

## **Linking Consumer Needs and Engagement Dimensions with Social Media Brand Pages to Brand Attachment Formation Process**

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### **Abstract**

*This study investigates the influence of consumer needs pertaining to brand social media pages on the consumer brand attachment formation process. We collected 278 valid responses from females who have experienced the food brands' social media pages. Following the data analysis, we developed the results as follows. First, we examined the significant influence of attachment to brand social media page needs and socialization needs on consumer content consumption engagement and content contribution engagement on brand social media pages. Then we determined that consumer engagement significantly influenced consumer brand attachment. Finally, we found consumer consumption engagement exerted a significant mediation effect on the relationship between consumer needs and brand attachment. Based on the results, we outlined the potential theoretical and marketing strategy implications of this research.*

**Keywords:** *Attachment to Social Media Brand Pages, Socialization, Consumption, Contribution and Creating, Brand Attachments*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Due to the proliferation of smart mobile devices, social media brand pages have created new opportunities for marketers to manage brands and their image. Social media brand pages offer spaces for both marketers and consumers to create a range of branded content that goes beyond display advertising and sponsored content [1]. Brand marketers utilize social media brand pages as one of their information channels to continually offer consumers the latest product information [2]. Moreover, consumers' content consumption engagement and contribution engagement give them a role in generating sustainable benefits for brands [3]. At present, brand social media pages have been widely applied in several industry areas, such as fashion and food [4,5]. From the brand marketer's perspective, the application of brand social media pages can greatly improve business

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Manuscript Received: July. 31, 2022 / Revised: August. 8, 2022 / Accepted: August. 10, 2022

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performance by influencing consumers' online engagement behavior.

The modern consumer is often regarded as inherently social [6]. Social media brand pages provide content to satisfy consumer needs. As noted in the existing literature, consumers use brands' social media pages to build, maintain, and improve their inter-relationships with other brand consumers [7]. Consumers form attachments to special brands to identify individuals who are similar to them or form para-social attachments to others [8,9]. It should be noted that female consumers may be more active on brands' social media pages. If the brand page manager can fulfill female consumers' needs, this will work to attract other consumers [10]. Therefore, it is critical to understand female consumers' engagement behavior and needs relating to brands' social media pages.

As noted above, brand social media pages have been widely applied as a marketing channel to promote products [11]. Previous studies have observed that brand social media pages assist brands to promote the brand [12]. Meanwhile, brand social media pages also provide a place to satisfy consumer needs, such as socialization and attachment needs [9, 13]. According to consumer engagement theory, if a brand's social media page satisfies consumer needs, it will positively affect consumer online engagement behavior [14]. On this basis, consumer online engagement behavior will lead consumers to form positive brand attachments [15]. As noted in the existing studies, brand social media pages can offer benefits for both consumers and brands' marketing teams. Therefore, it is necessary to understand how to use brand social media pages to satisfy consumer needs and enhance consumer online engagement behavior to foster positive consumer brand attachments.

Although social brand page marketing-related research has been conducted in several areas, there are still some gaps in the existing literature. Firstly, research on brand social media page consumer factors as antecedents is still lacking. Much of this attention has focused on brand, product, content, and social media factors, while comprehensive research on consumer factor antecedents remains noticeably absent [13]. Secondly, very few studies have considered consumer engagement as a multi-dimensional factor. Most of the existing consumer engagement-related studies consider consumer engagement as one-dimensional [16], although there are studies that take consumer engagement to be a multi-dimensional construct [13, 17]. Finally, the research on brand social media pages in the context of the food industry remains limited.

This study intends to fill the gaps in the previous studies. This study aims to build an integrated model to develop a food promotion strategy through the use of brand social media pages. This study also sets out to investigate the influence of consumer attachment needs relating to brand social media page needs, their socialization needs relating to consumer content consumption engagement on brand social media pages, and consumer content contribution engagement on brand social media pages. It will then move on to illustrate how consumer content consumption engagement and content contribution engagement influence consumer brand attachment. Finally, it will investigate the content consumption engagement and contribution engagement mediation effects. The results of this study may have theoretical implications for understanding consumer engagement behavior and will also provide practical guidance for the formulation of food online marketing strategies.

