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LET'S BE FRIENDS: EXAMINING CONSUMER BRAND RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH THE LENS OF BRAND PERSONALITY, ENGAGEMENT, AND RECIPROCAL ALTRUISM

by

Daniel D. Haun

Bachelor of Fine Arts
University of Kentucky, 2012

Master of Fine Arts
University of Pennsylvania, 2015

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University of South Carolina

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Accepted by:

Tara Marie Mortensen, Major Professor

Kenneth Campbell, Committee Member

Kealy Carter, Committee Member

Kevin Hull, Committee Member

Tracey L. Weldon, Interim Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the unending patience of Dr. Carol Pardun, Dr. Tara Marie Mortensen, Dr. Kevin Hull, Dr. Kealy Carter, and Dr. Kenneth Campbell. Thank you Dr. Pardun for our teatime chats. Your thoughtfulness and humor kept me sane. Thank you Dr. Mortensen for pushing me to finish the dissertation. Your tenacity, perseverance, and generosity is contagious. I would not have graduated without your guidance. Thank you Dr. Hull for our mini career conferences at Which Wich. Your transparency about academia and overall kindness changed my perspective completely. Thank you Dr. Carter for your mentorship, and for allowing me to have a leadership role with the Cushman project. You sparked my interest in advertising and marketing research. Thank you Dr. Campbell for mentoring me at my first academic conference, and for helping me write my first top paper at the AEJMC Southeast Colloquium in 2019. You empowered me and set me on my current path. Thank you to my family and your never-ending grace. Dad, Mom, David, Heather, I am amazed by your kind-heartedness. Thank you to Wally, Geoff, and Nathan. You are my torchbearers, without whom the darkness would have consumed me.

ABSTRACT

Brands have always exuded personality and status to consumers in order to promote a competent impression and induce positive perceptions and behaviors (Griskevicius, et al., 2007). In order for individuals to identify with brands, the brands must become more personable by consciously embodying a specific personality trait. Research has found that when a brand embodies a personality, there is an associated increase in consumer preference and usage (Sirgy, 1982), purchase choices for that brand (Ha & Janda, 2014; Gordon et al., 2016; Guèvremont & Grohmann, 2013; Swaminathan et al., 2009), and consumer preference and brand loyalty (Louis & Lombart, 2010; Mengxia, 2007). The purpose of this study is threefold: first, to examine the relationship between each of Aaker's (1997) brand personalities – competence, sincerity, excitement, sophistication, and ruggedness – and consumer engagement on social media; second, to explore for the first time brand-consumer reciprocal altruism and its relationship with engagement; and third, to investigate whether reciprocal altruism is related to greater engagement from consumers following the brand on social media.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"*The symbolic use of brands is possible because consumers often imbue brands with human personality traits (termed animism). Consumers easily can think about brands as if they were celebrities or famous historical figures and as they relate to one's own self which may be due in part to the strategies used by advertisers to imbue a brand with personality traits …"* (Aaker, 1997, p. 347).

Brands have always exuded personality and status to consumers in order to promote a competent impression and induce positive perceptions and behaviors (Griskevicius et al., 2007). In order for individuals to identify with brands, the brands must become more personable by consciously embodying a specific personality trait. For example, the personalities of sincerity, excitement, and competence tap an innate part of human personality; sophistication and ruggedness tap a dimension that individuals desire but do not necessarily have. "People motivated to enhance their self-concept form connections to brands that are used by groups they aspired to belong to, whereas people motivated to verify their self-concept form connections to brands used by groups to which they already belong" (Escalas & Bettman, 2003, p. 346). This premise is consistent with the advertising created for prototypical sophisticated brands (e.g., Monet, Revlon, Mercedes), in which aspirational attributes such as upper class, glamorous, and sexy are a focus. Similarly, so-called rugged brands (e.g., Marlboro, Harley-Davidson, Levi's) tend

to glamorize American western ideals, such as “strength, and masculinity” (Aaker, 1997, p. 353).

