

DEVELOPING AFFECTIVE BRAND COMMITMENT THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

Brands, like humans, can serve as legitimate relationship partners. Brand relationships can provide consumers with resources in making decisions, meeting their needs, and motivating them. Marketers are using social media as a way to promote their brands and build consumer brand relationships. This research examines how emotional, or affect-based brand relationships, are developed in online social communities. It explores this phenomenon in the context of personal branding for music artists and uses Facebook as a social medium. A conceptual model is developed and empirically tested. Findings indicate that emotional relationships are cultivated by the intimacy and self-connection a consumer has toward the brand, or artist. This intimacy and connection can lead to an emotionally based attachment and bond, or affective commitment. Strong affective commitment from the consumer can be extremely valuable to the branded artist and his/her music because it leads to loyalty in the form of purchase behavior, reduced digital piracy, support of artistic vision and advocacy for the artist. However, value co-creation also plays an important role in developing emotionally based brand relationships and value-co-creation interacts with the impact of affective commitment on loyalty and advocacy. Implications for marketers managing brands and consumer brand relationships are discussed.

Keywords: Affective commitment; Brand relationships; Social media; Emotion

1. Introduction

Brands comprise both physical and socio-psychological attributes. Brands can imbue unique meaning to consumers and such meaning and personal experience with a brand can create a connection, or relationship, between the consumer and the brand. Fournier [1994; 1998] was one of the first to conceptualize consumer brand relationships. In this metaphor, a consumer and a brand are theorized as being in a dyadic relationship similar to a relationship between two people. Subsequently, brand relationships can help consumers develop and communicate something about who they are, who they were, or who they aspire to be.

Currently, marketers are using social media as a way to promote their brands and build these consumer brand relationships [Chen et al. 2011]. Social communities such as Facebook, Twitter, Four Square, and LinkedIn are channels of social media focused on relationships, shared interest and identification. These communities feature multi-way communication, conversation and collaboration [Tuten and Solomon 2012]. Brands like Coca-Cola, Starbucks, PlayStation, Oreos and McDonalds actively use online social communities as forums for consumer engagement. Additionally, the use of online social communities has especially become important in the

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entertainment industry. Artists of all types and in all stages of their careers promote themselves—their personal brand—by sharing information about themselves and their artistic offerings [Oszejca 2012].

However, building consumer brand relationships can be a challenging and complex process. Brand relationships with consumers are often associated with different psychological processes and social norms and can take many forms. For example, a consumer brand relationship may be emotionally based and can involve obsessive thought, or it may be cognitively based and simply habitual [MacInnis et al. 2009]. The literature suggests that relationships which involve an emotional tie or connection are formed on the basis of identification and shared values [Evanschitzky et al. 2006]. In such relationships, the ties that bind may be stronger and more enduring than cognitively based relationships.

Further, building brand relationships involves observing consumer behavior related to a purchase decision. In brick-and-mortar outlets, it may be a challenge obtaining information about such behavior. However, due to the Internet's potential for interactive communication, it is a prime tool for relationship building. In the online environment it is often possible to gather detailed behavioral information about consumer decision making and build customer relationships by learning from interactions with the customer.

Research suggests that firms stand to benefit from establishing emotionally based relationships between their brands and consumers [Allen and Meyer 1990; Oliver 1999]; however, limited research examines how they can benefit from the capabilities of the Internet in fostering such relationships. Subsequently, this research examines how emotional, or affect-based, brand relationships are developed in online social communities. It explores this phenomenon in the context of personal branding [Labrecque et al. 2011] for music artists and uses Facebook as a social medium. A model is developed, which proposes that emotional relationships are cultivated by the intimacy and self-connection a consumer has toward the brand, or artist. This intimacy and connection can lead to an emotionally based attachment and bond, or affective commitment. Strong affective commitment from the consumer can be extremely valuable to the branded artist and his/her music because it may lead to loyalty in the form of purchase behavior, reduced digital piracy, support of artistic vision and advocacy for the artist.

This research also postulates that value co-creation in online communities can enhance relationship quality with a brand [Vargo and Lusch 2004; 2010]. Value co-creation is the realization that the consumer is necessary and must play a part in order to produce value. Specifically, in order for online communities to thrive, members must participate as “content creators” by posting comments and sharing information. These content creators are co-creating value for an artist's fans. This research proposes that value co-creation will interact with the influence of affective commitment on various dimensions of loyalty as well as overall advocacy for an artist.

In the following research, a conceptual framework from the behavioral and branding literatures is first presented. These theoretical underpinnings provide the basis for the development of a model that elucidates how emotional brand relationships are developed in an online context. Next, the model is tested on a sample of 422 respondents, using structural equation modeling. Findings are discussed, and implications are delineated for marketers managing brands and consumer brand relationships in both a product and personal context.

