

EXPLORING ENGAGEMENT WITH SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT

by

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ABSTRACT

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Engagement in the realm of social media is thought to be related to a number of positive brand and organizational outcomes and has emerged as a hot topic among marketing academics and practitioners alike. However, there is currently no consensus on exactly what constitutes this type of engagement. This lack of agreement and, hence, lack of a “social media engagement” measure, have made it difficult for academics to advance theory in this area and for researchers to test hypotheses concerning positive brand and organizational outcomes that may be related to this form of engagement. This dissertation directly addresses this gap in the marketing literature through the construction of a definition of engagement with social media content and the subsequent development of an approach for measuring it.

In the first essay, engagement theory is paired with findings from two qualitative studies in which engagement in the context of social media is examined from both the marketer and consumer perspectives. Based on the findings, it is argued that this form of engagement is a psychological state of mind that operates distinctly from social media interactive behaviors such as “liking,” commenting, and sharing. In the second essay, an existing scale is adapted to tap into the level of engagement experienced by consumers exposed to branded social media content.

Survey research is utilized to empirically test a conceptual model of the construct and hypothesized drivers and outcomes. The third essay builds on the first two by testing a conceptual model of engagement with social media content in the realm of non-profit marketing using data collected from stakeholders of a charitable organization. The findings of this research offer new insight into consumer consumption of social media content and sow the seeds for future exploration of engagement in this domain.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is affectionately dedicated to my husband, Scott, and daughter, Emma, for being my cheerleaders during this arduous process and in recognition of the sacrifices they made along the way. I also dedicate this work to my parents, and in memory of my grandmother, Patricia R. Schulte, who made me believe that I am capable of accomplishing great things.

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ESSAY 1:
A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF
ENGAGEMENT WITH SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT

Abstract

In this study, qualitative methods are utilized to examine engagement in the context of social media from both the marketer and consumer perspectives. I suggest that, in this context, the focal object of engagement is the content that is consumed by social media users, indicating that engagement with social media content is conceptually distinct from consumer engagement with a brand. The findings indicate that engagement with social media content operates separately from social media interactions such as “liking,” commenting, and sharing, and that engagement is not always a prerequisite for these types of interactions. I argue that this form of engagement is a psychological state of mind experienced when consuming content that sometimes precedes measurable outcomes. The findings of this research offer new insight into consumer consumption of social media content and sow the seeds for future exploration of engagement in the context of social media.

Keywords

Social Media, Engagement, Social Media Engagement, Social Media Content, Social Media Interaction, Social Media Participation

As marketers race to leverage social media to advance their brands and organizations, the concept of “social media engagement” has surfaced as a hot topic among practitioners and academicians alike. In a recent survey of over 800 C-level executives, digital customer engagement was ranked as the highest priority among a list of several possible digital initiatives (McKinsey and Company 2014). In fact, 69% of executives ranked engagement among the top three organizational digital priorities and 62% indicated it is a budgetary priority as well (McKinsey and Company 2014). This prioritization of social media engagement is logical given that it is thought to be associated with a number of positive outcomes, including increased sales (eMarketer 2015; Lake 2011), increased brand loyalty (Powers et al. 2012), development of

positive organizational image (Kietzmann et al. 2011), and brand equity (Bruhn, Schoenmueller, and Schafer 2012).

Although marketing researchers and practitioners agree that “social media engagement” is an important marketing objective and performance metric (MSI 2013; Mersey, Malthouse, and Calder 2010; McKinsey & Company 2014), it is interesting to note that there is currently no consensus on exactly what constitutes this form of engagement. Some suggest the size of a brand’s or organization’s fan base (e.g., the number of people who “like” an organization’s or brand’s page on Facebook or follow an organization or brand on Twitter) constitutes social media engagement and is equated with successfully utilizing the medium. Others describe social media engagement in terms of behaviors specific to a particular social media platform, such as “likes,” comments, and/or shares on Facebook (e.g., Blowers 2012; Oracle 2012). Others argue that *engagement* is a psychological state of mind that precedes behaviors (e.g., Calder and Malthouse 2008; Brodie et al. 2011; Mollen and Wilson 2010), which leads to questions as to whether behaviors should be included in the definition of social media engagement. The marketing literature offers little insight on the topic, as it suffers from a lack of agreement in the overarching conceptual domain of engagement (Dessart, Veloutsou, and Morgan-Thomas 2015; MSI 2010). In fact, clarifying the meaning of social media engagement has emerged as a top marketing research priority in academia (MSI 2013).

The rationale underlying the call for clarification of this form of engagement is two-fold. First, from an academic standpoint, the lack of a formal definition of engagement in a social media context makes it difficult to put forth theory concerning relationships between the construct and potential drivers and outcomes. Second, from a practitioner standpoint, engagement is one of the most heavily discussed metrics for establishing returns on investment

for social media spending (Drell 2012). However, the lack of a consensus regarding what constitutes engagement in this context makes it challenging to demonstrate that it results in positive outcomes for a brand or organization.

To address this gap in the marketing literature, I examine various conceptualizations of engagement and conduct qualitative research with the objectives of delineating the nature and scope of engagement in the context of social media and establishing a formal definition for this form of engagement. Much of the extant marketing research on engagement focuses on engagement with a *brand*. Examinations of engagement within the realm of social media are limited to studies incorporating the medium as part of the context in which *customer* engagement operates. However, I argue that the focal object of social media engagement is actually the *content* (e.g., status updates, pictures, videos, blog posts, etc.) that individuals consume while utilizing social media. This is an important distinction because, although social media users may be motivated to consume branded content because of a connection with a given brand, they may also be motivated by a host of other reasons. For example, a consumer may choose to read a brand's social media post because the information contained therein serves a utilitarian need. In this case, it is not the brand attracting the user to the content; rather it is the information contained in the content. However, this type of utilitarian-motivated consumption of branded content still serves as a point of contact between the brand and the consumer and, as such, it represents an opportunity to influence consumers. Therefore, I focus my research efforts on engagement with social media *content*.

This paper is organized as follows. First, I provide a literature review inclusive of the overarching domain of engagement, as well as various conceptualizations of engagement in the marketing literature. I then propose research questions based on upon the literature review. Next,

I delineate the exploratory method employed in two studies of engagement with social media content. After presenting the results and findings, I conclude with a discussion of the limitations of my studies and identify avenues for future research.

Literature Review

Although there is currently no formally accepted definition of social media engagement, the concept of “engagement” itself has been studied and measured in various disciplines, including education, organizational behavior, and marketing, for many years. An overview of conceptualizations of engagement from the domains of education and organizational behavior are provided below, followed by various conceptualizations and potentially related constructs found in the marketing domain.

Conceptualizations of Engagement in Other Domains

Academic engagement. Within the realm of higher education, academic engagement has been defined as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (Astin 1999, p. 297). More recently, academic engagement has been conceptualized as the time and effort students expend in educational activities that are empirically linked to desired college outcomes (Kuh 2009). Comprised of various factors including investment in the academic experience of college, interactions with faculty, involvement in co-curricular activities, and interaction with peers (Pascarella and Terenzini 2005; Kuh 2009), academic engagement is measured primarily in the form of *behaviors* specific to the field of higher education (Kuh 2001).

Job engagement. In the area of organizational behavior, job engagement is defined as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” and a “persistent and pervasive affective–cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual, or behavior” (Schaufeli and Bakker 2004, p. 295). The construct is measured with the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli et al. 2002a), consisting of three dimensions: vigor (e.g., “When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work”), dedication (e.g., “I am enthusiastic about my job”), and absorption (e.g., “When I am working, I forget everything else around me”). The absorption dimension is similar to the concept of “online flow,” which describes human-computer interactions (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi 1990; Ghani, Supnick, and Rooney 1991; Trevino and Webster 1992).

Conceptualizations of Engagement in the Marketing Domain

Online flow. The notion of online flow has been studied by researchers addressing the role of marketing in computer-mediated environments and may be related to social media engagement. Expanding upon the concept of flow put forth by Csikszentmihalyi (1997), Hoffman and Novak (1996) define a flow experience in a computer-mediated environment as a “state occurring during network navigation, which is (1) characterized by a seamless sequence of responses facilitated by machine interactivity, (2) intrinsically enjoyable, (3) accompanied by a loss of self-consciousness, and (4) self-reinforcing” (p. 57). They posit consumers in a flow experience are so involved in the act of network navigation that irrelevant thoughts and perceptions are filtered out and focus is completely on the interaction. Hoffman and Novak (1996) contend online flow is a cognitive state experienced during navigation of a web site (e.g., in online shopping environment), in which self-consciousness disappears, the individual’s sense

of time becomes distorted, and the individual enters into an extremely gratifying state of mind and focuses completely on the interaction.

Media engagement. In the marketing literature, engagement has been conceptualized and studied in a number of different ways. In a stream of research on media engagement that spans almost a decade, Bobby Calder and Edward Malthouse have extensively researched consumer engagement with various advertising media, including newspapers, TV shows, magazines, and online media (e.g., Calder and Malthouse 2004; Calder and Malthouse 2005; Malthouse, Calder, and Tamhane 2007; Ware et al. 2007; Calder, Malthouse, and Schaedel 2009; Malthouse and Calder 2011; Mersey, Malthouse, and Calder 2010; Mersey, Malthouse, and Calder 2012). They contend media engagement embodies a sense of involvement and of being connected with something and suggest it stems from experiencing something like a magazine or TV program in a certain way. The researchers note that while engagement is sometimes defined in terms of behavioral usage, such as the amount of time an individual spends viewing a TV show or reading a magazine, many other things can produce these types of outcomes as well. For example, a person may watch a TV show because their spouse is watching it, rather than because he/she is actively engaged with it. Therefore, they contend engagement cannot be accurately measured simply by measuring behaviors and that engagement actually occurs *before* the behaviors.

Calder and Malthouse suggest the theoretical model proposed by Higgins (2006) offers a useful framework for understanding the relationship between experience and engagement. Higgins (2006) theorizes there are two distinct components of an experience: liking and engagement. A person may like a particular radio talk show, but not be engaged with it. Or, he/she may be engaged with it, but not particularly like it. In order to understand and measure engagement, Calder and Malthouse (2008) identify relevant experiences (defined as “the

thoughts and feelings consumers have about what is happening when they are doing something,” p. 3), which they describe as inherently qualitative. They view responses to ads embedded in the media and usage of the media as consequences or side effects of engagement.

To measure media engagement, Calder and Malthouse began by conducting qualitative research in the form of individual in-depth interviews with users in order to create descriptions of various experiences commonly talked about by informants across a specific media category (e.g., across magazines). Reported experiences were then categorized and used to induce experience items. Quantitative methods were then employed to examine the relationships among the items and to produce scales to measure media engagement with several types of media.

Brand engagement in self-concept (BESC). Engagement has also been conceptualized in the marketing literature as brand engagement in self-concept (BESC), which is described as an “individual difference representing consumers’ propensity to include important brands as part of how they view themselves” (Spratt, Czellar, and Spangenberg 2009, p. 92). The BESC scale measures a consumer’s general engagement with brands and how ingrained the brand is in an individual’s identity. BESC is a predictor of consumers’ differential attention to, memory of, and preference for their favorite brands. It is related to differential brand loyalty, with high-BESC consumers being less price and time sensitive regarding their favorite brands than low-BESC consumers.

Customer engagement. In the services marketing literature, Bowden (2008) defined customer engagement as “a psychological process that models the underlying mechanisms by which customer loyalty forms for new customers of a service brand as well as the mechanisms by which loyalty may be maintained for repeat purchase customers of a service brand.” Van Doorn et al. (2010) addressed “customer engagement behaviors,” resulting from motivational

drivers including word-of-mouth activity, customer-to-customer (C2C) interactions and/or blogging activity. They suggest “customer engagement behaviors go beyond transactions” (cf. MSI 2010) and may be defined as “customers’ behavioral manifestations that have a brand- or firm-focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers” (p. 254). Based on this rationale, a theoretical model is developed linking customer engagement behaviors to specific customer-, firm-, and contextual antecedents and consequences. Participating in word-of-mouth activities, recommendations, helping other customers, blogging, writing reviews, and even taking legal action constituent customer engagement behaviors under the umbrella of this definition.

Brodie et al. (2011) offer a theoretical analysis of *customer engagement*. Drawing on relationship marketing theory and service-dominant logic, they distinguish “engagement” from “participation” and “involvement” based on existence of a customer’s interactive, cocreative experiences with a specific engagement object. They conceptualize engagement as a form of social, interactive behavior characterized as a transient state occurring within broader relevant engagement processes developing over time, with participation and involvement being antecedents of customer engagement rather than dimensions of the construct (Brodie et al. 2011).

Malthouse and Calder (2011) offer three points of “clarification” regarding the conceptualization of customer engagement by Brodie et al. (2011). First, they contend engagement is based on experiences, making it a different type of psychological state that must be studied jointly with experiences. Second, while Brodie et al. (2011) argue engagement stems from interactive and cocreative experiences, Malthouse and Calder (2011) postulate that engagement does not require active behavior. For example, engagement can arise from simply being mentally transported into a story (Wang and Calder 2006, 2009), an event that can be viewed as interactive and cocreative, but that does not imply active behavior. Third, they express

concern with the conceptualization of engagement as an “expression of relevant cognitive, emotional and behavioral dimensions” and argue that behaviors should be viewed as consequences of (vs. a dimension of) engagement.

Based on a literature review and exploratory research (interviews with executives and focus groups of customers), Vivek, Beatty, and Morgan (2012) sought to delineate the nature and scope of customer engagement. They define the construct as “the intensity of an individual’s participation and connection with the organization’s offerings or organizational activities, which either the customer or the organization initiates” (p. 133). The authors suggest the individuals may be either current or potential customers and that customer engagement may be manifested cognitively, affectively, behaviorally, or socially. The experiences and feelings of customers are incorporated by the cognitive and affective components of customer engagement, while the participation by current and potential customers is captured by the behavioral and social components. Vivek, Beatty, and Morgan (2012) postulate that involvement and customer participation are antecedents of customer engagement, and that value, trust, affective commitment, word-of-mouth, loyalty, and brand community involvement are consequences of the construct.

More recently, consumer engagement has been investigated within the context of online brand communities by Dessart, Veloutsou, and Morgan-Thomas (2015). These researchers did not attempt to re-define consumer engagement; rather, they sought to describe the meaning, conceptual boundaries, and dimensions of the construct as it applies to online brand communities. A brand community is a “specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand” (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001, p. 412). Dessart, Veloutsou, and Morgan-Thomas (2015) note that although there

are various interpretations of consumer engagement, it is often conceptualized as a motivational construct, with varying intensity. Additionally, they observe previous research suggests consumer engagement involves an object (i.e., a brand) and a subject (i.e., the consumer), and has a valence (positive versus negative) (Brodie et al. 2011a; Hollebeek and Chen 2014).

Based on 21 interviews conducted with online brand community members embedded on social media, Dessart, Veloutsou, and Morgan-Thomas (2015) posit that consumer engagement is comprised of three dimensions: affective, cognitive, and behavioral. The authors further propose that the affective dimension is comprised of two sub-dimensions (enjoyment and enthusiasm), the cognitive dimension is made up of two sub-dimensions (attention and absorption), and the behavioral dimension consists of three sub-dimensions (learning, endorsing, and sharing). Dessart, Veloutsou, and Morgan-Thomas (2015) theorize that drivers of online engagement in brand communities include brand-related variables, such as brand identification, brand satisfaction, and brand trust; online brand community identification; and community value-related variables, including the level of information, entertainment, networking, and monetary incentives offered by the community.

Online brand engagement. Mollen and Wilson (2010) build upon e-learning and online marketing research to develop a conceptual framework for online brand engagement. They define the construct as a “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. It is characterized by the dimensions of dynamic and sustained cognitive processing and the satisfying of instrumental value (utility and relevance) and experiential value (emotional congruence with the narrative schema encountered in computer-mediated entities)” (p. 923). The authors suggest that telepresence is an antecedent of online

engagement and that this form of engagement leads to “optimal” consumer attitudinal and behavioral consequences. As there was some disagreement among prior researchers regarding exactly what constitutes telepresence, the authors synthesize the literature to develop the following definition of it: “the psychological state of ‘being there’ in a computer-mediated environment, augmented by focused attention. It is characterized by cognitive and sensory arousal, control, and immersion (defined as perceiving oneself to be steeped in and interacting with an environment that sustains a continuous stream of stimuli and experiences)” (Mollen and Wilson 2010, p. 921). While the authors discuss how telepresence, flow, and interactivity relate to online engagement, they firmly assert that engagement is a discrete construct, comprised of cognitive and affective dimensions. Mollen and Wilson (2010) also note that while there was sparse empirical evidence of a direct relationship between engagement and optimal consumer attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Wang 2006; Marci 2006), it is plausible and consistent with available data that that relationship exists.

