video game

brand communities are identified as high-involvement, where Brand Defence often appears alongside Brand Appraisal, and Brand Positivity frequently co-occurs with Brand Zest, while noting that generalising is limited to similarly intensive entertainment franchises until cross-genre studies are conducted. Fourthly, this research introduced a transparent computational approach that combines prompt-guided large language model classification with interpretable lexical analysis, enabling scalable analysis of organically expressed advocacy and focusing on advocacy-rich discourse, rather than the full linguistic output of each community.

2. Background

2.1 Online brand advocacy and video game brands

Existing literature established brand advocacy as distinct from positive word of mouth, defining it as a combination of customer-motivated behaviours encompassing consumers' active promotion, defence and recommendation of brands through supportive behaviours that extend beyond mere purchase decisions (Conduit *et al.*, 2019; Gaustad *et al.*, 2019). Wilk *et al.* (2020) conceptualised online brand advocacy as a multidimensional construct encompassing six dimensions before reducing this to four dimensions through survey validation with 191 Australian respondents. While this reduction improved statistical efficiency in general retail contexts, the methodological choice to prioritise scale brevity over conceptual completeness raises theoretical concerns.

Specifically, the removal of Brand Appraisal (critical evaluation) and Brand Zest (high-arousal enthusiasm) may reflect the low-involvement nature of the products studied (e.g. retail banking and consumer electronics), rather than a universal advocacy structure. In high-engagement contexts, such as video games, where consumers actively critique beloved brands to improve them (Burgess and Jones, 2023) and exhibit intense emotional excitement (Marticotte *et al.*, 2016), the exclusion of these dimensions may constitute a theoretical oversight, rather than a methodological refinement. This research, therefore, revisits the six-dimensional structure to test whether dimensional reduction is context-dependent.

The digital transformation of advocacy has reshaped how consumers interact with brands, yet most existing research treats "online advocacy" as a monolithic construct, failing to distinguish between low-involvement social media endorsements (e.g. liking a post) and high-involvement community participation (e.g. writing detailed critiques). While online platforms magnify the visibility and influence of advocacy, showing that these behaviours cut across traditional demographic boundaries (Aksoy and Yazici, 2023; Suban, 2025; Wilk *et al.*, 2018; Wilk *et al.*, 2020; Wilk *et al.*, 2021), the theoretical mechanisms driving advocacy in passive consumption contexts (e.g. fashion and tourism) may differ fundamentally from those in interactive, skill-based contexts like video games. Examples of this are Aksoy *et al.* (2023) and Choi *et al.* (2021), who emphasise community-driven brand support, but they do not account for how technical mastery and narrative immersion – unique to video games – might create distinct advocacy pathways. This gap necessitates a context-specific examination of advocacy in hedonic brand entities.

The theoretical foundation of advocacy extends beyond traditional word of mouth through its proactive, recipient-focused nature, where advocates perceive their actions as serving others' best interests (Sweeney *et al.*, 2020; Xie *et al.*, 2019). However, this "altruistic framing" of advocacy may oversimplify the motivations of player communities, where advocacy often serves dual purposes: helping others and asserting in-group identity against rival brands (Marticotte *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, peer-driven advocacy in player communities operates under conditions of anonymity, technical expertise and competitive tribalism factors that may fundamentally alter the "recipient-focused" assumption (Kim *et al.*, 2023). This research, therefore, examines whether advocacy in video game player communities reflects purely altruistic motives or also includes identity-signalling and status-seeking behaviours.

2.2 Social identity theory

Social identity theory underpins the understanding of online brand advocacy by explaining how individuals connect with emotionally significant communities that create a shared identity through signalling, verification and identification processes. In turn, this transforms brand communications into loyalty and defensive advocacy behaviours (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Hogg, 2016; Park and Jiang, 2023). However, prior research has not explored how community characteristics, particularly the balance between narrative immersion and technical expertise, shape distinct advocacy pathways within the same theoretical framework (Shimul *et al.*, 2026). Evidence suggests that different community orientations can generate comparable advocacy intensity through different cognitive and emotional mechanisms, yet this remains underexplored.

The advocacy process is driven by brand satisfaction, trust and emotional attachment, with recent research revealing that emotional attachment operates through distinct affective pathways differentiated by arousal levels and expressive intensity, creating multiple routes to advocacy manifestation (Ahmadi and Ataei, 2024; Bhati and Verma, 2020). Furthermore, while social identity theory explains in-group cohesion, its application in marketing often overlooks the aggressive side of "out-group derogation" (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). In video games, in the context of debates over preferred video game consoles or games (e.g. *Battlefield* vs *Call of Duty*), advocacy is often defined not just by loving one brand but by hating the other (Marticotte *et al.*, 2016). Standard advocacy models that focus solely on "brand love" miss this "oppositional loyalty" (Badrinarayanan and Sierra, 2018), which is a primary driver of engagement for video game players.

Research demonstrates that consumers' self and social community identification with brands serves as a significant predictor of online brand advocacy (Li *et al.*, 2025). Stronger social connections motivate consumers to support brands that reflect their identities through positive word of mouth and social media engagement, ultimately enhancing purchase intent and brand forgiveness (Appel *et al.*, 2020; Choi and Ahn, 2023; Halder *et al.*, 2024; Mandl and Hogueve, 2020; Wallace *et al.*, 2012). Yet, this literature predominantly examines "positive identification" (pride in the brand), neglecting how negative experiences can paradoxically strengthen advocacy in player communities.

Brand advocacy is further strengthened by consumer-brand identification. This is driven by brand credibility, value congruence and experience, with customer engagement moderating these relationships and corporate social responsibility initiatives creating additional pathways for values-based advocacy expression (Kim *et al.*, 2023). The technological mediation of advocacy has evolved beyond traditional social media to include augmented reality and other online affordances that blend human expression with technological enhancement, creating new channels for advocacy manifestation in online immersive environments (Kumar *et al.*, 2024).

2.3 Research gap

Recent context-specific research has examined brand advocacy across diverse contexts, including tourism, luxury brands, social causes and fashion, revealing how industry characteristics shape advocacy expression through factors such as online content engagement, environmental sustainability messaging, attachment-driven luxury advocacy and values-based corporate social responsibility responses (Pham *et al.*, 2023; Shimul *et al.*, 2026; Shimul and Phau, 2022; Wilk *et al.*, 2024). However, these contexts often involve products where the brand is separate from the consumption experience. For example, a tourist advocates for a destination after visiting it, and a luxury consumer advocates for a handbag after purchasing it.

In contrast, video games are hedonic brands with experiential aspects where the product is the brand (Burgess and Jones, 2020), and consumption is continuous and interactive. This distinction is critical because advocacy in video games may occur during experiential consumption (e.g. live-streaming gameplay) and may involve technical expertise (e.g. optimising builds and discovering exploits) that has no equivalent in tourism or fashion.

Given the interactivity and engagement within video game brand communities, they have become fertile ground for research into various dimensions of brand management in the video game industry. Concepts such as brand community coping, brand evangelism, consumer brand engagement and brand authenticity have all been examined within these communities (Burgess and Jones, 2020; Burgess and Jones, 2023; Marticotte *et al.*, 2016; Weijs *et al.*, 2019). However, other video game brand management dimensions, including brand advocacy, remain relatively underexplored. The limited existing studies have investigated brand advocacy in video games, mainly focusing on mobile games and advergaming and revealed that factors such as game-self congruity, game involvement and flow experience significantly influence brand advocacy intentions (Vashisht, 2019; Vashisht *et al.*, 2021).

Critically, no existing research has examined how advocacy dimensions naturally emerge and interrelate within passionate video game brand communities, nor has any research explored whether the dimensional structure of advocacy varies by community orientation (narrative vs technical focus). Current methodological approaches in brand advocacy research remain dominated by structured self-report instruments (Shimul *et al.*, 2026) that assume respondents can accurately introspect their advocacy behaviours, an assumption that may fail in high-volume, spontaneous community discourse where advocacy is

expressed implicitly through memes, jargon and technical debates (Suban, 2025). Furthermore, by relying on cross-sectional surveys, prior research cannot capture the temporal dynamics of advocacy.

The integration of advanced natural language processing techniques with explainable AI methods offers unprecedented opportunities to uncover nuanced advocacy dimensions and their interdependencies that may be invisible to traditional survey-based approaches, particularly in contexts where technical expertise and narrative immersion create distinct forms of brand attachment (Mishra and Gupta, 2025). This research, therefore, uses a computational approach to analyse thousands of organic community posts, testing whether the six-dimensional advocacy structure (including the previously discarded brand appraisal and brand zest dimensions) better captures video game player advocacy than the reduced four-dimensional model.

