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ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF SOCIAL MEDIA FIRM BRAND ENGAGEMENT: A FRAMEWORK FOR BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS SOCIAL MEDIA BRAND ENGAGEMENT

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ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF SOCIAL MEDIA FIRM BRAND ENGAGEMENT: A FRAMEWORK FOR BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS SOCIAL MEDIA BRAND ENGAGEMENT

A Dissertation Proposal

Presented to

The Graduate Faculty of

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Doctor of Business Administration

By

BETTY N. CAREW

Dr. Jimmy Peltier, Dissertation Chair

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ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF SOCIAL MEDIA FIRM BRAND ENGAGEMENT: A FRAMEWORK FOR BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS SOCIAL MEDIA BRAND ENGAGEMENT

BETTY N. CAREW

Dr. Jimmy Peltier, Dissertation Chair

ABSTRACT

The digital era has transformed how business-to-business (B2B) firms need to engage with customers and stakeholders to develop brands. Social media (SM) provides an opportunity for B2B firms to co-create brand value and develop sustainable brands by engaging business customers in online SM platforms. However, there is a lack of research empirically investigating how SM firm brand engagement activities can create value when implemented within a comprehensive framework. SM marketing research has mainly focused on the implementation of SM platforms (Cartwright et al., 2021). Scholars are calling for research to propose a comprehensive framework with theoretical support, which incorporates SM as a strategic tool throughout a firm’s customer engagement process for brand value co-creation (Cartwright et al., 2021; Essamri et al., 2019; Gustafson et al., 2021; Iglesias & Ind, 2020).

This dissertation fills this gap by examining how B2B firms engage customers via SM to contribute to the co-creation of brand value (Essamri et al., 2019; Gustafson et al., 2021; Iglesias & Ind, 2020). Specifically, the study used two essays to (a) develop a framework for B2B SM firm brand engagement, (b) conceptualize the SM firm brand engagement construct, (c) address
B2B SOCIAL MEDIA BRAND ENGAGEMENT

the antecedents and outcomes related to SM firm brand engagement, (d) provide supporting theories to advance future research in B2B SM brand engagement, and (e) provide an empirical analysis to support our SM firm brand engagement framework.

Structural equation models provided analyses of 215 survey results from marketers and brand managers within B2B firms. The model analysis was done within Smart-PLS using a bootstrap subsample of 5,000. Our results demonstrate that significant relationship exist between a firm’s SM marketing strategic orientation, brand engagement activities (developing brand partnerships, nurturing brand passion and bridging brand meaning) and Outcomes (brand value co-creation and performance).

Combined, the results provide implications for marketing scholars, practitioners, and business leaders. Our results emphasize that successful firm led SM brand engagement activities depend on the firm’s SM marketing strategic orientation. Top management must share their corporate vision with employees for SM use, supported by an integrated marketing strategic plan that leverages SM platforms for customer engagement.
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Antecedents and Consequences of Social Media Firm Brand Engagement: A Framework for Business-to-Business Social Media Brand Engagement

This dissertation is organized into two essays. Essay 1 provides a review of literature and proposes a social media (SM) firm brand engagement framework for business-to-business (B2B) models. The framework centers around three key SM firm brand engagement activities between firms and business customers (such as organization buying groups). The SM firm brand engagement tactics and activities include developing brand partnerships through marketing collaborations and knowledge sharing, nurturing brand passion via storytelling, and bridging brand meaning via negotiations and legitimization of brand. The framework outlines the antecedents (firm, industry, business customers), and outcomes (customer engagement, value co-creation, brand performance) associated with SM firm brand engagement activities. Essay 1 also includes related theories that support the proposed framework, by connecting SM firm brand engagement tactics to its antecedents and outcomes. Our framework also provides a research agenda for future research.

Essay 2 empirically evaluates a subset of the framework proposed in Essay 1, examining, and confirming the relationships that exist between SM marketing strategic orientation (a key antecedent) and SM firm brand engagement activities identified in the framework. The model further evaluates outcomes such as brand value co-creation, which plays a mediating role between SM firm brand engagement activities and brand performance.
Essay 1: Review of the Literature on Social Media Firm Brand Engagement

The growth of digital marketing platforms and user dynamics have impacted how customer brand engagement is created, enhanced, and sustained (Vander Schee et al., 2020). This digital evolution has also transformed brand development beyond the traditional approach grounded in a firm’s internal management-controlled processes to one that is rooted in participative co-creation with multiple stakeholders who develop brand meaning and value (Essamri et al., 2019; Iglesias & Ind, 2020).

Value Co-Creation Defined

Value co-creation has been defined by scholars as the interaction between the firm and multiple stakeholders through dialogue, integration of skills, and resources to produce beneficial outcomes for all involved (Lusch et al., 2010; Payne et al., 2009). The value co-creation process combines resources and skills of both a firm’s internal and external stakeholders to co-create value that neither could create alone (Zhang et al., 2015). Following the service-dominant (S-D) logic theory, value resides in the projects and actions that result from acquired resources, skills, and interactions from multiple stakeholders (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008, 2011).

Value co-creation has been studied in a multitude of contexts within brand development. Earlier studies of brand value co-creation took more of a consumer perspective within the business-to-consumer (B2C) markets (Echeverri & Skålén, 2011). It emphasized that the brand’s value is co-created through the interaction activities conducted by the firm and its consumers. As a result, consumers improve the value-in-use of the brand, resulting in a brand that is unique and differentiated in the marketplace (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2016). The digital era has only strengthened this concept by utilizing SM platforms (Drummond et al., 2020).
Other studies have extended brand value co-creation beyond just the firm and consumer business models by studying brand value co-creation processes with multiple stakeholders (Essamri et al., 2019; Iglesias, Landgraf, & Ind et al., 2020; Mingione & Leoni, 2020; Pera et al., 2016; Wieland et al., 2016). These studies emphasized that brand value is co-created through B2B network relationships and social interactions among multiple stakeholders (Pathak & Pathak-Shelat, 2017). The continuous and multiple relational interactions among these stakeholders determine brand value and lead to alignment in brand meaning and brand perception, as well as performance (Iglesias et al., 2013; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013).

The expansion of brand value co-creation to go beyond the individual consumer to multiple stakeholders (Hatch & Schultz, 2010) is characterized by B2B corporate brands that are grounded in social networks (Halinen & Törnroos, 1998) and include multiple stakeholders (e.g., suppliers and business customer buying groups such as users, influencers, and decision makers) who interact and maintain long-lasting relationships with other stakeholders (Lindgreen & Wynstra, 2005) in order to consciously or unconsciously co-create brand knowledge and identity (Da Silveira et al., 2013; Iglesias et al., 2013; Vargo & Lusch, 2011). The digital era has expanded corporate B2B brand value co-creation within the context of SM online brand communities (Essamri et al., 2019; Iglesias & Ind, 2020). These platforms connect firms to customers and stakeholders via modern mobile devices to create brand value through social experiences and increase involvement in innovation production (Iskoujina et al., 2017).

The value that is co-created for a firm’s brand can result in strengthening its brand meaning or identity, reputation, and performance, as well as improve customer experience and support of the brand (Black & Veloutsou, 2017). Given this perspective, corporate brand value co-creation within the B2B context is defined as the process of building brand value through
network relationships and social interactions in a multi-stakeholder ecosystem for the purpose of improving brand perception and performance (Merz et al., 2009; Mingione & Leoni, 2020).

Corporate brand value co-creation has been shown to positively impact the firm’s brands by enhancing the brand’s core value and identity, which has led to product innovations (Ind et al., 2020; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013). A strong B2B corporate brand represents uniqueness and credibility and commands a premium in the marketplace (Michell et al., 2001). Customers and stakeholders are motivated to participate in co-creation activities because they can express their self-identities, as well as participate in learning and sharing the brand experience (Ind et al., 2020; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013). Corporate brand value co-creation within SM branding communities has influenced how a firm’s brand engagement on SM is created, nurtured, and shared (Vander Schee et al., 2020).

**Social Media Brand Engagement**

Research traditionally has viewed customers as passive recipients of information (Vander Schee et al., 2020). Marketers traditionally have created customer engagement through varied outward communication flows, including advertising, public relations, direct marketing, personal selling, and other seller-directed content (Ots & Nyilasy, 2015). Digital marketing platforms on SM have empowered customers to create and share information amongst themselves, thereby co-creating value for service innovation (Peltier et al., 2020). Framed through the lens of S-D logic (Peltier et al., 2020; Vargo & Lusch, 2017), actors within service ecosystems co-create value for innovations through the sharing of unique experiences.

More recently, SM platforms have placed customer-to-customer communications at the center of brand acceptance and engagement (Dahl et al., 2018; Peltier et al., 2020). Information flows have thus transitioned from at-arms-length communication processes to interactive
processes in which customers access and share information from a multitude of digital sources (Peltier et al., 2020). 87% of businesses invest in knowing more about their customers and their SM behavior (Vander Schee et al., 2020). Brand marketers post content online; consumers also make posts about their perception of products, and evaluation of firm performance. Consumers in the United States frequently post user-generated content (UGC) every week, including 59% of WhatsApp users, 53% of Facebook users, and 48% of Snapchat users (Vander Schee et al., 2020). UGC also produces feedback about brands, with 72% of consumers posting a product rating and consumers expecting an average of 112 reviews to trust the product. Firms that choose to engage in only one-way communication on SM risk losing their business with negative customer impact (Vander Schee et al., 2020). Replication of online content without control is considered viral and can have positive or negative brand effects (Vander Schee et al., 2020). In addition, firms can also gain customer insight from customer feedback posted online (Agnihotri et al., 2012). Customers can become content co-creators and provide value to firms. A firm’s marketing strategy will now need to engage customers through SM as one of many touchpoints in developing brand meaning (Dahl et al., 2018). However, firms are usually challenged with preserving the essence of the corporate brand’s core meaning and values (Burghausen & Balmer, 2015) while trying to align with the needs of multiple stakeholders (Kristal et al., 2020). A SM firm brand engagement framework that enables brand value co-creation needs to empower marketers to transition from brand guardians who own the brand, to more of brand conductors who facilitate multiple perspectives in developing a brand meaning aligned with customers’ desires and the firm’s core values (Iglesias & Ind, 2020). Marketers and brand managers that function as brand conductors have the potential to co-create brands that embrace broader responsibilities beyond just their business customers and shareholders. A co-created brand takes
into consideration the needs and expectations of their employees, partners, and society (Iglesias & Ind, 2020). For example, during the COVID-19 crisis many firms were faced with the issue of providing dividends to their shareholders or safeguarding the jobs of their employees and partners (Iglesias & Ind, 2020). Resolving these types of issues require a humanistic approach to management and a brand that takes a broader responsibility in society (Iglesias & Ind, 2016). Companies such as Johnson & Johnson or Dilmah Tea embrace multiple internal and external stakeholders. Johnson & Johnson’s brand is known for connecting doctors, nurses, patients, parents, children, communities, and stockholders (Ind & Ryder, 2011). Dilmah Tea’s corporate brand is known for creating value by contributing to the development of its local community (Iglesias & Ind, 2020).

Recognizing the importance of digitization, a firm’s SM marketing engagement can be defined as a firm’s ability to use the internet to engage customers in marketing functional areas such as online advertising, sales, purchasing and procurement, marketing research, and brand development collaborations through SM branding communities to co-create value (Matthews et al., 2016). Collaborations between a firm and business customer on SM allow the firm to integrate SM resources and skills with the firm’s strategic direction (Vargo & Lusch, 2017). Brand communities are defined as shared cultural communities on SM, where the brand meaning is negotiated, and co-created through member consumption meanings, rituals, and practices (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001). Community members are usually admirers of the brand and want to express their perceptions of the brand to others (Merz et al., 2009). Firms can leverage these brand communities on SM to co-create value with customers and stakeholders that can result in business opportunities for the firm (Essamri et al., 2019).
B2B SOCIAL MEDIA BRAND ENGAGEMENT

Despite previous research on SM communities and their contributions towards brands, the specific firm-led processes by marketers to engage their customers within B2B SM communities to co-create brand meaning and value is still underdeveloped (Essamri et al., 2019). Our study focuses on providing antecedents and outcomes to three key activities (SM firm brand engagement activities) that the firm’s marketers can use on SM to co-create brand value that enhances brand meaning and performance. These three activities are: developing brand partnerships via marketing collaborations and knowledge sharing, nurturing brand passion via storytelling, and bridging brand meaning via negotiation and legitimization (Essamri et al., 2019). To the best of our knowledge, this is one of the first studies to empirically test a comprehensive framework that promotes an understanding of how B2B SM brand engagement activities are created and implemented to co-create brand value and enhance brand performance.

One of the SM firm brand engagement activities is developing brand partnerships within the B2B context. Firm marketers engage in knowledge sharing and marketing collaborations with business customers within SM platforms, including online brand communities. Brand community members are considered partners to the firm (Essamri et al., 2019). Their role is to provide feedback that helps develop the firm’s brand meaning. The key role of the firm’s marketers within the community is to actively encourage and accept positive or negative feedback on current brand meaning. Knowledge sharing is also an important part of a firm’s partnership with customers. Members of brand communities share technical aspects of the brand and try to align on meaning. The marketer’s role is to encourage this engagement and share knowledge that is helpful for alignment. Marketers also play the role of educators within the branding community by correcting misinformation that is posted online.
B2B SOCIAL MEDIA BRAND ENGAGEMENT

Additionally, marketers engage customers via branding communities by creating a brand family structure. This is an attempt to nurture the brand’s passion among customers (Essamri et al., 2019; Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001). This involves creating an environment in SM where brand enthusiasts can interact with each other, and brand meaning is shared and negotiated among members. The marketers usually use feedback from these interactions to assess the internal branding strategy. Storytelling is a powerful tool used in staging the imaginary experience process, resulting in enhanced brand passion among customers. This is done by posting videos online and providing launching tools (such as microsites) that allow fans to access the brand and construct brand meaning (Essamri et al., 2019).

Another firm brand engagement activity is bridging brand meaning, which includes engaging customers to negotiate brand meaning or identity (Essamri et al., 2019). It is part of the marketer’s attempt to connect internal and external brand messaging and perceptions, which involves continued communication exchange with the online branding committee to support current brand meaning or provide a rationale for new brand meaning if members of the community are not aligned with the current brand meaning. Legitimizing a brand is another part of the marketer’s process to bridge the differences in brand perception and meaning between internal and external stakeholders (Essamri et al., 2019). Marketers want to ensure that the generalized perception of a firm’s corporate brand is desirable and has proper socially constructed norms, values, and beliefs (Suchman, 1995). Therefore, marketers coordinate moral and cultural acceptance inputs of what the brand should represent among members within an online community. To achieve this goal, the perceived brand meaning among customers and stakeholders needs to align to the firm’s desired public image.
Researchers have supported these SM firm brand engagement activities, especially within the B2B market space where corporate brands are often built on long-term close relationships between stakeholders (Drummond et al., 2020; Iglesias, Landgraf, & Ind et al., 2020). While the brand value co-creation process has many benefits, such as great client relationships, product development, sales endorsements, and more, there are also negative aspects of brand value co-creation, such as loss of control, loss of ownership, defective co-creation, and disharmony in brand meaning and identity (Iglesias & Ind, 2020; Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017). However, to remain competitive in the future, corporate marketing leadership must ensure a process that manages these negative aspects of co-creation. We need marketing engagement processes that will require marketing leadership behaviors that reconcile stakeholder perspective with a humble, open, and empathetic leadership style (Iglesias & Ind, 2020).