Marketer-generated content (MGC). Goldring and Nicholson (2013) examined digital marketer-generated content (MGC) engagement in context of B2B sales. Examples of marketer-generated content include e-mail newsletters, white papers, research reports, videos, blogs, and webinars. Building upon the framework of Mollen and Wilson (2010), who defined online engagement as the commitment to an active relationship with the brand via computer-mediated communication intended to enhance brand value, they developed a scale to measure MGC engagement. The scale measures the extent to which customers process and identify with the content of marketing material to which they are exposed and effects of that content experience on pre-sales behaviors. Goldring and Nicholson (2013) suggest that engagement with MGC is

characterized by active, sustained cognitive processing, satisfaction with utility and relevance, emotional impact and experiential value, and attractive and appealing aesthetics.

Consumer Brand Engagement (CBE). Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie (2014) extended the work of Brodie et al. (2011) and Hollebeek (2011a/b) by developing a scale to measure consumer brand engagement (CBE) in a social media setting, conceptualizing the construct as “a consumer’s positively valenced brand-related cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity during or related to focal consumer/brand interactions” (p. 149). Specific brands of social media (i.e., various social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter) are incorporated into the wording of the CBE scale items. For example, “Using Facebook makes me happy” and “I feel good when I use Twitter” are two of the items used to measure the affection dimension of CBE. Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie (2014) specify that the three dimensions of CBE (cognitive, emotional, and behavioral) are positively valenced. The authors suggest this scale could apply to other brands that are not social media sites, although they did not test it with other brands.

Table 1 provides an overview of various conceptualizations of engagement. Notably, in the majority of these conceptualizations, behaviors are not an integral part of the definition. Rather, in the majority of conceptualizations of engagement, the construct is described as a state of mind or psychological state. However, conceptualizations of engagement as a state of mind conflict with current managerial perspectives of engagement in social media contexts. “Engagement” has become a buzzword among digital marketers and is commonly used in describing one of two phenomena. First, practitioners sometimes discuss the amount of “engagement” a brand or organization has generated in terms of the number of individuals who friend, follow, or like a brand’s official presence on various social media sites (Tuten and Solomon 2015). Second, in the digital marketing industry, the term is commonly used to refer to

participatory behaviors undertaken by social media users (e.g., Drell 2012). For example, a recent white paper on optimizing social media strategies defines engagement in terms of behaviors, specifically “a like, comment, or share” on Facebook (Oracle 2012, p. 2). Thus, in addition to the vast discrepancies in the conceptualizations of engagement in academia, there is also some variation in the characterization of engagement in social media contexts from practitioner perspectives.

Given the lack of a clear definition of engagement with social media content, the central aim of this paper is to provide answers to the following three research questions in order to define the term and to explore the nature and scope of the construct.

RQ1: What characteristics describe the experience of engagement with social media content?

RQ2: What characteristics describe engaging social media content?

RQ3: How should engagement with social media content be defined?

Methodology

A qualitative methodology was employed to examine the domain of engagement in social media content. Qualitative research, which allows for a more discovery-focused approach compared with quantitative methods, can be particularly useful in exploring phenomena where little understanding exists (Stake 2010) as is the case in the social media marketing domain. In undertaking this exploration of engagement with social media content, I specifically drew from grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss 2007), which is among the most commonly utilized qualitative methods in qualitative marketing research (e.g., Vivek, Beatty, and Morgan 2012; Pryor, Malshe, and Paradise 2013). Grounded theory is described as a “qualitative research

design in which the inquirer generates a general explanation (a theory) of a process, action, or interaction shaped by the views of a larger number of participants” (Creswell 2007, p. 63).

Grounded theory aids in the theoretical understanding of nascent and underdeveloped areas of research; as such, it is likely to be a better approach than the common practice of “theory borrowing” from other domains of inquiry to propose theoretical relationships (Johnson 2014).

To obtain multiple perspectives on engagement with social media content, I conducted two studies over an eight-month period in 2015. In the first study, a series of in-depth interviews was conducted with marketing practitioners who incorporate social media in their marketing strategy. In the second study, in-depth interviews and focus groups were utilized to gain insight into the thoughts and opinions of consumers who are connected with brands and organizations through social media. Data collection was terminated once theoretical saturation was reached.

Study 1 – Marketing Practitioner Perspective

Sample and data collection. A series of 14 semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with marketers who utilize at least one of the following social media platforms to promote a brand and/or organization: Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, and/or LinkedIn. These platforms were chosen because they are used by large percentages of American adults who use the Internet (Facebook, 71%; LinkedIn, 28%; Pinterest, 28%; Instagram, 26%; Twitter, 23%) (Duggan et al. 2014). Potential informants were selected from a list of personal business contacts and colleagues of the researchers (i.e., a convenience sample) and were contacted by phone, email, or LinkedIn private message. Twenty marketers were contacted and 14 agreed to be interviewed (eight men and six women). The participating informants represent U.S.-based brands and organizations of various sizes in a wide range of industries, including advertising,

financial services, real estate, collegiate sports, luxury gifts, higher education, and non-profit marketing. Additionally, the informants represent a wide range of hierarchical levels in their respective organizations (e.g., vice president of marketing, director of communications, marketing and social media coordinator, small business owner) and range in age from 27 to 64 years old. Marketing practitioner characteristics are presented in Table 2.

Informants were assured that their identity, as well as that of their organization, would be not be revealed in any published research and that their confidentiality would be protected. The interviews averaged about 90 minutes in length and were conducted either in the informant's place of work, or via Skype or phone call. The following questions were initially used to prompt discussion focused specifically on engagement with social media content:

- 1) In your opinion, what constitutes engagement in the realm of social media?
- 2) Describe the types of content that you feel are most engaging for your social media followers.

Data analysis. NVivo qualitative data analysis software was utilized to organize the data collected from the interviews. As prescribed by qualitative inquiry guidelines, the analysis of the data was an iterative process, which allowed for emerging themes to be identified and to be used to shape subsequent interviews. Additionally, the technique of peer debriefing (Lincoln and Guba 1985) was used over the course of the study to solicit helpful feedback and to refine the study as it progressed. The first step performed in the analysis process was open coding, in which all meaningful quotations were assigned to a higher-level major category of information. Next, relationships among the first-order codes were identified and aggregated into higher-order themes in the axial coding step. The findings stemming from the analysis of the interviews with marketers are discussed next.

Results

The three questions used to prompt discussion with marketers form an outline in which I have organized the discussion of the results.

Engagement in the realm of social media. In response to the question concerning what constitutes engagement in the realm of social media, much discussion centered on the participatory behaviors resulting from the dissemination of content created by the organization. This suggests that, from a practitioner perspective, the focal object of social media engagement is the content on social media platforms. Many informants indicated that engagement with social media content involves specific behaviors performed by social media users on various platforms. Examples of specific behaviors that were mentioned include “liking” a brand’s posts on Facebook, retweeting a brand’s tweet on Twitter, and commenting on a brand’s posts on various platforms. This perspective was not surprising given the frequent use of the term “engagement” by the popular press when categorizing the aforementioned activities (e.g., Drell 2012; Oracle 2012).

Although this perspective seems to be somewhat pervasive among the practitioner informants, some informants offered alternative views that suggest engagement with social media content is a psychological state of mind. For example, one informant described engagement in terms of “being highly consumed, committed, or involved with something” [Heidi]. Another informant, who relies heavily on Twitter for his social media marketing efforts, stated that merely viewing and/or reading social media content are forms of engagement. Indeed, the same informant noted that, for his purposes, “viewing and reading are the most important...more so than retweeting, etc.” [Shawn]. The notion that viewing and reading content may constitute engagement was explored in subsequent interviews and all informants agreed the

two activities fall under the umbrella of engagement. Many informants suggested that various levels of engagement exist. Some characterized engagement with social media content as being “passive” or “active,” with viewing and reading falling into the passive category and behaviors such as “liking,” commenting, and sharing belonging to a more active category of engagement. Additionally, several informants felt that engagement can be best thought of as a continuum, with viewing and reading on the lower end representing less engagement and behaviors such as sharing and commenting on the higher end, indicative of greater engagement. Informants tended to think of “liking” content as being in the middle. While informants generally agreed upon the concept of an “engagement continuum,” they were not consistent in their opinions of where certain activities and behaviors fall along the continuum. For example, some informants felt that sharing content represents a higher level of engagement compared with commenting, while others held the opposite viewpoint. The idea of engagement with social media content existing along a continuum seems logical as it bears some resemblance to The Engagement Food Chain, an existing model of consumer engagement with a brand. This pyramid model illustrates the hierarchy of effects marketers seek from target audiences as they reach increasing levels of engagement with a brand (Tuten and Solomon 2015). Effects such as “saw” and “saved” reside at the base of the pyramid and more desirable effects, such as “purchased” and “recommended,” at the top.

Additionally, the data suggests marketers recognize that the behaviors, which they often refer to as “engagement” (i.e., “liking,” commenting, sharing, etc.), are not always dependent upon an individual’s level of actual engagement with the content. Several informants noted that it is possible for consumers to be engaged with content, but not perform any measurable behavior. For example, an individual may be very engaged with an article about strategies for

buying a home shared by a realtor on Facebook, reading the article from beginning to end and thinking deeply about it. However, the individual may not share, comment on, or even “like” the post containing the link to the article. While the marketer (i.e., the realtor) may have access to analytic measures indicative of the number impressions (i.e., views) for the Facebook post and number of clicks on the link to the article, he or she would have no way of knowing that the post is resulting in this form of deep engagement.

The data also reveals that the source of the content (i.e., the person or organization who shares the content) plays a role in driving engagement with social media content. One informant, the owner of a freelance photography business, revealed that she believes the source of the content greatly impacts behaviors that are currently characterized as “engagement” by marketing practitioners. Specializing in custom photography sessions with families and children, she posts the photographs she takes to Facebook and Instagram (with permission of the subjects) as method of allowing her customers to preview their photos before she provides them with digital files. A benefit of allowing her customers to preview their photographs on social media is that her customers often “like,” comment, and share the pictures with their social networks, thus providing a wealth of positive publicity for the photography business. Interestingly, she notes that her photography posts sometimes have no apparent association with what she considers to be actual “engagement” with the content:

Many times, people will like and share and so forth because they’re my friend or someone else’s friend, but they may not really care or actually like or have an interest in what they’re “liking” or sharing. [Samantha]

Samantha believes her personal friends are often sharing her photography posts in order to be supportive of her business initiatives and/or because they think their social media connections might be in the market for a photographer for family portraits. She also

acknowledges that some of her photography posts may be “liked” or shared as a means of simply being nice to and/or supporting the subjects in the photos and she stated that she would not characterize these individuals as necessarily being “engaged” with the photographs.

The finding that the source of content influences engagement with social media content is in line with previous research that has investigated the impact of source credibility in the context of social media. For example, Bruhn, Schoenmueller, and Schafer (2012) examined the influences of firm-created content and user-generated content on brand image. They found that firm-created social media communications positively affects functional brand image, while user-generated content aids in increasing hedonic brand image. Other research has noted the importance of source credibility to consumers when deciding whether to interact with content, especially when thinking about sharing the content with social media connections (Syrdal and Bok 2016).

Engaging content. The data analysis reveals a great deal of variation in the types of content that marketers feel is most engaging for their social media followers depending upon industry and the social media platform(s) utilized. However, one commonality emerging from the data is that content that in some way offers a personal connection for social media users seems to be more engaging. Heidi, who is a realtor, stated that she has noticed pictures she has posted of buyers and sellers at closings, which typically show people simply sitting around a table or standing against a wall in an office setting, generate a tremendous response compared with content that is more utilitarian in nature, such as news articles related to buying or selling houses. She attributes this response to the personal connection between the buyers and/or sellers in the pictures and their friends and family wanting to offer support and share in the excitement. In the quotation below, Allison also notes the importance of the personal connection aspect when

asked to describe the characteristics of the content that is most engaging for the audience to which her organization tries to appeal:

Content that revolves around pride and vanity. People like to see their name, their pictures, people they know. I think there's a personal connection and pride that comes from engaging. For example, alumni updates garner more engagement than posts about upcoming events. [Allison]

Additionally, several informants suggested that user-generated content (UGC) produces more of a response compared with content created by the brand or organization. The marketers reported experiencing success with a variety of tactics for increasing UGC associated with their brand or organization. These tactics include contests and sweepstakes involving sharing pictures or video taken by consumers or offering entry into drawings for prizes when consumers perform certain actions such as "liking" the brand's page on a social media platform. The quotation below speaks to the notion that UGC is likely more powerful than marketer-generated content:

Overall, I'd say user-generated content is going to be more engaging compared to marketer-generated. Marketers need to achieve a "trusted advisor" status on social media. But this is tough because the audience knows they're trying to sell stuff. But if you can get people screaming about how good you are, it's better than *you* screaming about how good you are. [Leon]

Some informants, however, noted that they are not able to employ UGC contest campaigns due to regulations imposed upon the industries in which they operate (e.g., financial services). Also, several informants stated that the level of success they have experienced with UGC contest campaigns seems to be dependent upon the social media platform utilized.

I have gotten our followers to submit user-generated content...tried with Facebook and got no response. But then I tried with Twitter and got lots of retweets and photos. So it seems to me that it's platform-specific...what works, what doesn't work. [Allison]

Finally, some informants reported that the valence of the content plays a role in the response it generates. Victor, a communications director for a large non-profit organization,

stated that while his organization tries to mix in positively-valenced social media posts, he admits the majority of what they post is more negatively-valenced due to the nature of the organization's mission. Reflecting on his years of experience in the non-profit world, he noted that from his perspective, generating a response to social media content is similar to soliciting donations through mailers in that messages that are more "detailed and gruesome produce at least twice the response as happy messages." Shawn, a political activist, shared a similar view, stating "content that is negative in nature seems to draw more attention." Not surprisingly, however, the data suggests that what works for one brand or organization in terms of valence of the content, may not work for another. Shelley, who also works for a non-profit organization focused on animal advocacy, stated that her organization has experienced higher levels of success by sharing high-quality pictures and videos that showcase animals looking happy in a more positive environment.

Study 2 - Consumer Perspective

Data collection. To gain the perspective of the consumer, focus groups and in-depth interviews were conducted with consumers who use Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, and/or LinkedIn at least three hours per week and are connected to brands and/or organizations through at least one of those platforms. For the purposes of this research, "connected" means they "like" the brand's or organization's Facebook page and/or follow the brand or organization on one of the other platforms. The platforms were selected because of their high level of popularity (Duggan et al. 2014) and to maintain consistency with the eligibility criteria used to screen marketers for in-depth interviews. All participants and informants were assured that their confidentiality would be protected. The focus groups and interviews ranged in length from 60 to

90 minutes and were recorded to allow for the creation of accurate transcriptions. The following questions were included in the discussion guide and used to prompt discussion on engagement with both focus group participants and interview informants:

- 1) What comes to mind when you think about social media engagement?
- 2) What does it feel like when you're engaged with social media content?
- 3) Describe the types of content that you find most engaging.

Focus groups sample. Six focus groups were conducted with upper level undergraduate business students at a Southwestern university. The participants were recruited from marketing courses by offering an extra credit opportunity for participation. The focus groups were conducted in conference rooms in the business building on the university's campus. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 36 years of age and represent a variety of ethnicities. Descriptive characteristics of the focus group participants are presented in Table 3.

In-depth interviews sample. Nine semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with informants who were selected from a list of personal contacts and colleagues of the researchers (i.e., a convenience sample) and were contacted by phone, email, or LinkedIn private message. Thirteen individuals were contacted and nine agreed to be interviewed (eight women and one male). The consumer informants ranged in age from 22 to 68 years old and comprised a diverse sample, with a number of ethnicities, educational levels, and occupations represented. The interviews were conducted in a location convenient for the informant or via phone call. Table 4 provides descriptive characteristics of the consumer informants.

Data analysis. The same process utilized for the analysis of the data collected from the interviews with marketers was employed to analyze the data collected from the focus groups and interviews with consumers. The findings from the analysis follow below.