## **2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT**

### **2.1 Theoretical Background: Consumer Engagement Theory**

The consumer engagement theory concept has been built from relationship marketing theory to illustrate the relationship between consumers and services or products [18]. In the existing literature, consumer engagement theory has been used to show the level of a customer's physical, cognitive, and emotional presence in their relationship with a service organization [19]. On the other hand, consumer engagement theory has been used to investigate consumers' participation in and connection with the organizations' offerings initiated by either

the consumer or the organization [20]. In the online environment, consumer engagement can be either passive or active. Passive engagement can be explained as consumer consumption, which means that consumers only watch and read the content on brands' social media pages. By way of contrast, active engagement refers to how consumers actively comment on or create brand-related content on the brand pages. On this point, [14] developed a conceptualization of consumer engagement framework to illustrate consumer and service provider relationships. In this framework, the antecedents of consumer engagement include brand, social media, and consumer motivation factors [13]. On the other hand, the consequences of consumer engagement include satisfaction, brand trust, brand engagement, and brand loyalty [21, 22]. Due to the widespread usage of social media pages by brands, consumer engagement has been applied in several marketing areas to investigate these relationships. The present study also adopts the consumer engagement theory framework to illustrate female consumer engagement behavior.

## **2.2 Hypotheses Development**

### **2.2.1 Attachment to Social Brand Pages and Consumer Engagement Behavior**

As posted by attachment theory, attachment is generally applied to illustrate how humans develop attachments with others to satisfy their needs [23]. With the proliferation of social media, consumers have started to forge attachments, with special attachments forming a type of consumer disposition [8]. Based on the previous studies, attachment to brand social media pages refers to the strength of the bond between the consumer and a brand's social media page [13]. Following these studies, the present study defined attachment to brand social media pages as a consumer and social brand page strength relationship, which can satisfy their personal motivations.

Drawn from the attachment theory, consumer personal motivation underlies consumer online behavior [24]. A number of studies have observed that consumer attachment to brand social media pages enhances different consumer online engagement behaviors. For instance, [25] demonstrated that attachment is positively related to consumers meaningfully creating and contributing to engagement behavior. Meanwhile, a Facebook-related study also illustrated that consumers form special attitudes and attachments with social media, which in turn, positively influence consumers' content consumption and contribution behaviors [2]. More recently, online consumer engagement research has revealed that consumer attachment to social media is positively related to consumer emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement [26]. Based on these studies, the following hypotheses are put forward:

Hypothesis 1: Attachment to social brand pages positively impacts contents consumption in social brand pages

Hypothesis 2: Attachment to social brand pages positively impacts contents creation and contribution in social brand pages

### **2.2.2 Socialization and Consumer Engagement Behavior**

Socialization is another consumer need present in the online environment. Based on the previous studies, socialization reflects the interpersonal relationships between people [27]. Socialization needs refer to online community members' need to improve their interpersonal relationships on a brand's social media page [9]. Elsewhere, socialization has also been explained as staying in touch or communicating with people who share the same interests, whilst also feeling connected with others [28]. Based on this work, the present study defines socialization needs as consumer intent to develop interpersonal relationships and engage in interaction activities with others on brand social media pages.

Brand social media pages create a free and active interactive environment, which can easily satisfy users' socialization needs and positively enhance consumer engagement behavior. In line with engagement theory, socialization is a critical factor in consumer engagement [29]. Previous studies identified these positive relationships among them. Socialization is a type of motivation, which more likely to induce individuals to engage in online consumer activities, such as online content consumption or online content generation [30]. [31] Facebook study investigated how socialization positively influences consumers' creation and contribution behaviors. Therefore, based on this theory and literature background, we formulate the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3: Socialization positively impacts contents consumption in social brand pages

Hypothesis 4: Socialization positively impacts contents creation and contribution in social brand pages

### **2.2.3 Consumer Engagement Behavior and Brand Attachment**

Brand attachment refers to the special connection that consumers feel toward a brand [32]. Brand attachment, as a higher level of consumer loyalty, could give rise to more positive behavior and increase a brand's financial performance [25]. Therefore, this study considers brand attachment as a special bonding relationship between the consumer and brand that is shaped around loyalty behavior.

