

# Can consumer perception of Social Media Marketing (SMM) characteristics lead to better Brand Attachment?

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**Abstract:** Social media platforms are playing an extensively important role in the marketing landscape by building and fostering customer-brand relationships. This study tries to find out the influence of SMM in the creation of brand attachment. The study examines which perceived characteristics of Social Media Marketing help to develop the emotional attachment that consumers feel towards brands. The perceived SMM characteristics are entertainment, interaction, trendiness, and customization and the dimensions of emotional brand attachment are affection, connection and passion. The data were collected from 215 respondents who have followed one or more brand/(s) in Social Media and are between the age of 18 and 40. The hypotheses are tested using regression analysis. The hypotheses testing showed that the perceived characteristics of entertainment, interaction, trendiness, and customization positively influence the affection dimension of emotional brand attachment. This means that the respondents feel love towards the brand they follow on Social Media. The perceived characteristic of Entertainment has the most significant influence on affection. The emotional attachment dimension of passion is influenced by the perceived SMM characteristics of entertainment and customization. Thus a customized and enjoyable content help to generate the feeling of delight and captivity in the social media audience. The study shows that connection is formed with entertainment, interaction and trendiness. The results obtained from the study would help companies understand how effective SMM is in the creation of brand attachment.

**Keywords:** Social Media Marketing, Brand Attachment, Entertainment, Trendiness, Customisation, Interaction, Affection, Connection, Passion

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## 1. Introduction

Social media platforms are playing an extensively important role in the daily lives of people as people increasingly look at them and the interactions that people have, have become virtual. People increasingly look at social media applications as an important part of their daily life and are more likely to move their interactions to virtual platforms (i.e. Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter). Companies are now focusing on advertising through social media as it is less costly and will reach the right customer.

There were 500 million active Internet Users in early 2019 and according to Statista, currently, the number is at 560 million users. Only 17% of the total Indian Population could access the internet in 2015. There seems to be a budding interest among marketers to experiment with Social Media platforms for endorsement due to its large reach among mobile phone users worldwide. With the advent of Social Media networks and platforms globally, new opportunities for growth and selling are coming up. In today's world, it has become more and more important for companies to promote their products via social media platforms so that they reach the target audience, increase the word-of-mouth for their products and achieve their desired sales target (Bao, 2014). In recent years, many firms have begun to utilize social media to engage customers with their brands (Okazaki, et. al., 2015), thus paving the way to the branch of Social Media Marketing (SMM). SMM activities are sub-parts of online marketing activities which provides a completion to traditional promotion strategies which are web-based (Barefoot & Szabo, 2010).

Consumers often use social media accounts to follow their most liked brands on their social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram to get latest happenings and information of the latest products, to access special promotions, to receive discounts and to get to know more news regarding the company. Valuable consumer brand relationship provides many benefits to the consumer (eg, consideration in price, special treatment etc. (Liao, Wang, & Yeh, 2014)

The study is being done to find the influence of SMM in the creation of brand attachment. We try to examine which perceived characteristics of Social Media Marketing helps to develop the emotional attachment that consumers feel with brands. The perceived SMM characteristics are entertainment, interaction, trendiness, and customization (Kim & Ko, 2012). Drawing from the above studies, this research examines how the perceived social media marketing characteristics influence brand attachment. The data were collected from 215 respondents. The results obtained from the study would help companies understand how effective SMM is in forming brand attachment.

## **2. Literature review**

Social media is defined as a group of applications that are internet-based which builds on the web 2.0 foundations, which Allows for creation, also for the exchange of content generated by the user (Kaplan, 2010). Social Media Marketing (SMM) is the use of web-based social networking sites and informal communities to showcase the products and services of a company. Social media marketing provides organizations with an approach to arrive at new clients, draw in with existing clients, and promote their ideas. Otherwise called "digital marketing" and "e-marketing," SMM allows marketers to understand the height of their success. More than 50 percent of social media users follow brands on social media on a global scale (van Belleghem, 2011) and up to 29 percent follow trends and find product reviews and information, and 20 percent comment on what is hot or new or to review products (Gallup, 2014). Social media gives the consumers a say, by which they can share their experience with any person in any corner of the world. Social media has in turn changed the views of communication between the marketers and end consumers

