

SOCIAL MEDIA AND USER ENGAGEMENT:
A SELF DETERMINATION PERSPECTIVE

By

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ABSTRACT

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Industry professionals and scholars in academia have probed the question of how best to engage audiences. Social media has facilitated various business opportunities as well as provided organizations with platforms through which they can engage their stakeholders. A key issue surrounding customer engagement is how it is conceptualized and what factors facilitate and support user interaction on social media. In this dissertation, the Self Determination framework served as the theoretical foundation for understanding customer engagement on Facebook brand pages. The research model was based on the premise that individuals are likely to symbolically engage on social media when they feel self-determined to do so based on three key factors: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Through a survey of students at a large Midwestern university (n=745) this dissertation found: 1) social media self-efficacy positively predicts symbolic customer engagement in the form of sharing on Facebook brand pages; 2) time spent on Facebook is a positive predictor of liking, commenting, and sharing; 3) social media experience is a negative predictor of symbolic customer engagement in the form of liking and commenting; 4) social skills negatively predict symbolic customer engagement in the form of commenting, and 5) customer relationship with the brand and community predict symbolic customer engagement in terms of liking, commenting and sharing. This research contributes to the body of knowledge in the realm of communication and marketing through strengthening our understanding of how online brand communities and relationships serve as strategic assets for organizations in building brand engagement. Findings in this dissertation are limited by the

characteristics of the population studied. Further research is recommended to better understand the different types of engagement and how such engagement impacts user perceptions.

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To my parents, my wife, and my family, for their continuous prayers,
sacrifices, guidance, and support.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

The use of digital media in the form of social networking sites (SNS) has shown remarkable growth in recent years. According to PEW statistics, 72% of online adults are SNS users, and Facebook stands as the most popular SNS (Brenner & Smith, 2013). Social media sites are increasingly becoming platforms for social interaction, information, news, and entertainment; whereby individuals can meet each other, produce and share online content (Boyd and Ellison, 2007).

Social media comprises a rich and diverse mix of systems where users interact and engage with media as well as with other users. Social media systems vary in terms of their functionality and scope. LinkedIn focuses on professional networks, and Twitter allows short posts from a myriad of users including prominent personalities. YouTube specifically concentrates on video. On Facebook, users post and share content with their network of friends. The number of Facebook users exceeds one billion (Facebook, 2013). Social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, all have unique architecture, norms and culture. Users view each platform somewhat differently, and differ on how they interact on them (Smith, Fischer, and Yongjian, 2012). However, a common theme that binds these disparate networks is the ability of users to interact through media with other users.

The commercial relevance of SNS has attracted businesses in increasing numbers. SNS offer the potential for brand owners to advertise their products and services through viral marketing, develop products and services by involving their customers or audiences, and gain vital market intelligence through an observation and analysis of the user generated content (UGC) (Richter, Riemer, & vom Brocke, 2011). Digital media provide businesses the

opportunity to interact with their customers and make it relatively easier for customers to communicate with the company and with each other (Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009). Interactions on SNS can be in the form of opinions about the brand (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002). Individuals can provide feedback in form of Facebook “likes”, and comments on Facebook posts from brand pages. Sites like YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, thus provide a voice to users who can now directly interact with the businesses and the brands of their choosing. Businesses increasingly share control of their brand with their customers who can engage with them in a rich online dialogue (Brown, Broderick, and Lee, 2007), especially in a social setting.

Through digital media, customers have ample information about brands (Clemons and Gao, 2008), and increasingly identify with the brands they consume and organize in brand-related communities. On Facebook, individuals organize around a brand and form virtual communities through “liking” a page. Some may argue that the emergence of online brand communities on social media is the latest step in the evolution of communities (Wirtz et al., 2013).

Crucial to understanding the future of social media is studying the motivations that draw people to these sites. Businesses need to anticipate why and how individuals take part in a brand community on a SNS (Pagani, Hofacker, & Goldsmith, 2011). The key question here is, why do customers engage on Facebook brand pages? Researchers have often attempted to understand the motivations of participation on such sites (Brandtzaeg & Heim, 2009; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008).

Customers may benefit by gaining social support and engaging in information seeking in a community (Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Pearo, 2004). At a general level, the basic motivations of

Internet use center on information seeking, convenience, entertainment and social interaction (Ko, Cho, & Roberts, 2005). In particular, SNSs are used mainly for social interaction (Brandtzaeg & Heim, 2009). Information seeking and socializing can be important reasons that explain interaction on SNSs, but these factors do not fully explain the widespread participation on such platforms. Various other factors may explain why users engage on these sites.

Therefore, there is a need to investigate what antecedents determine user interactions with a brand page and its users. In order to have an effective marketing and communication strategy, businesses need to know the factors that lead some users to engage while others do not interact and remain passive. Participation on social media can be understood with the concept of engagement; which some industry practitioners refer to as the “Holy Grail” of Internet marketing (Mollen & Wilson, 2010).

In the realm of social media, customer relationships differentiate an organization from another. It is critical to understand engagement and its antecedents because it is the first step in building a relationship with current and potential customers, and is vital to promote and protect the brand, and to make the products and services better (Paine, 2011). Gaining customer loyalty through effective customer relationship management on social media further drives interest in this important topic (Hollebeek, 2011). Retaining a customer rather than gaining a new one is not only cost-effective but also vital from a public relations standpoint. Hence, the benefits of identifying and validating the antecedents of customer engagement with the brand apply to both the business and communication domains.

1.1 Statement of Purpose

Studies have attempted to address the reasons or motivations for participation in brand communities; however, these attempts have yielded limited results. Despite the widespread popularity of the term engagement in business circles, there is a shortage of theory-guided empirical research in the communication field about the motivators and the dynamics of engagement. To bridge this gap, this dissertation contributes to the body of knowledge by developing a structured model for understanding why individuals engage with brands on social media. In other words, the dissertation model addresses why people use social media for online symbolic engagement with company brands. The model was tested using Facebook as the social media platform, and likes, comments and shares as measures of engagement.

CHAPTER 2: Review of Literature

The literature review section is structured as follows: Since customer interaction is increasingly visible on social media especially Facebook, a review of literature about social media use provides insight into how it forms an integral element of marketing in online brand communities. After shedding light on what brand communities are, a discussion of the theoretical foundation is introduced. This is followed by literature on the concept of symbolic customer engagement. The chapter concludes with a review of the independent variables.

2.1. Social Media

The media landscape has shown considerable change during the past decade. Social media such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube now supplements traditional media such as television and newspapers. Different types of social media share some common characteristics such as the facilitation of two-way communication and user control over content creation, dissemination and consumption (Vernuccio, 2014). In other words, social media platforms provide important tools that enable user interaction. According to Vernuccio (2014), the terms social media describes “platforms of digital communication that continually appear in their interactive environment, underlining their participative and collaborative social characteristics” (p.3).

Social media has become an important element of the overall marketing strategy of businesses in terms of managing their brand image through effective customer relationship management (Baird & Parasnis, 2011). Mangold and Faulds (2009) described social media use by businesses as a “hybrid element of the promotion mix” (p. 357). Social media has transformed the marketing landscape by allowing for customer participation, whereby they interact with the brand or the business and with other consumers (Muniz & Schau, 2011).

Most Fortune 500 business organizations already have a strong social media presence. In 2011, more than 50% of social media users followed brands on social media (Van Belleghem, Eenhuizen, & Veris, 2011). According to BIA/Kelsey, social media spending on advertisements in the U.S. was about \$3.8 billion in 2011, and is expected to further rise to \$9.8 billion by 2016 (Kelsey, 2012). About 50% of the top global brands had already established an online brand community by 2012 (Manchanda, Packard, & Patabhiraiah, 2012). A study by Stephen and Galak (2012) found that the percent sales impact of traditional media was greater than that of social media, however, due to the high frequency of social media activity, it played an important role in the marketing mix.

PEW statistics reveal that 67% of online adults are Facebook users (Rainie, Smith, & Duggan, 2013). It is therefore not surprising that U.S.'s top performing corporations have a Facebook presence (McCorkindale, 2010). On average, a user is connected to 80 community pages, groups and events on Facebook (Facebook, 2011), where customers behave in a number of ways. It starts with them "liking" the page, which is a basic act and an opportunity for the organization or brand to connect to its audiences. Through this act they become members of that community of fans and also start receiving their status updates.

2.2. Online Brand Communities

A community of fans around a product, service, or an organization is often referred to as a brand community. The American Marketing Association (1960) defines the term, brand, as "a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors". Corporate branding is "the corporation's voice and the images" projected to diverse global audiences (Argenti & Forman, 2002, p.4). There has been a shift from a traditional branding

model in which customers are viewed as passive (Norman & Ramirez, 1993), to an “open source branding” system (Fournier & Avery, 2011, p.194) that is based on interaction with and among stakeholders. Through this interaction, various stakeholders especially customers are able to contribute in building the brand and generating value (Vernuccio, 2014). Based on the premise of social interaction amongst various users, branding is therefore a “dynamic and social process” (Merz, He, Vargo, 2009, p.332).

There is widespread adoption and popularity of social media in the business environment. According to a Nielsen (2011) study based on a sample of ten global markets, social networking sites (SNS) and blogs account for the majority of time spent online and reach at least 60% of active Internet users. Social media is therefore an important focus of research in the marketing realm (Gupta, Armstrong, & Clayton, 2010). In particular, Facebook represents not only a platform for the development of communities, but also for businesses to reach out to those communities with their marketing messages, build brand image, and engage with their customers in a novel and social setting.

In the marketing literature, a brand community is defined as “a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of the brand” (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2011, p. 412). A brand community has also been defined as “a community of consumers who perceive added value from the relationship with the brand” (Wirtz et al., 2013, p. 224). Brand communities have been found to lead to increased sales (Adjei, Noble & Noble, 2010).

Brand communities are increasingly visible online through Facebook pages, which provide information about new products and services, events and coupons, polls, and create an environment where user discourse around the company’s brand takes place. Businesses also

generate brand posts that comprise diverse content including entertaining messages, video, information, trivia, images and other information. Millions of individuals use Facebook brand pages and view feeds on their profiles.

Customers may join online brand communities because of loyalty towards the brand and being its customers online. Social media users also may share news about brands, share brand related information with others, and possibly engage in social interactions. The degree to which consumers are involved with a brand may play a role in determining social media use. According to Shang, Chen, and Liao (2006) highly involved consumers may show more active participation in online brand communities than those having a low involvement.

A strong identification with the brand can lead to consumers interacting with others who share similar traits and are like-minded (Wirtz et al., 2013). According to Hughes and Ahearne (2010), a person derives practical, emotional, and self-expressive benefits through a set of associations with the brand. Brand relationships in terms of these factors serve as antecedents to customer's participation in the brand community (Wirtz et al., 2013). Discussions about brand communities increasingly use the terms "engage" and "engagement" to refer to user interactions (Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric, and Ilic, 2011). It is therefore important to have a clear understanding of term customer engagement in understanding customer participation on social media platforms.

2.3. Theoretical Foundation

The model developed and tested in this dissertation is based on the Self-Determination Theory (SDT). SDT is a broad theoretical framework for understanding human motivation, according to which conditions that support autonomy, competence, and relatedness foster motivation, creativity and engagement. On the other hand, factors that avert autonomy, competence, and relatedness lead to poorer performance and motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

The motivations emerging as a result of the satisfaction of these three broad innate needs are self-determined (Kreijns, Vermeulen, Acker, and van Buuren, 2014). Vallerand (1997, p.319) pointed towards the evidence that motivation “causes consequences”, which can be cognitive, affective and behavioral. This dissertation focuses on the behavioral outcomes of motivation reflected in customer engagement. SDT can thus help us better understand the factors that motivate individuals to engage with brands on Facebook pages.

Self Determination Theory (SDT) by Deci and Ryan (1985) states that motivation is a result of different goals or reasons that give rise to an action. Both intrinsic and extrinsic factors that affect human motivation can be understood through Self Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Over the years, SDT has been applied in a range of contexts such as education, parenting, health, sports, work, and relationships (Deci and Ryan, 2008). Past studies have employed SDT to explicate motivation in the realm of learning motivation (Black & Deci, 2000; Noels, Pelletier, Clement, & Vallerand, 2002; Reeve, 2002, 2012), physical activity and sports (Edmunds, Ntoumanis, & Duda, 2006; Ntoumanis, 2001; Russell & Bray, 2009), health care (Ryan, Patrick, Deci, & Williams, 2008; Williams, 2002), virtual environments and video games (Rigby & Ryan, 2011), and organizations and work (Lian, Ferris, & Brown, 2012; Trepanier, Fernet, & Austin, 2013), etc.

According to SDT, “all human beings have fundamental psychological needs to be competent, autonomous, and related to others” (Deci & Ryan, 2012). SDT is thus based on three main postulates—autonomy, competence, and relatedness. At a more advanced level, SDT comprises five mini-theories—basic needs theory, organismic integration theory, goal contents theory, cognitive evaluation theory, and causality orientation theory (Reeve, 2012). However, for

this dissertation the intent is to use its basic and parsimonious form and test the framework in the context of customer engagement on social media.

Environments that provide autonomy lead to higher self-determined motivation (Vallerand, Pelletier & Koestner, 2008). Therefore, to be fully motivated, a social context that is supportive of autonomy would lead to a greater motivation to participate. When individuals are autonomous, they exhibit greater engagement and creativity (Deci & Ryan, 2012). Figure 1 depicts a theoretical model derived from SDT that shows concepts predicting customer engagement on Facebook brand pages.

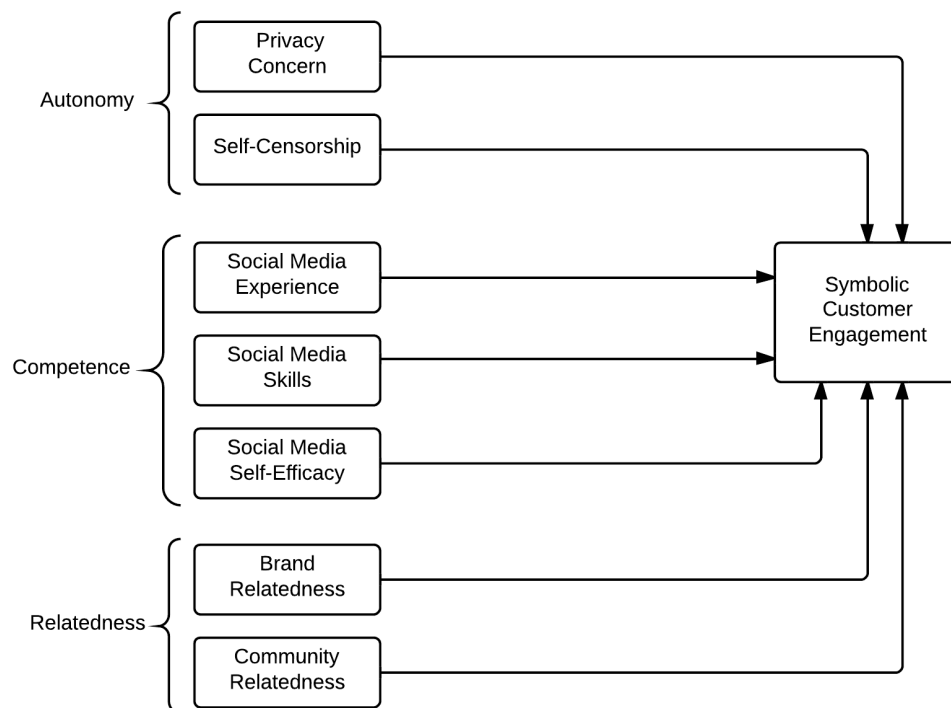


Figure 1: Theoretical Model

Within social contexts, autonomy may be supported or constrained. Autonomy refers to “being the source of one’s own behavior and achieving congruence between the activity and

one's integrated sense of self" (Bachman & Stewart, 2011, p.181). Autonomy also implies behaving with a sense of volition and fully comfortable with the behavior one is engaged in (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 2012). In the law literature, autonomy has been referred to as "individual liberty" (Henkin, 1974, p.1416); and the "freedom from regulation" (Henkin, 1974, p.14214-1425). In the online world, autonomy is not possible until one has the complete volition to exercise one's participative abilities. Factors such as privacy concerns can impact the freedom to interact freely. It is for this reason that privacy is seen a major digital media issue. Consumer confidence in personal privacy has the potential to impact user interactions and even the use of the Internet for commercial purposes (Al-Shakhouri, Nour, & Mahmood, 2009).