Results

To facilitate comparison, the following discussion is organized in the same manner as the results of the analysis of the data collected from marketing practitioners.

Engagement in the realm of social media. The first and second questions posed to the consumer participants and informants were designed to prompt the subjects to describe their characterization of engagement when using social media. When asked what comes to mind when thinking about “social media engagement,” focus group participants and interview informants were noticeably less confident in their answers compared with the marketing practitioners who were interviewed; the consumers spent considerably more time formulating their answers. Most consumers struggled with answering this question and some admitted they had never heard of the terminology. The major first-order categories identified from responses to this question include the following: interest, involvement, interaction, keeping in touch, communication, participating. Interestingly, social media behaviors often categorized as “engagement” by practitioners (e.g., liking, commenting, sharing), were only mentioned by one individual.

Responses to the second question, in which subjects were asked to describe what it feels like when engaged with social media content, were more free-flowing and illuminated a number of differences in perspective compared with that of the marketer informants. A common theme emerging from analysis of the data is that of *enjoyment*, as the subjects characterized the experience of being engaged with social media content using the following words: relaxing,

positive, good, happy, exciting, and fun. Another emerging theme was that of a sense of *involvement*, described by subjects using the following words and phrases: absorbed, interested, involved, “zoned in,” all-consuming, holds attention, “light bulbs in my head,” intrigued, captivated, entranced, focused, and “plugged in.”

Social media behaviors such as “liking,” commenting, and sharing, were notably absent from nearly all of the subjects’ responses to the first two questions. After discovering this apparent departure from the marketing practitioners’ characterization of engagement in a preliminary data analysis conducted early on in the data collection process, a follow-up question was added to the discussion guides for both the focus groups and interviews with consumers. Participants were asked whether they typically interact with social media content that they find engaging and, if so, to describe how they interact with it. While some subjects indicated they are more likely to undertake social media behaviors if they find content highly engaging, others disclosed additional factors that they weigh more heavily in their decision of whether or not to perform social media behaviors. Many consumers described their consumption of social media content, and subsequent decision regarding whether or not to interact with it, as a two-step process in which they first perform an initial evaluation of the content to determine whether they want to spend time consuming it. After spending time viewing/reading/watching content, a second assessment is conducted to determine whether they will perform a social media behavior such as “liking” or sharing the content. In the second assessment, consumers indicated they take a host of variables, other than their level of engagement with the content, into consideration. The most notable variables identified through the analysis of the data were privacy concerns and source considerations.

Both focus group participants and interview informants expressed concerns about the lack of privacy on social media. Privacy salience, defined by Tuten and Solomon (2015) as the extent to which worries about sharing too much information impact an individual's online behavior, was especially prevalent among the focus group participants, the majority of which were Millennials. Concerns about social media activities being monitored or observed emerged as a chief consideration when deciding whether to undertake various social media behaviors, especially sharing content. In many of the focus groups, participants reported that their concerns about their personal privacy have led them to decrease their usage of Facebook, while simultaneously increasing their usage of other social media sites, such as Instagram. The motivation underlying this migration is to avoid disclosing details of their personal lives to certain individuals (e.g., some family members, co-workers) who are increasingly using Facebook. This finding is in line with recent research that finds 55% of Internet users have taken steps to hide from specific people or organizations, such as employers and family members (Rainie et al. 2013). Focus group participants indicated they believe they have greater levels of privacy on newer social media platforms because older generations have yet to begin using them en masse. Both focus group participants and interview informants noted that the decision of whether or not to interact with content is often impacted by the social media platform on which the content is posted. In other words, if consumers are exposed to the same content on multiple platforms, it would be expected that the outcome of their decision of whether to interact with that content would be the same across platforms. However, the data suggest consumers' concerns about who may observe their interaction with the content on a given platform impacts the interaction outcome. Below, an informant explains how her behavior differs when utilizing Tumblr compared with Facebook:

On Tumblr, I am very free with my likes and follows. But, then again, it is more private than Facebook. My parents and friends don't see my Tumblr profile."
[Susan, years old]

Focus group participants and interview informants also cited the source of the content as a variable that impacts their initial interest in social media content and also their decision of whether to undertake any form of interaction with it. Source considerations were inclusive of both the creators of the content (i.e., the person or organization that originally produced the content), as well as the source redistributing (by posting or sharing it) the content when applicable. Subjects discussed how they evaluate the credibility of both types of sources to initially determine whether they will spend time viewing or reading the content and, subsequently, to decide whether they will interact with it. Before choosing to interact with content, they think about how associating themselves with the source(s) of the content will reflect upon their image. Subjects also indicated they consider whether the content itself, as well as the source of the content, might be considered controversial by their social media connections. Below, an informant who often finds herself "engaged with content," even though she mostly "just looks and reads," elaborates on her thought process when deciding whether to interact with content:

I rarely do any of those things ["like," comment, share], especially with controversial stuff. I especially avoid interacting with political and religious stuff. I really think about it before making a comment. I think about who shared it and where it came from and how it's going to reflect on me. I consider what other people will think if they see I've liked or commented on something, especially people outside of my close circle. There are so many people on social media. I need to try to maintain my professionalism because I'm connected to a lot of people from work. Plus, I hate the drama...I just want to avoid that and keep my opinions to myself. [Terri, 39 years old]

The data analysis suggests that when consumers decide to interact with content, the underlying motivations for doing so vary with the type of interaction (i.e., “liking,” commenting, sharing, etc.) and also the social media platform being utilized. Consumers indicated they are, overall, much more liberal with “liking” or similar behaviors (e.g., “favoriting” on Twitter) compared with behaviors such as commenting and sharing. A common motivational theme for “liking” content was to support a social media connection, such as a friend, brand, or organization. Two motivations for sharing emerged: to help connections and/or to maintain or enhance one’s own image. Said one focus group participant in reference to Facebook, “I’ll like and favorite stuff that I won’t share. Because sharing means it goes on your wall, and then it represents *you*” (Cassie, 21 years old). Many other subjects echoed this sentiment.

Responses to the question concerning the types of content that consumers find engaging varied greatly; however, the specific examples provided by consumers can be classified into a number of common themes. Humorous content seems to hold wide appeal, as consumers discussed how they often feel engaged with funny memes and comical videos circulating on social media. Newsworthy is another theme that emerged. Consumers described this type of content using the terms “breaking news,” “fresh,” “relevant,” “up-to-date,” and “breaking stories.” The focus of newsworthy content that consumers find engaging mirrors their individual, specific interests such as sports, politics, local news, etc. (i.e., no particular topics emerged as common themes in the data). Further, while some subjects indicated they prefer positively-valenced content, it was acknowledged that engagement could occur with negatively-valenced content as well. Consumers also noted they often find themselves engaged with content that is utilitarian in nature and provided examples such as decorating ideas, lists of tips (e.g., all the things you can do with a lemon), and articles such as “How to Successfully Network.”

Authenticity was another theme that emerged. Consumers explained that they prefer content that they perceive to be authentic, or original, as opposed to “canned” or “recycled” content that is sometimes circulated by brands and organizations. One interview informant shared the following regarding her perceptions of authenticity: “Content that’s not real, not authentic is not engaging. It’s almost the opposite of engaging.” (Alexis) The same informant discussed her negative feelings about what she described as the large amount of “click bait” and the increasingly commercial aspects of social media. Additionally, many consumers noted the impact of their personal social media connections on their initial decision to view/read/watch content and also their level of engagement:

If content comes from my friends, especially if they tag me in a comment on a post, pic, or video...or if I get a push notification about it on my phone, I’m definitely going to check it out. I’m going to go look at whatever it is because there’s a good chance I’m going to be interested in it because my friends know me pretty well. [Stephen]

Below, another consumer discusses how she sometimes experiences a heightened level of engagement with content when reading comments from other social media users regarding the that content:

Social media gives more opportunity to play with people’s emotions. With a TV ad, you’re left to interpret by yourself. With social media, you’re reading through other people’s interpretations and that’s going to influence you too. [Alexis]

Finally, consumers suggested that content that is visually appealing is more engaging compared with content that is not attractive or is not as visual in nature (e.g., text compared with pictures). Some subjects noted that the specific social media platform impacts their judgment of what is engaging. For example, one consumer noted that when using Pinterest, she has higher expectations for content to be visually appealing than on other platforms, such as LinkedIn and Facebook. It was also noted that, in some cases, the specific platform dictates the type of content

distributed (i.e., Instagram requires pictures, YouTube necessitates the use of videos). Consumers were further probed as to whether they feel the format (e.g., content that includes pictures vs. only words, pictures vs. videos, etc.) impacts their level of engagement. While the data suggests consumers perceive that content that includes pictures is more engaging than content without pictures, there is no indication that the format of the content (pictures compared with videos) impacts the level of engagement experienced by the consumer. However, other factors, such as the physical surroundings of the consumer when he or she is deciding whether to initially consume the content, do matter. For example, several focus group participants noted they will not watch a video if they are in class because they would not want other people to hear the video playing, but they would view content consisting of text and/or pictures, such as blog posts, memes, and news articles.

Discussion

Engagement with Social Media Content vs. Social Media Interactive Behaviors

Taken together, the findings from the marketing practitioner and consumer studies contribute to the marketing literature by expanding our understanding of engagement in the context of social media and offering a number of novel findings. First, the results of both studies indicate marketers and consumers are in agreement in their view that the focal object of engagement in the context of social media is the *content* consumed on social media sites. This is important as it suggests this form of engagement is conceptually distinct from consumer engagement with a brand, in which the focal object is a brand.

Second, consumer characterizations of engagement with social media content differ greatly from marketer characterizations. While marketing practitioners tend to use the term “engagement” in the context of social media to describe active behaviors such as “liking,” commenting, and sharing, the consumer characterization does not include a behavioral component. Instead, consumers tend to characterize engagement with social media content as a state of mind in which they often feel a sense of enjoyment coupled with a high degree of involvement. When consumers experience this state of mind, they sometimes choose to interact with the content, by “liking” or sharing it for example. However, when social media interaction follows the engagement state, the decision to interact involves a conscious thought process based on several other factors in addition to the level of engagement with the content. Thus, although marketers currently operate under the assumption that higher levels of consumer interaction with content are indicative of higher levels of interest or involvement with the content, this was not found to be the case. Interestingly, consumers also report sometimes interacting with content with which they are *not* engaged and, in some cases, content they have not even consumed (e.g., sharing a video they have not watched). These findings suggest that engagement with social media content is separate and distinct from social media interactions and that engagement is not always a prerequisite for interactive behaviors.

Third, when consumers choose to interact with content, underlying motivations such as a desire to support others and/or maintain or enhance one’s own image may play a larger role than the level of engagement with the content. The findings also suggest that the motivations underlying social media interactive behaviors vary by the type of behavior being performed. While consumers often “like” content to support brands (and other consumers) for which they have positive feelings, sharing is a more complex behavior that is likely motivated by an

expectation of the gain of some personal and/or social benefit, similar to the motivations underlying word-of-mouth (Alexandrov, Lilly, and Babakus 2013). Because the motivations underlying social media interactive behaviors are distinct from one another, any examination of the potential drivers and outcomes of these behaviors should be conducted on an individual basis, as it is entirely possible that there are vast differences in the processes surrounding each type of behavior.

Fourth, interaction with social media content is platform-specific, as consumers consider the individuals with whom they are connected on a given social media platform when deciding if interactive behaviors with the content is appropriate. Concerns about privacy and the credibility of the source of content may attenuate consumer interactions with content even when a high level of engagement exists. For example, a consumer may “like” a meme on Instagram that he/she will not “like” on Facebook. In this case, the difference in behavior may be attributed the consumer’s heightened sense of privacy while utilizing Instagram, stemming from having fewer connections on that particular platform.

Characteristics of Engaging Social Media Content

While the characteristics of engaging content varied widely among the informants and participants in the study, content that can be categorized as humorous, entertaining, newsworthy, and/or utilitarian holds wide appeal for consumers. Additionally, positively-valenced content is preferred by consumers, although content that is negatively-valenced can also engage social media users. Authenticity is also important, as consumers indicate a preference for content that they perceive to be fresh and relevant, rather than syndicated content created to be sold to, and distributed by, multiple brands and organizations. Finally, aesthetic qualities of social media

content affect the level of engagement consumers say they experience while consuming content, with more engagement occurring when the content is visually appealing. The expectations for the level of visual appeal vary by platform, often with higher expectations for content on platforms that are considered more visual in nature (e.g., Instagram, Pinterest).

Definition of Engagement with Social Media Content

The findings of the current research bear some similarities to the stream of research on media engagement generated by Calder and Malthouse. As discussed in the literature review, their research examines engagement with media such as TV, newspapers, and magazines. They view engagement as “the sum of the motivational experiences consumers have with the media product” (Calder and Malthouse 2008, p. 5) and argue media engagement is a state of mind that is an antecedent to outcomes such as usage, affect, and responses to advertising (Calder, Malthouse, and Schaedel 2009). Similar to this conceptualization of media engagement, the overall findings of the current research suggest engagement with social media content may be an antecedent of consumer interaction with content and other outcomes and, therefore, should be defined separately.

The findings of the consumer study indicate that when consumers are engaged with social media content, the experience is characterized by a deep feeling of involvement, often combined with a sense of excitement or enjoyment. Therefore, I propose engagement with social media content be defined as follows:

“a psychological state of mind experienced when consuming social media content in which an individual is highly absorbed in the content and experiences a sense of excitement.”

I suggest that this state of mind likely has a greater impact on important brand and organizational outcomes that have been posited to result from engagement in the realm of social media compared with social media interactions.

Managerial Implications

The results of the studies provide a host of implications for marketing practitioners, an estimated 92% of whom believe social media is important to their business (Stelzner 2014). One of the most important implications of the present work is that the metrics currently being used to assess the successfulness of a brand's or organization's social media efforts (often the number of brand fans who "like" or follow a brand's social media page or the number of social media interactions such as "likes," comments, shares, etc.) are not adequate proxies for measuring the level of engagement experienced by consumers when consuming the brand's social media content. The notion that garnering a large social media fan base translates into meaningful outcomes has already been called into question by previous research (Lake 2011; Andzulis, Panagopoulos, and Rapp 2012; Kristofferson, White, and Peloza 2014). Rather, it has been suggested that utilizing content and technologies to better engage fans will move them towards desired outcomes, such as purchasing product (Lake 2011).

Although social media metrics, such as the number of shares generated by a branded post, provide an indication of whether consumers are choosing to interact with the content, they offer no insight into the level of actual engagement experienced by individuals when consuming the content. While social media interactions are certainly valuable in that they allow for increased distribution of the content to more news feeds, I suggest that engagement with content is also important, possibly more so. For example, a recent white paper examining how brands can

optimize social media strategy indicates that 79% of brand fans get content directly from the brand, as opposed to a viral source. Brands are advised not to rely on viral strategies to distribute their messages; rather, it is suggested “the production of consistent, quality, and relevant content will pay higher dividends than swinging for the fences in a misguided attempt to ‘go viral’” (Oracle 2012, p. 8). Brands seeking to develop deeper relationships with their customers should place a greater focus on ensuring their social media content is meeting the needs and expectation of their audience. The number of social media interactions garnered by the content should not be used as the sole yardstick for assessing this.

Additionally, because social media metrics are simply measures of observable behaviors and engagement with content is not an observable behavior, marketers may be overlooking some members of their target audience on social media. It is estimated that the vast majority (up to 90 percent) of social media users are lurkers, people who consume content (e.g., reading posts, watching videos, etc.), but who do not contribute to the flow of content on social media by carrying out any measurable behavior (Little 2015). Although this group of social media users often goes undetected by brands and organizations whose content is part of what lurkers consume on social media, they should not be disregarded because they may still be influenced by the content to which they are exposed. Additionally, while lurkers may not perform any measurable behaviors on social media, it is likely that they carry out important offline behaviors, such as spreading positive word-of-mouth about brands. Views (or impressions) of content are may be more valuable than many practitioners currently realize and there is value in knowing how well a brand's social media content is psychologically engaging targeted consumers. Brands and organizations should strive to develop content that is engaging so that it adds value to the brand experience desired by customers.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

As with any research, the current work is not without limitations. The data collected in the studies are self-reported and retrospective in nature, which may result in some inaccuracies. Future research might address this concern by employing additional qualitative techniques, such as auto-driving or diary accounting to enhance and expand the findings of the current research. Auto-driving is a technique in which informants are asked to comment on a stimulus to which they are exposed (e.g., a picture, video) and how the stimulus relates to them (Woodside and Wilson 1995). Future researchers might employ techniques such as auto-driving by asking informants for permission to observe their browsing and interaction habits with content on a social media platform. It would be interesting to assess whether observed consumer behaviors on social media are consistent with the findings of the current research.

