

The Sociological Antecedents of Brand Attachment: A comparison of Broadcasting and Passive Consumption on Social Networking Sites

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상표 애착의 사회적 선행변수에 대한 연구

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Abstract In this study, the authors examine the ways in which social media ultimately affects the attachment of individuals to their favorite brands. Through an analysis of data using multiple linear regression, this study finds that SNS (social networking site) users that post status updates for a wide audience have no bearing on the individual's use of socialization agents. Those who consume social news passively are, however, likely to depend on socialization agents for determining their final purchase decisions. Socialization agents, both personal and non-personal, also play a role in the formation of brand attachment among individuals who depend on these social sources. Based on these results, marketers are encouraged to establish an online footprint of a social nature to formulate brand awareness and to provide a means for users of social media to improve their brand attachments to their favored brands. As this research was conducted exclusively in the predominantly collective culture of South Korea, further studies could attempt to analyze social networking use and socialization agent use via a cross-culture study, particularly one including an individualistic culture.

Key Words : Social networking sites (SNSs), Broadcasting, Passive consumption, Socialization agents, Brand attachment

요 약 본 연구 사회적 미디어가 개인이 선호하는 브랜드에 대한 상표 애착에 미치는 영향에 대한 연구이다. 따라서 본 연구는 다중회귀분석을 통하여 다양한 참여자들에게 개인 신상정보를 공개하는 SNS 사용자는 사회화 대리인을 이용하는 것과는 아무 상관이 없다는 사실을 발견하였다. 그러나 사회적 뉴스를 소극적으로 이용하는 소비자들은 그들의 최종 구매의사결정을 확정하는데 사회화 대리인에 의존할 것이라는 결과가 나왔다. 인적 및 비인적 사회화 대리인은 이러한 사회적 발신인에 의존하는 개인들의 브랜드 어태치먼트 형성에 중요한 역할을 하는 것으로 드러났다. 이러한 연구결과를 바탕으로 마케터는 브랜드 인지도를 형성하기 위해 온라인 전략을 체계화할 필요성을 인식해야 하고 사회적 미디어 이용자들이 자사의 선호되는 브랜드에 대한 상표 애착을 증진시키기 위해 방법을 제공해야 한다는 것을 알게 되었다. 집단주의 문화로 상징되는 한국 소비자 대상의 본 연구결과를 바탕으로 향후 개인주의 문화를 포함하는 비교연구 차원의 SNS와 사회화 대리인 연구의 필요성을 제기한다.

주제어 : 소셜 네트워킹 사이트, 방송, 소극적 소비, 사회화 대리인, 상표 애착

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1. Introduction

Social networking has vastly changed the way that consumers interact with and perceive the world. It has given users new means to re-establish old ties with past friends, to bridge distance gaps with loved ones, and to provide information to other like-minded individuals. It is word-of-mouth interaction by consumers on a global stage[1]. Some have claimed that social media could become the means through which all commercial communication will take place in the future[2]. Due to the ability of SNSs, like Facebook, to collect data on its users and provide that information to investing advertising firms or to "recommend" various brand groups and links to users based on their data profile, managers must understand the intricacies of how this media platform can establish relationships and whether this will ultimately have any bearing on purchasing behavior.

Individuals depend greatly on various socialization agents such as family, peers, and mass media in order to determine the acceptable social norms in society which includes purchasing decisions[3]. The use of these socialization agents can help an individual determine which brands are adequate within the society for establishing their desired social identity. A deeper understanding of how individuals learn to use and depend on various socialization agents as well as how those socialization agents affect consumer behavior is desperately needed by marketers seeking to understand how social processes are affected by the proliferation of SNSs and other forms of digital communication among consumers.

Marketers are always struggling for ways to protect their customer base and to prevent switching behavior. They often attempt to do this through the creation of strong brand images that consumers can form an attachment to, and this strategy is known to be an effective one[4]. Brand attachment, the strength of the cognitive and emotional bond between a brand and the

customer[5], is a significant means to help prevent brand switching and, instead, strengthen the relationship between the customer and the brand. Consumers form emotional connections with brands in order to strive to achieve their "ideal self". They use the brands in order to modify their current reality into one that they aspire toward[6]. Thus, an understanding of variables affecting brand attachment is very useful from a managerial standpoint to ensure the success of brands. Brand attachment is a recent theoretical concept that requires more theoretical studies to build its concept and usefulness in the scholastic research and managerial communities.

