LEVERAGING SOCIAL STORYTELLING TO FOSTER

CONSUMER BRAND ENGAGEMENT

By

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Storytelling's potential to mentally transport consumers and influence their attitudes, behaviors and beliefs has been traversed by researchers from diverse fields, including anthropology, psychology, and marketing. In addition, the effects of brand stories on consumers have been tested in contexts ranging from television commercials, to print advertisements, to travel brochures. The popularity of social media usage among brands and consumers alike suggests a need to explore storytelling within this relatively new context. In 2017, an estimated 90% of U.S. companies were harnessing social media to increase brand awareness, and of an estimated 4.57 billion internet consumers worldwide, about 3.6 billion use social media (Clement, 2020a, 2020b). Yet, there is limited research on using social storytelling to develop engagement between consumers and brands. This dissertation relies on a quasi-experimental study to investigate if social storytelling ads that use narrative structure can foster consumer brand engagement (CBE), specifically when narrative transportation, self-brand connections and co-creation serve as mediators. Further, it explores the moderating role of self-referencing during the storytelling process. Four significant research findings are presented: 1) social storytelling advertisements led to consumer brand engagement when mediated by narrative transportation and partially mediated by self-brand connections; 2) self-brand connections, effectuated through storytelling, served as an antecedent to consumer brand engagement, despite being conceptualized by prior literature as only an outcome of CBE; 3) through narrative transportation, social storytelling led to co-creation; and 4) self-referencing did not significantly strengthen the positive relationship between storytelling and narrative transportation. These contributions offer marketing practitioners meaningful insights about leveraging social storytelling to foster consumer brand engagement.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"A story only matters, I suspect, to the extent that the people in the story change."

—Neil Gaiman, *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, 2013

From nursery rhymes to television sitcoms, stories are integral to our lives from the moment we take our first breath. According to the founder of analytical psychology, Carl Jung, we are born with the unconscious ability to identify a range of emotions (e.g., love and apathy, disgust and delight, comfort and fear) because we are each biologically wired through DNA with certain character archetypes (Megehee & Spake, 2012; Woodside, Sood, & Miller, 2008). As a result, we are apt to conceptualize our thoughts and emotions through stories (Pace, 2008; Woodside et al., 2008). Children who play house to emulate a loving family, courageously don superhero capes to ward off evil, or transform into doctors to care for their ailing stuffed animals demonstrate how stories can mentally and emotionally transport us to new and familiar places. Our ability to travel into a story's world continues even as we age through adulthood.

A *story* can be defined as an episode of interrelated actions that occur chronologically and have consequences (Escalas, 2004a; Gilliam & Flaherty, 2015).

Strong brands are built and maintained on strong stories, and companies have long capitalized on our affinity for stories (Mucundorfeanu, 2018). In a recent study of how brands use storytelling, 57% of brands reported believing that stories were somewhat effective or very effective as part of their social media strategy (Buffer, 2019). Firms primarily leverage three types of stories to engage consumers: brand stories, product/service stories, and consumer-generated stories. Brand stories are used to personify companies and convey their missions and values in ways that resonate with consumers. For example, Patagonia's brand story is centered around the company's founder, Yvon Choinard. The tale starts with Choinard's outdoor adventures as a teenager, transitions to his desire to fill a need by inventing pitons (stakes used for rock climbing). It ends with the pride he and his friends felt from being rebels who idolized well-known environmentalists like Muir, Emerson, and Thoreau. Stories that evoke such archetypes can engage consumers because they are prone to sympathize or empathize with the emotions and perspectives of a story's character, particularly when the character relates to the consumer's self-concept, such as a person who cares about Planet Earth (Bublitz et al., 2016; Escalas, 2007).

Patagonia also relies on telling stories about its products and services to extoll its climate-friendly brand virtues and engage customers. For example, the company shares how it evolved its pitons into aluminum chocks to reduce environmental damage. In 1972, the chocks' product story was featured in Patagonia's first catalog with an editorial from the company's owners and a 14-page essay by Sierra climber Doug Robinson on how to use chocks (Bodzioch, 2017). His essay began with this paragraph:

> *There is a word for it, and the word is clean. Climbing with only nuts and*
>
> *runners for protection is clean climbing. Clean because the rock is left*

unaltered by the passing climber. Clean because nothing is hammered into the

rock and then hammered back out, leaving the rock scarred and the next

climber's experience less natural. Clean because the climber's protection

leaves little trace of his ascension. Clean is climbing the rock without

changing it, a step closer to organic climbing for the natural man.

In this short passage, the word "clean" is mentioned six times, signaling Patagonia's desire to position the brand as pure and virtuous in its environmental stewardship role.

In addition to initiating brand stories to evangelize its values, Patagonia invites customers to share personal stories about their adventures wearing the brand, using the Tumblr microblogging platform embedded in its "Worn Wear" website. Hanna from Malibu, California posted a childhood memory of the bright turquoise fleeces her parents made the family wear. She goes on to say she will inherit her parents' fleeces and carry on this "family uniform" tradition in her own clan. And Emily of Bozeman, Montana proudly shares that her Patagonia jacket stood in as her veil when snowfall graced her wedding. She now affectionately calls it her "wedding jacket." By creating a platform for consumers to share their own brand-related stories, Patagonia fosters story *co-creation*: consumers' voluntary, explicit, and active contribution to a brand or its offerings at any stage of the marketing lifecycle (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014). Patagonia's investment in stories demonstrates that storytelling is an essential strategy in its marketing activities. The company's efforts also show what empirical research has confirmed: a story's persuasive influence lies in its power to elicit consumers' attention, mentally transport them into a story's world, and make brands, as well as their products and services, more memorable (Delgadillo & Escalas, 2003; Escalas, 2004b; Green & Brock 2000; van Laer et al., 2014).

Patagonia's examples also indicate that storytelling is a viable means for fostering consumers' brand engagement. Consumer brand engagement has been conceptualized in several ways in marketing and consumer behavior literature, ranging from consumers' psychological states of mind to their behaviors toward the brand (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1

Consumer Brand Engagement Conceptualizations

Authors	Definition/Conceptualization
Calder et al. (2015)	Psychological state that occurs by virtue of interactive, co-creative customer experiences with a focal agent/object, under a specific set of context-dependent conditions
Dwivedi (2015)	Consumers' positive, fulfilling, brand-use-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption.
Fernandes & Moreira (2019)	Consumer brand engagement (CBE) has been defined as a consumer's cognitive, emotional, behavioral, co-creative brand-related activities related to specific interactions (Hollebeek et al., 2014) and is expected to have a significant role in building increasingly experiential relationships with consumers, namely brand relationships (Dessart et al., 2015).
France et al. (2016)	A psychological state, distinct to behavioural manifestations, which are considered a consequence of customer-brand engagement. Conceptualises two contributors to customer-brand engagement: a firm-led platform for driving engagement and customer-centred influences.
Harmeling et al. (2017)	A behavioral conceptualization of customer engagement better captures its implicit and explicit meaning, and narrowing and clarifying this definition can help establish more effective building blocks for strong theory.
Hollebeek (2011a)	The level of a customer's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral investment in specific brand interactions.
Hollebeek (2011b)	The level of an individual customer's motivational, brand-related, and context-dependent state of mind characterised by specific levels of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural activity in direct brand interactions.
Hollebeek et al. (2014)	A consumer's positively valenced brand-related cognitive, emotional, and behavioral activity during or related to focal consumer/brand interactions.
Kumar & Nayak (2019a; 2019b)	The customers' cognitive, affective, and behavioural investment in specific brand interactions (Hollebeek, 2011a; Brodie et al., 2013).

Consistent with Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie (2014), this dissertation defines *consumer brand engagement* as a consumer's volition to contribute cognitive, emotional, or behavioral resources to a brand because, according to prior relationship marketing research, consumer interactions with a brand are more holistically observable not only as actions but also via emotions and thoughts (Gordon, McKeage, & Fox, 1998; 2014; Sheth, 2017). Hollebeek et al.'s (2014) conceptualization may be particularly salient when storytelling is involved because narratives have been shown to evoke cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses in consumers (Ching et al., 2013; Mattila, 2000). Further, such responses are foundational in literature expositing consumer experiences (Pace, 2008; Pera, Viglia, & Furlan, 2016). In their framing of engagement, Hollebeek et al. (2014) simultaneously build on prior studies while leaving space for new research. Such flexibility is important given the lack of consensus surrounding the concept of consumer engagement. Considering the allure of storytelling, and in an age of unprecedented online access to consumers willing to engage, a new question is worthy of exploration: How might brands leverage stories told through social media (social storytelling) to foster consumer brand engagement?

Social Media and Storytelling

Social media is an umbrella term to describe platforms that operate differently (e.g., YouTube for videos, Instagram for photographs, Twitter for micro-blogging, LinkedIn for career networking, and Facebook for social networking) but share a common business purpose: enabling firms and consumers to engage with one another in unprecedented ways (Farook & Abeysekara, 2016). Exploring storytelling in the interactive setting offered by social media has received limited research attention (see Table 1.2). Yet, in 2017, an estimated 90% of North American companies that were using social media did so to increase

brand awareness, and over 80% were using it to develop and maintain consumer engagement (Hootesuite, 2018). Further, of an estimated 4.57 billion internet users worldwide, about 3.6 billion use social media (Clement, 2020a, 2020b). These figures suggest that companies may benefit from a deeper understanding of the antecedents and outcomes of social storytelling.

Table 1.2

Storytelling Study Contexts

Authors	Context	Consumer Focal Construct
Adaval & Wyer (1998)	Vacation travel brochure	Information processing of narratives
Stutts & Barker (1999)	Television advertisements	Value conflict in image advertising
Green & Brock (2000)	Written narratives	Narrative transportation's effect on beliefs
Matilla (2000)	Print advertisements	Influence of customer familiarity with service on response to story-based vs. list-based print ads
Escalas (2004a)	Print advertisements	Mental simulation in response to narrative structure
Escalas (2004b)	Storyboard print advertisements	Self-brand connections
Escalas & Stern (2003)	Television advertisements	Consumer empathy and sympathy responses to TV drama commercials
Escalas (2007)	Print advertisements	Narrative self-referencing vs. analytical self-referencing
Megehee & Spake (2012)	Consumer blog entries	Meaning of luxury brands through visual narrative art
Elder & Krishna (2012)	Print advertisements	Mental simulation via product orientation
Singh & Sonnenburg (2012)	Conceptual paper (no empirical study)	Brand story co-creation in social media through the metaphor of improv theater
Gilliam & Zablah (2013)	Storytelling during retail sales encounters	Attitude toward salesperson and product
Table 1.2 (cont'd.)		