Research has found that when a brand embodies a personality, there is an associated increase in consumer preference and usage (Sirgy, 1982), purchase choices for that brand (Ha & Janda, 2014; Gordon et al., 2016; Guèvremont & Grohmann, 2013; Swaminathan et al., 2009), and consumer preference and brand loyalty (Louis & Lombart, 2010; Mengxia, 2007). Oliver (1999) defines brand loyalty as “a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior" (p. 34). Schulz and Bailey (2000) posit that brand loyalty is essentially the repeated social interaction between brand and consumer. As Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) point out: “the strongest consumer–company relationships are based on consumers’ identification with the companies” (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003, p. 77). Therefore, these distinct personalities are created through a conscious effort by a brand. Consumers then assess brands for these personalities, including their perceived sincerity, competence, and statuses (Davies et al., 2018). A number of scholars have categorized brand personalities (e.g. Blackston, 1993; Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003; Geuens et al., 2009; Singh, 2013), but Aaker’s (1997) study is considered seminal. This personality psychology work developed a framework of brand personality and a generalizable scale for their measure by administering a questionnaire that asked participants to assign personalities to brands. Some 114 personality traits were reduced to five distinct personality dimensions: Sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. In the present study, Aaker’s

(1997) five personality traits are used to define and measure the concept of brand personality.

The advent of social media has changed the landscape of brand-consumer interaction. Consumers on social media possess almost unlimited opportunities to communicate with brands in ways unheard of a mere couple of decades ago (Christodoulides et al., 2012; Helm & Jones, 2010). The advent of social media has created a digital community in which brands, with their distinct personalities, build "relationships" – a tie between a person and a brand that is voluntary and interdependently created – with consumers (Chang & Chieng, 2006). Social media is a place where brands can become anthropomorphized, meaning they are "perceived by consumers as actual human beings with various emotional states, mind, soul, and conscious behaviors that can act as prominent members of social ties" (Puzakova, Kwak et al., p. 413). Hudson et al. (2016) found that the more highly anthropomorphized a brand is on social media, the better the brand-relationship quality will be and "social media interaction is more likely to benefit a brand high in anthropomorphism" (Hudson et al., 2016, p. 8).

This interaction can be defined by the concept of engagement: "an individual's interaction with media … comprising behavioral aspects or click-based interactions (participation) as well as simple content viewing and reading (consumption)" (Khan, 2017, p. 237). Engagement is "a user-initiated action consisting of three distinct phenomena: Ad engagement (reviewing whether the creative is compelling and whether a consumer interacted with the ad in some way), content engagement (gauging which content is most captivating on a site), and audience engagement (identifying which

viewers are paying the most attention and are contributing to the conversation)" (Gluck, 2012, p. 8). Engagement leads to a "co-creation" of value as "interactive consumer experiences co-created with other actors can be interpreted as the act of engaging" (Brodie et al., 2013). Hollebeek (2011) found that engagement is a multidimensional concept that comprises behavioral, cognitive, and emotional dimensions. "Customer brand engagement is defined as the level of a customer's cognitive, emotional and behavioral investment in specific brand interactions" (Hollebeek, 2011, p. 555).

In social media studies, the concept of engagement is used as a measure of influence related to the online interactivity associated with social media campaigns (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). In research studies about social media engagement, the term is typically measured through follows, likes, shares, and comments on content (Chang & Chieng, 2006). Consumers regularly engaged in liking, sharing, and commenting on social media posts are creating a bond and a dialogue with brands and are considered highly engaged. When a consumer likes, share or comments on a brand's social media post, they become engaged members of the brand community. Following Chang and Chieng (2006), engagement is defined by the number of likes, shares and comments on a brand's Twitter post in this dissertation.