This study takes a look at how an individual's use of social networking, either generating information output or passively acquiring information input, affects the individual's choices of socialization behaviors. It then attempts to establish that various socialization agent usage can show likelihood of an individual to become attached to favored brands.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Networking Site Use

In recent years, companies have taken advantage of Facebook's vast user base in order to leverage their brands, engage their customers in dialogue, and build product interest[7]. Marketers utilize SNSs as a means of commercial interaction in order to promote their products and services[8]. They are used to help increase loyalty in the product and the brand, as well as provide a way to troubleshoot problems or discuss beneficial uses of a product.

There have been various ways in which past researchers have categorized social network usage. Users participating in Facebook groups will engage in socializing, entertainment, self-status seeking, and information seeking endeavors[9]. Those who utilize SNSs engage in one-on-one communication with other

users, passive consumption of information on the SNSs, and/or broadcasting of information to their general audience of SNS friends[10, 11, 12]. In order to engage these users, nearly all social networking sites offer free services in the form of "fan pages", such as on Facebook, that allow companies to connect with users and advertise their products[7]. It has been found that users who engage in social networking site groups are more likely to undertake actions and events that are organized and discussed in the groups[9]. Individuals who participate in Facebook brand communities do so to seek information rather than fulfilling needs for social interaction or entertainment purposes[13]. The presence of brand communities has been shown to influence the actions of members and how they perceive the brand[14]. They are venues where very loyal customers interact and collaborate[15].

They give a "felt sense of duty or obligation to the community as a whole, and to its individual members" [16]. It is clear that a deeper understanding of how users are socialized via their methods of using social media is needed. <Table 1> summarizes several of the SNS use types proposed by other researches. For this research, these authors focus on broadcasting and passive consumption since these are key factors that are prevalent activities on SNSs and for which SNSs are most well known in regards to communication and consumption of information. Broadcasting is thought to occur when individuals use social networking sites for the purpose of providing information or news to all on

their friend list (e.g. post status updates, share website links, or share photos).

Passive consumption refers to the times when users simply read or view social network content without creating any feedback or output.

2.2 Socialization Agents

Individuals will utilize various socialization agents in order to learn about product information or to help in making a final purchase decision[3, 17]. These agents are often thought to be members of one's family, peers, and mass media[18, 19]. Socialization itself has been defined to be "the process by which we learn the ways of a given society or social group so that we can function within it"[20]. The social learning theory, from which spawned the study of specific socialization agents, proposes that individuals are socialized through passive learning via direct social exchanges with others [21]. Marketers and managers need to understand where consumers are gathering information for their purchase decisions in order to find alternative ways to reach their target market. Socialization agents play a major role in this aspect, in that they are a key factor for swaying a consumer toward or away from committing to an action in the marketplace. In this research, socialization agents have been divided into personal, designated as parents, and non-personal socialization agents.

<Table 1> Types of SNS Use

Types of SNS Use	Definition
Direct Communication	Communication with specific individuals through one-on-one contact, such as through SNS instant messaging, liking posts, or tagging photos.
Indirect Communication/ Broadcasting	Communication with other individuals on social networking sites through posting information that is not directed at any particular individual and is, instead, for the general audience of connected users.
Informal Communication	Communication among a collaborative group outside official channels via a commercial, public SNS for the purposes of organizing events or providing information provision to others in the group.
Passive Consumption/ Information Seeking	The consumption of social information without any output from the individual in the process of consuming, such as through reading status updates, browsing photos, or clicking on links.

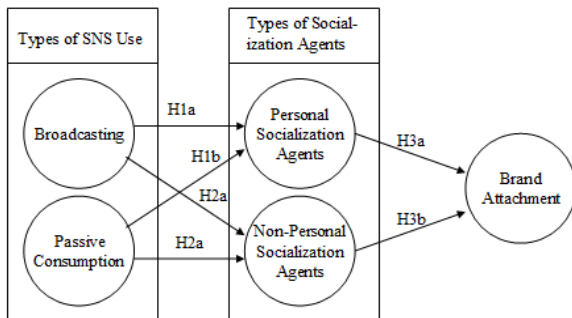
2.3 Brand Attachment

Brand attachment is formed from the foundation of the attachment theory, which is explained to be when individuals gain an understanding of how relationships should function through their own interpersonal experiences[22]. Brand attachment is defined as the strength of the bond connecting the brand with one's self [23]. It is considered to show the strength of connectedness to the brand as well as the cognitive bond and the emotional bond with the brand [5]. Brand attachment is also distinct from brand attitude in that it has emotional and self-implications that are efficient precursors to predicting action; brand attachment is often long-term and involves large amounts of time input into the relationship whereas brand attitudes are generally not[23].

degrees of social exchange, either active through broadcasting or passive through passive consumption. For this research, we analyzed the SNS usage types of passive consumption and broadcasting. The types of socialization agents used (i.e. non-personal and personal sources) are then thought to affect an individual's likelihood to form attachments with their favorite brands.