3. Methodology

This research utilises a qualitative content analysis approach to explore advocacy behaviour within video game brand communities, leveraging large-scale user-generated content analysis to uncover organically emergent online brand advocacy patterns and dimensional interdependencies that may be invisible to structured self-report instruments. The six online brand advocacy dimensions utilised in this analysis were adapted from Wilk *et al.* (2020) and comprise: Brand Positivity (positive and favourable communication about a brand, including brand endorsement); Brand Defence (proactive and reactive defence of a brand, including standing up for the brand's best interests); Virtual Positive Expression (virtual visual manifestation in support of a brand through emoticons and online symbols); Brand Zest (expressing conviction and enthusiasm based on brand experiences); Brand Knowledge (providing shrewd and relevant information about a brand's intricate details); and Brand Appraisal (providing honest brand comparisons and transparent assessment of brand attributes).

3.1 Research context

Video game brands such as *Call of Duty* and *Battlefield* represent a unique theoretical context for online brand advocacy research, which is why they were selected as the research context. These games are narrative brands that create emotional attachments through immersive storytelling and interactive engagement, resulting in highly engaged consumers, who develop exceptional brand loyalty (Burgess, 2026). Both brands are long running, with the first instalments released in 2003 and 2002, respectively, thus providing ample resources over more than two decades for players to engage in online brand advocacy and develop passionate brand communities and engagement.

Call of Duty and *Battlefield*'s brand community engagement are different from traditional advocacy environments (Burgess and Jones, 2020; Philp and Nepomuceno, 2024; Wong and Hung, 2023). These interactive brand communities are inherently social spaces where players express themselves, share knowledge and nurture common interests through competitive, cooperative and collaborative relationships that can centre around specific intellectual properties or encompass multiple

games more broadly (Saldanha *et al.*, 2023). Community interaction serves as a core aspect of the video game player experience, with members engaging in extensive behaviours including sharing gameplay tips, technical support, content creation and participating in discussions that create substantial value for community members (Burgess and Jones, 2020; Marticotte *et al.*, 2016; Shi *et al.*, 2024; Weiyo *et al.*, 2019). The differential impact of user-generated versus firm-generated content becomes particularly pronounced in these communities, where organic peer discourse carries distinct persuasive power compared to official brand messaging, creating unique pathways for advocacy expression (Ahmadi and Ataei, 2024).

Video game communities exhibit distinctive advocacy dynamics characterised by competitive and combative behaviours. Members readily critique their favourite brands, while simultaneously defending them against external criticism, creating a paradoxical environment where Brand Appraisal (critique) and Brand Defence (protection) coexist, a pattern that contradicts the “purely positive” framing of advocacy in general marketing literature (Burgess and Jones, 2020; Campbell *et al.*, 2024; Marticotte *et al.*, 2016). This “critical advocacy” is theoretically distinct from the “brand forgiveness” studied by Mandl and Hogreve (2020), as video game players do not merely tolerate flaws but actively engage with them through mods, patches and community-driven fixes. These behaviours reflect how consumer behaviour patterns evolve within platform ecosystems characterised by strong community engagement and technical expertise (Campbell *et al.*, 2024; O'Reilly *et al.*, 2022).

3.2 Data collection

Data were collected from the brand communities of *Call of Duty* and *Battlefield* on the social media platform Reddit. These brand communities were strategically selected to enable examination of narrative-focused versus technical-focused advocacy orientations within video game contexts. The data collection period spanned from June 2023 to June 2024, ensuring a comprehensive capture of community interactions over a full annual cycle. The one-year data collection period was selected to ensure comprehensive coverage of community interactions and to account for seasonal variations in video game discussions. This timeframe aligns with established methodological practices in Reddit research (Hintz and Betts, 2022) and allows for the capture of complete annual cycles of brand community behaviour. Extended collection periods of one year are particularly important for video game brand communities, which often follow yearly release and update patterns, to ensure the data encompasses both regular community interactions and significant video game events (Gaffney and Matias, 2018). Furthermore, this duration helps mitigate temporal biases and provides sufficient data to identify consistent patterns in community engagement (Holec and Mack, 2020).

The data collection process involved systematically identifying and extracting advocacy-related content through a multi-step approach. Following established methodological approaches in Reddit research (Maxwell *et al.*, 2020; Park *et al.*, 2018), this research analysed user discussions to identify terms and expressions signifying positive game experiences and recommendations. This resulted in a comprehensive set of 22

advocacy-related phrases including: “best game”, “favourite/favourite game”, “must-play”, “highly addictive”, “can’t stop playing”, “game of the year”, “masterpiece”, “hidden gem”, “underrated game”, “exceeded expectations”, “worth the hype”, “worth every penny”, “lives up to the hype”, “blew me away”, “incredible experience”, “unforgettable”, “love this”, “made me fall in love with gaming again”, “deserves more recognition”, “spent countless hours playing”, “bought copies for friends” and “eagerly awaiting the next release”. It is important to note that in line with existing literature on online communities (Kumar and Nayak, 2019), the sample of this research captures comments from participants who actively post content, rather than the entire community membership. Brand advocacy inherently involves active, observable promotional behaviours that require visible participation. A community member who does not actively post does not engage in online brand advocacy.

The identified search phrases were then systematically applied to the two subreddits (r/COD and r/Battlefield). The resulting URLs from comments containing these phrases were archived for subsequent data extraction (see *Appendix* or a list of search result URL links – 1 – Supplementary Material). Data was collected from Reddit through its application programming interface, using the Python library Python Reddit Application Programming Interface Wrapper. Comments containing the phrase “best game” as well as additional phrases mentioned above were retrieved using a targeted query. It is important to note that in line with existing literature on online communities (Kokkodis *et al.*, 2020; Kumar and Nayak, 2019), the sample of this research captures comments from participants who actively post content, rather than the entire community membership. Brand advocacy inherently involves active, observable promotional behaviours that require visible participation. A community member, who does not actively post, does not engage in online brand advocacy.

The collected data was organised into a structured data frame using Python’s Pandas library (<https://pypi.org/project/pandas/>), providing a format suitable for analysis. The resulting data set comprised 6,952 comments from *Call of Duty* and 16,435 comments from *Battlefield*, which provided a substantial number of authentic advocacy expressions for computational analysis. The difference in comment volume between the two communities reflects organic variations in community engagement behaviours on Reddit during the data collection period, which provides insight into how different video game brand communities manifest advocacy behaviours.

The Battlefield subreddit (r/Battlefield) exhibited higher volumes of discourse containing the targeted search phrases, which may indicate differences in community size, posting frequency or the nature of discourse between the two brand communities. Importantly, this imbalance does not compromise the analytical validity of our findings, as:

- both data sets exceed minimum thresholds for robust computational text analysis (Wang *et al.*, 2024);
- our analytical approach examines proportional distributions of advocacy dimensions within each community, rather than absolute frequencies; and
- the comparative analysis focuses on identifying distinct advocacy orientations rather than direct quantitative comparisons between communities.

All data collection was conducted in compliance with Reddit's terms of service and Application Programming Interface usage guidelines, ensuring ethical research practices and data integrity. Care was taken to ensure ethical standards, with only publicly available data accessed and any user information excluded. The project also received ethics approval (7545) from the first author's institution.

3.3 Data analysis

The data analysis addresses three main objectives. Firstly, to develop a large language model-based *classifier* to discover advocacy dimensions through organic community discourse, rather than validating predetermined frameworks. Secondly, to map associations among advocacy dimensions to understand their interdependencies in video game brand communities. Thirdly, to conduct a dual-level linguistic examination (unigrams and bigrams) to identify the specific linguistic features driving brand advocacy classification. The following sections outline the methodology and the steps taken in this research to achieve these objectives, summarised in Figure 1.

3.3.1 Text classification

To address the first objective of data analysis, a text classifier was developed. Text classification refers to the process of assigning textual data to predefined categories (Deng *et al.*, 2019; Mironczuk and Protasiewicz, 2018). GPT-3.5 Turbo, a type of large language model, was used. Large language models are advanced AI systems trained on substantial amounts of text, which allows them to understand language patterns, context and meaning (Brown *et al.*, 2020).