One method that brands employ to provoke engagement—likes, shares or comments—includes offers of discounts or other benefits. This reflects the concept of reciprocal altruism, which is: "a situation that forms among or is adopted by the participants in an exchange relation" (Emerson, 1976, p. 351). Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) note that "reciprocity or repayment in kind is probably the best-known exchange rule" (p. 875). Reciprocal altruism is "the basis for long-term cooperative interactions. It

involves acting in such a way that another individual is benefited at some expense to oneself, with the expectation that the recipient—who may be completely unrelated to the altruist—will return such assistance in the future" (Ashton et al., 1998, p. 244). When actors act in a manner that temporarily reduces its resources while increasing another actor's resources, they expect that compromise to be reciprocated (Molm, 1994).

Reciprocal altruism has previously been used to explain this kind of exchange in contexts primarily outside of the realm of social media. For example, Sierra and McQuitty (2005) found that reciprocity in the form of shared responsibility between employees and customers leads to consumer loyalty. The researchers note: "The inseparability between service employees and customers is positively related to perceptions of shared responsibility, which are positively related to the emotions associated with the service exchange. In turn, these emotions are positively related to the loyalty to the service brand" (p. 396). Game theorists have looked at reciprocal altruism in the Prisoner's Dilemma game. Axelrod (1980) explains, "the Prisoner's Dilemma embodies the tension between individual rationality (reflected in the incentive of both sides to be selfish) and group rationality (reflected in the higher payoff to both sides for mutual cooperation over mutual defect)" (p. 4).

Biologists have also examined reciprocal altruism in animals. There are many cases when two territorial neighbors or non-neighbors in the animal kingdom cooperate during predator mobbing, and thusly have an increased opportunity to drive the predator from their breeding area and survive as a group (Flasskamp, 1994; Krams & Krama, 2002; Arnold, 2000; Curio, 1978; Desrochers et al., 2002; Dominey, 1983; Shedd, 1983; Altmann, 1956; Pitcher, 1986; Krams et al., 2008). While this phenomenon is

conceivably applicable to brand-consumer relationships on social media, no one has yet undergone such a study. In this dissertation, reciprocal altruism is applied to social media, and is defined by social transactions whereby one party repays another for good deeds.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The link between brand personalities and positive consumer behaviors is well researched (e.g. Aaker, 1997; Phau & Lau, 2000; Biel, 1993; Fournier, 1998; Keller, 1993; Malhotra, 1988; Sirgy, 1982), but has scarcely been studied in the realm of social media. Past studies have examined brand personalities' influence on consumer outcomes such as purchase decision, brand loyalty preference, and usage (Biel, 1993; Fournier, 1994; Sirgy, 1982). Social media calls for examination of a more nuanced form of brand personalities' influences on consumer behavior, which has not yet been examined. This is an important gap given the opportunities afforded on social media for brand personality formation and direct consumer interaction. Specifically, a question is: Is there a relationship between brand personality and consumer engagement on social media?

Further, the literature shows that a number of researchers have explored reciprocal altruism in contexts outside of social media (e.g. Social Exchange Theory [e.g. Emerson, 1976; Molm, 1994; Ashton et al., 1998], game theory [e.g. Axelrod, 1980; Hamburger, 1973; Rapoport et al., 1965], and biology [e.g. Altmann, 1956; Curio, 1978; Dominey, 1983; Pitcher, 1986; Shedd, 1983]. While the relationship between brands and consumers on social media is often one where both actors are constantly cooperating, reciprocating, and attempting to benefit from the other actor, much like the ideas espoused by reciprocal altruism, no researchers–to the author's knowledge–have yet applied the concept of reciprocal altruism to brand engagement on social media. Social media has created a

digital community that allows for greater and more direct brand relationship-building with consumers, meriting examination of the relationship between reciprocity and brand engagement. This leads to a second research question: Is there a relationship between consumer engagement and reciprocal altruism on social media?

