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Modeling consumer engagement on social networking sites: Roles of attitudinal and motivational factors

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a study that seeks to assess an extended typology of consumer social networking engagement behaviors. Drawing on uses and gratifications theory, this study assesses consumer engagement with social media, where consumer engagement incorporates consumer responses to marketing communications. The paper argues that certain motivations for social media use serve as antecedents to general attitudes toward social networking sites, which subsequently affects attitudes toward marketers' social networking sites. These attitudes then influence subsequent consumer engagement behaviors. The results show that social facilitation motivation, participating and socializing motivation, and information motivation positively influence consumers' general attitudes toward social networking sites, which had a strong effect on their attitude toward marketers' social networking sites. The relationship between attitudes toward social networking sites and engagement with social networking sites was mediated by attitudes toward marketers' social networking sites also mediated. The current study brings together the online advertising perspective and the consumer motivation/gratifications perspective of using social media in branding and marketing into a conceptual model that holds up to empirical testing. The paper ends with a discussion of some limitations of the study and proposes avenues for future research.

1. Introduction

Global consumer use of social networking sites has witnessed significant growth in recent years, both in terms of the use of and the amount of time spent, on average, on these sites (Roy and Machado, 2018; Voorveld et al., 2018; Shanahan et al., 2019). This explosion in usage has generated an increase in consumer-to-consumer interaction and marketing efforts to capitalize on these media to interact with consumers. At the same time, researchers have turned their focus to consumer engagement via these media, with some research effort aimed at understanding factors that drive consumer engagement (Chang et al., 2013; Grace et al., 2015; Tafesse, 2016), and the impact that engagement has on various marketing variables (Dabbous and Barakat, 2020). Increasingly consumers use these sites to propagate information about personal consumption choices and brand preferences, adding their "voices" to the traditional communication tools used by marketers (De Vries et al., 2012; Hewett et al., 2016).

Researchers have started to investigate the ways in which consumers engage on social networking sites, identifying various antecedents and

consequences of this engagement with these sites (Tafesse, 2016; Voorveld et al., 2018). In addition, they have developed various models to explain consumer engagement in social relationships with brands on social media (Malthouse et al., 2013; Choudhury and Harrigan, 2014; Harrigan et al., 2018). Other studies have investigated the effects of consumer engagement on social media on firms' shareholder value (e.g., Colicev et al., 2018). This study contributes to this discourse on consumer engagement via social networking sites by exploring the mediating role of attitudinal variables, broken down into general attitudes toward social networking sites and attitudes specific to marketers' social networking sites, on consumer engagement behavior. Further, the study utilizes a composite measure of engagement that incorporates not only consumer engagement in curative and creative social media engagement but also marketing communications (marcom), which has not been a focus of extant literature. The focus on these behaviors derives from the "participatory, collaborative, personal, and simultaneously communal" nature of social media (Tsai and Men, 2017, p. 3), which provides marketers with opportunities to use consumers on social media to market their brands. Against the background of more and more

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marketers using social media sites to not only advertise but to also sell goods and services (Kumar et al., 2019), academic and marketing interest in this kind of engagement is warranted.

While there has been the aforementioned increase in interest in this stream of research on consumer engagement, most of the studies of consumer engagement have ignored consumer response to marketing communications as a component of engagement. This paper reports on a study that seeks to assess an extended typology of consumer social networking engagement behaviors. Drawing on uses and gratifications theory, this study assesses consumer engagement with social media, where consumer engagement incorporates consumer responses to marketing communications. Uses and gratifications theory (see Ruggiero, 2000) is a communications theory that seeks to explain the reasons that consumers seek out different media. The study tested a conceptual model linking social facilitation motivation, participating and socializing motivation, and information motivation to attitudes toward social networking and consumer subsequent engagement in curative, creative, and marcom social media behavior. This model helps us to understand the relationship between social media uses or gratifications and the extended typology of consumer social networking engagement behaviors. It is the first, to the knowledge of the authors, to link the above motivations to an expanded assessment of consumer engagement via sequential attitudinal variables, specifically general attitudes toward social networking sites (SNSs) and, in particular, attitudes toward marketers' SNSs.

The paper is organized in the following manner. The next section is a theoretical development section, where there is a discussion of consumer engagement via social media. This is followed by a discussion of the uses and gratifications theory and the proposal of a conceptual model regarding the impact of the social facilitation motivation, participating and socializing motivation, and information motivation on attitudes toward social networking and consumer subsequent engagement in the extended typology of social media behavior. The section also presents the hypotheses from the conceptual model, followed by a description of the study that was done. The results of the study, and its research and managerial implications, are discussed. The final section of the paper focuses on limitations of the study and proposes avenues for additional research.

2. Theoretical development

2.1. Consumer engagement

Many descriptions of consumer engagement relate it to how individuals interact with or experience something. A number of recent studies have looked at the role of consumer engagement in various online contexts including brand communities (e.g., Hanson et al., 2019; Marbach et al., 2019), service failure recovery (Islam et al., 2019), social networks (Kesgin and Murthy, 2019; Rabbanee et al., 2020), and e-commerce brands (Mohanty and Dey, 2020). In an online context, engagement typically refers to how involved an individual is with a website, social media platform, or brand community (Malthouse et al., 2013; Dessart et al., 2016). Patterson et al. (2006) assert that engagement has to do with consumers' level of emotional presence, physical presence, and cognitive presence in their relationship with a service provider. Calder et al., (2009) argue that most definitions of engagement, in fact, define engagement in terms of the outcomes of engagement, rather than engagement itself. In the context of online experiences, they contend that engagement with a website is what prompts individuals to visit it, have increased involvement with it, and recommend it to others. Mersey et al., (2010), in their research on media experiences, define engagement as "the collective experiences that readers or viewer have with a media brand" (p. 40). Calder and Malthouse (2008) note that experience refers to consumers' set of beliefs about media brand relation to their lives. Consumer engagement has also been defined as "positively valenced brand-related cognitive,

emotional and behavioral activity during or related to focal consumer/brand interactions" (Hollebeek et al., 2014, p. 54). Dwivedi (2015) argued that consumer engagement represents "consumers' positive, fulfilling, brand-use-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (p. 101). Dessart et al. (2015) provided a fairly comprehensive review of research on consumer engagement, with particular attention paid to the nature of the construct explored, as well as the engagement objects.