To ensure accurate classification of domain-specific advocacy behaviours, supervised fine-tuning to address the limitation of general-purpose language models in recognising specialised constructs was used. Pre-trained transformer models require domain-specific calibration to accurately identify nuanced online brand advocacy dimensions within authentic brand community discourse (Devlin *et al.*, 2019; Rogers *et al.*, 2020). The fine-tuning methodology involved creating a curated training data set through systematic manual

annotation, where 20–40 exemplar comments were coded for each brand advocacy dimension, guided by Wilk *et al.*'s (2020) validated scale items and descriptors, ensuring theoretical consistency between the computational approach and established advocacy frameworks.

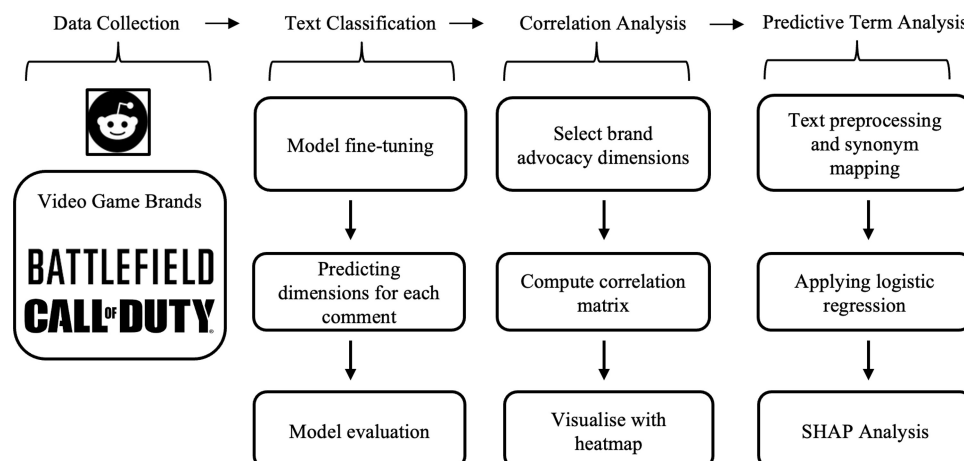
Next, the prompt was developed to instruct the model to “categorise the following text into the following dimensions using the corresponding descriptors and items”, followed by the full-scale details (see Table 1). This approach ensured that the model had robust, context-specific guidelines for classifying video game brand community comments into the six online brand advocacy dimensions.

After fine-tuning the model to predict online brand advocacy dimensions, its performance was evaluated through a manual annotation process, following the approach of Abedin *et al.* (2023). A random sample of 100 comments was selected, and two independent coders reviewed and assigned labels across the six predefined dimensions. The coders demonstrated high agreement, with discrepancies occurring in only three cases. To maintain consistency and reliability, these three comments were excluded, resulting in a final test set of 97 comments. Using this refined test set, the model's predictive performance was evaluated by running the fine-tuned version on the data set, while withholding the manually assigned labels. The model correctly classified 84 out of 97 comments in alignment with the human-coded labels, achieving 87% accuracy and demonstrating the effectiveness of the large language model fine-tuning approach for computational advocacy analysis.

3.3.2 Correlation analysis

To address the second analytical objective of mapping dimensional interdependencies, correlation analysis was conducted to reveal how advocacy dimensions naturally associate within passionate video game brand communities. The classification results for each comment were aggregated across the six dimensions of online brand advocacy. Using these data, pairwise correlations were computed to measure the strength and direction of associations between dimensions. To visualise these relationships, a heatmap was generated to

Figure 1 Workflow chart



Source: Authors' own work

Table 1 Brand advocacy dimensions, their descriptor and items as specifying prompts

Dimension	Descriptor	Items
Brand Positivity	Positive and favourable communication about a brand, endorsement of a brand	• Say positive things about the brand • Mention I am happy with its performance • Talk about the brand favourably • Say the brand is great • Express my fondness for the brand
Brand Defence	Proactive and reactive defence of a brand, standing up for a brand's best interests, providing backing for a brand, preserving a brand's good name and good will	• Defend the brand when others talk it down • Stand up for the brand when others talk negatively about it • Talk up the brand when others talk negatively about it • Defend the brand if I hear someone speaking poorly about it • Try to convince others to buy the brand • Talk about the good points of this brand
Virtual Positive Expression	Virtual visual manifestation in support of a brand, visual online expression and indication of feelings in favour of a brand	• Use emoticons or emojis, such as smileys or winks • Use smileys • Use visual symbols (e.g. emoticon, emoji, exclamation or capital lettering)
Brand Zest	Expressing conviction and enthusiasm for a brand, exceptional feeling for a brand based on brand experiences and the sharing of brand stories	• Express how excited I am to support the brand • Try to convince others to buy the brand • Feel a need to express my fondness for the brand
Brand Knowledge	Providing shrewd and relevant information about a brand, online astuteness about a brand's intricate details	• Provide details about upcoming promotions and available discounts for the brand • Provide extra details about the brand (e.g. price, store locations, availability of discounts or a link to a website) • Share information about available or upcoming promotions (discounts) for the brand • Provide lengthy explanations as to why the brand is better than other brands
Brand Appraisal	Providing honest brand comparisons and outlining distinct brand details, being honest and transparent about a brand's shortcomings	• Provide lengthy explanations as to why this brand is better than other brands • Discuss its good and not so good points • Provide a lot of information about the brand

Source(s): Authors' own work

provide an intuitive representation of correlation values through colour gradients. Strong positive correlations indicate that two dimensions frequently appear together in comments, whereas weak or negative correlations suggest limited or inverse relationships.

3.3.3 Predictive term analysis

To gain deeper insights into the patterns influencing the classification of online brand advocacy dimensions, this research used Shapley Additive Explanations analysis. Shapley Additive Explanations is a widely recognised interpretability method that explains machine learning predictions by showing how much each feature (i.e. in this research, individual words) contributes to the model's decision (Lundberg and Lee, 2017; Abedin *et al.*, 2024). It has been previously used in marketing research across various domains, including online purchase conversion prediction (Lee *et al.*, 2021), mobile payment behaviour analysis (Lee *et al.*, 2025), consumer video consumption patterns (Zhou *et al.*, 2021) and service quality assessment (Goktas and Dirsehan, 2025).

In this research, Shapley Additive Explanations provides transparency and highlights the most influential terms associated with each advocacy dimension. The analysis involved three stages. Firstly, text pre-processing and synonym mapping were conducted to ensure data consistency. This included removing stop words, URLs and user mentions; unifying words to their base form (e.g. "playing", "played" → "play"); and standardising synonyms and spelling variations (e.g. "recommend", "recommendation" → "recommend"). These steps minimised noise and improved the interpretability of the model.

Secondly, a logistic regression model was developed to identify term-level contributions across six advocacy dimensions (Abedin *et al.*, 2023). This ensures that distinctive words such as "recommend" or "defend" carry more influence than generic terms like "game" or "play". The term frequency-inverse document frequency matrix was then used to train the logistic regression model. The model predicts the likelihood that a comment reflects each of the six online brand advocacy dimensions: brand positivity, brand defence, virtual positive expression, brand zest, brand knowledge and brand appraisal. The primary objective of this step was to generate interpretable coefficients that, when combined with Shapley Additive Explanations analysis in the next step.

Finally, Shapley Additive Explanations values were computed to assess the influence of individual terms on model predictions. Analyses were performed at both unigram (single word) and bigram (two-word phrase) levels to capture context-dependent meaning. For example, "love" strongly supports brand positivity, while bigrams such as "sound design" provide richer contextual cues. Combining these analyses produced a comprehensive view of the linguistic features driving classification. The results are presented in the following section.

4. Findings

4.1 Text classification: results

This research's fine-tuned classifier revealed that all six advocacy dimensions naturally emerge from video game brand community discourse (see Table 2). It is important to note that individual comments could be classified into multiple online

Table 2 Distribution of online brand advocacy dimensions in *Call of Duty* and *Battlefield*

Online brand advocacy dimension	<i>Call of Duty</i> (<i>n</i> = 6,952)	<i>Battlefield</i> (<i>n</i> = 16,435)
Brand Defence	3,116 (45%)	8,562 (52%)
Brand Positivity	1,765 (25%)	5,292 (32%)
Brand Appraisal	1,493 (21%)	4,938 (30%)
Brand Zest	940 (14%)	2,711 (16%)
Virtual Positive Expression	658 (9%)	1,124 (7%)
Brand Knowledge	235 (3%)	1,068 (6%)

Source(s): Authors' own work

brand advocacy dimensions simultaneously, as they often contained elements reflecting different aspects of brand advocacy. The analysis demonstrates that each of the six online brand advocacy dimensions is present and significant across both *Call of Duty* and *Battlefield* brand communities, indicating the comprehensive nature of advocacy behaviours in video game contexts. While the distribution varies across all six dimensions, each contributes meaningfully to understanding online brand advocacy patterns.