In this dissertation, the factors that operationalize autonomy are *privacy concern* and *self-censorship*. As depicted in figure 1, privacy concern and self-censorship are factors that have the potential to support autonomy on social media especially Facebook. Privacy is defined as "the interest that individuals have in sustaining a personal space, free from interference by other people and organizations" (Clarke, 1999, p.60). For example, on social media platforms autonomy may be constrained when site design features may not allow individuals to participate due to privacy concerns.

Self-Censorship is also a factor that has the potential to limit or enhance autonomy. In certain situations, individuals may choose not to express themselves freely and self-censor their opinions because of feeling uncomfortable in an environment of potential disagreements. Certain norms or personal characteristics such as the willingness to self-sensor and the tendency of outspokenness can also impact user behavior thereby restricting autonomy. Therefore, these factors may limit their autonomy or the freedom to engage. Specifically, it is expected that

autonomy will be higher when the social media platform provides a sense of privacy and the ability to self-sensor and express freely when desired.

Furthermore, increased levels of engagement may be achieved when individuals experience competence. Competence has been viewed as sense of confidence in doing a certain activity (Reeve, Deci, & Ryan, 2004), and the need for challenge (Ryan, Rigby, & Przybylski, 2006). Competency is this the ability to produce an effect; and “the feeling that one is effective and that there are sufficient opportunities to demonstrate efficacy (Kreijns, et al., 2014, p.4). In the gaming contexts, competence becomes quite salient since games provide a challenging opportunity to demonstrate skills and efficacy (Ryan, Rigby, & Przybylski, 2006). Bandura (1977) had hypothesized that self-efficacy impacts a person’s selection of behaviors and the effort exerted in doing a task. Therefore, self-efficacy and in this case social media self-efficacy has been added as a measure for competence in figure 1 because it may have the potential to impact overall competence in customer engagement on social media. Other factors that relate to competence include the social media skills and the experience in using various social media sites.

Relatedness is about a sense of belonging and that one is connected and has a relationship with others (Kreijns, et al., 2014). Relatedness is a fundamental need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). It may be argued that it is similar to the concept of attachment by Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978). In the context of being part of an online brand community, a customer who feels related to the community and the brand is expected to show a greater degree of symbolic customer engagement.

2.4. Engagement

The concept of engagement has gained considerable business. Although user engagement has become a marketing buzzword (Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2013), it is often viewed as an elusive concept. This is because it can take a variety of definitions and manifestations depending on the subject being engaged. For example, engagement has been studied in terms of students, employees, customers, product, organizations, etc. (Brodie et al. 2011).

There is seen to be a widening gap between industry professionals and the academic community especially concerning the emerging and dynamic concept of customer engagement. This gap mainly emerged due to a lack of agreement surrounding the definition of engagement. There are several industry reports from various marketing research organizations that shed light on engagement. However, from an academic point-of-view these reports may often not meet the quantitative and theoretical standards of inquiry.

Peck and Malthouse (2011) define engagement as “the collection of experiences that readers, viewers or visitors have with a media brand (p. 4). Customer engagement can be seen as a new potential for advertising and public relations. Viewed from an organization’s point of view, engagement, even when symbolic, is highly sought after. Research involving hotel websites shows that higher engagement with the brand website positively predicts favorable attitude towards a brand (McMillan, Hwang, & Lee, 2003). According to Brodie et al. (2011) customer engagement leads to a “co-creation” of value, which benefits customers in the form of enhanced trust, satisfaction, connection, empowerment, and commitment.

Customer engagement on social media also play a role in developing customer relationships that are deeper and last longer (Kumar et al. 2010). According to Kane, Fichman, Gallagher, and Glaser (2009), social media are particularly suitable for customer relationship

development. Customers gain value and strengthen brand relationships through positive experiences gained from interactions (Algesheimer, Borle, Dholakia, & Singh, 2010). Customer engagement with the brand contributes to developing customer loyalty (Hollebeek, 2011), and membership continuance in an online community leads to customer advocacy (Algesheimer et al., 2005). According to Thompson and Sinha (2008), such brand loyalty translates into active participants in brand communities being more willing to buy a firm's new products and services and less inclined to adopt competing products. The factors that lead to customer engagement are viewed from a motivational perspective.

2.4.1. Dependent Concept—Symbolic Customer Engagement

Customer engagement is a prime research priority (Bolton, 2011). A number of behaviors are carried out regarding customer engagement and these behaviors include commenting, online discussions, searching for information etc. (Gummerus, Liljander, Weman & Pihlstrom, 2012). In a general sense, “engagement is a user-initiated action” (Gluck, 2012, p.8). According to Alhabash and McAlister (2014), engagement “encapsulates the psychological responses to online messages” (p. 2).

Gummerus, et al., (2012) analyzed customer engagement behaviors of liking, commenting, and reading messages on a Facebook brand community page and found that customers received social, entertainment and economic benefits. According to van Doorn et al., (2010) customer's behavioral expressions around a brand in the online context emerge from motivational drivers. Therefore, SDT as a motivational framework forms the basis for understanding customer engagement on social media brand pages.

As a result of the diversity in application of the engagement concept, different definitions have emerged. Building upon the Bloom's taxonomy of learning (cognitive, psychomotor, and

affective), several conceptualizations of engagement have emerged. For a deeper understanding, literature in this area informs us that engagement is a multidimensional concept that comprises behavioral (actions), cognitive (thoughts), and emotional (feelings) aspects (Hollebeek, 2011). This research concentrates on symbolic engagement, which is manifested in the form of likes, comments and shares on Facebook.

Table 1: Customer Engagement in the Selected Literature

#	Author(s)	Customer Engagement Definitions
1	Haven, B. (2007, p. 4)	“Engagement is the level of involvement, interaction, intimacy, and influence an individual has with a brand over time”.
2	Patterson et al. (2006)	“The level of a customer's physical, cognitive and emotional presence in their relationship with a service organization.”
3	Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan (2012, p.4)	“The intensity of an individual's participation in and connection with an organization's offerings and/or organizational activities, which either the customer or the organization initiate.”
4	Hollebeek (2011, p. 6)	“The level of a customer's motivational, brand-related and context dependent state of mind characterized by specific levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity in brand interactions.”
5	Mollen and Wilson (2010, p.5)	“The cognitive and affective commitment to an active relationship with the brand as personified by the website or other computer mediated entities designed to communicate brand value.”
6	Van Doorn, Lemon, Mittal, Nass, Pick, Pirner, Verhoef (2010, p.254)	“Customer’s behavioral manifestations that have a brand or firm focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers.”
7	Brodie, Ilic, Juric, and Hollebeek (2011, p.3)	“A multidimensional concept comprising cognitive, emotional, and/or behavioral dimensions, and plays a central role in the process of relational exchange...”
8	ARF (2006)	“Engagement is turning on a prospect to a brand idea enhanced by the surrounding context”

Table 1 provides a set of definitions for customer engagement. A synthesis of various studies (see table 1) reveals that the behavioral focus on engagement remains dominant (Brodie et al. 2011).

Cognitive engagement comprises factors such as awareness, interest and intention (Gluck, 2012). This means that in order to increase cognitive engagement, an organization needs to strategically place content that creates greater interest. Lastly, emotional or affective engagement looks into the emotional factors that cause individuals to feel in a certain way.

Earlier, Algesheimer et al. (2005) referred to engagement in a brand community as an attitude. However, according to van Doorn et al. (2010) customer engagement goes beyond attitude to include customers' behavior towards a brand. In the realm of social media, van Doorn's definition seems plausible since an individual's attitude (e.g. trust, commitment, and satisfaction) is translated into symbolic engagement when he/she interacts with the media. In case of Facebook brand pages, customers demonstrate engagement in the form of liking, commenting and sharing.

Engagement in an online brand community (such as Facebook pages) leads to interactive participation (Brodie, et al., 2011). Moreover, Higgins and Scholer (2009) conceptualize engagement as a state of persistent attention, often illustrated by deep involvement. On SNSs customers can turn their passive disposition to active participation through commenting, reviewing, liking and sharing information about the brand. Thus, symbolic customer engagement can only be possible when actual participation takes place on the Facebook brand page. Especially in terms of liking, commenting and sharing, some research highlights parts of what constitutes online media engagement. For example Calder, Malthouse, & Schaedel (2009) view user discussions on websites to measure engagement. Hence, a user becomes engaged when

he/she actively involves with the content. The sense of involvement (a dimension of engagement) is motivated by the intrinsic desire of a user to interact with the online platform and other users (Algesheimer et al. 2005). Since intrinsic desire has not been fully explicated in the earlier frameworks of customer motivations on social media, the research model in this dissertation helps understand the intrinsic motivations through the SDT.

According to Mollen and Wilson (2010), a consumer's engagement with the brand comprises an interactive relationship with the engagement object. The notion of interactive customer relationships involving brands has also been discussed in the wider literature in relationship marketing (Vivek et al., 2012).

In this dissertation, customer engagement on social media is defined as follows:

Customer Engagement with the brand is a continuing intense relationship between a person and a product or service. The engagement can be expressed symbolically through the use and creation of mediated messages (symbolic customer engagement) and physically as actual product/service use or purchase (physical customer engagement).

2.4.2. Assumptions and Limits

Although, all symbolic engagement may not necessarily lead to physical customer engagement, a key assumption in this dissertation is that symbolic customer engagement in general can lead to physical customer engagement. Symbolic customer engagement is also expected to vary in intensity, whereby; likes contributing the least to the level of customer engagement with the brand. Comments may provide the greatest level of intensity and shares on Facebook brand pages may provide a greater level of engagement than likes. Tucker (2011) had argued that

users' behaviors of liking, commenting and sharing collectively qualify as engagement measures of online ad effectiveness.

In this dissertation, engagement is divided into physical customer engagement (PCE) and symbolic customer engagement (SCE). PCE is the actual and continuing use of branded products or services by a consumer. On the other hand, SCE is continuing online interaction with the brand symbols that represent the product or service. This dissertation is focused on SCE in the social media context. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of PCE and SCE.

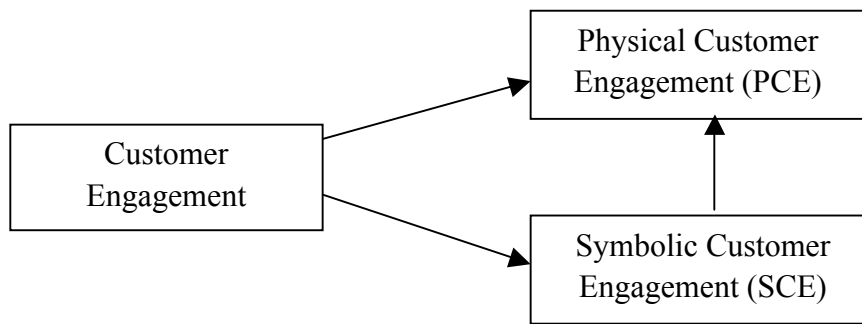


Figure 2: Types of Customer Engagement

2.4.3. Symbolic Customer Engagement through Likes, Comments & Shares

2.4.3.1. Liking

From a new media perspective, likes on social media represent a form of user vote or an expression of appreciation of content. Similarly a dislike expresses disapproval of some content. Although seemingly simple hyperlinks, Facebook likes serve as a social currency, which also indicate the popularity of content. It is a way to show others of one's approval or disapproval of something. For example, according to Facebook, individuals who click on the Facebook Like button are more engaged and active, than other average Facebook users who do not (Facebook, 2010). In addition, an average

Facebook user who clicks on the Like button is seen to have 2.4 times the number of friends than an average Facebook user (Facebook, 2010).

2.4.3.2. *Commenting*

Commenting on various Internet platforms is a commonly observed phenomenon that has gained considerable importance overtime. In an online social media environment, users express their opinions about a topic by writing how they feel about it. Such comments can be detailed or short and comprise diverse views. Comments may also be viewed as User Generated Content (UGC).

Comments are beneficial because they may further encourage user interaction and discussion. Such participation from users may give the impression of an active website where everyone is and thus adding to the overall credibility (Kraut & Resnick, 2011). Research has already shown that user-generated comments have the potential to significantly alter reader's perception about issues (Kim & Sun, 2006; Lee & Jang, 2010).

2.4.3.3. *Sharing*

Social media users have the option of repurposing the content to fit their needs, thereby creating the possibility of multilevel mass communication. A user's creation and sharing of information, allows it to be viewed by others. This in turn affords storytelling thereby inducing enhanced forms of communication and different types of interactivity (Pavlik, 1999). Typically a user can share a video, an image, a post, or a link emanating from a particular brand page on Facebook. Therefore, by sharing a Facebook brand post, a user may make a conscious decision to make available the content (sometimes on other social media platforms) within one's network of friends.

2.5. Social Media Competence

Social media competence can be viewed from various angles. Competence is “one of the most fundamental judgments people make of behavior” (Egland, Spitzberg, & Zormeier, 1996, p.107). Competence to navigate one’s way in social setting online may require experience in using the technical features of a website. In addition to mastery of technical features, the social nature of new media requires a possession of a set of social skills, knowledge, and experience.

Competence may also be related to the self-efficacy of a person on social media. This is because past research has shown that prior Internet experience causes Internet self-efficacy (Eastin & LaRose, 2000). According to Eastin and LaRose (2000), prior Internet experience is positively correlated to Internet self-efficacy. It may thus be argued that among other factors, skills that are important in enabling a person to interact within Facebook brand pages are attained through social media experience. The greater the amount of experience in using disparate social media tools as well as the duration of time spent in exploring social media sites, the greater the propensity of users to engage with Facebook brands and other users. This is also confirmed by a study by Kraut et al. (2002) according to which computer use has a positive relationship with Internet skills acquired over a period of time. This becomes possible through “enactive mastery” (Bandura, 1986). The following sections will discuss the independent concepts such as social media self-efficacy and skills, etc.