Social Media helps to build social networks and social relations among people who share interests, backgrounds, activities or have real-life connections. Social network sites include Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, Skype, Snapchat, LinkedIn, Telegram, Tik-Tok etc. These networking sites are user-generated content sites, that provide for some means by which users can connect and communicate

with one another. Sites that offer a means of connection can be either business-related (e.g., LinkedIn) or social in nature (e.g., Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook) (Gangadharbatla, 2008). These networking sites are not just means of communication, but it has influential power on information sharing. Large majorities of people are active in their social networking pages and get influenced by these sites. As a cost-effective advertisement tool, many retailers, manufactures and advertisers s are today choosing social network marketing as their medium of advertising (Gangadharbatla, 2008; Jones, et., al., 2009). With less investment, the reach becomes massive and thereby evoking an impulse buying behaviour in the mind of customers. Retailers and manufacturers, therefore, have included social networking sites in their promotion mix in order to engage their customers and create new ones (Gangadharbatla, 2008; Jones, et., al., 2009).

Many previous studies have used an S-O-R framework (Stimulus-organism-response) to study how consumers respond to Social Media Marketing (Angella&. Kim, 2015). These studies prove that SMM helps in the generation of positive emotional response from consumers (Angella& Kim, 2015) and generate brand awareness and brand loyalty (Kim and Ko, 2012). The perceived SMM characteristics are entertainment, interaction, trendiness, and customization (Kim and Ko, 2012; Seo and Park, 2018)

Entertainment refers to the fun and plays emerging from the social media experience (Agichtein, et. al., 2008). Consumers who interact with social media for these hedonistic reasons are seeking entertainment and pleasure (Bagozzi&Utpal, 2002).Interaction is the information sharing and opinion exchange with others. Today, Social media interaction is changing communication between brands and customers.Brands post unique content and is always active and open in discussions, and are helpful with practical matters in order to promote interaction. Trendiness is defined as providing the latest information about products or services by the brand (Bruno et. al., 2016). Most consumers rely on Social media for news and hot discussion topics. With customisation, it is possible to provide individually optimized information to customers. The customization of social media is also a tool for companies to communicate the uniqueness of their brands and improve preferences for and loyalty to those brands (Martin &Todorov, 2010).

Creating emotional brand attachment is a key branding issue in today's marketing world. e Emotional brand attachment is the bond that connects a consumer to a brand characterized by feelings of affection, connection and passion (Thomson et al., 2005). Affection refers to "consumer feelings of peace, love and friendliness towards a brand" (Dwivedi, et. al., 2018, p. 1181). Connection refers to the "feelings of being attached and bonded with a brand", while passion is the "feelings of consumer delight and captivation with a brand" (Dwivedi, et. al., 2018, p. 1181).

### **3. Research Methodology**

The research has Descriptive Design, using an online sample survey using google forms.

#### ***3.1. Population***

Indian citizens who follow any brand on their Social Media page within the age group of 18-40

#### ***3.2. Sample:***

The sample consists of 215 respondents chosen through a convenient sampling technique. Data was collected in the form of a structured questionnaire through Google Forms and 217 responses were collected, out of which the people who were not following any brands on Social Media were removed. Hence, we were left with 215 responses for the data analysis.

**3.3. Statistical tools used**

The respondent profiles were analysed using percentage analysis. The mean and standard deviation of each of the sub-constructs are calculated. Each hypothesis was tested for significance based on the regression statistics.