More recently, some researchers have identified various antecedents and consequences related to consumer engagement on social media (Hinson et al., 2019; Tafesse, 2016; Voorveld et al., 2018). They have also proposed and tested various models to explain consumer engagement in social relationships with brands on social media (Malthouse et al., 2013; Choudhury and Harrigan, 2014; Harrigan et al., 2018; Coelho et al., 2018). Of importance to this current study is that consumer engagement involves "a motivational state that leads to a heightened involvement in online brand activities ... as well as specific behavioral and cognitive responses, such as 'liking' and 'commenting' on brand posts or creating user-generated content" (Tafesse, 2016, p. 425). In this paper, consumer engagement is the focal outcome variable in the conceptual model. It is conceptualized as curative, creative, and marcom behaviors, which are discussed later.

2.1.1. Uses and gratifications theory (U>)

U> (see Katz et al., 1973; Katz et al., 1974; Ruggiero, 2000) was developed in the field of mass communication and focuses on the motivations of consumers to use different media. Originally, it was used to explain the use of, and gratifications derived from, media such as newspaper and television (Katz et al., 1973). According to Katz et al. (1974), uses and gratifications relate to the "(1) social and psychological origins of (2) needs, which generate (3) expectations of (4) the mass media, which lead to (5) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in (6) need gratifications and (7) other consequences..." (p. 20). However, since its introduction to explain media use in respect to television and newspapers, the theory has been used in recent times to explain consumer social media and Internet use (Dolan et al., 2016, 2019; Ozanne et al., 2017). In general, U> enhances understanding of the reasons that consumers use social media to meet different goals that they have set (Ozanne et al., 2017). In addition, it has been applied in explanation of consumer adoption of different kinds of applications that consumers use to achieve different goals and objectives. For example, Ray et al. (2019) applied uses and gratifications theory in an exploration of the motives that drive consumers' use of food delivery apps (FDAs). They found that there was a link between intention to use these FDAs and the gratifications derived from using them (for example, convenience, societal pressure, customer experience, delivery experience). Similarly, Betzing et al. (2020) investigated consumer intention to participate in virtual communities (VCs) specifically for local high street retail. They found that gratifications such as purposive value, social enhancement, and entertainment value positively affected participation in the VCs, as well as intention to visit the actual high street retail stores. More recently, Chen et al. (2020) employed uses and gratifications theory in their investigation of consumer adoption of location-based mobile apps. In the domain of consumer engagement with sports club on social media, Vale and Fernandes (2018) applied U> in explaining sports fan engagement in consumption, contribution and creation behaviors on sports clubs' Facebook pages.

When it comes to the motivations that drive consumer social media use, Muntinga et al. (2011) contend that, "In the context of media use, motivations are understood as the incentives that drive people's selection and use of media and media content" (p. 14). They state that among the motivations are integration and social interaction motivation, and information motivation. In the case of integration and social interaction, they list among the factors: belongingness; social connections; support; and the quest for real-life companionship. In the case of information

motivation, they argue, consumers are driven by the need for opinions and advice, as well as information exchange. They also posit that *surveillance* is an element of this information motivation. Ozanne et al. (2017) examined US and Ecuadorean consumers' use of the 'Like' button on Facebook, and found that among the motivations were entertainment, information/discovery, bonding, and self-identification. There has also been an application of U> in explaining the use of global networking sites by Arab consumers (Al-Jabri et al., 2015); senior consumers' use of mobile social network sites (Kim et al., 2019); and Korean consumers' continued use of Instagram (Hwang and Cho, 2018). The explosion in new media such as social media also enable consumers to obtain social gratifications from these new media (Chen et al., 2020; in press).

This study draws on this theory given its recent adoption to explain motivations for engaging in social media behavior. We argue that integration and social interaction motivation and information motivation for consumer social media use are reflected in social facilitation experience; participating and socializing experience; and information seeking behavior. These are gratifications that consumers seek from using social media. Consistent with research that indicates that motivations for social media use influence consumers' attitude toward social media (Ko et al., 2005; Gangadharbatla, 2008), we contend that these motivations influence attitudes toward social networking sites. These attitudes then drive consumer engagement in social media behaviors.

2.2. Research model and hypotheses

The research model highlights relationships among information motivation in the form of "information-seeking behavior"; integration and social interaction motivation, represented by "participating and socializing experiences"; and "social facilitation" (Calder et al., 2009; Simon and Tossan, 2018), and their subsequent effects on consumer attitudes toward social networking. The model also captures the effects of these attitudes on engagement behaviors on social networking sites. The model mirrors in some respects prior models used in studies of consumer engagement and its effects (e.g., Demangeot and Broderick, 2016; Bianchi and Andrews, 2018; Osei-Frimpong (2019). Demangeot and Broderick (2016) studied UK consumers' engagement during their website visits and theorized that the drivers of engagement (information exploration potential, sense-making potential, and experiential exploration potential) had an influence on dimensions of engagement,

including behavioral, communication, interaction, and active engagement. Bianchi and Andrews (2018) proposed a model engagement in which the TRA and TAM variables impacted consumer attitude towards engagement with retail brands via social media. These attitudes influenced their engagement intentions via social media with these retail brands, which then impacted intentions to purchase via social media. Finally, Osei-Frimpong (2019) proposed a related model in which different types of consumer regulations impacted consumer participation in social brand engagement, which influenced brand purchase intention. Fig. 1 reflects the conceptual model that formed the basis for the study's hypotheses.

2.3. Attitudes

2.3.1. Attitudes toward social networking sites (SNS)

Attitudes influence individuals' behaviors and are thus of great interest to brand marketers. While there are differences regarding the process of attitude formation, there is general agreement that the construct of attitude represents 'a summary evaluation of a psychological object captured in such attribute dimensions as good-bad, harmful-beneficial, pleasant-unpleasant, and likeable-dislikeable' (Ajzen 2001, p. 29). The current study makes a distinction between the attitude objects "social networking sites" and "marketers' social networking sites." Social networking sites are seen collectively as a general case of media for which consumers can develop favorable or unfavorable attitudes; these sites can be used for activities other than marketing communications about products. Marketers' social networking sites, on the hand, are used by companies and brands for marketing communications, so consumers' attitudes towards them may be shaped by factors such as perceived credibility, information quality, and interactivity, and individual consumer factors such as persuasion knowledge and skepticism (see, for example, Lee et al., 2016; Tran, 2017; Zarouali et al., 2018). The attitudes that consumers have toward social media, specifically, are clearly of interest to many marketers, and there has been expanding research on this issue. Akar and Topçu (2011), in their exploration of factors that influenced affecting consumers' attitudes toward social media marketing, concluded that consumers with higher income levels displayed more positive attitudes toward social media marketing. They also found that consumers' knowledge, use, and following of social media, in addition to their social media marketing fears, had an influence on their social media marketing attitudes. Cha (2009) found that