Gilliam et al. (2013)	Retail sales encounters	Dimensions of storytelling by retail salespeople
Ching et al. (2013)	Website advertisements	Effectiveness of four advertising design elements
Hsiao et al. (2013)	Online blogs	Intention to adopt travel products
Lundqvist et al. (2012)	Written brand story and product packaging	Impact of stories on consumer brand experience
van Laer et al. (2014)	Published and unpublished articles	Meta-analysis of the antecedents and outcomes of narrative transportation
Granitz & Forman (2015)	Semi-structured interviews with consumers regarding brand stories	Millennial consumers' preferred story types and media
Dessart et al. (2015)	Semi-structured interviews with social media users	Consumer engagement in online brand communities
Pera (2016)	"CouchSurfing" online travel community	Self-storytelling's effect on personal reputation
Kim et al. (2016)	Website advertisements for luxury products	Consumer brand engagement
Dessart (2018)	Between-subjects experimental design using YouTube advertisements	Role of characters in advertisements
Gilliam & Rockwell (2018)	Retail sales encounters	Metaphors in retail selling
Weber & Grauer (2019)	Between-subjects experimental design using Facebook feed screenshots	Narrative quality (high, low)

Social media's emergence has facilitated a focal shift from marketing as commercial activities to marketing as socio-commercial activities (Hughes et al., 2016). By co-creating stories together, consumers and companies can be partners in assigning meaning to brands and their offerings (Laurell & Söderman, 2018; Scholz & Smith, 2019). Consumers may be more likely to become emotionally invested in stories they helped to create, and brands are increasingly relying on co-creation as a way to connect with consumers. For example, beauty brand Dove leveraged social storytelling co-creation through its "Real Beauty Should be

Shared" fill-in-the-blank contest on Facebook. Consumers were invited to add their own words to existing sentences to describe how their friends and loved ones personify real beauty (capitalized words added by the consumer):

> *My friend AMY has real beauty. She has the most beautiful SMILE, and I love her* *MORE THAN SHE KNOWS.*

Contest winners were featured in Dove's marketing campaign, which further reinforced the company's brand story by using everyday people rather than professional models in the advertisements. The interactive nature of social media has empowered consumers to not only source products and services but also to be stakeholders in their development and consumption. Further, this co-created story example is about more than Dove; it is also about the writer's dear friend. A consumer who filled in the blanks contributed her feelings about her friend to the story she helped co-create, paving the way for connecting her self-identity with the brand. Additionally, by using pronouns such as "My" and "I," the consumer is *self-referencing*—evaluating information through the lens of its relevance to her self-concept. Self-referencing is a cognitive activity shown to prime consumers for persuasion (Burnkrant & Unnava, 1995; Escalas, 2007) and *mental simulation* (Ching et al., 2013), a cognitive response through which consumers imagine interacting with a brand or product by referencing memories or hypothesizing about the future (Elder & Krishna, 2012; Escalas, 2004a, 2004b).

Automobile maker Land Rover offers another example of leveraging social storytelling to engage consumers. In 2014, the company commissioned a best-selling author to create a transmedia (i.e., spreading content across multiple media types/platforms) story named "The Vanishing Game." Combining video, cinematography, photography, animation,

narration, and music, the experience allowed consumers to interact with select words—such as "river" to see the SUV crossing a waterway—discover hidden story elements, and hear stories told by loyal Land Rover customers. Land Rover's narrative approach opened consumers' cognitive gateways to narrative transportation as they imagined being in the story's virtual world.

Land Rover's goal was to recapture a time when consumers viewed the brand's SUVs as vehicles of adventure rather than only as luxury automobiles. In a recap of the campaign's success, a Land Rover spokesperson said, "an amazing story is nothing without an engaged audience. Our challenge became how to utilize one of the oldest storytelling mediums in a modern, digital landscape" (Boyd, 2015). The company credits the multi-faceted campaign— which included a downloadable e-book as well—with a 10% increase in brand awareness among its target audience and over 275,000 social media engagements (i.e., liking, commenting on, or sharing posts). Land Rover also made gains toward its goal to position the brand as adventurous, which it measured via content analysis of terms such as "versatility" and "innovative."

Because stories can conjure strong consumer responses, I propose that storytelling via social media can lead to consumer brand engagement when moderated by *self-referencing* (evaluating information through its relevance to themselves) and mediated by *narrative transportation* (becoming mentally part of a story's world), *self-brand connections* (incorporating brands into their self-concept) and *co-creation* (actively contributing to a brand at any stage in the marketing lifecycle based on their own volition).

Social media is a particularly cogent context for researching brand engagement through storytelling for three primary reasons. First, when consumers are exposed to stories,

they tend to reference self as they attempt to process the story's narrative; social media has been empirically shown to heighten self-identity behaviors in consumers (Escalas, 2007; Pace, 2008). Second, stories are most influential when they prime interactive exchanges, such as co-creation; social media was designed for such behaviors (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). Third, social media's structure enables stories to be told using multiple media; empirical research offers evidence that storytelling's ability to influence consumer behavior is enhanced when visuals are used (Adaval & Wyer, 1998; Hsiao, Lu, & Lan, 2013; Kim, Lloyd, & Cervellon, 2016).

Studying the relationships noted above fills three important research gaps in the marketing literature. First, it advances our understanding of social media as a critical context to examine how storytelling can lead to consumer brand engagement. Such an understanding is relevant because consumers now rely on social media networks to learn about brands and products (Moore, Raymond, & Hopkins, 2015). Also, over the last several years, companies have increasingly shifted their advertising budgets away from traditional media—e.g., yellow pages and newspaper ads—to digital realms, like Facebook and Google ads (eMarketer, 2019).

Second, this dissertation challenges consumer engagement literature by positing that co-creation can serve as an antecedent to consumer brand engagement. Although extant literature positions co-creation as an outcome that occurs once engagement has been effectuated (e.g., Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014; van Doorn et al., 2010), a departure is justifiable for two reasons: (1) Thus far, co-creation addressed in consumer engagement literature relates to the customer creating value for the company as a post-engagement behavior. This dissertation, however, draws upon evidence in storytelling literature that

narratives can be co-created with consumers and that the narrative processes that consumers engage in when evaluating stories may lead to consumer brand engagement. There is empirical convergence on storytelling's ability to activate mental processes that may be regarded as antecedents to co-creation, and these antecedents have been shown to influence brand involvement (Escalas, 2003; van Laer et al., 2014); and (2) social media's interactive nature allows for co-creation to occur at all stages of the lifecycle (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014). In the context of storytelling, co-creation occurs when consumers take the initiative to augment a brand's narrative. For example, in the Patagonia microblogging examples, after post-purchase experiences with the brand, Hanna and Emily are each co-creating the company's brand story by connecting their clothing with personal memories. In addition, Emily shares that she will pass along the Patagonia tradition to future generations of her family, which suggests she is mentally simulating about future purchases.

Third, this research advances the novel idea that *self-brand connections* mediate the relationship between social storytelling and consumer brand engagement because consumers who have incorporated a brand into their self-concept may be more likely to continue to engage with that brand. Storytelling has been shown to foster connections between consumers and brands as consumers rely on their personal memories to interpret incoming story information (Escalas, 2004b). Within social media, the content sharing that inherently occurs on various networking platforms may strengthen users' sense of identity and lead to self-brand connections (Granitz & Forman, 2015). Also, stories contribute to connections between consumers and brands by offering conversational topics to engage in together and allowing consumers to see themselves within the brand's story (Escalas, 2004b; Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012).

Dissertation Organization

This dissertation comprises five chapters. Chapter I has provided an overview of the dissertation. Chapter II, Conceptual Development, includes a synthesis of salient literature from anthropology, marketing, and psychology to exposit storytelling, narrative processing, social media, branding, and related behavioral and psychological outcomes. Chapter III, Methods, presents the collection of data and this study's analytical approach. Chapter IV, Results, details the findings of the data analysis in regard to the hypothesized relationships between the model variables. Chapter V concludes with a discussion on the empirical and practical implications of the findings, future research ideas, and the study's limitations.

CHAPTER II

CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

This chapter presents a synthesis of salient literature from anthropology,

marketing, and psychology to exposit storytelling, narrative processing, social media,

branding, and related behavioral and psychological outcomes.

Storytelling and Narrative Processing

Storytelling. Storytelling is an age-old construct dating back to ancient Egypt, a

period when visual hieroglyphics and oral tales were the prevailing distribution channels.

Stories have always been a part of civilization as reflections of daily life because our

brains are naturally wired to think in terms of narratives rather than arguments (Woodside

et al., 2008). Storytelling has enjoyed robust research attention for its propensity to move

brands beyond surface relationships with consumers to deep connections that engage and

empower them (Dessart & Pitardi, 2016; Harmeling et al., 2017). While there is general

agreement on the usefulness of story narratives, this utility is conceptualized in myriad

ways in the research literature: to clarify goals (Escalas, 2004a, 2004b), evoke empathy

and sympathy (Escalas & Stern, 2003; Mooradian, Matzler & Szykman, 2008), effectuate

persuasion (Green & Brock, 2000), foster loyalty (Papadatos, 2006), aid information

processing (Adaval & Wyer, 1998), encourage word-of-mouth behavior (Delgadillo &

Escalas, 2003), establish salesperson credibility and rapport with consumers (Gilliam &

Flaherty, 2015), strengthen brand attitudes (Ching et al., 2013), elicit co-creation (Singh

& Sonnenburg, 2012), and build self-brand connections (Escalas, 2004; Granitz & Forman, 2015).

Relevant to this dissertation is storytelling's ability to foster consumer brand engagement. Stories with a strong narrative structure can mentally prime consumers to engage with brands in a way that other content formats, such as a list of product features, cannot (Adaval, Isbell, & Wyer, 2007; Escalas, 2004; Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). Storytelling's resonance with consumers has been attributed to how we process information. The social stimuli we gather during our daily lives are stored in narrative form within memory (Adaval & Wyer, 1998; Escalas, 2004b). When we glean new information that does not readily present itself in a narrative format but we have enough prior knowledge to construe, we connect the information with that prior knowledge to form narratives that aid in our sensemaking (Adaval & Wyer, 1998; Gilliam & Rockwell, 2018; Woodside et al., 2018). However, when information is presented in a manner that misaligns with our knowledge (e.g., an unordered list), we may instead use non-narrative piecemeal processing. When piecemeal processing is activated, consumers do not tend to conjure mental images and are forced to consider bits of information individually.

Consequently, when they attempt to synthesize the information, they may give greater weight to particular details— including those that are negative or false—or even reject the entire argument. In contrast, stories told using narrative structure enable consumers to process information more holistically. As a result, they can transcend bounded (i.e., limited) rationality and paint a mental picture that compensates for ambiguous, erroneous, or incomplete facts (Gilliam & Flaherty, 2015). Hence, consumers

are more likely to be drawn to information presented in narrative format and can typically recall stories more readily than facts (Lundqvist et al., 2012).

Storytelling literature consistently advances two key attributes of effective narrative structure—causality and chronology (Bublitz et al., 2016; Escalas, 2004; Hsiao et al., 2013). *Causality* relates to the relationship between story components. These components enable the reader to infer cause and effect. *Chronology* refers to a story having a middle, beginning, and end. It also provides a frame of reference for the period of time, or temporal dimension, in which a story occurs (Bublitz et al., 2016; Delgadillo & Escalas, 2004b; Nielsen, Escalas & Hoeffler, 2018). Lacoste and La Rocca (2015) challenge the idea that chronology is a key characteristic of narrative structure, citing the detours and U-turns a narrator often takes when sharing a story. However, even when storytellers take a less linear approach, a beginning, middle, and end may be inferred by the listener.