Brand defence emerged as the most prevalent dimension (45% *Call of Duty* and 52% in *Battlefield*), with comments containing statements where consumers actively defended brand characteristics such as game mechanics, developer decisions and gameplay features against criticism. For example, “i will never forgive the cod community for hating the game so much that it will never get a continuation to the campaign. Genuinely pisses me off lol”. Brand positivity came second (25% *Call of Duty* and 32% *Battlefield*), where consumers expressed satisfaction and positive endorsements for the game brands. These included comments such as “After a long time I came back in BF 1 and now having fun, enjoying graphics and aesthetics”. Brand appraisal was third (21% *Call of Duty* and 30% *Battlefield*), characterised by detailed comparative analyses and balanced evaluations of game features. For example, “I personally loved ghosts, and I don’t understand all the hate behind It in my honest opinion It was the last good call of duty before they started messing things up and I have been playing Cod since the OG MW but I’m enjoying MW3”.

The dimensions removed (Wilk *et al.*, 2020) in the previous survey-based investigations, brand zest, virtual positive expression and brand knowledge, were exhibited in the findings of this research. Specifically, brand zest (14% *Call of Duty* and 16% *Battlefield*) was shown in comments such as “It’s one of the best immersive and memorable games”. Virtual positive expression (9% *Call of Duty* and 7% *Battlefield*) was shown in statements like “All of the artwork (and not to mention the music) from bfl is just on another level”. Finally, brand knowledge (3% *Call of Duty* and 6% *Battlefield*) was shown in comments such as “Bfv is rly fun imo, but you can’t go a match without a Japanese girl in Africa with an experimental American gun and tanks that have a turret rotation speed of 40 mph. But BF1 is even better and much more cinematic and more realistic explosions, better maps, better voice lines, and it’s just pitch perfect”. Brand Knowledge, though least frequent, provides technical credibility scaffolding that

supports Brand Appraisal and Brand Defence, indicating expertise sharing enables, rather than constitutes, advocacy.

The dominance of Brand Defence over Brand Positivity diverges from traditional models where positivity dominates (Wallace *et al.*, 2012), suggesting more experiential brand activate defensive, rather than promotional mechanisms, while the co-presence of Brand Appraisal with defence demonstrates that critical evaluation legitimises, rather than undermines advocacy, in expert communities (Burgess and Jones, 2023).

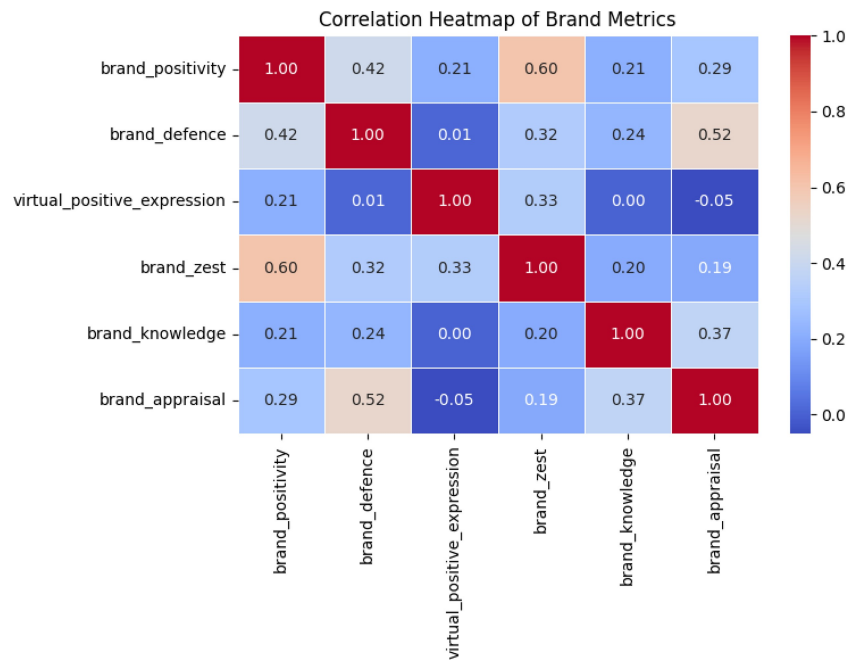
4.2 Correlation analysis: results

To examine dimensional interdependencies, pairwise correlations were computed to reveal how advocacy dimensions naturally cluster in video game brand communities, as shown in Figure 2 for *Battlefield* and Figure 3 for *Call of Duty*. The correlation analysis reveals distinct patterns of dimensional interdependencies that illuminate the underlying structure of brand advocacy in video game brand communities. Across both brands, Brand Positivity demonstrates the strongest associations with other dimensions, exhibiting particularly robust correlations with Brand Zest ($r = 0.60$ for *Battlefield*, $r = 0.62$ for *Call of Duty*) and brand defence ($r = 0.42$ for *Battlefield*, $r = 0.38$ for *Call of Duty*). The strong Brand Positivity–Brand Zest correlation ($r = 0.60$ – 0.62) suggests different intensity levels of the same affective pathway, yet remains below multicollinearity thresholds ($r < 0.70$), justifying Brand Zest’s theoretical retention, despite Wilk *et al.*’s (2020) elimination for redundancy.

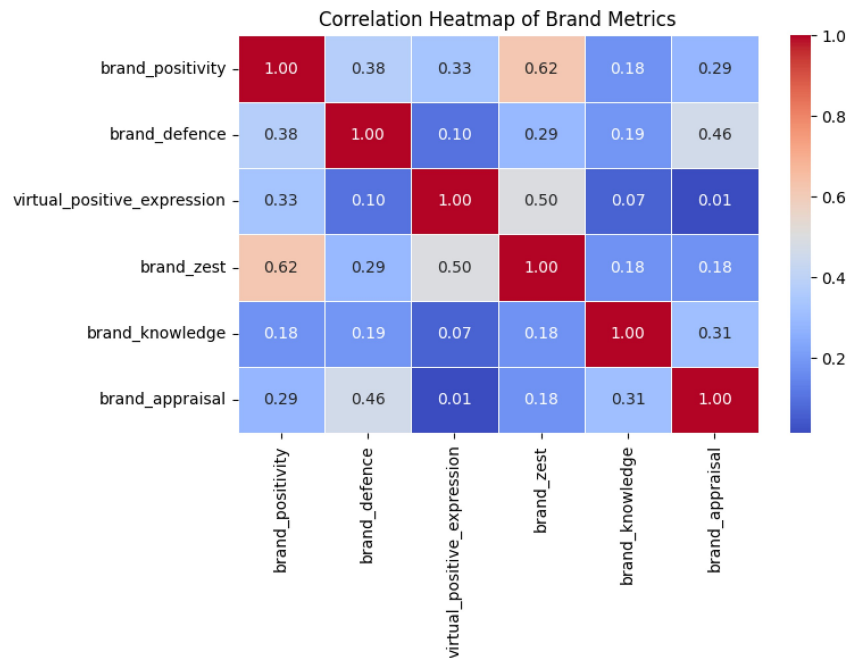
Brand Defence shows notable correlations with Brand Appraisal across both communities ($r = 0.52$, *Battlefield*; $r = 0.46$, *Call of Duty*), suggesting that defensive advocacy often involves comparative evaluations and detailed assessments of brand attributes. This co-occurrence provides empirical evidence for critical advocacy, where defensive advocacy requires rational justification, creating integrated cognitive-affective processes distinguishing video game playing from low-involvement contexts (Colliander and Dahlén, 2011; Ahmadi and Ataei, 2024).

Virtual Positive Expression exhibits interesting divergent patterns between the two video game brand communities. In the *Call of Duty* brand community, this dimension shows stronger associations with Brand Zest ($r = 0.50$) and Brand Positivity ($r = 0.33$), suggesting that visual expressions of support align closely with enthusiasm and positive sentiment. Conversely, in the *Battlefield* community, Virtual Positive Expression demonstrates weaker correlations across all dimensions, with the strongest relationship being with Brand Zest ($r = 0.33$), indicating a more independent expression pattern within this community. This divergence suggests medium-specific advocacy is moderated by community orientation: visual expression extends affective advocacy in narrative-focused communities but serves informational functions in technical-focused ones.

