



# Don't Just “Like” Me, Promote Me: How Attachment and Attitude Influence Brand Related Behaviors on Social Media

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## Abstract

As social media marketing becomes more pervasive, questions continue to emerge regarding utilizing the medium strategically to maximize positive brand-related outcomes. Marketers are increasingly seeking guidance for targeting consumers who will interact and behave in ways that are meaningful to the brand on social media. Understanding how individual differences among consumers can influence social media behaviors linked to valuable organizational outcomes is crucial for managers seeking to justify social media marketing expenditures. This research addresses that issue by applying Attachment Theory to social media. In Study 1, we examine the roles of two individual difference factors, attitude toward social media and attachment to social media (ASM), in predicting token and meaningful behaviors on social media. We find that while attitude toward social media and ASM are both related to token behaviors, only ASM predicts meaningful behaviors. In Study 2, we investigate attachment and attitude toward the brand and social media as predictors of offline and social media brand advocacy and demonstrate that individuals who are attached to or have a positive attitude toward the brand are more likely to engage in offline advocacy. Further, ASM adds incremental explanatory power, beyond attitude and attachment to the brand, in predicting advocacy via social media. In Study 3, we examine likelihood of advocating for a brand via social media as a moderator and find that even consumers who are not likely to be offline advocates are more likely to advocate for the brand on social media if they are strongly attached to social media. In sum, the results indicate that ASM is an important predictor of meaningful social media behaviors and is a new means by which marketers can identify consumers who are more likely to perform meaningful behaviors for brands via social media.

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**Keywords:** Attachment; Social media; Attitude; Brand advocacy; Brands; Social media recommendation

*“We don't have a choice on whether we DO social media, the question is how well we DO it.”*

Erik Qualman, author of *Socialnomics*

## Introduction

Extant research supports the notion that many consumers are open to learning about and interacting with brands via social

media (e.g., King, Racherla, and Bush 2014; Kumar et al. 2016; Lamberton and Stephen 2016; VanMeter, Grisaffe, and Chonko 2015). For example, a leading digital marketing agency reports that 70% of consumers have read a corporate blog, 67% have watched brand videos on YouTube, 65% have played a branded game online, and over 30% of the world's populations (over 2.2 billion people) have an active social media account (Feed 2009; Kemp 2015; Shively and Hitz 2016). As consumer usage of social media continues to increase, so does the portion of marketing budgets allocated to this medium. Indeed, social media is predicted to grow to 24% of marketing budgets over the next five years, an increase from 10% today (White 2017). Further, the percentage of marketers who seek to actively

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engage their audiences using social media now stands at 91% (Stelzner 2017).

Since the mass proliferation of the Internet, researchers and marketers have been examining electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and numerous antecedents and consequences have been identified (see King, Racherla, and Bush 2014). However, in the emerging realm of social media marketing, much less is known about how to utilize the medium strategically to maximize the positive impacts of this new tool. For example, although it is considered relatively easy to precisely target consumers who are likely to click on paid advertisements on social media (e.g., through micro-targeted ads on Facebook), very little is known about how to strategically target consumers who are likely to “socially” interact with (e.g., “like,” share) branded social media content (Lamberton and Stephen 2016). Even less is known about how to target consumers who are willing to undertake some of the most coveted social media behaviors, such as advocating for their favorite brands by mentioning them to their personal network of connections on social media (i.e., influence impressions; Li and Bernoff 2008). Much of the research to date has focused on the characteristics of the *content* itself rather than the consumer. For example, Kumar et al. (2016) found that firm-generated content (FGC) is positively and significantly related to consumer spending (total dollars) and cross-buying behaviors; Stephen and Galak (2012) had similar findings with user-generated content (UGC) posted to an organization's online community; and Ashley and Tuten (2015) examined how various types of creative strategies and appeals used in branded content relate to consumer engagement. However, to our knowledge, there is a dearth of research that examines the other side of the equation; that is, are there some types of *consumers* who are predisposed to interacting with content and performing behaviors beneficial to the brand?

This is an important research question as there is currently little guidance available to aid marketers in identifying and targeting consumers who will interact and behave in ways that are meaningful to the brand on social media. Many marketing practitioners are currently operating blindly and merely guessing at what drives social media behaviors such as “liking” and sharing brand-related content, all the while recognizing that “likes” do not necessarily translate into meaningful outcomes (Lake 2011; Naylor, Lamberton, and West 2012; John et al. 2017). The result is that brands and organizations are neither able to develop effective strategies for increasing meaningful social media behaviors, nor able to identify appropriate metrics of success. Clearly, more research is needed in this area, as it is crucial for managers to understand how individual differences among consumers can influence social media behaviors linked to valuable organizational outcomes in order to justify social media marketing expenditures.

Further, there are questions regarding the value of interactive behaviors with the brand in the context of social media. Recent research on helping behavior classifies consumer behaviors into one of two categories: *token* or *meaningful* behaviors (Kristofferson, White, and Pelozo 2014). Token behaviors (e.g., wearing a lapel ribbon) for a cause do not

always result in meaningful helping behavior (e.g., donation of time or money). In fact, individuals who display public token behaviors actually engage in lower levels of meaningful behaviors compared with those who do not exhibit token public behavior. Further, a recent study found that “liking” a brand is a token form of endorsement and is less effective than other more meaningful endorsements outside of social media (John et al. 2017). These findings bring to the forefront an important question: what drives meaningful social media behaviors? Although consumers can display token behaviors for causes or brands by “liking” them, this does not necessarily lead to more meaningful behaviors in the future, including ultimately, purchase behavior (John et al. 2017).

We posit that not all social media behaviors are equal, that they differ from one another in terms of their importance to the brand or organization, and they also differ in underlying motivation. In Study 1, we examine the roles of two individual difference variables in predicting various types of social media behaviors. Study 2 builds on the findings of Study 1 and investigates both brand- and social media-related variables' efficacy in predicting brand advocacy offline and on social media. Study 3 builds on the findings of Study 2 and investigates a moderator of an individual difference variable and the likelihood of advocating on behalf of a brand via social media. Taken together, the results of the studies address potential differences in the organizational value of various social media behaviors and provide new insights into what influences more valuable social media behaviors. Further, we provide managerial recommendations for driving organizationally meaningful social media outcomes.

## Theory

In this section, we develop a conceptual framework and hypotheses that draw from Attachment Theory to shed light on motivations underlying consumer social media behaviors. We also differentiate consumers' ASM from their attitude toward social media, their attitude toward the brand, and their emotional attachment to the brand (EAB).

Attitude and attachment are important and different phenomena that plausibly relate to distinct behavioral intentions. Following the logic of Park, Chen, Gallagher (2010), we posit that ASM and attitude show differentiated influences on social media outcomes. Park, Chen, Gallagher (2010) demonstrated that brand attachment is distinct from brand attitude and that brand attachment provides incremental predictive value when both attachment and attitude are considered together as predictors of behavioral intentions. Additionally, they demonstrated that brand attachment is a better predictor of more difficult (versus less difficult) consumer behavioral intentions. That is, brand attitude plays a greater role in predicting less difficult consumer behaviors, whereas brand attachment plays an increasingly larger role as behavioral intentions become more difficult to enact. These differential outcomes stem from theoretical differences in the constructs themselves.

Both attachment and attitude are psychological constructs that involve assessments of “strength” (i.e., the bond or the

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