2.5.1. Social Media Self Efficacy

The concept of self-efficacy lies at the heart Bandura’s social cognitive theory. Originally situated in the educational literature, Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) posits that an individual's knowledge acquisition can be a result of observing others in the environment, within the context of social interactions (Pajares, 1997). This implies that new behaviors are not only learned

through trying them but often through the replication of other's actions. SCT also posits that's individuals through a self-system, control their thoughts, feelings, actions, and motivations (Bandura, 1986). There is interplay of personal (learned experiences), environmental (social context), and behavioral factors (responses to stimuli), also termed as reciprocal determinism (Bandura, 1986). Most importantly, the beliefs that people have about themselves impact control and personal agency (Pajares, 1997). The beliefs about oneself include self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997).

Self-efficacy is "the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (Bandura, 1997, p.2). In other words, self-efficacy is a person's belief in one's ability to do something in a particular situation with the skills possessed. Therefore, self-efficacy does not refer to skills that individuals possess or believe to possess, rather it pertains to what individuals believe they can do (Bandura, 1997). According to Bandura (1994), these beliefs determine how individuals think, feel, and behave. In educational research, self-efficacy has been applied to understand academic motivation and self-regulation (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996); addiction (Marlatt, Baer, & Quigley, 1995); assertiveness (Lee, 1983, 1984); social skills (Moe & Zeiss, 1982). Self-efficacy and a sense of perceived competence have been hypothesized to be similar (Williams, McGregor, Ryan, Sharp, & Deci, 2006).

Self-Efficacy is related to outcome expectations. The stronger an individual's self-efficacy belief, the more likely he or she will achieve the desired outcome (Oliver & Shapiro, 1993). Self-efficacy has been applied in different domains. For example, self-efficacy is predictive of email and Internet use—Internet self-efficacy (Eastin & LaRose, 2000). Moreover, self efficacy may be viewed as the proper handling and use of the Internet, especially SNSs,

which depends on user “confidence in their ability to successfully understand, navigate, and evaluate content online” (Daugherty, Eastin, and Gangadharbatla 2005, p. 71).

Today the Internet is more advanced and SNSs dominate the Internet landscape. Therefore, this dissertation uses the term social media self-efficacy to refer to the belief in one’s capabilities to engage with social media brand pages.

Bandura (1994) argued that individual beliefs about their efficacy could be developed by four main sources: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and psychological states (stress, anxiety, arousal, fatigue, and mood etc.). The first source, *mastery experiences* concerns how a person construes the outcomes of his/her earlier performance. In other words, by gauging the effects of their own actions individuals create their efficacy beliefs (Pajares, 1997). This means that humans are self-learners. For example, when outcomes of some action are interpreted as positive, self-efficacy rises, and vice versa.

Vicarious experiences concerns forming a belief in one’s own self-efficacy by observing other individuals model a behavior. In other words, people have expectations influenced by the observation of the consequences. For example, a person observes that people receives many likes on their comment, they may learn that if they behave in that way they will receive appreciation.

The third source of individual beliefs, *social persuasions* concerns judgments made by others in which positive appraisal strengthen self-efficacy while negative judgments weaken self-efficacy beliefs. For example, on social media such as Facebook, “likes” serving as a positive appraisal would play a role in socially persuading a user to participate.

Lastly, a person’s *psychological or emotional state* would impact beliefs about self-efficacy. Individuals may assess their own emotional state in interpreting their confidence level

in contemplating an action. For example, fears about one's capability in doing a certain task may lower perceptions of capability and lead to stress, possibly leading to an inadequate performance that was feared (Pajares, 1997).

Prior experience predicts self-efficacy (Lewis, 1985). Beliefs in one's personal competence also determines how much effort a person applies in a certain activity (Pajares, 1997). Based on this premise, this model indicates that a customer's intention to engage with social media, such as Facebook brand pages, will be a function of his/her social media self-efficacy, which in turn will be affected by user's competence (skills and experience). It must be noted here that an individual's judgment of personal competence is different from "judgments of the likely consequences that behavior will produce (Bandura, 1986, p. 391). Therefore, self-efficacy beliefs are distinct from the outcome expectations in predicting behavior.

It can thus be concluded that individuals can behave in a certain way by observing others. According to SCT, people engage in goals directed behavior and are motivated to accomplish those goals. Moreover, leaning is an internal process that may or not lead to a behavior. This means there is more to it than what SCT posits. SCT assumes that behavior eventually becomes self-regulated and that a change in environment would lead to a change in behavior. However, this may not always be true. Motivation may be the missing piece. For a truly holistic understanding of human behavior, theory must address the linkage between self-perceptions and certain behaviors (Pajares, 1997). According to Nahl (1996, 1997), self-efficacy perceptions positively relate to task performance. Ren (1999) also argued that self-efficacy perceptions also positively relate to the amount of use.

In this dissertation's context, social media self-efficacy is expected to be positively related to the expectation of Facebook brand page engagement. Among other factors, social

media self-efficacy is an important variable that helps understand social media engagement brand pages especially for behaviors such as commenting and sharing. Social Media Self-Efficacy hypotheses are as follows:

H1a: *Social media self-efficacy will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of commenting on Facebook brand pages.*

H1b: *Social media self-efficacy will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of sharing on Facebook brand pages.*

2.5.2. Social Media Experience

Social media competence can be built over time through experience in dealing with other individuals. Past research shows that factors such as time play an important role in determining computer use over time (Kraut, Kiesler, Boneva, Cummings, Helgeson, & Crawford, 2002). In this dissertation, social media experience has been conceptualized using the amount of time a person has used disparate social media platforms. It can therefore be argued that the more time an individual has spent on social media the more adept or skilled he/she will be in its use. This leads us to our second set of hypotheses:

H2a: *Social media experience will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of liking on Facebook brand pages.*

H2b: *Social media experience will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of commenting on Facebook brand pages.*

H2c: *Social media experience will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of sharing on Facebook brand pages.*

2.5.3. Social Media Skills

Skills have traditionally been studied as Internet skills. With the pervasive use of social media, a more comprehensive understanding and conceptualization of Internet skills is necessary. A study by Hargittai and Walejko (2008) revealed that Internet skills were a mediating factor for sharing content online.

The concept of skills required to use the Internet have been studied in various academic disciplines such as sociology, education, media, and communication (Litt, 2013). A natural result of this diversity in research has been the use of different terms to refer to Internet skills. Hargittai (2009), Van Deursen and Van Dijk (2009) refer to it as skills. On the other hand, Eshet-Alkali and Amichai-Hamburger (2004) have referred to it as digital literacy. Spitzberg (2006) referred to Internet skills as competency. Spitzberg (2011) further defined communication skills as “repeatable goal-oriented action sequences involved in message production and interaction” (p.147). Warschauer and Matuchniak, (2010) have even defined Internet skills as “21st century skills”, which are important to be able to navigate one’s way through common tasks in a social environment (p.206).

Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear and Leu (2008) emphasized the importance of digital literacy (or Internet skills) as essential to participation in civic, economic and personal life. Such skills are also important because in the new media environment, one must have the ability to manipulate, structure and coordinate (Coiro et al., 2008). These may be viewed as skills that help a person coordinate different tasks in the new media landscape. Also important are practices such as creating media, repurposing it for use in varied contexts, and engaging in online social interactions to communicate ideas (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009; Ito et al. 2009; Jenkins, 2006).

Social media use has become pervasive, and many of the basic skills required to read, analyze and contribute content are quite intuitive. The acts of liking, commenting, and sharing content do not require much training and are being conducted pervasively on various social media platforms. Users now need to possess skills that allow them to deal with trust issues, be aware of online social norms, and communicate with each other effectively (Haythornwaite, 2007). In particular, individuals now need communication competencies that allow them to communicate more effectively. Communication competencies can be viewed under the following key categories: knowledge competencies, interpersonal skills and social skills.

2.5.3.1. *Knowledge*

Knowledge based competency may be understood as the practical understanding of something.

Knowledge is reflected through planning, familiarity, expertise etc. (Spitzberg, 2006).

Knowledge may also be understood as a skill that allows a typical user to communicate effectively on social media in terms of knowing what to say, how to say it and how best to adapt messages in different situations. The ability of users to manipulate, structure and use information to their advantage is critical in the new media environment. More so for new media, these vital skills need to be mastered. Since the key behavioral manifestation of knowledge is in the form of commenting and sharing, the hypotheses for this variable are as follows:

H3a: *Knowledge will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of commenting on Facebook brand pages.*

H3b: *Knowledge will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of sharing on Facebook brand pages.*

There are other skill-based competencies that are usually learned, and these may hold the key to aid user participation and may play a vital role in promoting user engagement on social media. A typical social media user can participate on sites such as Facebook and commonly engage in liking content. When it comes to commenting on posts or writing status updates, a person may need a lot more than simple familiarity with the medium. An illustrative example given by Ring, Braginsky, & Braginsky (1966) highlights the role of an actor on stage. Even when highly motivated, an actor may not demonstrate quality performance if he/she does not possess the necessary acting skills to render such motivation and knowledge into proper action. In case of an average social media user, there needs to be a certain degree of communication competence that can translate into engagement behaviors such as commenting.

Spitzberg and Cupach (2002) identified more than a hundred different skills in the communication literature centering on competence. At a more parsimonious level, Spitzberg (2006) condensed these skills in four basic skill groups: *attentiveness* (showing concern for, interest in, and attention to another individual in communication), *coordination* (displaying time management, conversation start and ending, topic management etc.), *composure* (displaying confidence, assertiveness, and control), and *expressiveness* (displaying vividness and animation in expressions). A variety of measurement studies have employed these typologies in explicating skills (Spitzberg, 1994; Spitzberg, Brookshire, & Brunner, 1990).

2.5.3.2. *Attentiveness*

Norton and Pettegrew (1979) describe attentiveness as a communication style which “signals that the communicative process is working” (p.13). In written communication, attentiveness can be displayed through various ways such as, appropriateness of questions, message sophistication, showing of concern, politeness, compassion, and empathy (Spitzberg, 2006). It is hypothesized

that such communication tactics manifested through likes, comments and shares would positively predict symbolic customer engagement on Facebook brand pages. The hypotheses concerning attentiveness are as follows:

H4a: *Attentiveness skills will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of liking on Facebook brand pages.*

H4b: *Attentiveness skills will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of commenting on Facebook brand pages.*

H4c: *Attentiveness skills will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of sharing on Facebook brand pages.*

2.5.3.3. Coordination

Coordination skills have also been termed as interaction management skills (Spitzberg, 2006). In this context, the length of the message and how quickly a response is given to other messages in an online conversation can demonstrate the possession of a skill (Spitzberg, 2006). In some ways, coordination and attentiveness have similarities. Condon and Ogston (1966) shed light on phenomena in the realm of interpersonal coordination, which they termed as “interaction synchrony” or coordination between conversational partners (p.342). Bernieri and Rosenthal (1991) defined coordination as “the degree to which the behaviors in an interaction are nonrandom, patterned, or synchronized in both timing and form” (p. 402- 403). It may therefore be understood that coordination is an important skill in social media conversations. Since coordination is most appropriate when conversations are involved, the hypothesis for this variable focuses on commenting:

H5: *Coordination skills will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of commenting on Facebook brand pages.*

2.5.3.4. Composure

In computer-mediated communication, composure is displayed when a person has an assertiveness style and exhibits certainty (Spitzberg, 2006). Composure is more of a “self-promotional” skill (Spitzberg, 2006, p. 642). Composure may also be seen as a form of assertiveness (Castella, Abad, Alonso, & Silla, 2000), which is manifested online through avoiding cues of uncertainty (Spitzberg, 2006). Composure also includes expressing opinions forcefully, and writing messages that display confidence. Composure is thus a skill that is manifested in commenting behavior on social media. The hypothesis for composure is as follows:

H6: *Composure skills will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of commenting on Facebook brand pages.*

2.5.3.5. Expressiveness

CMC affords users the opportunity to express themselves in various ways. In fact, in online interactions, greater self-disclosure is possible than face-to-face interactions (Tidwell & Walther, 2002). Besides textual interactions, individuals can express themselves through emoticons, humor, and various “paralinguistic features” (Spitzberg, 2006). The opposite of expressiveness has termed by some as “lurking” (Preece, Nonnecke, and Andrews, 2004), or lack of participation and passiveness. This leads us to the following set of hypotheses:

H7a: *Expressiveness skills will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of liking on Facebook brand pages.*

H7b: *Expressiveness skills will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of commenting on Facebook brand pages.*

H7c: *Expressiveness skills will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of sharing on Facebook brand pages.*

2.5.3.6. Social Skills

In the study of interpersonal relationships, social skills are known to offer various benefits. Social skills facilitate competence (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2011), and enable users to participate effectively. Social skills may be defined as the specific competencies that help users interact effectively with others (Baron & Markman, 2000). In the psychological literature, social skills have been found to be of great importance for children's adjustment in educational settings. For example, social skills have been related to social outcomes of mainstreaming (Gresham, 1983); and peer acceptance (Asher & Hymel, 1981). Social skills have also been found to be important for entrepreneurs in ensuring financial success (Baron & Markman, 2003).

According to a study by Baron and Markman (2003), aspects of an entrepreneurs' social competence or social skill, which was defined as their capability to successfully interact with others, was positively predictive of their financial success. Baron and Markman (2003) viewed social competence comprising factors such as correctness in understanding others, skill at managing impressions, and persuasiveness. In the social media milieu, social skills are expected to positively predict customer engagement on Facebook brand pages. This leads us to the following hypotheses related to social skills:

H8a: *Social skills will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of liking on Facebook brand pages.*

H8b: *Social skills will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of commenting on Facebook brand pages.*

H8c: *Social skills will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of sharing on Facebook brand pages.*

2.6. Relatedness

Relatedness is an important construct of the self-determination theory, and can be understood as the intrinsic need to experience satisfaction derived from participation and involvement with in social setting (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Brand communities exhibit certain characteristics such as common understanding of things (or shared consciousness), common norms and practices, and a sense of moral responsibility (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001; Madupu, 2006). Individuals are not only engaged with the brand but also with other individuals in the brand community. Therefore, relatedness has two main dimensions—brand relatedness and community relatedness.