Brand Knowledge demonstrates moderate correlations with Brand Appraisal in both brand communities ($r = 0.37$, *Battlefield*; $r = 0.31$, *Call of Duty*), suggesting that information sharing behaviours naturally align with evaluative discussions. This relationship indicates that knowledgeable community members often engage in comparative analyses, leveraging their expertise to provide comprehensive brand assessments (Marticotte *et al.*, 2016).

Figure 2 Correlation heatmap, *Battlefield*

Source: Authors' own work

Figure 3 Correlation heatmap, *Call of Duty*

Source: Authors' own work

4.3 Predictive terms analysis: Results

The Shapley Additive Explanations analysis conducted on both the *Battlefield* and *Call of Duty* brand community comments provides a detailed examination of how different terms influence six distinct brand-related dimensions. It reveals

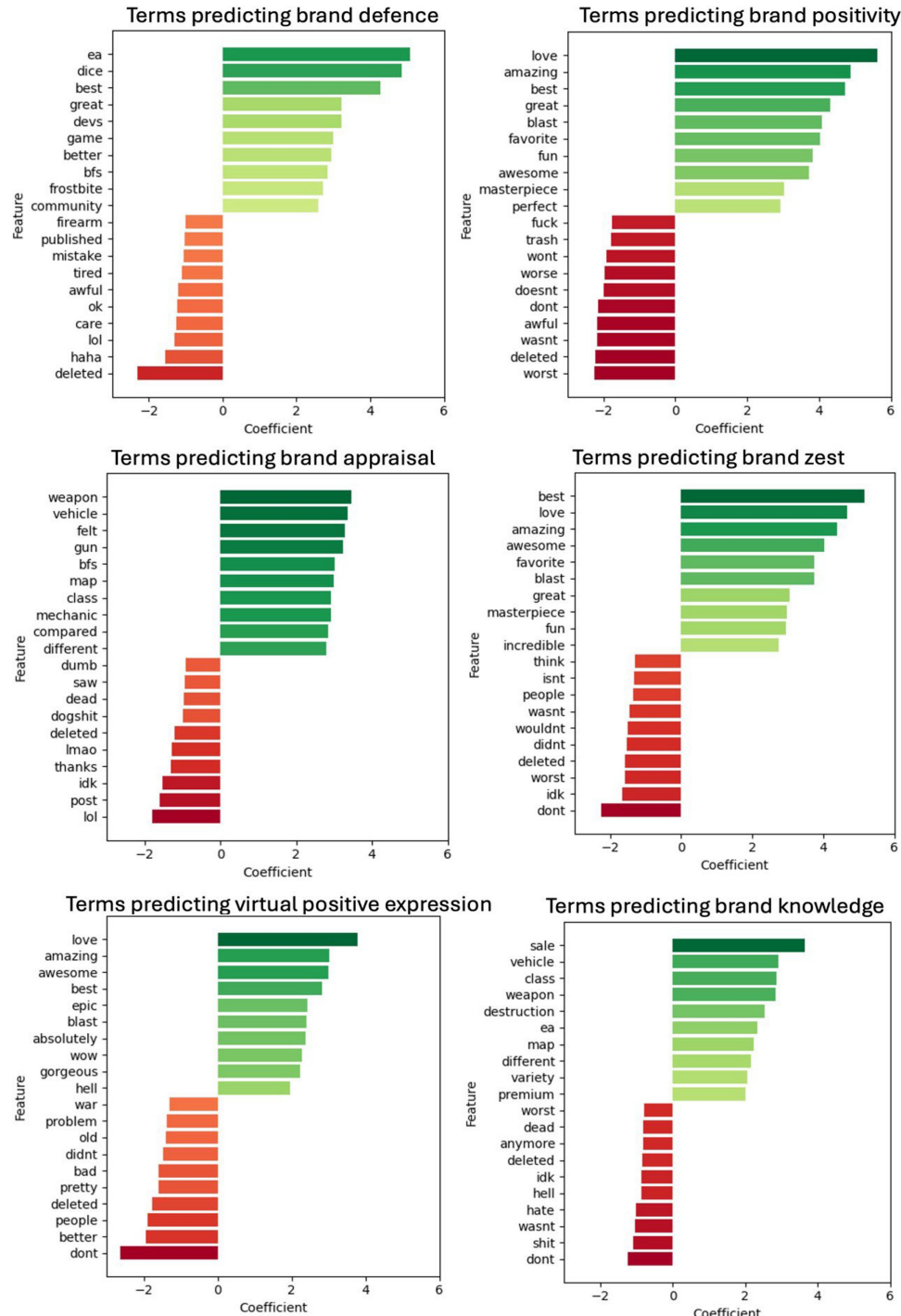
advocacy characterised by authentic, experience-based discourse, rather than promotional language, with the absence of commercial terms indicating identity construction functions, rather than persuasion objectives (Kim *et al.*, 2023; Dessart *et al.*, 2015). Through this analysis, this research can observe

which words and phrases most strongly predict various dimensions of online brand advocacy. The visualisations (Figures 4 and 5, for unigrams and Figures 6 and 7 for bigrams) present the Shapley Additive Explanations analysis-based predictive terms analysis results. Each figure presents these relationships through colour-coded bars, where green indicates

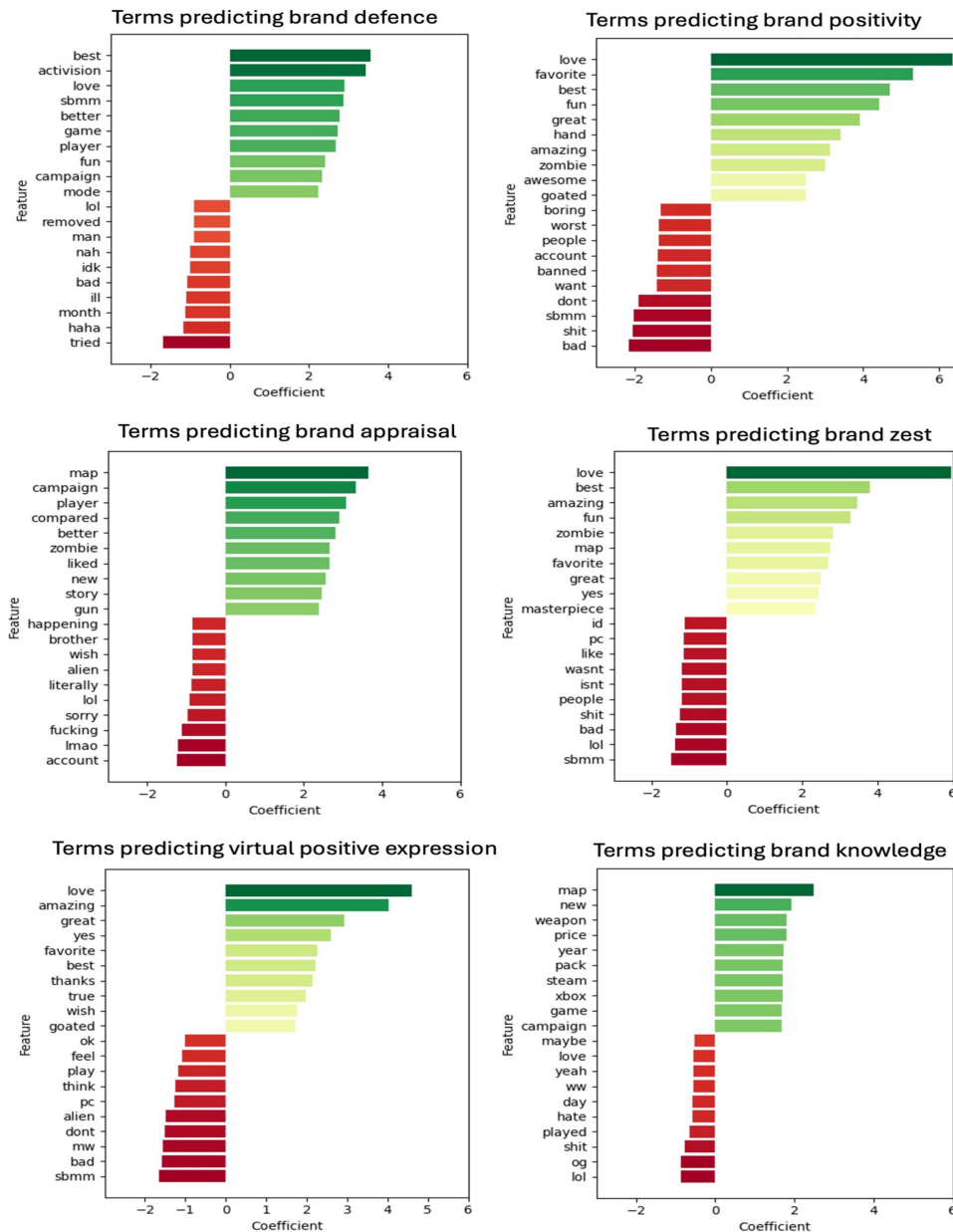
the top ten most positive contributions and red shows the top ten most negative influences, with the length of each bar representing the magnitude of the term's impact on the prediction.

