The effects of social media on emotions, brand relationship quality, and word of mouth: An empirical study of music festival attendees

Simon Hudson [a, *], Martin S. Roth [b, 1], Thomas J. Madden [c, 2], Rupert Hudson [c, 3]

[a] SmartState Center of Economic Excellence for Tourism & Economic Development, School of Hospitality, Retail and Sport Management, University of South Carolina, Coliseum Room 1012, Columbia, SC 29208, USA
[b] Barney School of Business, University of Hartford, 200 Bloomfield Avenue, West Hartford, CT 06117, USA
[c] Darla Moore School of Business, University of South Carolina, 1705 College Street, Columbia, SC 29208, USA

HIGHLIGHTS

- This study examines the influence of social media on customer relationships.
- A conceptual model was developed and tested using structural equation modeling.
- The use of social media of attendees with music festivals was examined.
- Results show social media usage has a significant influence on festival engagement.
- Social media-based relationships also lead to positive word of mouth recommendations.

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on two under-researched areas of tourism management – the management of music festivals, and the influence of social media on customer relationships. In the new digital era of marketing communications little is known about how social media interactions with tourism brands affect how consumers think and feel about those brands, and consequently how those interactions affect desired marketing outcomes such as word mouth. Based on the literature, a conceptual model was developed and was tested using structural equation modeling. The results show that social media does indeed have a significant influence on emotions and attachments to festival brands, and that social media-based relationships lead to desired outcomes such as positive word of mouth.

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1. Introduction

Music tourism is a significant and growing sector of tourism (Gibson & Connell, 2007). In the U.S. alone, music based tourism constitutes approximately 17 percent of the tourism industry (Connell & Gibson, 2003), and music festivals in particular are more popular than ever, attracting millions of fans (Schwartz, 2013). However, despite its significance, music tourism is still not perceived as a defined segment within the tourism market, and research exploring the dynamics of this burgeoning field is lacking (UK Music, 2011).

Likewise, while social media platforms have emerged as a dominant digital communications channel (Chappuis, Gaffey, & Parvizi, 2011), with 67 percent of all internet users using social media (Pew Research Center, 2012), little is known about how social media influences emotions and attachments to brands, and whether social media-based relationships lead to desired outcomes such as positive word of mouth. In the tourism sector in particular, tourism practitioners have received very little guidance for incorporating social media into their communications strategies (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

The purpose of this paper therefore was to examine how social media interactions with tourism brands, and specifically music festival brands, affect how consumers think and feel about those brands, and consequently how those interactions affect desired marketing outcomes. More specifically, the researchers sought to

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 803 777 2705.
E-mail addresses: shudson@mailbox.sc.edu, shudson@hrsm.sc.edu (S. Hudson), mroth@hartford.edu (M.S. Roth), maddent@moore.sc.edu (T.J. Madden), rupertahudson@gmail.com (R. Hudson).
[1] Tel.: +1 860 768 4243.
[2] Tel.: +1 803 777 4784.
[3] Tel.: +1 803 777 6074.

answer the following questions about brand–customer relationships: to what extent does social media interaction affect consumers' emotional attachment with festival brands?; and do stronger brand relationships, cultivated through social media interaction, enhance the willingness to recommend the brand? Thus the research makes a number of theoretical contributions. First, it explores whether existing customers who engage in brand-related social media have more favorable brand perceptions and behaviors than those who do not. Second, a conceptual model captures the relationships between social media use, emotions, brand perceptions, and word of mouth. Third, the study examines the roles that emotional attachment and brand relationship quality play in the context of social media use.

Although there are only a few studies on brand ownership and brand control related to festivals, Mossberg and Getz (2006) argue that "brand thinking" can be applied to festivals, as it can be applied to products, services, an organization, a person, a team or a symbol (p. 308). Based on a case study of 14 festivals and events, they concluded that festivals can be managed as brands. d'Astous, Colbert, and d'Astous (2006) concur, although they do propose that festival brands have distinctive characteristics, in that consumption is mainly social, and occurs within a limited period of time. In fact, Addis and Holbrook (2001) suggest that the hedonic nature of music festivals make them an ideal context to empirically test the influence of emotions on brand relationship quality, since the value of the experience hinges on the ability of the festival to engage one's subjectivity to arouse feelings or to provoke emotional reactions.

2. Music tourism

Music tourism involves individuals traveling to a place where they do not reside to either listen to live performances or to experience history related to the creation of or performance of music (Campbell, 2011). In the U.K. alone, music tourism generates approximately $2 billion in spending and provides the equivalent of 19,700 full-time jobs. They include people like David Nye, of the Great British Sausage Company, who sells around 41 miles worth of sausages at music festivals around Britain each year and employs 20 students who host sausage-eating competitions to keep waiting customers happy (Topping, 2011).