2.6.1. Community Relatedness

Relatedness with other individuals is a universal want to interact and be connected (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). In this dissertation, relatedness with other individuals has been termed as community relatedness (or relationship with community). Community Relatedness Hypotheses are as follows:

H9a: *Community relatedness will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of liking on Facebook brand pages.*

H9b: *Community relatedness will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of commenting on Facebook brand pages.*

H9c: Community relatedness *will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of sharing on Facebook brand pages.*

2.6.2. Brand Relatedness

Relatedness with the brand (product/service) may be understood as the basic dispositions that individuals have towards the brand. In this dissertation, brand relatedness is defined as how a brand communicates a consumer's concept of self in relation to his/her value and goals. Sprott, Szellar, and Spangenberg (2009) argue that the relatedness with the brand (also referred to as brand self-concept) differentiates between individual differences along a continuum from low to high. It is therefore argued that, brand relatedness impacts the interaction and engagement with the brand (Goldsmith, Flynn, and Clark, 2011). Brand Relatedness hypotheses are as follows:

H10a: Brand relatedness *will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of liking on Facebook brand pages.*

H10b: Brand relatedness *will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of commenting on Facebook brand pages.*

H10c: Brand relatedness *will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of sharing on Facebook brand pages.*

2.7. Privacy and Self-Censorship

While the boundaries of physical spaces may be clear, boundaries in the virtual worlds are not. Westin (1967) claimed that privacy is a right through which an individual is able to prevent the release of a certain set of information to others. Privacy concerns may make users feel less autonomous and free in interacting with certain content and thus this factor may serve as an impediment in information sharing and other participatory acts. This is because research shows

that public consumption behavior is a form of message communication and self-representation (Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Calder & Burnkrant, 1977; Midgley, 1993). Goodwin (1992) viewed privacy as a “management of self-boundaries (p. 263). In a study by Goodwin (1992) subjects were asked to select a product or service that they would not want their close acquaintances such as relatives or friends to know about. Results showed that participants wanted privacy exercise control over intrusion (such as prevention of embarrassment, avoidance of evaluation by others) and control over disclosure (such as protection of information about self, protection of self-image).

As a result of user perceptions of a lack of privacy especially on Facebook, users may not fully disclose their preference thereby limiting their overall engagement on the site. Kupfer (1987) argues that privacy hinges upon a degree of control over information about oneself. However, some degree of control is relinquished by being on social media platforms. By being online and through registering on Facebook, users do agree to forgo some aspects of their privacy such as their name, their preferences and interests etc. Especially on Facebook brand pages, any likes, comments and shares are visible publicly thereby possibly giving rise to issues of privacy. According to Dell and Marinova (2002) privacy related issues would lead to more conservative disclosure of online personal information, as it may be hard to keep separate one audience from another. For example, some individuals may not feel comfortable discussing brand related information because they may feel that such information needs not be seen by “friends” in their Facebook network. Such concerns may limit individuals from commenting on brand posts.

The feeling of being in control or being autonomous has also been associated with improved self-efficacy beliefs (Gist and Mitchell, 1992; Tafarodi, Milne & Smith, 1999).

Moreover, a lack of control not only causes stress but also lowers perceived competency (Judge, Bono, Erez, & Locke, 2000).

Closely related to privacy concerns is the feeling of trust. Trust in social media is the belief that the Internet environment has the necessary safeguards in place to ensure user safety and security (McKight, Choudhury, & Kacmar, 2002). A user's perception of trust on Facebook may vary. Trust in social media is about the security of a user in terms of his/her privacy that is linked to the perceived ability to modify one's self-presentation. If a user feels constrained by the perception that his/her profile features are not within his/her control, the motivation to participate may be limited. Autonomy therefore is dependent on various social practices including privacy that encourage self-determined behavior (Kupfer, 1987). This leads us to the following hypothesis:

H11a: Privacy Concern *will be negatively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of liking on Facebook brand pages.*

H11b: Privacy Concern *will be negatively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of commenting on Facebook brand pages.*

H11c: Privacy Concern *will be negatively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of sharing on Facebook brand pages.*

A key feature of a SNS especially Facebook is a public display of connections (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Therefore SNS provide an opportunity to users to selectively present and manage their public image. If selective self-presentation is difficult or not possible to pursue, a person would feel constrained and this may impact his/her willingness to engage with a particular Facebook brand page. Individuals are often cautious of their image in online communities. Online public

self-consciousness is defined as the general cognizance of the self as a social being that affects others (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975). There are certain topics such as politics, religion, relationships, that social media users would simply not discuss on sites like Twitter (Marwich, 2011). On a SNS, the self is part of or surrounded in a peer group (Livingstone, 2008). Self-censorship is thus a useful technique to manage an online persona (Marwick, 2011); and thus play a role in impacting symbolic customer engagement on Facebook brand pages. This leads us to the Self-Censorship hypotheses, which are as follows:

H12a: Self-Censorship *will be negatively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of liking on Facebook brand pages.*

H12b: Self-Censorship *will be negatively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of commenting on Facebook brand pages.*

H12c Self-Censorship *will be negatively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of sharing on Facebook brand pages.*

CHAPTER 3: Research Methods

This study employed an online survey to test the hypothesis and the overall model predicting customer engagement. The survey was hosted on Qualtrics and employed a convenience sample comprising MSU students who are already avid Facebook users.

Upon completion of the survey, those individuals who provided their email addresses were entered into a draw through which they could win \$50 Amazon gift cards. Participants needed to provide their email addresses at the end of the survey, which was completely voluntary. No identifiable information was obtained except the email, thus participant confidentiality was ensured. The winners were sent the Amazon digital gift card via email. Once the drawing was complete and participants were rewarded, email information was deleted from the dataset thus making participant information completely anonymous.

3.1. Instrument pre-testing.

The university's SONA system was used to conduct the pre-test. Before initiating the data collection process, a pre-test of the survey instrument was performed in order to deal with any possible misunderstandings and issues that might be encountered in answering the survey questions. This is because research shows that participants may encounter difficulties answering the questionnaire (Presser et al., 2004). Respondents took a pretest survey that yielded 122 responses. The online questionnaire was hosted on Qualtrics.

This number of participants for the pre-test was appropriate according to recommendations of leading methodology researchers in reference to having the right sample size during questionnaire pre-testing (Presser et al., 2004; Hunt, Sparkman, & Wilcox, 1982). An open-ended question at the end of the survey asked for suggestions for improvement. The results

of this pretest survey gave indications of possible issues with the questionnaire design. These suggestions were taken into account to improve the questionnaire in terms of layout, format, and the wording of the questions. The survey pre-test process allowed for the improvement of the instrument before actual data collection.

3.2. Data Collection

The data for this study were collected during February of 2014. At the beginning of the questionnaire, participants were directed to an online consent form. As a precaution, a screening question at the beginning of the survey excluded those who did not use Facebook in the past two months. The questionnaire comprised an introduction to the survey, a consent statement, and questions related to customer engagement and its predictors.

The survey was conducted in a manner consistent with the Tailored Design Method (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009). The Tailored Design Method has proven to be effective for getting maximum participation and was employed because it seeks the development of trust and minimal respondent effort.

There can be varied understanding of the tailored design method, and in this dissertation it reflects the “piping” of responses to reflect the selected favorite brand name throughout the survey. The questions were tailored specifically for each participant based on their favorite brand on Facebook. A question inquired about the favorite brand whose page they had “liked” on Facebook. Most questions that followed included the name of the favorite brand indicated by the respondents. This ensured that there was consistency in the respondent’s conceptualization of the favorite brand on Facebook. For example, participants were asked: “Please write the name of your favorite brand page that you have liked on Facebook. Note: Please write the name of ONLY

one favorite brand.” This allowed the following questions in the survey to be customized (or piped) for each participant, thus enabling them to focus on a single brand throughout the survey.

Once a final version of the questionnaire was achieved, the data collection process started using Qualtrics. A personalized email message with the survey link was sent by the MSU registrar’s office to 10,000 MSU students. A week later, an email was sent reminding participants to participate in the survey. A total of 1154 questionnaires responses were received.

3.3. Data Cleaning

Data were downloaded from Qualtrics and cleaned so that it could be analyzed. From the total 1154 responses that were received, three hundred and twenty four were left incomplete after the first screening question, so these were excluded. Incomplete responses can be due to various reasons such as lack of participant interest in the survey, survey length, etc. The remaining eight hundred and thirty surveys were evaluated and cleaned to see if major portions of the survey were left incomplete. There were further eighty-three responses that were only half-complete and were also thrown out of this sample.

As part of the data cleaning process, frequency tables outlining the minimum and maximum numbers, and data histograms provided a visual representation of how the data looked. Data were further cleaned for missing entries. Missing cases comprised less than ten cases of the total sample. The final number of complete responses equaled 757 (note: survey was sent to 10,000 students). Therefore, the total response rate for the online version of the study was 11.54%.

It is observed that the use of a student sample, and non-probability samples in general, raises questions about the generalizability of the results. While it is indeed problematic to draw

conclusions about univariate values (what a population might think, do) from a student sample (Abelman, 1996; Cunningham, Anderson, & Murphy, 1974), the insights generated about multivariate relationships (the relationships among variables) are still interesting. In further support of the sampling frame, Basil, Brown, and Bocarnea (2002) state: “Simply because samples may be different on one characteristic (such as univariate means) does not indicate they will differ in regard to their multivariate relationships” (p. 512). Thus, the use of a student sample for the present study qualifies as appropriate.

3.3.1. Testing for Normality & Multicollinearity

Data were also tested for meeting normality assumptions. In this regards two methods were employed—visual screening of the data and statistical tests. The normality plot or frequency histograms with a normal overlay were employed to check whether the distribution were normal. The plots provided an indication of outliers, skewness, bimodality, or heavy tails.

Normal QQ plots further gave an indication about data normality. Statistical procedures to test for normality comprised Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests. Overall, the skewness and kurtosis for all variables in the model were below 1.0, thereby indicating data normality. Only the engagement variables of comment and share were not normal. An effort was made to log transform the data; it did not achieve the desired objective of normalizing the data for these variables. It is worth mentioning that such count data are usually in non-normal form.

Histograms for the various scales used as independent variables in the study showed that the data were approximately normally distributed. Diagnostics tests for cases that could be considered as influential outliers were also performed for all variables in the model. Eleven outliers were identified that were skewing the data and were therefore omitted from the dataset.

These were open-ended questions concerning age and time spent on Facebook. A detailed inspection of the cases revealed one case that was identified as spurious (having the same response for all major questions), and was thus excluded from the dataset. The size of the sample for the data analysis was 745.

Multicollinearity can be an issue because it becomes hard to determine the unique contribution to a variable of the highly correlated variables (Field, 2009). Therefore, an analysis was conducted to check for the issue. It was revealed that no multi-collinearity was found among the independent variables. The variance inflation factors (VIF) scores were below 2.0, which confirmed that there were no collinearity issues.

3.4. Dependent Variables

Engagement in an online brand community is operationalized as interactive participation (Brodie, et al., 2011) or symbolic customer engagement. Such engagement is manifested through likes, comments, and shares, which also form the three dependent variables in this dissertation. Participants were asked the following questions: “I Like the posts of my favorite brands Facebook page”, “I write comments on Facebook posts of my favorite brand”, and “I share Facebook posts of my favorite brand’s page”. Responses were recorded on a 7-point scale ranging from never (1) to very often (7).

3.5. Independent Variables

3.5.1. Social Media Self-Efficacy

The Social media self-efficacy in this dissertation is a five-item scale (see table 2). Items for the social media self-efficacy scale were adapted from Eastin & LaRose (2000) scale ($\alpha=0.93$) about Internet self-efficacy and the Sherer, Maddux, Mercadante, Prentice-Dunn, Jacobs, and Rogers, (1982) self-efficacy scale ($\alpha=0.86$).

Table 2: Social Media Self-Efficacy

	Mean	S.D.
I feel confident in locating the necessary information on Facebook for a specific topic	4.82	1.70
I feel confident in turning to my friends when help is needed	5.24	1.53
I feel capable of using all currently available Facebook features	4.98	1.66
I handle myself well in online social settings	5.58	1.38
I am confident in participating in discussions on Facebook	4.90	1.60

3.5.2. Social Media Experience and Skills

In this dissertation, social media competence is also a function of experience with using social media and social media skills. Social media experience was operationalized as the time spent on social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. In addition to the experience-related factors, social media competence in terms of social media skills are being operationalized using the social perception scale ($\alpha=0.83$) by Baron and Markman (2003); and the four dimension (coordination, attentiveness, expressiveness, and composure) CMC competence / skills measures by Spitzberg (2006). In this case, being competent in social media use especially on Facebook brand pages is hypothesized to lead to symbolic customer engagement. The following table (table 3) contains the questions that gauged competence in terms of knowledge, social skills, attentiveness, coordination, expressiveness, and composure.

Table 3: Social Media Skills

	Mean	S.D.
Knowledge		
I am very knowledgeable about how to communicate through social media.	5.67	1.34
I am never at a loss for something to say on social media.	4.22	1.72
I always seem to know how to say things the way I mean them using social media.	4.79	1.55

Table 3 (cont'd)

When communicating with someone on social media, I know how to adapt my messages to the medium.	5.30	1.33
Social Skills		
I'm a good judge of other people	5.36	1.31
I can usually recognize others' traits accurately by observing their behavior	5.43	1.19
I can usually read others well — tell how they are feeling in a given situation	5.48	1.24
I can tell why people have acted the way they have in most situations	5.23	1.25
I generally know when it is the right time to ask someone for a favor	5.31	1.27
Attentiveness		
I ask questions of the other person in my communication on social media.	4.84	1.41
I show concern for and interest in the person I'm conversing with on social media.	5.25	1.21
I can show compassion and empathy through the way I write.	5.39	1.25
I take time to make sure my communication with others is uniquely adapted to the particular receiver I'm sending it to.	5.38	1.27
Coordination		
I know when and how to close down a topic of conversation in social media dialogues	5.07	1.40
I manage the give and take of social media interactions skillfully	5.04	1.29
I am skilled at timing when I respond in social media conversations	4.90	1.37
Expressiveness		
I am very articulate and vivid in my conversations on social media.	4.76	1.391
I use a lot of expressive symbols (e.g. emoticons) in my social media conversations	4.42	1.79
I try to use a lot of humor in my social media conversations	5.27	1.38
I am expressive in my social media conversations.	5.11	1.32
Composure		
I display a lot of certainty in the way I communicate on social media.	4.97	1.31
I use an assertive style in my communication on social media.	4.62	1.43
I have no trouble expressing my opinions forcefully on social media.	4.21	1.57

Table 3 (cont'd)

I make sure my objectives are emphasized in my communication on social media.	4.57	1.38
My messages on social media are written in a confident style.	5.04	1.31
I am skillful at revealing composure and self-confidence in my social media interactions.	5.11	1.26

3.5.3. Relatedness—Brand & Community

As discussed in chapter 2, the brand self-concept (Sprott, Czellar, & Spangenberg, 2006) has been operationalized as relatedness with the brand product/service. Brand self-concept scale ($\alpha=0.94$) is similar to the audience-persona interaction scale by Auter and Palmgreen (2000). The scale has been adapted to include the words “favorite brand / services”.

The scale for relatedness with other users (termed as relationship—community in this dissertation) ($\alpha=0.92$) has been adapted from the basic psychological needs scales by La Guardia, Ryan, Couchman, and Deci, (2000).