1.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Given the identified gaps in the literature, the purpose of this study is threefold. First, the dissertation examines the relationship between each of Aaker's (1997) five brand personalities – competence, sincerity, excitement, sophistication, and ruggedness – and consumer engagement on social media. Brand personality is coded using Aaker's (1997) five personality traits and engagement is measured by likes, shares and comments.

Second, the dissertation explores for the first-time brand-consumer reciprocal altruism and its relationship with engagement.

Third, the dissertation investigates whether reciprocal altruism is related to greater engagement from consumers following the brand on social media. In this dissertation, reciprocal altruism is defined by brands' tweets offering incentives, including discounts, coupon codes, raffles, and giveaways reciprocated by consumers liking, sharing or commenting on the brands' tweets.

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study will expand knowledge concerning consumer-brand relationships and consumer engagements. Although previous studies have examined how brand personalities create emotional attachments, strong emotional brand connections, and engagement in a one-way, top-down approach, there is a notable gap in the literature concerning the two-way, dyadic relationships between brands and consumers working

together via reciprocal altruism to create unique brand communities on Twitter. This dissertation seeks to fill that gap. Given that "reciprocal altruism can be viewed as a symbiosis, each partner helping the other while he helps himself" (Trivers, 1971, p. 39), and given that social media users "are seen as goal-oriented, with rationales for their use (and non-use) of various media" (Brandtzæg & Heim, 2009, p. 144) the symbiotic relationship between brands and consumer on social media must be more closely examined through the lens of reciprocal altruism. In practical terms, this dissertation will help brands and businesses identify whether brand personalities are associated with social media engagement and whether reciprocal altruism is associated with greater engagement with consumers on Twitter. In order to emotionally connect to consumers, brands must create a unique brand personality which consumers can better identify with (Malär et al., 2011). These unique personalities can create strong emotional brand connections with consumers in order to create higher levels of consumer loyalty and financial performance (Park et al., 2010). Consumers will emotionally attach to only a limited number of these brands (Thomson et al., 2005).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 BRAND PERSONALITY

Brands have long exuded personalities to consumers to promote a competent impression (Griskevicius, et al., 2007). Brand personalities are the human characteristics associated with a brand (Aaker, 1997). A number of scholars have attempted to categorize the personalities of brands, including Aaker (1997), Blackston (1993), Kim et al. (2001), Azoulay and Kapferer (2003), Freling and Forbes (2005), Ekinci and Hosany (2006), Geuens et al. (2009), Grohmann (2009), Sung and Kim (2010), and Singh (2013). Aaker is most seminal for developing a theoretical framework of the brand personality construct and five dimensions of brand personality (sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness).

Aaker's (1997) study developed a framework of brand personality dimensions and a reliable and generalizable scale for their measure. Prior to Aaker (1997) "no research had been conducted to develop systematically a reliable, valid, and generalizable scale to measure brand personality" (Aaker, 1997, p. 347). Aaker built a scale and theoretical framework of the brand personality construct. In this study, 631 subjects rated a subset of 37 brands on 114 personality traits. A total of 1,200 questionnaires were sent via Federal Express to subjects from a national mail panel. The questionnaire asked participants to use a five-point Likert scale to rate the extent to which 114 personality traits describe a specific brand. The questionnaire asked participants to think of each brand as if it were a

person. Most of the following questions were about a variety of brands of products or services. Specifically, the questionnaire asked:

> We would like you to think of each brand as if it were a person. This may sound unusual, but think of the set of human characteristics associated with each brand. For example, you might think that the human characteristics associated with Pepto Bismal are kind, warm, caring, soothing, gentle, trustworthy and dependable. The human characteristics associated with Dr. Pepper might be non-conforming, fun, interesting, exciting and off-beat. We're interested in finding out which personality traits or human characteristics come to mind when you think of a particular brand (p. 350).