Music festivals themselves are a key component of music tourism (Haslam, 2009), and have been around for hundreds of years. Most historians believe that they date back to Ancient Egypt in 4500 BC, consisting of religious ceremonies and political fests with music and dancing (Mintel, 2013). Ancient Greece hosted its first known music festival, the Pythian Games, during the sixth century BC as a precursor to the Olympic Games, as well as holding competitions for music and poetry. In more modern musical history, the Monterey Pop Festival in the summer of 1967 is considered one of the most important landmarks for music festivals (Campbell, 2011). Occurring in June during the "Summer of Love", this iconic moment in music history shaped a generation and influenced countless future artists. It was the coming out party for stars like Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, and Otis Redding. A few years later, probably the most famous music festival of all time was staged – Woodstock in 1969 – which prompted a crowd of over 400,000 people to travel by any means necessary to a small town in New York for the festival.

The music festival sector has since grown to be a sizeable industry, and is one of the few sectors to have fared well in the economic downturn. Worldwide, there are more than 800 music festivals of various types in 57 countries (Schwartz, 2013). The industry is generally made up of independent operators and entrepreneurs, but bigger umbrella groups like Live Nation, Music Festivals and Festival Republic are emerging.

Research examining the music festival sector tends to be dominated by economic impact studies. UK Music for example, commissioned a major study of the contribution of music festivals and major concerts to tourism in the UK (UK Music, 2011), and the Northern Ireland Tourism Board conducted a similar study in Northern Ireland in 2010 (Northern Ireland Tourism Board, 2010). But some researchers have looked beyond the immediate economic impacts. Haslam (2009) for example, comments that music festivals offer potential as vehicles for branding cities, towns and villages, as they can enhance a destination's image and identity, improving perceptions of the place and the people that live there. Others have studied the motivations of festival attendees. Campbell (2011) for instance, found a distinct connection between humans and music in the context of human development, religion, politics and sporting events, as well as the sense of place created by music festivals.

Few researchers have examined the promotion or marketing of music events, although Rivero (2009) found that organizers of music festivals in Spain do not aggressively promote their festivals from a touristic point of view – instead relying on positive word of mouth to build a loyal following. But we do know that social networks are key delivery channels for festivals and organizers owing to the large amount of information that can be provided through them, such as artist information and schedules, and general festival information, much of which is delivered for many months leading up to the event (Mintel, 2013). In a recent case study analysis of music festivals, Hudson and Hudson (2013) confirmed this, finding a relatively high degree of sophistication in the implementation of social media by music festival marketers. For example, the Bonnaroo festival in the U.S. used radio frequency identification (R.F.I.D.) technology to foster engagement with visitors, creating nearly 1.5 million impressions. They also successfully employed geo-location software, using Foursquare to reward fans with a unique festival experience. When the festival ended they encouraged visitors to continue the conversation, asking them to tag themselves in the picture where they camped.

But despite this relatively high level of sophistication in the employment of social media marketing by festivals, and a high adoption of social networks by music festival tourists (Mintel, 2013), the influence of social media on customer relationships and actual behavioral outcomes has not been explored. It has been suggested that a positive music festival experience combined with proactive social networking could help festival brands build long-term relationships with music fans (Mintel, 2013). But this hypothesis requires further investigation. The conceptual model presented in Fig. 1 proposes a relationship between social media use, emotions, brand relationship quality and the behavioral outcome of customer willingness to recommend. Each component of the model will be discussed in turn, followed by specific hypotheses.

3. Social media interactions

Companies have generally embraced social media because of its potential for engagement and collaboration with consumers. Through social media, marketers can gain rich, unmediated consumer insights, faster than ever before, and can foster loyalty through networking. According to Facebook, the average user has 130 friends on the social network, and when people hear about a product or service from a friend, they become a customer at a 15 percent higher rate than when they find out about it through other means (comScore, 2011). The growth of social networking has been
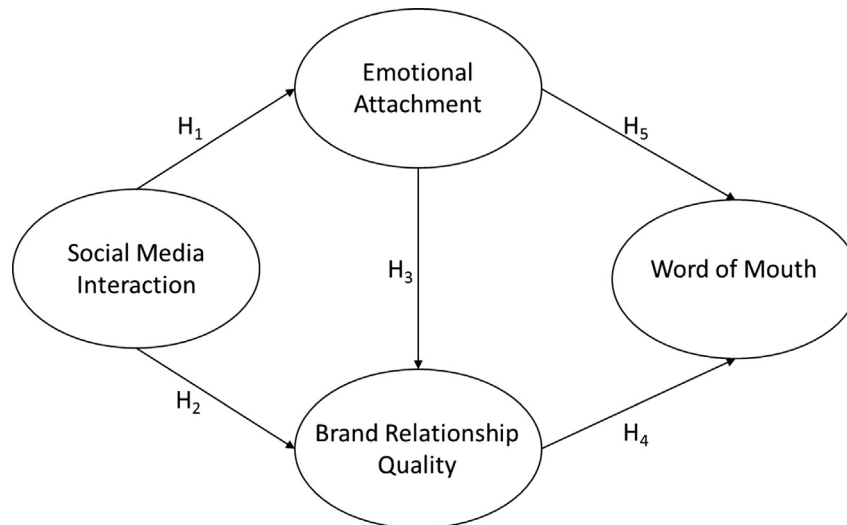
Fig. 1. Conceptual model.

largely driven by Facebook, which reaches 90 percent of U.S. social media users and 85 percent of Europeans (comScore, 2011), but YouTube, Instagram and Twitter have been growing strongly. By mid-2013, Twitter had 200 million active users, and Instagram 150 million – a gain of roughly 128 million after Facebook bought the app the year before (Rusli, 2013).