2. Theoretical Background

Brands and brand relationships have been examined extensively in the literature [Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001; Fournier 1994; 1998]. Fournier [1994; 1998] conceptualized the brand and the consumer as being partners in a relationship. Brand relationships serve a number of functions by providing consumers with resources in making decisions, meeting their needs, and motivating them. Strong consumer brand relationships can make a brand resistant to competitive attacks because consumers hold robust brand attitudes that have persisted despite external influence. Further, strong emotional ties and intimate bonds can form around a product or brand [Muniz and Schau 2005; Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Thomson et al. 2005].

Social media are valuable forums for building brand relationships with consumers [Gabisch and Gwebu 2011]. Marketers can interact regularly with consumers, and communications can be humanized to such a degree that friendships and personal relationships can be formed. Prominent social networking communities include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and MySpace. Facebook is the largest of the social networking sites and currently has over 845 million users globally as of this writing [Facebook 2012]. It is multimedia-friendly and members can post text, pictures, audio and video, as well as share their location. An average Facebook user has approximately 130 friends; and more than 3.5 billion pieces of content are shared on Facebook each week [Tech Revel 2012]. While young adults in the United States, ages 18-25, are the predominant users of Facebook—totaling 50 million—the 26-34 demographic includes 29 million users and the 35-44 group totals 23 million. There are a combined 28 million people in the U.S. over the age of 45 that are active on Facebook [Burbary 2011].

Many organizations, products, brands and entertainment professionals have a presence on Facebook because of its ability to facilitate multiplicative exposure and its suitability as a relationship enhancing tool [Oszejca 2012,

Thorbjornsen et al. 2002]. A Facebook page becomes an entity's or brand's personal profile and serves as an information hub. Facebook pages are also public-facing, meaning they can appear in search engines and give an entity or brand even more exposure.

The subsequent research examines how emotional ties can be fostered in branding relationships for music artists, using Facebook as a platform. It proposes that affective commitment, a key variable in developing emotion-based relationships is cultivated through brand intimacy and self-connection. Strong affective commitment can lead to the manifestation of consumer loyalty in several forms, as well as brand advocacy. However, value co-creation also plays an important role in developing emotionally based brand relationships. Consequently, this research proposes that the influence of affective commitment on brand loyalty and advocacy is moderated by value co-creation. A discussion of affective commitment is delineated next.

2.1. Affective Commitment

Individuals are inherently motivated to become attached to entities [Bowlby 1973]. Accordingly, they may become attached, or committed, to brands [Park et al. 2009]. Brand commitment is an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship with a brand [Lacy 2007; Moorman et al.1992]. It refers to the economic, emotional and psychological attachments that the consumer may have toward a brand [Evanschitzky et al. 2006]. Committed consumers are often willing to stay in an exchange relationship as well as put forth effort to maintain the relationship. Such attachments are important forerunners to loyalty [Beatty and Kahle 1988].

Researchers have identified distinct components of commitment—one dimension that is more emotional in nature and the other that is more economic in structure [Allen and Meyer 1990; Bansal et al. 2004]. The economic type of commitment is known as calculative, or continuance commitment and the emotional type is called affective commitment. Continuance commitment stems from cost-based calculations and results in commitment because of a need to stay in the relationship when no other comparable alternatives exist, or the costs of switching to other options are too high [Allen and Meyer 1990]. However, affective commitment differs from continuance commitment in that the customer develops an emotional attachment to the brand or organization based on his/her identification with that brand or organization [Allen and Meyer 1990]. Affective commitment involves the desire to maintain a relationship that the customer perceives to be of value [Morgan and Hunt 1994]. Relationships which involve an emotional tie or connection are formed on the basis of identification and shared values [Evanschitzky et al. 2006]. Consumers who are affectively committed to a brand are less expensive to retain; less vulnerable to loss from competitive efforts, brand blunders, or service failures; willing to pay a price premium; and also desire to convert others to the brand via brand advocacy [Bolton et al. 2000; Grisaffe and Nguyen 2011].

3. Research Model and Hypotheses Development

Connecting emotionally and developing affective commitment is not only important for branded products and services, but is also paramount in personal branding. Social media are being used by many entertainment professionals and music artists as platforms for developing emotional ties between consumers and their personal brands. However, cultivating affective commitment in consumers requires a self-connection or identification with the artist's product offering. Furthermore, individuals must feel as if they share a personal intimacy with the artist. Both self-connection and intimacy are essential to relationship building in online environments, given the absence of human contact. However, through technological innovation, the Internet can deliver in creating customer personalization and community [Thorbjornsen et al. 2002]. The precursors, or antecedents, of affective commitment, along with the proposed relationships (see Figure 1) in the model are discussed next.

3.1. Antecedents of Affective Commitment

3.1.1. Self-Connection and Identification

Consumers prefer products with images that are congruent with their self-concepts. They often construct their self-identity and present themselves to others through their product and brand selections [Escalas 2004; Escalas and Bettman 2003]. As consumers discover fit between their self-concepts and brand images, they are able to make self-connections with a product or brand.