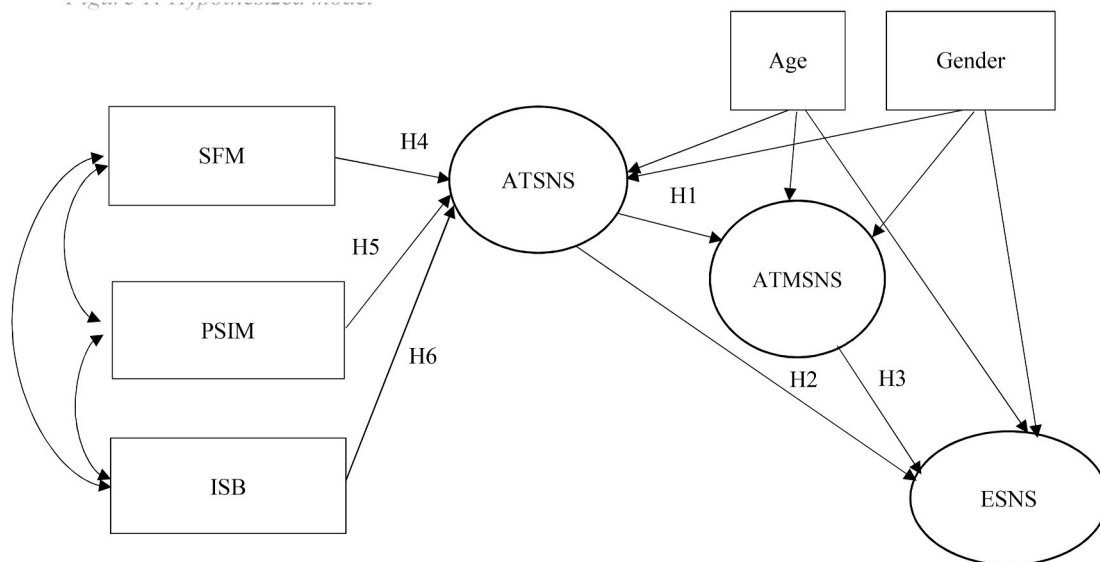


Fig. 1. Hypothesized model.

fit, ease of use, usefulness, and age created favorable attitudes toward shopping for real items, while fit, ease of use, gender, and social networking site experience influenced attitudes toward shopping for virtual items. Wei et al. (2015) found that Taiwanese consumers' attitude toward SNS were impacted by a combination of information and social needs, as well interaction between consumers and message; these attitudes then influenced their intentions to stick with social networking sites. Regarding Dutch consumers, Ketelaar et al. (2016) found that the likelihood of consumers passing along a viral ad was impacted by their attitudes toward viral advertising.

2.3.2. Attitudes toward marketers' SNS

SNS provide marketers opportunities to increase awareness for their brand, connect with customers, convert new customers, humanize their brand, and provide customer service, to name but a few of the benefits to marketers. In recent years, SNS growth has been enormous, as both consumers and marketers find value in them. Gangadharbatla (2008) found that attitudes toward SNS were influenced by collective self-esteem, need to belong, and Internet self-efficacy; attitudes toward SNS mediated the relationships between willingness to join SNS and Internet self-efficacy, and between willingness to join SNS and need to belong. Yuan et al., (2016) found that attitude toward using SNS had a positive influence on various customer equity drivers, including relationship, brand, and value equities. Consumers hold particular attitudes toward social networking sites in general, and this study theorizes a relationship between these general attitudes and their attitudes toward marketers' social networking sites. This appears consistent with prior research that links attitudes toward different attitude objects: for example, attitude towards an ad influences attitude toward the brand being advertised even in a social networking site environment (Bang and Lee, 2016). In addition, Shareef et al. (2019) found that source credibility affected attitudes toward social networking sites, depending on whether the source was an associative reference group, aspirational reference group, or the marketers themselves.

Based on the foregoing discussion, there should be a link between general attitudes toward SNS and attitudes to specific types of SNS (e.g., marketers' SNS). These expectations are represented in the following hypotheses:

- H1.** There is a positive impact of attitude toward SNS (in general) and attitudes toward marketers' SNS.
- H2.** There is a positive impact of attitude toward SNS (in general) and consumer engagement on SNS.

2.4. Social media engagement behavior

The consumer engagement literature contends that engagement involves certain behavioral outcomes (Tsai and Men, 2013; Tafesse, 2016; Simon and Tossan, 2018). Curative behavior on SNS relates to accessing content that other SNS users have created rather than engaging in the creation of content (Pagani et al. 2011). It is passive behavior that involves activities such as reading comments and viewing photos, videos, and content other users have created. Consumers also engage in creative behaviors on SNS, which include writing product reviews or brand related articles; publishing blogs about brands; recommending social media pages of brands to other SNS users; and uploading brand-related video, audio, pictures or images (Muntinga et al., 2011; Pagani et al., 2011; Simon and Tossan, 2018; Tsai and Men, 2013). There are also marketing communication (marcom) behaviors in which consumers can engage. This particular engagement on SNS has not been studied previously; nor has it been part of the typologies of social networking behaviors. Marcom behavior refers to specific consumer responses to marketing communication activities on SNS. The list for marcom behaviors (see Table 2), which were author-generated, is not exhaustive, but an assessment of face validity of these items (see Saenger et al., 2013, for a similar approach) suggests that the items are reflective of

consumer marcom behaviors. Attitudes will drive engagement with social networking sites (see, for example, Bianchi and Andrews (2018)).

- H3.** Attitude toward marketers' SNS has a positive effect on consumer engagement on social networking sites.

2.5. Social facilitation motivation

Social facilitation motivation is based on the idea that consumers use social networking sites to "arm" themselves for future engagements. According to Calder et al. (2009), the social facilitation experience scale assesses the extent to which consumers engage with a website or social media site because it provides them with information that they can use when they discuss things with others. Calder et al. (2009) hold that among the experiences that consumers derive from social networking sites is a utilitarian experience, that is, social networking sites enable consumers to accomplish something in their lives. Mersey et al., (2010) studied online engagement with news organizations and suggest that personal and social-interactive engagement are linked to readership. Using what they refer to as the extended U&G framework, Mersey et al. (2010) found social facilitation experience as an indicator of personal engagement. Given its nature, social facilitation should positively affect consumers' attitude toward SNS, as well as on their engagement on these sites.