Through factor analysis, these 114 personality traits were reduced to five distinct dimensions: Sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. Aaker (1997) was inspired by human personality research, and built a conception of brand personality traits based on that foundation. Aaker described the acute differences between human and brand personality traits. "Although human and brand personality traits might share a similar conceptualization, they differ in terms of how they are formed. Perceptions of human personality traits are inferred on the basis of an individual's behavior, physical characteristics, attitudes and beliefs, and demographic characteristics. In contrast, perceptions of brand personality traits can be formed and influenced by any direct or indirect contact that the consumer has with the brand" (Aaker, 1997, p. 348). In many ways, brand personality traits are more complicated than human personality traits. The personality traits of a brand's employees, CEO, endorsers and influencers can be transferred directly to the brand's personality (McCracken, 1989). Additionally, product-

related attributes, product category associations, brand names, the symbol or logo, advertising style, price, and distribution channel add more layers and dimensions to a brand's personality (Batra et al., 1993).

Studies have investigated a number of relationships between brand personality and positive outcomes. For example, brand personality is linked to evocation of emotions, increasing levels of trust, brand loyalty, brand equity, brand identification, and purchase intention. Below, these studies are discussed in more detail. Brand personality can increase consumer preference and usage (Sirgy, 1982), evoke specific emotions in consumers (Biel, 1993), and increase levels of trust and loyalty toward a brand (Fournier, 1994), ultimately informing purchase intentions of the consumer. "Products have multiple 'attributes' of value to the consumer: brand image, reliability, styling, availability of servicing, etc., on which he may base his purchase decisions" (Porter, 1974, p. 420). Fournier (1998) argued that "brands cohere into systems that consumers create not only to aid in living but also to give meaning to their lives. Put simply, consumers do not choose brands, they choose lives" (p. 367). A brand is therefore more than a series of attributes. A brand is a lifestyle choice for a person which gives them meaning. Consumers are heavily invested in the personality of the brand as they are heavily invested in their own personalities.

Highlighting the connection between lifestyle preferences and brand personalities, a pioneer in the study of brand personality, Evans (1959), examined personality factors of brands by profiling Chevrolet owners versus Ford owners on numerous personality traits and linking these personalities to purchases. Evans noted the importance of establishing a brand's personality in advertising:

> The manufacturer through his advertising tries to create the impression that his brand is best for certain people or uses. For example, a certain automobile has recently been advertised as being particularly appropriate for doctors, as it is a very dependable car … people associate a brand with the type or classes of people they observe using it. In some undefined and unspecified pattern, these elements contribute to the brand's personality (p. 359).

Plummer (2000) further links brand personality and purchase intention, asserting that brand personality can transform the consumer's purchase intention from "not appropriate for me" to "appropriate for me." Plummer's research demonstrates that brands can be characterized by personality descriptors such as "cheerful," "friendly," "ordinary," "practical," "modern," "reliable," and "honest". "gentle," "sophisticated," "mature," "exotic," "mysterious," and "down to earth." Plummer examined brand personality profiles through consumer surveys as executive vice president and director of research services at Young & Rubicam USA. The research and development that Plummer went through to make the profiles an operational tool at Young & Rubicam included early developmental work on brand personality to see whether simple checklist procedures could discriminate between brands. Plummer developed a 50-attribute checklist from previous research on personality and in-depth interviews.
"We asked respondents to indicate which of the words and phrases on our list they would use to describe each of the brands we were interested in" (Plummer, 2000, p. 81).