Service Dominant Logic Theory and Brand Engagement

The S-D logic theory supports the SM firm brand engagement activities that co-create brand value with stakeholders (Merz et al., 2009), encouraging firms to conduct marketing with customers instead of marketing to customers. Firms should address strategic marketing by focusing on the ecosystems in which a firm operates and the firm’s collaboration with other actors (Johanson & Vahlne, 2011). This implies that practitioners should focus less on traditional marketing management (e.g., marketing mix, competition) and more on understanding the firm’s ecosystem and developing relationships with internal and external stakeholders (Vargo & Lusch, 2017). The S-D logic theory focuses on how value creation occurs (Peltier et al., 2020; Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2017). It reflects a paradigm shift that places service exchange (not goods) and consumers (not producers) at the center of value creation (Peltier et al, 2020; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Under this perspective, value is defined and co-created by the consumer (Vargo & Lusch,
2016), and co-creation only exists if the consumer is actively involved in the process and engaged throughout the service exchange through a value-in-use concept (Peltier et al. 2020).

The link between S-D logic and brand development was established by scholars claiming that co-created brands are the outcome of the relationships that unfold over time (Payne et al., 2009).

Successful implementation of S-D logic theory in brand development is highly dependent on the firm’s ability to develop ongoing, cooperative relationships that provide access to and integrate resources (e.g., skills, knowledge) to create value (Vargo & Lusch, 2014).

Addressing Research Gaps

Due to its collaborative nature, SM plays a critical part in the digital transformation of business (Dwivedi, Ismagilova, & Hughes et al., 2021). Chief Marketing Officers (CMOs) worldwide are concerned about a digital talent shortage, with 79% placing a high priority on finding staff capable of creating SM initiatives for engaging customers (Gilch & Sieweke, 2021).

Given the dearth of research in this area and the growing business challenges, the academic community has called for investigations into how firms can engage to co-create value (Barger et al., 2016; Gilch, & Sieweke, 2021).

This study responds to the call from the academic community to provide a better understanding on how firms can engage to co-create value with customers. Specifically, the study aims to answer the following research question especially as it pertains to B2B models on SM: How does a firm’s marketing function engage customers to contribute to the co-creation of corporate brand meaning or identity within SM communities? Research also has called for a framework with theoretical support that incorporates SM as a strategic tool throughout a firm’s business customer engagement process for brand value co-creation (Cartwright et al., 2021; Essamri et al., 2019; Gustafson et al., 2021; Iglesias et al, 2020). Answers to these questions will
help practitioners close the gap on how B2B buyers and sellers interact on SM to form relationships that add value.

The study proposes a detailed conceptual framework that focuses on a variety of factors that serve as antecedents and consequences of SM firm brand engagement tactics and activities (Kucharska, 2019). The proposed framework in our study contributes by providing insights into the types of firm brand engagement activities required to co-create brand value with customers on SM. The framework enables firms to digitize their brand development processes and build sustainable brands that provide competitive advantage. The paper also provides supporting theories such as S-D logic and opportunities to advance future research in B2B SM brand development.

**Scope and Importance of the Study**

The current study is a comprehensive literature review of B2B SM brand engagement research. Our goal is to provide an understanding of how firms contribute to customer engagement on SM to co-create brand value and develop sustainable brands to remain competitive in the digital age (Essamri et al., 2019; Gustafson et al., 2021). The study develops a framework that includes antecedents and consequences of SM firm brand engagement activities, starting by conceptualizing and defining SM firm brand engagement based on literature. It also includes a comprehensive list of antecedents based on firm, industry, and business customer factors that must be present to activate SM firm brand engagement. The consequences within our framework are identified as business customer engagement, value co-creation, and brand performance. In addition, we used the S-D logic theory to connect the SM firm brand engagement activities (developing brand partnerships, nurturing brand passion, and bridging
brand meaning) to value co-creation. Through this literature review we hope to answer the following research questions (RQ) and contribute to future research:

• RQ1: How do B2B firms interact with customers within the value co-creation process on SM for brand value co-creation?

• RQ2: How does value co-creation mediate the relationship between SM firm brand engagement activities and brand performance?

• RQ3: What new marketing skill sets or behaviors are required by B2B firms to effectively facilitate SM firm brand engagement activities that result in value co-creation with customers?

Summary of Contributions to Theory and Practice

Previous SM marketing research has focused on the implementation of SM platforms (Cartwright et al., 2021). Therefore, very little is known about how SM firm brand engagement activities can create value when implemented within a comprehensive framework. This study contributes to current literature in several ways. First, it addresses the marketing literature’s request for additional research in B2B utilization of SM given the rapid growth trend in digital technology (Hollebeek, 2019). Second, this study addresses research gaps by providing antecedents that help firms create a comprehensive SM marketing strategy. Third, it provides a road map for firms to utilize SM platforms as strategic tools for brand value co-creation development. Finally, we extend the S-D logic theory to marketing and brand development by connecting SM firm brand engagement activities to value co-creation for future research.
Literature Review

In the digital age, SM firm brand engagement activities have been a topic of discussion, especially with B2C brands (Drummond et al., 2020). Research is still in its infancy for B2B SM firm brand engagement (Bocconcelli et al., 2017). Industrial firms and their marketing practices are profiting from customer engagement on SM (Salo, 2017), yet little is still known about how SM relationships and network marketing within B2B firms are co-creating brands and contributing to the firm’s brand performance (Drummond et al., 2020).

The traditional brand meaning, or identity development processes have been internally focused, with most marketing departments leading this effort within the firm (Essamri et al., 2019). The digital evolution is transforming brand development processes from being internally focused to co-created by multiple stakeholders (Essamri et al., 2019; Iglesias, Landgraf & Ind et al., 2020). In this evolution, SM has played a critical role as brand meaning gets defined and redefined socially. Firms can engage in this process or lose control of their brands (Agnihotri et al., 2012). The purpose of our literature review is to define SM firm brand engagement and propose a framework for further research. The framework provides an understanding of the antecedents and consequences of the theoretical dimensions of SM firm brand engagement, which includes key activities such as developing brand partnerships, nurturing brand passion, and bridging brand meaning (Essamri et al., 2019). The proposed framework was prepared by reviewing current literature for factors that function as antecedents to SM firm brand engagement activities, such as the firm, business customers, and industry. Each of these antecedents were further defined to understand their impact by researching their orientation, behavior, and
characteristics. In addition, we investigated consequences of SM firm brand engagement activities such as customer engagement, value co-creation, and brand performance.

**Social Media Firm Brand Engagement Defined**

In the same way that firms hope that customers will engage with brand-related content, customers also hope that firms will engage with customer or stakeholder UGC on SM. Sheng et al. (2021) defined SM firm brand engagement as actions that firms implement to interact with customers via online platforms. One of the most effective ways for firms to engage in SM is through online communities that foster new social interactions and change the firm’s approach to retaining or gaining new customers (Sheng et al., 2021). Firms engage by creating a platform or participating in an existing third-party organized group (Sheng et al., 2021; Sonnier & Ainslie, 2011). This digital presence helps transform the firm’s influence on a broader scale. However, research on SM firm brand engagement is at the early stages. Scholarly efforts have focused primarily on how marketing generated content influences customer behaviors, measured by number of likes on SM (Sheng et al., 2021). Less focus has been on how firms interact with customers to co-create brand value.

Effective SM firm brand engagement requires a listening and response process through which marketers themselves become engaged. Specifically, a firm’s role in managing social communications may be either passive or active (Dholakia & Zhao, 2009). Passive engagement is more of a push communication approach in which messages are delivered via SM by a firm, with customers providing the bulk of follow-up conversations. In contrast, active engagement takes place when the firm is involved in all stages of the communication process from delivery to response. Singh and Sonnenburg (2012) advocated for a change in the mindset of the firm’s
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marketers from that of just creating stories for audiences to involving the audience in the co-creation of brand value.

According to Webster and Wind (1972), B2B organizations have defined roles within the buying center (such as gatekeeper, user, buyer, etc.). The gatekeeper has traditionally managed the flow of information within the B2B organization and buying center. The emergence of SM has changed the flow of information by providing access to all parties involved within the B2B buying center at the same time. The current definitions and practice of SM firm brand engagement highlight the communication and customer interaction aspects of promoting and managing the B2B brands (Diba et al., 2019). However, the current definitions do not provide a comprehensive understanding of brand value co-creation within the B2B markets. Researchers are still calling for comprehensive studies on how firms engage with business customers to co-create brand value on SM (Essamri et al., 2019; Iglesias, Landgraf, & Ind et al., 2020). We expand on Essamri et al. (2019) and offer the following definition of SM firm brand engagement: SM firm brand engagement co-creates brand value with customers on SM by integrating organization-led activities that support nurturing customer brand passion, bridging gaps by legitimizing brand meaning, and developing brand partnerships with business customers. Other researchers have supported this approach by suggesting similar organization-led activities to enhance engagement. Drummond et al. (2020) stated that effective SM firm brand engagement requires that a firm develop the ability to connect, engage, coordinate, and collaborate in interaction with customers. Iglesias, Landgraf, & Ind et al. (2020) emphasized that brand meaning, or identity may stem from leadership or the company founders but develops over time in an on-going process with multiple stakeholders through communicating, internalizing, contesting, and elucidating (Iglesias, Landgraf, & Ind et al., 2020). Communicating includes
transmitting corporate brand identity to all corporate stakeholders. Internalizing is concerned with bringing the corporate brand identity to life (this could include creating imaginary experiences for customers) and turning it into actual behaviors. Contesting consists of corporate stakeholders contesting the corporate brand identity with their perspectives (customers effort to legitimize brand meaning and align with firm). Elucidating is the conversation and negotiation process of reconciling the diverse corporate brand perceptions into a cohesive co-created brand.

**Social Media Firm Brand Engagement Framework**

We contribute to the literature by offering a conceptual framework for investigating the firm’s engagement on SM to co-create brand value with customers and measure its impact on brand performance (Figure 1). Our framework includes three elements:

1. Antecedents (firm, industry, business customer factors). Antecedents are further categorized by orientation, behavior, and characteristics.

2. SM firm brand engagement activities (developing brand partnerships, nurturing brand passion, and bridging brand meaning).

3. Consequences (the incremental value that is co-created from firm and business customer interactions and engagement).

This brand value co-creation we propose will have a strong impact on brand performance (which can be measured by brand loyalty, customer retention, market share growth, etc.).
Figure 1

Antecedents and Consequences of Social Media Firm Brand Engagement

Note. SM = social media.
Social Media Firm Brand Engagement Activities

Developing Brand Partnerships. The first SM firm brand engagement activity of our framework involves developing brand partnerships with our customers by collaborating on marketing initiatives and sharing knowledge (Essamri et al., 2019). The continuous process of collaborations and knowledge sharing by the firm and members of the SM community provides opportunities for brand enthusiasts to feel a sense of fulfillment and play an active role within SM (Ind et al., 2020).

When collaborating on marketing initiatives in online communities, the firm’s marketing department encourages critical feedback from customers and stakeholders and views clients as peers (Essamri et al., 2019). The role of members within online brand communities is to offer feedback on content, produce UGC, be brand advocates, and provide input into brand meaning and development. Customers and stakeholders of the branding community collaborate by helping to promote the brand beyond what the firm can do to impact brand performance. Since customers and members of the brand communities are critical to the brand’s success, the firm’s marketers need to ensure that brand knowledge is shared. Members of the brand community discuss technical aspects that are critical to the brand’s identity or meaning. The role of the firm’s marketers is to provide reliable information about the brand that can be disseminated and correct any misinformation in brand communities. The firm’s marketers also assume the role of educators, with other members in the community intervening to correct members who have posted misinformation associated with the brand.

The firm’s understanding of the functional roles within the customer’s organization and buying group is critical for understanding customer motivation for value-co-creation (Pera et al., 2016). The buyers and internal stakeholders in the decision-making process may have different
motivations for partnering with a firm. Motivation to partner with a firm to co-create brand value can include reputation enhancement, experimentation, and relationship development (Pera et al., 2016). These motives result in the sharing of networks and content for experimentation and innovation within the ecosystem for brand value co-creation.

**Nurturing Brand Passion.** Scholars have defined brand passion as an intense feeling of consumers towards the brand (Hatfield & Walster, 1978; Keh & Eng, 2007). The intense feelings allow the customer to develop a close relationship with the brand through their physiological arousal from possessing or consuming that brand (Baumeister & Bratslavsky, 1999; Hatfield & Walster, 1978). Key components of brand passion are the presence of the brand in the customer’s mind and the idealization of the brand (Albert et al., 2008). This level of emotional connection between the customer and brand is critical for business–customer brand engagement.

Nurturing brand passion becomes critical when firms are targeting new markets where there is little brand awareness (Essamri et al., 2019). Nurturing brand passion in the B2B context goes beyond just the consumer to multiple stakeholders. Unlike consumer markets where individual consumers make buying decisions, the B2B buying process results from organization use, and the buying decision is made by a group of professionals within a buying group (Huang, 2014). Because B2B products can be process inputs used in the manufacturing process or component parts of the final product (Huang, 2014; Mudambi et al., 1997), B2B marketing communication tends to be more rational with a focus on product or service features and benefits (Huang, 2014). Nurturing brand passion within B2B markets to create the emotional connection to the brand continues to evolve. Scholars have claimed that organizational buying criteria should involve both rational and emotional characteristics, not just functionality and price (Huang, 2014). This is also supported by the fact that buying units within organizations are made
up of individuals who are also consumers, influenced by personal experiences, perceptions, and various levels of technical understanding (Huang, 2014). As a result, the usual technically worded and rational marketing communications for B2B markets fail to develop strong B2B brand identities with business customers (Gilliland & Johnston, 1997).

Buying models in B2B organizations have shifted to buyers seeking greater emotional connections to brands (Kemp et al., 2018). Traditional buying models that have identified B2B buyers as strictly rational decision makers who are unable to be motivated by emotionally compelling stories are outdated (Huang, 2014; Kemp et al., 2018). Stories featuring buyer and seller experiences are useful within B2B contexts where purchase transactions are quite complex due to multiple stakeholders demands that must be considered in the decision-making process (Lilien & Kijewski, 1987).

Through SM, B2B marketers have a new approach to communicate with buying group members. This type of marketing communication has traditionally been more of a direct and personal communication than the impersonal SM communication found in the B2C context. However, impersonal SM channels in B2B marketing can help open doors for industrial salespeople to connect with consumers and other stakeholders (Huang, 2014).