- H4.** Social facilitation motivation has a positive effect on attitude toward social networking sites.

2.6. Participating and socializing motivation

Mersey et al. (2010) and Calder et al. (2009) referred to 'experiences' on social networking sites in their discussion of consumer engagement on these sites and make a distinction between social facilitation and "participating and socializing" motivation. They regard participating and socializing as a form of *social-interactive engagement*, whereas they theorized that social facilitation was a form of *personal engagement*. According to these researchers, in the case of personal engagement, "... users seek stimulation and inspiration from the site, they want to use the site to facilitate their interactions with other people, they feel the site affirms their self-worth, they get a sense of intrinsic enjoyment in using the site itself, they feel it is useful for achieving goals, and they value input from other users" (p. 327). Social-interactive engagement, they argue further, could lead to some of these same things, "but in a way that links to a sense of participating with others and socializing on the site" (p. 327). Personal engagement derives from the personal quality of media sites, while social engagement derives from the social relevance of the media sites and the sense of being able to interact with a community and participating with others. Their participating and socializing experience scale captures the extent to which consumers are engaged in online socializing and their perceptions about the amount of time they are engaged (see, for example, Calder et al., 2009).

Similar to their theorizing about the social facilitation construct, the theorizing about participating and socializing motivation by Calder et al. (2009) also draws from the uses and gratifications literature. Mersey et al. (2010) suggest that participating and socializing experience aligns with social-interactive engagement and, as such, is particularly relevant to online media rather than more traditional media. They contend, further, that social-interactive engagement means that consumers' use of social networking sites would create a sense of participation and socialization on these sites (p. 52). Hwang and Cho (2018) conducted a study regarding motivations for Instagram use among Korean students and found support for their hypothesis that social interaction needs impacted Korean consumers' intentions to continue using Instagram. Rathnayake and Winter (2018) confirmed in their study that community building and interaction were among motivations for social networking sites among a sample of Hawaiian SNS users. Researchers such as Marder et al. (2018) point out that social networking

sites facilitate conspicuous social consumer behaviors including liking, sharing, following, and posting about brands. Because social networking sites can lead to these gratifications, there should be a positive link between participating and socializing motivation and attitude toward SNS.

H5. Participation and social interaction motivation positively affects attitude toward SNS.

2.7. Information-seeking motivation

Information motivation has also been proposed as a factor that generates consumers' engagement with media, including SNS (McQuail, 1983; Calder et al., 2009). Drawing on the uses and gratifications literature, McQuail (1983) included information motivation among his typology of motivations for media use. This consists of elements such as self-education, learning, and a sense of security based on knowledge acquisition. The information-seeking behavior on social networking sites (Ridings et al., 2002) relates to the degree to which people resort to SNS as a forum to obtain information from others.

Drawing from uses and gratifications theory, Lee and Ma (2012) explored how information-seeking influences news sharing intention. Their research suggests that news stories shared in social media can also be used for future information seeking needs, since shared news stories are often archived in online profiles. Sin and Kim (2013) studied information seeking among international students, theorizing that SNS play a key role in the information seeking behaviors of international students. Their study found that SNS serve an important function for international students' information-seeking needs. This line of research, therefore, establishes that information motivation is among the motivations that are likely to drive consumers to use social networking sites. The extent to which consumers derive gratifications from their use of SNS will generate (un)favorable attitudes toward social networking sites among consumers.

H6. Information motivation has a positive effect on attitude toward SNS.

2.8. Mediation

The expectation is that, in addition to the foregoing predicted relationships, the attitudinal variables will serve as mediators in the relationships between the motivational variables and consumer engagement on social networking sites. That is, attitude toward SNS should affect consumer engagement through its impact on attitude toward marketers' SNS. Consumers who have positive (negative) attitudes toward SNS in general will also have positive (negative) attitudes toward those used by marketers. These positive (negative) attitudes toward marketers' SNS will then impact consumer engagement. Therefore, attitude toward SNS in general will also impact consumer engagement through its creation of positive (negative) attitudes toward marketers' SNS. Prior research has shown the mediating role of attitudinal variables in different contexts and supports this expectation. For example, prior research has shown that there is a mediating effect of attitude toward the ad on purchase intentions through its impact on attitude toward the brand; favorable attitudes toward an ad positively influence brand attitudes, which in turn influence consumers' purchase intentions (see, for example, Biehal et al. 1992; Mackenzie et al., 1986). Petrescu et al., (2015), in their study of viral advertising intentions (defined as the passing along of electronic ads from consumer to consumer), theorized, and found, that the nature of the appeal used in an electronic ad would influence consumer attitudes toward the ad, which in turn would influence intentions to pass along the ad. The relationship among the variables in this study is presented in the following hypothesis.

H7. Attitude toward marketers' SNS will mediate the relationship between attitude toward SNS and consumer engagement on SNS.

3. Method

3.1. Questionnaire and sample

The model was tested using data gathered from a survey. A survey approach was deemed appropriate given the aim of the study to assess the relationships posited in the conceptual model in Fig. 1. Participants were 340 business students at a Midwestern US University, who were invited by email announcements to take part in the study in exchange for extra credit course points. This sample was deemed appropriate, given that research in the US indicates that young adults were among the earliest adopters of these media and continue to use them at very high levels (Perrin and Anderson, 2019). The survey was administered online using Survey Monkey. The participants were directed to the study site by the email message that invited them to take part in the study; the message provided the URL to access the questionnaire. Participants were told at the start that the study related to consumer use of social networking sites (SNSs), were provided with some examples of SNSs, and were asked to take part. The first question on the questionnaire was a screening question that asked participants "Do you use social networking sites (for example, Facebook, Flickr, Google+, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Twitter, Youtube, among others)?" They then were asked to state the number of these social networking sites that they used. Participants reported using, on average, four social networking sites. The next part of the questionnaire used for the survey contained a mix of personality inventories that were unrelated to the main study; attitudinal questions; and the social media motivational uses questions. The following part contained social media engagement behavior questions; and the final part collected demographic information. Ten incomplete questionnaires were excluded from the data set, leaving 330 completed responses for the data analysis. Table 1 has details of the sample.

3.2. Measures

Table 2 contains detailed information on the measures that were

Table 1
Demographic profile of participants.