Self-connections are created when brands engender strong and favorable brand associations from the consumer's perspective and can be used to satisfy psychological needs, reinforce identity and allow an individual to connect to others [Escalas 2004; Escalas and Bettman 2003; Wallendorf and Arnould 1988]. A strong self-connection with a brand allows for easier and more frequent retrieval of thoughts and feelings regarding the brand [Park et al. 2009].

Strong attachments can manifest as a result of self-connections with a brand, and consumers may become committed to brands that help them create or represent their desired self-concepts [Escalas and Bettman 2003]. In the context of musical product offerings, when individuals develop connections to an artist's music and they feel that the music by that artist represents who they are, they may be more likely to develop an emotional tie to the

artist. Social media platforms may further facilitate this connection and identification, as an artist’s Facebook page may serve as an information hub and distribution site for the artist’s musical product offerings. To this end, the following is proposed:

H1: Self-connection with an artist’s music is positively related to affective commitment to the artist’s brand.

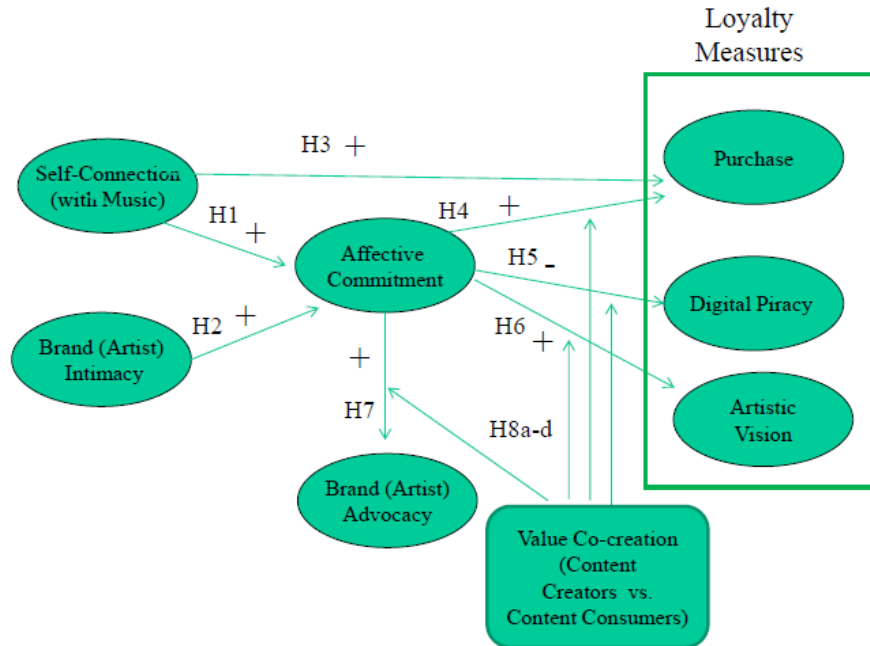


Figure 1: Conceptual Model - Affective Commitment in Brand Relationships through Social Media

3.1.2. Brand Intimacy

As mentioned previously, Fournier [1998] suggested that brands, like humans, can serve as legitimate relationship partners. One of the characteristics of human relationships [Miller and Lefcourt 1982] is intimacy. Intimacy can be defined as feelings of closeness and connectedness in a relationship [Gaia 2002]. In a consumer brand relationship context, brand intimacy is characterized as the consumer having a detailed knowledge of the brand and the brand having special meaning for the consumer [Fournier 1994; 1998]. Cross [2000] suggested that a firm’s or a brand’s survival is partially based on its ability to develop intimate relationships with customers that are based on excellent communication, listening skills and strategic thinking.

Creating consumer brand intimacy can be a challenge. Intimate relationships are characterized by frequent, close and cherished interactions. For intimacy to develop in a relationship, both partners need to engage in intimate behaviors toward one other. As a result, organizations make concerted efforts to employ customer intimacy practices, which often involve reaching out to consumers on a personal level and using information from customers to inform marketing plans [Hoard 1997]. Social media provide an optimal forum for developing such closeness and connectedness with the consumer.

Intimacy in human relationships can lead to feelings of attachment and commitment. Furthermore, just as intimacy can foster commitment in human relationships, it is proposed that a similar progression will manifest with a consumer-brand relationship online for a music artist. Subsequently, the following is predicted:

H2: Intimacy for a branded music artist will be positively related to affective commitment to the artist’s brand.

When consumers have an emotional attachment or affective commitment to a brand, the brand can benefit in a myriad of ways. Strong affective commitment can generate loyalty, which may manifest in several different forms. Additionally, affectively committed consumers may be more likely to become advocates for the brand. These valuable outcomes are explicated next.