Consumer engagement behavior has been shown to be positively related to consumer brand attachment. Previous studies have illustrated that consumers' engagement on online brand pages positively influences consumer attachment with the brand [15]. Other studies have also developed a framework for consumer online behavioral engagement, such as indicating that the contribution to and consumption of content positively enhances consumer brand attachment [13]. Thus, the following hypotheses are formulated:

Hypothesis 5: Contents consumption in social brand pages positively impacts brand attachment

Hypothesis 6: Contents creation and contribution in social brand pages positively impacts brand attachment

## **3. METHOD**

### **3.1 Measurement Development**

The variables in our measurement model are attachment to brand social media pages (AI), socialization (SO), consumption on brand social media pages (CO), creating content and contributing to brand social media pages (CU), and brand attachment (BA). The measurement items were derived from the previous studies. Attachment to brand social media pages from [33] and socialization include five items from [31]. Meanwhile, consumption on brand social media pages was measured by four items from [34,35] and creating and contributing content on brand social media pages was measured by five items from [36]. Brand attachment was measured using four items adapted from [37]. The English questionnaires were translated into Chinese and then back-translated into English to verify the questionnaire validity and accuracy. Next, pre-testing was carried out to investigate whether the questionnaires were misunderstood by the survey participants. After this step, the final-version survey questionnaires were developed. All items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

### **3.2 Data Collection and Sample Characteristics**

This study used the online survey method to collect data. Only participants who met two criteria could join this survey. First, the participants had to be female, as this study seeks to investigate females' food brand social media page usage behaviors. Second, the participants must have food content creation and food content consumption experience on food brands' social media pages within the past 6 months. Each participant will receive an incentive after they finish the survey. A total of 278 participants were selected as valid data.

### 3.3 Statistical Method

The main objectives of this study were to investigate the proposed model and to test the relationship among the stated variables. R studio was applied to conduct the data analysis. Basic descriptive statistics were used to produce demographic information and assess the study variables. Moreover, univariate and bivariate tests in the psych R package were applied to check the reliability of the data. Lastly, the Lavaan R package [38] was used to determine the reliability and validity and conduct structural equation modeling.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Measurement Model

To test the measurement model, the exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis were performed. Firstly, Cronbach's alpha was computed to analyze the internal consistency of the construct. As shown in Table 1, all of the Cronbach's alpha values were higher than the acceptable value of 0.7 [39], which indicated that the construct was sufficiently reliable. Meanwhile, the confirmatory factor analysis results showed that measurement model had a satisfactory model fit,  $X^2=564.263$ ;  $df=220$ ;  $p=0.00$ ;  $CFI=0.931$ ;  $IFI=0.932$ ;  $GFI=0.850$ ;  $RMSEA=0.074$ ;  $RMR=0.049$ . Meanwhile, all standardized factor loading were significant and higher than 0.5. To test the reliability and validity, the composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) were calculated. All CR were than the required value of 0.7, thus indicating the high reliability of the results. Then, AVE values were used to check the convergent validity, all of which were higher than the required value of 0.5 [40]. Lastly, the discriminant validity among constructs was checked. The squared root of AVE on the diagonal was higher than the correlations among these constructs, which supported the discriminant validity.