Table 4: Relatedness

	Mean	S.D.
Brand		
I have a special bond with the my favorite brand / services	3.67	1.96
I consider my favorite brand / services to be a part of me.	3.34	1.96
I feel as if I have a close personal connection with the my favorite brand / services	3.33	1.96
I can identify with the my favorite brand / services	4.01	1.92
There are links between the my favorite brand / services and how I view myself	3.58	1.96
The my favorite brand / services are an important indication of who I am	3.24	1.95

Table 4 (cont'd)

Community

I really like the people I interact with via the my favorite brand Facebook page or my favorite brand's posts	3.64	1.58
People are generally pretty friendly towards me on the my favorite brand Facebook page or my favorite brand's posts	3.98	1.56
I find it very easy to form a bond with other members of the my favorite brand Facebook page	3.35	1.64
When I am seeing the my favorite brand Facebook page/post, I often feel a lot of distance with other users	3.22	1.65
When I am seeing the my favorite brand Facebook page/post, I feel a sense of being connected to other members of this brand community	3.65	1.73
I would like a chance to interact with other users more often on the my favorite brand Facebook page/post	3.03	1.74
I feel strong ties to other members of the my favorite brand community on Facebook	2.94	1.75

3.5.4. Privacy Concern & Self-Censorship

As depicted in table 5, privacy related questions had an average mean of about 4.38. The standard deviations are also depicted in the right column.

Table 5: Privacy and Self-Censorship

	Mean	S.D.
Privacy Concern		
In general, how concerned are you about your privacy while you are using Facebook?	4.62	1.77
Are you concerned about online organizations on Facebook not being who they claim they are?	4.15	1.74
Are you concerned that you have to disclose too much personal information when you participate on Facebook?	4.12	1.78
Are you concerned about online identity theft?	4.55	1.76
Are you concerned about people on Facebook not being who they say they are?	4.17	1.80
Are you concerned about people you do not know obtaining personal information about you from your Facebook activities?	4.73	1.77

Table 5 (cont'd)

Self Censorship

In general, it is difficult for me to express my opinion online if I think others won't agree with what I say.	3.33	1.73
There have been many times when I thought others around me were wrong but I didn't let them know.	4.43	1.71
When I disagree with others, I'd rather go along with them than argue about it.	3.33	1.56
I feel uncomfortable if someone asked my opinion and I knew that he or she wouldn't agree with me.	3.46	1.73
I tend to speak my mind online only around friends or other people I trust.	4.23	1.73
It is safer to keep quiet than publicly speaking of an opinion online that you know most others don't share.	3.95	1.73

Buchanan, Paine, Joinson, and Reips (2007) conducted a study about privacy concerns on the Internet. In this study, a scale for privacy concern that was viewed as an attitude comprised sixteen items measuring concern for privacy on the Internet. In this dissertation, the Buchanan et al. (2007) privacy scale was adapted to measure customer privacy concerns on Facebook. The privacy concern scale had a Chronbach alpha of 0.85, and the condensed scale used in this dissertation comprised 6-items. For example, the original scale contained questions such as: "In general, how concerned are you about your privacy while you are using the Internet?" This was adapted as follows: "In general, how concerned are you about your privacy while you are using Facebook?" The responses are a seven point Likert scale anchored by "Not at all" (1) to "Very Much" (7).

Respondents seem to moderately concerned about their privacy on Facebook. The willingness to self-sensor is measured using a scale that has been adapted from Nekmat and Gonzenbach (2013). The original willingness to self-sensor scale had a Chronbach alpha of 0.93 and comprised eight items. However, two of the eight questions seemed redundant and were

deleted. In the reliability analysis it was noted that these deleting these two questions ensured a higher Chronbach alpha. Therefore for this dissertation, a more parsimonious willingness to self-censor scale comprised six items. A greater score on the willingness to self-censor implies that a customer would not want to disclose what he/she actually feels and therefore this factor would inhibit participation in the form of likes, comments, and shares.

CHAPTER 4: Results and Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in the following steps:

- a) Descriptive Analysis
- b) Exploratory Factor Analysis
- c) Scale Reliabilities
- d) Correlations
- e) Regressions

4.1. Descriptive Analysis

A descriptive analysis was conducted to summarize the sample and see emerging patterns in data. Table 2 provides a snapshot of the percentages for the demographic variables. A majority of the respondents were female (70.5%), and White (75.5%). All academic levels were represented in this sample.

Participant's age ranged from 18 to 70 years ($M=22.8$, $S.D.=5.03$). The average amount of time spent on Facebook was about two hours ($M=2.38$, $S.D.=2.73$). Participants indicated that they had been using social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube etc. for about five years ($M=5.94$, $S.D.=1.08$).

Table 6: Sample Descriptives

	Percentage
Gender:	
Male	29.5%
Female	70.5%
Race:	
White	75.5%
Black	3.4%
Asian	10.6 %
Asian American	4.0%
Mixed	3.4%
Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander /	0.9%
Academic Level:	
Freshmen	15.3%
Sophomore	17.1%
Junior	23.8%
Senior	26.0%
MA Student	10.4%
PhD Student	7.4%

4.2. Symbolic Customer Engagement

Customer engagement has been operationalized using three key dimensions: content liking, commenting, and content sharing. Each measure of engagement consisted of seven options, ranging from highest frequency (7) to lowest frequency (1).

Data analysis reveals that on Facebook, participants are more likely to like a post ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.96$) from a brand page than share it ($M = 2.39$, $SD = 1.73$) or comment on it ($M = 1.76$, $SD = 1.37$). A one-way repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted and assumptions of sphericity were violated. Results were therefore reported based on the Huynh-Fed degrees of freedom adjustment ($F(1.97, 1458.50) = 349.58$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .32$). As shown in the figure below, the three engagement types were significantly different. These mean differences were qualified by pairwise comparisons, which showed that likes ($p < .001$) were different from shares ($p < .001$), which were different from comments ($p < .001$).

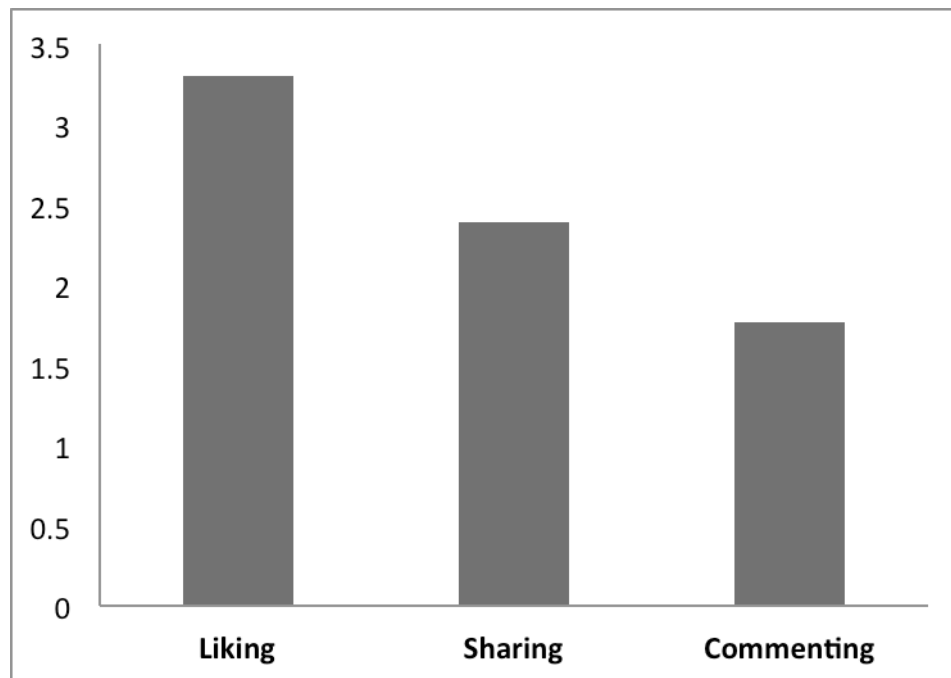


Figure 3: Means for Symbolic Customer Engagement on Facebook brand pages

4.3. Exploratory Factor Analysis

An Exploratory factor analysis is useful in grouping variables that are highly correlated, but are independent of other variables (Field, 2009). An exploratory factor analysis can also be a valuable research tool to help consolidate variable measurements besides testing underlying processes in accordance with the theoretical foundations (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

For this dissertation, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted to test the 55-items comprising the independent variables: brand relatedness, community relatedness, coordination, attentiveness, composure, social skills, privacy concern, self-censorship, social media self-efficacy, knowledge, and expressiveness (see appendix A). The exploratory factor analysis was also useful in consolidating variable measurements and testing underlying processes that should be taking place according to the theory (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001, p.582).

According to Field (2009) there are two major approaches to discovering the underlying dimensions of a data set: factor analysis and principal component analysis. However, it must be noted that both techniques only differ in the “communality estimates that are used” (Field, 2009, p. 638). Furthermore, the solutions generated from both these techniques do not differ much (Guadagnoli & Velicer, 1988).

It was seen that while conducting the analysis in SPSS, item loading with at least 0.6 on the primary factor and less than 0.4 in the rest of the factors are retained (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998).

Exploratory factor analysis with principal component analysis and orthogonal (varimax) rotation revealed that items formed ten distinct factors (see appendix A), instead of the expected eleven factors. Therefore, ten components had Eigenvalues over Kaiser’s criterion of 1 and in combination explained 68.55% of the variance. Given the convergence of scree plot and Kaiser’s criterion on ten components, this is the number of components that were retained in the final analysis.

In appendix A rotated component matrix, for interpretative purposes, the factor loadings of less than 0.4 have not been displayed (Stevens, 2002). The items are also listed in the order of size of their factor loadings. Coordination and attentiveness variables clustered together and were therefore collapsed into a single scale. Overall, the items loaded clearly on the factors they were expected to load on.

4.4. Reliability Analysis

Initially, the survey response items were analyzed at the item level using tables and histogram outputs to provide a first impression. These item level responses were scrutinized for underlying patterns via factor analytic procedures utilizing SPSS.

A reliability analysis was conducted for the independent variables to establish the factor structure based on earlier literature. Reliabilities were evaluated of each scale. 0.8 is seen as a good value for alpha (Field, 2009). All scales (see table 7) had high reliabilities. Items in the SPSS output that indicated the reliability alpha if an item was deleted was taken into account. In the self-censorship scale, two questions were deleted since they caused a lowering of the alpha. Also, in the expressiveness scale, one question as deleted because it adversely affected the alpha. Based on the reliability analysis, the scales were constructed by averaging the sum of the variables.

Table 7: Scale Reliabilities

	Mean	Alpha
Social Media Self-Efficacy	4.72	0.82
Knowledge	4.99	0.83
Social Skills	5.36	0.90
Attentiveness & Coordination	5.10	0.90
Composure	3.61	0.90
Expressiveness	5.04	0.74
Community Relatedness	3.40	0.93
Brand Relatedness	3.53	0.96
Privacy	4.38	0.88
Self Censorship	3.78	0.82

4.5. Correlations

Person correlation coefficients showing relationships between variables were calculated and have been reported in table 8. Coefficients close to 1.0 or -1.0 represent a strong relationship, between 0.3 and 0.7 a moderate relationship, and below 0.3 a weak relationship (Cronk, 2012). Pearson correlation analysis revealed that most variables had a moderate or weak relationship. Only age had a strong relationship with education, $r=.76$, $p < .01$.

Amongst the moderate relationships, a moderate positive correlations was found between likes and comments ($r=.55$, $p < .01$), and between likes and shares ($r=.61$, $p < .01$). Likes also showed a positive moderate correlation with community relatedness ($r=.50$, $p < .01$), and brand relatedness ($r=.42$, $p < .01$).

Comments also indicated moderate relationships with some variables. A moderate positive correlation was found between comments and shares ($r=.57$, $p < .01$), between comments and community relatedness ($r=.45$, $p < .01$), and between comments and brand relatedness ($r=.35$, $p < .01$). Similarly, shares also showed a moderate positive correlation with community relatedness ($r=.42$, $p < .01$), and brand relatedness ($r=.39$, $p < .01$).

Social media self-efficacy also showed some moderate relationships. A significant moderate correlation was found between social media self-efficacy and knowledge ($r=.43$, $p < .01$), social skills ($r=.35$, $p < .01$), coordination/attentiveness ($r=.46$, $p < .01$), expressiveness ($r=.31$, $p < .01$), and composure ($r=.40$, $p < .01$). There was also a significant moderate correlation between community relatedness and brand relatedness ($r=.63$, $p < .01$).

Table 8: Pearson Correlations among Dependent and Independent Variables

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.	16.	17.	18.
1. Like	1	.546*	.613*	.054	-.006	.018	.220*	.117*	-.100*	.133*	.055	.152*	.142*	.166*	.500*	.419*	.097*	.056
2. Comment		1	.565*	.096*	.034	.095*	.165*	.161*	-.139*	.082*	-.037	.052	.081*	.099*	.449*	.346*	.127*	.092*
3. Share			1	.101*	-.015	.083*	.239*	.152*	-.053	.146*	.065	.171*	.142*	.158*	.421*	.394*	.147*	.071
4. Age				1	.069	.759*	-.042	-.007	.147*	-.036	-.036	-.003	-.068	-.005	.009	.031	.121*	-.005
5. Gender					1	.033	-.133*	.030	-.082*	-.076*	-.125*	-.124*	-.135*	-.024	.045	.019	-.110*	-.022
6. Education						1	-.044	.010	.187*	-.060	-.004	-.053	-.091*	-.057	-.004	.062	.135*	.071
7. Self-Efficacy							1	.043	.061	.428*	.353*	.464*	.305*	.404*	.297*	.258*	.086*	-.036
8. Time on Facebook								1	-.011	.074*	-.011	.065	.116*	.096*	.066	.070	.035	-.011
9. SM Experience									1	.154*	.198*	.133*	.073*	.099*	-.107*	-.021	-.041	-.159*
10. Knowledge										1	.449*	.547*	.408*	.567*	.151*	.143*	.000	-.267*
11. Social Skills											1	.596*	.395*	.467*	.074*	.132*	.069	-.121*
12. Coordination-Attentiveness												1	.546*	.686*	.183*	.213*	.070	-.083*
13. Expressiveness													1	.571*	.110*	.148*	.044	-.011
14. Composure														1	.190*	.171*	-.006	-.218*
15. Community Relatedness															1	.633*	.132*	.106*
16. Brand Relatedness																1	.134*	.189*
17. Privacy Concern																	1	.180*
18. Self-Censorship																		1

Note: Two-tailed, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001, n=745

4.6. Regressions

Multiple linear regressions were conducted to predict symbolic customer engagement based on demographic factors, social media competence-related variables, relatedness with the community and brand on Facebook, privacy concern and self-censorship.