The analysis reveals several patterns across both video game brand communities, while also highlighting key differences in

Figure 4 Shapley Additive Explanations analysis for *Battlefield* (unigram)



Source: Authors' own work

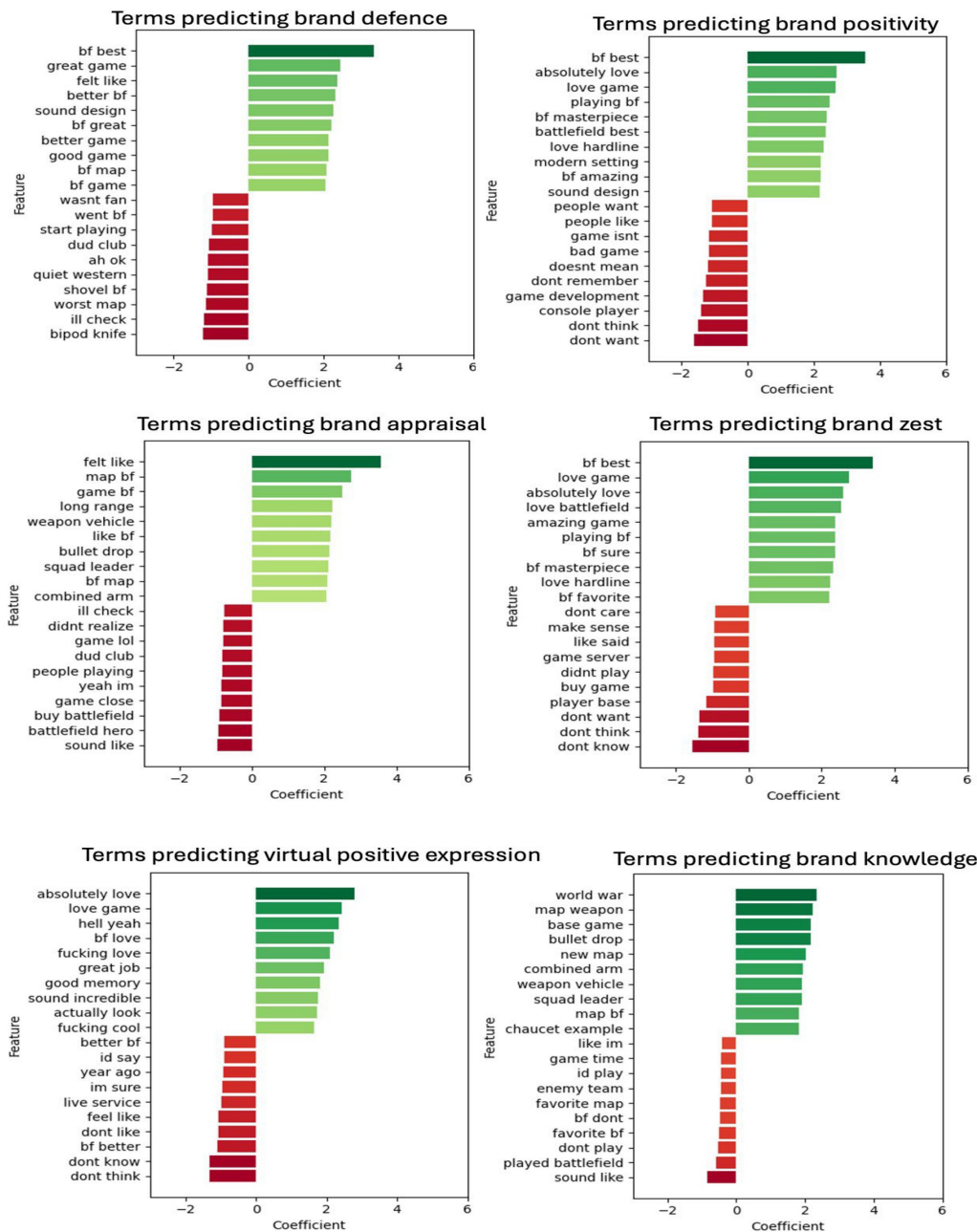
Figure 5 Shapley Additive Explanations analysis for *Call of Duty* (unigram)

Source: Authors' own work

how consumers engage with each brand franchise. The integration of unigram and bigram analysis provides a comprehensive view of both individual term impacts and contextual phrase influences on brand advocacy dimensions.

Both video game brands share common emotional expressions, with “love” consistently emerging as the strongest brand positivity predictor at both unigram and bigram levels, accompanied by terms like “amazing” and “best”. The bigram analysis reveals more nuanced emotional expressions, with phrases such as “absolutely love” and “favourite game” demonstrating intensified emotional connections. This prominence of love-related expressions aligns with the intense

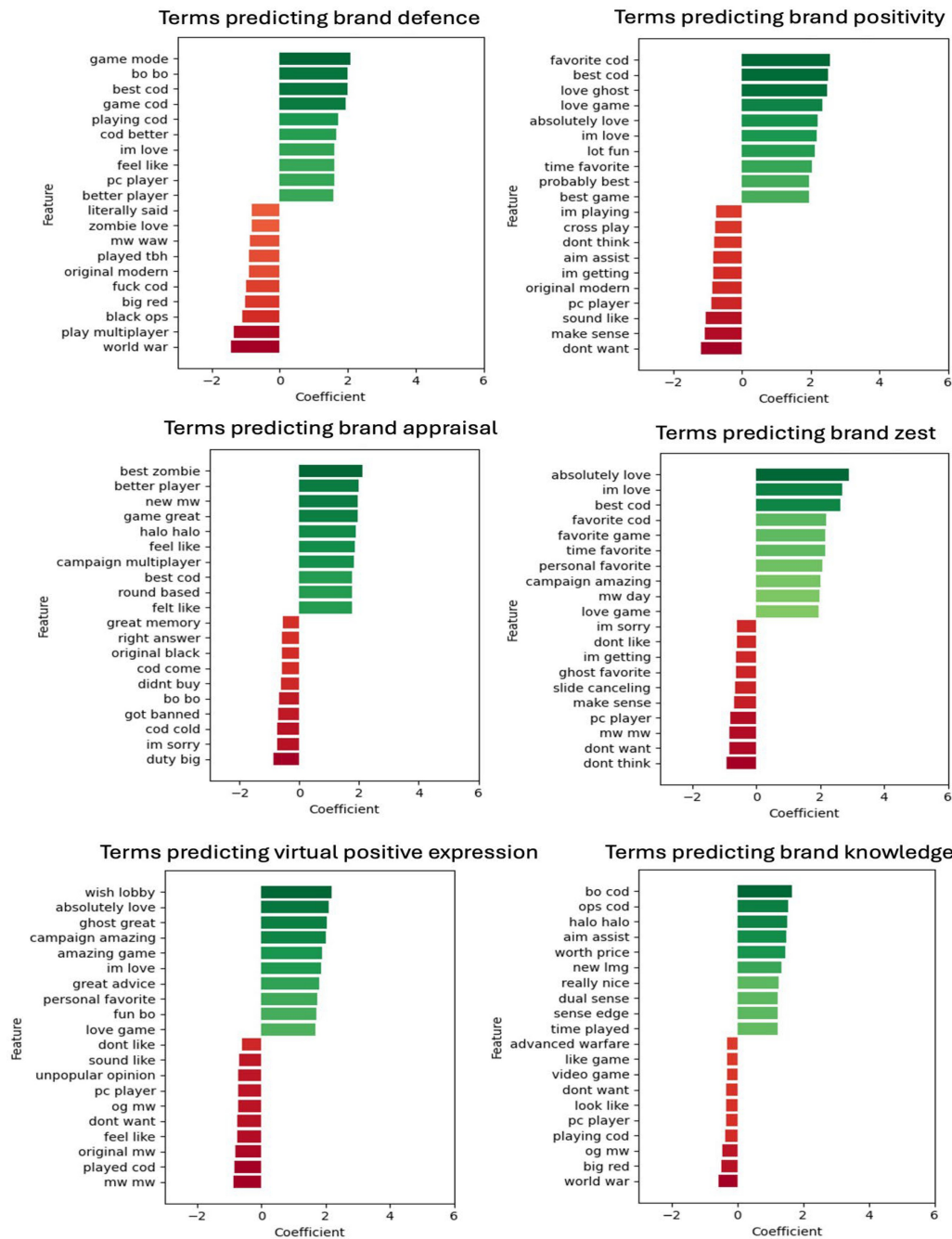
emotional connections typical of video game brand communities, where consumers develop deep personal attachments to their preferred games through countless hours of immersive experiences (Burgess and Jones, 2020). For *Call of Duty*, bigrams like “love game” and “best cod” demonstrate brand-specific emotional attachment, while *Battlefield* shows similar patterns with “bf best” and “love battlefield”, indicating that emotional advocacy naturally incorporates brand identifiers. Across both video game brands, results suggest player advocacy operates at higher arousal levels than traditional contexts, explaining why Brand Zest (eliminated in general retail) remains theoretically meaningful (Ahmadi and Ataei, 2024).