More recently, researchers have investigated relationships between brand personality and brand identification, the perceived state of oneness with a brand. Brand equity is the "incremental utility or value added to a product by its brand name, such as

Coke, Kodak, Levi's, and Nike … brand equity can be estimated by subtracting the utility of physical attributes of the product from the total utility of a brand" (Yoo et al., 2000, p. 195). The physical attributes of a product have a certain value, and the brand itself has an added value on top of the product's inherent characteristics. Brands can exude a personality via empathic versus unempathic behaviors and gender-based language used on Twitter. The Harvard Business Review conducted a study of brands using empathic and unempathic behaviors on Twitter analyzing interaction with users, repetitious stock phrases, diverting users to non-social channels, and gender-based language used. They found that top-performing companies use either gender-neutral language or a slightly female tone of voice. Companies like Wal-Mart employ an empathic female tone with emotional ways of responding using emoticons (Parmar, 2015). Consumers follow brands on social networking sites due to brand identification. Brand identification is a "consumer's perceived state of oneness with a brand, a valid and potent expression of our quest for identity-fulfilling meaning in the marketplace of brands" (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012, p. 407). Just as Fournier (1998) argued that brands give meaning to consumers lives, here Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012), argue that our search for identity-fulfilling meaning is found in brands. If there is some synergy between a consumers' personality and a brand's personality, this is identification. And the more consumers identify with a brand in this "perceived state of oneness," the higher the brand equity and value of the brand will be. Kim et al. (2001) found that brand identification had a direct effect on word-of-mouth reports and an indirect effect on brand loyalty. "The development of brand identification affects the building of a relationship between brand and consumer. In other words, when brand personality seems attractive, brand identification is created. If

brand identification increases, then online consumers will not so readily click away from the brand's website" (Kim et al., 2001, p. 204).

As Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012) pointed out, brands are "carriers of symbolic meanings and can help consumers achieve their fundamental identity goals and projects" (p. 407). Brands help consumers define who they are and what groups they belong to. Brand identification is "a customer's psychological state of perceiving, feeling, and valuing his or her belongingness with a brand" (p. 407) and is a pivotal moment when the consumer has found a sense of belonging among a collective of other consumers who are likewise part of the same brand community. A well-articulated brand personality is the first step in the creation of this sense of belonging.

2.2 ENGAGEMENT

Engagement is "a holistic psychological state in which one is cognitively and emotionally energized to socially behave in ways that exemplify the positive ways in which group members prefer to think of themselves" (Ray et al., 2014, p. 531). Group engagement is a psychological state in which members of the group are ready to invest their full range of energies into challenging tasks that are important and personally meaningful (Kahn, 1990; Maslach et al., 2001). In engagement, individuals "employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, or emotionally during role performances" (Kahn, 1990, p. 694). Engagement was initially researched by work psychologists as a positive work psychology that can mitigate employee burnout (Hakanen et al., 2006, Harter et al., 2002, Maslach et al., 2001, Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). These studies defined engagement as "the individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work (Harter et al., 2002, p. 269), as "characterized by energy,

involvement, and efficacy—the direct opposites of the three burnout dimensions" (Maslach et al., 2001, p. 416), and as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, p. 295). These work psychologists recognized engagement as the opposite of burnout. "Engagement is assumed to be the positive antipode of burnout" (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, p. 294).

In the context of social media and digital communities, it is easy to see how the users who are the most "engaged" are also the user who are most energetic, involved, enthused, satisfied, fulfilled et cetera and express that via likes, shares, and comments. Engagement reemerged in research concerning sustained conduct of exemplary performance (Bakker et al., 2008, Rich et al., 2010). "Engaged workers create their own job resources over time. Our overview suggests that a focus on work engagement may not only benefit the individual but also offer organizations a competitive advantage" (Bakker et al., 2008, p. 196). "Engagement, conceptualized as the investment of an individual's complete self into a role, provides a more comprehensive explanation of relationships with performance" (Rich et al., 2010, p. 617).

Building on the research of positive work psychology, social media engagement researchers categorize engagement as heightened involvement that leads to greater usage of a social media platform. "The more frequently users take part in a variety of activities, the more valuable the social media platform becomes to the organization and fellow users, resulting in the co-creation of value" (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016, p. 56).