An emotional and universal B2B marketing communication campaign on SM plays an essential role in shaping the brand attitude, perception of products, and intent to purchase of an organization’s buying unit (Gilliland & Johnston, 1997). Research also has shown that emotional content involving symbolic brand image, reputation, humor, trustworthiness, reliability, and success are encouraged by B2B buyers (Huang, 2014; Lynch & De Chernatony, 2004).

A firm’s attempt to nurture brand passion within B2B usually begins with communication and transmission of the corporate brand identity to all business customers
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(Iglesias, Landgraf, & Ind et al., 2020). Nurturing brand passion through storytelling is seen as a powerful way for firms to convey emotional and cognitive brand experience (Essamri et al., 2019). Research has indicated that organizational buyers want to connect to B2B brands (Anaza et al., 2020). These connections are often created and strengthened via the use of stories that induce strong emotions (Escalas, 2004a). Storytelling provides customers with a context in which to understand the brand (Brechman & Purvis, 2015) and gives companies a strategic mechanism to communicate ideas that sell (Anaza et al., 2020). Despite the recognition that storytelling sells, research in B2B marketing literature has not fully explored the role of stories in B2B markets (Anaza et al., 2020).

Storytelling has been defined as sharing knowledge and experiences to communicate lessons, ideas, or concepts (Huang, 2014). Storytelling is made up of four core elements that are used as a guide when developing corporate brand stories. These elements include message, conflict, characters, and plot (Essamri et al., 2019; Huang, 2014). A clearly defined message that works as a central theme throughout the story is critical to nurture brand passion. The story also needs an element of conflict, which is essential to the story and arouses people’s interest. A cast of interacting and compelling characters is also needed for the conflict in the story to play out. The last element lies in the plot and how the story should progress. Storytelling helps capture the audience and allows them to follow the protagonist through encounters with difficulties, conflicts, enemies, and breakthroughs. Audiences go through emotionally fluctuating processes, recalling their own experiences, connecting with the brand, and coming to the same conclusion as the storyteller (Kemp et al., 2020).

Storytelling has the power to emphasize the firm’s brand history and identity, which has proved to have more impact than just posting brand content (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001). Studies
have shown that consumers who are exposed to storytelling are more likely to have a positive perception of the brand, are more willing to pay a premium, and are more likely to be loyal (Anaza et al., 2020).

Storytelling has the potential to increase marketing power in four areas: sales, branding, relationship building, and social marketing (Huang, 2014), all of which are critical to nurturing brand passion. Storytelling provides communicative advantages such as connectivity with customers, emotionality, and memorability, which enables marketers to target an organization’s buying unit group (Huang, 2014), making it a powerful instrument to build a brand. It can also influence an industrial B2B purchasing team at the initial stage by opening doors for personal selling to occur and the eventual closing of the sale. This is because storytelling has the power to differentiate the company’s products by going beyond its functional attributes. A powerful brand builds on clearly defined values based on emotional ties to customers (Huang, 2014); good storytelling communicates those values in an understood language and drives emotional bonds with customers and stakeholders. Powerful content on SM incorporates storytelling (Essamri et al., 2019). In marketing, storytelling has been aligned with content marketing, which involves creating compelling content to generate positive behavior from the customer (Anaza et al., 2020).

**Bridging Brand Meaning.** The firm is committed to its corporate brand meaning or identity because it is usually a reflection of the firm’s executives or founders (Iglesias, Landgraf, & Ind et al., 2020; Urde 2003). The connection between the founder’s identity and the corporate brand identity is usually evident to employees and multi-stakeholders within the B2B context and must be aligned (Iglesias, Landgraf, & Ind et al., 2020). Multi-stakeholders will have to go through the process of contesting and confronting the corporate brand identity with their perception to achieve alignment (Iglesias, Landgraf, & Ind et al., 2020).
Bridging is the process firms use to engage and ensure brand meaning co-creation and performance. It involves balancing, negotiating, and legitimizing the various corporate brand meanings rooted in customer and stakeholder interpretations (Edvardsson & Oskarsson, 2011). Firms participate in online community platforms to negotiate and interpret brand meaning with clients and stakeholders (Vallaster & Von Wallpach, 2013). The bridging process allows the firm’s marketers to negotiate brand meaning with other stakeholders, which involves a continuous exchange with the SM brand community to align on a meaning that resonates with the firm’s core values and the customers’ brand perception.

The role of the firm’s marketers is to balance the various brand meanings or identities (Iglesias & Ind, 2020). This activity acts as a base for confirmation or further development of brand meaning across stakeholders that will direct the firm’s strategic direction. Another important activity associated with bridging corporate brand meaning is legitimacy. Legitimacy refers to the firm’s actions being desirable, and appropriate within society’s norms, values, and beliefs (Suchman, 1995). Legitimacy highly depends on the relationship between firms and their stakeholders. Therefore, the firm’s marketing function aims to coordinate stakeholders’ views and gain alignment on the moral and cultural views of the firm’s brand meaning (Iglesias & Ind 2020). The firm’s marketing team understands the risk if they fail to fully legitimize the brand meaning with the public. As a result, marketers are continuously trying to communicate the role of the corporate brand in the lives of buyers and institutionalize the meaning of the brand to resonate with personal and social identities (Essamri et al., 2019).

Legitimizing on SM is supported by the social legitimacy theory, which occurs all the time as individuals make sense of their world (Coskuner-Balli, 2013). Social legitimacy theory consists of several levels: regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive (Gustafson &
Regulative legitimacy is the degree to which the firm’s practices conform to the rules, standards, and regulations set forth by our government institutions (Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002). Normative legitimacy is the degree to which a particular practice is perceived as aligned to fundamental norms and values in society (Suchman, 1995). Cognitive legitimacy looks at the degree to which firm practices can be understood according to cultural frameworks (Suchman, 1995).

It is easy to see how SM plays a dominant role in projecting legitimacy of firm information and content based on social legitimacy theory (Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021). Studies have shown that customers consider the information they obtain from SM to be far more trustworthy than marketing messages from traditional channels (Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021). A firm’s presence on SM positively impacts clients’ attitudes toward the firm (Hassanein & Head, 2007). Therefore, firms are seeking to engage in online social networks to make up brand performance gaps resulting from traditional communication channels such as mass media advertising (Risselada et al., 2014). In addition, research has shown that B2B buyers are now likely to first investigate a firm’s products on SM before calling a sales representative for additional information; the sales process starts even before connecting with a sales representative (Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021).

**Antecedents to Social Media Firm Brand Engagement**

Our literature review revealed three key factors that function as antecedents to SM firm brand engagement. These antecedents directly influence the SM tactics and activities necessary to engage customers and stakeholders to develop a coherent brand online. The factors are firm, industry, and customers. Each factor has been further categorized to reflect its orientation, behavior, and characteristics.
**Firm Factors.** Firm factors include a company’s orientation (leadership and culture, customers, corporate brand, SM marketing strategy, technology, marketing, and sales), behavior (SM strategy adoption, human resource initiatives, internal and external communications, employee and customer value-added relationships and partnerships) and firm characteristics (such as firm size).

**Leadership and Culture.** Company culture and leadership’s role in the brand meaning development process in small to medium size enterprises (SMEs) may look different than in large corporations. Some organizations may not even have a marketing department, and stakeholders tend to be family owners (Inskip, 2004). In most cases, SMEs seem to think that branding is out of reach and thus is regarded as secondary to short-term sales figures (Merrilees, 2007). This type of mindset stifles SM firm brand engagement activities because it is not integrated into the firm’s culture.

According to Inskip (2004), branding has shifted towards a philosophy of organizational change over the past 15 years. Leaders and owners of SMEs need to have a clear set of guidelines to compete in the global market and must keep a long-term view by allocating resources to build their brand (Lassen et al., 2008). De Chernatony (2001) stated that leadership of all types should consider three phases to their visionary process when leading brand meaning development. The first phase is for leadership to envision the future brand environment they would like to create within the next 10 years. The second phase envisions a better world because of the brand’s impact on internal and external stakeholders (brand purpose), and third phase is the value of the brand, which drives staff behavior and determines if the brand is delivering on its promise (brand promise).
Customer Orientation. According to Aaker and Joacimsthaler (2000), brand meaning enables differentiation from competitors, includes a promise to customers, and predicts customer action in the future. A customer-oriented company possesses the skills to create a strong relationship between the brand and customers through its value proposition (Baumgarth, 2010). Given the digital age and the shift to co-creating brand meaning with customers, customer-oriented firms are investing in technologies to increase their presence on SM. Most firms (87%) have invested in increasing firm engagement activities with customers on SM (Vander Schee et al., 2020).

Corporate Brand Orientation. A firm that is highly driven by its corporate brand tries to establish a coherent perception for its various stakeholders and aims for a good corporate reputation in the market (Hatch & Schultz, 2003). Aaker (1996) developed a personality scale originating from scales found in psychology and including five key elements: sincerity (honesty), excitement (daring), competence (reliability), sophistication (upper class) and ruggedness (tough). These elements can define a brand’s personality. According to De Chernatony (2006), the role of brand personality is to bring the brand’s emotional values to life. Aaker and Joacimsthaler (2000) stated that brand meaning development without brand personality is weak and too narrowly conceived. Sinha et al. (2010) clarified that brand meaning is the total proposal or promise that a firm makes to a customer. It includes features, benefits, and all other values that the brand possesses. Given the shift of firm-controlled processes in developing brand meaning to co-creation of brand meaning with stakeholders, brand-oriented firms must now engage with SM online communities to align their corporate brand meaning with customer and stakeholder perceptions for their brands to be successful in this digital age.
**Social Media Marketing Strategic Orientation.** Brand co-creation online in B2B markets is the principle that brands are not solely defined by organizations but by customers/stakeholders who interpret brands through SM and online communities (Iglesias et al., 2013). SM marketing strategic orientation enables the firm to assess customer motivation for brand engagement and transforms the SM interactions and engagement into strategic means to achieve the firm’s marketing outcomes (Li et al., 2021). Leadership must ensure the company culture is ready to engage with customers on SM. When corporate culture is favorable towards SM, firm engagement on SM is enhanced to collaborate with B2B customers (Keinanen et al., 2015).

**Technology Orientation.** Technology orientation is defined as the firm using and developing technology (Dutot & Bergeron, 2016). Technology-oriented companies are eager to develop and support the use of new technologies. These firms are more likely to use their technical knowledge to meet the needs of customers (Gatignon & Xuereb, 1997).

**Marketing Orientation.** A marketing-oriented firm has a good understanding of its chosen markets, customers, and internal capabilities (Kotler & Levy, 1969; Sharp, 1991). A market-oriented firm focuses on satisfying customers’ needs (Kotler & Levy, 1969). These companies have the ability to manage customer demand, as well as internal productive capabilities to achieve their goals (Sharp, 1991). Marketing-oriented firms will find SM firm brand engagement activities to be critical in this digital age.

**Sales Orientation.** Sales orientation involves value creation overtime for both the buyer and seller (Barney-McNamara et al., 2020; Hartmann et al., 2018). A sales-oriented company focuses on closing the sales with customers (Barney-McNamara et al., 2020; Jaramillo et al., 2007). A company that is customer, marketing, and sales oriented is well positioned to advance its brand meaning development through SM firm brand engagement activities, compared to a
company that is only sales oriented and focused on just closing the sale (Barney-McNamara et al., 2020; Jaramillo et al., 2007).

**Employee Adoption of Social Media Strategy.** A firm’s commitment to SM strategies and tactics has a strong impact on stakeholders and customer brand engagement (Barger et al., 2016; Cummins et al., 2016). Additionally, a firm’s communication technology is an important asset for gaining competitive advantage via SM and increasing customer engagement (Barger et al., 2016). This commitment requires an organizational vision for utilizing information and the sharing of customer data (Schultz & Peltier, 2013). Lack of resources and employee attitude are some of the challenges identified to corporate adoption and usage of SM (Schultz & Peltier, 2013). A SM-oriented company with employees who are aligned with the company’s strategy is more likely to increase SM engagement compared to companies that lack employee alignment (Cartwright et al., 2021). According to Keinänen and Kuivalainen (2015) an employee is likely to use SM if the corporate culture sees SM as important. A firm’s competence in SM is demonstrated through knowledge, expertise, and improved productivity via SM (Guesalaga, 2016). There must be alignment between SM firm brand engagement activities and marketing strategic plans, with metrics around brand performance.

**Human Resource Initiatives.** The human resource initiative comprises of aligning the company’s staff to the organization’s brand meaning through training and other initiatives. There are unique characteristics in B2B firms such as a multifaceted supply chain relationship, a complex selling process to a decision-making unit (De Chernatony et al., 2010), highly customized solutions (Baumgarth, 2010), a smaller number of powerful customers (Beverland et al., 2007), high value transactions, and personal selling (Lynch & de Chernatony, 2007); all of this makes human resource initiative implementation distinct and complex within the brand co-
creation process. Firms must ensure internal employees are aligned on the internal core values, purpose, brand personality, and promise before engaging in SM firm brand engagement activities and value co-creation process with customers.

**Brand Communications.** According to Lin and Siu (2020), B2B brand communication is both a functional and emotional approach. A functional approach includes explicitly displaying the brand’s qualities, functionalities, prices, and distribution channel position (Lin & Siu, 2020). Emotional brand communication in B2B firms is scarce, and scholars have pointed out the importance of communicating the emotional value in such a context (Candi & Kahn, 2016). A consistent functional and emotional communication strategy within the brand value co-creation process ensures that the brand value is communicated and negotiated with stakeholders.

**Employee and Client Value-Added Relationships and Partnerships.** The relationship that the staff, stakeholders, and customers have with each other is foundational when it comes to shared values and alignment in brand meaning. These relationships are crucial to the B2B brand development process because of the interpersonal nature of the market and the complex selling processes (Glynn, 2010). Previous studies have highlighted that in complex or high value selling environments such as the B2B markets, buyers expect value-added relationships to enhance their buying experience (Van Riel et al, 2005). When customers consider the firm to be a partner who adds value to their operations, SM firm brand engagement activities are likely to be successful.

**Firm Characteristics.** Firm size based on total assets and market value equity indicate that larger firms are more likely to use more SM than smaller firms (Smith et al., 2015). Additionally, firm size has been positively associated with adoption of SM technology (Fosso Wamba & Carter, 2014). Adoption of SM technology has an impact on the type of firms that drive SM firm brand engagement activities with their customers in branding communities.
**Industry Factors.** The industry in which a firm participates can be influential in its SM firm brand engagement activities and consequences. Market dynamics, competitive intensity, and characteristics such as industry classifications, as well as product or service complexities can influence the market trends and firm activities.

**Market Dynamics.** Market dynamics are the forces within an industry that can influence supply and demand. The industry technology orientation is one of the key market forces that can influence market dynamics (Gao et al., 2007). The value the firm puts on technology is also highly dependent on the industry and market it serves. Technology adoption ranges from incremental to cutting-edge (Zhou et al., 2005). How fast technology changes within a market or industry also determines the firm’s technology orientation and strategy (Gao et al., 2007). Market dynamics also considers the industry ecosystem, which includes customer orientation, and competitive orientation (Gao et al., 2007). All of these factors play a significant role in how firms approach SM engagement activities.

