



## Does the Purpose of Using Social Media Platforms Affect Relations between Consumers and Brand?

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Keywords: Social media, media systems dependency, psychological sense of community

**Introduction.** The prevalent adoption of social media platforms (SMP) among consumers has attracted increasing attention from consumer researchers and marketers. Using web 2.0 technology, highly interactive SMPs enable users to create, share, discuss, and modify user-generated content (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Due to its democratic nature, SMPs have been serving as an agent for consumer socialization (eMarketer, 2013) and empowerment (Heinonen, 2011). In this regard, more than 90% of marketers have adopted SMPs and majority of them reported the effectiveness of the marketing activities via SMPs on the business (Stelzner, 2016). For example, Burberry reached a total of nearly 40 million followers via 20 different SMPs. A research by Frontline, a marketing firm, revealed that close to 90 percent of the 400 U.S. women used SMPs to seek opinions, reviews/recommendations, and advice before finalizing purchase decisions (Duran, 2016). In the context of fashion, user-generated contents via SMPs over the company's promotional messages has been considered as a critical tool to nurture consumers' trust on products as well as building positive relationship among the users (Marwich, 2015; Newman, 2016; Strugatz, 2016). Despite the impact of social media marketing on fashion businesses, little effort has been devoted to understand why consumers visit a specific brand SMPs and how their different purposes impact on cognitive and affective responses toward brand. To fill this gap, we propose and examine the types of motivations among SMP users and their impact on the users' dispositions toward the use of SMPs such as attachment toward the fashion brand featured on the SMPs (hereafter brand attachment), and one's relational proximity to brand (i.e., self-identity), based on the Media System Dependency (MSD) theory as a theoretical foundation.

**Theoretical Underpinning and Hypotheses Development.** MSD theory postulates that individual users/consumers of a medium may possess a wide range of goals in using such medium: 1) understanding of self and others, 2) orientation of oneself which depicts interaction and action in the social setting (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989), and 3) entertainment purpose that includes social and solitary play (Loges, 1994; Patwardhand & Yang, 2003). In the context of fashion brand SMPs, consumer may possess various reasons/goals of following a certain fashion brand (de Vries, Arefin, & Moscato, 2014). In this regard, current literature provides empirical support.

According to Whiting and Williams (2013), social interaction, information seeking, relaxation, communicatory utility, expression of opinions, information sharing are identified to explain reasons why consumers use and like SMPs. Similarly, Bernoff and Li (2008) concluded that consumers' level of brand related activities in SMPs can be categorized based on the purpose such as consumption, contribution, and creation of contents. Depending on motivations, consumers are likely to have different purposes of using SMPs, so does the relationship building (Shao, 2009). Muntinga, Moorman, and Smit (2011) also demonstrate that consumers' brand related behaviors are driven by distinct motivations such as personal identity, social interaction, and entertainment. Given that today's consumers perceive a brand as an extended self (Belk, 1988) and an active relationship partner (Fournier, 1999), a brand can represent one's image/personality to others. Thus, people tend to contribute to brand-related activity to gain self-assurance. Similar to personal identification, consumers' strong desire for sense of belonging may lead them to contribute to the brand-related social media activity (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Lastly, entertainment which denotes enjoyment and relaxation motivations indicates that people with high

enjoyment and relaxation are likely to share more in the SMPs (Muntinga et al., 2011). Therefore, we propose that there are various purposes/goals of using SMPs for a fashion brand among users.

Determined by an individual's motivation, personality, attitudes, and participation in community, *Psychological Sense of Community* (PSOC) construct highlights the importance of feeling of belonging as to create positive attitudinal and behavioral outcomes in community (Sarason, 1974). PSOC is found to encourage consumers' voluntary engagement and sharing of personal stories in brand community (Blanchard, 2008). Since the purpose and types of participation in SMPs can vary from information seeking to relaxation, the consumers with strong motivations/goals of using SMPs are expected to encourage active participation and positive feelings toward them, which in turn developing positive brand attachment (i.e., self-identity) and PSOC. Thus, the following hypotheses are developed: H<sub>1</sub>: Goals/purposes of using SMPs are different among SMP users; H<sub>2a-b</sub>: There are significant differences in (a) brand attachment and (b) psychological sense of community depending on the (high vs. low) levels of the motivations using SMPs.

**Method.** Data were collected through an online survey administered through Amazon Mechanical Turk. The online survey consisted of a Likert-scale to measure followings: MSD scale (Patwardhand & Yang, 2003), brand attachment (Park, Maclnnis, & Iacobucci, 2010), and PSOC (Buckner, 1988). Questions regarding social media related activity (e.g., frequency, product categories, list brands that the participants feel connected) as well as demographic information were also included in the survey. SPSS 21.0 was used to perform descriptive statistics, reliability tests, Principal Component Analysis (PCA), and independent sample *t*-tests. A total of 389 responses were collected. After excluding incomplete responses, a total of 277 usable responses were retained. Respondents' ages were ranged between 21 and 76 (mean age of 35.9); more than three quarters identified themselves as Whites/Caucasian Americans; more than a half of them were males.

**Findings.** Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for all constructs ranged from .88 to .94 demonstrating good reliability. The results of PCA on the goals/purposes of SMP uses yielded three distinctive factors – *knowledge seeking*, *relaxation seeking*, and *communication* - explaining 68.86% of the total variance, which confirmed H<sub>1</sub>. To test H<sub>2</sub>, for each factor was summated and s recoded into high vs. low based on the mean score. The levels of all three factors (i.e., knowledge seeking, relaxation seeking, community communications) resulted in statistically significantly different mean scores of PSOC (Mean  $_{\text{knowledge\_high}} = 4.72$ , Mean  $_{\text{knowledge\_low}} = 5.21$ ,  $t(275) = 4.16$ ; Mean  $_{\text{relaxation\_high}} = 4.75$ , Mean  $_{\text{relaxation\_low}} = 5.21$ ,  $t(275) = 3.99$ ; Mean  $_{\text{communication\_high}} = 5.17$ , Mean  $_{\text{communication\_low}} = 4.76$ ,  $t(275) = 3.39$ ). Moreover, the levels of all three factors resulted in statistically significantly different mean scores of brand attachment (Mean  $_{\text{knowledge\_high}} = 4.00$ , Mean  $_{\text{knowledge\_low}} = 4.78$ ,  $t(271) = 3.94$ ; Mean  $_{\text{relaxation\_high}} = 4.73$ , Mean  $_{\text{relaxation\_low}} = 4.08$ ,  $t(271) = 3.17$ ; Mean  $_{\text{communication\_high}} = 3.99$ , Mean  $_{\text{communication\_low}} = 4.76$ ,  $t(271) = 3.78$ ). Therefore, H<sub>2</sub> was fully supported.

**Discussion and Implications.** The results of this study confirm that MSD theory is appropriate to predict various motivations that SMP users in relation to the fashion brands of their choices. Thus, the marketers should understand differences among SMP users and provide appropriate contents and activities to contribute to the content generation. Regarding the mean differences in brand attachment and POSC among different levels of the goals seeking while using SMPs, the results was supported, suggesting people who are highly immersed and involved in social media platforms tend to develop positive affective consequences. In other words, without thinking of purpose of using SMPs, the consumers with highly goal orientations create feeling of closeness to the platform as well as brand that is discussed within SMPs. Findings of this study shed lights on the marketing literature and provide the implications to the practitioners by presenting importance of providing accepting, comforting, and supporting environment in social media platforms where the consumers feel a sense of belonging and closeness to the brand.

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