Table 9: OLS regressions predicting symbolic customer engagement

	Liking		Commenting		Sharing	
	β	Sig.	β	Sig.	β	Sig.
Age	.090	.074	.056	.274	.091	.078
Gender	-.025	.456	.001	.974	-.025	.467
Education Level	-.043	.404	.063	.225	.017	.748
Self-Efficacy	.053	.180	.035	.381	.091	.024
Time Spent on Facebook	.065	.049	.104	.002	.097	.004
Social Media Experience	-.081	.019	-.101	.004	-.040	.262
Knowledge	.011	.799	.041	.351	.045	.317
Social Skills	-.026	.540	-.092	.033	-.049	.258
Attentiveness & Coordination	-.017	.744	-.065	.227	.032	.549
Expressiveness	.072	.086	.039	.359	.030	.492
Composure	.013	.798	.051	.329	-.003	.951
Relatedness—Community	.360	.000	.349	.000	.254	.000
Relatedness—Brand	.163	.000	.105	.017	.183	.000
Privacy Concern	.016	.637	.043	.222	.056	.112
Self Censorship	-.030	.419	.006	.878	-.001	.982
Adjusted R ²	.27		.24		.23	

β = Beta, the standardized regression coefficient. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

In the above table (table 9), Ordinary Least Square (OLS) regressions examined the liking, commenting, and sharing, and their relationship with independent variables. The variables included age, gender, education level, personality, social media self-efficacy and time spent on Facebook. The results indicate that some elements of the proposed SDT model are supported in predicting symbolic customer engagement on Facebook brand pages.

As depicted in table 9, the regression model for Liking explained 27% of the variance ($R^2=.27$, $F(15, 683) = 18.17$, $p<.001$), and had four key predictors that were significant in predicting the liking symbolic engagement. These were time spent on Facebook ($\beta =.065$, $p<.05$), social media experience ($\beta =-.081$, $p<.05$), community relatedness ($\beta =.36$, $p<.001$) and brand relatedness ($\beta =.163$, $p<.001$).

Table 9 also depicts the OLS regression model predicting symbolic customer engagement through commenting. The R^2 was about 24% ($R^2=.24$, $F(15, 682) = 15.48$, $p<.001$). The commenting model were had five key predictors that were significant in predicting the liking symbolic engagement. These were time spent on Facebook ($\beta =.104$, $p<.005$), social media experience ($\beta =-.101$, $p<.05$), social skills ($\beta =-.094$, $p<.05$), and relationship with community ($\beta =.349$, $p<.001$) and relationship with brand ($\beta =.105$, $p<.05$).

The right most columns in Table 9 depict the OLS regression models predicting symbolic customer engagement in terms of sharing. The sharing regression model in table 9, explained 23% of the variance ($R^2=.23$, $F(15, 682)=15.03$, $p<.001$), and had four key predictors that were significant in predicting the sharing symbolic engagement. These were self efficacy ($\beta =.091$,

$p < .05$), time spent on Facebook ($\beta = .097, p < .005$), and relationship with community ($\beta = .254, p < .001$) and relationship with brand ($\beta = .183, p < .001$).

Hypotheses 1 were about social media self efficacy and individuals' commenting, and sharing. As evident through the regression models in table 9, self-efficacy variable was positively significant ($\beta = .091, p < .05$) in predicting engagement in terms of sharing on Facebook brand pages. Therefore hypothesis H1b was supported, while H1a was not supported.

Hypotheses 2 were that as individuals show greater social media experience, they were likely to have higher symbolic customer engagement in the form of liking (H2a), commenting (H2b) and sharing (H2c). H2 hypotheses were not supported as social media experience or the amount of time an individual had used social media sites such as YouTube, Twitter and Facebook were negatively related to liking and commenting. Social media experience was not statistically significant for sharing on Facebook brand pages.

Hypotheses 3 were about Knowledge being positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of liking (H3a), commenting (H3b), and sharing (H3c) on Facebook brand pages. These hypotheses were not supported as the knowledge skills scale proved to be insignificant in predicting liking, commenting and sharing in all regressions.

Hypotheses 4 concerned attentiveness. It was hypothesized that Attentiveness skills will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of liking (H4a), commenting (H4b), and sharing (H4c) on Facebook brand pages. H5a, H5b, and H5c (coordination) were also not supported as none of the regression models showed these variables as significant.

Hypotheses 6 concerned composure skills and how they will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of commenting on Facebook brand pages. H6 was not supported.

H7a, H7b, and H7c concerned Expressiveness skills and also not supported for all three regression models of liking, commenting and sharing.

Hypotheses 8 concerned social skills and they were hypothesized to be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of liking (H8a), commenting (H8b), and sharing (H8c) on Facebook brand pages. All three of these hypotheses were not supported. However, social skills were negatively predictive ($\beta = -.092$, $p < .05$) for commenting on Facebook brand pages.

Hypotheses nine were about community relatedness as being positively related to symbolic customer engagement on Facebook brand pages. Hypotheses H9a, H9b, and H9c were significant for all three engagement through liking ($\beta = .36$, $p < .001$), commenting ($\beta = .349$, $p < .001$), and sharing ($\beta = .254$, $p < .001$).

Hypotheses ten were about brand relatedness as being positively related to symbolic customer engagement on Facebook brand pages. Hypotheses H10a, H10b, and H10c also were as significant for all three engagement types of liking ($\beta = .163$, $p < .001$), commenting ($\beta = .105$, $p < .05$), and sharing ($\beta = .183$, $p < .001$).

Hypotheses 11 hypothesized that privacy concern will be negatively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of liking (H11a), commenting (H11b), and sharing (H11c) on Facebook brand pages. All three of these hypotheses were not supported. Hypotheses twelve

were also operationalization for autonomy in the form of self-censorship and these were also not supported for any of the three DVs liking (H12a), commenting (H12b) and sharing (H12c).

As depicted in table 10, out of the thirty hypotheses only seven were supported. Amongst the competence related hypotheses, only H1b was supported. Hypothesis H1b was about social media self-efficacy being positively predictive of sharing on Facebook brand pages. Another hypotheses amongst the competence related measures were H8b concerning social skills being positively predictive of commenting. Regression results indicated that social skills are negatively predictive of commenting.

All relatedness hypotheses (brand and community relatedness) H9a, H9b, H9c, H10a, H10b, and H10c were supported. The results show that relatedness with the community and the brand are positively predictive of liking, commenting and sharing on Facebook brand pages.

Lastly, privacy and censorship related hypotheses H11a, H11b, H11c, H12a, H12b, and H12c were not supported.

Table 10: Summary of results for each hypothesis

<i>Competence</i>	
H1a: <i>Social media self-efficacy will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of commenting on Facebook brand pages.</i>	Not Supported
H1b: <i>Social media self-efficacy will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of sharing on Facebook brand pages.</i>	Supported
H2a: <i>Social media experience will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of liking on Facebook brand pages.</i>	Not Supported
H2b: <i>Social media experience will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of commenting on Facebook brand pages.</i>	Not Supported

Table 10 (cont'd)

H2c: <i>Social media experience will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of sharing on Facebook brand pages.</i>	Not Supported
H3a: <i>Knowledge will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of commenting on Facebook brand pages.</i>	Not Supported
H3b: <i>Knowledge will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of sharing on Facebook brand pages.</i>	Not Supported
H4a: <i>Attentiveness skills will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of liking on Facebook brand pages.</i>	Not Supported
H4b: <i>Attentiveness skills will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of commenting on Facebook brand pages.</i>	Not Supported
H4c: <i>Attentiveness skills will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of sharing on Facebook brand pages.</i>	Not Supported
H5: <i>Coordination skills will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of commenting on Facebook brand pages.</i>	Not Supported
H6: <i>Composure skills will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of commenting on Facebook brand pages.</i>	Not Supported
H7a: <i>Expressiveness skills will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of liking on Facebook brand pages.</i>	Not Supported
H7b: <i>Expressiveness skills will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of commenting on Facebook brand pages.</i>	Not Supported
H7c: <i>Expressiveness skills will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of sharing on Facebook brand pages.</i>	Not Supported
H8a: <i>Social skills will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of liking on Facebook brand pages.</i>	Not Supported
H8b: <i>Social skills will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of commenting on Facebook brand pages.</i>	Not Supported
H8c: <i>Social skills will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of sharing on Facebook brand pages.</i>	Not Supported
<i>Relatedness</i>	
H9a: <i>Community relatedness will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of liking on Facebook brand pages.</i>	Supported

Table 10 (cont'd)

H9b: Community relatedness will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of commenting on Facebook brand pages.	Supported
H9c: Community relatedness will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of sharing on Facebook brand pages.	Supported
H10a: Brand relatedness will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of liking on Facebook brand pages.	Supported
H10b: Brand relatedness will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of commenting on Facebook brand pages.	Supported
H10c: Brand relatedness will be positively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of sharing on Facebook brand pages.	Supported
<i>Autonomy</i>	
H11a: Privacy Concern will be negatively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of liking on Facebook brand pages.	Not Supported
H11b: Privacy Concern will be negatively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of commenting on Facebook brand pages.	Not Supported
H11c: Privacy Concern will be negatively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of sharing on Facebook brand pages.	Not Supported
H12a: Self-Censorship will be negatively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of liking on Facebook brand pages.	Not Supported
H12b: Self-Censorship will be negatively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of commenting on Facebook brand pages.	Not Supported
H12c: Self-Censorship will be negatively related to symbolic customer engagement in the form of sharing on Facebook brand pages.	Not Supported

CHAPTER 5: Discussion

Motivations of user participation in online communities have previously been studied under the uses & gratifications (U&G) framework (Haridakis & Hanson, 2009; Jahn & Kunz, 2012; Khan, 2013; Kim, Sohn, & Choi, 2011). However the predictive power of previous studies has been low. Moreover, most U&G studies have been helpful in providing us empirical evidence that users engage with online media for information benefits, for entertainment / enjoyment, identity benefits, and for socializing (Brodie et al. 2013; Calder et al., 2009; Jahn & Kunz, 2012; McQuail, 1983; Men & Tsai, 2013). However, lesser is know about user engagement at a granular level in the realm of social media. There is a shortage of empirical research about online customer engagement (Jahn & Kunz, 2012).

This dissertation contributes to the field of communication as well as marketing by conceptualizing a theoretical model for customer engagement. The model (see figure 1), which forms the theoretical basis for this dissertation, is built on an adapted SDT framework that originally emanates from the education literature. Viewing engagement as liking, commenting, and sharing, the aim of this study was to test whether SDT framework could explain why people engage on Facebook brands pages. As discussed earlier, SDT is based on the premise that individuals make self-determined choices regarding their actions (Sugarman & Sokol, 2012). It was therefore hypothesized that when customers are self-determined, they are likely to engage by liking, commenting, and sharing on Facebook brand pages.

SDT has offered valuable insights into better understanding the antecedents for customer engagement on social media. This dissertation also provides a new lens to look into the

antecedents and motivations for customer engagement on social media by testing factors such as privacy concern and self-censorship, relatedness and competence measures.

5.1. Empirical Support for the SDT Framework

In this dissertation, the adapted SDT framework comprised three broad components—(1) autonomy (operationalized as privacy concern & self-censorship), (2) competence, and (3) relatedness. The empirical analysis provided no support for autonomy-related factors of privacy concern and self-censorship factors, some support for the competence-related factors, and full support for the relatedness factors. Contrary to the initial understanding, privacy concern and self-censorship were not predictive of liking, commenting and sharing. However, some of the competence-related factors were significant in predicting liking, commenting, and sharing. Amongst competence, social media self-efficacy positively predicted symbolic customer engagement in the form of sharing on Facebook brand pages; time spent on Facebook positively predicted liking, commenting, and sharing; social media experience negatively predicted liking and commenting; and lastly, social skills negatively predicted commenting. Both community and brand relatedness proved to be predictive of liking, commenting, and sharing.

It may thus be stated that customers are expected to *like* content on Facebook brand pages when they have spent a greater amount of time on Facebook, and have higher relatedness with the brand and community. On the contrary, customers are less likely to *like* when they have greater experience of being on social media platforms,

Customer are likely to *comment* on Facebook brand pages if they have spent a greater amount of time on the site, and relate to or feel connected to the community and it's brand. On

the other hand, customers are less likely to comment when they have greater experience of being on social media platforms, and have higher social skills.

Customers are likely to *share* on Facebook brand pages when they have higher social media self-efficacy, have spent greater amount of time on Facebook, and have higher relatedness with the community and the brand. Salient findings are discussed in greater depth in the following section.

5.2. The important role of customer engagement

In the social media landscape, marketing is not simply about creating awareness about the products and services. Today's customers gain awareness from a myriad of sources. Factors such as recommendation from friends or family, product reviews, and feedback from other individuals affects decision-making (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). There also is an increasing realization that the most important customers may not only be those who only buy a company's products or services; rather, individuals who also influence buyers on social media platforms. For example, an individual who is not an avid buyer but chooses to engage on social media actively may influence a hundred other individuals into actually buying the product.

The shift away from traditional media is also focusing attention towards new media platforms such as discussion forums, Facebook pages, Twitter and video sharing sites such as YouTube, where individuals choose to interact, seek and give information (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Newer platforms for interaction demand a closer look at engagement metrics that provide rich information in the forms of site visitors, page views, time spent on the site, visit frequency and acts such as liking, commenting, and sharing.

Interaction forms the gist of engagement. This is because it measures events, contributions, or actions that allows an individual to engage with a brand. Social media contributions provide a tangible way to assess what users think about the product or service. Interaction on Facebook brand pages is visible through the acts of liking, commenting, and sharing.

5.3. Understanding the Liking phenomenon

In terms of liking content on Facebook brand pages, there were four significant predictors. Time spent on Facebook, social media experience, relatedness with the community, and relatedness with the brand stood out as important in predicting engagement in the form of liking. As evident through the OLS regression models for liking (see table 9), demographic variables, self-efficacy, and various skills and autonomy factors did not stand as significant predictors.

The descriptive analysis and the ANOVA test showed that liking was most common amongst the three engagement types. This may mean that the act of liking may underlie a common psychological process, which forms the simplest form of engagement. It may not require great cognitive load. In any case, we are aware that user engagement through participation in the form of liking (and sharing) are valuable for both users and the organization simply because such interactions promote engagement and allow the web to be experienced more socially (Gerlitz & Helmond, 2011).

The results of this study showed that strongest predictor of liking was relationship with the community ($b=.277$, $p<.001$). This may mean that individuals who are fans of the brand page share a sense of community that may induce them to like content. In addition, the relations with the brand was another predictor ($b=.157$, $p<.001$) for liking. This implies that if likes are seen as

a social currency (even though they may not be as valuable as comments), they need to be encouraged for various reasons.

Attitude towards an advertisement has an impact on the attitude towards the brand (MacKenzie, Lutz & Belch, 1986; Yoo & MacInnis, 2005). Brand familiarity through advertisements strengthens cognitive processing, impacts attention towards the brand, and the formation of an opinion (Chung & Zhao, 2011). This in turn may induce favorable responses towards the brand in the form of liking.

Likes on page or its post indicate activity and an image that the brand and its posts are liked and appreciated by others. This may have several implications in terms of creating a positive perception. For example when individuals view a post with hundreds of likes as compared to a post with one a few likes, they may assume that the content of the post with the most like must be better. They may trust such content more simply because so many have endorsed it through their likes. Past research reveals that participation on a website adds to the overall credibility (Kraut & Resnick, 2011).