3.2. Outcomes of Affective Commitment

3.2.1. Loyalty

Loyalty has been defined as a deeply held commitment to re-buy or re-patronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future regardless of situational influences and competitive marketing efforts [Oliver 1999]. The importance of brand loyalty has been recognized in the marketing literature for decades [e.g., Howard and Sheth 1969; McAlexander et al. 2003], and Aaker [1991] discussed the role of loyalty in the brand equity process. Brand loyalty leads to certain marketing advantages, such as reduced marketing costs and retention of new customers.

Engendering emotional commitment from consumers to a brand can result in loyalty. In the context of a consumer-brand relationship for a music artist, several different types of loyalty are proposed to emerge. These forms of loyalty include purchase loyalty, a disposition against digital piracy of the artist's music and support of the musician's artistic vision.

Purchase Loyalty: Repeat customers are valued customers. Repeat patronage has long-term financial and brand performance advantages, including increasing market share for a brand and customer lifetime value [Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001]. Purchase loyalty is the behavioral component of loyalty and represents the willingness to repurchase a brand [Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001]. Researchers have shown that young consumers' self-connection with a brand will increase their attitudinal loyalty to that brand [Hwang and Kandampully 2012] and that dissatisfaction as well as negative emotion inversely influence repurchase behaviors [Lu et al. 2012]. Therefore, it stands to reason that consumers, who have formed a self-connection with and are affectively committed to a brand, are more likely to engage in repeat purchase behavior of the brand. Thus, the following is predicted with respect to consumer brand relationships for a music artist.

H3: Self-connection with an artist's music is positively related to purchase loyalty.

H4: Affective commitment for a music artist is positively related to purchase loyalty.

Digital Piracy: Music piracy, which involves the downloading of songs illegally, accounts for \$12.5 billion of economic losses every year, globally [IPI 2012]. Individuals who engage in music piracy can vary in terms of economic, demographic, and cultural backgrounds [Fetscherin 2009]. Additionally, the effects of music theft can be devastating for an artist as well as other members of the music industry, including songwriters, recording artists, audio engineers, computer technicians and publishers [McCorkle et al. 2012].

In order to make music accessible and facilitate the purchase process, music companies have licensed hundreds of digital partners offering music downloads and subscription services [Bhatia et al. 2003]. Further, according to the global music trade body, the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry, there are now more than 13 million licensed tracks available on more than 400 different services worldwide [IFPI 2012]. However, statistics indicate that only 37 percent of music acquired by U.S. consumers was paid for in 2009 [IPI 2012].

Consumers that are in an emotionally committed relationship with an artist will not only be likely to engage in repeat purchase behavior of the artist's music, but they might also be less likely to render harm to the relationship partner, or transgress. Transgressions are violations of the relevant norms of the consumer-brand relationship. They include breaches of the implicit and explicit rules guiding performance and evaluation in a relationship [Aaker, Fournier and Brassel 2004]. Realizing that digital piracy might have deleterious effects on the relationship partner (the artist), individuals that feel emotionally committed to an artist may resist participating in such damaging behaviors. To this end, the following is proposed:

H5: Affective commitment for a music artist is negatively related to digital piracy.

Artistic Vision: Artistic vision is the generation of ideas for works of art [Klickstein 2010]. Just as product innovation is the lifeblood of a firm and tantamount to its success, artistic vision is essential in the development, success and longevity of an artist. Similarly, just as new line extensions are created for brands to serve new consumer tastes and preferences, an artist may explore new musical styles or foray into different musical genres, sometimes solely for artistic expression but often to reach new audiences. Sometimes these attempts might not yield the same degree of success as previous offerings.

However, research suggests that when consumers self-identify with a brand and have formed emotional ties to it, they may be more forgiving of marketing blunders for the product, and even temporary product quality problems [Escalas and Bettman 2003]. Thus, individuals that are emotionally committed to an artist may be supportive of the artistic vision of the artist in pursuing new musical styles, even if such a venture does not result in a product offering commensurate (i.e., in quality and style) to previous output. Subsequently, the following is hypothesized:

H6: Affective commitment for a music artist is positively related to support of that musician's artistic vision.

3.2.2. Brand Advocacy

Favorable communication about a brand from consumers can accelerate new product acceptance and adoption [Keller 1993]. Advocacy in the form of word of mouth can be the most influential source of information for the

purchase of some products because it is perceived as originating from a less biased, more trustworthy source, which helps to lessen consumer anxiety [Dhar and Chang 2009; Herr et al. 1991]. For example, research has found that information distributed through online communities may be perceived as highly credible due to the trustworthiness and expertise of community members [Brown et al. 2007].