3. Theoretical Model and Development of Hypotheses

3.1 Research Model Proposal and Explanation



[Fig. 1] Research Model

The research model (see [Fig. 1]) demonstrates the various types of SNSs and how they can affect consumer brand attachment. The types of SNS use affect an individual's use of socialization agents by encouraging individuals to depend on certain agents to assist in helping to make a final purchase decision. This is done through various methods of SNS use that help individuals interact with socialization agents on

3.2 Development of Hypotheses and Background

Social networking sites are designed for individuals to keep in touch with family, friends, colleagues, and other acquaintances; and users of social networking sites participate in activities that facilitate the exchange of information. This can be done via direct communication with individual friends through one-on-one exchanges, passive consumption of social news via simply reading status posts that others share, and broadcasting personal news with no particular individual target through status updates and widely viewed posts [10]. Users of a neurotic nature are more likely to use broadcasting, or the wall posting method, in order to have a greater control over the information that they are providing and receiving from others so that they can better manage their social relationships in a non-threatening manner[24, 25]. SNS communication with specific other users can predict relational closeness[26]. Frequency of contact between SNS friends has been shown to be positively related with the quality of relationships[27]. Even strangers who investigate social interests shared on a Facebook user's profile have been found to be able to use those details to establish a closer relationship through discussion of common interests[28]. According to Haythornthwaite's media multiplexity theory, individuals who exhibit strong social ties will utilize a larger number of different communication media methods than those with weak ties[29]. Individuals are known to use SNSs for gathering information regarding the specific details

about products or services they are interested in as well as to seek self-status among social groups [9]. SNSs provide a means for word-of-mouth type of behaviors that can not only directly provide information from one user to another but also provide links to other forms of media, such as video sharing sites, that can inform users about products, stores, services, and use experiences[30, 31].

Thus the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1a - Individuals who use high degrees of broadcasting on SNSs are more inclined to use personal socialization agents than those who use low degrees of broadcasting.

H1b - Individuals who use high degrees of passive consumption on SNSs are more inclined to use personal socialization agents than those who use low degrees of passive consumption.

H2a - Individuals who use high degrees of broadcasting on SNSs are more inclined to use non-personal socialization agents than those who use low degrees of broadcasting.

H2b - Individuals who use high degrees of passive consumption on SNSs are more inclined to use non-personal socialization agents than those who use low degrees of passive consumption.

Consumers form relationships with and interact with brands in a manner that is likened to intimate and personal relationships with others. Fournier[32] found that consumers utilize a psycho-social-cultural contextual system of brand knowledge and also formulated measures of brand relationships that

included items such as committed partnership, marriage of convenience, casual friendship, kinship, fling, and so forth and poses the idea that brands can become humanized, personalized, and animated in the mind of consumers facilitating an impression of a living brand with which a personal relationship can form. Links that connect a brand to one's self can have an emotional altering effect in that hope, efficacy, optimism, coping mechanisms, and overall emotional stability can all be influenced[33]. Trust is a critical aspect of close personal relationships[34], and brand trust has been shown to have a positive effect on brand attachment [4]. Consumer socialization, especially among generations of a family, is thought to affect brand loyalties and purchasing habits[35], and higher uses of personal socialization agents decreases the likelihood of brand switching tendencies[36]. These authors can conclude that individuals with more reliance on personal relationships are likely to mimic those relationship qualities with brand attachments as well.

And so, the authors propose the following hypotheses:

H3a - Individuals who use high degrees of personal socialization agents are more inclined to have strong brand attachments than those who use low degrees of personal socialization agents.

H3b - Individuals who use high degrees of non-personal socialization agents are more inclined to have strong brand attachments than those who use low degrees of non-personal socialization agents.