**3.4. Instrument:**

The respondents were administered a structured questionnaire using Google forms. The Questionnaire has 5 Demographic Questions, followed by scale items to measure the constructs. The scale items for SMM were adapted from Seo& Park, 2018 and the scale items for brand attachment were adapted from Dwivedi, et. al., 2019. (Table 1)

**Table 1: Construct Scale Items**

Construct	Sub-constructs	Scale Items
Social Media Marketing	Entertainment	The social media page of the brand I follow is enjoyable.
		The content shared by the social media page of the brand I follow is enjoyable.
	Interaction	Information sharing is possible on the social media page of the brand I follow.
		The discussion and exchange of opinions are possible on the social media page of the brand I follow.
		The expression of opinions is easy on the social media page of the brand I follow.
	Trendiness	The information shared on the social media page of the brand I follow is up to date.
		The use of social media page of brands I follow is fashionable.
	Customization	The information that I need can be found in the social media page of the brand I follow.
		The social media page of the brand I follow provided the information that I needed.
Brand Attachment	Affection	I feel that I love the brand I follow on Social Media
		My feelings towards the brand I follow on Social Media can be characterized by affection
	Connection	My feelings towards the brand I follow on Social Media can be characterized by a sense of personal

		connection
		I feel attached to the brand I follow on Social Media
	Passion	I am passionate about the brand I follow on Social Media
		My feelings towards the brand I follow on Social Media can be characterized by delight
		I feel captivated by the brand I follow on Social Media

### 3.5. Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

1. To identify the effects of the perceived characteristic of Entertainment on Brand Attachment
2. To identify the effects of the perceived characteristic of Interaction on Brand Attachment
3. To identify the effects of the perceived characteristic of Trendiness on Brand Attachment
4. To identify the effects of the perceived characteristic of Customisation on Brand Attachment

### 3.6. Hypothesis

In order to examine the objectives, the following hypotheses were formed:

**H1:** There is a significant relationship between the perceived characteristic of Entertainment and Brand Attachment (Affection)

**H2:** There is a significant relationship between the perceived characteristic of Entertainment and Brand Attachment (Connection).

**H3:** There is a significant relationship between the perceived characteristic of Entertainment and Brand Attachment (Passion).

**H4:** There is a significant relationship between the perceived characteristic of Interaction and Brand Attachment (Affection)

**H5:** There is a significant relationship between the perceived characteristic of Interaction and Brand Attachment (Connection).

**H6:** There is a significant relationship between the perceived characteristic of Interaction and Brand Attachment (Passion).

**H7:** There is a significant relationship between the perceived characteristic of Trendiness and Brand Attachment (Affection)

**H8:** There is a significant relationship between the perceived characteristic of Trendiness and Brand Attachment (Connection).

**H9:** There is a significant relationship between the perceived characteristic of Trendiness and Brand Attachment (Passion).

**H10:** There is a significant relationship between the perceived characteristic of Customisation and Brand Attachment (Affection)

**H11:** There is a significant relationship between the perceived characteristic of Customisation and Brand Attachment (Connection).

**H12:** There is a significant relationship between the perceived characteristic of Customisation and Brand Attachment (Passion).

## 4. Analysis and findings

**4.1. Demographic Profile:**

Only respondents who are followers of one or more brands on social media pages between the age group of 18-40 are included in the study. 215 questionnaires were selected for the final analysis. The sample comprised of 108 male respondents (50.23% of respondents) and 107 female respondents (49.77% of respondents), showing no significant difference in the distribution of the respondents between the gender. The present study span over respondents of varying age groups between 18 to 40. The distribution of the demographic characteristics of the sample is summarised in Table 2.

**Table 2: Demographic characteristics of the sample**

Characteristics	Number of	Percentage of respondents
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	108	50.23%
Female	107	49.77%
Total	215	100%
<b>Age</b>		
18-23	105	49%
23-29	82	38%
29-35	17	8%
35-41	11	5%
Total	215	100%
<b>Educational Qualification</b>		
Undergraduate	11	5%
Graduate	95	44%
Post Graduate	103	48%
Others	6	3%
Total	215	100%
<b>Occupation</b>		0%
Student	19	9%
Employed	150	70%
Self-Employed	29	13%
Unemployed/ Homemaker	17	8%
Total	215	100%
<b>Monthly family income</b>		
Upto Rs.20000	29	13%
Rs. 20001-40000	85	40%
Rs. 40001-60000	22	10%
Rs. 60001-80000	32	15%
Rs. 80001-100000	16	7%
Above 100001	31	14%
Total	215	100%

#### 4.2. Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics gives the mean and standard deviation for all the variables under study. The number of respondents is 215. Table 3 shows the mean and standard deviation of each of the variables. The means range from 2.93 to 3.37 for the variables and the standard deviations range from 0.841 to 0.951.