When a consumer becomes affectively committed to a brand, this connection can lead to brand advocacy [Fullerton 2003]. The consumer becomes an “evangelist” for the brand and spreads positive word-of-mouth about the brand as well as recruits others to become purchasers and users of the brand [Thompson et al. 2006; Chakravarty et al. 2010]. As a result, it is proposed that individuals that are affectively committed to a music artist will promote the artist via positive word of mouth in the form of advocacy.

H7: Affective commitment for a music artist is positively related to brand advocacy.

3.3. Moderating Effects of Value Co-Creation

The co-creation of value implies that all social and economic actors (e.g., firms, customers) must be engaged in an exchange [Lengnick-Hall et al. 2000; Vargo and Lusch, 2004; 2010] and researchers have called for it to be explored further in the brand literature [Iglesias et al. 2011]. Co-creation requires meaningful, cooperative contributions to the exchange process [Auh et al. 2007]. It is paramount in online communities that value co-creation take place in the form of member content generation. If members do not participate, the site may fail to offer fresh material and, ultimately, individuals may stop visiting a site. Research has shown that only one percent of a typical community’s users regularly participate by offering content and nine percent do so intermittently [Tuten and Solomon 2012]. Most users of online communities are “content consumers” or “lurkers” and simply passively observe what is on the site. In contrast, “content creators” add value to social communities by posting comments and sharing social content. Content creators exhibit higher levels of involvement in the exchange process in social communities than content consumers. Such active participation can help foster greater loyalty [Holland and Baker 2001; Kim et al. 2012].

Because content creators demonstrate heightened levels of involvement and value creation than their content consumer counterparts, the relationships between outcome measures of loyalty and advocacy associated with affective commitment are expected to be greater for individuals that are characteristically content creators than for those that are content consumers. Accordingly, the following is proposed:

H8: Value co-creation will moderate the effect of affective commitment on (a) purchase loyalty (b) digital piracy (c) artistic vision (d) and brand advocacy. Specifically, individuals that are characteristically content creators will express greater purchase loyalty, a greater disposition against digital piracy, more support of the musician’s artistic vision and higher levels of brand advocacy than content consumers.

4. Methodology

The constructs represented in the model (see Figure 1) were measured using both existing scales adapted for this study as well as scales created specifically for this research. All scale items appear in the Appendix A. Antecedents of affective commitment were measured using existing scales. Self-connection was assessed using items adapted from Escalas and Bettman [2003] and was measured using seven items (e.g., “The music of this artist(s) reflects who I am”). Brand intimacy was measured using items adapted from Fournier’s [1994] Brand Relationship Quality Scale. The scale included three items (e.g., “I feel like I know the background and life of this music artist”). Items for affective commitment captured the emotional attachment consumers might have toward a brand and were adapted from Allen and Meyer [1990]. Three items were used to measure affective commitment (e.g., “I feel emotionally attached to this music artist”).

The outcome variables of affective commitment were assessed using extant scales and newly constructed scales. Purchase loyalty was measured using an existing scale from Chaudhuri and Holbrook [2001] and included two items (e.g., “I am a loyal purchaser of the music of this artist”). Digital piracy (e.g., “I would never download the music of this music artist for free illegally”) and artistic vision (e.g., “I will support this artist with any new music he/she decides to pursue”) were created specifically for this research and were measured using two items respectively. Further, brand advocacy (e.g., “I try to get my friends and family to patronize this music artist”) was assessed using three items adapted from Phillips, Noble and Noble [2011]. Finally, value co-creation was evaluated by asking if an individual actively contributes information to online forums by being a content creator or whether he/she is simply a passive observer on online forums, or a content consumer. This construct was assessed using one item, “More often than not, I tend to make posts and comments on Facebook pages outside of my own Facebook page.” Respondents answered “yes” or “no” to this question.

An Internet-based survey was administered to 422 students at a university in the southwestern part of the United States. Students were given extra credit points for participating. Forty-nine percent of respondents were male and 51 percent were female. The mean age was 21. This was a viable demographic for this research since the 18-25

segment comprises over 35% of Facebook users in the United States [Burbary 2011]. Additionally, consumers in this segment are ranked as one of the most frequent purchasers of music online [Pew Research Center 2010].

5. Results

The data were subjected to structural equation analysis in AMOS 17.0 using the maximum likelihood estimation method. As recommended by Anderson and Gerbing [1988], a two-step procedure was used to first assess the model for construct and discriminant validity, and then test hypotheses in the structural model. Additionally, the marker variable technique [Lindell and Whitney 2001; Malhotra et al. 2006], was applied to ensure that findings were not inflated due to common method bias.

5.1. Measurement Model

Standard statistical techniques, including performing exploratory factor analysis and examining item-to-total correlations, were conducted. Exploratory factor analysis confirmed that each item loaded on the appropriate factor [Churchill 1979; Cheung and Lee 2001]. To assess the model for construct and discriminant validity, confirmatory factor analysis was performed. The final measurement model exhibited adequate fit χ^2 (600.12), p-value (.01), CFI (.93), IFI (.94), and RMSEA (.07).