When stories develop chronologically and causally, a plot is formed (Lundqvist et al., 2012). Story plots may increase the degree to which consumers are narratively transported into the story's setting (van Laer et al., 2014). Tension or conflict within a plot can play an important role in capturing consumers' attention while also advancing a central brand message or goal (Lundqvist et al., 2012; Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012; Woodside et al., 2008). Recent literature also suggests a third attribute as an essential story element— *character* (Hsiao et al., 2013; van Laer et al., 2014). Because people can more effectively self-reference when relating to other people, a story's characters can evoke emotional responses, such as sympathy and empathy (Escalas & Stern, 2003; Mooradian, Matzler & Szykman, 2008). When consumers feel sympathy or empathy for a story's character, it

helps facilitate their transportation into the story's world (van Laer et al., 2014). The cognitive and emotional processes that stories elicit through narrative transportation have been empirically linked to several benefits for brands, including positive word-of-mouth, stronger product evaluations, self-brand connections, and purchase intentions (Delgadillo & Escalas, 2003; Escalas, 2004b; Nielsen et al., 2018; van Laer et al., 2014).

Narrative Transportation. Researchers from a diverse range of disciplines, including psychology, anthropology, and marketing, have shown interest in the potential persuasive effects of *narrative transportation*, the process through which people mentally enter a story's world. These researchers suggest that when stories elicit narrative transportation, consumers are more open to being influenced and may exchange reality for the story world, subsequently demonstrating shifts in their real-world beliefs (Escalas, 2004; Green & Brock, 2000). Attitudes, intentions, and behaviors also become malleable when story consumers experience narrative transportation, weakening their defenses against being persuaded and making them more amenable to brand appeals (Escalas, 2004b; van Laer et al., 2014). For example, in their examination of antecedents that can lead to narrative transportation, van Laer and colleagues (2014) found evidence that narrative transportation can positively influence story receivers' attitudes toward a story and willingness to complete certain story-related actions. Such outcomes indicate that narrative transportation may heighten reception to brand messages and weaken persuasion knowledge (defense against persuasion attempts), a critical-thought gatekeeper that helps us mitigate against being

persuaded by others and aids us in crafting our own persuasive tactics (Friestad &

Wright, 1999; Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010).

Self-referencing. The concept of "self" comprises both our semantic

characteristics (e.g., weight, ethnicity, gender identity) and our life events (Burnkant &

Unnava, 1995). *Self-referencing* occurs when consumers process narratives by relating

the content to their self-constructs stored in memory (Burnkant and Unnava, 1995; Ching

et al., 2013; Escalas & Krishnamurthy, 1995). Self is a complex and highly organized

concept, creating the potential for myriad associations between words and a person's

memory structures (Burnkant & Unnava, 1995; Escalas, 2007). As a result, when using

second-person terms such as "you" and "your" in story narratives, brands may be able to

capture consumers' attention by stimulating self-referencing. For example, Verizon

Wireless's "Can You Hear Me Now" campaign created a scenario in which consumers

could relate to poor mobile phone reception while also invoking the term "You" to signal

reference to the consumer. When consumers connect their self-concept with a narrative,

their defenses against persuasion might be weakened (Escalas, 2007; Pace, 2008). Brands

also can capture our propensity for self-referencing by using stories that rely on

characters because consumers may empathize with those characters by relating them to

their self-constructs stored in memory.

Because referencing can trigger self-absorption during the elaboration process,

some researchers show that excessive self-referencing related to analytical (non-

narrative) processing may diminish the success of persuasion tactics (Burnkrant &

Unnava 1995; Escalas, 2007). However, self-referencing fostered by storytelling has been

shown to mitigate against this inverted-U dynamic by inducing positive attitudes toward

brand products when consumers are narratively transported into a story's world (Ching et al., 2013; Escalas, 2007). Social storytelling offers an appropriate setting for self-referencing to enhance storytelling effects, as narratives can be shared in both visual and text-based formats to appeal to consumers' sense of self. Also, social media platforms YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter provide advertising opportunities that draw on insights and metrics they have gathered about consumers to serve up personalized content.

Storytelling Outcomes

  Consumer Brand Engagement. *Consumer brand engagement* can be defined as a consumer's willingness to contribute cognitive, emotional, or behavioral resources to a brand. Relative to the well-established stream of research on relationship marketing, the concept of consumer brand engagement is nascent in marketing literature. The engagement concept spawned from the recognition that trust, commitment, and loyalty—three widely accepted brand benefits of relationship marketing—do not sufficiently account for the modern customer's collaborative role in shaping brands. Online social networks can incite strong emotional and cognitive responses, and they thrive on interactions between and among myriad actors, including customers, brands, salespeople, and other influencers (Hsiao et al., 2013; Karahanna, Xu, & Zhang, 2015). Today's consumers expect elevated brand experiences that cater to their emotional and cognitive needs via products and services that entertain them and fulfill their fantasies (Gambetti & Graffigna, 2010; Mucundorfeanu, 2018). Consumer brand engagement also can benefit companies. Engaged consumers may evangelize a brand through positive word-of-mouth, advising other consumers, or contributing to the brand's stories (Alalwan et al., 2017;

Sembada, 2018). As a result, companies may experience increased brand equity and purchase intention (Bublitz et al., 2016; Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014). Further, when customers contribute to the development of products and services, companies stand to gain financially for the long-term (van Doorn et al., 2010). Given the visibility of online consumer responses, it is plausible that social storytelling can multiply these benefits for companies.

Although sometimes conflated, engagement is distinct from the involvement and participation constructs (Brodie et al., 2011). Whereas engagement can be described as a consumer's active investment of cognitive, affective, and behavioral resources, involvement has been conceptualized as a state of mind, not a behavior, manifested from a consumer's perceived relevance of a brand based on personal desire, need or interest (Dessart, 2017; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan, 2014). Further, engagement goes beyond involvement as it is realized through proactive efforts related to a specific target, such as a brand (Brodie et al., 2011).

The concept of participation, or the extent to which a consumer is involved with producing or delivering a service, is closely related to co-creation. However, with participation, consumers choose from pre-determined options rather than truly creating those options with the company (van Doorn et al., 2010). An example of participation can be seen in American Girl's business model, which enables consumers to choose their doll's hair, clothing, facial features, and personality. Lego offers perhaps one of the most well-known co-creation examples, allowing customers to innovate with the company by designing new playsets. Lego playset designs that receive more than 10,000 votes are then considered for production. Recent examples of co-created Lego playsets include the

DeLorean car that actor Michael J. Fox drove in the "Back to the Future" movie and a 30th-anniversary "Ghostbusters" movie set (Gardner, 2018).

      Co-creation. Now more than ever, consumers are contributors at each juncture of the marketing process, including during product development, promotion, and service delivery (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014), a concept known as "co-creation." *Co-creation* can be defined as a customer's voluntary, active involvement, and interaction with a company's brand from product development through consumption (Payne et al., 2009). In the context of brand storytelling, consumers who co-create may shift from passive story receivers to active story contributors. According to Kozinets et al. (2010), practitioners who market through social media should expect that consumers will participate in narrative creation. Since platforms like YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter were developed to build social networks, foster relationships, and interact with each other and with brands, social media has expanded opportunities for co-creation between consumers and brands. A Hitachi-commissioned, multi-industry study of European businesses revealed that over half of respondents (*n*=433) believed that co-creation had transformed the way their organizations approached innovation, reduced new product development costs, improved the company's financial performance, created new business opportunities, and increased their firm's social impact.

      Co-creation literature developed from the service-dominant logic perspective, which is undergirded by the idea that service is not a specific type of exchange but is instead integral to any business. The service-dominant logic paradigm differs from goods-dominant exchange logic, which promoted a purely transactional point of view wherein suppliers make products and consumers simply buy them (Vargo and Lusch,

2004). Service-dominant logic is especially relevant in the era of social media because it acknowledges the two-way interaction between consumers and brands and views brands as nurturers of customers' needs and desires via the experiences they create for them (Payne et al., 2009.) Through social media platforms, brands may benefit from near-instantaneous insights about their products and services by leveraging customer feedback and user data. Consumers can play a role in shaping how brands respond to their needs and desires. Accordingly, consumers have evolved from brand-story hearers to brand-story co-creators (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). Co-creation can positively influence consumer responses to brands and their willingness to engage with them (Sembada, 2018). Although agreement on what constitutes engagement is largely lacking in the research literature, co-creation has been linked to consumer engagement in extant literature (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014; Sarkar & Banerjee, 2019).

Different kinds of co-creation can occur between brands and consumers, including having customers solve their own problems, offering them self-service opportunities, and engaging them to design a product (Payne et al., 2009). Successful brands embrace co-creation as an inherent evolution of how consumers engage with the company's products (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). For example, marketing professionals have lauded Nike's knack for providing consumers with product-related co-creational experiences. The company's 2018 "Nike on Air" contest gave participants the chance to attend workshops in six cities across the globe to develop new sneaker designs inspired by the unique attributes of their local communities. Six winners (one from each city) were selected by online votes from other consumers, and each shared personal stories about the thought process behind their designs. Nike then partnered with the winners to

manufacture prototypes of their shoes. Nike's example demonstrates how the advent of social media has made customer co-creation more accessible than ever.

Self-Brand Connections. *Self-brand connections*—when consumers incorporate brands into their mental concepts of self—it also can be a conduit for fostering consumers' brand engagement via social storytelling (Sembada, 2018). Self-brand connections can be built during storytelling when consumers evoke new nodes and memories through narrative processing. During this processing, they may strengthen their social identities in relation to the brand (Escalas, 2004b; Granitz & Forman, 2015). When a connection occurs, consumers tend to use the company's brand to express themselves, to demonstrate their self-concept to others, or to draw conclusions about themselves (Schmitt, 2012). Escalas (2004b) uncovered evidence that self-brand connections developed during narrative processing led to positive brand evaluations.

In empirical research, self-brand connections are positioned in varying roles: as drivers of consumer brand engagement (Sembada, 2018), as psychological outcomes of engagement (Kumar & Nayak, 2019b), and as consequences of engagement (Hollebeek et al., 2014). Although some researchers suggest that self-brand connections develop as a result of consumer brand engagement, research on narrative processing offers evidence that, via storytelling, self-brand connections can serve as antecedents to engagement. In her seminal article introducing the concept of self-brand connections, Escalas (2004b) found that ads with narratives created or enhanced self-brand connections by tapping into consumers' self-concept. Similarly, Granitz and Forman (2015) discovered that when creating new memory pathways through narrative processing, brand stories led to stronger self-brand connections.

Hypotheses and Theoretical Model

This dissertation advances the novel idea that self-brand connections mediate the relationship between narrative processing and consumers' brand engagement. Consumers who have incorporated a brand's social storytelling into their self-concept may be more likely to continue engaging with that brand.