The academic literature related to social media in tourism is still in its infancy (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Some researchers have suggested ways that managers can leverage social media by shaping consumer discussions (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Mangold & Faulds, 2009), and others have offered strategies for measuring the success of social media marketing campaigns (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010). The literature on the use of social media by festival organizers is also quite limited, but a 2011 study found that for destination marketing organizations (DMOs) in general, the most influential social media tools were Facebook (64%), Twitter (26%), TripAdvisor (4%), YouTube (3%) and Foursquare (1%) (Sparkloft Media, 2011). The two most common objectives for social media efforts for destinations were to increase awareness for the destination and to build engagement with consumers. VisitBritain was one of the first DMOs to adopt a proactive social media strategy that embeds Facebook (LoveUK), Flickr, YouTube and Twitter, supported by utilization of new mobile technology. For instance, in 2010, they launched an iPhone application for British film locations which had over 40,000 downloads, and included Google maps and Facebook integration system allowing users to find their favorite film locations, take a picture, and then post it on their social networking sites.

In the entertainment field, Rothschild (2011) has looked at how social media is used, managed, and perceived by sports and entertainment venue managers. He found that more than half (57%) have a defined social media strategy, and those that do experience higher revenues than those that do not. This supports emerging research revealing that those brands conducting social media interactions with consumers in a meaningful way are seeing a positive impact on the bottom line (Dholakia & Durham, 2010). Chadwick Martin Bailey research for example (Cruz & Mendelsohn, 2010) states that the likelihood for individuals to buy/recommend increases after they follow a brand via social media. The fact that almost 50 percent of a brand's Facebook fans already are customers further boosts this proposition. They suggest that a positive experience from direct brand interaction via social media will lead to repeat purchases and recommendations.

4. Emotions

Although emotions are ubiquitous throughout marketing, we are only beginning to understand the important role of emotions in marketing communications (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999). Emotions are a person's positive (i.e., pleased or relaxed) and negative (i.e., nervous or annoyed) feelings (Lee, Back, & Kim, 2009). Human behavior is heavily influenced by emotions, not solely by reason. Consumers are often highly emotional and intuitive in their behavior, operating through the emotional centers of the brain, dictated by their 'heart' or 'gut feel' and often independent of conscious control (Pawle & Cooper, 2006).

It is Damasio (1994, 2000, 2003) who can take the credit for modern theories about exactly how emotions are processed. He provides evidence that emotions and feelings are formed in what he calls the 'proto-self', whereas thoughts are formed in what he calls 'core consciousness'. He shows that activity in the proto-self always precedes activity in the core consciousness, which confirms that emotions and feelings will always be formed pre-cognitively and pre-attentively, before any information processing takes place (Damasio, 2003). This is exactly the opposite of the assumptions in most advertising models. However, when non-consciously processed emotional content is processed consciously, its effectiveness is weakened (Bornstein, 1989), suggesting that the less aware consumers are of emotional elements in advertising, the better they are likely to work, because the viewer has less opportunity to rationally evaluate, contradict, and weaken their potency. Heath, Brandt, and Nairn (2006) conclude therefore, that if advertising wishes to build strong brand relationships, it needs to incorporate high levels of emotional content, and this emotional content will be most effective if less attention is paid to it.

One U.K. study interviewed 2000 consumers to determine exactly how they form emotional relationships with brands. The consumers in the BrandHouse Emotion 100 Report were asked to measure 100 leading brands on seven emotional principles: contentment, belonging, compassion, pride, enjoyment, excitement, and desire. The results revealed that very few brands have succeeded in building a strong emotional attachment with customers. Interestingly, when respondents were asked how important they felt each emotional principle was, contentment, belonging and compassion took the top three spots. While generating desire and excitement is often the key aim of advertising campaigns, those surveyed ranked these two attributes as least important (Clark,

2009). While technology brands scored highly — Google and Sony topped the chart — consumers also recorded high emotional connections to brands with heritage and longevity, such as Heinz, Kellogg and Marks & Spencer. Some sectors were better at connecting emotionally with consumers. Those brands offering a tangible product, such as food or drink, scored higher than service-based brands. Relatively low scores were awarded in the airline, tour operators, hotels and resorts, restaurants and coffee shops sectors.

Roberts (2004) has suggested that in order to connect emotionally with consumers, brands need to evolve into "Lovemarks". Lovemarks as defined by Roberts are 'super-evolved brands' which maximize their connection with consumers by creating strong emotional bonds. A strong emotional bond reinvigorates loyalty and creates advocacy.