<Table 2> Operational Definition of the Variables

Variables	Operational definition	References
Types of SNS Use	The degree to which an individual uses SNSs for broadcasting and passive consumption of social news.	[12, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45]
Socialization Agent	The degree to which an individual uses personal sources (e.g. family) or non-personal sources (e.g. Internet and television) for product information source or final purchase decision.	[3, 18, 19, 46]
Brand Attachment	The strength of the bond connecting the brand with one's self and is considered to show the strength connectedness to the brand as well as the cognitive bond and the emotional bond with the brand.	[5, 23, 47, 48, 49]

4. Method and Results

A questionnaire was prepared utilizing 7-point Likert scales to measure the various constructs. Measurement items present on the survey were all adapted from previous researches. Items used to measure passive consumption included statements such as "I read my SNS friends' status updates." and "I follow the goings on of my SNS friends' lives."; while items used to represent broadcasting included statements like "I post status updates." and "I share/like posts I find interesting." Personal socialization agents were represented in the questionnaire as an individual's use of family to acquire product information, and non-personal socialization agents were represented by commercials on TV or online, brand SNS pages, and product or service websites. The brand attachment variable was determined by first asking respondents to write their favorite brand to

increase their involvement and understanding of the variable, and then, they were presented with items such as "My favorite brand is a part of who I am." and "I often think about my favorite brand." Operational definitions are present in <Table 2>.

In total, 199 usable surveys were collected for use in the analysis. Due to the fact that this research requires survey responses from individuals who utilize SNSs, responses were collected from individuals in their twenties in a major metropolitan city of South Korea. Surveys were distributed to research assistants who assisted in collection of responses and were asked to ensure that respondents were familiar with and frequently used social networking services. The assistants gathered surveys from their acquaintances and classmates in their universities. Males make up 45.7% (n=91) of the sample size with females consisting of the remaining 53.8% (n=107). Young people in their twenties tend to be well acquainted with

<Table 3> Exploratory Factor Analysis

Factor	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
PC06		.880			
PC07		.888			
PC08		.853			
PC09		.826			
BC10			.890		
BC11			.899		
BC12			.769		
BC13			.866		
PSA01					.887
NPSA05				.627	
NPSA06				.808	
NPSA07				.836	
BA01	.772				
BA02	.834				
BA03	.783				
BA04	.735				
BA05	.717				
BA06	.780				
BA07	.739				
BA08	.780				
BA09	.659				
EigenValue	5.331	3.305	3.298	1.937	1.103
Variance Expl.	25.384	15.740	15.704	9.225	5.252
Cronbach Alpha	.912	.921	.917	.694	N/A

Note: PC = Passive Consumption; BC = Broadcasting; PSA=Personal Socialization Agents; NPSA=Non-personal Socialization Agents; BA=Brand Attachment

<Table 4> Correlations

Constructs	PC	IC	PSA	NPSA	BA
PC	1				
BC	.444**	1			
PSA	.155*	.040	1		
NPSA	.294**	.231**	.037	1	
BA	.236**	.326**	.181*	.185**	1

*p<0.05, **p < 0.01

Note: PC = Passive Consumption; BC = Broadcasting;

PSA=Personal Socialization Agents; NPSA=Non-personal Socialization Agents; BA=Brand Attachment

<Table 5> Results of Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis	Path	Standardized Coefficients Beta	T-value	Accepted/Rejected
H1a	BC → PSA	-0.047	-0.618	Rejected
H1b	PC → PSA	0.190	2.481*	Accepted
H2a	BC → NPSA	0.120	1.672	Rejected
H2b	PC → NPSA	.0308	4.272**	Accepted
H3a	PSA → BA	0.142	2.072*	Accepted
H3b	NPSA → BA	0.156	2.266*	Accepted

*p<0.05, **p < 0.01

Note: PC = Passive Consumption; BC = Broadcasting; PSA=Personal Socialization Agents; NPSA=Non-personal Socialization Agents; BA=Brand Attachment

SNSs and have a large number of friends, a median of 300, that they can interact with and follow[37]. Individuals over thirty in South Korea tend to be far less likely to utilize SNSs on a frequent basis, and as such, were excluded during the analysis. Additionally, all respondents who indicated that they did not frequently use SNSs were not used in the analysis.

An analysis of the data collected was conducted using SPSS v21.0. An exploratory factor analysis (see <Table 3>) shows that all items used to represent passive consumption, broadcasting, and brand attachment for the analysis have acceptable factor loadings, all of which exceed 0.6; and personal socialization agents utilize only one item since the item used is "family" which is one of the major socialization agents favored by many researches studying socialization. Two items of the five used to represent non-personal socialization agents were removed due to low factor loadings prior to testing the hypotheses. Correlations are summarized in <Table 4>.