Social Storytelling

Companies have used stories for decades to connect consumers with their brands; however, social media's proliferation has changed how consumers and brands engage with stories. Traditionally, a story's narrator is distinct from its listener. However, within social media, these lines have become blurred because listeners can supplant storytelling efforts by contributing their own actions and ideas. Consumers may post stories about their experiences with certain products and services—good or bad. Their perspectives can become part of a brand's story as other users view and interact with their comments. For example, when Peloton launched a television commercial for the 2019 holiday season in which a husband gave his wife an exercise bike for Christmas, a social media backlash swiftly followed, initiated by consumers who viewed the fictitious husband's gift as body-shaming behavior (Kelly, 2019). However, the actor who played the wife used the attention to her advantage, starring in another commercial sitting at a bar without her wedding ring. Both commercials were the subject of news stories, with some reporters analyzing the impact of the consumer-generated narratives on the company's stock prices (e.g., NPR.org, 2019; Gross, 2019; Steinberg, 2019).

Although exploration of storytelling in the context of social media has received limited research attention, storytelling literature has firmly established the elements that

make storytelling effective, particularly narrative structure. Stories with a strong narrative structure include thematically and temporally related events and comprise three key features: *Chronology* (clear beginning, middle, and end), *Causality* (required order of events), and *Character* (at least one protagonist or antagonist). A narrative structure can mentally prime consumers to engage with brands in a way that other content formats, such as lists of product features, cannot. Unlike piecemeal processing, wherein we evaluate bits of information individually, holistic processing enables consumers to imagine a sequence of events, such as how they might look swinging their new golf club and achieving a hole-in-one. Extant storytelling literature converges on the idea that when stories incorporate well-developed narrative structures and imagery, they are more likely to effectuate holistic narrative processing (Adaval et al., 2007; Escalas, 2004b; Laurell & Söderman, 2018; Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). Social storytelling may be especially adept at priming narrative transportation because social media platforms are designed to foster interaction with brands and their products or services (Brodie et al., 2013).

Narrative Transportation

Brands derive their meaning and deliver consumer experiences by telling stories (Escalas, 2004b; Granitz & Forman, 2015). Through narrative transportation, consumers become engrossed in a story's virtual setting (Escalas & Luce, 2003; Green & Brock, 2000). The Narrative Transportation Theory advances the idea that when people become enraptured within a story, their attitudes and intentions become increasingly malleable in alignment with that story (Dessart, 2018; Escalas, 2007; Stutts & Barker, 2016). Consumers exposed to stories are more open to persuasion and less likely to resist errors

or omissions in the information being presented (Adaval & Wyer, 1998). For example, in their study of consumer responses to vacation travel brochures, Adaval and Wyer (1998) found that consumers evaluated vacations more positively when features were provided in a narratively structured format rather than as an unorganized list. Thus, Hypothesis 1 is posited.

H1: *Social storytelling positively influences narrative transportation.*

Self-Referencing

Consumers' responses to stories told via social media may be heightened when self-referencing is evoked. Specifically, self-referencing may contribute to persuasion during the narrative transportation process (Escalas, 2007). Further, the development of narrative transportation will be strengthened when stories include self-referencing cues that a viewer can relate to, such as photographs of identifiable characters or second-person pronouns like "you" and "your" (Ching et al., 2013; Escalas, 2007; van Laer et al., 2014). Including relatable characters within a story might also aid self-referencing because consumers may vicariously identify with the character's feelings and perspectives and evaluate the story from the character's perspective (van Laer et al., 2014).

When people's imaginations and observations are accessed, it can lead to an activation of mirror neurons (Carr, 2011), biological reactions that help us feel connected with the emotions of others. As such, when processing narratives, consumers can intermingle their emotions with those of a story character, feel empathy for a character, or "try on" a character's identity (Escalas, 2003; Polyorat, Alden, & Kim, 2007). For example, Slater (1997) found that when exposed to characters who live healthy lifestyles,

story consumers engaged in healthier habits. Building on Escalas's (2007) findings that consumers exposed to narrative-based ads that leveraged second-person pronouns were more likely to evaluate products favorably because of narrative transportation, this dissertation proposes that self-referencing may strengthen the degree to which consumers engage in narrative transportation after exposure to social storytelling. Thus, Hypothesis 2 is posited.

H2: Self-referencing moderates the positive influence that social storytelling has on narrative transportation.

Self-Brand Connections

When a brand's story evokes narrative transportation, consumers often connect their self-identity, forming self-brand connections (Escalas, 2004b). Self-brand connections are primed when a brand satisfies consumers' psychological needs related to their self-identity (Escalas, 2004b; Granitz & Forman, 2015). Specifically, through the narrative transportation process, consumers may imagine themselves within the story and consequently formulate their sense of self based on how a product or service aligns with their values, especially if self-referencing is primed within the story. For instance, when the company Toms shares through its brand story that it donates a pair of shoes to children in poorer countries each time someone buys a pair, it may fulfill a consumer's need to believe they are making a difference in the lives of those who are less fortunate.

Granitz and Forman (2015) posit that consumers who are strongly connected to a brand prefer to hear stories about the brand's experience in an interactive setting, such as that provided via social media. Brands that foster self-brand connections may benefit

from increased purchase intentions, word-of-mouth, and commitment. Thus, Hypothesis 3 is posited.

> **H3:** *Social storytelling positively influences self-brand connections. This positive influence is fully mediated by narrative transportation.*

Co-Creation

Whereas self-brand connections signify oneness with the company's brand, co-creation is the process through which consumers voluntarily contribute their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral resources to the brand at various stages in the marketing lifecycle. For instance, consumers may post stories about their experiences with specific products, such as the bride who wore a Patagonia jacket on her cold wedding day. Also, co-creating consumers may add on to stories posted by other consumers about a brand, product, or service (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). Social media can be an ideal context for narrative processing to manifest because online social networks were designed to foster engagement between various actors, including brands and consumers. Brand stories told through social media networks are not told solely by the brand; they are co-created in partnership with consumers (Kozinet et al., 2010; Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012).

The narrative transportation process primes the opportunity for co-created brand stories to ensue. When a consumer is narratively transported into a brand's story, he or she may be motivated to augment the story by actively contributing his or her ideas, memories, past experiences, and goals. Whereas consumers who are transported into a story are changed mentally, co-creation is distinct in that consumers may make explicit efforts to augment the story. In Dove's fill-in-the-blank campaign example described earlier, the brand invited the consumer to change the story by intentionally leaving out

information for the consumer to complete and, therefore, co-create the narrative. When narrative transportation fosters co-creation, consumers are more likely to actively engage with the brand (Alexander, 2016; Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014; Sembada, 2018). While extant literature exposits co-creation as an outcome of consumer brand engagement, this dissertation hypothesizes co-creation as an antecedent. Given the resources that consumers must voluntarily invest to co-create, it is plausible they can be primed to engage with the brand. Further, because social media platforms allow consumers to interact with brands more readily, co-creative behaviors can occur at any stage during the marketing lifecycle (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014). Thus, Hypothesis 4 is posited.

> **H4:** *Social storytelling positively influences consumer co-creation. This positive influence is fully mediated by narrative transportation.*

Consumer Brand Engagement

Consumer brand engagement is defined as a consumer's cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and co-creative brand-related activities related to specific interactions (Hollebeek et al., 2014). Consumer brand engagement is particularly observable and relevant in the context of online social networks, which facilitate interactions between and brands and consumers. As Gambetti and Graffigna (2010) aptly state, "The pursuit of consumer brand engagement plays a key role in a new customer-centric marketing approach designed to cope with the constantly evolving individual and social dynamics of post-consumer behavior." Posting product reviews, becoming involved in product development, and story giving (e.g., consumers sharing their own stories with brands) are ways in which consumers can contribute resources to a brand's story (Harmeling et al., 2017; Hughes, Bendoni & Pehlivan, 2016; Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). Consumers

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might be more willing to contribute to a brand they feel connected to and have assigned meaning to. In particular, social media can lead to self-brand connections that foster engagement because it is naturally a context in which consumers share content related to their self-identities (Granitz & Forman, 2015). Also, self-brand connections can be formed when a brand fulfills a consumer's psychological needs. When brands reinforce consumers' sense of self and provide the opportunity for consumers to express themselves through co-creative storytelling activities, consumer brand engagement may be formed (Escalas, 2004b; Granitz & Forman, 2015). Further, self-brand connections can positively affect consumers' attitudes and behavioral intentions related to the company's brands (Escalas, 2004b). As a consumer becomes enraptured in a brand's story, self-brand connections and co-creation may foster consumer brand engagement. Thus, Hypothesis 5 and 6 are posited.

H5: Self-brand connections positively influence consumer brand engagement.

H6: Co-creation positively influences consumer brand engagement.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Mucundorfeanu (2018) describes brands as the products that individuals conceptualize as stories and emotions. Compelling brand storytelling may lead to cognitive, emotional, and behavioral shifts in consumers. For example, narrative-transportation storylines can activate story receivers' desire to become one with the brand and even help shape it, opening the gateway for consumer engagement to ensue (Escalas, 2004a; Kim et al., 2016). However, there has been limited research regarding this benefit within the context of social media. Given that about 90% of U.S. companies were using social media in 2017 to increase brand awareness (Hootesuite, 2018), further examination of social storytelling is vital to gaining a deeper understanding of the potential benefits for brands. This study explores storytelling's ability to foster consumer brand engagement through social media. I hypothesize that by evoking narrative transportation leading to self-brand connections and co-creation, consumer brand engagement can occur. Further, I posit that invoking self-referencing will strengthen the positive relationship between social storytelling and narrative transportation.

Study Design

This study proposes that storytelling via social media can lead to consumer brand engagement when moderated by *self-referencing* (evaluating information through its relevance to themselves) and mediated by *narrative transportation* (becoming mentally part of a story's world), *self-brand connections* (incorporating brands into their self-concept) and *co-creation* (actively contributing to a brand at any stage in the marketing lifecycle based on their own volition).
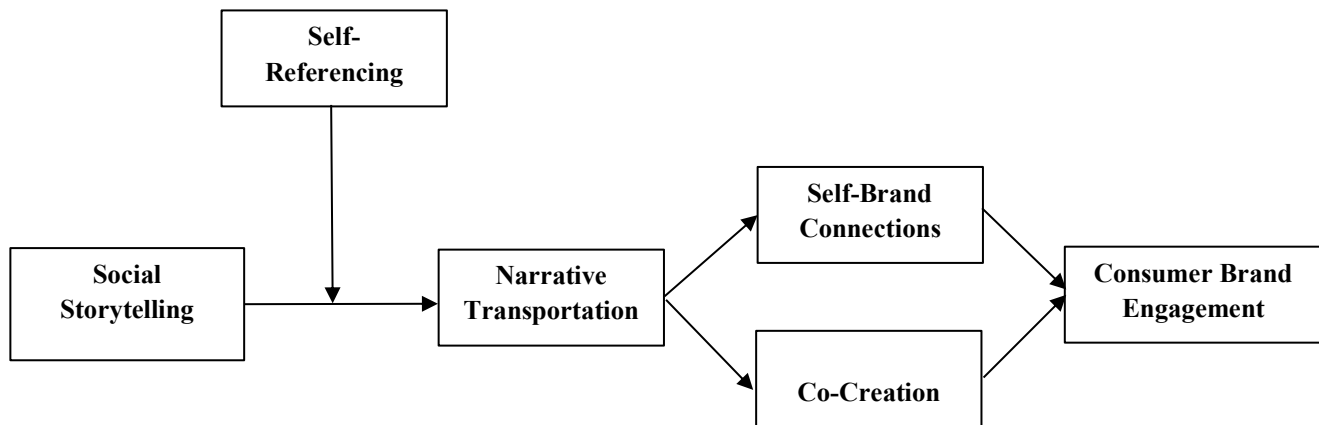
Figure 3.1. Theoretical model.