Pawle and Cooper (2006) operationalized the Lovemark grid, and found that the actual contribution of emotional factors to brand decision making was significantly greater than functional factors and ranges from 63 to 85 percent, depending on the product category. They also found that the factors overall that have the strongest influence on buying intention are the emotional factors that drive love, in particular intimacy followed closely by mystery underpinned by sensuality. They therefore suggest that the key emotional trigger for strengthening the consumer–brand relationship is to create strong brand intimacy. The triggers for this are consistently, across difference product categories, the need to make the brand highly relevant to the consumer, and to make consumers feel more closely in tune with, and passionate about, the brand.

5. Brand relationship quality

Brand relationship quality (BRQ) has been described as a customer-based indicator of the strength and depth of the person–brand relationship (Smit, Bronner, & Tolboom, 2007), and the concept has attracted increasing interest from academics over the years. Belk (1988) and Kleine, Kleine, and Allen (1995) both suggested that people often regarded their possessions as part of themselves and an important component of their sense of self. Phau and Lau (2001) showed that consumers project their own personality characteristics onto the brands when describing them. Customers who project their self on brands display strong attachment with the same brand. Blackston (1993) conceptualized a reciprocal relation between brands and consumers, arguing that the consumer's recognition of the brand's attitude toward consumers should be incorporated into the study of brand image. The brand therefore becomes an active partner of a consumer on the basis of the brand–consumer relationship. Aaker (1996) too argued that when consumers interact with brands, they can develop an active relationship with those brands like people can with friends.

Perhaps the most cited work in this field is Fournier's (1998) conceptualization of the BRQ framework. Fournier discovered that consumers were not just buying brands because they work well. They were involved in relationships with a collectivity of brands so as to benefit from the meanings they add into their lives. Some of those meanings were functional and utilitarian; others were more psychological and emotional. All, however, were purposive and ego centered and therefore of great significance to the persons engaging them. Important factors keeping a relationship alive were affective and socioemotive attachments (love/passion and self-connection), behavioral ties (interdependence and commitment), and supportive cognitive beliefs (intimacy and brand partner quality). All these combine to yield strength and durability over time.

Fournier's model has been tested in various settings, including tourism and hospitality. Ekinci, Yoon, and Oppewal (2005) found strong support for the validity of the BRQ concept from the European consumer's point of view in the context of restaurant brands.

The four dimensions of brand relationship identified in their study were partner quality, nostalgic connection, self-concept connection and intimacy. In testing an adapted version of Fournier's model, Kim, Lee, and Lee (2005) also found that self-connected attachment was correlated with BRQ more strongly than any other factors. In their study, they compared product to service brands and discovered one meaningful difference; with product brands, commitment explains BRQ better than trust does, whereas with service brands, trust accounts for BRQ better than commitment does.

Bowden (2009) also studied BRQ in a service context, and presented a conceptual model of the process by which new and repeat purchase customers become engaged with a restaurant service brand. The model, based on the results of qualitative research and supported by the literature on relationship marketing, proposes that the relational mediators of satisfaction, calculative commitment, affective commitment, trust, and involvement each have important roles in the customer–brand engagement process. However, the model emphasizes that the salience of these relational mediators differs across new and repeat purchase customers. New customers to a restaurant displayed a tendency to base their initial evaluations of service performance on the functional benefits and relied on a calculative process for evaluating the utility that the service brand offered them. However, repeat customers evaluated performance more on relational benefits such as affiliation, personal recognition, rapport and empathy. It follows that satisfaction was not enough in itself enough to generate ongoing attitudinal loyalty.

6. Behavioral outcomes

The conceptual model suggests that emotional attachment and BRQ will influence the behavioral outcome of customer willingness to recommend. Previous studies have shown that consumption emotions have an impact on behavioral intentions, such as word of mouth communications and loyalty (Crosby & Johnson, 2007). Ladhari (2007) for example, found that pleasure and arousal have significant effects on word of mouth. Thomson, MacInnis, and Park (2005) similarly found that emotions can predict outcomes such as loyalty toward a brand and willingness to pay a premium price for it.

Likewise, BRQ can influence marketing outcomes. Fournier (1998) argues that everyday execution of marketing plans and tactics is perceived as behavior of a brand. One could hypothesize therefore that from social media interactions with a brand, consumers will draw conclusions about the characteristics of a brand and establish a relationship. As a result, the brand moves from being a passive object to an active partner in the mind of the consumer. When such a strong relationship is established, consumers often look on that brand as an irreplaceable and inseparable part of their life (Ekinci et al., 2005). BRQ will therefore have an influence on behavioral outcomes such as word of mouth. In fact, Smit et al. (2007) found that BRQ is positively related to the intention to use the brand in the future, more reluctance to brand switching, and more positive word of mouth. With the advent of online communications and social media, marketing efforts that influence consumers to spread positive word of mouth and recommend brands they choose can be as important as building awareness and driving purchases (Edelman, 2010).