Having established that likes may contain some value, marketers and social media managers can post content that gets most likes. Through the results of this study, it is evident that liking is strongly predicted by relationship with the brand and community. If this relationship is strengthened, more likes should be expected leading to a positive outcome for a brand. Another predictor for liking in this study was social media experience. Surprisingly, the more social media experience a person has, the less likely he/she would engage through liking. This is discussed in further detail in the following section.

5.4. Social Media Experience & Fatigue

Time spent on Facebook was also a significant positive predictor of all three types of symbolic engagement—liking, commenting, and sharing. This finding is supported by previous studies that explored Internet use in general. Expertise in computer use and experience is predictive of web use (Perse & Ferguson, 2000). It is understandable that the greater amount of time that is spent on Facebook may translate into a higher tendency to like, comment and share.

Conversely, the results of the current study show a negative relationship between symbolic engagement and the amount of social media experience. The length of time an individual uses social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Facebook is negatively predictive of liking, commenting, and sharing. There could be various explanations of this findings and a further research would be required to reach a conclusion. However, a plausible reason for social media experience being negatively related to symbolic engagement may be social media fatigue that may set in once people have used social media for extended periods of time. It may also explain why sites like Facebook are losing individuals to other sites. Another reason that may explain a negative relationship between social media experience and symbolic customer engagement is that customers may learn to read better into conversations that some individuals may do instead of participating themselves.

According to PEW research, 61% of current Facebook users have indicated that at some point they have voluntarily “taken a break” from using Facebook for several weeks or more (Rainie, Smith, & Duggan, 2013). When asked as to why they had taken a break from the site, 10% pointed towards a lack of interest in the site, while another 10% mentioned a general lack of compelling content, and 8% were concerned about spending too much time on the site (Rainie,

Smith, & Dogan, 2013). Although these numbers may not be high, however, they do point towards a trend that organizations need to be cognizant of.

Other thoughts from the participants in the PEW research may provide further insight. Those who took a break from Facebook included the following: “I was tired of stupid comments.” (Rainie, Smith, & Duggan, 2013). Experienced social media users may see the comments by other community members on a Facebook brand page as being not interesting. This may result in them visiting the page and subscribing to its Facebook feed for informational purposes but not engage on the content by liking, commenting, and sharing. Further research is required to validate this claim.

Nevertheless, findings of this dissertation point towards the need to devise strategies that engage users. If some form of fatigue sets in due to the type of content available on these brand pages, this monotony must be broken through interesting and entertaining content that keeps users engaged. Since customers who visit these pages may be feeling bored, there is a greater need to post content that is more engaging and entertaining. Research has already shown how content that is informative and entertaining attracts greater engagement (Brodie et al., 2001).

5.5. Social Media Competence

In managing social situations people need to possess skills that help them understand the affect and flow of information and how this information is interpreted (Boyd, 2014). Especially for engaging on social media brand pages, individuals need skills that help them manage their impressions and interactions with others. Social skills have been studied in the psychology literature by researcher such as Riggio (1986). However, research regarding social skills in the communication domain especially for social media is scant.

In the current study, social skills variable was insignificant for liking and sharing but was significant in negatively predicting commenting. At a first glance it seems probable that social skills would be significant in predicting commenting. However this finding implies that individuals who possess greater amounts of social skills are less likely to comment. Social skills was a scale that measured competence through questions such as the ability to judge other people, asking for information at the right time, and being able to tell why others behave in a certain way, etc. Social skills being negatively predictive of commenting may imply that as people have a better understanding about how they should interact with others meaningfully, they choose not to participate. This may be due to several reasons. Supporting messages or comments by other users on Facebook brand pages may motivate customers not to post any further messages. Such customers may simply like the post and choose to refrain from commenting any further.

It may also be that individuals feel more comfortable at exercising their social skills on other social media platforms such as Twitter. The dynamics of participation on Twitter are different from Facebook (Smith, Fischer, & Yongjian, 2012). On Twitter, user participation is not focused on identity and self-presentation (Kietzman, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011). In comparison with Facebook and YouTube, Twitter users more often engage in discussions, spread news and share more brand related content instead of self-promotion (Smith, Fischer, & Yongjian, 2012).

On Facebook pages the atmosphere may seem more social due to which most visitors may only read posts and not comment because they are in a position to make meaningful inferences from the available information in the conversation threads and the brand page posts. Since users perceive that they can judge the quality of information and more importantly

recognize other's traits and tell why others act in a certain way, they are in a better position to gain the needed information without commenting. On the other hand, individuals who perceive that they have lesser social skills i.e. a lesser ability to distinguish the direction of a conversation would choose to participate by commenting.

5.6. Relationship with Community & Brand: Why it matters?

Past research in this domain had revealed that customer engagement leads to an improved customer and brand relationship (viewed as relatedness), thereby leading to an enhanced brand loyalty (Brodie, et al., 2011). Consumer brand relationship is the focus of the branding theory (Franzen, 1999), and such relationships have often translated into greater sales and higher brand loyalty (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998; Franzen, 1999).

This dissertation sheds light on another angle of relationships—how a strong brand and community relationship positively predicts customer engagement on Facebook brand pages. Findings of this study show that relationship with the community and the brand proved to be the strongest predictors of symbolic customer engagement on Facebook brand pages. All three engagement types—liking, commenting, and sharing had a positive link with brand and community relationship.

Engagement through liking, commenting, and sharing is about managing relationships in the age of social media marketing. Organizations can create superior value through nurturing relationships and cooperating with their stakeholders especially their customers to gain competitive advantage. It may be rightly stated that customer engagement on social media is essentially embedded in the wider frameworks of relationship management. It is thus

understandable that the focus of engagement efforts on social media ought to be on building relationships with customers.

This research links the commonly discussed concept of engagement with the customer relationship management literature. Various researchers in the field of marketing, such as Berry (1995) had laid emphasis on the importance of developing close relationships with customers to win their loyalty. In fact, marketing is about customer relationships; as Gronroos (1990) stated that, “marketing is to establish, maintain, and enhance relationships with customers and other partners” (p.138). Social media has transformed the landscape by facilitating relationship building and maintenance through engagement in the form of liking, commenting, and sharing on Facebook brand pages. In this case, SDT framework has provided a strong rationale for enhancing relationships with brand and its community.

Relationship in the form of interactions with a brand community leads individuals to have a shared conscience, and a sense of shared rituals leading to brand loyalty and even brand recommendations (Madupu, 2006). The more related a person feels to the brand on Facebook, the more likely he/she is going to like, comment and share. This means that brands must build strong relationships with their audiences to foster engagement.

To engender loyalty and a strong community conscience, customers need to be involved in a dialogue so that they can participate effectively. Behaviorally, brand community members like, comment and share content from the Facebook brand page and further aid the company’s marketing efforts.

It may be understood that relationship with a brand or a community is leading to symbolic customer engagement because individuals who visit social media brand pages have

needs to be filled. In other words, brand relationship yields benefits in the form of large information availability at any given time, entertaining content, the possibility of socialization and self-disclosure, and sharing of new information with other users. Such participation in the form of comments that may range from answering questions, discussing new products, showing support for an initiative all contribute to the overall relationship development, which in turn leads to engagement. Dholakia et al. (2004) had categorized benefits gained from a community in the following categories: practical benefits, social benefits, social enhancement, entertainment, and economic benefits. Therefore, to achieve those benefits, community members engage in some form of participation that is beneficial for the individual, the business and the whole community.

It is notable that on Facebook, such a community may be unique in terms of the benefits offered. Communities outside the dominant social media platforms may not be trusted as much. They may also be less attractive because of a lack of convenience in accessing them. Facebook use is pervasive and the presence of Facebook brand communities allows individuals to access these pages with relative ease. Facebook brand communities may also be more active simply because of the accruing network effects.

Therefore, organizations having a social media presence need to strengthen their communities by matching the needs of consumers with the content being offered in a strategic manner. Brand communities can foster engagement through quality content that is engaging, informative and entertaining (Gummerus et al., 2012).

Customer engagement is vital for the success of a social media community. A weak and loosely defined brand community may mean that very few people actually comment and like

content. This may eventually be detrimental to not only the image of the brand but also cause few users to visit the Facebook page since it is not active. If the benefit that individuals seek is not available in the form of informative content that is user generated, community development cannot happen. Therefore, to strengthen communities and relationships with the brand, organizations need to track customer engagement and encourage them through engaging in a dialogue. Active participation can even be rewarded so that maximum benefit can be attained through a community. An active Facebook page also adds to the overall brand image and brand recognition. Such community relationships can lead to increased sales. Thus the basic relationship an individual may have with a brand is strengthened through participation in the community (Algesheimer et al., 2005).

5.7. Privacy Concern

Information sharing online from a privacy perspective has been debated extensively in academic circles (Woo, 2006). Individuals are often faced with the choice of participation in online communities including social media. With the advent of social media, there is a constant revaluation over what comprises private space and how it relates to personal expression (Boyd, 2014).

It may be argued that the social norms around privacy may have changed, which explains why individuals participate freely on social media. However, the question arising here is why and how individuals engage on brand pages on social media. In other words, how do individuals of different ages conceptualize and view privacy? In this dissertation, privacy concern and self-censorship variables did not prove to be a significant predictors of liking, commenting, and sharing on Facebook brand pages. Contrary to what was initially hypothesized, both privacy

concern and self-censorship variables did not explain why individuals engage on social media brand pages.

The relationship between privacy concerns and the actions taken by individuals to safeguard privacy is paradoxical. Studies indicate that although users usually express very strong concerns about privacy and how their personal information is kept and shared online, individuals are less cautious about protecting it (Awad and Krishnan, 2006). Results in this dissertation show that while individuals are cognizant and concerned about issues such as self-disclosure in public spaces, safety of their personal information and ID theft, they still feel relatively unconstrained in engaging in acts such as liking, commenting and sharing when they feel that they feel connected to the brand and it's community. In other words, privacy concern and self-censorship factors do not predict liking, commenting, and sharing on Facebook brand pages.

This finding in this dissertation is supported by past research by Rivera (2004), which showed that survey respondents were concerned about privacy on Internet; however, they are ready to sacrifice privacy if they received some rewards in the form of discount coupons etc. Moreover, the respondents in another survey indicated that they never searched for online information about safeguarding their privacy but had strong concerns for online privacy (Turow, 2003). Facebook profiles of more than 4000 students were analyzed by Gross and Acquisti (2005) where it was found that very small number of participants had changed their default privacy settings. Moreover, Chu (2011) studied Facebook group participation and found that college-aged Facebook users engage in greater levels of self-disclosure and general have more positive attitudes towards social media and advertising.

In other cases, privacy may be properly managed. In a yearlong ethnographic study centering on social media privacy, Raybes-Goldie (2010) examined how Facebook users

navigate privacy concerns. In line with this research and past research about individuals caring for their privacy, Raybes-Goldie (2010) found that users engage in certain practices such as using aliases and weekly “wall” cleanings or deletion of personal posts deemed inappropriate, having multiple Facebook accounts, and viewing their online behavior in the context of a social cost and benefit relationship. Such practices helped these individuals that became part of the ethnographic study to manage their privacy.

In trying to understand the privacy paradox on large European SNSs, Utz and Kramer (2009) found that users manage their privacy and most users protect at least certain parts of their online profile such as pictures and email addresses. The same study also shed light on the greater protection of SNS profiles when there was a higher privacy concern, and that individuals actually engaged in less restrictive privacy settings when impression management and narcissism factors were dominant.

Since this dissertation concerned social media use for business, it may be possible that the cost of giving away personal information is not high. From a cost benefit perspective, the opportunity cost of obtaining a discount coupon through liking, commenting or sharing a brand post on Facebook is not high to inhibit user engagement. On the other hand, when topics of contentious nature are discussed on Facebook pages of a political or social nature, individuals may hold back from liking, commenting, or sharing because they may want to safeguard their online professional personas. Research involving adolescents has shown that the perception of a risky behavior leading to unpleasant outcomes may negatively affect engagement possibilities in that behavior (Moore & Gullone, 1996).

This may also be viewed in light of the impression management literature in which individuals are known to be concerned about how others perceive and value them (Leary &

Kowalski, 1990). In comparison with face-to-face interactions, online environments offer individuals a greater degree of control over their interactions (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006). Online interactions are also more flexible and subject to self-censorship (Walther, 1996).

Studies about privacy concerns and social media use have offered conflicting results. Some researchers have found privacy concerns to be not predictive of SNS participation. For example, Acquisti and Gross (2006) found that an SNS user's privacy concerns were a weak predictor of SNS use. Similarly, Tufekci (2008) also found a weak relationship between privacy concerns and SNS disclosures, and that users controlled their information by taking measures such as using nickname and regulating profile visibility. On the other hand, more recent studies show that privacy concerns lead to fewer disclosures on SNS (Krasnova, Spiekermann, Koroleva, & Hildebrand, 2010; Stutzman, Capra, & Thompson, 2011). Krasnova, et al. (2010) found that for Facebook users privacy concerns serve as a barrier to participation on a SNS, however, users mitigate such risks by controlling their privacy. A common theme emerging from both set of studies is that whether privacy concerns impact SNS participation or not, users have generally been found to be taking measures to adjust their privacy settings whereby they have a degree of control over what is shared with disparate social media audiences.

The results of this dissertation regarding a lack of significant relationship between privacy concern and liking, commenting and sharing can be understood in light of the above mentioned literature which points to the possibility of users successfully managing their privacy controls.

CHAPTER 6: Conclusion

Encouraging symbolic user engagement in the form of shares, comments, likes/dislikes has benefits. It gives marketing information for products and services that may help organizations/businesses make improvements. Moreover, active user participation is vital in creating the image of an active audience. Sites that attract more shares, comments, likes/dislikes and views may achieve higher popularity rankings on search engines. When the reasons for engagement are known, better decisions can be made.

This research extends our understanding of the different acts that foster engagement on social media. Deeper insights were also provided about the role social media experience, self-efficacy, social skills, and relationships plays in impacting user behavior. This research can serve as a guide for organizations and businesses who have a social media presence. By understanding the dynamics of user interaction with media, it has become to view symbolic engagement on social media through a different lens that incorporates privacy concerns, relationship with brand and the community and social media skills.

Building upon this research, organizations can design strategies that attract maximum user engagement. This is because understanding user behavior forms the prerequisite of any marketing and public relations efforts.

6.1. Research Implications

Building a community of engaged audience should be the objective of organizations and business that have a social media presence. Individuals like brands on social media such as Facebook as a sign of support. This requires a reciprocal relationship in which involves some give and take. We know through this study that audiences engage with brands on social media

because of their relationship with brand and it's community. Such relationship is maintained by receiving social, hedonic, and monetary benefits (Kang, Tang, & Fiore, 2014). Customers may also receive value in the form of coupons, discounts, special offers (Harris & Goode, 2004). Others gain value by gaining most up-to-the-minute information about new products and services.