The findings of this research offer a number of directions for future research that are ripe for exploration. The current research suggests that engagement with social media content is a separate and distinct phenomenon from the behaviors performed with social media content. This indicates that the observable social media interactions currently being used to measure “engagement” do not serve as adequate proxies of actual engagement in social media contexts. Thus, one direction for future research would be the development of a scale (or adaptation of an existing scale) to measure the construct so that hypothesized relationships between engagement in a social media context and various outcomes can be empirically tested.

Further, a natural extension of this research would be to examine the relative impacts of engagement with social media content and social media interactions on the positive business outcomes that have been posited to result from “social media engagement.” To the authors’ knowledge, there has been no research conducted to date to explore the drivers or outcomes of

engagement in a social media context as it is conceptualized in this paper. While there has been some research examining the impact of social media interactions (sometimes referred to as “engagement” or “participation”) on marketing outcomes, the manner in which the variable has been operationalized and the specific contexts utilized to test hypotheses severely limit the generalizability of the findings. For example, Kumar et al. (2016), examine the impact of “social media engagement” on customer purchase behavior. More specifically, the authors investigate “engagement” in terms of the impact of firm-generated content, which they operationalize as the number of messages posted by the firm on a particular social media site per week. While the findings are interesting and bolster support for the inclusion of social media as an important component of marketing strategy for retailers, it is a stretch to consider the frequency of posts made by a retailer to be a form of “engagement.” Certainly, more research is needed to study both engagement with social media content and the highly coveted social media interactions prized by marketing practitioners.

Additionally, while specific features of social media content have been examined as drivers of social media interactions, the results of the present research suggest that the source of the content may play a larger role than physical attributes of the content itself, such as the format. Previous research examining the source of online reviews for businesses such as restaurants and resorts found that consumers are more persuaded by reviews written by similar reviewers and ambiguous reviewers compared with reviews written by dissimilar reviewers (Naylor, Lamberton, and Norton 2011). Although consumers in the study did not specifically state that they find themselves more engaged with social media content that is distributed by other consumers more similar to themselves, it would be interesting to investigate whether this phenomena is taking place at a subconscious level with branded social media content.

Finally, recent research examining a phenomenon called “attachment to social media” specifically calls for an investigation of possible relationships between the new construct and engagement in the context of social media. VanMeter, Grisaffe, and Chonko (2015) define attachment to social media as “the strength of a bond between a person and social media” (p. 71) and find the new construct predicts C2C advocacy and C2B supportive communication behaviors on social media in an applied retail setting. Specifically, individuals who are more strongly attached to social media have a greater propensity to express positive C2C word-of-mouth via social media and higher levels of C2B supportive communication behaviors via social media. It seems logical that a consumer’s level of attachment to social media would have a positive impact on that individual’s level of engagement with social media content and it would interesting to examine this empirically.

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Tables

TABLE 1
Overview of Selected Conceptualizations of Engagement

Engagement Construct	Discipline	Author(s)	Definition	Behavioral Component?
Academic Engagement	Higher Education	Astin (1984)	“the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience”	Yes
Job Engagement	Organizational Behavior	Schaufeli and Bakker (2004)	“a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption”	No
Online Flow	Marketing	Hoffman and Novak (1996)	“a state occurring during network navigation, which is (1) characterized by a seamless sequence of responses facilitated by machine interactivity, (2) intrinsically enjoyable, (3) accompanied by a loss of self-consciousness, and (4) self-reinforcing.”	No
Media Engagement	Marketing	Calder and Malthouse (2008)	“embodies a sense of involvement and of being connected with something...stems from experiencing something like a magazine or TV program in a certain way”	No
Brand Engagement in Self-Concept (BESC)	Marketing	Sprott et al. (2009)	“an individual difference representing consumers’ propensity to include important brands as part of how they view themselves”	No
Customer Engagement	Marketing	Patterson et al. (2006)	“the level of a customer’s physical, cognitive, and emotional presence in their relationship with a service organization”	No
		Bowden (2008)	“a psychological process that models the underlying mechanisms by which customer loyalty forms for new customers of a service brand as well as the mechanisms by which loyalty may be maintained for repeat purchase customers of a service brand”	No
		VanDoorn et al. (2010)	“customers’ behavioral manifestations that have a brand- or firm-focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers”	Yes
		Brodie et al. (2011a)	“a psychological state the occurs by virtue of interactive, cocreative customer experience with a focal agent (e.g. a brand) in focal service relationships”	No

		Vivek, Beatty, and Morgan (2010)	“the intensity of an individual’s participation and connection with the organization’s offerings and activities initiated by either the customer or the organization”	Yes
Online Brand Engagement	Marketing	Mollen and Wilson (2010)	“a customer’s “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”	No
Marketer-generated Content (MGC)	Marketing	Goldring and Nicholson (2013)	“the extent to which customers process and identify with the content of marketing material... characterized by active, sustained cognitive processing, satisfaction with utility and relevance, emotional impact and experiential value, and attractive and appealing aesthetics”	No
Consumer Brand Engagement	Marketing	Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie (2014)	“a consumer’s positively valenced brand-related cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity during or related to focal consumer/brand interactions”	Yes
Consumer Engagement in Online Brand Communities	Marketing	Dessart, Veloutsou, and Morgan-Thomas (2015)	“a cognitive, affective, and behavioral commitment to an active relationship with the brand”	Yes

TABLE 2
Marketing Practitioner Descriptive Information

ID #	Person	Title	Industry	Social Media Audience	Geographic Scope
1	Carter	Marketing and Social Media Coordinator; Owner	Financial services; marketing consulting	Individuals and Businesses	Regional
2	Shelley	Social Media Administrator and Volunteer	Non-profit	Individuals	Local
3	Heidi	Realtor	Real estate	Individuals	Local
4	Michael	Assistant Commissioner for Television and Electronic Media	Sports Media	Individuals	Regional
5	Warren	VP of Marketing	Luxury gifts	Individuals and Businesses	National
6	Julia	Designer and Owner	Furniture	Individuals and Businesses	Local
7	Whitney	Regional VP of Communications	Non-profit	Individuals	National
8	Victor	Director of Communications	Non-profit	Individuals	National
9	Shawn	Political Activist	Politics	Individuals	Regional
10	Samantha	Owner and Photographer	Small business owner	Individuals	Local
11	Leon	Marketing Professor	Higher Education	Individuals	National
12	John	Marketing Director	Apparel	Individuals	National
13	Andrew	VP of Marketing and Digital Strategies	Advertising	Businesses	National
14	Allison	Director of Marketing and Communications	Higher Education	Individuals	National

TABLE 3
Focus Group Descriptive Information

Focus Group	# of Participants	Gender	Age Range	Average Age	Ethnicities
1	7	4 female 3 male	21-31	25	5 White 2 Hispanic
2	7	4 female 3 male	21-35	23.6	5 White 1 Asian 1 Hispanic
3	7	2 female 5 male	21-32	25	4 White 1 Asian 1 Black 1 Hispanic
4	4	2 female 2 male	21-27	23	2 White 1 Black 1 Hispanic
5	6	0 female 6 male	21-36	24.3	3 Asian 2 White 1 Hispanic
6	7	5 female 2 male	18-23	21.6	4 Black 4 White 1 American Indian

TABLE 4
Consumer Informant Descriptive Information

ID #	Informant	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Education Level	Marital Status	Occupation
1	Stephen	Male	23	Black	Some college	Single	Undergraduate student
2	Carol	Female	22	White	Some college	Single	Undergraduate student
3	Belinda	Female	37	White	College degree	Married	Homemaker
4	Janice	Female	68	White	High school diploma	Married	Retired
5	Alexis	Female	35	Black, Asian	Master's degree	Married	Homemaker
6	Terri	Female	39	White	College degree	Married	Executive Assistant
7	Vickie	Female	37	Black	College degree	Married	Homemaker
8	Charlotte	Female	47	White	Master's degree	Married	Elementary special education teacher
9	Susan	Female	25	White	College degree	Single	Graduate student

ESSAY 2:

AN APPROACH TO MEASURING ENGAGEMENT WITH SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT

Abstract

Measuring engagement in realm of social media has emerged as an important priority for marketing academics and practitioners alike. However, the lack of an established measure of engagement in this context has precluded examination of this phenomenon. I directly address this gap in the marketing literature by developing an approach to tap into the psychological engagement experienced by individuals when consuming social media content. I apply theory from an extant stream of research focused on engagement with other forms of media and adapt scale items to comprise a measure of engagement with social media content. A model of engagement with social media content and hypothesized brand- and content-related drivers and outcomes is developed and empirically tested. Further, the impact of engagement is compared to the influence of interactive behaviors performed on social media and the findings reveal the behaviors have no significant impact on outcome variables in the study.

Keywords

Social Media, Engagement, Social Media Engagement, Content Marketing, Brand Equity, Word-of-mouth

The explosive growth of social media in recent years has dramatically changed the media environment for both consumers and markets. Consumers are now open to participating in relationships with brands and organizations on social media sites. For example, a leading digital marketing agency reports that 97% of online consumers have searched for a brand online; 70% have read a corporate blog; 67% have watched brand videos on YouTube, and 65% have played a branded game online (Feed 2009). Additionally, research suggests that consumers are increasingly relying on social media to learn about unfamiliar brands (Naylor, Lamberton, and West 2012). A survey of over 1,000 social media users found that around 50% of consumers think a brand's Facebook page is more useful than a brand's web site (Murphy 2012). The same research found that about 82% of respondents believe branded Facebook pages are good places

to interact with brands, as evidenced by the finding that 87% of people “like” brands on Facebook.

With 74% of online adults using social media (Duggan et al. 2014) and the average American spending over 22 hours per week on social networking sites (Ipsos 2013), marketers are now actively embracing social media as a promotional tool. A recent study found that 97% of marketers are using social media marketing and 92% believe social media is important to their business (Stelzner 2014). As marketers race to leverage social media to advance their brands and organizations, increasing “social media engagement” has surfaced as a crucial imperative. In a recent survey of over 800 C-level executives, digital customer engagement was emerged as the highest priority among a list of several possible digital initiatives (McKinsey and Company 2014). This prioritization of engagement in the realm of social media is logical given that it is thought to be related to important organizational and brand-related outcomes, including increased sales (eMarketer 2015; Lake 2011), increased brand loyalty (Powers et al. 2012), development of positive organizational image (Kietzmann et al. 2011), and brand equity (Bruhn, Schoenmueller, and Schafer 2012).

Although academic researchers and marketing practitioners agree that increasing “social media engagement” is a crucial marketing objective and performance metric (MSI 2013; Mersey, Malthouse, and Calder 2010; McKinsey & Company 2014), there is currently no consensus as to exactly what comprises engagement in the context of social media. It is sometimes described in terms of the size of a brand’s or organization’s fan base (e.g., the number of people who follow an organization or brand) or as behaviors specific to a particular social media platform, such as “likes,” comments, and/or shares on Facebook (e.g., Blowers 2012; Oracle 2012). Others argue that *engagement* is inherently a psychological state of mind that precedes behaviors (e.g., Calder

and Malthouse 2008; Brodie et al. 2011; Mollen and Wilson 2010). Building on the findings of the qualitative research conducted in Essay One, I suggest engagement in this realm is a state of mind experienced when individuals are consuming social media content that is distinct from fan base size and interactive behaviors, such as “liking,” commenting, and sharing.

However, because there is currently no established measure of this form of engagement in the context of social media, researchers have been unable to produce evidence of a link between this form of engagement and the positive outcomes with which it is thought to be associated. Although the active behaviors expressed by consumers on social media (e.g., “liking,” sharing) have occasionally been utilized for social media engagement-related research inquiries, recent research has called into question the adequacy of using these measures as proxies for the level of engagement experienced by individuals when consuming social media content (Essay One; Syrdal and Briggs 2015). A measure of psychological engagement with social media content is needed, as it would allow brands and organizations to assess the quality of their social media content and the value it offers their target audiences. An engagement measure in this context would also facilitate the examination of possible drivers and outcomes of the phenomenon, which would aid in the development of theory that could prove useful to both academics and practitioners. For example, if a brand or organization were able to evaluate the level of engagement experienced by individuals consuming branded content, strategies for improvement could be formulated to improve it if the content is not psychologically engaging target audiences.

I directly address this gap in the marketing literature by developing an approach to tap into the psychological engagement experienced by individuals when consuming social media content. In this essay, I apply theory from an extant stream of research focused on engagement

with other forms of media, including newspapers, TV, and magazines, and adapt items from a measure of engagement with online media (i.e., web sites) (Mersey, Malthouse, and Calder 2010). In Study 1, a scale purification process is employed that results in an adapted engagement measure comprised of two factors and a total of 14 items. In Study 2, I develop and empirically test a model of engagement with social media content and hypothesized brand- and content-related drivers and outcomes. I then compare the impact of engagement, conceptualized as a psychological construct, to the influence of interactive behaviors performed on social media, which are often used by as proxies of engagement in this context.

Literature Review

While there is currently no formally accepted definition of engagement in the context of social media, “engagement” itself has been conceptualized and measured in a number of disciplines, including education, organizational behavior, and marketing. An overview is presented in Appendix A and an extensive literature review of these conceptualizations is provided in Essay One. Within the marketing domain, there are two major distinguishing elements of the conceptualizations of engagement: 1) the focal object of the engagement and 2) the presence or absence of a behavioral component.

In the vast majority of the engagement conceptualizations in marketing, the focal object of the consumer’s engagement is the *brand* or *organization* with which consumers may become engaged (e.g., Bowden 2008; VanDoorn et al. 2010; Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie 2014). However, some marketing researchers have studied engagement as it relates to other types of focal objects. For example, in a stream of research examining engagement with advertising

media such as newspapers, TV, magazines, and web sites, it is argued that the focal object of engagement is the advertising medium, rather than a brand or organization. This distinction is important, as the medium is more than just a vehicle for an ad. It provides a context for the ad and if the media content engages consumers, this can make the ad more effective (Calder and Malthouse 2008). Along the same lines, in this research, I suggest the focal object of engagement in the context of social media is *content*, such as status updates, pictures, and videos posted by brands and organizations. I further suggest that branded content that is more psychologically engaging will be more effective for delivering branded messages and influencing target audiences on social media.

Additionally, it is important to note that consumers likely experience psychological engagement with content for a variety of reasons. While consumers may be driven to consume and become engaged with content due to their feelings about a certain brand, these processes may also take place because the content is fulfilling a need or creating a certain type of experience for the consumer. For example, an individual may consume and become engaged with social media content promoting the Apple Watch due to his/her attachment to the Apple brand. However, an individual may also consume and become engaged with branded content because it fulfills a certain purpose or creates a desirable experience for them. For example, a individual who is planning to sell his/her home might become engaged with a realty company's social media post about real estate market conditions. Although the post is a form of branded content distributed by a realty company, the reason the individual is psychologically engaged with the content may well have more to do with the fact that it is fulfilling the person's need for information rather than his or her feelings toward the realty company. However, this scenario

could still result in positive exposure for the brand and, as such, could shape the consumer's attitudes and behaviors regarding the brand.

The second point of distinction concerning engagement conceptualizations is the absence or presence of a behavioral component. There are a fair number of marketing researchers holding each perspective. However, based on the findings of qualitative research conducted in Essay One, it is argued that engagement with social media operates separately from any measurable behaviors performed by consumers. The construct is defined as *“a psychological state of mind experienced when consuming social media content in which an individual is highly absorbed in the content and experiences a sense of excitement.”*

In their work on online media engagement, Mersey, Malthouse, and Calder (2010) present an approach for measuring engagement that may be particularly relevant to the this exploration of engagement with social media content. Expanding upon a previous stream of engagement research by Calder and Malthouse, the authors define online media engagement as “the collective experiences that readers or viewers have with a media brand” and describe experiences as specific sets of beliefs that consumers have about how some media brand fits into their lives (Calder and Malthouse 2008). Experiences are essentially the *reasons* for being engaged. In this research, the authors examine consumer engagement with online media brands such as Reuters.com, Washingtonpost.com, and about.com. They contend individuals can have many types of experiences with brands, including those of a hedonic, utilitarian, and/or social-psychological nature. For example, online media brands providing useful advice, tips, and ideas may play a utilitarian role in the lives of consumers. Other online media brands may help consumers relax and escape daily life by mentally transporting them to another place, time or

state of mind, thus, offering a more hedonic function. Therefore, the authors assert that online media brands do not have to deliver the same experiences to be engaging.