7. Hypotheses

From the literature, five hypotheses are proposed regarding social media use and customer–brand perceptions. First, previous research suggests that consumers respond much more positively to content shared through social media than they do to paid placements such as advertising. One study for example found that consumers that viewed a company's video via social media sharing

were 83% more likely to have positive perceptions of the brand than those exposed to the same content via paid advertising (Neff, 2012). Further, it has been proposed that it is the emotional response to these social media interactions that strengthens this relationship (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Sashi, 2012). It is therefore hypothesized that emotional attachment to music festivals will be greater for customers who engage with brands using social media.

H1: Emotional attachment will be greater (lower) for customers who (do not) engage with brands using social media

Smit et al. (2007) suggest that BRQ will be enhanced when customers engage with their favorite brand using social media. Doing so will allow both parties to learn and share more of their brand knowledge, experiences, suggestions and so on by having a brand-focused interactive communication. In addition, researchers have suggested that high levels of emotional content in communications will encourage strong brand relationships (Heath et al., 2006; Pawle & Cooper, 2006). Thus it is hypothesized that BRQ will be greater for customers who engage with brands using social media and greater for those who have a higher emotional attachment to brands.

H2: Brand Relationship Quality will be greater (lower) for customers who (do not) engage with brands using social media
H3: Brand Relationship Quality will be greater (lower) for customers who have a higher (lower) level of emotional attachment

Finally, building and strengthening brand attachment and relationship quality has been shown to affect behavioral outcomes such as purchase consideration and brand switching (Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci, 2010; Smit et al., 2007). Lee et al. (2009) found that brand personality has a significant impact on an individual's emotion and further influence on his or her consumption behaviors. The expectation of the brand leads to an emotional response in the customer's mind, resulting in either positive or negative emotions, which play a dominant role in explaining satisfaction, trust, and customer loyalty (Pham, Geuens, & De Pelsmacker, 2013). It is expected that when such brand perceptions are heightened as a result of social media use, the same effects on brand loyalty outcomes will be evident. Thus it is hypothesized that customers with greater BRQ and emotional attachment to brands via social media use will be more willing to recommend their favorite brand.

H4: Word of mouth will be greater (lower) for customers with greater (lower) brand relationship quality
H5: Word of mouth will be greater (lower) for customers with greater (lower) emotional attachment

8. Method

A survey instrument was developed and pre-tested to measure the variables in the model. Surveys were administered online, and took about 10–15 min to complete. A commercial market research firm was employed to identify and contact music festival attendees across the U.S. A quota-type sampling scheme was used to get a roughly equal number of social media users and non-users. Respondents were first asked if they had visited a music festival in the past year (from a list of festivals), and if they did, they were asked to identify which of the festivals was their favorite. The remaining questions on their social media activity and brand feelings and behaviors pertained specifically to their favorite brand of music festival. Consumers were classified as social media users or non-

users based upon whether they interacted in the past month with their favorite music festival using any type of social media.

Emotions were measured using a ten-item scale developed by Thomson et al. (2005). This scale was devised specifically to measure the strength of consumers' emotional attachments to brands. The items capturing how consumers feel about the brand were: affectionate, friendly, loved, peaceful, passionate, delightful, captivated, connected, bored, and attached. The scale for Brand Relationship Quality (BRQ) consisted of 16 items adapted from Fournier (1994), and used in previous studies of this nature (Smit et al., 2007). Respondents indicated their strength of agreement to these statements on a 7-point scale whereby 1 equaled "not at all" and 7 equaled "very much so." Fourteen items of the BRQ scale measured seven relationship facets proposed by Fournier (1998) and two items measured the trustworthiness of brand. As a criterion variable respondents were asked their willingness to recommend the music festival to a friend or colleague on an 11-point scale.

9. Analysis and results

423 Responses were collected, with just over half being male (54.8%) and about a third in their early adulthood (18–35). A fairly high proportion were in management positions (33.6%), and 28 percent were well-educated with a 4-year college degree (28.1%) or some college (27.2%). 215 respondents had interacted with their favorite music festival via social media, and 208 had not. The festival website, Facebook and YouTube were the most popular social media tools for those respondents engaging with the festival via social media (see Table 1).

Prior to fitting the model shown in Fig. 1 the psychometric properties of the two multi-item constructs (emotional attachment and BRQ) were assessed. To measure the dimensionality of these two constructs an exploratory factor analysis was fit to the data. This initial analysis included items from both constructs, and results showed that the two constructs were distinct, with no item cross-loadings. Fig. 2a and b shows the factor loadings of each construct respectively.