To test for convergent validity, factor loadings, along with the average variance extracted were calculated for each latent variable. Standardized factor loadings (see Table 1) exceeded the 0.6 threshold as recommended by Hair et al. [2006]. Additionally, as seen in Table 2, the average variance extracted (ranging from .62 to .83) for each construct exceeded the recommended rule of thumb of 0.5 [Hair et al. 2006], which is an indication that the variance captured by the construct is greater than the variance due to measurement error.

In order to assess discriminant validity, the Fornell–Larcker test [1981] was performed. Discriminant validity is demonstrated when the average variance extracted from a construct is greater than the squared correlations between that construct and other constructs in the model. The average variance extracted between each construct was greater than the squared multiple correlations for each construct pairing. Composite reliabilities were also assessed for each construct to ensure that each exhibited internal consistency (ranging from .82 to .93). All measures exemplified acceptable reliability by exceeding the recommended 0.7 threshold [Nunnally and Bernstein 1994]. The results for the structural model follow.

Table 1: Factor Loadings

Affective Commitment		Purchase Loyalty	
AC1	0.80	PL1	0.88
AC2	0.76	PL2	0.92
AC3	0.87	Digital Piracy	
Self-Connection		DP1	0.95
SC1	0.84	DP2	0.88
SC2	0.81	Artistic Vision	
SC3	0.84	AV1	0.84
SC4	0.85	AV2	0.82
SC5	0.78	Brand Advocacy	
SC6	0.83	BA1	0.81
SC7	0.72	BA2	0.85
Brand Intimacy		BA3	0.70
BI1	0.84		
BI2	0.86		
BI3	0.78		

Table 2: Means, Standard Deviation, Reliability, Average Variance Extracted (in bold) and Correlations

	Means	SD	Reliability	SC	BI	AC	PL	DP	AV	BA
Self-Connection (SC)	4.63	1.22	0.93	0.68						
Brand Intimacy (BI)	4.38	1.46	0.87	0.60	0.69					
Affective Commitment (AC)	3.52	1.49	0.85	0.53	0.55	0.66				
Purchase Loyalty (PL)	5.10	1.48	0.89	0.41	0.42	0.27	0.80			
Digital Piracy (DP)	4.39	1.77	0.91	-0.13	-0.20	-0.18	-0.26	0.83		
Artistic Vision (AV)	4.50	1.39	0.82	0.53	0.64	0.51	0.46	-0.33	0.82	
Brand Advocacy (BA)	4.06	1.46	0.83	0.52	0.57	0.52	0.28	-0.13	0.49	0.62

5.2. Structural Model

After attaining a validated measurement model, the structural model and hypotheses were evaluated. The structural model (see Figure 1) exhibited adequate fit: χ^2 (815.27), p-value (.01), CFI (.90), IFI (.91), and RMSEA (.08). Both direct and moderated effects were predicted between exogenous and endogenous variables. Results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Tests of Hypotheses – Direct Effects

Hypotheses			Unstandardized Coefficient	Standardized Coefficient	Standard Error	Critical Ratio	p-Value
H1:	Self-Connection	→ Affective Commitment	0.32	0.30	0.06	5.23	p < .01
H2:	Brand Intimacy	→ Affective Commitment	0.58	0.58	0.07	8.76	p < .01
H3:	Self-Connection	→ Purchase Loyalty	0.31	0.27	0.08	3.70	p < .01
H4:	Affective Commitment	→ Purchase Loyalty	0.29	0.26	0.08	3.51	p < .01
H5:	Affective Commitment	→ Digital Piracy	-0.37	-0.28	0.07	-5.19	p < .01
H6:	Affective Commitment	→ Artistic Vision	0.79	0.77	0.06	5.23	p < .01
H7:	Affective Commitment	→ Brand Advocacy	0.76	0.72	0.06	12.29	p < .01

H1 and H2 predicted that self-connection and brand intimacy would be antecedents to affective commitment. These hypotheses were confirmed and both self-connection and brand intimacy are positively related to affective commitment. H3 predicted that self-connection would also be positively related to purchase loyalty. This predication was validated. Next, H4 through H7 proposed that purchase loyalty, a disposition against digital piracy, support of artistic vision and brand advocacy would be outcomes of affective commitment. All four hypotheses were confirmed.