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics**

	Entertainment	Interaction	Trendiness	Customization	Affection	Connection	Passion
N	215	215	215	215	215	215	215
Mean	3.25	2.93	3.37	3.21	3.12	3.23	2.13
Median	3.33	3.00	3.50	3.33	3.00	3.00	2.50
Std. Deviation	.859	.928	.841	.916	.923	.928	.951
Minimum	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Maximum	5	5	5	5	5	5	5

#### 4.3. Reliability of constructs:

Reliability refers to the extent to which the same answers can be obtained using the same instruments more than one time. Reliability test is essential for analysis and inference. They help to find out whether the responses to question related to each latent variable are correlated with themselves. For measurement to have good reliability, both composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha coefficients should be greater than 0.7. All the variables under study had adequate reliability with Cronbach's alpha value of over 0.7 (Table 4)

**Table 4: Reliability measure of constructs**

Reliability construct	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha
Entertainment	2	0.74
Interaction	3	0.94
Trendiness	2	0.81
Customization	2	0.87
Affection	2	0.86
Connection	2	0.86
Passion	2	0.87

#### 4.4 Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis testing is done using significant level testing on each path of influence between dependent and the independent variables using regression analysis.

**Table 3: Hypothesis Testing**

Hypothesis	Independent variable	Dependent variable	Un-standardised coefficients		t	P	R2	Hypothesis supported
			$\beta$	Std. error				
H1	Entertainment	Affection	0.805	0.805	9.906	0.000	0.5747	Supported
H2	Entertainment	Connection	0.521	0.521	4.710	0.000	0.3156	Supported
H3	Entertainment	Passion	0.557	0.557	2.867	0.004	0.4213	Supported
H4	Interaction	Affection	0.336	0.336	3.096	0.002	0.3090	Supported
H5	Interaction	Connection	0.862	0.785	9.268	0.000	0.6750	Supported
H6	Interaction	Passion	0.143	0.056	7.623	0.430	0.1123	Not Supported
H7	Trendiness	Affection	0.875	0.823	4.954	0.000	0.5246	Supported
H8	Trendiness	Connection	0.786	0.682	3.026	0.003	0.432	Supported
H9	Trendiness	Passion	0.067	0.067	0.464	0.642	0.3160	Not Supported
H10	Customization	Affection	0.775	0.523	4.974	0.000	0.5676	Supported
H11	Customization	Connection	0.21	0.198	1.389	0.053	0.015	Not Supported
H12	Customization	Passion	0.757	0.557	5.467	0.009	0.4903	Supported

**5. Conclusion:**

With the emergence of Social Media as a successful communication medium for brands, there has been an increasing number of studies that chart the implications of social media for brand building. This study analyses the importance of the perceived characteristics of SMM in forming the passion, connection and affection dimensions of emotional brand attachment. The paths have been analysed using regression analysis. The hypotheses testing showed that the perceived characteristics of entertainment, interaction, trendiness, and customization positively influence the affection dimension of emotional brand attachment. This means that the respondents feel love towards the brand they follow on Social Media. The perceived characteristic of Entertainment has the most significant influence on affection (from R<sup>2</sup> value). The emotional attachment dimension of passion is influenced



by the perceived SMM characteristics of entertainment and customization. Interaction and trendiness do not affect passion. Thus a customized and enjoyable content help to generate the feeling of delight and captivity in the social media audience. The study shows that connection is formed with entertainment, interaction and trendiness. It defies the popular belief that it is customisation that leads to the formation of a personal connection with the brand.

## 6. Implication of the study

As the studies relating to SMM and its influence on brand attachment is limited, this study provides significant insight into this area and therefore contribute some managerial implications in social media marketing. This study shows that the perceived SMM characteristics are entertainment, interaction, trendiness, and customization influence the dimensions of brand attachment- affection, connection and passion differently. Hence Social Media marketing managers should include in their communication with customers, the different characteristics of SMM. However, since today's mediascape is constantly changing, periodic assessment of the findings of the study is required to continually assess the influence of SMM on brand attachment.

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