Demographic Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Female	165	50.0
Male	164	49.7
Prefer not to answer	1	0.3
Age		
18–24 years	253	76.7
25–34 years	55	16.7
35–44 years	9	2.7
45–54 years	12	3.6
55 years and above	1	0.3
Education		
No high school	1	0.3
High school diploma	29	8.8
Some college	205	62.1
College graduate	59	17.9
Graduate school	32	9.7
Prefer not to answer	4	1.2
Race		
Am. Indian/Alaskan Native	1	0.3
Asian/Asian American	37	11.2
Black/African American	27	8.2
Hispanic	8	2.4
Native Hawaiian/Pac. Isl.	1	0.3
White/Caucasian	230	69.9
More than one of the above	9	2.7
Prefer not to answer	16	4.9
Personal life		
Very busy	162	49.2
Somewhat busy	127	38.6
Neutral	36	10.9
Somewhat unoccupied	4	1.2

Table 2
Measurement model estimation.

Factors/Items	Factor Loadings	CR	α	AVE
<i>Social facilitation</i>				
In conversations with many other people, I bring up things I have seen on social media platforms.	0.81***	0.92	0.88	0.64
Social media sites often give me something to talk about.	0.88***			
I use things from social media sites in discussions or arguments with people I know.	0.84***			
Source: <i>experience</i> (Calder et al. (2009))				
<i>Participating and socializing experience</i>				
I do quite a bit of socializing on social networking sites.	0.85***	0.92	0.85	0.74
I contribute to the conversations on social networking sites.	0.87***			
Source: (Calder et al., 2009)				
<i>Information motivation</i>				
I visit social networking sites to get information on different topics.	0.83***	0.94	0.85	0.71
I visit social networking sites when I want advice on how to carry out some task.	0.77***			
I visit social networking sites when I need facts about a particular subject.	0.81***			
Source: Ridings, Gefen, and Arinze (2002)				
<i>Attitudes (Attitude toward SNS)</i>				
Negative/Positive	0.93***	0.98	0.95	0.83
Unfavorable/Favorable	0.91***			
Poor/Excellent	0.92***			
Unpleasant/Pleasant	0.89***			
Bad/Good	0.90***			
Source: Batra and Stayman (1990); VanMeter et al. (2015)				
<i>Attitudes (Attitude toward marketers' SNS)</i>				
Negative/Positive	0.92***	0.98	0.96	0.85
Unfavorable/Favorable	0.90***			
Poor/Excellent	0.90***			
Unpleasant/Pleasant	0.94***			
Bad/Good	0.95***			
Source: As above				
<i>Curative (passive) behavior</i>				
a. Watch a video about a brand on a SNS	0.83***	0.97	0.90	0.71
b. Read information about a brand on a SNS	0.88***			
c. Read product review about a brand at a SNS	0.84***			
d. Review photos on a brand's SNS	0.83***			
e. Read comments on the wall of a brand's Facebook page	0.83***			
Source: Muntinga, Moorman, and Smit (2011); $\alpha = 0.90$				
<i>Creative (active) behavior</i>				
a Upload a video about a brand to a SNS	0.81***	0.97	0.90	0.66
b Forward the link to a video about a brand at a SNS	0.80***			
c Become a fan of a brand via its SNS	0.84***			
d Invite another person to become a fan of a brand through its SNS	0.77***			
e Post information about my experiences with brands on a SNS	0.73***			
f Visit the SNS for a brand	0.90***			
g Download a video about a brand at a SNS	0.85***			
Source: Muntinga, Moorman, and Smit (2011); Simon and Tossan (2018)				
<i>Marcom response on SNS</i>				
a Accept a promotional offer such as a coupon from a SNS	0.89***	0.98	0.93	0.80
b Use a promotional offer, such as a coupon, obtained from a SNS	0.89***			
c Sign up to receive information from brands through SNS	0.85***			
d Make a purchase decision as a result of information at a SNS	0.90***			
e Change opinion of a brand as a result of a SNS	0.91***			

Table 2 (continued)

Factors/Items	Factor Loadings	CR	α	AVE
f Change purchase decision as a result of information at a SNS	0.92***			
Source: Adaptation based on Ashley et al. (2011) and general consumer behavior items				
<i>Engagement (Higher-order factor)</i>				
Curative	0.93***	0.97	0.91	0.82
Creative	0.91***			
Marcom	0.87***			

***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05.

used in the study, including the items used for each measure and the source for the measures; the majority of the measures were based on existing scales. The study's questionnaire included a measure of social facilitation motivation ($\alpha = 0.87$), which was based on Calder et al. (2009) social facilitation experience scale. The measure of participating and socializing motivation ($\alpha = 0.83$) was also based on a Calder et al. (2009) scale. The information motivation scale was based on Ridings et al. (2002) desire to get information scale. Consumer engagement with social networking sites was modeled as a higher-order latent variable, with three first-order factors involving curative behavior ($\alpha = 0.90$), creative behavior ($\alpha = 0.90$), and MARCOM behavior ($\alpha = 0.93$). Cronbach alpha for the composite engagement scale was 0.91. Participants indicated their likelihood of participation in certain online behaviors, classified as curative and creative social networking activities by previous researchers (Muntinga et al., 2011; Pagani et al., 2011; Tsai and Men, 2013). Marcom behavior was conceptualized as consumer response to marketing communication activities through social networking sites. The marcom behavior scale was author-generated, which is consistent with previous studies where specific scales for certain activities do not exist (e.g., Ashley et al., 2011). Responses to these items yielded consumer self-reports of their engagement activities. The foregoing were measured using 7-point Likert scales. The attitudinal measures (attitude toward social networking sites [SNS], $\alpha = 0.95$; and attitude toward marketers SNS, $\alpha = 0.96$) were based on attitude scales used previously in consumer behavior literature. The attitudinal items included items such as Negative/Positive; Unfavorable/Favorable; and Bad/Good. The attitudinal variables were measured using 7-point semantic differential scales. Table 2 contains additional details on the scales.

Table 3 contains information that regarding the discriminant validity of the study's constructs, as well as their descriptive statistics.