The findings of this research, especially the fact that relationship building with customers stands out as the most important factor in engendering engagement should provide a base to initiate programs that strengthen that relationship. Customers need to be offered an experience that is value-oriented. Customer engagement actually makes individuals part of the marketing team. Visible engagement in the form of product endorsements on social media forms the basis of expanding the customer base and generating positive public relations. The affordances on Facebook facilitate a connection between a brand / organization and it's publics. Such a relationship when strengthened has the potential to offer benefits for both the organization and its audiences.

6.2. Limitations and Future Research

This research has several limitations. First, there are a few limitations that mainly emanate from the characteristics of the population studied. A convenience sample of students was used. Additional aspects that can be explored in future studies concern the diversity of the sample. It may therefore be argued that results may not be fully generalizable to other users of Facebook brand pages. However, it is also clear that students comprise the most active users of social media sites, thus giving support to the use of student sample as a valid choice.

Another limitation concerns the nature of the study in not allowing stating causal relationships among different variables in this study. Therefore, any conclusion should be made with caution. The research model that has been tested provides useful insights in the realm of social media marketing, but keeping in view the homogeneity of the population, further testing of the model would be desirable in alternative settings. There are other variables outside the self-determination framework that might predict the engagement phenomenon. Customer behavior is a complex phenomenon, and often it is context-dependent. This implies that behaviors may vary across timeframes and situations.

The coefficients of determination that emerged through the regression analyses are rather weak, however, given the nature of the social science research they are considered acceptable. Also, the findings explain variance of around 23%, in explaining customer engagement on Facebook brand pages, implying that there would be other factors that can be explored in future studies.

Overall, the dissertation provided empirical findings centered on symbolic customer engagement that fall in the behavioral realm. As discussed, engagement is a deeper concept that includes other factors such as involvement, cognitive and emotional engagement. In addition, future studies can also increase the number of control variables that have the potential to impact the results. Such control variables can include measures such as the amount of time spent reading a post, ease of locating the desired content on the Facebook page, etc.

Finally, this study is based on self-reported data. Due to the nature of self-reported measures, there may exist a gap between the perceived and the actual engagement behaviors of participants. As with any study that builds upon self-reported measures it is likely that we are

able to have a better understanding of customer engagement on social media and their behaviors by employing site and server level data in a combination with experiments. Future research can unearth how symbolic customer engagement in general can lead to physical customer engagement.

Future research can test the model of this research and evaluate it in other contexts. Since customer engagement is contextual in nature (Vibert & Shields, 2003), future research can delve into additional factors such as resources, mood, involvement, goals and the perceived costs/benefits of utilizing Facebook to better understand customer engagement. In the realm of social media marketing and customer engagement, other important constructs such as trust, credibility, and satisfaction can be tested to better understand their impact on brand relationship.

Future studies may also unearth in greater detail, why customers are less likely to *like* and *comment* when they have greater experience of being on social media platforms. In particular, research can examine the broader psychological characteristics of users that may impact their interactive behaviors on Facebook and other social media sites. Studies can also investigate the influence of content creation on brands, and how effective content creation strategies create word-of-mouth effects and recommendations about the brand, ultimately impacting the actual buying of products and services.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Exploratory Factor Analysis

Table 11: Rotated Component Loadings for Independent Items

	Component									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
BRAND RELATEDNESS										
I feel as if I have a close personal connection with the favorite brand / services	.875									
I consider favorite brand / services to be a part of me.	.871									
I have a special bond with the favorite brand / services	.854									
There are links between the favorite brand / services and how I view myself	.854									
I can identify with the favorite brand / services	.834									
The favorite brand / services are an important indication of who I am	.827									
COORDINATION/ATTENTIVENESS										
I show concern for and interest in the person I'm conversing with on social media.	.797									
I can show compassion and empathy through the way I write.	.754									
I take time to make sure my communication with others is uniquely adapted to the particular receiver I'm sending it to.	.705									
I know when and how to close down a topic of conversation in social media dialogues	.624									
I manage the give and take of social media interactions skillfully	.620									
I ask questions of the other person in my communication on social media.	.595									
I am skilled at timing when I respond in social media conversations	.556									

Table 11 (cont'd)

COMMUNITY RELATEDNESS

I find it very easy to form a bond with other members of the favorite Facebook page	.860
I would like a chance to interact with other users more often on the favorite Facebook page/post	.810
I really like the people I interact with via the favorite Facebook page or brand's posts	.797
I feel strong ties to other members of the favorite community on Facebook	.785
People are generally pretty friendly towards me on the favorite Facebook page or brand's posts	.763
When I am seeing the favorite Facebook page/post, I feel a sense of being connected to other members of this brand community	.758

COMPOSURE

I make sure my objectives are emphasized in my communication on social media.	.804		
I have no trouble expressing my opinions forcefully on social media.	.769		
I use an assertive style in my communication on social media.	.753		
My messages on social media are written in a confident style.	.697		
I am skillful at revealing composure and self-confidence in my social media interactions.	.693		
I display a lot of certainty in the way I communicate on social media.	.590		
I am very articulate and vivid in my conversations on social media.	.415	.425	.406

Table 11 (cont'd)

SOCIAL SKILLS

I can usually recognize others' traits accurately by observing their behavior	.833
I can usually read others well—tell how they are feeling in a given situation	.816
I am a good judge of other people	.789
I can tell why people have acted the way they have in most situations	.777
I generally know when it is the right time to ask someone for a favor	.676

PRIVACY CONCERN

Are you concerned about people you do not know obtaining personal information about you from your Facebook activities?	.849
Are you concerned about online identity theft?	.814
Are you concerned that you have to disclose too much personal information when you participate on Facebook?	.771
In general, how concerned are you about your privacy while you are using Facebook?	.759
Are you concerned about people on Facebook not being who they say they are?	.754
Are you concerned about online organizations on Facebook not being who they claim they are?	.732

SELF CENSORSHIP

It is safer to keep quiet than publicly speaking of an opinion online that you know most others don't share.	.794
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Table 11 (cont'd)

When I disagree with others, I'd rather go along with them than argue about it.	.725
In general, it is difficult for me to express my opinion online if I think others won't agree with what I say.	.716
I feel uncomfortable if someone asked my opinion and I knew that he or she wouldn't agree with me.	.691
There have been many times when I thought others around me were wrong but I didn't let them know.	.671
I tend to speak my mind online only around friends or other people I trust.	.595
SOCIAL MEDIA SELF EFFICACY	
I feel confident in turning to my friends when help is needed	.752
I feel confident in locating the necessary information on Facebook for a specific topic	.740
I handle myself well in online social settings	.739
I feel capable of using all currently available Facebook features	.729
I am confident in participating in discussions on Facebook	.589
KNOWLEDGE	
I am never at a loss for something to say on social media.	.786
I always seem to know how to say things the way I mean them using social media.	.731
When communicating with someone on social media, I know how to adapt my messages to the medium.	.599
I am very knowledgeable about how to communicate through social media.	.487

Table 11 (cont'd)

EXPRESSIVENESS

I use a lot of the expressive symbols [e.g., emoticons] in my social media conversations.	.767
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I try to use a lot of humor in my social media conversations	.656
--	------

I am expressive in my social media conversations.	.426	.593
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Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 7 iterations.

APPENDIX B

Survey

Survey

Study's Purpose: This questionnaire is designed to assess the factors that predict engagement on Facebook pages and is being conducted by researchers at Michigan State University's College of Communication Arts and Sciences.

Your Time: The survey should take about 15 minutes to complete. Taking this survey is the extent of your participation in the research.

Participation will be confidential: Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. Only the researchers associated with this project will have access to study data. All electronic data will be saved on a password-protected computer and on a password protected server. All data will be kept for a minimum of 3 years.

Participation is voluntary: If you refuse to participate there will be no penalty, and you may discontinue participation in the survey at any time. The study involves minimal risk, but the survey will require a small amount of your time and attention.

Monetary Compensation: Participation in this survey would entitle you to be voluntarily entered into a prize draw. You can win a \$50 Amazon gift card if you choose to participate in the study. The number of students who participate will determine the odds of winning.

Questions or Concerns: If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact the researcher using the information below:

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, you may also contact the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 202 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

By clicking the “**Next Page**” button below you acknowledge that you have read the above statements and grant your consent.

1. Have you visited (or received status updates from) a Facebook page of a company/organization or a product /service during the past 2 months?
 - a) Yes (if yes, proceed with the survey)
 - b) No (if no, end survey)
2. Please select your favorite brand whose page you have liked on Facebook.
_____ (Responses will piped into the [my favorite brand] in the following questions.
3. Please rate the following statements on a scale of 1 to 7, anchored by Never (1) and Very Often (7):
 - a) I “*like*” Facebook posts of [my favorite brand] page
 - b) I write *comments* on Facebook posts of [my favorite brand] page

- c) I *share* Facebook posts of [my favorite brand] page
4. Please rate your level of confidence on a scale of 1 to 7, anchored by strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (7):
- a) I feel confident in locating the necessary information on Facebook for a specific topic
 - b) I feel confident in turning to my friends when help is needed
 - c) I feel confident in turning to other Facebook users (non-friends on Facebook pages) when help is needed
 - d) I feel capable of using all currently available Facebook features
 - e) I find changes in Facebook's website settings very frustrating (reverse)
 - f) I handle myself well in online social settings
 - g) I avoid facing difficult situations online (reverse)
 - h) I am confident in participating in discussions on Facebook

For this part of the survey, we are interested in any privacy concerns you might have when online.

5. Please answer every question using the full scale provided. (Participants response will be on a 7-point scale for each item (*not at all (1) – very much (7)*).
- a) In general, how concerned are you about your privacy while you are using Facebook?
 - b) Are you concerned about online organizations on Facebook not being who they claim they are?
 - c) Are you concerned that you have to disclose too much personal information when you participate on Facebook?
 - d) Are you concerned about online identity theft?
 - e) Are you concerned about people on Facebook not being who they say they are?
 - f) Are you concerned about people you do not know obtaining personal information about you from your Facebook activities?
6. Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements on a scale of 1 to 7, anchored by strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (7):
- f) In general, it is difficult for me to express my opinion online if I think others won't agree with what I say.
 - g) There have been many times when I thought others around me were wrong but I didn't let them know.
 - h) When I disagree with others, I'd rather go along with them than argue about it.
 - i) It is easy for me to express my opinion online to others who I think will disagree with me (reverse coded).
 - j) I feel uncomfortable if someone asked my opinion and I knew that he or she wouldn't agree with me.

- k) I tend to speak my mind online only around friends or other people I trust.
 - l) It is safer to keep quiet than publicly speaking of an opinion online that you know most others don't share.
 - m) If I disagree with others, I have no problem letting them know (reverse coded).

- 7. Please rate the following on a scale of 1 to 7, anchored by strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (7).
 - a. I really like the people I interact with via the [favorite brand] Facebook brand page or brand's post.
 - b. People are generally pretty friendly towards me on the [favorite brand] Facebook brand page or brand's post.
 - c. I find it very easy to form a bond with other members of this [favorite brand] Facebook brand page.
 - d. When I am seeing the [favorite brand] Facebook brand page/post, I often feel a lot of distance with other users.
 - e. When I am seeing the [favorite brand] Facebook brand page/post, I feel a sense of being connected to other members of this brand community.
 - f. I would like a chance to interact with other users more often on [favorite brand] Facebook brand page/post.
 - g. I feel strong ties to other members of this [favorite brand] community
 - h. I feel a sense of community with other people who visit this [favorite brand] page.

- 8. Please rate the following on a scale of 1 to 7.
 - a. I have a special bond with the [favorite brand] products/services that I like.
 - b. I consider my [favorite brand] products/services to be a part of me.
 - c. I often feel a personal connection between the [favorite brand] products/services and me
 - d. I feel as if I have a close personal connection with the [favorite brand] products/services I most prefer
 - e. I can identify with my [favorite brand] products/services in my life
 - i. There are links between the [favorite brand] products/services that I prefer and how I view myself
 - j. My [favorite brand] products/services are an important indication of who I am

- 9. How long have you been using social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.?
 - a. Less than 6 months
 - b. 6 months or more but less than 12 months
 - c. 12 months or more but less than 2 years
 - d. 2 years or more but less than 3 years
 - e. 3 years or more but less than 5 years

- f. 5 years or more but less than 7 years
 - g. 7 years or more.
10. Time spent on other online social media platforms (other than Facebook) per day
{the answers will be in the form of a time slider on Qualtrics}?
- a. Less than 30 minutes
 - b. 30 minutes – 1 hour
 - c. Between 1 hour – 2 hours
 - d. Between 2 hours – 3 hours
 - e. Between 3 hours – 4 hours
 - f. Between 4 hours – 5 hours
 - g. More than 5 hours
11. Please indicate the degree to which each statement regarding your use of various CMC media is true or untrue of you, using the following scale:
- a. I am very knowledgeable about how to communicate through social media.
 - b. I am never at a loss for something to say on social media.
 - c. I always seem to know how to say things the way I mean them using social media.
 - d. When communicating with someone on social media, I know how to adapt my messages to the medium.
12. How much do you agree with the following statements (Strongly Disagree, moderately disagree, slightly disagree, neutral, slightly agree, moderately agree, strongly agree):
- a. I'm a good judge of other people
 - b. I can usually recognize others' traits accurately by observing their behavior
 - c. I can usually read others well — tell how they are feeling in a given situation
 - d. I can tell why people have acted the way they have in most situations
 - e. I generally know when it is the right time to ask someone for a favor
13. How much do you agree with the following statements (Strongly Disagree, moderately disagree, slightly disagree, neutral, slightly agree, moderately agree, strongly agree):
- a. I know when and how to close down a topic of conversation in social media dialogues.
 - b. I manage the give and take of social media interactions skillfully.
 - c. I am skilled at timing when I respond in social media conversations.
 - d. I ask questions of the other person in my communication on social media.
 - e. I show concern for and interest in the person I'm conversing with on social media.

- f. I can show compassion and empathy through the way I write.
- g. I take time to make sure my communication with others is uniquely adapted to the particular receiver I'm sending it to.
- h. I am very articulate and vivid in my conversations on social media.
- i. I use a lot of the expressive symbols [e.g., emoticons] in my social media conversations.
- j. I try to use a lot of humor in my social media conversations
- k. I am expressive in my social media conversations.
- l. I display a lot of certainty in the way I communicate on social media.
- m. I use an assertive style in my communication on social media.
- n. I have no trouble expressing my opinions forcefully on social media.
- o. I make sure my objectives are emphasized in my communication on social media.
- p. My messages on social media are written in a confident style.
- q. I am skillful at revealing composure and self-confidence in my social media interactions.

14. What is your gender?

- a. Male
- b. Female

15. In which year were you born? (Please indicate using the dropdown list).

16. Are you currently....?

- a. Freshmen
- b. Sophomore
- c. Junior
- d. Senior
- e. Masters (for example: MA, MS, MEng, MEd, MSW, MBA)
- f. Doctorate (For example: PhD, EdD)

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