Finally, H8a-d proposed that value co-creation, or whether an individual was a content creator or content consumer, would moderate the relationship between affective commitment and the different forms of loyalty and brand advocacy. In order to test these moderating effects [Byrne 2001; Hair et al. 2006], the unconstrained model was assessed (across both content creators and content consumers) and fit statistics were obtained, (χ^2 1063.67/402 df, $p < .01$). Next, the moderating paths were constrained and fit statistics were again calculated (χ^2 1078.25/406 df, $p < .01$). A chi square difference test indicated that there were differences between the two models ($\Delta\chi^2$ 14.58/4 df, $p < .01$). Individual path tests for moderation were then run using the unconstrained model. Results for H8a-d indicate that value co-creation moderates the relationships between affective commitment and the outcome variables of loyalty and advocacy. Specifically, content creators expressed greater purchase loyalty, a stronger disposition against digital piracy, greater support of a musician's artistic vision and higher levels of advocacy than content consumers. Please refer to Table 4 for statistics on these moderating effects.

Table 4: Moderating Effects

Moderating Effects of Value Creation				Unstandardized Coefficient (Content Creator vs. Content Consumer)	Standardized Coefficient (Content Creator vs. Content Consumer)	Critical Ratio Diff	P-Value
H8a:	Affective Commitment	→	Purchase Loyalty	0.61/0.21	0.46/0.19	-1.93	$p < .05$
H8b:	Affective Commitment	→	Digital Piracy	-0.56/-0.27	-0.31/-0.24	1.72	$p < .05$
H8c:	Affective Commitment	→	Artistic Vision	1.07/0.68	0.82/0.74	-2.53	$p < .01$
H8d:	Affective Commitment	→	Brand Advocacy	0.97/0.54	0.80/0.65	-2.76	$p < .01$

6. Discussion

6.1. Findings and Theoretical Implications

Developing consumer-brand relationships can be an intricate and complex process, yet a rewarding endeavor. Marketers are interested in developing "committed" relationships between consumers and brands and have used social media as avenues to achieve such partnerships. Affective commitment is an emotionally based attachment to a brand where a consumer derives such value from a brand that he/she is interested in maintaining a long-term relationship with the brand. This research demonstrated both the antecedents and outcomes of relationships that are based on affective commitment. Self-connection and brand intimacy provided the basis from which strong emotional ties to brands can develop, and both were positively related to affective commitment. The benefits of having consumers emotionally committed to a brand proved to be multi-faceted. Such commitment manifested in varying forms of loyalty where strong affective commitment was positively related to greater purchase loyalty, but also impacted a consumer's disposition toward digital piracy. Affectively committed consumers were less tolerant of and less willing to engage in digital theft. Additionally, an affective tie to the branded artist resulted in consumers expressing greater support for the musician's artistic vision. Finally, affective commitment led to greater brand advocacy from consumers.

Value co-creation also played an important role in consumer brand relationship development in this research. At the core of value co-creation is consumer involvement. Findings from this research demonstrated that individuals that were actively involved in creating and sharing social content, or content creators, possessed greater intentions toward loyalty (whether it be purchase-related, opposing digital piracy, or supportive of artistic expression) as well as advocacy for an artist compared to content consumers.

Emotionally based consumer-brand relationships often result in strong and enduring connections. The Internet is an optimal mechanism for developing consumer-brand relationships due to its interactivity. This research

contributes to understanding about how such relationships are developed in an online context. Emotional relationships in an online environment are cultivated by the intimacy and self-connection a consumer has toward the product offering. Strong affective commitment results in advocacy and loyal behavior toward the brand. Such loyal behavior may not only include repeat purchase behavior, but may also impact whether consumers are less likely to engage in damaging behavior toward the brand (transgressions), or whether they will be more tolerant of brand mistakes. Further, in the online environment, value co-creation also plays an integral role in developing emotionally based brand relationships. As individuals become more actively involved in creating and disseminating information about the brand, they may also exhibit more loyal behavioral intentions and overall advocacy for the brand.

6.2. Managerial Implications

Cultivating emotionally based and committed customer brand relationships requires time and resources to develop. Facebook, as do other social media, provides a viable platform for the formation of such relationships because of its targeted approach. This research suggests that marketers might be successful in developing committed partnerships between a consumer and a brand by (1) being proactive in developing intimacy with consumers (2) managing consumers' emotions in order to engender affective commitment and (3) encouraging consumers to contribute and share social content in communities.

6.2.1. *Developing Intimacy*

True intimacy is achieved through shared knowledge, understanding, commonly held beliefs and mutual compassion [Treacy and Wiersema 1992]. Companies can achieve intimacy between customers and their branded offerings by displaying to the customer that he/she is an important partner. This can be done by capturing and maintaining intimate knowledge of the customer's preferences and habits [Leaper 2011]. Leveraging social media platforms to understand customers' personal interests, preferences and motivations can provide the data required to drive successful marketing campaigns.

As such, it may be necessary for companies pursuing intimacy with their customers to tailor and adapt products and services to meet the consumers' needs. This can require considerable resources, but such actions may be necessary if a company is interested in building loyalty for the long-term. Ultimately, these companies are assessing a customer's lifetime value with the company and not a single transaction.