To develop the scale items to measure online media engagement, Mersey, Malthouse, and Calder (2010) drew upon existing Uses and Gratification (U&G) theory, as well as their own previous research. The U&G theory suggests people “define their needs and control of the media-seeking process in an attempt to gratify those needs” (Mersey, Malthouse, and Calder 2010, p. 42). Regarding this framework, Stone (1987) states “People will not attend to messages that have no perceived interest value for them. They will choose among media content offering those items they deem valuable, even if that value is only momentary enjoyment” (p. 129). Building upon a widely used typology (McQuail 1983) of the U&G framework from the mass communication domain and Ruggiero’s (2000) notion that the interactive components of online media differentiate it from its print predecessors, Mersey, Malthouse, and Calder (2010) developed what they term the “extended U&G framework.” This framework consists of eight types of experiences posited to comprise engagement with online media: stimulation & inspiration, social facilitation, temporal, self-esteem & civic mindedness, intrinsic enjoyment, utilitarian, participation & socializing, and community. The authors then chose survey items previously developed for other types of media engagement research to represent each of the eight first order constructs, or “experiences.”

Utilizing survey research, Mersey, Malthouse, and Calder (2010) sampled users of media web sites to collect data. The results of exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses suggested two second-order engagement factors, which the authors call “personal engagement” (comprised of the stimulation & inspiration, social facilitation, temporal, self-esteem & civic-mindedness, intrinsic enjoyment, utilitarian, and community experiences or dimensions) and “social-

interactive engagement” (comprised of the self-esteem & civic mindedness, intrinsic enjoyment, utilitarian, participation & socializing, and community experiences or dimensions). Personal engagement is comprised of experiences similar to those that individuals have with print newspapers and magazines, while social-interactive engagement tends to be more specific to web sites. Notably, the authors also empirically demonstrate that the engagement items they developed predict readership.

The work of Mersey, Malthouse, and Calder (2010) on online media engagement serves as a strong foundation for the development of a instrument to measure engagement with social media content. The scale items used to measure experiences with online media brands (e.g., web sites such as cnn.com, espn.com) lend themselves nicely to adaption in the context of social media. In Study 1, I adapt online media engagement scale items to create a measure of engagement with social media content. Survey research is then conducted to construct a data set to examine the factor structure of the adapted measure.

Study 1

When using scales adapted from other sources of existing research, a pretest is recommended to screen items for appropriateness (Hair et al. 2010). Therefore, the objective of Study 1 is to test the factor structure of a series of scale items adapted to measure engagement with social media content. In this study, I adapt items from a scale originally developed to measure engagement with online media (Mersey, Malthouse, and Calder 2010) for use in the context of social media content. The original scale measures a consumer’s level of engagement with a media web site (e.g., washingtonpost.com, about.com, reuters.com) and is comprised of

two second-order factors (personal engagement and social-interactive engagement) reflected by eight first-order factors, which are indicated by a total of 37 items. Because previous research (Syrdal and Briggs 2015; Essay One) suggests that engagement with social media is a psychological state of mind that does not include a behavioral component, I focus my efforts on adapting items from the second-order personal engagement factor to form a non-behavioral measure of engagement. Further, to create a more parsimonious scale that can be more effectively utilized in empirical models and that will lend itself to marketing practice, I chose to adapt items comprising the three first-order factors that loaded highest on personal engagement (see Mersey, Malthouse, and Calder 2010, p.47): stimulation & inspiration, self-esteem & civic-mindedness, and intrinsic enjoyment. A list of the 15 original items comprising these first-order factors is provided in Appendix B.

Method

Data Collection and Sample. To test the structure of the adapted scale, survey research is conducted with respondents from an undergraduate subject pool at a large southwestern university. The respondents were business majors enrolled in principles of marketing courses completing the survey for course credit. To participate in the study, respondents were required to meet the following screening criteria: 1) be 18 years of age or older, 2) use any combination of Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, and/or LinkedIn for a total of at least three hours per week, and 3) be connected to brands and/or organizations through at least one of those social media platforms. For the purposes of this research, “connected” means the consumer “likes” the brand’s or organization’s Facebook page and/or follows the brand or organization on one of the other platforms. The social media platforms included in the screening criteria were selected due

to the pervasive usage and high level of popularity of these sites in the U.S. (Duggan et al. 2014). An alternative assignment was made available to students who did not meet the screening criteria or who did not wish to participate.

An online survey was administered to 232 consumers. Responses from subjects who did not complete the survey or who failed an attention check item were eliminated from the sample, resulting in 190 cases for analysis. Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 52 years old (average age was 23.4 years, SD = 5.8) and 50% were female. The ethnic diversity of the sample is reflective of the diversity of the university's student population, with the following percentages reported: 36% White, 32% Hispanic, 22% Asian, 13% Black, 3% Middle Eastern, and .5% American Indian. (Some respondents reported multiple ethnic backgrounds.)

Measures. After responding to a series of questions regarding their personal social media usage, respondents were asked to name a brand or organization with which they are connected through at least one of the following: Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, and/or LinkedIn. (The meaning of the word "connected" was provided.) The name of the brand or organization indicated by the respondent was subsequently piped into each of the adapted items used to measure engagement with social media content. Finally, the respondents were asked to respond to a series of demographic questions.

Results

The 15 adapted scale items were subjected to a set of exploratory factor analysis (Principal Component Analysis) using an oblique rotation. Based on the sample size of 190 cases, factor loadings greater than .45 were assumed to have practical significance (Hair et al. 2010) and one item with a loading of less than .45 was eliminated. The final set of items,

presented in Table 1, consists of 14 items and reflects a two-factor solution (Eigen values > 1). In this solution, items adapted from both the stimulation and inspiration dimension and the self-esteem and civic-mindedness dimension of the Online Media Engagement Scale (Mersey, Malthouse, and Calder 2010) merge together into the first factor. Items adapted from the intrinsic enjoyment dimension of the scale hold together to comprise the second factor.

The first factor, labeled “Inspiration,” includes items that reflect an experience a consumer has when engaged with social media content in which the consumer feels inspired and has an enhanced sense of self-esteem. The second factor, labeled “Enjoyment,” includes items that are indicative of an enjoyable experience. The correlation between the two dimensions is significant and positive (.642, $p < .05$). The alpha coefficient for the global engagement measure indicates a high degree of reliability ($\alpha = .92$) and meets the guidelines for the development of psychometric instruments (Nunnally 1978). This set of items will be employed as the measure of engagement with social media content in Study 2.

Study 2

In Study 2, I further examine the items adapted to measure engagement with social media content in a model that includes content authenticity and brand attachment as drivers of the construct. Word-of-mouth and brand equity are posited to be outcomes of engagement with social media content. The conceptual model is presented in Figure 1.

Antecedents of Engagement with Social Media Content

Content authenticity. Authenticity emerged as an important characteristic of social media

content that consumers described as engaging in Essay One. Consumers indicate a preference for content they perceive to be “fresh and relevant” and created by the brand or organization itself rather than syndicated content, which is developed to be sold to, and distributed by, multiple brands and organizations. Information concerning a brand must be relevant to the consumer in order for the consumer to engage with a brand in self-relevant ways (Schmitt 2012). In their work on authenticity and product contagion, Newman and Dhar (2014) conceptualized product authenticity to be a consumer’s belief that a particular product contains the legitimate and genuine character of a particular brand. Tuten and Solomon (2015) note that in order for brands to succeed as “social friends” to consumers, they “should socialize with fans and participate in conversations using a credible and authentic brand voice” (p.150). Along the same lines, I suggest consumers will perceive the brand’s social media content to be authentic if they believe it embodies the genuine character of the brand. Thus, the perceived authenticity of an organization’s social media content is hypothesized to be related to engagement with the content:

H₁: Content authenticity is positively related to engagement with social media content.

Brand attachment. Brand attachment has been defined as “the strength of the bond connecting the consumer with the brand” and has been shown to predict important outcome variables such as brand loyalty and willingness to pay a price premium (Park et al. 2010, p. 1; Thomson, MacInnis, and Park 2005). Brand attachment has also been found to be superior to brand attitude in predicting consumers’ intentions to perform difficult behaviors (those they regard as using consumer resources), purchase behaviors, and need share (the extent to which consumers rely on a brand to address relevant needs) (Park et al. 2010). Previous research focused on attachment reveals that the stronger an individual’s attachment to an object, the more

likely the individual is to maintain proximity to the object. Additionally, people sometimes experience distress when a real or threatened separation takes place (Bowlby 1980; Hazan and Zeifman 1999). Because consumers demonstrate a preference for maintaining proximity to brands to which they are attached and a brand or organization's presence on social media sites provides consumers with additional touch points for communication, it is likely that attachment drives consumers to seek out, and subsequently experience a sense of engagement with, the content of brands to which they are attached. Therefore, I hypothesize that brand attachment will have a positive relationship with engagement with social media content.

H₂: Brand attachment is positively related to engagement with social media content.

Additionally, if consumers perceive a brand's social media content to be more authentic and congruent with their perceptions of brand, exposure to this type of content will lead to greater levels of attachment to the brand. Therefore, I hypothesize:

H₃: Content authenticity is positively related to brand attachment.

Consequences of Engagement with Social Media Content

Brand equity. Engagement in the context of social media is thought to be associated with a number of positive outcomes, including brand equity (Tuten and Solomon 2015; Bruhn, Schoenmueller, and Schafer 2012). In his seminal work on brand equity, Keller (1993) defines the construct as “the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand” (p. 1). Keller suggests that brand knowledge is a key antecedent of brand equity, and as a consumer's knowledge of a brand increases, ultimately, so too does the perceived value of the brand in the mind of the consumer (Keller 1993; Sinha, Ahuja, and

Medury 2011). Social media content provides additional touchpoints, beyond those offered by traditional marketing strategies, to encourage ongoing interaction between the consumer and the brand story over the course of time, which can deepen consumer–brand relationships (Murdough, 2009). I suggest that when consumers are exposed to a brand’s social media content, their knowledge of the brand is likely to increase. In turn, this increased knowledge is likely to impact customer-based brand equity. Therefore:

H₄: Engagement with social media content is positively related to brand equity.

Word-of-mouth. Social media, and social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter in particular, represent ideal platforms for the transmission of word-of-mouth, as users freely create and disseminate brand-related information in their social networks composed of friends, family and other acquaintances (Vollmer and Precourt 2008). Positive word-of-mouth may include “relating pleasant, vivid, or novel experiences; recommendations to others; and even conspicuous display” (Anderson 1998, p. 6). Previous research indicates that word-of-mouth communications plays an important role in forming consumers’ attitudes and behaviors (Brown and Reingen 1987). Indeed, it is claimed that word-of-mouth, which can be stimulated by high levels of involvement with a brand, influences the vast majority of purchase decisions (Dichter 1966). Further, it has been noted in recent research that branded social media activities can be used to increase brand awareness and brand liking, and inspire consumer word-of-mouth communication about the brand (Ashley and Tuten 2015). I suggest that increased engagement with social media content will translate into increased brand engagement and, in turn, will result in higher levels of positive word-of-mouth. Therefore:

H₅: Engagement with social media content is positively related to word-of-mouth.

Further, I hypothesize that brand equity has a positive impact on word-of-mouth:

H₆: Brand equity is positively related to word-of-mouth.

Mediating Role of Engagement with Social Media Content

In addition to brand awareness and favorable, strong, and unique brand associations (Keller 1993), extant research has identified a number of antecedents of brand equity, including price, advertising spending, and distribution intensity (Yoo, Donthu, and Lee 2000). Therefore, it is recognized that engagement with a brand's social media content does not act in isolation in terms of its affect on brand equity. As such, I suggest that engagement with social media content will function as a *partial* mediator of the relationship between brand attachment and brand equity:

H₇: The relationship between brand attachment and brand equity is partially mediated by engagement with social media content.

Like brand equity, word-of-mouth has been studied extensively in the marketing literature. Previous research has identified a number of drivers of word-of-mouth, including the rapidly growing practice of seeding (i.e., stimulation) of word-of-mouth by firms through a variety of means, which may or may not include social media strategies (Trusov, Bucklin, Pauwels 2010). I suggest that while engagement with a brand's social media content provides a channel through which content authenticity impacts word-of-mouth, content authenticity likely also directly affects word-of-mouth to some degree as well. Therefore, I argue the relationship between content authenticity and word-of-mouth is *partially* mediated by engagement with social media content:

H₈: The relationship between content authenticity and word-of-mouth is partially mediated by engagement with social media content.

Predictive Power of Engagement Compared with Interactive Behaviors

Interactive social media behaviors. The term “engagement” is used by some marketers to refer to interactive behaviors performed by consumers with social media content, such as “liking,” commenting, and sharing. However, a major finding of the qualitative research conducted in Essay One is that the interactive behaviors performed on social media content by consumers should not be equated with psychological engagement with the content. While the behaviors are highly desirable for facilitating the diffusion of the content, they are not necessarily indicative of actual engagement. This is because consumers sometimes perform these behaviors when they are *not* psychologically engaged with content (sometimes when they have not even *viewed* or *consumed* the content) and they also sometimes choose not to perform interactive behaviors when they *are* engaged with content. Additionally, the motivations underlying each of the behaviors appear to be separate and distinct. The idea that these interactive behaviors should be treated separately has been advanced by other research as well. Recent research applied a “token vs. meaningful” framework developed for consumer behaviors in a non-profit context (Kristofferson, White, and Peloza 2014) to differentiate between lower level, “token” behaviors expressed by consumers on social media in support of a brand (e.g., “liking”) versus more “meaningful” behaviors such as commenting and sharing (Syrdal, VanMeter, and Grisaffe 2014). Taken together, the findings suggest that behaviors should be examined separately from the construct of engagement with social media content, and from one another. Further, because psychological engagement with social media content necessitates the utilization of a greater degree of cognitive resources compared to interactive social media

behaviors, which are sometimes performed in a more mechanical manner, engagement should have a stronger impact on word-of-mouth and brand equity compared to behaviors.

H₉: Engagement with social media content will have a greater impact on word-of-mouth and brand equity compared with the interactive social media behaviors of “liking,” commenting, and sharing.

Method

Data Collection and Sample. To test the proposed model, an online survey was administered to a sample of students recruited from two U.S. universities (one in the Midwest and the other in the Southeast) who agreed to participate in the study in exchange for course credit. The sample consists of undergraduate students of various majors who were enrolled in marketing or introductory psychology courses. To be eligible to participate in the study, respondents were required to be 18 years of age or older. Additionally, they had to be able to name a brand they have purchased previously and were connected with on at least one of the following social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and/or Pinterest. It was explained that for the purposes of the survey “connected” means “liking” the brand’s Facebook page and/or following the brand on one of the other platforms. The specific social media platforms were chosen to be consistent with the method utilized in Study 1.

After responding to questions regarding their social media usage, respondents were asked to name a brand they have purchased (even if only once) and are connected with through at least one of the aforementioned social media platforms. The brand name indicated by the respondents was then piped into subsequent survey items concerning the brand, as well the items that comprise the engagement with social media content measure. Finally, the respondents were asked to respond to a series of demographic questions.

Several techniques were used to enhance the validity of the data collected. First, the order of the presentation of items comprising each scale was randomized. Second, data from incomplete survey responses and surveys completed in less than five minutes were discarded. Third, two “attention check” items, in which respondents were asked to select a specific answer choice, were embedded in the survey. Data collected from respondents who failed to select the correct answer for either of the attention check items was discarded.

Initially, 391 responses were obtained; however, after discarding data from respondents who did not complete the survey or who failed to select the correct answer to either of the two attention check items, 298 usable responses remained. Of the usable responses, 66.8% were obtained from females and 33.2% were from males. The age of respondents ranged from 18 to 57, with a mean age of 21.9 years (SD = 5.3).

Measures. The items used to measure each construct and variable in the analysis are presented in Table 2. *Brand attachment* was measured using three items from Park et al. (2010). Responses to these items were captured using a seven-point agreement scale anchored by “not at all” and “completely.” Three items used by Newman and Dhar (2014) to capture the perceived authenticity of a product were adapted to measure the perceived authenticity of a brand’s social media content (i.e., *content authenticity*). The original set of items was utilized to measure a consumer’s belief that a particular product contains the legitimate and genuine character of a particular brand (Newman and Dhar 2014). Responses were measured with a seven-point scale anchored by “strongly disagree” and “strongly agree.”