Social media engagement is a metric of social media interactivity, often measured through likes, comments and shares to see what particular kinds of content resonate with

followers. For example, engagement is a way to measure the success of social media-based brand communities. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 61) describe these communities as "a group of internet-based applications that builds on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and it allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content." Muniz and O'Guinn (2001, p. 412) defined these communities as a "specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand." McAlexander et al. (2002, p. 38) argued that the most important currency in a social media-based brand community is the "creation and negotiation of meaning." It is these very same likes, comments, shares, and user generated content that creates meaning in a brand community and interactivity between brand and consumer. The point of branded social media content is to create interactivity between brand and consumer: the more activity (likes, comments, shares) the better the engagement. Engagement is a measure of influence in social media (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Engagement is an individual's interaction with media that involves behaviors such as clicks and as actions such as viewing and reading (Khan, 2017, p. 237). Consumers find digital platforms upon which they can influence and be influenced by other users, which includes both consumers and brands.

Social media research indicates that consumer engagement may be prompted when presented in the form of diary blogs and social media rather than through traditional media sources (Neiger et al., 2012). Neiger et al. (2012) used Twitter as a case study of social media use for health promotion and proposed that "health promotion must build on its initial efforts in social media and move from low engagement to medium and then high engagement. Engaged conversations reflected in medium engagement must develop

to the type of involvement represented in high engagement" (Neiger et al., 2012, p. 162). Neiger et al. (2012) proposed that social media strategies should encourage reading and responding to messages so that dialogic messaging is occurring.

Consumers regularly engaged with brands–through liking, sharing, and commenting on social media posts–create a bond and dialogue with the brands, similar to the way one might converse with other people. Just as engagement is the new metric of marketing performance, conversations are the new "products." Rather than push content that is only product centric, brands are instead finding new ways to create content that leads to a dialogic relationship between brand and consumer. Engagement is no longer a luxury but a requisite to having a future as a brand (Levine et al., 2001). Social media allows for newfound levels of commitment from the consumer, "advocating" for a brand through user-generated content, sharing branded content, and becoming invested in a product story on social media. Social media campaigns involving consumer-generated content and fostering consumer engagement reinforce brand loyalty (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010).

Social media is a medium, a conduit through which social relations can build between institutions and publics that may never engage within a physical space. Social media channels, like Twitter, can create these global relations which are "social connections in which territorial location, territorial distance and territorial borders do not have a determining influence. In global space `place' is not territorially fixed, territorial distance is covered in effectively no time, and territorial frontiers present no particular impediment" (Scholte, 2000, p. 179). The globalization afforded by the internet and social media channels creates new spaces, digital spaces, where communities can emerge.

Globalization is “imagined through the lens of this conceptualization of space - time, the globalization we are facing now, is a thoroughgoing, world-wide, restructuring of those space - times, along particular lines. It is a remaking of those, inherited but always temporary and provisional, spaces, places, cultures which are themselves the hybrid products of previous restructurings" (Massey, 1999, p. 23). Reconceptualizing digital spaces via globalization leads to a series of complex networks. Network analysts examine these digital spaces via community detection, giving credence to the idea that digital spaces created by globalization become communities. “Detecting and analyzing the community structure of networks has led to important findings in a wide range of domains … such studies have shown that communities constitute meaningful units of organization and that they provide new insights in the structure and function of the whole network under study” (Papadopoulos et al., 2011, p. 516).

Digital spaces called communities may be analyzed via community detection in which a series of transactions occur between users (engagement) such as tagging a photo with another user’s username and handle, commenting on a social media post, liking, sharing, subscribing, and retweeting all serve as transactions and engagement in these communities. The transactions themselves become a type of currency in these communities. Every transaction in these communities involves metadata signifying the level of involvement of every user. How many posts are they liking, sharing, pinning, posting, commenting, hearting, archiving, blogging, favoriting and retweeting? “Every such transaction typically involves different entities; for instance a tag assignment in Flickr involves a user, a photo and a tag, while a comment on a blog article involves the commenter, the blog article and the comment text” (Papadopoulos et al., 2011, p. 519).