**Table 1.** Reliability, Convergent Validity and Discriminant Validity

Constructs	AI	SO	CO	CU	BA
AI	1(.869)				
SO	.423	1(.817)			
CO	.672	.616	1(.810)		
CU	.666	.450	.629	1(.889)	
BA	.247	.217	.275	.297	1 (.799)
Cronbach's $\alpha$	.940	.910	.900	.870	.880
CR	.939	.910	.905	.868	.876
AVE	.756	.668	.656	.790	.639

Goodness-of-Model-Fit:  $X^2=564.263$ ;  $df=220$ ;  $p=0.00$ ;  $CFI=0.931$ ;  $IFI=0.932$ ;  $GFI=0.850$ ;  $RMSEA=0.074$ ;  $RMR=0.049$

AI = Attachment to Social Brand Pages; SO = Socialization; CO = Consumption in Social Brand Pages; CU = Creating and Contribution in Social brand Pages; BA = Brand Attachment

### 4.2 Structural Model

This research used the Lavaan R package structural equation modeling to test the hypotheses. The results of hypothesis testing are presented in Table 2. The goodness-of-model fit is  $X^2=574.377$ ;  $DF=223$ ;  $p=0.00$ ;  $CFI=0.930$ ;  $IFI=0.930$ ;  $GFI=0.848$ ;  $RMSEA=0.074$ ;  $RMR=0.052$ , which revealed that the structural model is satisfactory. The estimated results and standardized path coefficients are shown also in Table 2. Attachment to social media brand pages ( $\beta=0.531$ ,  $p < 0.00$ ) and socialization ( $\beta=0.449$ ,  $p < 0.00$ ) significantly influence

consumer consumption on brand social media pages, which supported H1 and H2. Meanwhile, consumer contribution to and creating content on brand social media pages was significantly influenced by attachment to social media brand pages ( $\beta = 0.655, p < 0.00$ ) and socialization ( $\beta = 0.176, p < 0.00$ ). On this basis, H3 and H4 are also supported. Moreover, consumption, contribution ( $\beta = 0.175, p < 0.05$ ) and creating content on brand social media pages ( $\beta = 0.201, p < 0.00$ ) were shown to significantly influence consumer purchase intention. Thus, the H5 and H6 were also supported.

**Table 2.** Path Analysis

Path	Std. estimate	P	Support
AI → CO	.531	***	Yes
SO → CO	.449	***	Yes
AI → CR	.655	***	Yes
SO → CR	.176	***	Yes
CO → BA	.175	*	Yes
CR → BA	.201	*	Yes

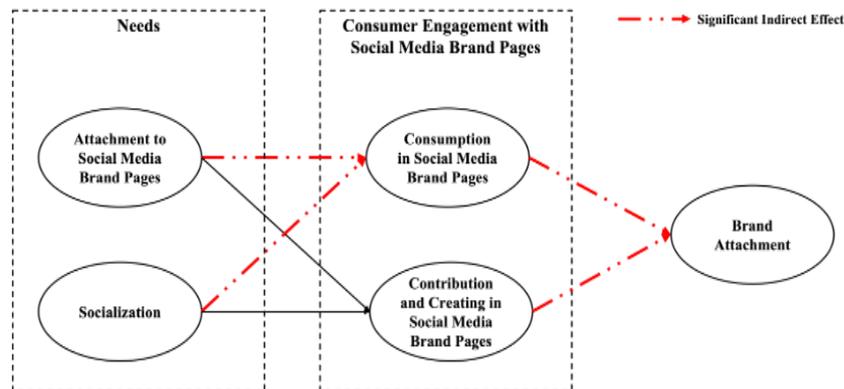
Goodness-of-Model-Fit:  $X^2=574.377$ ;  $df=223$ ;  $p=0.00$ ;  $CFI=0.930$ ;  $IFI=0.930$ ;  $GFI=0.848$ ;  $RMSEA=0.074$ ;  $RMR=0.052$

\*\*\*  $P < 0.001$ ; \*\*  $P < 0.01$ ; \*  $P < 0.05$

AI = Attachment to Social Brand Pages; SO = Socialization; CO = Consumption in Social Brand Pages; CU = Creating and Contribution in Social brand Pages; BA = Brand Attachment