Further, companies can foster closeness with customers and their brands by delivering valuable content in social media platforms and also by being responsive to the consumer. Consistent, relevant and quality content can help in developing relationships with readers (e.g., a blog from a bank targeting Gen Y about student loans). Consumers can form intimate relationships with content—particularly if presented in a personal, empathetic manner. Further, being responsive to the voices from the social community can create trust and intimacy and allow for a more qualitative understanding of customer attitudes and feelings.

6.2.2. *Managing Emotional Engagement*

Emotionally engaged members of a brand's social community are extremely valuable. As demonstrated in this research, emotional engagement can inspire loyalty and advocacy. Companies can work to engage consumers on social media sites by focusing on the quality of interactions between the consumer and the brand.

During interactions between the consumer and the brand, marketers should make efforts to "stage experiences" around their brand [Pine and Gilmore 1999; Wirtz et al. 2013]. Generating "experiences" around a brand in online communities might start with creating a cohesive theme around a brand and then employing emotionally-rich imagery in communication messages that capture attention. Additionally, providing memorabilia and content that tells a story and connects consumers to human aspects of the brand provides the bedrock for engagement, intimacy and identification. Finally, soliciting feedback from consumers about their experiences and being responsive to consumer suggestions is paramount for continuous improvement and further emotional engagement.

6.2.3. *Encouraging Value Co-creation*

Value co-creation is paramount in customer brand development and social communities. Therefore, a company must be proactive at seeding content development from members as well as encouraging community interaction. This can involve initiating conversations that are new, stimulating and appropriate for the community. Depending on the specific topical focus of the community, this may be done by highlighting interesting, relevant news items or by flagging certain themes which may be of interest to the community. Members should be encouraged to participate in these exchanges by offering their views, ideas and information. Simple inducements to contribute to these conversions might include asking members 'What do they think?' Igniting such discussion and participation can enhance value creation which can result in stronger emotional attachment between the consumer and the brand.

6.3. Limitations and Future Research

Although this research makes important contributions in understanding emotionally based consumer brand relationships, it is not without its limitations. The data from this study were cross-sectional in nature and no causal

relationships could be established. Future studies might include field experiments that assess the effect of consumer brand relationships on actual behavior.

Additionally, the age demographic in the sample that was used for this study was appropriate, given both the buying behavior of this group with respect to online music purchases and also the selection of Facebook as a social medium to study the phenomenon in question; however, students might be more accepting of music piracy than other age groups, given their financial limitations. Subsequently, future studies might enlist other age demographics and compare differences among age groups. Further, this research investigated how consumer brand relationships are developed in a personal branding context for a music artist. Additional research might examine consumer brand relationships in other product categories and contexts.

Brands, like humans, can serve as legitimate relationship partners. Although developing consumer brand relationships may be a multi-faceted and challenging process, consumers that have emotional ties and strong commitment to a brand are very valuable to a firm. More research that explores consumer-brand relationships and investigates the mechanisms through which consumers become emotionally attached to brands is warranted.

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APPENDIX A - Scales

All scales were measured using a 7-point Likert scale unless otherwise indicated.

Affective Commitment - Adapted from Meyer and Allen [1990]

I feel emotionally attached to this music artist(s).
I feel like this music artist(s) is part of my family.
I feel a strong sense of belonging to this music artist(s).

Self-Connection (Music) - Adapted from Escalas and Bettman [2003]

The music of this artist(s) reflects who I am.
I can identify with the music of this artist(s).
I feel a personal connection to the music of this artist(s) (*not at all/very much so*).
I (can) use the music of this artist to communicate who I am to other people.
I think the music of this artist (could) help(s) me become the type of person I want to be.
I consider the music of this artist(s) to be “me” (it reflects who I consider myself to be or the way that I want to present myself to others).
The music of this artist(s) suits me well.

Brand Intimacy - Brand Relationship Quality Scale [Fournier 1994]

I feel like I know the background and life of this music artist(s).
I feel like I know what this music artist(s) stands for.
I know more about this music artist(s) than the average person.

Purchase Loyalty - Chaudhuri and Holbrook [2001]

I intend to keep listening to the music of this artist(s).
I am a loyal listener of the music of this artist(s).

Digital Piracy (items reverse coded)

I would never download the music of this music artist(s) for free illegally.
I would not engage in illegal file sharing of the music of this artist(s).

Artistic Vision

I feel a commitment to this music artist(s) in all his/her musical endeavors.
I will support this artist(s) with any new music he/she decides to pursue.

Brand Advocacy - Adapted from Phillips, Noble, Noble [2011]

I try to get my friends and family to patronize this music artist(s).
I seldom miss an opportunity to tell others good things about this music artist(s).
I would defend this music artist(s) to others if I heard someone speaking poorly about him/her.

Value Co-creation (Content Creator versus Content Consumer)

More often than not, I tend to make posts and comments on Facebook pages outside of my own Facebook page.
(Yes/No)