In order to analyze the hypotheses present in this

study, independent variables were regressed against the dependent variables via multiple linear regression with the results summarized in <Table 5>. Based on the analysis H1a and H2a, which propose that broadcasting affects both personal socialization agents and non-personal socialization agents respectively, do not achieve significant t-values, -0.618 and 1.672 respectively, and are rejected.

H1b and H2b, which propose that passive consumption affects both personal and non-personal socialization agents respectively, do obtain significant t-values, 2.481 and 4.272 respectively, which provide statistically significant evidence that users of SNSs that partake in higher degrees of passive consumption are more likely to depend on socialization agents, both personal and non-personal. Additionally, H3a and H3b have significant t-values, 2.072 and 2.266 respectively, showing that individuals that highly utilize personal and non-personal socialization agents are likely to have stronger brand attachments.

5. Conclusions and Further Research

This study finds that passive consumption of social news present on social networking sites does play a role in socialization behaviors, both in personal and non-personal socialization choices, for individuals who frequently use these resources; while generating output on SNSs through broadcasting does not, in fact, play a significant role. One can assume from the results that individuals utilizing passive consumption do feel that this improves their social relationships and does provide them with information that encourages them to socialize themselves via non-personal sources as well. On the other hand, individuals who broadcast are less likely to depend on socialization agents. Pagani, Hofacker and Goldsmith[10] found that as self expression and social identity increases, broadcasting content on SNSs is likely to increase. As individuals are more secure in their individualistic tendencies and uniqueness, they may be less likely to depend on socialization agents since they are often seeking to carve their own path and set their own trends.

This study also finds that consumers who depend more on both personal and non-personal socialization agents are more likely to develop brand attachments than those who do not. It seems plausible that individuals will tap their socialization agents for information about the latest trends or acceptable social practices and then make brand choices based on the information obtained. Following their brand choices, the individuals feel more attached to those brands since they are supported by the socialization process the individuals undergo; and the individuals are less likely to switch to other brands.

Managerial implications are significant regarding the findings. Non-personal socialization agents utilized in this research include commercials online or on TV, brand SNS pages, and brand websites. Many companies hoping to establish stronger brand attachment should realize that, due to the connection

between non-personal socialization agents and brand attachment, it is critical for marketers to present an online footprint that will help consumers to learn about and form a positive relationship with the brand. It is simple for even small companies to formulate and manage a brand SNS page, and this is one way for the brand to interact and even form a "friendship" with SNS users, all while strengthening brand attachment in the mind of the users. In addition, due to the analysis results that passive consumption is key in individuals utilizing socialization agents of a non-personal nature, even if a company is generating output on a SNS with little or no feedback, the marketers should not be discouraged. Brand attachment is shown to be higher from personal socialization sources as well, thus brand image and presence in the minds of consumers should be encouraged in meaningful ways that encourage word-of-mouth advertising.

This research was conducted in South Korea which is thought to be significantly collective in nature[38]. Collectivism implies that people in the culture will rely more heavily on socialization sources to determine social norms. This collectivist thinking may cause certain individuals to more heavily depend on socialization sources in general thus watering down the effects of SNS dimensions as a construct variable. As H1a and H2a are rejected, this same study regarding broadcasting and its effects on socialization processes should be conducted in other locations of varying culture types to corroborate and bring deeper understanding regarding this area of study.

Due to the scope of this research focusing on SNS use, individuals in their twenties were surveyed and the responses were then used to conduct an analysis to verify the proposed hypotheses. In more recent years, SNS use has increased among all age groups, and it would be useful for future researchers to consider studying SNS use among those in their 30's and up to confirm the hypotheses hold true beyond the age variable.

For personal socialization agents, this research narrowed the scope to family members. Future researches may wish to explore other dimensions of what makes up personal socialization agents, such as colleagues, close friends, peers, and so forth. Additionally, non-personal socialization agents may also be expanded upon by researching the differences or similarities that exist between the Internet, television, written media, and other mass media sources.

This study found that non-personal socialization agents such as TV or online commercials, brand SNS pages, and product/service websites have an influence on brand attachment. It may be of interest to narrow the scope to determine how much various brand SNS activities can play a role in affecting brand attachment. Frequent status updates, personification of the brand through interaction with brand "followers" on SNSs, and other types of brand interaction with consumers on SNSs can all be considered for future studies on socialization agents and brand attachment.

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