**Competitive Intensity/External Stakeholder Social Media Usage.** The number of competitors in an industry and the types of marketing techniques, such as advertising and pricing strategies, both determine the intensity of competition within the industry (Gao et al., 2007). SM online competitive situations includes Ambush marketing which allows one company’s advertising to be superimposed on another company’s paid advertisements on web pages, obliterating the advertisement and any prospect of reaching the customers targeted by the advertisements (Wood, 2004). Given digital growth, we expect competitive intensiveness to increase with the rise of firm engagement with customers on SM. Firms will have to learn how to differentiate themselves online. This starts with proper execution of the right brand engagement activities via various platforms on SM.
Industry Classification and Product Complexity. Industries can be classified into various sectors such as manufacturing, retail, healthcare, and service. Studies have shown no significant difference in SM adoption by industry type when studying the manufacturing, retail, and service industries; however, they have shown a difference in the SM platform used by industry type (Smith et al., 2015). For instance, manufacturing as an industry sector has been linked to adoption of Facebook events pages (Fosso Wamba & Carter, 2014). Industry factors have an impact on which SM platform a firm chooses for its SM firm brand engagement activities.

Business Customer Factors. Business customers are the buying organizations. Firm (or supplier) customer engagement is critical to a successful brand value co-creation outcome. Firms can engage with customers via tradeshows and SM for value co-creation (Hollebeek, 2019). SM can be leveraged to post events that support both SM and traditional business customer engagement activities.

Brand Perception. The customers’ perception of the brand is a critical component within the brand value co-creation process between internal stakeholders and customers. To ensure brand success, SM firm brand engagement activities try to negotiate and align the customers’ brand perception with the firm’s brand meaning (Essamri et al., 2019).

Customer Social Media Usage/Engagement. Customers engage in SM intending to achieve value. Organizations need to consider how to leverage SM to create customer experience that is unique to their brand (Heller Baird & Paranis, 2011). These firms can invite customers to participate in SM firm brand engagement initiatives and seek feedback to improve brand meaning and performance.

Brand Experience. Brand experience can influence customer engagement (Prentice et al., 2019). Customer engagement can be measured using four dimensions: purchase engagement,
referral engagement, influence value engagement, and knowledge engagement (Prentice et al., 2019). Given the various levels of brand engagement measurements, not all customers will necessarily participate in SM firm brand engagement activities. Firms will have to understand the customer’s buying journey and align it to their SM brand engagement activities.

**Technical Savvy.** Training impacts an individual’s attitude towards technology and their effectiveness (Ogilvie et al., 2018). A customer’s level of training in using computers and navigating SM online communities can directly influence engagement in SM brand development. Firms need to identify their technical savvy SM customers for participation in SM firm brand engagement activities.

**Consequences to Social Media Firm Brand Engagement**

We examined brand performance as the consequence of SM firm brand engagement activities. We expected to see brand performance (measured as customer-based brand equity and financial performance) improve with successful firm engagement activities. Business customer engagement along with value co-creation are expected to mediate the relationship between SM firm brand engagement activities and brand performance.

**Brand Performance.** Brand identity’s outcome is the customer’s brand perception, which leads to customer-based brand equity (Sinha et al., 2010). Brand equity (value) is the premium achieved when a firm has a well-known brand as compared to generic equivalents (Ailawadi et al., 2003). Firms with higher brand equity usually enjoy strong brand performance, such as higher market share and price premiums (Ailawadi et al., 2003), and generate higher returns for stakeholders (Aaker & Jacobson, 1994). There are different types of brand equity from the S-D logic perspective. Sales-based brand equity is derived from the value in exchange perspective, with emphasis on firm brand economic performance (Datta et al., 2017). The other
type is customer-based brand equity, which focuses on what customers think and feel about the brand (Datta et al., 2017).

Customer-based brand equity plays a greater role in value co-creation, especially in the digital age. Customer-based brand equity is a multidimensional concept that is made up of customer perceived quality, brand loyalty, and brand associations (Yoo et al., 2000). The literature has shown that corporate B2B brand performance can be measured in terms of financial and economic performance (sales growth, profit growth, return on investment, market share) and operational performance (customer loyalty, satisfaction, trust, customer relationship management (CRM), productivity, customer retention, and acquisition; (Tiwary et al., 2021)).

Marketing on SM has become automated, ensuring quality sales with personalized content and customer targeting (Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016). Firm SM usage is known to impact sales growth by improving salespeople’s access to information, communication behavior, and responsiveness, which leads to customer satisfaction (Agnihotri et al., 2016). Any CRM tools integrated with SM lead to improved communications with customers, resulting in high performing brands (Agnihotri et al., 2017). Facebook has proven to be an important SM platform for acquiring B2B customers and predicting brand performance (Drummond et al., 2020). Firms access UGC (big data) from Facebook posts, tweets, and blogs to understand customer behaviors, preferences, brand experience, and reputation (Drummond et al., 2020). All of these should be considered when pursuing value co-creation and customer-based brand equity.

**Business Customer Engagement.** A firm’s commitment to SM strategies and tactics will have a strong impact on customer brand engagement (Cummins et al., 2016). To gain a competitive advantage and increase engagement on SM, firms must manage their communication technology effectively (Zahay, 2014). Investment in a firm’s communication technology requires...
an organizational vision for utilizing information and sharing of customer data (Schultz & Peltier, 2013). It has been established that a firm’s presence on SM positively impacts customer’s attitudes toward the firm, impacting customer engagement (Hassanein & Head, 2007).

Online forums and brand communities are defined as communities where buyers and suppliers can co-create on SM platforms by sharing content with likeminded users and stakeholders (Merz et al., 2009). Community members could be admirers of the brand who want to express their perceptions of the brand (Merz et al., 2009). On SM platforms, B2B firms focus strongly on relationships with multiple stakeholders such as distributors, suppliers, and customers (including other stakeholders within the customer organization or buying group) to create a web of users that can be leveraged for SM firm brand engagement activities (Gil-Saura et al., 2009).

Customers and stakeholders are critical within brand communities where brand meaning is collectively enacted, negotiated, and co-created by its members based on consuming meanings, rituals, and practices (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001). According to Muñiz and O’Guinn (2001), there are three key markers of brand communities on SM: consciousness of kind, evidence of the rituals and traditions, and a sense of obligation to the community and its members. These elements must be considered when considering SM firm brand engagement to increase business customer engagement and interaction.

Prior research has identified four cultural dimensions that are important to customer engagement such as individualism, collectivism, idiocentrism, and allocentrism (Vander Schee et al., 2020). Individualism exists in society where people are independent of their in-group goals, and their attitudes instead of group norms dictate their behavior. Collectivism, on the other hand, involves highly independent people within their in-groups who behave in a communal way.
Idiocentrism refers to consumers who emphasize the values of a comfortable life and social recognition, which may call for higher levels of social engagement. Allocentrism describes an individual’s need to make relationships more intimate, these customers value cooperation, equality, and honesty. Firms should invest in understanding their customers’ and stakeholders’ motivations for SM engagement. It is known that B2B customers are motivated to engage with firms on brand-related content for entertainment, information acquisition, incentives and promotions, social influence and bonding, and impression management (Barger et al., 2016; Schultz & Peltier, 2013).

Customer engagement on SM can also be operationalized into measurable actions such as interactions with brand content (e.g., likes, hearts, 1-to-5-star ratings, comments), sharing content with others (e.g., Facebook shares, Twitter retweets), posting UGC (e.g., product reviews, Facebook posts about brands), and firm engagement (participating in branding online communities to co-create brand meaning and improve brand performance) (Barger et al., 2016; Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001).

**Value Co-Creation.** Corporate brands, when compared to product or service brands, are broader in scope and more strategic and represent brands at the corporate level within B2B models (Iglesias, Landgraf, & Ind et al., 2020; Roper & Davies 2007). Their objective is to promote long-term relationships between the organization and its internal and external stakeholders (customers, employees, suppliers, shareholders, commercial partners, and community) (Iglesias, Landgraf, & Ind et al., 2020). The main element of a corporate brand is its meaning or identity. The corporate brand meaning is what makes a brand unique and provides something that resonates with its stakeholders, allowing the B2B organization to emphasize their competitive advantage in the marketplace (Beverland et al., 2007). Corporate brand meaning has
also been characterized as stable and determined by a firm’s management (Essamri et al., 2019), representing how the company perceives itself and how it aims to present itself to the world (Koporčić & Halinen, 2018).

However, given the growth of the internet, SM, and online communities, this traditional view of corporate brand meaning has been challenged (Kapferer and Bastien, 2012). Corporate brand meaning development is now seen as fluid, ever evolving, and co-created by multiple internal and external stakeholders (Da Silveira et al., 2013; Iglesias et al., 2013, 2020; Koporčić & Halinen, 2018; Vallaster & Von Wallpach, 2013).

Value co-creation is the shared value between a supplier and business customer, where each feels the value created matches the effort to participate in the co-creation (Barney-McNamara et al., 2020; Schultz & Peltier, 2013; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). The SM firm brand engagement activities (developing customer partnerships, nurturing brand passion, bridging brand meaning) allow the firm, customer, and stakeholders to interact and co-create value that results in brand meaning alignment and enhanced performance. This multi-stakeholder value co-creation approach produces resources and skills from participants that are transformed and used to develop a shared brand meaning and identity (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). The key elements for a successful value co-creation process are customer or stakeholder interaction and collaboration, as well as effective leadership characteristics to facilitate the co-creative process (Pera et al., 2016).

Clients and stakeholders engage within the value co-creation process via information seeking, sharing, and building interpersonal relationships (Yi & Gong, 2013). The value created aligns customers and firm brand perceptions to co-create brand meaning that leads to a common purpose and promise.
Social Media Firm Brand Engagement Theories

Multiple theories have been proposed to examine SM firm brand engagement and value co-creation (see Appendix A). This study does not provide an exhaustive list of theories, but it serves as a starting point to continue research in SM firm brand engagement activities. This study puts special emphasis on S-D logic as the key theory supporting our SM firm brand engagement framework. Future research will continue to expand this list.

**Service Dominant Logic Theory.** The key theory supporting our B2B SM brand engagement framework is known as the S-D logic theory. The theory focuses on how value occurs when firms engage customers in the value co-creation process (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2017; Peltier et al., 2020). The importance of co-creation of value and the sharing of competence between the firm’s internal and external stakeholders is emphasized through S-D logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2008).

The S-D logic theory is rooted in marketing research and has gained momentum with the study from Vargo and Lusch (2004). There are three core principles and perspectives of S-D logic that have important value co-creation implications for marketing and brand development. First, an emerging S-D logic ecosystem perspective suggests that a complex network exists involving interrelationships and communications among multiple participants that go beyond the typical consumer–service provider dyad (Grönroos & Voima, 2013; Peltier et al. 2020). Value co-creation is increasingly coordinated through actor-generated institutions and arrangements that reflect multiple stakeholders within the ecosystem (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). Specific to B2B brand meaning development, the service ecosystem includes actors representing the supply side (e.g., brand managers, marketers, sales, service designers); on the demand side, actors include the firm’s buying center representatives (e.g., buyers, users, influencers) and other various
stakeholders (e.g., stockholders, government, distributors). Consequently, each of these actors may play a critical role in the brand meaning development, perceptions, and adoption processes that contribute to value co-creation. Information flows between these multiple actors are critical to helping consumers (and other network members) recognize and co-create value (Peltier et al., 2020).

Second, S-D logic considers service to reflect any process of exchanging information and other operant resources (Peltier et al. 2020; Vargo & Lusch, 2008). Operant resources reflect the personal skills and knowledge each participant uses during the service exchange (Vargo & Lusch, 2004) and serves as the primary basis of exchange (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). Value co-creation is thus enhanced when all participating actors and influencers contribute their respective inputs as part of the exchange (Grönroos & Ravald, 2011, Peltier et al. 2020). The emerging S-D logic perspective considers customers and clients to be the key actors defining value within the service exchange process (Grönroos & Ravald, 2011; Grönroos & Voima, 2013). Unlike a B2C model, the B2B and industrial marketing literature related to S-D logic theory is not only concerned with the value created for the customers but also the value that is derived from the interaction of multiple stakeholders at the business network level (Singaraju et al., 2016). This exchange among clients and stakeholders leads to integration of resources, which provides the value that is unique and content dependent (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). In the SM context, customers and stakeholders provide resources and skills available in online forums and communities that enable product rating and content sharing to co-create value (Paredes et al., 2014).

Therefore, marketers and brand leaders are responsible for incorporating processes that encourage multiple stakeholder value co-creation efforts (McColl-Kennedy, et al., 2017). The quality of value co-created is highly dependent on the personal interactions between the firm’s
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internal and external stakeholders during this process (Yi & Gong, 2013). According to S-D logic theory, the notion of relationship development is critical within the business network ecosystem, which can lead to marketing exchange becoming a set of interactive episodes across time that is no longer transactional (Ballantyne & Aitken, 2007).

Third, efficient resource integration and utilization of the limited operant resources available to service participants are critical to ecosystem value co-creation (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Therefore, to ensure success, brand managers need to focus on the customer interaction processes that monitor the productivity and value of the interactions (Ballantyne & Aitken, 2007). Through the lens of S-D logic, employees of a firm are internal service providers with skills and knowledge that benefit each other and the firm. However, in most firms, senior executives are responsible for strategy and lower-level managers and employees execute the strategy. Employees are seldom treated as service providers and beneficiaries, which leads to poor implementation of marketing strategy (Vargo & Lusch, 2017). Evidence suggests that poor implementation is a key cause for failure in strategy (Hickson et al., 2003; Nutt, 1999).

The link between S-D logic and brand development was established by scholars to provide a comprehensive perspective of brands as co-created by all the firm’s stakeholders (Merz et al., 2009), claiming that co-created brands are the outcome of the relationships that unfold over time (Payne et al., 2009). The formulation of brand and its meaning is shifting towards co-creation in the digital age, and it aligns with S-D logic’s emphasis of value co-creation (Ballantyne & Aitken, 2007). This view is very different from traditional views that brand meaning within the firm and responsibility for the brand lies with the marketing department (Ballantyne & Aitken, 2007). The traditional view of brand meaning is tactical and reactive rather than strategic and visionary (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000).
Successful implementation of S-D logic theory in brand strategy development and implementation is highly dependent on the firm’s ability to develop ongoing, cooperative relationships that integrate and provide access to resources (skills, knowledge) to create value (Vargo & Lusch, 2014). Applying S-D logic’s view of customers, suppliers, and all employees as operant resources (skills, knowledge) will result in effective brand meaning development and implementation.

**Performative Theory.** This is another related theory. Performative theory and approach argue that stable phenomena such as brand meaning does not exist but is characterized by ongoing social processes that constitute social objects (Butler, 2010; Kristal et al., 2020). This view supports the firm’s engagement activities to co-create meaning with customers and stakeholders that evolves in response to internal and external contextual changes and is open to continuous redefinition (Da Silveira et al., 2013; Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017).