### 4.3 Mediation Analysis

This study also conducted mediation analysis through bootstrapping. As shown in Figure 1, consumer attachment to brand social media pages exerted a significant indirect influence on consumer brand attachment through consumer consumption engagement ( $\beta_{AI-CO-BA} = 0.128, p < .05$ ), although it did not significantly influence brand attachment through consumer contribution engagement ( $\beta_{AI-CR-BA} = 0.068, p > .05$ ). Meanwhile, it was also found that consumer consumption engagement ( $\beta_{SO-CO-BA} = 0.147, p < .05$ ) played a significant mediating role between consumer socialization needs and consumer brand attachment. However, consumer contribution engagement ( $\beta_{SO-CR-BA} = 0.070, p > .05$ ) did not have a significant effect.



**Figure 1.** Mediation Effect between Consumer Needs and Brand Attachment

## 5. DISCUSSION

Since brand social media pages have become a key marketing communication channel, many brands have started to build a social media brand page to perform brand management. However, most brand social media page research has focused on brand, product, content, social media, and consumer factor antecedents of consumer engagement, resulting in a noticeable lack of research on brand attachment [13]. Meanwhile, a number of studies have only considered consumer online engagement as one construct. Contrastingly, this

study regarded consumer online engagement as multi-dimensional to illustrate the differential effect on consumer brand attachment formation. In line with the previous studies, this study aimed to fill the gaps in the existing literature and develop a comprehensive model to investigate the ancestors and outcomes of consumer online engagement behavior based on consumer engagement behavior theory. The results of this study intend to offer a strategy for food brand managers to improve financial performance.

This study collected valid data from individuals who have experience with food brands' social media pages. The results determined that attachment to brand social media pages positively impacts consumers' online content consumption, creation, and contribution engagement behaviors, which were consistent with the previous studies [2]. Meanwhile, consumer socialization needs also positively influence consumer online content consumption engagement and contribution engagement behaviors. It should be noted that previous studies have also illustrated this relationship [31]. This study also investigated the influence of consumer online engagement on consumer brand attachment, which aligns with the study results of [15]. The results of the present study can provide several theoretical implications for future studies and managerial implications for food brand managers.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

Social media assist brand manager to formation brand image and develop brand attachment to improve brand finance performance. The present study developed several theoretical and implications for food brand. This study focused on the social food brand pages to enhance consumer food brand attachment. Previous studies have focused on the content factors or brand factors. We filled the previous studies by focusing on consumer needs, attachment to social brand pages and socialization. Meanwhile, we have extended the consumer online engagement by considering consumer online as multi-dimension. Not considering content consumption behavior, but also include consumer brand related contents creating and contribution engagement. Based on these results, we also revealed several managerial implications. First, it is necessary to formation warmth image towards the brand and social brand pages. Due to attachment to the social brand pages could enhance consumer online engagement, which then influence consumer loyalty behavior, brand attachment. Second, it is critical to allow social brand pages users freely to have interaction with other, which could enhance their engagement behavior and attachment towards the brand. Lastly, this study had some limitations. Specially, this study could not consider any demographic information to investigate the differential marketing strategy.

Social media assists brand managers with the formation of brand image and helps to develop a brand attachment and improve brand finance performance. The present study put forward several theoretical implications for food brands. This study focused on how food brands' social media pages can be used to enhance consumer food brand attachment. Previous studies have focused on content factors or brand factors. This study addressed the gaps in the previous studies by focusing on consumers' needs, attachment to brand social media pages and socialization. Meanwhile, we extended the consumer online engagement by regarding consumers' online behaviors as a multi-dimensional factor. Moreover, this study not only considered content consumption behaviors, but also included consumer brand-related content creation and contribution engagement. These results have a number of managerial implications. First, it is necessary to form a positive image of the brand and its social media pages. As an attachment to brand social media pages could enhance consumer online engagement, this could then influence consumer loyalty behavior, and brand attachment. Second, it is necessary to allow brand social media page users to freely interact with each other, which could enhance their engagement behavior and attachment toward the brand. Lastly, this study was subject to certain limitations. Specifically, this study did not consider any demographic information when investigating differential marketing strategies.

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