The items retained after scale purification process employed in Study 1 were used to measure *engagement with social media content*. A seven-point Likert scale anchored by “strongly disagree” and “strongly agree” was used to capture responses to these items. To

measure of the likelihood of consumers spreading positive *word-of-mouth* about the brand, three items comprising the word-of-mouth component of the Behavioral-intentions Battery developed by Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman (1996) were utilized. A seven-point response scale, anchored by “not at all likely” and “very likely,” was used to measure the responses. *Brand equity* was measured with the consumer-based overall brand equity scale developed by Yoo, Donthu, and Lee (2000) using a seven-point response scale, anchored by “strongly disagree” and “strongly agree.”

To measure the *interactive social media behaviors* of “liking,” commenting, and sharing, three items were created in which the respondents were asked to indicate the frequency with which they perform each behavior when they see the brand’s content. The responses were captured using a seven-point frequency scale anchored by “never” and “always.” Additionally, *gender* was also recorded for use as control variable in the model because previous research has noted gender differences in consumer online and social media behavior (Richard et al. 2010; Oracle 2012).

Results. Following the two-step approach outlined by Anderson and Gerbing (1998), a measurement model was developed before the testing the structural model. The measurement model was estimated as a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) model using AMOS with ML estimation with all latent variables correlated. The fit statistics indicate the model is a good fit for the data: $\chi^2 = 538.978$, $df = 308$, $p < .05$; RMSEA = .051, CI 90% = .044-.058, $p = .398$; CFI = .952, TLI = .946; SRMR = .046 (Hair et al. 2010). Table 2 provides the Cronbach alpha indices and average variance extracted. The bivariate correlations among the constructs in the model are provided in Table 3. Discriminant validity was assessed using Fornell and Larcker’s (1981) approach. The average variance extracted for each of the latent constructs is greater than the

squared correlations for all pairs of constructs, providing further evidence of discriminant validity. Scale items and corresponding standardized factor loadings from the measurement model are provided in Table 2.

Next, the hypothesized relationships in the conceptual model were tested by analyzing a structural equation model in AMOS 23 with maximum likelihood estimation. Gender is included in the model as control variable because previous research has noted gender differences in consumer online behavior (Richard et al. 2010). The resulting fit statistics indicate the model is a good fit for the data: $\chi^2 = 600.264$, $df = 335$, $p < .05$; RMSEA = .052, CI 90% = .046-.059, $p = .271$; CFI = .945, TLI = .938; SRMR = .049 (Hair et al. 2010). Therefore, the model findings were subsequently utilized for hypothesis testing.

The first hypothesis, which states that content authenticity drives engagement with social media content, was supported (H_1 : $\beta = .21$, $t = 3.64$). The results also provide support for H_2 , which posits a positive relationship between brand attachment and engagement with social media content ($\beta = .63$, $t = 8.52$). As predicated by H_3 , content authenticity is also positively related to brand attachment ($\beta = .43$, $t = 6.54$). The results also show that engagement with social media content is a driver of brand equity (H_4 : $\beta = .20$, $t = 2.04$) and positive word-of-mouth (H_5 : $\beta = .33$, $t = 4.22$). Finally, there is a positive relationship between brand equity and word-of-mouth (H_6 : $\beta = .36$, $t = 5.37$).

It was also hypothesized that engagement with social media content partially mediates the relationships between brand attachment and brand equity (H_7), as well as the relationship between content authenticity and word-of-mouth (H_8). To test these hypotheses, a separate model was developed in which the paths between the engagement construct and both brand equity and word-of-mouth were constrained to zero. Table 4 provides the standardized estimates and fit

statistics for both models. The increased strength of the relationship between brand attachment and brand equity in the direct effects model compared with the hypothesized model offers support for H₇. The comparison also offers support for H₈, as the strength of the relationship between content authenticity and word-of-mouth is stronger in the direct effects model compared with the hypothesized model.

To further examine the mediating effect of engagement with social media content on the relationships between brand attachment and brand equity and between content authenticity and word-of-mouth, bootstrap tests were conducted using 5,000 samples and a confidence interval of 95% (Zhao, Lynch, and Chen 2010). Bootstrapping provides biased corrected confidence intervals (unstandardized parameters) of model relationships. The results offer additional support for the mediating role of engagement with social media content. As predicted, the indirect effect of brand attachment on brand equity through engagement with social media content is significant ($\beta_{\text{upper}} = .096$; $\beta_{\text{lower}} = .001$; $p < .05$). Additionally, the indirect effect of content authenticity on word-of-mouth through engagement with social media is also significant ($\beta_{\text{upper}} = .172$; $\beta_{\text{lower}} = .051$; $p < .05$).

Finally, the potential influence of the interactive social media behaviors of “liking,” commenting, and sharing were examined individually. To test the influence of the behaviors on the outcome variables, each behavior was individually added to the final model as a control variable to account for the possible influence of the behaviors on brand equity and word-of-mouth. As shown in Table 5, the addition of the interactive behaviors as control variables did not significantly improve the fit statistics compared to those of the final model. The summary of results presented in Table 5 offer support for H₉, which stated that engagement with social media content will have a greater impact on word-of-mouth and brand equity compared with the

interactive social media behaviors of “liking,” commenting, and sharing. The path between engagement with social media content and word-of-mouth remains significant even while accounting for the interactive behaviors of “liking,” commenting, and sharing. The path between engagement with social media content and brand equity remains significant when controlling for commenting, but is not significant when either “liking” or sharing are included as control variables. Notably, none of the paths between the interactive behaviors and the outcome variables are significant, suggesting these behaviors are not predictive of brand equity or increased positive word-of-mouth.

Discussion

While social media marketing tends to be less expensive than other forms of promotion, it still requires investments of both time and money. Although social media offer a plethora of opportunities for marketers to communicate with consumers in ways never before possible, executives are often hesitant to invest time and money in social media efforts without evidence of return on investment (Falls and Deckers 2012). Over 80% of marketers report being concerned about measuring the returns on investment from social media (eMarketer 2015). The findings of this research provide a stepping-stone toward measuring true engagement in the social media environment – in a manner never before investigated – and offer a number of theoretical contributions and managerial implications.

Theoretical Contributions

This research represents the first empirical examination of engagement with social media content conceptualized as a non-behavioral, psychological construct. Further, it is established that brand attachment and the perceived authenticity of a brand's social media content are two drivers of this form of engagement. This work also provides empirical evidence of a direct links between psychological engagement with social media content and two important brand outcomes: brand equity and positive word-of-mouth about a brand. Branded content provides additional touchpoints between the brand and consumers. Thoughts, feelings, perceptions, images, and experiences from these touchpoints form a set of associations with the brand in consumer memory (Keller 2009) and it is through this process that engagement with social media content is likely translating into increased brand equity and increased word-of-mouth.

Importantly, the findings of this research also demonstrate that engagement with social media content and the behaviors that are sometimes considered to constitute, or be indicators of, engagement in this domain are not one and the same. This research provides further support for the notion that engagement in the realm of social media is a psychological phenomenon that should be examined separately from the interactive behaviors that are often termed "engagement" by marketing practitioners. In addition, the findings of Study 2 suggest the interactive behaviors should be studied separately from one another as they have inconsistent impacts when added to the model as control variables. For example, the path between engagement with social media content and brand equity becomes non-significant when "liking" or sharing is included as a control variable, but not when commenting is as added in the same way.

Practical Implications

The results of the studies in this research offer a host of implications for marketing practitioners. First, the approach utilized for measuring engagement with content affords practitioners the ability to tap into the level of psychological engagement individuals experience when consuming their brand's content. To date, social media management tools such as Radian6 and Hootsuite have provided marketers with a means of listening to social media conversations and monitoring the frequency of interactive social media behaviors performed with the content. However, none of the social media management tools currently available offer the ability to tap into the psychological state of mind of engagement because they exclusively measure observable behaviors. Yet, no evidence is found to indicate that the interactive behaviors, which marketers are currently relying upon as indicators of the effectiveness of their content, impact important outcomes such as brand equity and positive word-of-mouth.

Social media marketing practitioners can utilize the approach developed in this research to measure engagement with social media content through survey research to assess the effectiveness of their brand's social media content. If it is determined that current content is not engaging target audiences, brands can take steps to remedy to this problem. While it is likely there additional drivers of engagement that have yet to be empirically demonstrated, this research demonstrates that the perceived authenticity of a brand's content impacts engagement. Practitioners should consider the implications of this finding, as a recent study of the creative strategies used in social media marketing suggests that brands are currently using a variety of message strategies and brand voices in this arena (Ashley and Tuten 2015). The use of multiple creative appeals and voices may be negatively impacting consumer perception of authenticity of the branded content, which could in turn negatively affect the amount of positive-of-mouth

generated by the brand's social media efforts. The perception of authenticity of the content is something that can be easily evaluated and, if needed, social media marketers can take steps to ensure the branded content produced is true to the essence of the brand.

Additionally, the approach for measuring engagement with social media content in this work can also be used to demonstrate the impact of social media on important outcomes such as brand equity and increased positive word-of-mouth. The critical nature of measuring the effectiveness and return-on-investment of social media is a common theme among marketers focused on optimizing social media strategy (eMarketer 2015; Oracle 2012; Falls and Deckers 2012). This new measure can be used to empirically test potential relationships between engagement with social media content and other important outcomes as well.

Finally, the number of lurkers on social networking sites speaks to the importance of measuring psychological engagement with social media content. Lurkers consume content by doing things such as reading posts and watching videos on social networking sites, but they do not perform the interactive behaviors that result in the flow of content. It has been estimated that these social media users make up about 90% of any online community (Nielsen 2006) and although they are not contributing to the distribution of branded content, they may still aid the brand through spreading positive word-of-mouth. Further, lurkers are valuable to brands as they may be potential customers who can be influenced by the content they consume. As in advertising, impressions in social media have the power to influence consumers.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although this work offers important key insights into how engagement operates in the realm of social media, it does have limitations that may be addressed by future research. One

limitation is that student samples were used, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. An avenue for future research would be to test a similar model with a sample of customers of one or two specific brands. Additionally, the respondents were asked to name a brand with which they are connected to on at least one of five social media platforms. This procedure yielded responses to subsequent survey items that were focused on a variety of brands across various product categories. Although the wide range of brands named by the respondents makes it impossible to control for industry in this research, it is logical to assume that the relationships between engagement and the predictors and outcomes I have identified may vary in strength depending upon the specific brand and industry that is being examined. Examining the research model in specific industry and brand contexts is warranted.

Additionally, this research is specific to brands and brand-related outcomes. It would be interesting to investigate possible relationships between engagement with social media content and important outcome variables in other contexts, such as in the realm of services marketing or non-profit marketing. Further, while I find empirical support for relationships between key drivers and outcomes of engagement with social media content, casual conclusions cannot be drawn because a cross-sectional survey was utilized to generate single-source data. An avenue for future work would be to make use of longitudinal or experimental research designs to further examine the relationships revealed by this research.

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Tables and Figures

TABLE 1
Engagement with Social Media Content Dimensions Revealed by
Exploratory Factor Analysis

Item	Factor	
	Inspiration & Esteem	Enjoyment
___'s content inspires me in my own life.	.559	.273
___'s content makes me think of things in new ways.	.583	.262
___'s content stimulates my thinking about lots of different topics.	.650	.126
___'s content makes me a more interesting person.	.541	.342
Some content ___ posts and/or shares on social media touches me deep down.	.711	.080
Consuming ___'s content makes me feel like a better citizen.	.794	.042
___'s content makes a difference in my life.	.504	.383
___'s content reflects my values.	.801	.144
Consuming ___'s content makes me more a part of my community.	.845	.164
I am a better person for consuming ___'s content.	.782	.005
___'s content is a treat for me.	.011	.776
___'s content improves my mood, makes me happier.	.319	.644
I like to kick back and wind down with ___'s content.	.055	.872
I like to look at ___'s content when I am eating or taking a break.	.009	.721

Note: The blanks (“___’s”) indicate where the name of the brand or organization indicated by the consumer was piped into each item. Bold values indicate the factor on which each item loads.

TABLE 2
Constructs and Measures

Constructs and Measures	Standardized Item Loadings
<i>Brand Attachment</i>	
Source: Park et al. (2010)	
Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$; AVE = .61	
1. To what extent is ___ part of you and who you are?	.85
2. To what extent do you feel that you are personally connected to ___?	.82
3. To what extent are your thoughts and feelings toward ___ often automatic, coming to mind seemingly on their own?	.65
<i>Content Authenticity</i>	
Source: adapted from Newman and Dhar (2014)	
Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$; AVE = .80	
1. ___'s content contains the true essence of the brand.	.82
2. ___'s content embodies the pedigree and history of the brand.	.92
3. ___'s content reflects the heritage of the brand.	.94
<i>Engagement with Social Media Content</i>	
Source: adapted form Mersey, Malthouse, and Calder (2010)	
Inspiration and Esteem	
Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$; AVE = .53	
1. ___'s content inspires me in my own life.	.77
2. ___'s content makes me think of things in new ways.	.77
3. ___'s content stimulates my thinking about lots of different topics.	.72
4. ___'s content makes me a more interesting person.	.76
5. Some content ___ posts and/or shares on social media touches me deep down.	.66
6. Consuming ___'s content makes me feel like a better citizen.	.76
7. ___'s content makes a difference in my life.	.79
8. ___'s content reflects my values.	.70
9. Consuming ___'s content makes me more a part of my community.	.61
10. I am a better person for consuming ___'s content.	.73
Enjoyment	
Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$; AVE = .58	
1. ___'s content is a treat for me.	.71
2. ___'s content improves my mood, makes me happier.	.86
3. I like to kick back and wind down with ___'s content.	.65
4. I like to look at ___'s content when I am eating or taking a break.	.81
<i>Word-of-mouth Communications</i>	
Source: Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman (1996)	
Cronbach's $\alpha = .79$; AVE = .59	
1. Say positive things about ___ to other people.	.80
2. Recommend ___ to someone who seeks your advice.	.69
3. Encourage friends and relatives to do business with ___.	.81
<i>Brand Equity</i>	
Source: Yoo, Donthu, and Lee (2000)	
Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$; AVE = .70	
1. It makes sense to buy ___ instead of any other brand, even if they are the same.	.81
2. Even if another brand has the same features as ___, I would prefer to buy ___.	.91
3. If there is another brand as good as ___, I prefer to buy ___.	.84
4. If another brand is not different from ___ in any way, it seems smarter to purchase ___.	.77

Interactive Social Media Behaviors

Overall, how frequently would you say you do each of the following when you view ___'s social media content?

1. "Like" (or "favorite" on Twitter) ___'s content.
2. Comment on ___'s content.
3. Share (or "retweet" on Twitter) ___'s content.

Note: "___" indicates where the brand indicated by the respondent was piped into the item.

TABLE 3
Correlation Matrix and Summary Statistics

Constructs and Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
(1) Brand attachment	.82								
(2) Content authenticity	.39**	.92							
(3) ESMC – Inspiration & Esteem	.61**	.45**	.92						
(4) ESMC - Enjoyment	.49**	.29**	.69**	.82					
(5) Word-of-mouth	.42**	.38**	.44**	.38**	.79				
(6) Brand equity	.45**	.34**	.41**	.29**	.47**	.91			
(7) “Liking”	.24**	.35**	.38**	.42**	.21**	.16**			
(8) Commenting	.20**	.17**	.27**	.25**	.13*	.13*	.30**		
(9) Sharing	.32**	.26**	.38**	.35**	.19**	.21**	.53**	.40**	
Mean	6.02	5.44	3.62	4.30	5.89	3.78	3.55	1.63	2.34
Standard deviation	2.43	1.20	1.22	1.31	.92	.90	1.67	.94	1.31

Note: Cronbach alphas of the constructs are shown on the matrix diagonal.