Common method bias assessment was carried out in an effort to ensure the validity of the study results. One approach to its assessment is to establish that no single factor accounts for the majority of the variance among the variables in the model. Consequently, Harman's single factor test, which is a test that assesses whether a single factor can explain the majority of variance in the data, and a CFA, with all factors in the model loaded onto a single factor to determine model fit (Mossholder et al., 1998), were used to assess common method bias. The Harman's single factor test showed that a single factor accounted for 42 per cent of the variance in the data; if there is common method bias, the single factor should account for more than 50% of the variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The CFA revealed an inadequate model fit for the single-factor model: CFI = 0.67; TLI = 0.66; RMSEA = 0.14; $\chi^2(784) = 5470.15$, $p < 0.001$ (Korsgaard and Roberson, 1995; Mossholder et al., 1998).

4. Model and hypotheses testing

4.1. Research model

We initially tested a model (Fig. 1) where social facilitation motivation, participating and socializing motivation, and information motivation each predicted attitude toward SNS. Attitude toward SNS

Table 3
Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix^a.

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. SFM	14.11	4.32	0.64^a					
2. PSIM	7.80	3.30	0.58	0.74				
3. ISB	12.43	4.70	0.56	0.53	0.71			
4. ATSNS	25.02	6.17	0.51	0.48	0.40	0.83		
5. ATMSNS	24.72	7.11	0.42	0.27	0.33	0.46	0.85	
6. Engage	73.24	24.95	0.53	0.60	0.56	0.43	0.46	0.82

^a Numbers in bold represent the AVEs for the variables. Numbers below the diagonal represent correlation estimates.

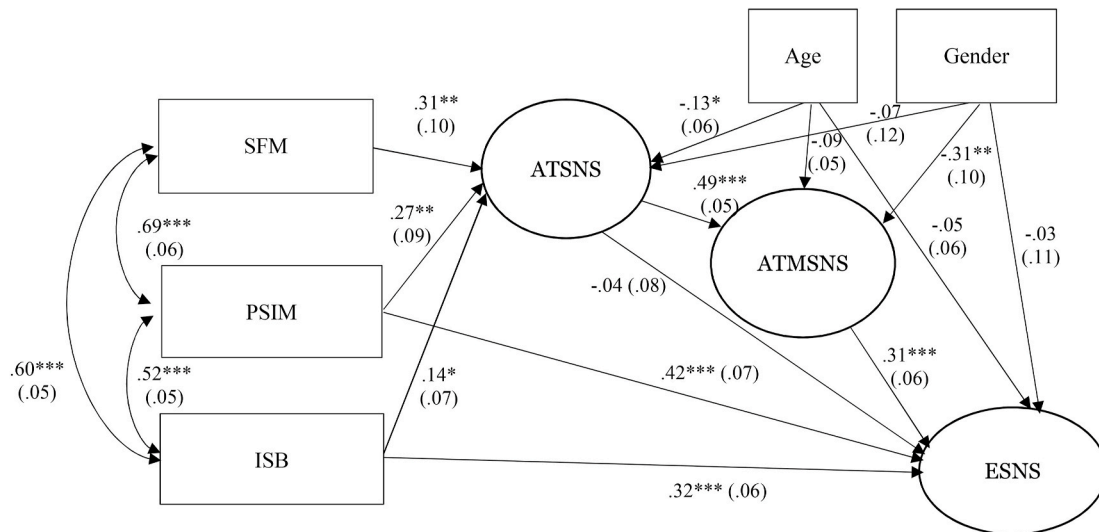
was specified to predict attitude toward marketers' SNS and engagement with SNS. Furthermore, attitude toward marketers' SNS was specified to predict engagement with SNS. Finally, we used gender and age as covariates of attitudes toward social networking sites, attitudes toward marketers' social networking sites, and engagement with brands'/marketers' social networking sites. This controls for the effects of age and gender on attitudes. Millennials display higher usage of social media (Bilgihan et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2017), and prior research has found that women tend to show higher social media site satisfaction and loyalty than men (Lim et al., 2014). Mplus (Muthén and Muthén, 1998–2014) was used for structural equation modeling to assess the model in Fig. 1. Age (dichotomized as younger than age 25 vs. age 25 or older) and gender were modeled as observed variables. All other variables were modeled as latent variables, except for social facilitation experience, participating in socializing experiences, and information seeking behavior, which were modeled as observed summed scores; these variables had too few items (two to three items each) to model as latent variables with adequate fit. The engagement with social networking sites variable was modeled as a higher-order latent variable, with three first-order factors involving curative behavior, creative behavior, and marcom behavior.

We treated items within a latent factor as continuously scaled, but because of model fit issues, we treated curative behavior, creative behavior, marcom behavior, and attitudes toward social networking items as ordinal. Consistent with recommendations by DiStefano and Morgan (2014), this involved a polychoric covariance matrix, with probit factor loadings and weighted least squares estimation with a mean- and variance-adjusted chi-square. Small amounts of missing data

were treated using a pairwise present approach. We present standardized path coefficients. Benchmarks for adequate fit are comparative fit index are root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) ≤ 0.08 ; comparative fit index (CFI) ≥ 0.90 , and Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) ≥ 0.90 (Hu and Bentler, 1999).

4.2. Mediation test

We additionally tested several indirect effects (mediation) by determining the cross-product of two direct path coefficients. For example, we multiplied the standardized path coefficient for the social facilitation experience -> attitudes toward SNS path by the standardized coefficient for the attitudes toward SNS -> attitudes toward marketers' SNS path, deriving an indirect path coefficient from this cross-product. We used the Delta method to estimate the standard error of a given indirect path coefficient. Because indirect effect standard errors are not normally distributed on a sampling distribution, we computed 500 bootstrapped replications and derived an averaged indirect effect standard error from the replications, to enhance accuracy of the indirect effect standard error estimates (MacKinnon, 2008). We divided an indirect effect's standardized coefficient by its averaged standard error to compute a z-test, testing the null hypothesis that the indirect effect was different from zero (also including indirect effect confidence intervals). This approach maps onto the method discussed by Zhao et al. (2010); that is, we tested the bootstrapped indirect effect of a x b (indirect-only mediation). This is different from the traditional approach posited by Baron and Kenny (1986).



Model statistics: CFI = .92; TLI = .92; RMSEA = .09; SRMR = .06; χ^2 (479) = 1816.68; $p < .001$

Fig. 2. Results of measurement model.

Model statistics: CFI = 0.92; TLI = 0.92; RMSEA = 0.09; SRMR = 0.06; χ^2 (479) = 1816.68; $p < .001$.