Figure 6 Shapley Additive Explanations analysis for *Battlefield* (bigram)

Source: Authors' own work

The technical focus of each brand community differs significantly across both analytical levels. *Call of Duty*'s significant terms emphasise narrative elements and social features, with unigrams like "campaign", "zombie" and "story" complemented by bigrams such as "campaign multiplayer" and "zombie mode". This pattern suggests that *Call of Duty* advocacy centres around diverse gameplay experiences and narrative content. Conversely, *Battlefield*'s influential terms centre heavily on mechanical and technical aspects, with unigrams like "vehicle", "weapon" and "destruction" expanded through bigrams such as "weapon vehicle",

"combined arm" and "bullet drop". These technical bigrams reveal the sophisticated mechanical discussions that characterise *Battlefield* community advocacy, emphasising tactical and realistic warfare elements. These divergent vocabularies across the two video game brands provide empirical evidence for dual-pathway advocacy, revealing that narrative immersion versus technical mastery produce comparable intensity through different psychological mechanisms, extending social identity theory to show identity formation can be emotionally or intellectually driven (Hogg, 2016).

Figure 7 Shapley Additive Explanations analysis for *Call of Duty* (bigram)

Source: Authors' own work

Brand Defence patterns diverge meaningfully between the two brand communities, with distinct characteristics emerging through bigram analysis. *Call of Duty*'s defence focuses on gameplay elements and corporate brand relationships, with unigrams like "Activision" and "sbmm" (skill-based matchmaking) supplemented by defensive bigrams such as "best cod". This suggests that *Call of Duty* defence often involves justifying controversial game mechanics and corporate brand decisions. *Battlefield*'s defence revolves around developer-related

terms, with unigrams "ea", "dice" and "devs" expanded through bigrams like "bf best", "battlefield best" and "love hardline". These patterns indicate that *Battlefield* defence frequently involves protecting specific game iterations and the developer creative decisions. Defensive bigrams function as comparative superiority claims that simultaneously promote in-group and disparage rivals, consistent with social identity theory's out-group disparagement (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Marticotte et al., 2016).

The Brand Knowledge dimension reveals sophisticated brand community expertise through both analytical levels. *Battlefield* knowledge terms demonstrate technical proficiency with unigrams like “map”, “weapon” and “vehicle”, contextualised through bigrams such as “world war”, “weapon vehicle” and “combined arm”. This suggests knowledge sharing focuses on historical accuracy and tactical realism. *Call of Duty* knowledge patterns emphasise game mechanics and competitive elements, with unigrams like “map” and “campaign” supported by bigrams such as “ops cod” and “advanced warfare”, indicating knowledge discussions centre around brand franchise evolution and competitive gameplay strategies.

Notably, across both unigram and bigram analyses, there is an absence of explicit “selling” or promotional language, a pattern that makes sense given these communities comprise primarily dedicated consumers, who are more interested in sharing experiences with fellow enthusiasts than converting new consumers. The bigram analysis particularly reinforces this authenticity, revealing organic expressions like “absolutely love”, “great memory” and “feel like” that demonstrate genuine personal investment, rather than commercial advocacy.

5. Discussion and theoretical contributions

The findings of this research challenge existing theoretical frameworks for understanding online brand advocacy in brand communities in three ways. Namely, that advocacy dimensional structure is context-dependent; advocacy operates through integrated cognitive-affective pathways where critique and defence coexist; and equivalent advocacy intensity emerges through different mechanisms (narrative versus technical) (Burgess and Jones, 2020; Wilk et al., 2020). The consistent hierarchical ordering, with Brand Defence as the primary expression, indicates that passionate communities operate through different motivational structures than conventional consumer contexts, where positive expression typically dominates advocacy behaviours (Wallace et al., 2012).

The emergence of all six advocacy dimensions from authentic community discourse represents a methodological critique of structured survey approaches that have dominated advocacy research (Suban, 2025). Previous dimensional reduction through survey validation appears to have constrained the advocacy construct, missing critical expressions that naturally manifest in video game brand communities (Wilk et al., 2020). This suggests that brand advocacy measurement requires context-sensitive approaches that allow for organic dimensional emergence, rather than imposing predetermined frameworks developed in different consumer contexts. In other words, dimensions appearing redundant in surveys may be functionally distinct in organic behaviour, as consumers blend (or minimally imply) related dimensions when introspecting, but they express them explicitly and distinctly when advocating naturally (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). These implications extend beyond video game communities to any brand context characterised by passionate engagement, suggesting that advocacy research may need methodological reconsideration (Campbell et al., 2024).

The synergistic nature of advocacy relationships revealed through correlation analysis challenges assumptions about advocacy as a collection of discrete behaviours (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Instead, the findings suggest advocacy operates as an integrated system where different expressions mutually reinforce each other, creating compound effects that amplify overall brand support intensity (Sweeney et al., 2020). This systemic understanding has implications for how brands approach community engagement, suggesting that fostering any single advocacy dimension may naturally strengthen others through cascading effects.

The differences between communities, with *Battlefield* showing more analytical defensive patterns and *Call of Duty* demonstrating more expressive emotional advocacy, indicate that while the fundamental advocacy concept remains universal, brand community characteristics create meaningful variations in how these dimensions manifest and interrelate (Burgess and Jones, 2020). The co-occurrence patterns also suggest integrated advocacy where Knowledge enables Appraisal (credibility), and Positivity amplifies Zest (emotional foundation), reflecting deepening identity integration, from expertise, to evaluation, to attachment, to passion and to defence (Tajfel and Turner, 1979).

The narrative versus technical advocacy in the *Call of Duty* and *Battlefield* online brand communities suggests that advocacy research must move beyond universal models towards context-specific frameworks that account for how different brand attributes create distinct advocacy pathways (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). The technical-focused advocacy in the *Battlefield* brand community, emphasising mechanical complexity and tactical realism, operates through different cognitive and emotional routes than the narrative-focused advocacy in *Call of Duty*, which centres on storytelling and social experiences. This dual-pathway model demonstrates identity formation can be affectively (narrative) or cognitively (technical) driven, both producing equivalent intensity, challenging assumptions that emotional attachment is the primary driver and suggesting brands can cultivate advocacy through multiple routes (Ahmadi and Ataei, 2024).

The results suggest effective advocacy cultivation requires alignment with each community’s natural expression patterns, rather than applying generic advocacy strategies (Sweeney et al., 2020; Schau et al., 2009). Moreover, the absence of commercial language across both communities reveals the authentic nature of passionate community advocacy, distinguishing it from incentivised or orchestrated brand promotion (Ahmadi and Ataei, 2024; Kozinets et al., 2010). This authenticity suggests that video game brand communities represent environments where tribal, identity-driven behaviours can be observed organically through the lens of social identity theory, with advocacy emerging from genuine community alignment, rather than external motivations (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). This, more specifically, suggests advocacy operates as a form of community bonding and tribal enhancement, rather than persuasion, where consumers express their group affiliation, rather than merely attempting to influence others (Tajfel and Turner, 1979).

This research makes four theoretical contributions that advance online brand advocacy literature and establish video

game brand communities as a unique context for understanding online brand advocacy. Firstly, drawing on social identity theory as an interpretive framework, this research demonstrates how video game brand communities develop distinct advocacy orientations, narrative-focused versus technical-focused, that reflect different pathways to tribal and passionate engagement. While existing applications of this framework often assume homogeneous group processes (Hogg, 2016; Hogg and Terry, 2000), the observed patterns suggest that online community characteristics shape how tribal advocacy expressions manifest, with authentic peer discourse creating distinct community markers compared to business firm-orchestrated advocacy mechanisms (Burgess and Jones, 2023; Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). These findings illustrate how social identity theory can help explain the tribal nature of brand advocacy behaviours in passionate online communities.