**Resource Based View.** This theory focuses on how effectively the firm uses its resources to create an advantage that affects overall performance (Barney, 1991; Day, 1994). It puts emphasis on the antecedents that lead to effective social brand value co-creation firm engagement activities in branding communities. Employees are likely to engage in SM if the firm’s culture and resources support SM use (Keinänen & Kuivalainen, 2015).

**Customer Engagement Theory.** Customer engagement theory is argued to have its roots in marketing’s S-D logic, which proposes that important engagement-related customer outcomes are generated by the brand or firm-related interactive experiences (Vargo & Lusch 2004). Customer engagement theory states that a customer’s experience with a brand or firm influences their emotional state, which then influences the engagement with the firm, including contributing to positive feedback on SM (Pansari & Kumar, 2017). It is critical that a firm’s marketing
engagement with customers is perceived as positive for social branding engagement activities to be successful.

**Self-Determination Theory.** Self-determination theory argues that depending on the perceived marketing generated content and network, users construe their community membership as self-determined (autonomous motivation) versus non-self-determined (controlled motivation); this has an impact on the level of customer engagement (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Self-determination theory seeks to help us understand the importance of marketing generated content in customer or buyer engagement. The theory helps marketers understand user motivation for engagement prior to implementing SM firm brand engagement activities that drive buyer or customer behavior.

**Social Media Presence Theory.** This theory claims that communication on the most popular SM platforms results in a higher degree of social presence, which leads to better customer engagement and interaction (Short et al., 1976). When it comes to projecting the legitimacy of firm information and content, SM plays a dominant role (Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021). Most businesses (87%) invest in knowing more about their customers’ SM behavior (Vander Schee et al., 2020). It is critical that firms choose the most popular SM platforms to have a significant impact on their SM firm brand engagement activities.

**Social Identity Theory.** This theory argues that consumers first define and then express themselves in the context of a particular reference group (Heinonen, 2011). Therefore, self-expression and social interaction are always combined and influence one another. Social interaction and self-expression benefits are key functions of SM. Therefore, SM forums and branding communities and groups are extremely powerful in driving firm and customer engagement.
Transfer of Meaning Theory. According to McCracken’s (1990) theory of meaning transfer, individuals can achieve “self-expression” by transfer of meaning from influential individuals, group, or symbol to themselves to gain desired importance. Individuals can identify with brands via access to usage content produced by branding communities on SM (Kucharska, 2017) and transfer those brand meanings to themselves through their visible identification with the brands (Kelley & Alden, 2016). This theory helps enhance the importance of SM firm brand engagement activities to co-create brand value with stakeholders within branding communities.

Social Legitimacy Theory. The origins of social legitimacy theory can be found in institutional theory. However, researchers have applied this theory to address why consumers perceive certain brands or consumption practices as legitimate but not others (Heiens & Narayanaswamy, 2021). To create this differentiation through its branding communities, SM firm brand engagement activities are key. Legitimacy is one of the tactics within our SM firm brand engagement framework. It is part of bridging the gap between customer and firm brand perception. Legitimacy highly depends on the relationship between firms and their stakeholders. Therefore, the firm’s marketing function should aim to coordinate stakeholders’ views as well as the moral and cultural views of the firm’s brand identity.

Conclusion and Future Research Agenda

The digital era is transforming how firms engage customers to market their products. The emergence of SM has made SM brand value co-creation the future for brand development. The internal process for establishing firm brand meaning (which includes determining brand purpose, personality, positioning, and communication of brand promise to targeted audience) is evolving. Customers and stakeholders are becoming part of the brand development process via online communities. While there are both positive and negative aspects to the brand meaning co-
creation process, firms will need to address the negative aspects of co-creation to remain competitive in the future (Iglesias & Ind, 2020).

This study contributes by proposing a comprehensive framework for marketing practitioners to adopt in co-creation of brand meaning via SM communities, providing a roadmap for firms to improve their SM firm brand engagement especially within the B2B space. The framework outlines antecedents and consequences of SM firm brand engagement activities to develop the brand with internal and external stakeholders. This framework warrants future research given that SM brand value co-creation is continuously evolving.

**Social Media Firm Brand Engagement Defined**

There is a call for research on how a firm’s marketing function engages customers to contribute to the co-creation of corporate brand meaning or value on SM forums and brand communities (Cartwright et al., 2021; Essamri et al., 2019; Iglesias & Ind, 2020). This study proposes a framework on how firms can engage with customers for brand value co-creation and brand performance. Our study also defines SM firm brand engagement activities as co-creating brand value with customers on SM by integrating organization-led activities that support nurturing customer brand passion, bridging gaps and legitimizing brand meaning, and developing brand partnerships with business customers and stakeholders. Future research is needed to clearly define and expand on the multidimensional constructs associated with SM firm brand engagement activities, which results in value that is co-created.

**Social Media Firm Brand Engagement Antecedents**

Further investigation is needed to understand the full effect of the antecedents to SM firm brand engagement and its consequences (Hollebeek et al., 2014). Our study explores the impact of firm, industry, and customer factors in successfully implementing SM brand engagement.
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activities online. It also examines the orientation, behaviors, and characteristics of each factor. Additional studies are required to determine how firm, customer, and industry orientation, behaviors, and characteristics create effective deployment of SM firm brand engagement activities with customers. Some future research questions addressing these antecedents could be:

- What are the leadership styles and firm structures that can most effectively support deployment of SM firm brand engagement activities online?
- What are the risks involved in firms deploying SM firm brand engagement activities to co-create brand value with B2B multi-stakeholders? How should firms mitigate such risks?

Social Media Firm Brand Engagement Outcomes

Business Customer Engagement. A firm’s commitment to SM strategies and tactics will have a strong impact on business customer brand engagement (Cummins et al., 2016). Various SM firm brand engagement activities such as nurturing brand passion, bridging brand meaning, and developing brand partnerships play a key role in ensuring customer engagement. Empirical research is required to confirm the outcomes of SM firm brand engagement activities, which are critical to customers for value co-creation to occur. When customers are engaged with the brand, it allows for value co-creation and the achievement of brand performance goals. Marketers building customer relationships or partnerships may control the ultimate level of engagement within the SM firm brand engagement activities (Vargo & Lusch, 2017). Future research questions to fully address the impact of SM firm brand engagement may include:

- What are the differential effects of SM firm brand engagement activities on business customer engagement?
- Which SM firm brand engagement activities should be prioritized for customer engagement?
- How should brand communities be structured for effective engagement?
**Value Co-Creation.** Value co-creation is the shared value that results from the integration of skills and resources between the firm, customers, and stakeholders (Barney-McNamara et al., 2020; Schultz & Peltier, 2013; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Brand communities on SM provide a platform for firms and customers or stakeholders to co-create value for a brand (Essamri et al., 2019). The value created in this process leads to firm and customer alignment on the brand purpose, personality, promise, and performance in the market. Therefore, understanding how SM firm engagement activities result in value co-creation requires additional study. Future research questions may include:

- How does value co-creation mediate the relationship between SM firm brand engagement activities and brand performance?
- What new marketing skill sets are required to effectively facilitate SM firm brand engagement activities that result in value co-creation with customers?

**Brand Performance.** Brand meaning outcomes impact brand performance (Sinha et al., 2010). This study promotes a framework where business customer engagement, brand value co-creation, and brand performance function as consequences of SM firm brand engagement activities. Future research is needed to align business metrics to measure these consequences. This will enhance and influence how companies design and execute their SM programs (Barger et al., 2016). Future research questions may include:

- Which business metrics accurately measure brand performance resulting from brand value co-creation within online communities?
Essay 2: Impact of Social Media Marketing Strategic Orientation on Social Media Firm Brand Engagement Activities and Outcomes – An Empirical Study

The practice of SM marketing has evolved with increased focus on communication approaches that enhance brand engagement (Cartwright et al., 2021) and customer interactions (Drummond et al., 2020). Scholars have defined SM as online platforms (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and private firm platforms) designed to facilitate communication exchange between a firm and its stakeholders (Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021). Academics and business practitioners are particularly interested in how a firm’s SM marketing strategic orientation impacts its engagement activities and how this engagement contributes to the brand value and performance (Drummond et al., 2020, Pardo et al., 2022). Given the rapid growth of SM platforms employing varied communication formats (i.e., video, picture, text), SM has shifted from a single marketing tool to an array of marketing intelligence sources, allowing firms to observe and enhance customer engagement through a variety of digital media (Li et al., 2021). A key challenge facing marketers is how to develop and execute a cohesive marketing and branding strategy across multiple SM platforms and digital formats (Cartwright et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2019).

To date, the bulk of SM research has been conducted in B2C settings, enabling firms to deploy successful SM campaigns and co-creation strategies (Kamboj & Sarmah, 2018). Research on SM in B2C settings has covered e-commerce (online shopping apps), consumer brand development and engagement via crowdsourcing, SM brand communities, mobile marketing advertisements, SM customer interactions via chatbot, and microsites, among others (Dwivedi, Ismagilova, & Hughes et al., 2021). Communication in B2C settings involves a two-way approach between the firm and individual customers, while B2B communication is networked...
(communication between multiple stakeholders) and involves a different communication and engagement approach (Diba et al., 2019). Buying decisions in a B2C environment are conducted by individual consumers, while B2B buying decisions are driven by organization needs and professional buying groups. However, emergent research in the context of B2B SM is still in the embryonic stage and future research is needed (Iannacci et al., 2021). Research on SM within B2B settings has primarily focused on the effect of SM on customer relationships (Hollebeek 2019; Iankova et al. 2019; Ogilvie et al., 2018), including CRM initiatives such as social selling. Social selling provides a conduit for information exchange between the seller and buyer (Barney-McNamara et al., 2020; Vander Schee et al., 2020), as well as a platform for creating and broadening a network to facilitate the sales process. The integration of CRM and SM prompted the start of social selling, allowing for more robust buyer engagement (Agnihotri et al., 2017; Barney-McNamara et al., 2021). Combined, research has suggested that SM enhances a firm’s brand engagement and performance (Dwivedi, Ismagilova, & Rana et al., 2021).

A firm’s SM marketing strategic orientation enables an organization to leverage SM. It also requires a supportive firm culture with employee skills emphasizing intelligence in customer analytics and organization business processes (Li et al., 2021). Despite the potential impact, there has been little extant research examining the role that SM marketing strategic orientation plays in the firm’s B2B brand engagement activities (Cartwright et al., 2021). Strategic orientation has been defined as the firm’s strategic direction in developing proper behaviors to achieve superior performance (Gatignon & Xuereb, 1997). Strategic orientation is influenced by both environmental factors (e.g., market uncertainties) and organizational characteristics such as firm structure, culture, and systems (Ginsberg & Venkataman, 1985). Firm leadership and structure are critical to establishing a group culture where employees are aligned to the firm’s strategic
direction through participation in shared decision making (Zhou et al., 2004). A firm’s group culture creates cohesion among employees and provides understanding of the actions that are taken in the firm (Quinn, 1988).

As a component of a firm’s portfolio of strategies, SM has gained significant importance over the years (Li et al., 2021). This has led firms to establish a SM strategic orientation, which can be defined as “the set of principles and objectives that direct and influence a firm’s activities on SM to improve performance” (Dutot & Bergeron, 2016, p. 1168). However, this definition limits SM to the firm’s activities. When viewed from a strategic marketing perspective, SM entails a process that not only focuses on the firm but also on customers, exchanging resources and co-creating value through SM (Li et al., 2021). For example, customers can exchange operant (e.g., knowledge), and operand (e.g., equipment) resources through interaction with the firm on SM (Hollebeek, 2019). Therefore, the success of a firm’s SM marketing strategic orientation is contingent on its ability to accurately assess customer motivation for SM brand engagement and transforms these interactions into valuable strategic means that achieve the firm’s marketing outcomes (Li et al., 2021). A major part of a firm’s marketing strategy is driven by its SM marketing strategic orientation, which is critical to execute the firm’s SM brand engagement activities (Bocconcelli et al., 2018).

The SM marketing strategic orientation has been studied through the lens of customer engagement theory, which stresses the importance of understanding customer motivations as a foundation for firms to develop effective SM marketing strategies and tactics (Luo et al., 2021). Customer engagement theory highlights the role of inputs and outputs from both firm (SM firm engagement tactics) and customer (SM behaviors) interactivity to produce sound marketing outcomes (Li et al., 2021).
Despite the importance of SM marketing strategic orientation, little research has examined how firm SM brand engagement activities vary in increasing brand value and performance (Drummond et al., 2020). Studies have shown that 83% of B2B executives now use SM for their information searches, and 92% of these executives also report that SM influences their purchasing decisions (Gustafson et al., 2021). In addition, 73% of personnel involved in B2B purchasing decisions are millennials (a group which heavily uses SM; Gustafson et al., 2021).

There are multiple active SM marketing platforms. These platforms are strategic places where customers are interacting with firms and thus co-creating brands. Customers’ level of loyalty to these SM platforms creates brand advocates who have emotional attachment to the brands (Nyagadza, 2022). Studies have shown that popular B2B SM platforms like Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook may positively impact firm engagement, leading to customer commitment and brand strength (Pardo et al., 2022).

Research also has shown that SM users are motivated on intellectual, social, and cultural grounds to engage with the firm (Li et al., 2021). The firm’s SM brand engagement activities allow the firms to interact with customers and stakeholders to co-create value by exchanging resources, skills, and knowledge (Li et al., 2021). The consequences of firm SM brand engagement activities are based on the fact that it is only when the firm and its customers engage to develop relationships that SM technology platforms become real resource integrators (Li et al., 2021). Hence, the outcome of SM firm brand engagement activities is jointly decided by both the firm and customers rather than by individual customer behavior as in traditional marketing (Li et al., 2021; Singaraju et al. 2016). The customer value that is derived from this interaction is unlike traditional marketing, where value is narrowly defined to capture purchase behavior through
customer lifetime value. In the case of SM firm brand engagement, value is captured through customer engagement and contributions to the brand’s value (Li et al., 2021).

Studies also have shown that aligning and engaging employees with the firm’s SM brand engagement activities results in enhancing firm competitiveness and brand performance (Cartwright et al., 2021). Research has determined that employee perception of organizational support of technology can enhance the relationship between frontline employees and online social networks with customers (Agnihotri et al., 2022). Therefore, employees are important to the execution of SM firm brand engagement activities and sustaining relationships with customers (Ng & Vargo, 2018).

A SM marketing strategic orientation results in SM firm brand engagement activities (discussed and defined in Essay 1), such as developing brand partnership via knowledge sharing, nurturing brand passion via storytelling, and bridging brand meaning and legitimacy (Essamri et al., 2019). These engagement activities are widely supported by scholars, especially within the B2B market space where corporate brands are strongly influenced by long-term relationships between stakeholders (Drummond et al., 2020; Iglesias, Landgraf, & Ind et al., 2020).