To examine the relationship between social storytelling and consumer brand engagement, this dissertation relied on a 2x2 between-subjects quasi-experimental design. Respondents were asked to watch a video on YouTube that told a fictitious water bottle company's (H2Flow) brand product story. Two videos included manipulations for self-referencing (i.e., using pronouns "you" and "your" versus "I" and "my") and narrative structure (i.e., chronology, causality, and character). For the two videos that did not use a narrative structure, text associated with the beginning, middle, and end of the narrative were displayed out of order, thus violating the chronology required of narrative structure. Otherwise, the text was identical for all four conditions. Since YouTube is a

visual social media platform, relevant images were placed behind each text frame. All four video versions presented the same images in the same order (see Figure 3.2).

YouTube was chosen for this experiment because (1) it is a social media site designed to post videos, (2) it is the second most popular social media platform (after Facebook) in which brands share digital content with consumers, and (3) approximately 73% of U.S. adults use YouTube (Van Kessel, 2019). In addition, unlike Facebook, YouTube allows brands to have more control over the content surrounding their video posts, an important consideration for controlling stimuli unrelated to the study. To mitigate against the potential influence that extraneous content could have on study participants while viewing the video, the functions allowing individuals to post comments about videos and to like/dislike them were disabled for this experiment. However, advertisements were not suppressed; YouTube does not offer this option. Since social media inherently incorporates multimedia, other advertisements displaying on the site may have contributed to the credibility of the fictitious brand created for this experiment and also preserved an element of the social media context upon which this study relied.

Procedures

From Prolific, participants were given a Qualtrics survey link. Before being asked to consent, participants were directed not to view other content on YouTube during the study and return to the survey immediately after viewing the video. After consenting, participants were randomly presented with a YouTube link for one of four conditions: 1) narrative structure, 2) narrative structure with self-referencing, 3) no narrative structure, and 4) no narrative structure with self-referencing. Participants were not aware of these condition types.

The YouTube channel was established under the H2Flow name, and no other content was posted to the channel. After viewing the video, participants completed a survey that included item measures for a story, narrative transportation, self-brand connections, co-creation, and consumer brand engagement. A 7-point Likert scale (ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree) was used for all survey items.

	Narrative Structure	No Narrative Structure
No Self-referencing	Introducing H2*FLOW* [Display logo] Cold for 48 hours Ready for adventure … I used to be afraid of trying new things Then I took a chance and tried something I never thought I would In that moment, I discovered what moves me …literally moves me It opened up a part of me that I didn't know existed And took me places I only imagined going before Any adventure is possible ...with a little water [Fade in logo]	Introducing H2*FLOW* [Display logo] Cold for 48 hours Ready for adventure … And took me places I only imagined going before Any adventure is possible…with a little water In that moment, I discovered what moves me …literally moves me It opened up a part of me that I didn't know existed I used to be afraid of trying new things Then I took a chance and tried something I never thought I would [Fade in logo]

Figure 3.2. Four Conditions (randomized)

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Self-referencing	Introducing H2*FLOW* [Display logo]	Introducing H2*FLOW* [Display logo]
	Cold for 48 hours	Cold for 48 hours
	Ready for adventure …	Ready for adventure …
	You used to be afraid of trying new things	And took you places you only imagined going before
	Then you took a chance and tried something you never thought you would	Any adventure is possible…with a little water
	In that moment, you discovered what moves you …literally moves you	In that moment, you discovered what moves you …literally moves you
	It opened up a part of you that you didn't know existed	It opened up a part of you that you didn't know existed
	And took you places you only imagined going before	You used to be afraid of trying new things
	Any adventure is possible…with a little water	Then you took a chance and tried something you never thought you would
	[Fade in logo]	*[Fade in logo]*
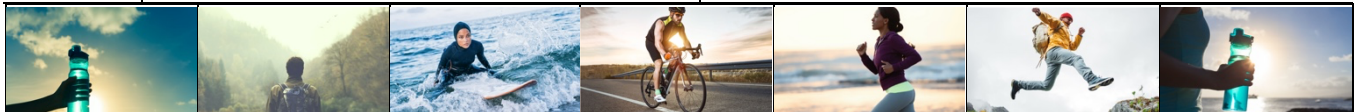
Qualtrics Survey

  The study introduction read:

ABOUT THIS SURVEY, DATA USAGE, CONSENT

You have been invited to participate in a study about your perceptions of an advertisement for a new product. You will be asked to watch a 50-second YouTube video and then complete the survey below immediately after. The survey takes an estimated 10 minutes to complete, including watching the video.

Risks and benefits of completing this survey: There are no known risks associated with this project that are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. There are no direct benefits to you. More broadly, this study may help the researchers learn more about consumer perceptions of a new product.

Compensation: After completing the survey, you will receive only the compensation offered through Prolific. You will be redirected to the Prolific website at the conclusion of the survey so that your survey submission can be connected with your Prolific account.

Confidentiality: The information that you provide for this survey will be handled confidentially. You will be asked for your Prolific ID to make the process of compensation easier; your ID will be separated from your responses for data storage and reporting. The data will be reported in aggregate, and your name will not be used in any reporting. The research team works to ensure confidentiality to the degree permitted by technology. It is possible, although unlikely, that unauthorized individuals could gain access to your responses because you are responding online. However, your participation in this online survey involves risks similar to a person's everyday use of the internet. It is unlikely, but possible, that others responsible for research oversight may require sharing

of your responses to ensure that the research was conducted safely and appropriately. We will only share your information with those directly involved with this research project or if law or policy requires us to do so. Finally, confidentiality could be broken if materials from this study were subpoenaed by a court of law.

Consent: Your participation in this survey represents your consent. Your participation in this survey is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and you are free to withdraw your consent and participation at any time. The alternative is to not participate.

For questions: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human research participants at Oklahoma State University has reviewed and approved this study. If you have questions about the research study itself, please contact the Principal Investigator at nefretiri@okstate.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer or would simply like to speak with someone other than the research team about concerns regarding this study, please contact the IRB at (405) 744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu. All reports or correspondence will be kept confidential.

After consenting to the survey, participants were given the following instructions: Please watch the following YouTube video by clicking the link, which will open in a new browser window. After watching the entire video (50 seconds), close the window to return to the survey. Please do not watch other videos during the course of this study.

Antecedents

Story (independent variable). To measure the story variable, a three-item scale validated by Escalas (2004a) was used. In addition, to determine if videos that told a story performed better than those that did not, the manipulation described previously was used.

Narrative Transportation (mediator). To measure narrative transportation, this study adopted scales used by Escalas (2004a).

Self-Brand Connections (mediator). Self-brand connections were measured using seven items developed by Escalas (2004b)

Co-creation. The limited extant literature that exists on story co-creation uses qualitative methods, so there was not an easily adaptable scale to measure this construct. A newly constructed three-item scale was used by relying on the theoretical contributions of prior literature (e.g., Chan et al., 2010).

Consumer Brand Engagement (DV). To measure if the dependent variable, consumer brand engagement, was effectuated, seven items from a scale developed by Hollebeek and colleagues (2014) was used (see Table 3.1). The scale is especially relevant in this study because it was validated through a social media study. Further, its measures incorporate the three consumer brand engagement dimensions conceptually developed earlier in this dissertation: behavioral, cognitive, and affective.

Self-Referencing (moderator). Self-referencing was assessed via a manipulation using the pronouns "you" and "your" instead of "I" and "my" in both the narrative and non-narrative versions of the videos. It was measured as a binary variable.

Table 3.1

Scale Items

Scale Items
Story (Escalas, 2004a)

1. The video told a story.

2. The video had a beginning, middle, and end.

3. One or more characters in the video experienced a personal evolution.

Narrative Transportation (Escalas, 2004a)

1. I was mentally involved in the video.

2. While thinking about the video, I could easily picture the events in it taking place.

3. I could picture myself in the scene shown in the video.

Self-brand Connections (Escalas, 2004b)

1. H2Flow reflects who I am.

2. I can identify with H2Flow.

3. I feel a personal connection to H2Flow.

4. I would use this H2Flow to communicate who I am to other people.

5. I think H2Flow would help me become the type of person I want to be.

6. I consider H2Flow to be "me" (It reflects who I consider myself to be or the way that I want to present myself to others).

7. H2Flow suits me well.

Co-creation (newly created)

1. Watching the video made me want to change the way H2Flow is described in it.

2. Watching the video made me want to add how I would use H2Flow to it.

3. Watching the video made me want to contribute my own story to describe H2Flow.

Consumer Brand Engagement (Hollebeek et al., 2014)

1. Thinking about using a water bottle makes me think about H2Flow.

2. Thinking about using a water bottle stimulates my interest to learn more about H2Flow.

3. I think I would feel positive about using H2Flow.

4. I think using H2Flow would make me happy.

5. I think I would feel good when using H2Flow.

6. I think I would be proud to use H2Flow.

7. I think I would use H2Flow a lot compared to other water bottles.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

For this quasi-experiment, I analyzed the results by conducting two pre-tests. After respecifying the scale measures based on the results of each Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) for the pre-tests, I administered the final experiment. To analyze the data from the final experiment, I first conducted an ANOVA to determine if the means between the four conditions were statistically significant. Although the means were not significant, I also conducted a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) to assess the manipulation effects further. I then created a Structural Equation Model (SEM), which included a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to assess the latent variables and sequential regression analyses to explore the effects between the individual dependent variables.

Sample Selection

Study participants for both pre-tests and the final test were sourced from Prolific, which was selected because of the quality of its participant pool, ease of use, and the fact that it was specifically designed for research (Palan & Schitter, 2017). The estimated time to complete the survey was ten minutes. Participants were compensated at a rate of $1.50/ten minutes, not to exceed 44 minutes. Selection criteria included U.S. residents

with at least a 95% approval rating. Individuals who completed the pre-test surveys were excluded from taking the final test. Prolific advertised the study to eligible individuals, and it remained open until the requested sample size was met (60 for each pre-test and 240 for the final test). The pre-tests each yielded 60 responses. For the first pre-test, one set of responses was eliminated for failing the attention check (stating the brand name of the product at the beginning and end of the survey), resulting in a sample size of 59. For the second pre-test, two sets of responses were eliminated because they chose the same values across the items, thus reducing the sample to 58.

For the final test, four surveys were incomplete, leaving 236 responses. Two sets of responses were eliminated for failed attention checks, resulting in 234 total responses. Respondents were ages 18–24 (37%), 25–34 (33%), 35–44 (20%), 45–54 (6%), 55 and older (2%). For race/ethnicity, participants identified as White (54%), Asian (22%), Mixed-Race (10%), Hispanic (7%), Black/African American (7%), and Native American (1%). Most participants were female (59%), followed by males (41%). Educational levels completed included high school diploma/GED (41%), bachelor's degree (39%), graduate degree (10%), and community-college/technical degree (10%).