** $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$*

FIGURE 1
Conceptual Model

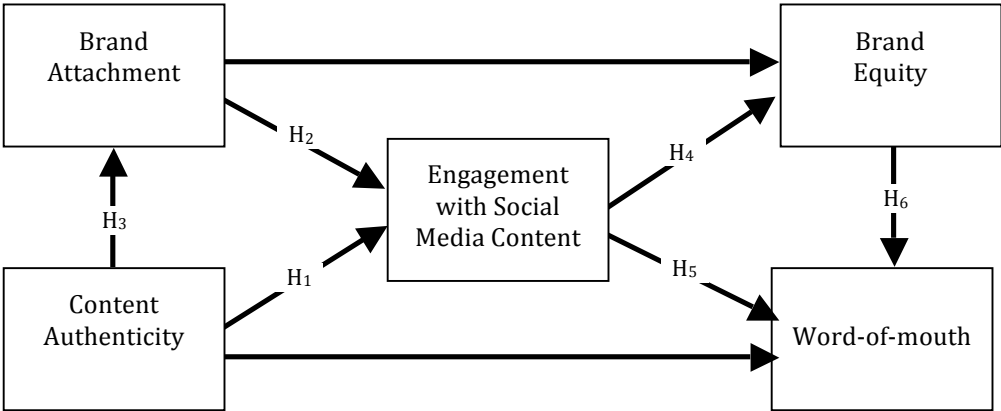


TABLE 4
Standardized Estimates and Fit Indices for Mediation Tests

	Hypothesized Model		Direct Effects Model	
	Standardized Coefficient	t-value	Standardized Coefficient	t-value
Estimated Path				
Brand Attachment → Brand Equity	.37*	3.70	.54*	8.37
Content Authenticity → Word-of-mouth	.15*	2.38	.29*	4.64
Squared Multiple Correlation				
Brand Equity	.28		.29	
Word-of-mouth	.46		.39	
Fit Indices				
CFI	.945		.940	
TLI	.938		.933	
RMSEA	.052		.055	
SRMR	.049		.066	
χ^2 (df)	600.3 (335)		625.6 (337)	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

TABLE 5
Standardized Estimates and Fit Indices for Interactive Behavior Comparisons

	Final Model		Controlling for “liking”		Controlling for commenting		Controlling for sharing	
	Standardized Coefficient	t-value	Standardized Coefficient	t-value	Standardized Coefficient	t-value	Standardized Coefficient	t-value
ESMC → brand equity	.20*	2.04	.20	1.74	.20*	1.97	.19	1.86
ESMC → word-of- mouth	.33***	4.22	.37***	4.23	.35***	4.25	.35***	4.21
Behavior → brand equity			-.02	-.29	.00	.07	.02	.29
Behavior → word-of- mouth			-.03	-.52	-.04	-.67	-.04	-.68
Fit Indices								
CFI	.945		.944		.945		.945	
TLI	.938		.937		.937		.937	
RMSEA	.052		.052		.051		.051	
SRMR	.049		.050		.049		.049	
χ^2 (df)	600.300*** (335)		632.164*** (358)		627.985*** (358)		629.686*** (358)	
$\Delta\chi^2$ (Δ df)			31.864 (23)		27.685 (23)		29.386 (23)	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Significant coefficients in bold.

APPENDIX A
Overview of Selected Conceptualizations of Engagement in Marketing Literature

Engagement Construct	Discipline	Author(s)	Definition	Behavioral Component?
Media Engagement	Marketing	Calder and Malthouse (2008)	“embodies a sense of involvement and of being connected with something...stems from experiencing something like a magazine or TV program in a certain way”	No
Brand Engagement in Self-Concept (BESC)	Marketing	Sprott et al. (2009)	“an individual difference representing consumers’ propensity to include important brands as part of how they view themselves”	No
Customer Engagement	Marketing	Patterson et al. (2006)	“the level of a customer’s physical, cognitive, and emotional presence in their relationship with a service organization”	No
		Bowden (2008)	“a psychological process that models the underlying mechanisms by which customer loyalty forms for new customers of a service brand as well as the mechanisms by which loyalty may be maintained for repeat purchase customers of a service brand”	No
		VanDoorn et al. (2010)	“customers’ behavioral manifestations that have a brand- or firm-focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers”	Yes
		Brodie et al. (2011a)	“a psychological state the occurs by virtue of interactive, cocreative customer experience with a focal agent (e.g. a brand) in focal service relationships”	No
		Vivek, Beatty, and Morgan (2010)	“the intensity of an individual’s participation and connection with the organization’s offerings and activities initiated by either the customer or the organization”	Yes
Online Brand Engagement	Marketing	Mollen and Wilson (2010)	“a customer’s “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”	No
Marketer-generated Content (MGC)	Marketing	Goldring and Nicholson (2013)	“the extent to which customers process and identify with the content of marketing material... characterized by active, sustained cognitive processing, satisfaction with utility and relevance, emotional impact and experiential value, and attractive and appealing aesthetics”	No
Consumer Brand Engagement	Marketing	Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie (2014)	“a consumer’s positively valenced brand-related cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity during or related to focal consumer/brand	Yes

Online Brand Engagement	Marketing	Mollen and Wilson (2010)	“a customer’s “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”	No
Marketer-generated Content (MGC)	Marketing	Goldring and Nicholson (2013)	“the extent to which customers process and identify with the content of marketing material... characterized by active, sustained cognitive processing, satisfaction with utility and relevance, emotional impact and experiential value, and attractive and appealing aesthetics”	No
Consumer Brand Engagement	Marketing	Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie (2014)	“a consumer’s positively valenced brand-related cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity during or related to focal consumer/brand interactions”	Yes
Consumer Engagement in Online Brand Communities	Marketing	Dessart, Veloutsou, and Morgan-Thomas (2015)	“a cognitive, affective, and behavioral commitment to an active relationship with the brand”	Yes

APPENDIX B

**Original Items From Selected First-order Factors of Online Media Engagement Scale
(Mersey, Malthouse, and Calder 2010)**

First-order Factor	Item
Stimulation & Inspiration	It inspires me in my own life. This site makes me think of things in new ways. This site stimulates my thinking about lots of different topics. This site makes me a more interesting person. Some stories on this site touch me deep down.
Self-esteem & Civic Mindedness	Using this site makes me feel like a better citizen. Using this site makes a difference in my life. This site reflects my values. It makes me more a part of my community. I am a better person for using this site.
Intrinsic Enjoyment	It's a treat for me. Going to this site improves my mood, makes me happier. I like to kick back and wind down with it. I like to go to this site when I am eating or taking a break. While I am on this site, I don't think about other sites I might to.

ESSAY 3:

AN EMPIRICAL EXAMINATION OF ENGAGEMENT WITH SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT IN A NON-PROFIT CONTEXT

Abstract

In this research, engagement with social media content is examined in a real-world setting with data collected from the constituencies of a non-profit organization. A conceptual model of the construct is empirically tested and the findings show that attachment to the organization and the authenticity of the organization's social media content drive engagement in this context. Further, positive organizational image is found to be an outcome of increased engagement with social media content. Additionally, engagement with social media content and social media interactive behaviors are investigated as correlates of important organizational outcomes among various stakeholder groups of the organization. Engagement with the organization's social media content is found to be related to positive word-of-mouth and higher levels of satisfaction among customers who utilize the services provided by the non-profit, whereas none of the interactive social media behaviors are found to be related to the outcomes examined.

Keywords

Engagement with Social Media Content, Social Media Engagement, Content Marketing, Non-profit marketing

Marketers of non-profit organizations face a variety of unique challenges. With well over one million charitable organizations in the U.S. alone (Barton 2012), non-profits must compete for their share of a limited pool of monetary donations and assistance from volunteers. In addition to soliciting donations and volunteer participation, in many cases, non-profit organizations must simultaneously market their services to the beneficiaries that they exist to serve. It might seem peculiar that marketers would expend resources (e.g., time and money) to attempt to entice beneficiaries to use the low- or no-cost services they provide. However, a fundamental reason that a charity exists is to support the clients it was established to serve in the most effective way possible. Targeting beneficiaries with effective marketing efforts facilitates the attainment of a charity's primary objectives (Bennett 2005). Additionally, many non-profit

organizations, such as some hospitals and charities concerned with health care, must compete with private institutions offering the same types of services (Pyne and Robertson 1997).

Another set of issues is introduced by the fact that many non-profit organizations are primarily providing and/or selling services versus products. Problems stemming from certain characteristics of services, including intangibility, inseparability of production and consumption, heterogeneity, and perishability, pose unique challenges for marketers and have been well-documented in the services marketing literature (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry 1985). Intangibility, in particular, has been cited as *the* major distinction between services and goods (Bateson 1979). This characteristic of services refers to the fact that consumers are not able to use their five senses to observe and evaluate services in the same way as goods. (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry 1985) summarize recommendations for counteracting the problems that may arise from the unique characteristics of services. Strategies to solve problems stemming from the intangibility characteristic include creating a strong institutional, or “organizational,” image and stimulating word-of-mouth communications by stressing tangible cues.

The increasing pervasiveness of social media holds much promise for non-profit marketers seeking positive organizational outcomes, including accomplishing the crucial tasks of enhancing the organization’s image, soliciting donations, and stimulating consumption of the services the organization provides. While social media are already a component of most marketing communications portfolios, many practitioners struggle to be able to tie its incorporation into the organization’s marketing strategy to important outcomes. A common goal across for-profit businesses and non-profit organizations alike is to increase “social media engagement.” However, there is currently no consensus, among academics or practitioners, regarding what exactly constitutes engagement in the realm of social media marketing. While

some describe engagement in this context in terms of the number of individuals who “like” or follow an organization’s social media pages (i.e., fan base) or the number of interactive behaviors generated by a given post (e.g., “likes,” comments, shares, etc.) (Blowers 2012; Oracle 2012), others argue that engagement is psychological state of mind (Calder and Malthouse 2008; Brodie et al. 2011; Mollen and Wilson 2010). To date, little is known about what drives psychological engagement with social media content and what positive outcomes may result from it (Ashley and Tuten 2015).

This gap in the literature is addressed in this essay through an empirical study of the role of engagement with social media content, conceptualized as a psychological state of mind, in the context of non-profit marketing. Using data collected from the constituencies of a non-profit organization, a conceptual model is tested to investigate hypothesized drivers and an outcome of this form of engagement. Additionally, engagement with social media content and social media interactive behaviors are examined as rival predictors of important organizational outcomes among various stakeholder groups of the organization.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Brand attachment. Brand attachment has been described as “ the strength of the bond connecting the consumer with the brand” and is superior to brand attitude in predicting consumers’ intentions to perform difficult behaviors (those they regard as using consumer resources), purchase behaviors, and need share (the extent to which consumers rely on a brand to address relevant needs (Park et al. 2010, p. 1). Previous work on attachment reveals that the stronger an individual’s attachment to an object, the more likely the individual is to maintain proximity to the object. Additionally, people may experience distress when a real or threatened

separation takes place (Bowlby 1980; Hazan and Zeifman 1999). Because consumers demonstrate a preference for maintaining proximity to brands to which they are attached and a brand or organization's presence on social media platforms provides consumers with additional touch points for communication, it is likely that attachment drives consumers to seek out, and subsequently experience a sense of engagement with, the social media content of brands and organizations to which they are attached. Therefore:

H₁: Brand attachment is positively related to engagement with social media content.

Content authenticity. Authenticity emerged as an important characteristic of social media content that consumers described as engaging in Essay One. Consumers indicate a preference for content they perceive to be “fresh and relevant” and created by the brand or organization itself rather than syndicated content, which is developed to be sold to, and distributed by, multiple brands and organizations. Information concerning a brand must be relevant to the consumer in order for the consumer to engage with a brand in self-relevant ways (Schmitt 2012). In their work on authenticity and product contagion, Newman and Dhar (2014) conceptualized product authenticity to be a consumer's belief that a particular product contains the legitimate and genuine character of a particular brand. Along the same lines, I suggest non-profit organization constituents will perceive the organization's social media content to be authentic if they believe it embodies the genuine character of the organization. Thus, the perceived authenticity of an organization's social media content is hypothesized to be related to engagement with the content:

H₂: Content authenticity is positively related to engagement with social media content.

Engagement with social media content. In Essay One, engagement with social media content is defined as “a psychological state of mind experienced when consuming social media

content in which an individual is highly absorbed in the content and experiences a sense of excitement.” Previous conceptual research has posited relationships between engagement in the realm of social media and important organizational outcomes including organizational image (Kietzman et al. 2011), increased sales (eMarketer 2015; Lake 2011), increased brand loyalty (Powers et al. 2012), and brand equity (Bruhn, Schoenmueller, and Schafer 2012).

Organizational image. Similar to corporations, non-profits continually work to manage public perceptions of their organizations through various public relations strategies. Van Riel and Fombrun (2007) describe corporate image as “the configuration of perceptions that take root in the minds of observers” (p. 39) and postulate that corporate image involves “the features of the company that stakeholders come to perceive” (p. 40). Changes in these perceptions can result changes in attitudes concerning quality, buying behavior, loyalty, and competitiveness (Dowling 2001; McWilliams and Siegel 2001). Extant research has noted the importance of harnessing the power of social media for building stronger relationships with various stakeholder groups of non-profit organizations (e.g., Briones et al. 2011) and suggests that utilizing social media as a communications tools may have a positive impact on the image of an organization held by consumers (Bruhn, Schoenmueller, and Schafer 2012; Kietzman 2011). Thus, the following hypothesis was developed:

H₃: Engagement with social media content is positively related to positive organizational image.

Brand-engagement in self-concept. Brand engagement in self-concept (BESC) is described as an “individual difference representing consumers’ propensity to include important brands as part of how they view themselves” (Sprott, Czellar, and Spangenberg 2009, p. 92). The BESC Scale measures a consumer’s general engagement with brands and how ingrained the

brand is in an individual's identity. The construct is related to differential brand loyalty, with high-BESC consumers being less price and time sensitive regarding their favorite brands than low-BESC consumers. It is also a predictor of consumers' differential attention to, memory of, and preference for their favorite brands. Because individuals who are high-BESC pay more attention to brands they incorporate as part of their identity, I suggest the same would be true for stakeholders of a non-profit organization. Therefore, high-BESC individuals will pay more attention, and likely be more engaged with, branded content generated by an organization to which they are attached. Thus:

H₄: Brand engagement in self-concept moderates the relationship between attachment to the organization and engagement with the organization's social media content, such that the relationship is stronger for individuals characterized by greater levels of brand engagement in self-concept.

Figure 1 depicts the conceptual model.

Stakeholder-related Outcomes and Interactive Social Media Behaviors

Interactive social media behaviors. The term "social media engagement" is used by some marketing practitioners to refer to interactive behaviors performed by consumers with social media content, such as "liking," commenting on, and sharing it. These behaviors are often posited to result in positive organizational outcomes, including positive online and offline word-of-mouth communications (Ashley and Tuten 2015). Therefore, I examine the commonly performed interactive behaviors of "liking," commenting on, and sharing social media content, along with the psychological form of engagement with social media content that is the major focus of this research, as possible correlates of important outcomes for various stakeholder groups. Specifically, I investigate the following possible outcome variables: monetary donations per year, number of hours volunteered per year, and satisfaction with the organization's

veterinary services and likelihood of spreading positive word-of-mouth regarding those services. I hypothesize stronger correlations between the outcome variables for each stakeholder group and engagement with social media content than between those variables and the interactive behaviors of “liking,” commenting, and sharing:

H₅: Outcome variables for each stakeholder group will be more strongly correlated with engagement with social media content compared to individual interactive social media behaviors.

Research Methods

Data Collection and Sample

Data were collected from the constituencies of an animal welfare organization located in the Southeast part of the U.S. The organization serves the unwanted, neglected, abandoned, and abused animals of the gulf coast region. The organization is an independent, non-governmental shelter that offers veterinary care, fostering, and adoption services. They rely solely on the support of community members to fund programs and services that benefit the animals in the community. Social media is an integral part of the organization’s marketing strategies for communicating with three key stakeholder groups: customers who utilize the veterinary services offered, donors who support the organization with monetary donations, and volunteers who aid the organization by performing crucial work needed to keep the organization in operation. The organization has maintained an active presence on Facebook (12,481 “likes”) and Twitter (5,128 followers) for over six years, and has recently (within the last year and a half) become active on Instagram (613 followers).

An online survey was developed to collect data from a sample of constituents of the organization who utilize social media and have been exposed to the organization’s social media

content. Respondents were solicited for participation in the study through numerous posts generated by the organization on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, which included a link to the online survey. Additionally, a solicitation was included in a monthly electronic newsletter and also in a separate email sent out to a distribution list of volunteers. As an incentive for participation, respondents who completed the survey could choose to submit their email address for a drawing in which two \$100 gift cards for a retailer of pet supplies were given away. The survey remained open for one month and was attempted by 125 respondents.