Based on the exploratory factor solution, a one-dimensional confirmatory factor analysis was fit to the data. The uni-dimensional models provide acceptable fits to the data. The composite reliabilities were .87 and .91 for emotional attachment and BRQ, respectively. The discriminant validity between the two constructs was assessed using the method advocated by Dillon and Goldstein (1984). Evidence of discriminant validity is supported when the average variance extracted is greater than .5 for each construct and the average variance extracted for each construct is greater than the squared structural link between the constructs. The model provides an acceptable fit to the data with a CMIN/df = to 3.44 and the CFI = .934. The average variance extracted for

Table 1
Social media used by respondents.

Social media usage: ranks, means and standard deviation			
Rank	Type of social media	Mean	Standard deviation
1	Festival website	4.60	2.13
2	Facebook	4.59	1.87
3	YouTube	4.01	1.88
4	Twitter	3.53	1.82
5	Google+	3.22	1.69
6	Instagram	3.08	1.73
7	MySpace	2.99	1.64
8	Tumblr	2.92	1.58
9	Pinterest	2.88	1.60
10	Spotify	2.86	1.57
11	StumbleUpon	2.78	1.49
12	FourSquare	2.67	1.22
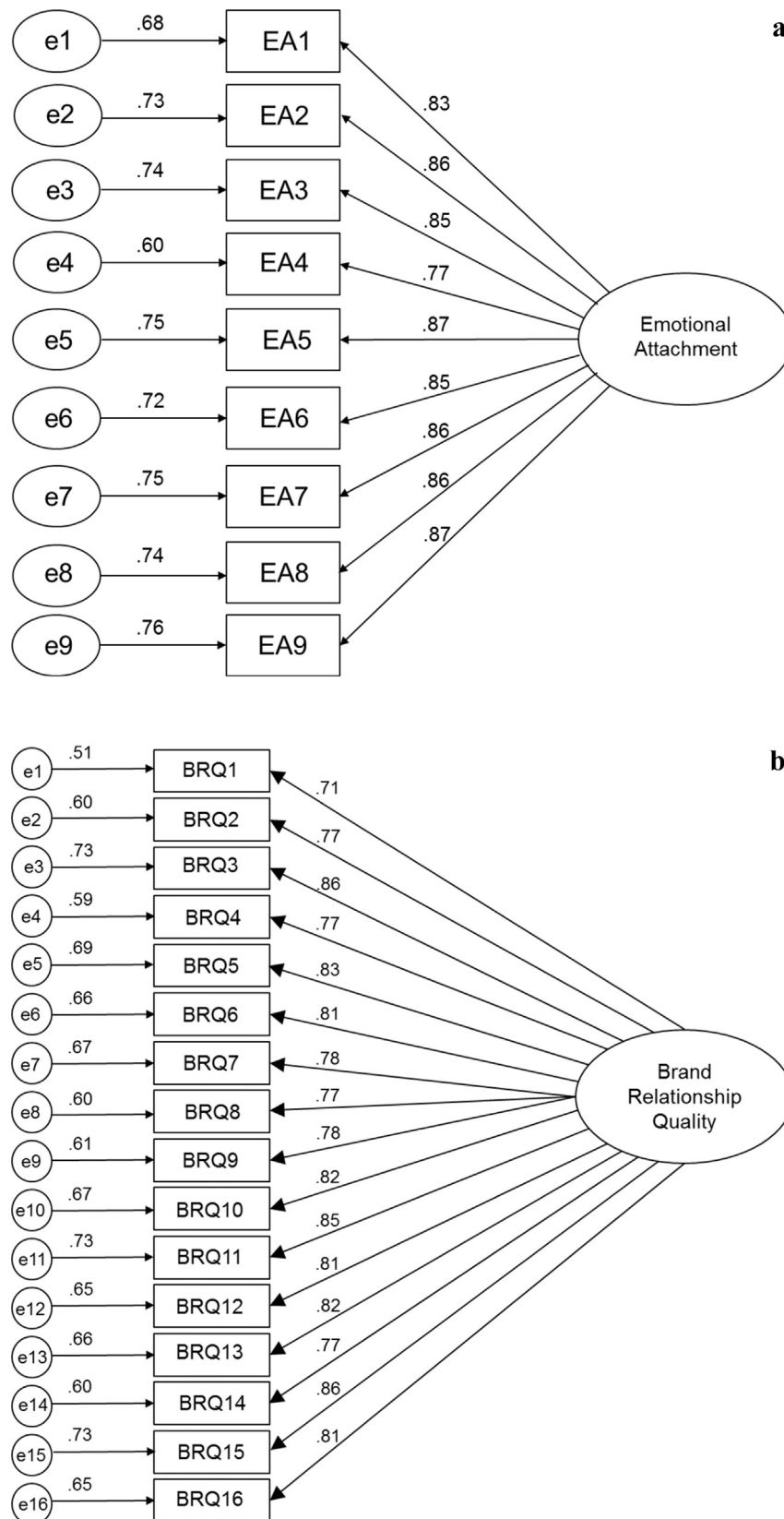
Fig. 2. (a) Factor loadings for the emotional attachment construct. (b) Factor loadings for the brand relationship quality construct.

Table 2
Model fit indices.