**Scope and Importance of the Study**

Essay 2 addresses the B2B SM research gaps by analyzing how a firm’s SM marketing strategic orientation impacts its SM brand engagement activities and how this engagement contributes to the brand value and performance (Drummond et al., 2020; Pardo et al., 2022). Specifically, this study explores the value that is co-created via firm’s SM marketing strategic orientation and SM firm brand engagement activities to enhance brand performance. The study establishes variables to measure SM marketing strategic orientation and SM firm brand engagement activities and outcomes. We propose a model (**Figure 2**) to empirically test the
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hypothesized relationships for each variable via partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) and to answer the following three questions:

- **RQ1**: What impact does a firm’s SM marketing strategic orientation have on its SM brand engagement activities?
- **RQ2**: What impact does a firm’s SM brand engagement activities have on brand value co-creation?
- **RQ3**: What is the impact of brand value co-creation on brand performance?
Figure 2

*Impact of Social Media Marketing Strategic Orientation on Brand Engagement and Outcomes*

*Note.* SM = social media, (+) = positive relationship
Summary of Contributions to Theory and Practice

In addition to the contributions to theory and practice outlined in Essay 1, Essay 2 provides empirical evidence to support the relationships between the firm’s SM marketing strategic orientation, brand engagement activities, and outcomes (brand value co-creation and brand performance) within our B2B SM brand engagement framework.

Literature Review

Essay 1 provides a comprehensive literature review that identifies the antecedents and consequences of SM firm brand engagement activities. Essay 2 proposes an empirical model to examine the impact of specific antecedents, such as SM marketing strategic orientation, on SM firm brand engagement activities and the impact of those activities on brand value co-creation and performance. Essay 2 uses both S-D logic theory and customer engagement theory to explain how value is co-created between the firm and customers via the firm’s SM marketing strategic orientation and SM firm brand engagement activities.

Service Dominant Logic and Customer Engagement Theory

Essay 2 uses the S-D logic theory (discussed in Essay 1) to connect the firm’s SM firm brand engagement activities. We also explore customer engagement theory in Essay 2 and its impact on SM marketing strategic orientation. Customer engagement theory promotes the firm’s understanding of customer motivation as the foundation for developing effective SM marketing strategy (Li et al., 2021). Customer engagement theory further expands on the four components necessary to developing a SM marketing strategy within every firm: drivers, inputs, throughputs, and outputs (Li et al., 2021). The first component is the driver, which involves the firm’s SM marketing objectives and customer’s motivation for using SM (Li et al., 2021). Customer SM motivation for brand interaction has been characterized by the need for entertainment,
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information, remuneration, personal identity, social interaction, and empowerment (Muntinga et al., 2011).

Second, inputs of SM marketing strategy involve firm initiatives to encourage customer engagement (Li et al., 2021). Resource dependence theory argues that firms must take the initiative to engage customers by interacting with them and generating contributions that will alleviate resource shortages (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Research has identified three types of customer brand engagement behaviors: observing (e.g., reading content), participating (e.g., commenting on a post), and co-creating (e.g., partaking in product or brand development; Maslowska et al., 2016). This provides support for our firm SM brand engagement activities (developing brand partnerships, nurturing brand passion, and bridging brand meaning) initiated by the firm for the purpose of encouraging customer engagement and co-creating brand value.

The third component is throughput, which is when the firm interacts and connects with customers and stakeholders to exchange resources (Li et al., 2021). Interaction via SM is complex given the multidirectional and interconnected information flow (instead of a firm monologue; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2013). This is because SM has empowered customers to be equal actors in firm–customer interactions such as sharing of ideas and networking. In addition, customer-to-customer interactions have also emerged as a powerful market force because customers can influence each other’s brand preferences through SM (Peters et al., 2013). Consequently, firms developing brand partnerships with customers provides a competitive advantage.

Fourth are outputs, which involve the resulting customer and firm engagement outcomes (Li et al., 2021). The more customers connect and interact with SM firm brand engagement activities, the more customers add value to the firm and brand (Pansari & Kumar, 2017).
Through the lens of S-D logic theory, the foundation of the customer engagement process includes customer resource integration, customer knowledge sharing, and learning (Hollebeek, 2019). This leads to customer operant resource development and co-creation, which can result in firm–customer connectedness on SM (Harmeling et al., 2017).

Application of customer engagement and S-D logic theories in our model emphasizes the interconnectivity that needs to occur among B2B firms and their stakeholders within the network for brand value co-creation to occur, which can lead to enhanced brand performance. The customer engagement and S-D logic theories emphasize the importance of the SM marketing strategy, which grounds the organization on objectives and ensures understanding of customer motivation and behavior (Li et al., 2021; Luo et al., 2021). This leads to developing and initiating the right brand tactics to engage customers and co-create brand value.

Model Development and Hypotheses

Essay 2 expands on the B2B SM brand engagement framework proposed in Essay 1. The framework includes SM marketing strategic orientation and SM firm brand engagement activities and outcomes. Firms in B2B industries currently lack a comprehensive SM marketing strategic approach (Cartwright et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2019), resulting in a lack of business opportunities for firms (Hollebeek, 2019). Academics and practitioners are eager to know the impact of a firm’s SM marketing strategic orientation on engagement activities and outcomes (Drummond et al., 2020; Pardo et al., 2022). This framework provides a roadmap that can help firms create a comprehensive marketing strategy for improvement in brand performance. The framework also explores the direct and indirect effects via structural equation statistical modeling for future research.
Given our previous definition of SM firm brand engagement activities within our framework, we will now put forth hypotheses to explore the impact of SM marketing strategic orientation on SM firm brand engagement activities, study the impact of SM firm brand engagement activities on brand value co-creation, and finally, look at the mediating role of brand value co-creation and its impact on brand performance.

**Social Media Marketing Strategic Orientation**

A SM marketing strategic orientation is defined as the firm’s ability to assess customer motivation for SM brand engagement and transform SM interactions and platforms into valuable strategic means to achieve the firm’s marketing and brand outcomes (Li et al., 2021). A firm’s SM marketing strategic orientation depends on the organization’s ability to leverage SM. It also requires a supportive firm organization culture (Li et al., 2021).

The social CRM strategy is the highest level of SM marketing strategic orientation deployed by a firm (Li et al., 2021). Social CRM strategy is different from traditional CRM marketing, which assumes that customers are passive (Li et al., 2021). Instead, social CRM strategy focuses on the active role of customers in a collaborative interaction, including firm–customer, inter-organization, and inter-customer interactions that intend to empower customers to build mutually beneficial relationships and contribute to brand value (Li et al., 2021). Social CRM strategy is the level of SM marketing strategic orientation required by B2B firms, given that these firms are part of social networks that include multiple stakeholders who interact and maintain long-term relationships (Iglesias, Landgraf, & Ind et al., 2020). Scholars have also defined CRM as a business strategy whose goal is to use information about customers to maximize value and profitability of the long-term customer relationship that the company has developed (Lopes & Oliveira, 2022). Hence, firms are improving customer experience and
satisfaction by integrating SM applications into their current CRM systems (Lopes & Oliveira, 2022). These CRM systems and strategies help in executing SM firm brand engagement activities; customer information collected within CRM systems can be utilized for developing brand partnerships, nurturing brand passion, and bridging brand meaning with customers.

Developing a SM marketing strategy requires investment in the firm’s employees and organizational culture (Cartwright et al., 2021). The impact of firm SM marketing strategic orientation on brand performance is dependent on human activities conducted by employees, customers, and stakeholders (Cartwright et al., 2021). The SM marketing strategy impacts a firm’s culture, and the role employees play on SM to influence SM firm brand engagement activities. Employee endorsement on SM helps firms develop the intended brand identity and increase corporate brand awareness, which contributes to customer’s trust in the brand (Barry & Gironda, 2019; Drummond et al., 2020). Studies also have shown that aligning and engaging employees with a firm’s SM marketing strategy results in enhancing firm competitiveness and brand performance (Cartwright et al., 2021). Research also has determined that employee perception of organizational support of technology can enhance the relationship between frontline employees and customers on SM (Agnihotri et al., 2022).

Research has outlined steps for firms to develop SM marketing strategic orientation through integration of SM and social marketing (Li et al., 2021). The first step to establishing a SM marketing strategy is to define the audience and preferred use of SM (e.g., purpose, frequency). Second, firms should determine the purpose for engagement with the customers (e.g., product development or feedback, trigger collaboration, identification of advocates or loyalists, development of influencers), Third, firms should outline strategies to accomplish their purpose. Fourth, firms should choose the appropriate technology platform to support their
strategies (e.g., public platforms such as Facebook or LinkedIn or private corporate platforms). It is also important to incorporate key performance indicators within this framework to measure progress (Rakship et al., 2022). This comprehensive process in establishing a firm’s SM marketing strategic orientation is the antecedent to SM firm brand engagement activities. Therefore, we posit that SM marketing strategic orientation will have a positive impact on SM firm brand engagement activities.

\[ H_1 \]: A firm’s SM marketing strategic orientation will be positively associated with developing brand partnerships with customers via marketing collaborations and knowledge sharing.

\[ H_2 \]: A firm’s SM marketing strategic orientation will be positively associated with nurturing customers’ brand passion via storytelling.

\[ H_3 \]: A firm’s SM marketing strategic orientation will be positively associated with bridging brand meaning via negotiations and legitimization with customers.

**Social Media Firm Brand Engagement Activities**

**Developing Brand Partnerships.** Developing brand partnerships involves ongoing collaboration and knowledge sharing between customers, suppliers, and stakeholders to create brand value (Essamri et al., 2019). Firms must also fully understand the motivation for customers’ and stakeholders’ partnerships with the firm and ensure alignment to firm brand meaning and values. Brand partnerships have the potential to lead to buyers and suppliers being connected by shared values, norms, and beliefs that result in value creation through service exchange (Vargo & Akaka, 2014; Vargo & Lusch, 2016). Therefore, we posit the following:

\[ H_4 \]: Developing brand partnerships with customers via marketing collaborations and knowledge sharing will be positively associated with brand value co-creation.
**Nurturing Brand Passion.** A firm’s ability to nurture brand passion via storytelling induces strong customer emotions for the brand (Anaza et al., 2020). This allows the firm to influence customer purchases. Studies have shown that customers exposed to storytelling are likely to pay a premium for the brand (Anaza et al., 2020). Nurturing brand passion via storytelling becomes powerful when value is communicated in a language that enhances emotional ties with the customer, which can lead to value co-creation (Essamri et al., 2019; Huang, 2014). Therefore, we posit the following:

\[ H_5: \text{Nurturing brand passion via storytelling will be positively associated with brand value co-creation.} \]

**Bridging Brand Meaning.** The firm’s ability to negotiate and legitimize corporate brand meaning to align with customer interpretation is important to the bridging brand meaning process (Edvardsson & Oskarsson, 2011; Essamri et al., 2019). It gives the perception that the firm’s actions are proper and aligned with societal norms (Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021; Suchman, 1995). The SM firm brand engagement activity of bridging brand meaning through negotiations and legitimizing the brand is important to the brand value co-creation process (Essamri et al., 2019). Therefore, we posit:

\[ H_6: \text{Bridging brand meaning via negotiations and legitimization with customers will be positively associated with brand value co-creation.} \]
Outcomes

Brand Value Co-Creation. An effective brand value co-creation process requires firm–customer interactions, collaborations, and effective firm leadership skills (Pera et al., 2016). This can have a direct impact on the firm’s brand engagement activities and brand performance. Hence, we posit:

$H_7$: Brand value co-creation will mediate the positive relationship between SM brand engagement activities and brand performance.

Brand Performance. According to literature, brand performance can be measured in terms of economic factors (business sales growth, margin growth, market share, etc.) and operations factors (customer loyalty, customer satisfaction, retention etc.; Tiwary et al., 2021). This empirical research measured brand performance using economic factors such as sales growth, market share growth, and profit growth. Future research can also explore operations factors to measure brand performance.
Methods

Data Collection and Sample

The study was conducted using cross-sectional research design, focusing on marketers at the individual level. Cross-sectional research allows for collecting data at one point in time and may reduce common method bias (Rindfleisch et al., 2008). Data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire, which allowed for data collection from many participants at one time (Adams & Lawrence, 2019). Qualtrics was used to administer the questionnaire electronically to panel participants. The survey was comprised of approximately 60 questions, taking participants about 10 minutes to complete. Our research sample consisted of individuals within a firm’s marketing function (top marketing management, mid-level, & non-management) with responsibility over firm marketing vision, strategy, and execution within B2B organizations in the United States. The respondents represented B2B firms that supply goods and services to other business organizations. We obtained our sample using panel participants via Cloud Research. Our sample size represented both large and small to medium-sized firms. We screened survey respondents by asking if they were employed within a B2B firm. If the answer was yes, they were advanced to complete the questionnaire. Our survey returned 215 completed responses for our model analysis using Smart-PLS. The model analysis was done using a bootstrap subsample of 5,000. Smart-PLS uses a predictive approach that allows researchers to estimate complex models that include large numbers of constructs and paths (Hair, Risher, & Sarstedt et al., 2019). Demographic characteristics of the respondents are shown in Table 1.
Table 1

Respondent Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Characteristic</th>
<th>Sample Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>26+ years</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Industry Type</td>
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<tr>
<td>Services</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Retail/Wholesale</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Note. N = 215
Measures

We employed a multi-stage process to develop our survey. First, we reviewed existing literature, which helped inform the measurements of our constructs. Second, we adapted existing scales and developed new scales to represent our constructs (SM marketing strategic orientation, SM firm brand engagement activities, brand value co-creation, and brand performance). Based on this information, 41 scale items were used to measure the six constructs in our model (see Appendix C). All scales were measured via an agreement scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree), except for brand performance (1 = Inferior to Competitors; 5 = Superior to Competitors). More detailed information about the scales for each construct follows:

• **SM Marketing Strategic Orientation:** This construct utilizes a 7-item scale reflecting the firm’s culture initiated by the executives and upper management. It emphasizes the marketer’s perception of the organization’s interest and direction for SM use in the company and within the marketing function. Survey items were both developed and adapted from Barney-McNamara et al. (2020).

• **Developing Brand Partnership:** An 8-item scale was used to measure the firm’s initiatives to connect with customers via marketing collaboration and knowledge sharing. It reflects the customer and firm interaction in discussing the brand, providing feedback, and developing brand content. Scales were both developed and adapted from Essamri et al. (2019).

• **Nurture Brand Passion:** For this construct, a 7-item scale measured how the firm uses storytelling to engage and nurture brand passion within customers. This scale assesses the specific activities deployed by the firm to achieve this goal. Survey items were both
developed and adapted from scholars such as Essamri et al. (2019) and Anaza et al. (2020).

- **Bridging Brand Meaning**: A 6-item scale was used to measure how a firm interacts with customers to negotiate and legitimize brand meaning. We measured the interactive activities initiated by the firm to bridge the gap between customer and firm perceptions. Survey items were both developed and adapted from Essamri et al. (2019).

- **Brand Value Co-Creation**: An 8-item scale was used to measure how marketers and customers work together to create the best value co-creation outcome. It focuses on firm and customer interaction to discuss and resolve issues, the follow-through on agreed-upon actions, and the continuous observation of product or service usage. Survey items were created and adapted from Yi and Gong (2013) and Barney-McNamara et al. (2020).