4.3. Results

4.3.1. Test of hypotheses H1-H6

We found adequate fit for the latent variables we tested. Attitude toward social networking fit well, robust χ^2 (5, N = 328) = 25.96, p = .0001, CFI = 0.97, TLI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.11. Attitudes toward marketers' social networking sites fit well, robust χ^2 (5, N = 328) = 5.90, p = .32, CFI = 0.999, TLI = 0.998, RMSEA = 0.02. The higher-order model of engagement with social networking fit well, robust χ^2 (132, N = 328) = 1416.63, p < .0001, CFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.91, RMSEA = 0.17. This was followed by an assessment of the structural model in Fig. 1. This model demonstrated adequate fit, χ^2 (481, N = 328) = 2305.08, p < .0001, CFI = 0.90, TLI = 0.89, RMSEA = 0.11. Based on modification indices and theory, we added paths from participating in socializing experiences and information-seeking behavior to engagement with social networking sites, resulting in adequate fit, χ^2 (479, N = 328) = 1816.68, p < .0001, CFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.09; SRMR = 0.06. This model's path estimates are displayed in Fig. 2.

The results of the hypotheses testing showed that attitude toward SNS positively affected attitudes toward marketers' SNS ($\beta = 0.49$, p < .001), consistent with the expectations expressed in H1. According to H2, attitude toward SNS(in general) should positively affect consumer engagement on SNS; however, this was not supported ($\beta = 0.04$, p > 0.05, ns). H3 predicted that attitude toward marketers' SNS would positively impact consumer engagement on SNS; this was supported ($\beta = 0.31$, p < .001). Consistent with the prediction in H4, social facilitation motivation positively affected attitude toward SNS ($\beta = 0.31$, p < .01). H5 predicted that participation and social interaction motivation positively affected attitude toward social networking sites. This was supported ($\beta = 0.27$, p < .01). H6 predicted that information motivation would also positively influence attitude toward SNS. This too was supported ($\beta = 0.14$, p < .05).

4.3.2. Results of mediation test

Attitudes toward marketers' SNS mediated the attitudes toward SNS and engagement with SNS relationship ($\beta = 0.15$, 95% CI: 0.09-0.21, SE = 0.04, z = 4.205, p < .001). This was consistent with the prediction in H7. We further explored H7, given the significant indirect effect when social networking site engagement was modeled as a higher-order latent dependent variable. We recomputed this indirect effect, separately using each first-order latent factor instead of the higher-order factor as the dependent variable; in each re-analysis, attitudes toward SNS was the predictor, and attitudes toward marketers' SNS was the mediator. These analyses revealed that attitudes toward marketers' SNS mediated the relationships between attitudes toward SNS and each of the dependent variables: curative behavior ($\beta = 0.16$, 95% CI: 0.10-0.22, SE = 0.04, z = 4.48, p < .001); creative behavior $\beta = 0.14$, 95% CI: 0.08-0.20, SE = 0.04, z = 3.93, p < .001); and MARCOM behavior ($\beta = 0.11$, 95% CI: 0.06-0.18, SE = 0.04, z = 3.29, p = .001). Table 4 contains information on these results.

No additional prediction related to mediation, besides H7, was made; however, given the nature of the model, further analyses were conducted; and these revealed several significant indirect effects shown in the model in Fig. 2. Attitudes toward SNS mediated relations between

Table 4
Hypotheses testing results.

Paths	β path coefficients	Test result
H1: ATSNS → ATMSNS	0.49***	Supported
H2: ATSNS → ESNS	-0.04	Not supported
H3: ATMSNS → ESNS	0.31***	Supported
H4: SFM → ATSNS	0.31**	Supported
H5 PSIM → ATSNS	0.27**	Supported
H6: ISB → ATSNS	0.14*	Supported
H7: ATSNS → ATMSNS → ESNS	0.15***	Supported

Key: ***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05.

social facilitation experience and attitudes toward marketers' SNS ($\beta = 0.15$, 95% CI: 0.07-0.24, SE = 0.05, z = 2.93, p = .003). Furthermore, attitudes toward SNS mediated relations between participating in social experiences and attitudes toward marketers' SNS ($\beta = 0.13$, 95% CI: 0.06-0.20, SE = 0.04, z = 3.03, p = .002). Finally, attitudes toward SNS mediated relations between information seeking behavior and attitudes toward marketers' SNS ($\beta = 0.07$, 95% CI: 0.01-0.12, SE = 0.03, z = 1.97, p = .049).

5. Discussion

The study reported above drew on uses and gratifications theory to propose that social facilitation motivation, participating and socializing motivation, and information motivation engender consumers' use of SNS; these uses, and resultant gratifications, dispose them to positive attitudes to SNS, in general, and to marketers' SNS, specifically. The results from the data analysis highlight that, consistent with the predictions anchored in uses and gratifications theory, social facilitation motivation, participating and socializing motivation, and information motivation positively influence consumers' general attitudes toward SNS. This is because social networking sites provide gratifications that they seek. H4 theorized that social facilitation motivation would have a positive impact on attitude toward SNSs; H5 theorized a positive impact of participating and socializing motivation on attitude toward SNSs; and H6 hypothesized that there would be a positive impact of information motivation on attitude toward SNSs. These were all supported. The results support the link between general attitudes toward SNS and specific attitudes toward marketers' SNS, as H1 was supported. This result establishes a link that, despite the body of research on social networking and social media, previously had not been investigated. Further, the results from the testing of H3 established attitude toward marketers' SNSs do impact a composite measure of consumer engagement that incorporates consumer response to electronic marketing communications. The lack of support for H2, which predicted a positive impact of attitude toward SNS on this composite measure of consumer engagement indicates the importance of looking specifically at attitude toward marketers' SNSs. The mediation results also support the important role of attitude toward SNS in linking consumers' motivations and their attitudes toward marketers' SNS. Attitudes toward marketers' SNS mediated the relationships between attitudes toward SNS and the composite measure of consumer engagement, and the relationships between attitudes toward SNS and each of the individual variables that make up consumer engagement. This finding is consistent with findings by Petrescu et al. (2015) regarding the mediational of attitudes, as in their study of attitudes and viral video distribution intentions, these researchers found that attitude toward the ad played a mediational role in the relationship between ad appeals and viral video distribution intentions.