Several techniques were used to enhance the validity of the data collected. First, the order of the presentation of items comprising each scale was randomized. Second, data from incomplete survey responses and surveys completed in less than five minutes were discarded. Third, two “attention check” items, in which respondents were asked to select a specific answer choice, were embedded in the survey. Data collected from respondents who failed to select the correct answer for either of the attention check items was discarded.

A total of 84 usable responses remained after data cleaning. Of the usable responses, 94% were obtained from females and 6% were from males. The age of respondents ranged from 20 to 69 years old, with a mean age of 43.3 years (SD = 13). The ethnic characteristics of the sample were reflective of the surrounding geographic area in which the organization is located, with the following percentages reported: 96.4% White and 4.8% Hispanic (no other ethnicities were reported and one respondent reported both ethnic backgrounds). The educational level of the respondents was reported as follows: 38.1% some college, 46.4% college degree, 13.1% master’s degree, 2.4% doctoral or professional degree. The number of respondents self-identifying as being part of each stakeholder group in the previous year was as follows: 21 veterinary service users, 36 donors, and 19 volunteers. (Note: Some respondents identified as

part of multiple stakeholder groups. For example, some donors are also volunteers. Additionally, while eight respondents were not part of any of the three stakeholder groups in the past year, some identified as being part of these groups prior to that time period. All respondents reported being exposed to the organization's social media content through one or more of the platforms utilized by the organization.)

Regarding the social media usage characteristics of the sample, the average amount of time spent by respondents on social media platforms was 32 hours per week ($SD = 22.1$). The vast majority of respondents, 95.2%, reported being connected to the organization (i.e., they "like" or follow the organization's official page(s) on social media platforms) via Facebook, with only very small percentages connected to the organization through Twitter (4.8%) and Instagram (2.4%). Additionally, 2.4% indicated they are not connected to the organization via any of the platforms utilized by the organization, suggesting these individuals are exposed to the organization's content when it is shared by other social media users to whom they are connected.

Measures

Brand attachment. To measure this construct, three items from the brand attachment scale developed by Park et al. (2010) were utilized. Responses to these items were captured using a seven-point scale anchored by "not at all" and "completely."

Content authenticity. Three items used by Newman and Dhar (2014) to capture the perceived authenticity of a product were adapted to measure the perceived authenticity of the non-profit organization's social media content. The original set of items was utilized to measure a consumer's belief that a particular product contains the legitimate and genuine character of a

particular brand (Newman and Dhar 2014). Responses were measured with a seven-point scale anchored by “strongly disagree” and “strongly agree.”

Engagement with social media content. The 14 items used to measure engagement with social media content in Essay Two were once again employed in the current study to assess this latent construct. A seven-point response scale anchored by “strongly disagree” and “strongly agree” was used to capture responses to these items. After performing a confirmatory factor analysis, five items with loadings of less than .6 (Kline 2011) were dropped and the remaining nine items were used as indicators of engagement with social media content in the subsequent analyses.

Organizational image. Following the procedure outlined for measuring corporate image in Vanhamme et al. (2012), four items were used to assess *organizational image* of the non-profit organization. The first three items were adapted for this study from Moore et al. (1995) and the fourth item, concerning overall impression of the organization, was adapted for this study from Van Riel (1995). Responses were measured using a seven-point semantic differential scale.

Behaviors of the stakeholder groups. A series of single-item measures were utilized to measure specific behaviors corresponding to each of the stakeholder groups. These measures included items to capture the monetary amount of donations in the last year, total number of hours spent volunteering in various capacities.

Brand engagement in self-concept. The eight items comprising the Brand Engagement in Self-concept Scale (Spratt, Czellar, and Spangenberg 2009) were used to measure the respondents’ individual propensities to include important brands as part of how they view themselves. Responses were measured using a seven-point scale, anchored by “strongly disagree” and “strongly agree.”

Positive word-of-mouth. To measure of the likelihood of customers spreading positive word-of-mouth regarding the veterinary services provided by the organization, three items comprising the word-of-mouth component of the Behavioral-intentions Battery developed by Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman (1996) were adapted for use in the survey. A seven-point response scale, anchored by “not at all likely” and “very likely,” was used to capture the likelihood that veterinary service customers would spread positive word-of-mouth concerning the veterinary services provided by the organization.

Satisfaction. A nine-item satisfaction measure (Westbrook and Oliver 1981) was employed to tap into the level of satisfaction experienced by the veterinary service customers. The response choices were in the form of a semantic differential scale.

The items used to measure each construct and variable utilized for analysis are presented in Table 1.

Results

Measurement model. To assess the properties of the latent constructs, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted (Anderson and Gerbing 1988) using AMOS 23 with maximum likelihood estimation. Given the sample size and the number of indicators, the fit statistics indicate the model is an adequate fit for the data: $\chi^2 = 399.70$, $df = 284$, $p < .05$; CFI = .93, TLI = .92; RMSEA = .07, CI 90% = .056-.087, $p = .016$; SRMR = .07 (see Hair et al. 2010, p. 654). All of the standardized item loadings (provided in Table 1) were significant at $\alpha = .001$ and above .6 (see Kline 2011), providing evidence of convergent validity. All multi-item scales measured demonstrated good reliabilities and the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct is greater than .5 (see Table 1).

Path model. Because the sample size of the data set precluded the use of structural equations modeling, a path model was constructed in AMOS and employed to test the hypotheses. The correlations among the variables are presented in Table 2. Age, education level, and time spent on social media per week were included in the path model as control variables. The fit statistics of the path model indicate the model is a good fit for the data: $\chi^2 = 12.17$, $df = 10$, $p = .274$; CFI = .96, TLI = .91; RMSEA = .05, CI 90% = .000-.135, $p = .435$; SRMR = .07 (Hair et al. 2010).

The data set, comprised of responses from all stakeholder groups ($n=84$), was examined first. In line with H_1 , brand attachment was positively related to engagement with social media content ($\beta = .43$, $t = 4.40$). H_2 , in which a positive relationship between content authenticity and engagement with social media content is posited, was also supported ($\beta = .22$, $t = 2.21$). Engagement with social media content was found to positively impact organizational image, in support of H_3 ($\beta = .41$, $t = 4.03$). None of the control variables were found to have a statistically significant impact on engagement with social media content or positive organizational image.

Moderation analysis. Brand engagement in self-concept was examined as a potential moderator of the relationship between brand attachment and engagement with social media content. Linear regression was used to test this hypothesis. H_4 was not supported, as the interaction term was not statistically significant ($\beta = .05$, $p = .980$).

Stakeholder outcomes and interactive social media behaviors. To test the hypotheses relating to the stakeholder outcomes, a series of correlations were computed. The results, presented in Table 2, provide partial support for H_5 , which states that outcome variables for each stakeholder group will be more strongly correlated with engagement with social media content compared to individual interactive social media behaviors. Engagement with the organization's

social media content is found to predict positive word-of-mouth (.43, $p = .051$) and higher levels of satisfaction among customers who utilize the services provided by the non-profit (.67, $p = .001$), whereas none of the interactive social media behaviors are found to be related to any of the outcomes examined.

Discussion

Contributions of the Study

This research represents the first empirical examination of engagement with social media content in a non-profit context and provides support for the generalizability of the new measure of this form of engagement to real-world applications. This research also provides further support that brand attachment and content authenticity drive engagement with social media content. Additionally, I find organizational image is directly impacted by the level of engagement constituents experience while consuming an organization's social media content. Further, while the body of knowledge concerning the interpersonal implications of social media has grown rapidly, organizational-level research on this topic, especially as it pertains to non-profit marketing, has been scarce (Lovejoy, Waters, Saxton 2012). The findings of this study provide support for the utilization of social media as an important part of non-profit marketing strategy.

Managerial Implications

The findings suggest that developing strategies to increase the level of psychological engagement with a non-profit organization's social media content should be incorporated into the marketing efforts of non-profit organizations to enhance the image of the organization.

Organizations should be cautious in relying on the notion that interactive behaviors, such “likes,” comments, and shares, are indicative of actual engagement with their social media content as no evidence is found to support that claim in this study. Instead, organizations may do well to assess the psychological form of engagement with their content as this type of engagement is associated with increased positive organizational image, as well as increased positive word-of-mouth and higher satisfaction levels for service users. Various characteristics of the content may enhance the level of engagement experienced with an organization’s content. Specifically, this study provides evidence that the authenticity of branded content plays a role in the level of engagement experienced with it. Therefore, social media marketing practitioners should strive to ensure their content is consistent with the essence of the organization and its values.

Limitations and Future Research

A limitation of this study is that the number of usable responses obtained was relatively small, thus limiting the methods of analysis utilized and reducing the statistical power of the analyses that were employed as well (Hair et al. 2010). Additionally, some of the sample characteristics could also impact the generalizability of the findings. For example, the sample is largely comprised of females identifying as white. This may limit the generalizability of the findings for non-profit organizations targeting audiences of different compositions of gender and ethnicity. Also, while the sample is comprised of social media users and the organization maintains an active presence on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, the vast majority of respondents view the organization’s content on Facebook. There are likely differences in how non-profit constituents consume and process content across the various social media platforms that could not be investigated due to the fact that only small percentages of the sample were

connected to the non-profit organization through a social media platform other than Facebook. A replication of this study with a sample comprised of more diverse constituents of another type of non-profit organization is warranted.

Future research could also examine other social media content characteristics that may impact engagement with social media content. For example, previous research has found that the frequency of messages posted to firms' own social media pages has a positive impact on customer spending and cross-buying (Kumar et al. 2016). It would be interesting to empirically investigate whether the frequency of social media posts may also impact important organizational outcomes for non-profits, such as donations and volunteering. Also, there may be moderators of the relationships revealed by this study, such as the valence of the content to which audiences are exposed. Small and Verrochi (2009) demonstrated that the expression of emotion on a victim's face in advertisements for charity can affect sympathy and charitable giving. An interesting avenue for future research may be to explore how the valence of an organization's content plays impacts the findings of this study.

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Figures and Tables

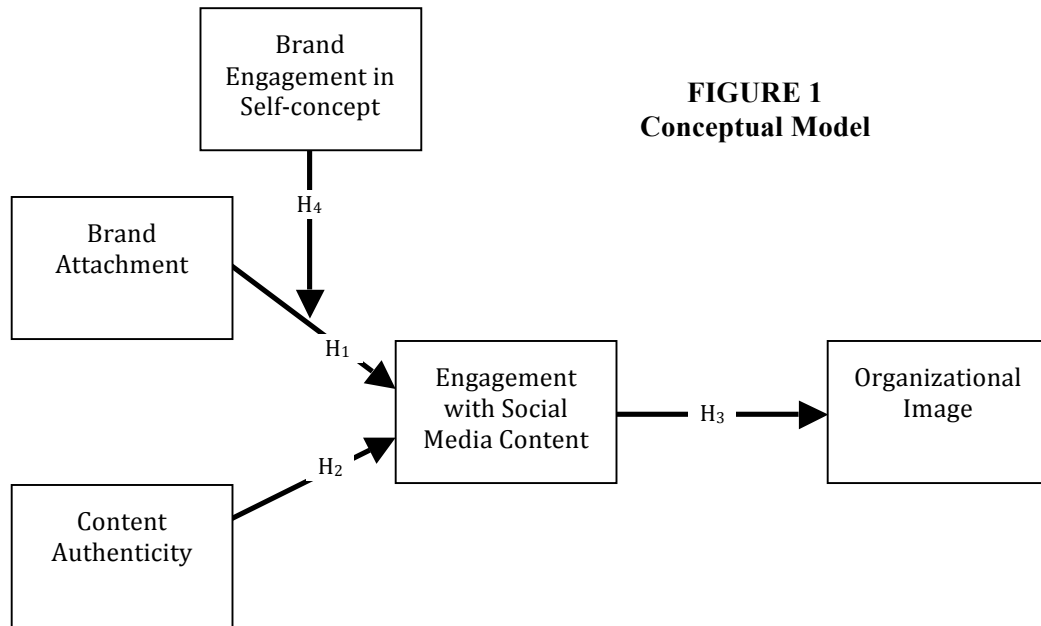


TABLE 1
Constructs and Measures

Constructs and Measures	Standardized Item Loadings
<i>Brand Attachment</i>	
Source: Park et al. (2010)	
Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$; AVE = .69	
4. To what extent is the organization part of you and who you are?	.93
5. To what extent do you feel that you are personally connected to the organization?	.83
6. To what extent are your thoughts and feelings toward the organization often automatic, coming to mind seemingly on their own?	.75
<i>Content Authenticity</i>	
Source: adapted from Newman and Dhar (2014)	
Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$; AVE = .80	
4. The organization's content contains the true essence of the organization.	.85
5. The organization's content embodies the pedigree and history of the organization.	.91
6. The organization's content reflects the heritage of the organization.	.92
<i>Engagement with Social Media Content</i>	
Source: adapted from Mersey, Malthouse, and Calder (2010)	
Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$	
<i>Inspiration and Esteem</i>	
Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$	
11. The organization's content inspires me in my own life.	.88
12. The organization's content makes me think of things in new ways.	.64
13. Some content the organization posts and/or shares on social media touches me deep down.	.71
14. Consuming the organization's content makes me feel like a better citizen.	.86
15. The organization's content makes a difference in my life.	.81
<i>Enjoyment</i>	
Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$	
5. The organization's content is a treat for me.	.81
6. The organization's content improves my mood, makes me happier.	.73
7. I like to kick back and wind down with the organization's content.	.71
8. I like to look at the organization's content when I am eating or taking a break.	.72
<i>Organizational Image</i>	
Source: Items 1-2, Moore et al. (1995); item 3, Van Riel (1995)	
Cronbach's $\alpha = .97$; AVE = .90	
How would you describe the organization?	
4. Bad ... Good	.99
5. Unnecessary ... Necessary	.87
6. Negative ... Positive	.99
<i>Brand Engagement in Self-Concept (BESC)</i>	
Source: Sprott, Czellar, and Spangenberg (2009)	
Cronbach's $\alpha = .95$; AVE = .61	
1. I have a special bond with the brands that I like.	.87
2. I consider my favorite brands to be a part of myself.	.91
3. I often feel a personal connection between my brands and me.	.88
4. Part of me is defined by important brands in my life.	.72
5. I feel as if I have a close personal connection with the brands I most prefer.	.90
6. I can identify with important brands in my life.	.78
7. There are links between the brands that I prefer and how I view myself.	.75
8. My favorite brands are an important indication of who I am.	.80

Behaviors

Service Use

1. Approximately how many times have you used the organization's veterinary services (on-site or at an off-site event) in the past year?

Donation Amount

2. Approximately how much money would you say you've donated to the organization in the past year?

Time Spent Volunteering

3. Please type the approximate number of hours you spent doing each activity for the organization over the last year in the box(es) below.

Walking dogs ____

Socializing cats ____

Special events ____

Offsite adoptions ____

Administrative duties ____

Other ____

Word-of-mouth Communications

Source: adapted from Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman (1996)

Cronbach's $\alpha = .95$

1. Say positive things about the organization's veterinary services to other people.
2. Recommend the organization to someone who seeks your advice about veterinary services.
3. Encourage friends and relatives to the organization for veterinary services.

Satisfaction

Source: Westbrook and Oliver (1981)

Cronbach's $\alpha = .99$

Please indicate how satisfied you are overall with the veterinary services provided by the organization when you've used them over the past year.

1. Very unfavorable ... very favorable
2. Poor choice ... wise choice
3. Unhappy with ... happy with
4. Disgusted with ... contented with
5. Does a poor job ... does a good job
6. Frustrating ... enjoyable
7. Displeased with ... pleased with
8. Bad value ... good value
9. Very dissatisfied with ... very satisfied with

Note: the actual name of the organization was used in place of "the organization" in items specific to the organization in the online survey instrument.

TABLE 2
Correlations Among Stakeholder Outcomes, Engagement with Social Media Content (ESMC), and Interactive Behaviors

	ESMC	“Liking”/ Favoriting	Commenting	Sharing
Donors (n = 36)				
Amount donated per year	-.02	.09	.13	.02
Volunteers (n = 19)				
Hours volunteered per year	-.26	-.02	.21	-.05
Customers (n = 21)				
Positive word-of-mouth	.43**	.06	-.18	.13
Satisfaction	.67*	.23	-.05	.18

*Note: statistically significant correlations in bold; *p < .01; **p < .10*