Pre-Tests

Pre-test 1. Before implementing the final survey, two pre-tests were conducted to assess measurement validity and avoid the multicollinearity of survey items. An exploratory factor analysis was then conducted for the latent variables.

Latent variables. Latent variables are those for which the effects cannot be easily observed, such as a person's intentions and behaviors. To enable researchers to draw meaningful conclusions about concepts that rely on understanding such effects, proxy measurement items are used to test latent variables. The latent variables in this study were: *narrative transportation* (mediator between social storytelling and co-creation, self-brand connections), *co-creation* (mediator between narrative transportation and consumer brand connections), *self-brand connections* (second mediator between narrative transportation and consumer brand engagement), and *consumer brand engagement* (dependent variable).

Exploratory factor analysis. When working with latent variables, EFA is useful for testing the factor structure, which aids the researcher to determine if items within a particular factor measure the item as intended by loading with positive coefficients of at least 0.4. In addition, EFA illuminates if any items that are meant to measure a respective factor are instead loading on other factors. Based on the results of exploratory factor analysis (EFA) in this study, two measures were revised following the first pre-test (see Table 4.1). Specifically, the scale for narrative transportation was reduced from seven items to three items because some of its original items loaded on self-brand connections. The final three-item scale was directly adopted from Escalas (2004a). The new measurement scale developed for this study for co-creation was reduced from three items to two items because one item did not load on the construct at all during the EFA analysis.

Table 4.1

Re-specified Scales Following Pre-Test 1

Original Narrative Transportation Scale (adapted from Green & Brock, 2000; Nielsen & Escalas, 2018)

1. While I was viewing the video, I could easily picture the actions in it taking place.

2. While I was viewing the video, activity going on in the room around me was on my mind.

3. I could picture myself in the scene of the actions described in the video.

4. I was mentally involved in the video while viewing it.

5. The narrative affected me emotionally.

6. I found myself thinking of ways the narrative could have turned out differently.

7. I found my mind wandering while viewing the video.

8. The scenarios in the video are relevant to my everyday life.

Re-specified Narrative Transportation Scale Items (adopted from Escalas, 2004a)

1. I was mentally involved in the video.

2. While thinking about the video, I could easily picture the events in it taking place.

3. I could picture myself in the scene shown in the video.

Table 4.1 (cont'd.)

Co-creation Scale Items (newly created based on literature, i.e., Chan et al., 2010)

1. Watching the video made me want to change the way H2Flow is described in it.

2. Watching the video made me want to add how I would use H2Flow to it.

3. Watching the video made me want to contribute my own story to describe H2Flow.

Re-specified Co-creation Scale Items (newly created based on literature, i.e., Chan et al., 2010)

1. Watching the video made me want to add how I would use H2Flow to it.

2. Watching the video made me want to contribute my own story to describe H2Flow.

Pre-test 2. Using the re-specified measures, a second pre-test was conducted to determine if the adjusted indicators were measuring their respective factors. The second pre-test also compared a version of the four videos that used only the same still image behind the story's text throughout the video with a second version that used a different photograph behind each text slide. The version with multiple images was selected following data analysis. It seemed more likely to result in meaningful results and was most closely aligned to the real-world advertisement style to which consumers are exposed. The EFA showed that the items and their constructs were hanging together cohesively, except for one item for narrative transportation (see Table 4.2). However, because the scale was pre-validated from prior studies and to ensure the robustness of measurement, it was retained.

Table 4.2

Pre-Test 2 Exploratory Factor Analysis

Pre-test 2 Exploratory Factor Analysis				
	Factor 1	**Factor 2**	**Factor 3**	**Factor 4**
Self-brand Connections 1	0.93	0.14	-0.18	-0.02
Self-brand Connections 2	0.92	0.01	-0.04	-0.01
Self-brand Connections 7	0.75	0.27	-0.04	-0.03
Self-brand Connections 6	0.64	0.15	0.14	0.14
Self-brand Connections 3	0.61	-0.03	0.36	-0.11
Self-brand Connections 5	0.51	0.13	0.29	0.15
Narrative Transportation 3	0.49	-0.05	0.19	0.09
Narrative Transportation 2	0.43	-0.07	0.29	0.11
Consumer Brand Engagement 5	0.06	0.97	-0.01	-0.02
Consumer Brand Engagement 3	0.04	0.78	0.08	0.15
Consumer Brand Engagement 6	0.36	0.56	0.11	-0.04
Consumer Brand Engagement 4	0.23	0.49	0.24	0.10
Consumer Brand Engagement 2	-0.04	0.19	0.82	0.10
Consumer Brand Engagement 1	-0.03	0.23	0.73	0.06
Self-brand Connections 4	0.37	-0.06	0.65	-0.05
Consumer Brand Engagement 7	0.16	0.30	0.48	0.16
Narrative Transportation 1	0.24	-0.01	0.38	-0.13
Co-creation 2	-0.05	0.08	0.16	0.97
Co-creation 3	0.18	0.23	0.01	0.52
Co-creation 1	-0.01	-0.24	-0.21	0.37

Before finalizing the manipulations, the same introduction was added to each video to set up the product and its features: "Introducing H2FLOW. Cold for 48 hours, Ready for your adventure…" This addition was based on participants' feedback shared via the survey's open-ended attention check question; the individual pointed out that the video they watched began with no context for the product.

Analysis of Final Test Data

Because the model included latent variables, it was necessary to create exploratory and measurement models to assess that the items tested for each factor were appropriate measures for their respective constructs. Using JMP Pro (v. 14), I first ran an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) on the final data set. Then, using Mplus (v. 8/1.5), I performed structural equation modeling (SEM), which included a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and a structural model to assess the hypothesized relationships between variables.

Exploratory Factor Analysis

To test the shared variance among constructs and determine if the intended number of factors (five) existed within the model, an EFA was performed to verify that items for each dependent variable (narrative transportation, self-brand connection, co-creation, and consumer brand engagement) loaded properly within their respective constructs (Table 4.3). Using Quartimin (oblique) rotation and Maximum Likelihood Estimation with a loading threshold of 0.4, most items loaded onto their respective constructs as expected, confirming the variable patterns observed in the pre-test. An EFA also was done with the independent variable, story, which loaded properly.

Table 4.3

Final Exploratory Factor Analysis

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
Self-brand Connections 6	0.83	-0.01	0.09	-0.02	0.03
Self-brand Connections 2	0.83	0.12	-0.11	0.05	-0.04
Self-brand Connections 1	0.82	-0.02	0.06	0.07	-0.03
Self-brand Connections 3	0.81	0.04	-0.01	0.02	0.05
Self-brand Connections 4	0.77	-0.03	0.07	0.02	0.04
Self-brand Connections 7	0.65	0.24	-0.07	0.06	-0.07
Self-brand Connections 5	0.58	0.07	0.14	-0.02	0.12
Consumer Brand Engagement 4	0.03	0.85	-0.02	-0.03	0.07
Consumer Brand Engagement 5	-0.03	0.81	0.12	0.06	0.04
Consumer Brand Engagement 3	-0.01	0.76	0.07	0.14	-0.08
Consumer Brand Engagement 6	0.20	0.70	0.02	-0.08	0.06
Consumer Brand Engagement 7	0.11	0.67	0.00	0.03	0.02
Consumer Brand Engagement 2	0.19	0.41	0.19	0.09	0.09
Story 1	0.00	0.06	0.87	-0.02	-0.07
Story 2	0.05	-0.04	0.66	0.01	0.04
Story 3	0.00	0.07	0.57	0.06	0.03
Narrative Transportation 2	-0.07	0.05	0.08	0.72	-0.06
Narrative Transportation 1	0.04	-0.02	0.01	0.64	0.12
Narrative Transportation 3	0.31	0.06	-0.09	0.59	0.00
Co-creation 3	0.14	-0.14	0.08	0.05	0.91
Co-creation 2	-0.06	0.13	-0.04	0.00	0.54

To assess reliability within the factors, Chronbach's α was used. Alpha for all scores ranged between acceptable ($\alpha > 0.7$) and excellent ($\alpha > 0.9$), with the exception of co-creation. Alpha for co-creation—a new scale created for this study and re-specified

from three items to two after the first pre-test—was 0.68, just below the acceptable

threshold of 0.7. When assessing all items, item reliability was 0.8, indicating good

overall internal consistency.

Manipulation Tests

To determine if the advertisements that included the narrative structure and those

that had self-referencing led to different outcomes than those that did not, I first ran a

one-way ANOVA by comparing the effect of the four categorical groups on the

independent variable. Since the ANOVA showed no significant difference between the

means of the four conditions, to further assess the manipulation effects, I conducted a

MANOVA test using the three-story survey items and the two respective levels for

narrative structure and self-referencing. The results of the MANOVA test also did not

support the effectiveness of the manipulation. Concerning the story items, the overall

model effect of the narrative structure was not significant. However, the least-squares

means plotted in the anticipated positive direction, and they were greater for the two ads

that included a narrative structure compared to the two that did not. The effect of self-

referencing was statistically significant (prob>F =0.01), but the effect's direction was not

as expected. Means for the two advertisements that did not use self-referencing were

lower for story items one and two (causality and chronology) and greater for story item

three (character). Conversely, the two ads with self-referencing resulted in greater means

for story items one and two compared to the ads that did not, but the mean for story item

three was lower (see Figure 4.1). While the results of the MANOVA manipulation test

were statistically significant, results from the subsequent behavioral model suggested that

the story measure introduced variability in the treatments; therefore, the manipulations may be considered meaningful in this regard.
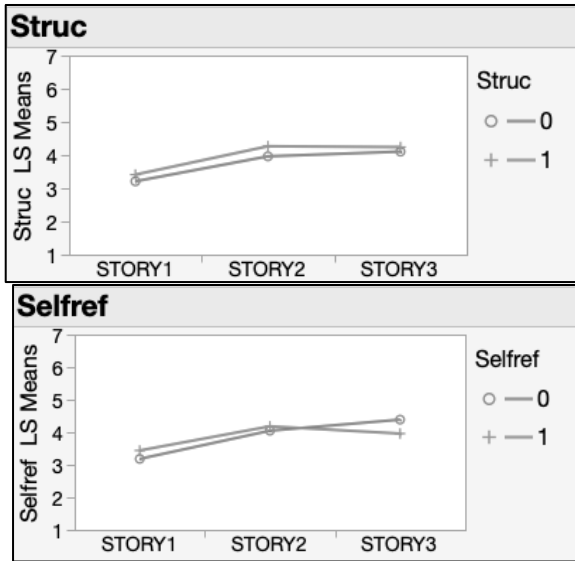
Figure 4.1. MANOVA test for the three-story survey items.