5.1. Research implications

The results contribute to extant research on consumer engagement with social media and consumers' subsequent behaviors such as curative and creative behaviors, as well as response to marketing communications. The research also ties uses and gratifications theory with consumer engagement in the aforementioned behaviors. The motivations discussed in the paper are among some of the major motivations identified by different researchers as impacting consumer engagement in virtual contexts (Calder et al., 2009; Simon and Tossan, 2018). The current research indicates that they can be applied to understanding attitudinal responses to marketers' social networking sites and an extended typology of social networking behaviors, including marketing communications-specific behaviors. We further argued that positive attitudes significantly affect engagement on social networking sites. In this way, the research proposes additional insights into consumer engagement with brands via social media. The conceptual model

reported in the paper expanded consumer engagement on social networking sites, as engagement was conceptualized as a composite of curative, creative, and marketing communications-related consumer behavior.

The current study also brings together the online advertising perspective and the consumer motivation/gratifications perspective of using social media in branding and marketing into a conceptual model that holds up to empirical testing. In the online advertising perspective, social media extends online advertising (p. 425); brand pages are advertising platforms where posts operate like ads (Tafesse 2016). The consumer motivation/gratifications perspective draws on U&G theory to explain SNS use. In our conceptual model, consumer engagement with SNS, the outcome variable, was modeled as a higher-order latent variable, with three first-order factors involving curative behavior, creative behavior and MARCOM behavior. The components of this outcome variable, along with the attitudinal responses, reflect the online advertising perspective.

The conceptual model in the study distinguished between attitudes toward SNS, generally, and attitude toward marketers' SNS, specifically. The results indicate that these attitudes have different roles in generating consumer engagement on SNS. For example, while attitude toward SNS in general did not significantly influence consumer engagement on SNS, attitude toward marketers' SNS positively and significantly affect consumer engagement on SNS. Besides, attitude toward marketers' SNS played a mediating role in the attitude toward SNS-consumer engagement on SNS relationship. The key role of attitudes toward SNS in fostering consumer engagement was further underscored by results of mediation assessment that revealed that SNS attitudes mediated relations between social facilitation experience and attitudes toward marketers' SNS; SNS attitudes mediated relations between participating in social experiences and attitudes toward marketers' SNS; and SNS attitudes mediated relations between information seeking behavior and attitudes toward marketers' SNS.

5.2. Practical implications

According to the study results, consumers' engagement with brands on SNS differs based on their attitudes, both toward generic SNS and marketers' SNS. Marketers can, therefore, design content to reach consumers with different attitudes toward generic SNS and marketers' SNS. Consumers will engage in different behaviors based on these attitudes. Marketers can then segment consumers based on these attitudes, as well as on their motivations for using social media. Campbell et al., (2014), for example, recommend a similar strategy of segmenting consumers based on their social network marketing attitudes.

The results also suggest that it would be in the interest of marketers that use SNS in consumer engagement to take part in collectively promoting SNS use generally. This would be regarded as a form of primary advertising, where participants in an industry come together to promote the industry. This is important, as the results highlight the strong link between attitude toward generic SNS and attitude toward marketers' SNS, specifically. Lawlor et al. (2016) also highlight SNS' role in enhancing marketing communications by brands, given that SNS users benefit marketers through their activities; and companies can connect with them through SNS. Marketers can generate not only paid social media by placing ads on social media sites, but they can also generate earned social media by utilizing information on consumers' motivations for using social media to get them to pass along brand information among each other.

In terms of advertising appeals to foster consumer engagement with brands' and companies' SNS, social networking site managers can use appeals related to the uses and gratifications reflected in social facilitation, participation and social interaction, and information acquisition. These antecedents affected attitudes toward social networking sites, hence appealing to them should prove effective in attracting consumers who experiences these uses and gratifications from social networking

sites. Some researchers have also utilized the technology acceptance model (TAM) in studying the relationship between attitude toward SNS and intention to use them (e.g., Choi and Chung, 2013; Shen, 2015; Hwang and Cho, 2018). These studies have shown that factors such as SNS' perceived ease of use (PEOU) and perceived usefulness (PU) influence attitudes towards, and intentions to use, them. Therefore, marketers need to ensure that their SNS provide value to consumers and are easy to navigate (Chun and Lee, 2016).

The measure of engagement contained consumer engagement with marketing communications. For example, the measure took into account consumer acceptance of a promotional offer, use of a promotional offer obtained from a social networking site, as well as sign up to receive information from brands through SNS. This information indicates that marketers can maximize their marketing communications efforts on SNS among consumers who have favorable attitudes to their SNS. Marketers can, as a result, target consumers on SNS with promotional offers based on their uses and gratifications, as well as their consequent attitudes toward SNS. These findings have important implications for advancing social commerce.

Marketers can also benefit from the motivations that generate consumer use of SNS. For example, in the case of socializing motivation, Salehan et al. (2017) argue that consumers could be motivated by socializing motivation to engage with other consumers in discussions about product purchase. Similarly, based on information motivation, consumers could solicit information from other consumers regarding these purchases. Marketers can, therefore, provide product and brand information to consumers on social platforms and provide incentives to consumers to engage others with this information. This could be also achieved through the use of appeals such as "socializing-based appeals" and "information-seeking appeals" in social networking ads.

6. Limitations and future research directions

While the research reported above provides additional insights into consumer engagement with social media, there are some limitations that could provide the basis for future research. A noted concern is the use of a student sample from the Midwest United States. While the mix of undergraduate and graduate students fall mainly into the group of US consumers designated as millennials, and who have grown up with social media, there is the possibility that they may behave differently than the general population. Therefore, there should be research using a non-student sample to determine if the conceptual model holds up with such a sample. It is also possible that, in the same way there are likely to be differences across cultures in consumer engagement with social media, there are possible differences in consumer engagement with social media based on regional and other subcultural differences (for example, racial and ethnic backgrounds, religion, and nationality origins) among US consumers. Testing of these possible differences could serve as the basis for future research.

Future research can extend this stream of research by tracking the online communication and engagement behaviors of consumers to see the kinds of online information that they consume and the kinds of communications to which they respond. This could be done through observational or content analytic methods. This research did not investigate individual difference factors that might moderate the relationships described and tested in the conceptual model. For example, two recent individual difference factors that could be moderators of the relationships discussed in this study are *general online social interaction propensity* (GOSIP) (Blazevic et al., 2014) and *susceptibility to social networking influence* (Bailey and Ben, 2016). These two individual factors represent plausible moderators that could be investigated in future research. There is the possibility for cross-cultural studies, using samples from populations that differ in economic and technological development, or individualism and collectivism, to test the model that formed the basis of this research. Since consumer motivation for using SNS and consumer engagement on SNS are likely to be influenced by cultural

factors, seeking to replicate this study in different cultural milieu would aid the research stream.

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