- **Brand Performance**: We used a 5-item scale measuring the firm’s brand financial performance compared to competitors in the market. The brand performance scales are also an indicator of customer brand loyalty. Brand loyalty can be associated with customer repeated purchase, willingness to buy at a premium, and customer retention (Asker, 1996). Survey items were originally developed to compare respondents’ firm performance to the industry as a whole.

- **Control Variables**: The control variables for this study included gender, age, and marketing experience. Prior literature has shown that gender impacts how SM is used (Goswami & Dutta, 2016). Studies have also shown that younger generations use SM on a larger scale (Keinänen & Kuivalainen, 2015). More years of experience have been shown to negatively affect technology orientation (Hunter & Perreault, 2006), which may
correlate with the marketer’s age. However, other studies have shown no significance in years of experience when examining CRM and SM usage (Agnihotri et al., 2017).

Results

Measurement Model Results

Smart-PLS 4.0 was used to assess the validity and reliability of our measurement models. An extensive review of 239 articles in the top 30 marketing journals from 2011–2022 by Sarstedt et al. (2022) suggested that PLS-SEM is valuable for most empirical studies, especially for complex models with many indicators, constructs, and model relationships; causal-predictive relationships; mediating and moderating effects; and showing discriminant validity using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations. Authors also acknowledge PLS-SEM is used for investigating a broad range of business disciplines including marketing and strategic management (Hair, Risher, & Sarstedt et al., 2019).

We used confirmatory composite analysis with 5,000 iterations to evaluate the measurement model. We estimated factor loadings, assessed indicators, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE), and determined convergent and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2020). Goodness of fit using PLS-SEM was evaluated through individual metrics, specifically internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2020). As shown in Table 2, all coefficients achieved or exceeded 0.7 factor loadings and were significant at $p < .001$, meeting the threshold for adequate indicator loadings (Hair et al., 2011). Internal consistency standards were met in that the coefficient alpha, composite reliability, and rho estimates for the model were greater than 0.7. The AVE for each of the constructs and models exceeded 0.5, establishing convergent validity. The square root of the AVE also exceeded all paired correlations, as shown in the diagonal of the correlation matrix for our model.
in Table 3 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In addition, the heterotrait-monotrait ratio correlations (Table 4) were also less than 0.85, confirming no issues with discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2020; Henseler et al., 2015). We also examined the outer variance inflation factor values, looking to maintain output below the threshold value of 3.3 before we could conclude that collinearity was not an issue (Hair et al., 2020). The highest variance inflation factor item value in our research was 2.641, confirming that collinearity was also not an issue (Table 5). Lastly, the achieved $R^2$ values for value co-creation (0.63), brand meaning (0.28), brand partnership (0.37), and brand storytelling (0.30) suggest an adequate predictive validity (Hair et al., 2020). Brand performance (0.10) had a weaker predictive validity (Table 6).

Following Podsakoff et al. (2003), common method bias was investigated via survey design analyses and marker variable approach (Rönkko & Ylitalo, 2011). First, the survey was developed within a committee to ensure clarity of specific items. Second, the constructs were measured via different formats (Likert scale and usage likelihood scale), creating measure separation. Finally, question order counterbalancing was created by separating the survey into distinguishable sections (e.g., demographics, technology skills, usage likelihood). Thus, common method bias was unlikely to be an issue in this study. In addition, the marker variable test revealed no significant differences for the structural path coefficient.
### Table 2

*Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity Measures*

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<th>Item</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>AVE</th>
<th>α</th>
<th>CR</th>
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### B2B Social Media Brand Engagement

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<td>VC9</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note. AVE = average variance extracted, CR = composite reliability(rho_a), α = Cronbach Alpha, Rho = composite reliability(rho_c), Item coefficient = outer loadings*
Table 3

*Discriminant Validity Measures using Correlation Matrix (Fornell-Larcker)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
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<th>BP</th>
<th>PER</th>
<th>ST</th>
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<td>.553</td>
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</table>

*Note. VC = brand value cocreation, BM = brand meaning, BP = brand partnership, PER = brand performance, ST = brand storytelling, SMO = SM orientation. The figures corresponding to square root of AVE for each column construct is captured in bold along the diagonal. Other figures are the correlation between two constructs.*
Table 4

*Discriminant Validity Measures using Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>VC</th>
<th>BM</th>
<th>BP</th>
<th>PER</th>
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<td>.349</td>
<td>.368</td>
<td>.252</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Story</td>
<td>.801</td>
<td>.851</td>
<td>.717</td>
<td>.312</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media Orientation</td>
<td>.691</td>
<td>.605</td>
<td>.682</td>
<td>.361</td>
<td>.629</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* VC = brand value co-creation, BM = brand meaning, BP = brand partnership, PER = brand performance, ST = brand storytelling, SMO = SM orientation.
**Table 5**

*Variance Inflation Factor*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>VIF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BM1</td>
<td>1.879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BM2</td>
<td>1.539</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BM4</td>
<td>1.728</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BM5</td>
<td>2.182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BM6</td>
<td>1.633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BM7</td>
<td>1.655</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BP1</td>
<td>1.953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BP2</td>
<td>2.145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BP3</td>
<td>1.959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BP5</td>
<td>2.076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BP6</td>
<td>2.189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BP7</td>
<td>2.209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BP8</td>
<td>2.144</td>
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<td>BP9</td>
<td>1.976</td>
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<td>PER1</td>
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<tr>
<td>PER2</td>
<td>1.897</td>
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<tr>
<td>PER3</td>
<td>1.976</td>
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<tr>
<td>PER4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>PER5</td>
<td>2.059</td>
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<tr>
<td>SMO1</td>
<td>1.838</td>
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### Constructs and VIF Values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>VIF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SMO2</td>
<td>1.842</td>
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<tr>
<td>SMO3</td>
<td>2.538</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMO4</td>
<td>2.641</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMO6</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMO8</td>
<td>1.935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMO9</td>
<td>1.934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST1</td>
<td>1.573</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST11</td>
<td>1.631</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST3</td>
<td>1.762</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST6</td>
<td>1.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST7</td>
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<tr>
<td>ST8</td>
<td>1.534</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST9</td>
<td>1.888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VC1</td>
<td>1.915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VC10</td>
<td>1.798</td>
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<tr>
<td>VC2</td>
<td>2.302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VC4</td>
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<tr>
<td>VC5</td>
<td>2.422</td>
</tr>
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<td>VC6</td>
<td>1.888</td>
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<td>VC8</td>
<td>2.207</td>
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<tr>
<td>VC9</td>
<td>1.833</td>
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</table>

*Note.* VIF = variance inflation factor, VC = brand value co-creation, BM = brand meaning, BP = brand partnership, PER = brand performance, ST = brand storytelling, SMO = social media orientation.
Table 6

$R^2$ Values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>$R^2$ adjusted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value Co-create</td>
<td>0.637</td>
<td>0.632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Meaning</td>
<td>0.282</td>
<td>0.278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Partnership</td>
<td>0.377</td>
<td>0.374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Performance</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Passion/Story</td>
<td>0.306</td>
<td>0.302</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Structural Model Results

Direct Effects on Brand Engagement Activities and Value Co-Creation. We tested our model hypotheses using a bootstrap subsample of 5,000 in Smart-PLS 4. Table 7 presents the direct effect results for our model. All paths were found to be significant at \( p < .001 \). The construct SM marketing strategic orientation was shown to have a significant and positive relationship with all brand engagement activities (brand partnership: \( \beta = 0.614, p = 0.000 \); brand meaning: \( \beta = 0.531, p = 0.000 \); and brand passion via storytelling: \( \beta = 0.553, p = 0.000 \)). Therefore, \( H_1-H_3 \) were supported. In addition, all brand engagement activities were also shown to have positive and significant relationships with value co-creation (brand partnership: \( \beta = 0.306, p = 0.005 \); brand meaning: \( \beta = 0.324, p = 0.000 \); and brand passion via storytelling: \( \beta = 0.280, p = 0.005 \)), supporting \( H_4-H_6 \). Value co-creation also had a positive and significant relationship with brand performance (\( \beta = 0.317, p = 0.000 \)).

Indirect Effects Results: Mediating Effects of Value Co-Creation. Table 8 displays results of the indirect effects within our model. Value co-creation mediates the relationships between the brand engagement activities and brand performance. Value co-creation proved to be significant and partially mediates the relationship between brand meaning and brand performance. Brand meaning had a direct effect on performance (\( \beta = .194, p = .047 \)) as well as an indirect affect through value co-creation (\( \beta = 0.103, p = 0.003 \)). However, in the case of brand partnership and nurturing brand passion we only found a significant indirect effect through value co-creation. Therefore, value co-creation fully mediates the relationship between brand partnership and brand performance (\( \beta = 0.097, p = 0.023 \)), as well as the relationship between nurturing brand passion/storytelling and brand performance (\( \beta = 0.089, p = 0.015 \)). Therefore, \( H_7 \) was supported.
### Table 7

*Tests of the Structural Equation Modeling Path Hypotheses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis and Path</th>
<th>Path Coef. ($\beta$)</th>
<th>$t$-value</th>
<th>$p$-value</th>
<th>Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$H_1$ SM Strategic Orientation $\rightarrow$ Brand Partnership</td>
<td>.614</td>
<td>7.45</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_2$ SM Strategic Orientation $\rightarrow$ Brand Passion/Storytelling</td>
<td>.553</td>
<td>8.38</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_3$ SM Strategic Orientation $\rightarrow$ Bridging Brand Meaning</td>
<td>.531</td>
<td>8.59</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_4$ Brand Partnership $\rightarrow$ Value Co-Creation</td>
<td>.306</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_5$ Brand Passion/Storytelling $\rightarrow$ Value Co-Creation</td>
<td>.280</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>.005</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_6$ Bridging Brand Meaning $\rightarrow$ Value Co-Creation</td>
<td>.324</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_7$ Value Co-Creation $\rightarrow$ Brand Performance</td>
<td>.317</td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* SM = social media
Table 8

Tests of the Structural Equation Modeling Paths Indirect Effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model Indirect effects</th>
<th>Point Estimate</th>
<th>t-Value</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand Partnerships → Value Co-Creation → Performance</td>
<td>.097</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>.023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Meaning → Value Co-Creation → Brand Performance</td>
<td>.103</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Storytelling → Value Co-Creation → Brand Performance</td>
<td>.089</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SM Orientation → Brand Meaning → Value Co-Creation</td>
<td>.172</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SM Orientation → Brand Partnership → Value Co-Creation</td>
<td>.188</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SM Orientation → Brand Storytelling → Value Co-Creation</td>
<td>.155</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>.014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. SM = social media
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Figure 3

*Impact of Social Media Marketing Strategic Orientation on Brand Engagement and Outcomes with Control Variables*

Note. *** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.05
**Controls Variable Tests.** We examined each of the direct pathways for our samples across our control variables. Table 9 shows the significance of the direct paths when no controls were included in the model and then when gender, age, and experience were separately included in the model. As shown in Table 9, none of the control variables changed the significance or direction of the paths compared to the no control model.
Table 9
Control Variable Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paths</th>
<th>Path Coef.(β)</th>
<th>Sig. no controls</th>
<th>Sig. w/ Gender</th>
<th>Sig. w/ Age</th>
<th>Sig. w/ Exp.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SM Strategic Orientation→Brand Partnership</td>
<td>.614</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SM Strategic Orientation→Brand Passion</td>
<td>.553</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SM Strategic Orientation→Brand Meaning</td>
<td>.531</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Partnership→Value Co-Creation</td>
<td>.306</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Passion→Value Co-Creation</td>
<td>.280</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Meaning→Value Co-Creation</td>
<td>.324</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value Co-Creation→Brand Performance</td>
<td>.317</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. SM= Social Media, Sig = Significance
Discussion, Limitations, and Future Research

Theoretical Implications

A growing stream of literature has shown interest in understanding the specific firm led activities by B2B marketers to engage their customers within SM platforms to co-create brand value (Essamri et al., 2019). However, SM marketing research has primarily prioritized the implementation of SM platforms (Cartwright et al., 2021). As a result, we know very little about how B2B SM firm brand engagement activities can create value when implemented within a comprehensive framework.

We contribute to literature by proposing and empirically investigating a B2B SM brand engagement framework. The study explored how antecedents such as SM marketing strategic orientation impacts firm-led brand engagement activities, and the impact of these brand engagement activities on brand value co-creation and performance. We demonstrated that SM firm brand engagement has at least three distinct categories that explain how B2B firms can leverage SM platforms to engage customers and stakeholders (Essamri et al., 2019). These categories, as previously discussed, include developing brand partnerships via marketing collaborations and knowledge sharing, nurturing brand passion via storytelling, and bridging brand meaning via negotiation and legitimization (Essamri et al., 2019).

Our survey findings indicate that a firm’s SM marketing strategic orientation, driven by top management, directly impacts SM firm brand engagement activities. According to the structural equation modeling results in our study, all pathways between SM marketing strategic orientation and SM firm brand engagement activities demonstrated consistency in direction and significance. These findings suggest that successful firm-led SM brand engagement activities highly depend on the firm’s strategic orientation. The firm’s top management must share their
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corporate vision for SM use with employees; this should be followed by an integrated marketing strategic plan that includes leveraging SM platforms for customer engagement and collaboration. Firms must also invest in SM training for employees to ensure successful execution of SM firm brand engagement activities. Thus, our framework provides insights on how critical a firm’s corporate culture, vision, and leadership structure are to successful deployment of B2B SM brand engagement activities.

Next, we extended the S-D logic theory literature to marketing and brand development by specifically exploring the critical role of SM firm brand engagement activities on value co-creation. Value co-creation produces beneficial outcomes for all involved in the co-creation process (Lusch et al., 2010). It does this through interaction between the firm and multiple stakeholders via dialogue, integration of skills, and resources.

Our results underscore that significant relationships exist between SM firm brand engagement activities and value co-creation. The findings support S-D logic literature and confirm that when a firm engages customers on SM by developing brand partnerships, nurturing brand passion via storytelling, and bridging brand meaning, it will develop cooperative relationships with customers, providing access to and integrating resources (skills, knowledge) to create value (Vargo & Lusch, 2014). According to the S-D logic theory, the value developed through the co-creation process resides in the projects and actions that result from the integration of skills and resources between the firm and its multiple stakeholders (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008, 2011). This study extends theory to brand value co-creation in the digital age. The digital era has expanded corporate B2B brand value co-creation within the context of SM online brand communities (Essamri et al., 2019; Iglesias & Ind, 2020). Our study contributes to literature by providing insight on how SM platforms connect firms to customers and stakeholders to create
brand value through social interactions and involvement in innovation production (Iskoujina et al., 2017). In combination, our framework and findings offer initial insights useful for examining the right skillsets required by firms to successfully deploy SM brand engagement activities that result in positive value co-creation outcomes. Future research supported by the resource-based view theory may also provide additional insight.