CMIN/df=	CFI	NFI	RFI	RMSEA
4.0	.996	.995	.950	.083

emotional attachment and BRQ is .72 and .69 respectively. The squared structural link between the constructs is .656. Although the two constructs are highly correlated, evidence of discriminant validity is supported. Next attention turns to fitting the model.

Table 2 shows that the model provides a good fit to the data [CMIN/df = 4.0, CFI = .996, NFI = .995, RFI = .950, RMSEA = .083], and Fig. 3 illustrates the standardized parameter estimates for the model. Based on the significance ($p < .001$) of the parameter estimates shown in the model, Hypothesis 1 (Emotion <– Social Media = .215), Hypothesis 3 (BRQ <– Emotion = .787), Hypothesis 4 (WOM <– BRQ = .398), and Hypothesis 5 (WOM <– Emotion = .411) are all supported. However, Hypothesis 2 is not supported. The path from social media to BRQ is not statistically significant (BRQ <– Social Media = −.023).

To assess the direct effect of social media on BRQ an alternative model was fitted that did not include the path from emotional attachment to brand relationship quality. As expected there was no change in the coefficient from social media to emotional attachment; however, the coefficient for the path from social media to BRQ changed from .15, which is statistically significant, to −.02, which is not statistically significant. Given that the direct effect of social media on BRQ is attenuated when the path from emotional attachment to brand relationship quality is included, provides some evidence of a meditational relationship between social media interaction and BRQ.

10. Discussion

Four of the five hypotheses were supported. Interacting with the brand using social media had a direct effect on emotional attachment to the festival, and emotional attachment has a direct effect on word of mouth. This supports recent contentions that social media interactions can lead to high levels of emotional engagement (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Sashi, 2012), and that the emotional responses triggered by marketing communications, play a dominant role in explaining behavioral outcomes (Pham et al., 2013). BRQ also has a direct effect on word of mouth. This supports the growing evidence

that BRQ is an important construct for assessing consumer–brand relationships (Bowden, 2009; Ekinci et al., 2005; Fournier, 1998; Kim et al., 2005), and further extends the literature by demonstrating its relevance for social media marketing and identifying how BRQ relates to other perceptual and behavioral outcomes. The results also support findings from other industry sectors that show a positive experience from direct brand interaction via social media will lead to favorable recommendations (Cruz & Mendelsohn, 2010).

Although there was no direct effect of social media usage on BRQ, statistical analysis showed a mediational relationship with emotional attachment being a mediator between social media usage and brand relationship quality. This finding has important theoretical and practical implications. It is clearly the emotional bond that consumers develop via social media interaction that influences the strength of their relationship with the brand, with the results supporting the proposition made by previous researchers that if marketers wish to build strong brand relationships, they need to incorporate high levels of emotional content in their marketing communications (Heath, 2001; Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Sashi, 2012). However, as suggested previously, the less aware consumers are of emotional elements in these communications, the better they are likely to work (Bornstein, 1989). So if advertisers wish to build strong brand relationships via social media, the emotional content used should be subtle.

One could argue that festival brands have the potential to evolve into "Lovemarks" (Roberts, 2004). They are maximizing their connection with consumers by creating strong emotional bonds. This strong emotional bond is building loyalty and creating advocacy. As mentioned previously, creating or maintaining Lovemarks has significant benefits. With the trend today toward commoditization and increasing price and quality parity, engaging with customers emotionally – through the brand experience – often provides the best opportunity for differentiation. The worldwide growth of music tourism as a niche market will ensure that music festivals will flourish, in particular as the key generating markets of Europe and the US start to improve (Mintel, 2013). So to remain competitive in this marketplace, marketers will have to aggressively pursue social media marketing strategies in order to maintain loyalty amongst fans.

Like all studies, there are limitations. The focus of analysis was music festivals only and the results may not be generalizable to other sectors of the tourism industry. Further research could test the hypotheses with consumers of other tourism products and
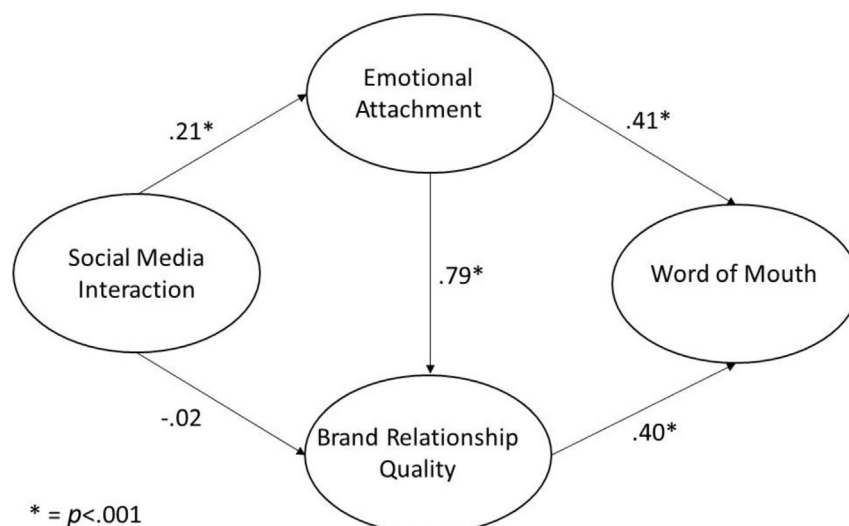