Structural Equation Modeling

Model Fit. The overall model fit the data acceptably (see Table 4.4). The Chi-square value was 366, with 184 degrees of freedom and was significant (p=.00). In comparison, the Chi-square value for the baseline model was 3,572.63, with 210 degrees of freedom. The output indicated that the specified model, which had a lower Chi-square estimate, was stronger than the baseline model. Although this meant I could not reject the null hypothesis stating that the model was not better than the baseline, it is important to note that Chi-square is sensitive to sample size and not the most reliable estimator for assessing model fit (Chen, 2007). Upon further examination, CFI (0.95) and TLI estimates (0.94) were both greater than 0.9, suggesting the model fit was acceptable (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation estimate of 0.07 (between 0.05 and 0.08) indicated a reasonable error of approximation (Browne &

Cudeck, 1992). Further, the upper bound C.I. value was less than 0.1 (0.08), signaling a

good fit. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (0.06), a measure of the

difference between the observed and the model-predicted correlations, met the ideal

threshold (less than 0.08, per Hu and Bentler, 1999) for good-fitting models. I also

reviewed the descriptive statistics, which showed no concerning outliers or distribution

issues (see Table 4.5).

Table 4.4

Model Fit

Chi-Square Test of Model Fit		
Value	366.144	
Degrees of Freedom	184.000	
P-Value	0.000	
RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation)		
Estimate	0.065	
90 Percent C.I.	0.055	0.075
Probability RMSEA <= .05	0.007	
CFI/TLI		
CFI	0.946	
TLI	0.938	
Chi-Square Test of Model Fit for the Baseline Model		
Value	3572.629	
Degrees of Freedom	210.000	
P-Value	0.000	

SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual)		
Value	0.059	

Table 4.5

Descriptive Statistics

N=234	Mean	Median	SD	S.E.	Upper CI (95%)	Lower CI (95%)
Story	3.87	4.00	1.31	0.85	4.04	3.70
Narrative Transportation	4.68	4.67	1.27	0.08	4.83	4.50
Self-brand Connections	3.27	3.14	1.35	0.90	3.44	3.10
Co-creation	3.79	3.50	1.48	0.10	3.77	3.39
Consumer Brand Engagement	3.89	4.00	1.31	0.09	4.16	3.83

Confirmatory Factor Analysis. Next, I assessed the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), which included the re-specified measures. Unstandardized loadings for all items were statistically significant, so I rejected the null hypothesis; the indicators were loading differently from the zero baseline. In addition, a review of the standardized output showed all items loading with coefficients greater than 0.4, and all unstandardized loadings for the indicators were statistically significant ($p<.05$). Therefore, I retained all indicators while continuing the analysis.

Items loaded on their respective measures acceptably except for one of the co-creation items (0.53), one item from the story construct (0.67), and two items for narrative transportation (0.62 and 0.63), whereas each loaded below the desired 0.7 minimum loading (see italics in Table 4.6). Also, the coefficient for item two of co-

creation was 0.98, suggesting the construct was primarily being measured by this item.

However, to ensure higher reliability for the constructs, I retained co-creation and

narrative transportation. This decision also supported model identification since removing

the items in co-creation and narrative transportation would have left each factor with only

a single indicator. In addition, I retained the one item in the story factor, which had a

coefficient close to the 0.7 desired loading and contributed to stronger reliability when

compared to loading the factor with only two items. Since unstandardized loadings for

the four items were statistically significant, they further justified running the model with

these items included. To continue assessing reliability, Composite Construct Reliability

(CCR) scores were calculated as well. Reliability scores for all constructs were above 0.7,

indicating good internal consistency among scale items (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 4.6

Construct and Item Assessment

STORY α=0.75; CCR=0.78; AVE=54%				
Indicator	Std./Unstd. Loading	S.E.	Est./S.E.	P-Value
1. The video told a story.	0.81	0.04	20.10	.00
	1.00	0.00	--	--
2. The video had a beginning, middle, and end.	0.73	0.04	16.74	.00
	1.29	0.12	10.92	.00
3. One or more characters in the video experienced a personal evolution.	0.67	0.05	14.04	.00
	1.25	0.14	8.66	.00
Narrative Transportation α=0.76; CCR=0.73; AVE=48%				
1. I was mentally involved in the video.	0.62	0.05	12.83	.00
	1.00	0.00	--	--
2. While thinking about the video, I could easily picture the events in it taking place.	0.63	0.05	13.05	.00
	0.94	0.11	8.62	.00
	0.81	0.03	24.94	.00

3. I could picture myself in the scene shown in the video.	1.33	0.15	8.93	.00

Self-brand Connections
α=0.94; CCR=0.94; AVE=69%

1. H2Flow reflects who I am.	0.85	0.02	42.96	.00
	1.00	0.00	--	--
2. I can identify with H2Flow.	0.88	0.02	52.06	.00
	1.10	0.04	24.92	.00
3. I feel a personal connection to H2Flow.	0.86	0.02	44.86	.00
	1.01	0.05	20.59	.00
4. I would use H2Flow to communicate who I am to other people.	0.81	0.03	32.72	.00
	0.93	0.06	16.59	.00
5. I think H2Flow would help me become the type of person I want to be.	0.73	0.03	22.57	.00
	0.92	0.07	13.53	.00
6. I consider H2Flow to be "me" (It reflects who I consider myself to be or the way that I want to present myself to others).	0.86	0.02	44.74	.00
	1.04	0.05	20.33	.00
7. H2Flow suits me well.	0.82	0.02	35.39	.00
	0.95	0.05	17.48	.00

Co-creation
α=0.68; CCR=0.75; AVE=62%

1. Watching the video made me want to add how I would use H2Flow to it.	0.53	0.08	6.30	.00
	1.00	0.00	--	--
2. Watching the video made me want to contribute my own story to describe H2Flow.	0.98	0.13	7.53	.00
	1.95	0.76	2.58	.01

Consumer Brand Engagement
α=0.93; CR=0.93; AVE=69%

1. Thinking about using a water bottle stimulates my interest to learn more about H2Flow.	0.76	0.03	25.04	.00
	1.00	0.00	--	--
2. I think I would feel positive about using H2Flow.	0.82	0.02	34.44	.00
	0.83	0.06	14.22	.00
3. I think using H2Flow would make me happy.	0.87	0.02	45.17	.00
	0.97	0.06	17.18	.00
	0.88	0.02	49.09	.00

4. I think I would feel good when using H2Flow.	0.90	0.06	15.22	.00
5. I think I would be proud to use H2Flow.	0.86	0.02	42.36	.00
	0.97	0.06	17.20	.00
6. I think I would use H2Flow a lot compared to other water bottles.	0.79	0.03	29.03	.00
	0.93	0.06	16.40	.00

The correlations among factors suggested there was sufficient discriminate validity between the latent variables. More specifically, the coefficients for the item correlations within factors were less than those between factors (see Table 4.7). To further establish discriminant validity (Furr & Bacharach, 2017), and to assess convergent validity between the factors, Average Variance Explained (AVE) scores were calculated. The AVE scores were at least 0.50, with the exception of narrative transportation, which was just slightly below (0.48). The results pointed to acceptable convergence within the latent variables (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Comparing the AVE scores to the squared factor correlations further supported sufficient discriminant validity; the AVEs were higher than the coefficients for each factor pair (see Table 4.8).

Table 4.7

Item Correlations

Item Correlations																									
	STO	NT	SBC	CC	CBE	STO1	STO2	STO3	NT1	NT2	NT3	SBC1	SBC2	SBC3	SBC4	SBC5	SBC6	SBC7	CC2	CC3	CBE2	CBE3	CBE4	CBE5	CBE6	CBE7
STO	1.00																									
NT	0.56	1.00																								
SBC	0.45	0.80	1.00																							
CC	0.25	0.44	0.35	1.00																						
CBE	0.38	0.68	0.84	0.32	1.00																					
STO1	0.81	0.46	0.36	0.20	0.31	1.00																				
STO2	0.73	0.41	0.33	0.18	0.28	0.59	1.00																			
STO3	0.67	0.38	0.30	0.16	0.25	0.54	0.48	1.00																		
NT1	0.35	0.62	0.49	0.27	0.42	0.28	0.25	0.23	1.00																	
NT2	0.35	0.63	0.50	0.27	0.43	0.29	0.26	0.24	0.39	1.00																
NT3	0.46	0.81	0.65	0.36	0.55	0.37	0.33	0.31	0.50	0.51	1.00															
SBC1	0.38	0.68	0.85	0.30	0.72	0.31	0.28	0.25	0.42	0.43	0.55	1.00														
SBC2	0.40	0.70	0.88	0.31	0.74	0.32	0.29	0.26	0.43	0.44	0.57	0.75	1.00													
SBC3	0.39	0.68	0.86	0.30	0.72	0.31	0.28	0.26	0.42	0.43	0.56	0.73	0.76	1.00												
SBC4	0.36	0.64	0.81	0.28	0.68	0.29	0.26	0.24	0.40	0.40	0.52	0.69	0.71	0.69	1.00											
SBC5	0.33	0.58	0.73	0.25	0.62	0.27	0.24	0.22	0.36	0.37	0.47	0.62	0.64	0.63	0.59	1.00										
SBC6	0.39	0.68	0.86	0.30	0.73	0.31	0.28	0.26	0.42	0.43	0.56	0.73	0.76	0.74	0.70	0.63	1.00									
SBC7	0.37	0.65	0.82	0.29	0.69	0.30	0.27	0.25	0.40	0.41	0.53	0.70	0.72	0.71	0.66	0.60	0.71	1.00								
CC2	0.13	0.23	0.18	0.53	0.17	0.11	0.10	0.09	0.14	0.15	0.19	0.16	0.16	0.16	0.15	0.14	0.16	0.15	1.00							
CC3	0.24	0.43	0.34	0.98	0.32	0.19	0.17	0.16	0.26	0.27	0.35	0.29	0.30	0.29	0.27	0.25	0.29	0.28	0.52	1.00						
CBE2	0.29	0.51	0.64	0.25	0.76	0.23	0.21	0.19	0.32	0.32	0.42	0.54	0.56	0.55	0.52	0.47	0.55	0.52	0.13	0.24	1.00					
CBE3	0.31	0.56	0.69	0.27	0.82	0.25	0.23	0.21	0.34	0.35	0.45	0.59	0.61	0.60	0.56	0.51	0.60	0.57	0.14	0.26	0.62	1.00				
CBE4	0.33	0.59	0.73	0.28	0.87	0.27	0.24	0.22	0.36	0.37	0.48	0.62	0.64	0.63	0.59	0.53	0.63	0.60	0.15	0.27	0.65	0.71	1.00			
CBE5	0.34	0.59	0.74	0.28	0.88	0.27	0.24	0.22	0.37	0.37	0.48	0.63	0.65	0.64	0.60	0.54	0.64	0.61	0.15	0.28	0.66	0.72	0.76	1.00		
CBE6	0.33	0.58	0.72	0.28	0.86	0.26	0.24	0.22	0.36	0.36	0.47	0.62	0.64	0.62	0.58	0.53	0.62	0.59	0.15	0.27	0.65	0.70	0.74	0.75	1.00	
CBE7	0.30	0.53	0.66	0.26	0.79	0.24	0.22	0.20	0.33	0.33	0.43	0.57	0.59	0.57	0.54	0.49	0.57	0.55	0.14	0.25	0.60	0.65	0.68	0.69	0.67	1.00

Table 4.8

Average Variance Extracted and Squared Factor Correlations

Average Variance Extracted and Squared Factor Correlations						
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	*CCR*
Story	*0.54 AVE*					*0.78*
Narrative Transportation	0.14	*0.48 AVE*				*0.73*
Self-brand Connections	0.19	0.36	*0.69 AVE*			*0.94*
Co-creation	0.06	0.07	0.15	*0.62 AVE*		*0.75*
Consumer Brand Engagement	0.23	0.31	0.63	0.14	*0.69 AVE*	*0.93*

AVE: Average Variance Extracted
CCR: Composite Construct Reliability

Structural Model. After completing the CFA, I moved on to the structural model to determine if the data supported my theoretical argument that storytelling via social media can lead to consumer brand engagement when moderated by *self-referencing* (evaluating information through its relevance to self) and mediated by *narrative transportation* (becoming mentally part of a story's world), *self-brand connections* (incorporating brands into their self-concept), and *co-creation* (actively contributing to a brand at any stage in the marketing lifecycle based on their own volition).