Finally, we contribute to literature by offering insights on the impact of value co-creation on brand performance. As previously discussed, the value that is co-created for a firm’s brand results in strengthening brand performance (Black & Veloutsou, 2017). Given this perspective, corporate brand value co-creation within the B2B context is defined as developing brands through network relationships and social interactions in a multi-stakeholder ecosystem to improve brand perception and performance (Merz et al., 2009; Mingione & Leoni, 2020).

Our study results underscore that a significant relationship exists between value co-creation and performance. Value co-creation also mediates the relationship between SM firm brand engagement activities and brand performance. Specifically, we prove that value co-creation fully mediates the relationship between brand partnership and brand performance, as well as between nurturing brand passion and brand performance. In the case of brand meaning, value co-creation partially mediates the relationship between brand meaning and brand performance, indicating that there is also a direct relationship between brand meaning and brand performance. These findings contribute to elevating the importance of the value co-creation process between the firm, customers, and stakeholders. Value co-creation is thus critical to predicting a firm’s brand performance and should be prioritized.
Practical Implications

According to literature, the digital evolution has transformed brand development from the traditional marketing approach based on the firm’s internal management-controlled processes to a co-creation approach with multiple stakeholders who develop brand meaning and value (Essamri et al., 2019; Iglesias & Ind, 2020). Lately, SM platforms have elevated customer-to-customer communications, which have a high degree of influence on public brand acceptance and engagement (Dahl et al., 2018; Peltier et al., 2020). Information flow on SM is now more interactive; customers share information from multiple digital sources with each other (Dahl et al., 2018; Peltier et al., 2020). The firm must understand it no longer has control over its brands (Iglesias & Ind, 2020). The firm’s marketers must now view brand meaning development as an ongoing process that involves the firm, customers, and stakeholders (Essamri et al., 2019). Firms must invest and participate in SM platforms that enable customer interactions for brand value co-creation in SM communities (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2016). The co-creation of brand value will require a leadership culture that enables organizations to work effectively with customers and stakeholders by including them in marketing planning and activities. However, many firms currently face the challenge of co-creating value with customers because they are trying to preserve the essence of their corporate brand core meaning and values (Burghausen & Balmer, 2015). Unfortunately, these challenges create issues that prevent firms from deploying effective SM marketing strategies and brand engagement activities that enhance brand value co-creation and performance. Our findings from the literature suggest that firms need to empower marketers to transition from brand guardians who believe they own the brand, to brand conductors who believe developing strong brands must be facilitated with multiple perspectives that align with customer and firm core values (Iglesias & Ind, 2020). As previously discussed in our literature
review, marketers, and brand managers that function as brand conductors co-create brands that have broader responsibilities in society. A co-created brand must consider the expectations of their employees, partners, and society (Iglesias & Ind, 2020). Companies such as Johnson & Johnson provide a good example of promoting brands that embrace multiple internal and external stakeholders. Johnson & Johnson’s brand is known for connecting doctors, nurses, patients, parents, children, communities, and stockholders (Ind & Ryder, 2011). The brand value co-creation process results in many benefits such as great client relationships, product development, and sales endorsements (Iglesias & Ind, 2020; Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017). However, there are also negative aspects such as loss of control, loss of ownership, defective co-creation, and disharmony in brand meaning or identity (Iglesias & Ind, 2020; Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017). Firms must manage the negative aspects of value co-creation with customers to be competitive in the future. We need marketing engagement processes and behaviors that reconcile multiple stakeholder perspectives by utilizing an effective leadership style (Iglesias & Ind, 2020). Our study findings emphasize the importance of a firm creating an integrated marketing strategy that leverages SM platforms for successful brand engagement activities. In addition, our study also shows that leadership and top management must signal the importance of SM marketing (or social marketing) by sharing the corporate vision and strategy for SM. Firm leadership can also encourage SM brand engagement with customers by providing budget and employee training for SM engagement. Our study results also show a significant and direct relationship between value co-creation and brand performance (measured by firm sales growth, margin growth, market share). Firms must elevate the importance of co-creating value with customers to enhance brand performance. Marketers should incorporate metrics within the value co-creation processes and activities to measure progress towards enhanced brand performance.
Limitations and Future Research

Although our research was limited to B2B firms in the United States, we encourage researchers to evaluate whether geography has an impact on our study results; B2B SM marketing practices may be different in other countries based on local market situations. In addition, further research is needed to determine the role industry plays in the relationship between SM firm brand engagement activities and value co-creation. Certain brand engagement activities may have more impact on value co-creation in certain B2B industries than others. For example, business practices within the healthcare or technology sectors may be highly collaborative across their value chain in sharing best practices and pursuing partnerships, thereby enhancing their brand value co-creation and performance compared to other industries. Future research can also explore the right firm leadership structure and culture that ensures employees are competent to facilitate the value co-creation processes between suppliers, customers, and stakeholders on SM. Applying resource-based theory could also provide additional insights. Additionally, it will be beneficial to empirically test other antecedents such as a firm’s sales orientation on SM firm brand engagement activities. This might shed light on the current challenges that some B2B firms are facing in increasing SM firm brand engagement in the digital age. Future research opportunities may also include replicating this study within the B2C context and analyzing the similarities and differences. Finally, the digital era is consistently evolving, and future research must explore the impact of artificial intelligence on our B2B SM firm brand engagement framework. Specifically, how will artificial intelligence impact how firms manage and facilitate the value co-creation process with customers and stakeholders?
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## Appendix

**Appendix A**

### Table A1

*Theories Related to Social Media Firm Brand Engagement*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Key Concepts</th>
<th>Implications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Service Dominant (S-D) Logic Theory</td>
<td>Internal and external actors play a critical role in the development of brand identity by exchanging information, resources, and skills to co-create value. The information flow between these multiple actors is critical to helping consumers and to co-creating value (Peltier et al., 2020). The emerging S-D logic perspective considers consumers to be the key actors defining value within the service exchange process (Grönroos &amp; Ravald, 2011; Grönroos &amp; Voima, 2013).</td>
<td>Marketers and brand leaders are responsible for incorporating processes that encourage consumer value co-creation efforts (McColl-Kennedy et al., 2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource-Based View</td>
<td>Performance is based on the firm’s available resources and its effectiveness to convert these resources to create advantage (Barney, 1991; Day, 1994).</td>
<td>The resource-based view examines the antecedents to social branding firm engagement. According to Keinanen &amp; Kuivalainen, 2015 when corporate culture and orientation are favorable towards social media, social media is used to reach business-to-business (B2B) customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performative Theory</td>
<td>Corporate brand identity that is co-created is not stable; it evolves in response to internal and external contextual changes and is open to continuous redefinition (da Silveira et al., 2013; Törmälä &amp; Gyrd-Jones, 2017).</td>
<td>Firms are challenged with preserving the essence of their corporate brand core meaning and values (Burghausen &amp; Balmer, 2015) while trying to align with the needs of multiple stakeholders (Kristal et al., 2020).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Additional Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Determination Theory</strong></td>
<td>Depending on the perceived marketing generated content and their network, users construe their community membership as self-determined (autonomous motivation) versus non-self-determined (controlled motivation), which has unique implications for engagement (Deci &amp; Ryan, 2002).</td>
<td>Digital marketing platforms on social media have empowered customers to create and share information amongst themselves, thereby co-creating value for service innovation (Peltier et al., 2020). More recently, social media platforms have placed customer-to-customer communications at the center of brand acceptance and engagement (Dahl et al., 2018; Peltier et al., 2020).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Legitimacy Theory</strong></td>
<td>Researchers have applied the concept of social legitimacy to the purpose of addressing why consumers perceive certain brands or consumption practices as legitimate but not others (Heiens &amp; Narayanaswamy, 2021).</td>
<td>Legitimacy highly depends on the relationship between firms and their stakeholders. Legitimacy is defined as a general perception that the firm’s actions are desirable, proper, and appropriate within society’s norms, values, and beliefs (Suchman, 1995). Therefore, the firm’s marketing function aims to coordinate stakeholders’ views and gain alignment on the moral and cultural views of the firm’s brand identity.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Transfer of Meaning Theory</strong></td>
<td>According to McCracken’s (1990) theory of meaning transfer, individuals can achieve self-expression by transfer of meaning from the more influential individual, group, or symbol to themselves to gain desired importance.</td>
<td>A brand’s functional benefits include attributes such as product quality, and its symbolic benefits represent the meaning (or identity) of the brand to a customer, which may be aligned with the customer’s ego, self-enhancement, and status in society (Iglesias et al., 2020).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Social Identity Theory</strong></td>
<td>Theory argues that consumers define and express themselves in the context of a particular reference group (Heinonen, 2011). Therefore, self-expression and social interaction are always combined and may influence one another. Social interaction and self-expression benefits are primary functions of social media (Heinonen, 2011).</td>
<td>Social media platforms have elevated customer-to-customer communications to the center of brand acceptance and engagement (Dahl et al., 2018; Peltier et al., 2020). Information flows have now transitioned from at-arms-length communication processes to interactive processes in which customers access and share information from multiple digital sources (Peltier et al., 2020).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Media Presence Theory</strong></td>
<td>The social presence theory (Short et al., 1976) claims that communication with the most popular media leads to a higher degree of social presence, which makes interactions more positive and tighter.</td>
<td>A total of 87% of businesses invest in knowing more about their customers and their social media behavior (Vander Schee et al., 2020). Firms that choose not to engage on social media or provide only one-way communication on social media risk lost business opportunities and negative feedback.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Customer Engagement Theory</strong></td>
<td>Customer engagement theory is argued to have its roots in marketing’s S-D logic, which proposes that important engagement-related customer outcomes are generated by their brand- or firm-related interactive experiences (Vargo &amp; Lusch, 2004).</td>
<td>B2B firms focus strongly on relationships with their corporate buyers to create a web of users on social media that can be leveraged for firm engagement activities (Gil-Saura et al., 2009). Buyers are critical within brand communities where brand identity is collectively negotiated and co-created by its members based on consuming meanings, rituals, and practices (Muñiz &amp; O’Guinn, 2001).</td>
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## Construct Definitions List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Media Marketing Strategic Orientation</td>
<td>How a firm’s leadership or culture maintains a vision for social media and influences an organization’s behavior to utilize social media to engage with customers and achieve firm marketing objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing Brand Partnership</td>
<td>How a firm develops brand partnerships via marketing collaborations and knowledge sharing with customers and stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurturing Brand Passion</td>
<td>How a firm engages and nurtures customer brand passion via storytelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridge Brand Meaning</td>
<td>How a firm interacts with customers to negotiate and legitimize brand meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Value Co-Creation</td>
<td>How a firm, customers, and stakeholders work together to create the best outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Performance</td>
<td>How a firm determines the metrics for brand performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Variables</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Gender (male, female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Age Ranges (18–24, 25–34, 35–54, 55–64, 65+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing Experience</td>
<td>Years in Marketing (&lt;1 to 10, 11–20, 21–30, 31–40, 41+)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C

Measurement Item List

SM Marketing Strategic Orientation (1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Somewhat disagree; 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree; 4 = Somewhat Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree)

Top Management in my organization:
1. Shares its corporate vision for social media use.
2. Sees value for using social media.
3. Is committed to marketing using social media.
4. Is committed to using social media for customer engagement.
5. Has a strategic plan for the use of social media.
6. Places emphasis on social media training.
7. Encourages customer collaboration through social media.

Developing Brand Partnerships (1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Somewhat disagree; 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree; 4 = Somewhat Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree)

Social Media is valuable for:
1. Marketing collaborations with customers.
2. Knowledge sharing with customers.
3. Seeking customer feedback on brand.
4. Collaborating on brand content.
5. Encouraging customers to strengthen the partnership.
6. Developing brand communities for brand development.
7. Co-creating content to develop brand.
8. Forming customer alliances.

Nurturing Brand Passion (1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Somewhat disagree; 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree; 4 = Somewhat Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree)

Social Media is valuable for:
1. Creating stories to build brand passion.
2. Sharing stories that give customers confidence in the brand.
3. Building brand passion through online communities.
4. Captivating customers through brand stories.
5. Increasing a magical relationship with the brand.
6. Increasing brand delight.
7. Creating brand love.

Bridging Brand Meaning (1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Somewhat disagree; 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree; 4 = Somewhat Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree)

Social Media is valuable for:
1. Establishing brand credibility.
2. Developing brand positioning.
3. Creating brand legitimacy.
4. Communicating brand authenticity.
5. Sharing brand values.
6. Differentiating brand meaning from competition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brand Value Co-Creation (1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Somewhat disagree; 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree; 4 = Somewhat Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Media is valuable for:</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Collaborating with customers to jointly create brand value.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Co-creating customized customer solutions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Implementing mutually beneficial, value creating solutions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Working together to find the best solutions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Working together post sales to ensure long-term collaborative value.</td>
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<td>6. Co-creating content through online branding communities.</td>
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<td>7. Exchanging ideas for new product/service development.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Accelerating product/service innovation with online brand communities.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Brand Performance (1 = Inferior to Competitors; 2 = Below Average; 3 = Average; 4 = Above Average; 5 = Superior to Competitors)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please compare your brand’s performance to competitors over the last three years based on the following:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Sales Growth.</td>
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<td>3. Profit Margin Growth.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Profit Growth.</td>
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<td>5. Overall, Success.</td>
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Note: SM=Social Media
Betty Carew is the Global Business Director at Aearo Technologies LLC, a 3M Company. Betty leads cross functional teams to commercialize highly differentiated Thermal and Acoustic solutions for the automotive and industrial markets industries. She oversees business vision, strategic direction, financial performance, expansions into high growth markets, and portfolio pipeline development.

Betty is a seasoned professional with 28 years of business and marketing leadership experience across 3M’s global businesses and geographic areas such as Latin America, North America, Asia and EMEA region (Europe, Middle East & Africa). She joined 3M in 1995 and has held roles of increasing responsibilities in several functions such as marketing, sales, international operations, business development, and Lean Six Sigma continuous improvement operations (Master Black Belt Certified). She is known for her customer centric thinking, maximizing operational excellence, delivering financial performance, and inspiring teams to deliver customer value.

Prior to her current role she served as Master Black Belt for 3M’s Corporate Lean Six Sigma, Supply Chain and Quality Operations, where she led efforts across 3M business groups to develop strategies and operational plans to deliver 3M’s growth, cost, and cash improvement targets.

Betty holds an MBA from the University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minnesota, specializing in Marketing. Her bachelor’s degree is in Business Administration with a Finance concentration from Minnesota State University, Mankato, Minnesota. She will graduate with a Doctorate in
B2B SOCIAL MEDIA BRAND ENGAGEMENT

Business Administration from the University of Wisconsin, Whitewater (Cohort 7) in December 2023.

Betty serves on the board of the American Marketing Association (Indiana Chapter) as vice president of marketing programs. She is also the founder of the Betty Carew Women’s Development Foundation and a founding member of the Indianapolis Professional Women for Good (A Grapevine Giving Circle). She is married with two children and enjoys reading and spending time with family.