Secondly, although previous research has validated Wilk *et al.*'s (2020) framework across service industries and tourism contexts (Wilk *et al.*, 2024; Xie *et al.*, 2019), this research reveals how all six advocacy dimensions naturally emerge from organic video game brand community discourse. Thus, survey-based dimensional reduction is challenged as passionate communities express advocacy complexity that self-administered quantitative instruments may overlook. New knowledge has been uncovered by showing that advocacy architecture derived from survey validation may underestimate the full spectrum of online brand advocacy behaviours in high-engagement contexts (Fritz *et al.*, 2017).

Thirdly, this research establishes online video game brand communities as a theoretically distinct advocacy environment where narrative immersion, technical expertise and passionate engagement converge to create advocacy patterns that are different from traditional consumer contexts. While previous research has shown the importance of emotional bonds in brand experiences (George and Ranjith, 2024; Hwang and Kandampully, 2012; Joshi and Garg, 2021), the findings reveal that online video game brand communities exhibit unique advocacy orientations. Technical mastery and narrative immersion are two that both generate intense emotional connections through different cognitive routes, demonstrating that different forms of expertise can produce equivalent advocacy intensity (Burgess and Jones, 2020; Sjöblom and Hamari, 2017).

Fourthly, while previous literature has emphasised explicit promotional behaviours in online environments (Bodhi *et al.*, 2024; Confetto *et al.*, 2023; Geia *et al.*, 2017), the findings challenge traditional advocacy conceptualisation by revealing that online video game brand communities develop sophisticated advocacy vocabularies that transcend promotional discourse. This research demonstrates that advocacy in these contexts serves identity construction, enhancement and community belonging functions, rather than persuasion objectives, representing a theoretical distinction in advocacy motivation and expression (Ahmadi and Ataei, 2024; Dessart *et al.*, 2015) that advances advocacy theory beyond online video game contexts to any brands characterised by deep emotional engagement and expert consumer communities (Burgess and Jones, 2023; Letizi and Norman, 2023). This multifunctionality (i.e. identity construction, status

differentiation, emotional expression and community maintenance) distinguishes video game player brand advocacy from traditional persuasion-focused advocacy, requiring frameworks accounting for functional complexity (Dessart *et al.*, 2015).

This research also represents a significant methodological advancement through the large language model-enhanced analyses that enable the discovery of online brand advocacy dimensions from large-scale authentic discourse, moving beyond survey-based validation towards computational advocacy architecture discovery. The linguistic analysis reveals distinct brand advocacy expression patterns that transcend individual brands (Dogaru *et al.*, 2024; Powell and Roberts, 2017). This approach demonstrates how computational analysis can capture the seamless integration of emotional and cognitive advocacy responses within online video game brand communities, revealing advocacy complexity that traditional dimensional reduction approaches miss (Burgess and Jones, 2020; Gao and Shen, 2024). The analyses identify distinct advocacy vocabularies that serve as cultural identity markers, extending analysis beyond simple engagement metrics to uncover context-specific advocacy manifestations that survey methods cannot capture, while advancing transparency and explainability in computational brand research (Shi *et al.*, 2024; Wang *et al.*, 2024).

6. Managerial contributions

The findings of this research provide actionable insights that can reconceptualise brand community engagement strategies in the video game brand industry. Firstly, managers may recognise that authentic brand advocacy manifests through organic peer discourse, rather than promotional activities and requires a shift from promotional marketing towards community facilitation strategies that enable natural advocacy expression through technical discussions and narrative appreciation. Recent research confirms that video game brands must prioritise authentic consumer communication over traditional promotional tactics to maintain brand credibility and engagement (Hamilton *et al.*, 2014), which suggests developing platforms that facilitate genuine experience sharing, rather than marketing message amplification, as brand community-driven authenticity directly impacts brand loyalty and long-term revenue generation (Ahmadi and Ataei, 2024; Morhart *et al.*, 2015). Managers should reconceptualise advocacy metrics beyond promotional activity to include identity expression indicators, recognising critique and defence indicate attachment rather than threats.

Secondly, the identification of distinct advocacy orientations, technical versus narrative focus, provides strategic guidance for brand community segmentation and engagement customisation. Managers may develop dual-track community strategies that simultaneously support technical expertise sharing and narrative experience discussion, recognising that both generate equivalent advocacy intensity through different cognitive and emotional routes. Contemporary video game marketing strategies emphasise the importance of tailored engagement approaches that align with specific community preferences and video game genres (Burgess and Jones, 2023). For technically focused games, this means facilitating detailed

discussions about game mechanics and features, while narrative-driven games should encourage story-focused conversations and character experiences, with both approaches promising positive brand outcomes through increased player retention and advocacy behaviours. Brands should audit communities to identify dominant orientations, then align content accordingly, as equivalent intensity can be achieved through different pathways.

Thirdly, the co-occurrence patterns observed between Brand Defence and Brand Appraisal, and between Brand Positivity and Brand Zest, suggest that evaluative depth and emotional enthusiasm reinforce, rather than compete with one another, in advocacy discourse. Traditional assumptions are that critical evaluation undermines brand loyalty (Luo and Homburg, 2007), but instead, thoughtful appraisal can coexist with protective defence within the same advocacy framework. Managers should therefore view balanced critique as compatible with brand advocacy, rather than as a threat to community cohesion, and foster environments where players can express both appreciation and constructive criticism to strengthen brand commitment. Brands should foster constructively critical norms where balanced evaluation is encouraged alongside defence, as suppressing criticism may weaken advocacy by eliminating the appraisal dimension, legitimising defensive behaviours.

Fourthly, the relatively low frequency but consistent presence of Brand Knowledge indicates that expertise sharing, while not dominant, serves an important scaffolding function within broader advocacy discourse. These contributions appear to provide credibility and depth to other advocacy dimensions, particularly appraisal, by supplying concrete details and contextual information. While managers should not expect all community members to engage in technical expertise sharing, creating occasional opportunities for knowledgeable players to contribute detailed insights may enhance the overall quality and persuasiveness of community advocacy.

7. Limitations and directions for future research

This research acknowledges several limitations that provide opportunities for future research directions. Firstly, this research is constrained by its focus on two specific video game brand franchises, *Call of Duty* and *Battlefield*, within the first-person shooter genre, which limits the generalisability of findings to other online video game brands and/or entertainment contexts. Future research should examine advocacy dynamics across diverse online video game brand and/or entertainment genres to determine whether the narrative-focused versus technical-focused advocacy orientations identified in this research represent universal patterns or are specific to competitive video game contexts.

Secondly, the data collection methodology, while comprehensive in scope, relied exclusively on Reddit as the platform for community discourse analysis. Video game brand communities exist across multiple platforms, including Discord, Twitter, Steam forums and dedicated websites, each with distinct norms and consumer demographics that may influence brand advocacy expression patterns. The linguistic analysis and dimensional relationships discovered through Reddit discourse may not fully capture advocacy behaviours as

they manifest across different online platforms, particularly those emphasising real-time communication or visual content sharing. Future studies should adopt multi-platform approaches to validate advocacy dimensions across diverse online environments and examine how platform characteristics influence advocacy expression. Comparative studies across high-involvement contexts (automotive, luxury and technology) would test whether narrative versus technical orientations are universal or video game-playing specific.

Thirdly, the temporal scope of data collection, spanning one year from June 2023 to June 2024, may not capture long-term advocacy evolution or the impact of significant industry events on community discourse. Future longitudinal research should examine how advocacy dimensions evolve over extended periods and respond to external events, providing insights into the stability and adaptability of advocacy frameworks in dynamic entertainment contexts. Additionally, future research should explore the causal mechanisms underlying the dimensional relationships identified in this research, particularly investigating whether certain advocacy dimensions serve as precursors to others or whether they develop simultaneously through shared community experiences. Longitudinal studies could test whether the hierarchical model (knowledge → appraisal → positivity → zest → defence) is universal, while experiments could test whether targeting foundational dimensions cascades into higher-order ones. Fourthly, because this study relies on scraped observational textual data, it does not directly measure the psychological constructs of social identity or users' internalised relationships with the community. Future research should use mixed methods, combining computational approaches with traditional survey-based research or interviews, to robustly measure the direct relationship between community social identity and the advocacy dimensions identified in this study.

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Supplementary material

The supplementary material for this article can be found online.

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