Regression for Hypothesis Tests

H1: Social storytelling positively influences narrative transportation. Hypothesis 1 was supported (β=0.56, p=.00) based on a regression analysis of survey items for narrative structure.

H2: Self-referencing moderates the positive influence that social storytelling has on narrative transportation. Hypothesis 2 was not supported (p=.67). Self-referencing did not significantly strengthen the linear relationship between social storytelling and narrative transportation. In addition to regressing the interaction effect of narrative structure and self-referencing

H3: Social storytelling positively influences self-brand connections. This positive influence is fully mediated by narrative transportation. Hypothesis 3 was partially supported. The indirect effect from the story to self-brand connections was statistically significant (β=0.45, p=.00) for the overall model. However, the direct effect between social storytelling and self-brand connections was significant as well (β=0.24, p=.01).

Therefore, the relationship between social storytelling and self-brand connections was partially mediated by narrative transportation.

H4: *Social storytelling positively influences consumer co-creation. This positive influence is fully mediated by narrative transportation.* Hypothesis 4 is supported. The indirect effect from the story to co-creation was statistically significant (β=0.25, p=.00) for the overall model. The direct effect between story and co-creation was insignificant (p=.11).

H5: *Self-brand connections positively influence consumer brand engagement.* Hypothesis 5 was supported (β=0.83, p=.00). Self-brand connections had a strong, positive linear relationship with consumer brand engagement.

H6: *Co-creation positively influences consumer brand engagement.* Hypothesis 6 was not supported. The direct relationship between co-creation and consumer brand engagement was not statistically significant (p=.07).

In summary, self-brand connections seemed to have the greatest effect on the model, explaining approximately 63% of the variance (R^2=0.63, S.E.=0.06, p=.00). Narrative transportation accounted for about 32% of the model's variance (R^2=0.32, S.E.=0.07, p=.00), and co-creation explained around 19% (R^2=0.19, S.E.=0.05, p=.01).

Table 4.9

Hypothesis (Standardized)

Hypothesis (standardized)	Std. Est.	S.E.	Est./S.E.	p-value
1. Story → Narrative Transportation*	0.56	0.6	9.01	.00
2. Narrative Transportation → Self-referencing x Story	-0.03	0.07	-0.04	.67
3. Story → Narrative Transportation → Self-brand Connections*	0.45	0.06	7.80	.00
1. Story → Narrative Transportation → Co-creation*	0.25	0.06	4.46	.00
2. Self-brand Connections → Consumer Brand Engagement*	0.83	0.03	25.14	.00
3. Co-creation→ Consumer Brand Engagement	0.04	0.06	0.63	.53

significant (p<0.05)

Table 4.10

Hypothesis (Unstandardized)

Hypothesis (Unstandardized)	Unstd. Est.	S.E.	Est./S.E.	p-value
1. Story → Narrative Transportation*	0.56	0.10	5.87	.00
2. Narrative Transportation → Self-referencing x Story	-0.06	0.14	-0.42	.68
3. Story → Narrative Transportation → Self-brand Connections*	0.60	0.10	6.10	.00
4. Story → Narrative Transportation → Co-creation*	0.22	0.08	2.92	.00
5. Self-brand Connections → Consumer Brand Engagement*	0.84	0.08	11.06	.00
6. Co-creation→ Consumer Brand Engagement	0.05	0.08	0.65	.52

significant (p<0.05)

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

In marketing literature, stories have been lauded for their ability to capture consumers' attention, mentally transport them into an advertiser's desired setting, and create lasting brand impressions in their minds (Delgadillo & Escalas, 2004; Escalas, 2004a, 2004b; Green & Brock, 2000; van Laer et al., 2014). The quasi-experimental study for this dissertation contributes to the limited research on how stories influence consumer thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors in the context of social media. Since the advent of social media has transformed marketing efforts from commercial activities to social-commercial activities (Hughes et al., 2016), this research responds to the need to understand how the dynamic interactions between brands and consumers that occur through social media can enhance a company's marketing efforts.

Hypotheses

A foundational argument for this research is that storytelling leads to narrative transportation, a well-established concept in extant literature (Escalas, 2004a, 2004b; Green & Brock, 2000; Kim et al., 2016; van Laer et al., 2014). This argument (Hypothesis 1) was supported and therefore aligned with prior empirical works that found when consumers are swept into a story's world, they are prone to changing their attitudes and behaviors in relation to that story and forgiving any errors or omissions (Adaval & Wyer, 2018).

Although Hypothesis 1 was supported, its theoretical underpinning—that brand product ads that rely on narrative structure's three Cs (chronology, causality, and character) are more effective—was not based on the homogenous manipulation results. While not the intended outcome, this finding offers an essential contribution to literature. It suggests that brand's product stories without chronology may still lead to a narrative transportation process. Work by Lacoste and La Rocca (2015) supports this explanation; the authors assert that chronology is not a necessary narrative structure attribute because narrators do not necessarily speak linearly when relaying a story, yet story receivers still may be able to piece together the story's causality.

Another plausible explanation for manipulation results is the reliance on the story's characters as a necessary component of narrative structure. There are varying points of view on the utility of characters for evoking consumer responses. Escalas & Bettman (2003) and van Laer et al. (2014) posit that story characters support the narrative transportation process by evoking feelings like sympathy and empathy. However, Dessart (2018) found that storytelling via video advertisements led to higher narrative transportation levels but reduced character identification.

Character identification also relates to the concept of self-referencing. Self-referencing can ensue when, during narrative processing, consumers relate a story's content to their self-constructs stored in memory (Burnkant & Unnava, 1995; Ching et al., 2013; Escalas & Krishnamurthy, 1995). Lack of character identification in the manipulations might also explain why self-referencing did not moderate the effect of social storytelling and narrative transportation (Hypothesis 2). This outcome is consistent with Burnkrant and Unnava's (1995) study, in which the researchers concluded that when

self-referencing is activated simultaneously to other variables that elicit elaboration (e.g., narrative transportation), the positive effect of self-referencing may be reduced or even reversed. Another plausible explanation for self-referencing's null outcome is that the photograph selections used in the advertisement countered any possible effect; each one showed a different person engaging in activities related to the text with which it was presented. Photographs were carefully selected to diversify gender, race, and recreational interests, yet perhaps respondents did not see their self-concepts reflected in the story, a necessary self-referencing element. Because of the emotions that character identification can elicit (e.g., empathy and sympathy), it has been conceptualized as an important component for achieving self-referencing through narrative structures (Escalas & Stern, 2003; Woodside et al., 2008; van Laer et al., 2014).

Although the idea of activating self-concept through self-referencing showed no impact on narrative transportation, narrative transportation influenced the relationship between storytelling and another phenomenon linked to self-concept: self-brand connections. When self-brand connections are formed, consumers attach their ideas about who they are to the brand, essentially becoming one with it. In the case of the brand story presented for this research, the idea of being afraid to try something new and then pushing oneself to do so is a relatable experience for many people. Also, the advertisement connoted striving for optimal physical fitness, another life area in which people may relate to being challenged. Consumers who merge their self-concept with a company's brand are more likely to engage with that brand as a result (Escalas, 2004b; Granitz & Forman, 2015; Schmitt, 2012). Self-brand connections stemming from

narrative processing also may influence consumers to evaluate a brand positively (Escalas, 2004b).

Consumers can be primed to connect their self-identity to a company's brand when they contribute to a product story via co-creation as well (e.g., Hughes et al., 2016). Since co-creation has mostly been conceptualized in terms of value to a company, this research sought to validate a new co-creation scale to assess participants' willingness to augment a brand's product story (e.g., Watching the video made me want to add how I would use H2Flow to it, and Watching the video made me want to help create the H2Flow story). Stories are most valuable when they result in tangible customer engagement outcomes, such as co-creation, and social media is an ideal context for this effect to take place because it was created for interaction (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). Narrative transportation was positively related to co-creation in this study (Hypothesis 4). This finding offers empirical evidence that there is merit to the co-creative efforts of companies like Dove and Patagonia, which were highlighted earlier. Co-creative marketing efforts have been shown to create opportunities for consumers to contribute their ideas, goals, and experiences (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014; Sembada, 2018).

While the relationship from narrative transportation to co-creation was significant, it did not extend to consumer brand engagement, lacking support for Hypothesis 6. Positioning co-creation as an antecedent of consumer brand engagement was a departure from prior research, which has evidenced co-creation as an outcome of consumer brand engagement rather than an antecedent (e.g., Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014; van Doorn et al., 2010). So, while consumers might be willing to share their ideas with a brand and

even feel connected to it, they may stop short of becoming active brand contributors through co-creation.

Hypothesis 5, self-brand connections positively influence consumer brand engagement, was supported by this experiment. Consumer brand engagement is a customer's volition to contribute cognitive, emotional, or behavioral resources to a brand. Engaged consumers tend to be more willing to evangelize brands through positive word-of-mouth, offering advice to their fellow consumers, and contributing their personal experiences to the brand's product stories (Alalwan et al., 2017; Kozinets et al., 2010; Sembada, 2018). Prior literature primarily establishes self-brand connections as an outcome of consumer brand engagement (e.g., Hollebeek et al., 2014; Kumar & Nayak, 2019b). However, this research positions self-brand connections as an antecedent to consumer brand engagement, offering a theoretical contribution to the limited research asserting connections can occur prior to engagement (e.g., Sembada, 2018).

In summary, this dissertation builds upon Escalas's (2004b) findings that narrative transportation can foster self-brand connections by introducing consumer brand engagement as an outcome of this effect. Further, it advances social media as a context wherein storytelling may lead to co-creation, and via self-brand connections, consumer brand engagement. For marketing managers, the insights presented herein highlight the value of leveraging social storytelling to connect consumers to brands, encourage co-creation, and foster engagement.

Limitations

The research presented in this dissertation was completed as the world was disrupted due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. As a result, the original brand

video conceptualized for the experiment, which involved using actors to produce a professional commercial, was adjusted in consideration of California's shelter-in-place orders. The resulting animated slides with text overlays, while still professional, were not in the advertisement style that consumers typically experience from brands. Fortunately, on social media, a more casual approach is acceptable compared to commercials shown via broadcast media.

The context for this study was social media, therefore, the advertisements were displayed in a video on YouTube. Because it was important to control for stimuli unrelated to the study, the features allowing commenting and the ability to like/dislike videos were disabled. Further, the advertisements were not made public. These restrictions reflect limitations on the types of interactions that typically take place in a social media environments.

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