Fig. 3. Standardized parameter estimates for conceptual model.

services such as airlines, tour operators or cruise ships. It may be that tourism brands in other sectors of the industry need to work harder than festivals to build emotional connections with customers. It was mentioned earlier that very few brands have succeeded in building a strong emotional attachment with customers, particularly those companies in the tourism and hospitality sectors (Clark, 2009). Future research could also be extended to other demographic groups, countries and cultures, in order to further understand the merits of social media investments.

The research also provides a basis for future work on social media use and brand relationships. Two constructs were studied here — BRQ and emotional attachment, but other brand perception constructs are emerging in the literature that may also be impactful for understanding consumer—brand relationships in the context of social media. An example is anthropomorphism, which refers to the attribution of human form, human characteristics or human behavior to nonhuman things (Bartneck, Croft, & Kulic, 2008). While anthropomorphism has received attention in the marketing literature, to date research has not examined it in the context of social media.

It may also be fruitful to assess moderating effects of social media use on brand perceptions and behaviors. Algesheimer, Dholakia, and Hermann (2005), for example, show that brand knowledge moderates the relationship between social influence and perceptions of brand community. Factors such as brand knowledge, degree of brand use, and brand strength may shed further light on conditions under which social media use can be most effective. Finally, future studies could investigate which type of social media may have the most impact. The samples in this study were not large enough to explore effects of different types of social media on perceptions and behaviors, a shortcoming that can be addressed in future research. It does seem though that music festival tourists are high users of social networks, using such channels liberally to find out about events, to blog and to use forums for engagement (Mintel, 2013). In this study, the festival website, Facebook and YouTube were the most popular social media tools for engaging with the festival via social media. Twitter and Google+ were ranked fourth and fifth respectively. However, the digital environment is dynamic and can change rapidly, so longitudinal research will be needed to keep track of changes. For example, in this survey, Instagram ranked sixth in popularity, but given its incredible growth in the last 12 months, once would expect to see this platform used more and more by festival marketers. An increasing number of companies are running free viral campaigns on Instagram (Rusli, 2013).

Despite the limitations outlined above, this is an important study. The intent was to examine how consumers' social media interactions with brands affect perceptual and behavioral marketing outcomes. In general, the study found compelling evidence that social media use makes a difference. Consumers that engage with their favorite brands using social media have stronger relationships with those brands compared with consumers who do not interact with their favorite brands using social media. Thus investments in social media programs can provide marketing benefits when they succeed in facilitating customer—brand interactions.

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Martin S. Roth is Dean and Professor of Management and Marketing at the Barney School of Business, University of Hartford. His areas of expertise include global corporate and marketing strategy. His research has been published in the leading marketing and management journals including the *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Journal of Consumer Research*, *Journal of Advertising*, and *International Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Administration*. His articles and video interviews have appeared in the *Wall Street Journal* and his *CountryManager* international marketing simulation game is used in over 120 schools worldwide. He has conducted executive development programs and consulted for companies ranging from multinationals to new ventures, most recently including Blue Cross Blue Shield SC, CSX, Fiberweb, Metso, Nissan, Spirax Sarco, and Verizon.

Thomas J. Madden was Professor of Marketing at the Moore School of Business, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC until his death in 2014. His research has appeared in the leading marketing journals. Dr. Madden's research on branding, along with his co-authors, received the Paul E. Green Award for the best paper in the *Journal of Marketing Research* 2001 and the Sheth award for the best paper in the *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 2007. He has also co-authored three textbooks on marketing management and marketing research. His most recent research focused on the use of value-based marketing strategies and specifically the impact of brand equity on shareholder value.

Simon Hudson is an Endowed Chair in Tourism and Hospitality at the University of South Carolina. He is also Director of the SmartState Center of Economic Excellence in Tourism & Economic Development. He has held previous academic positions at universities in Canada and England, and prior to working in academia Dr. Hudson spent several years in the tourism industry in Europe. Dr. Hudson has written six books, over 50 peer-reviewed journal articles and 20 book chapters. The marketing of tourism is the focus of his research, and he is frequently invited to industry and academic conferences as a keynote speaker.

Rupert A. Hudson is a graduate of international business from the Moore School of Business, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC. The international business major is consistently ranked by *U.S. News & World Report* as the number one international business course in the country. Rupert was also in the University of South Carolina Honors College, rated the number one honors college in America. Rupert was involved in many research projects supported by both the Honors College and the Office of Undergraduate Research, and received numerous research grants including Magellan Scholar and Exploration Scholars grants. He is currently working in the music industry in New York.