You can begin to see the level of engagement of every community member and user by how many of these transactions they have enacted.

It is interesting to note the term "social" in social media, which means socialness or the ability to interact well with others in a community. "Socialness" can refer to skills one has interacting on social media. "Socialness or sociability refers to the quality or state of being social. It is a concept often associated with people who are good at making friends and interesting interactions with others" (Hoang et al., 2011, p. 344). These network transactions: likes, shares, comments, retweets, tags, hashtags, mentions have a lot of value both to the members of the community and to brands trying to enter these communities. There is an inherent reciprocity and cooperation in the transactions occurring in social media networks. It is important to study the value of transactions, engagement, and how best to navigate these networks and communities. Engagement is occurring frequently on social networking sites (Neiger et al., 2012), all over the globe in a never-ending dialogue (Held, 1995), with influencers and consumers having varying degrees of sociability and influence in these spaces (Hoang et al., 2011).

2.3 RECIPROCAL ALTRUISM

Reciprocal altruism is acting in such a way that another individual is benefited at some expense to oneself, with the expectation that the recipient will return such assistance in the future (Ashton et al., 1998, p. 244). Reciprocal altruism is very similar to the relationship dynamics explained in Social Exchange Theory, a theory that states all of social life involves transactions whereby one party repays another for good or bad deeds. "In this regard, all social exchange theories share a number of common features. All social exchange theories treat social life as involving a series of sequential transactions

between two or more parties. Resources are exchanged through a process of reciprocity, whereby one party tends to repay the good (or sometimes bad) deeds of another party" (Cropanzano et al., 2017, p. 1). This dissertation employs the specific concept of reciprocal altruism within Social Exchange Theory. Reciprocal acts are defined as "situations in which the behavior of each partner influences the outcomes" (Zayas et al., 2002, p. 884). Reciprocal altruism is a form of collaboration and a "form of mutual co-operation, in which one individual helps a non-relative and receives assistance itself in return sometime later" (Krams et al., 2008, p. 599). Reciprocal acts have often been considered a cultural norm or mandate. Sociologists suggest that reciprocity is in part due to obligation, as "people feel an obligation to repay when they receive a certain value of resources from others" (Wang et al., 2003, p. 515). Reciprocal altruism is "more or less rewarding or costly, between at least two persons. Cost was viewed primarily in terms of alternative activities or opportunities foregone by the actors involved … behavior is a function of payoffs, whether the payoffs are provided by the nonhuman environment or by other humans" (Cook et al., 2013, p. 54).

Reciprocal altruism has been studied in a number of fields beyond basic human interaction; for example, biology and game theory. Biologists often look at the pervasiveness of cooperative behavior among organisms in nature. Stephens (1996) looked at a number of instances where organisms in nature exude helping behavior even when there is a high cost or sacrifice for the organism. "Prima facie, the theory of evolution by natural selection implies that helping behavior should not exist because organisms that do not help should do better than helpers by reaping the rewards of the help without incurring the costs. But, of course, organisms frequently do help one

another. Why is this?" (Stephens, 1996, p. 533). Organisms in nature will act in a self-sacrificing way to help one another. Stephens looked at an example of guppies leaving the safety of their school to approach a predator in a self-sacrificial manner. "Each guppy has a choice—approach the predator (cooperate) or play safe and hang back (defect). If a guppy approaches the predator, it increases its chance of being eaten, but gains valuable information about the predator. If two guppies inspect together, the risk of being eaten for each inspector is reduced" (Stephens, 1996, p. 541).

Game theorists have examined reciprocal altruism in an iterated Prisoner's Dilemma game of strategy have to choose between cooperation and defection.
The Prisoner's Dilemma is a game showing why two rational individuals might or might not cooperate. The game was created by Merrill Flood and Melvin Dresher while working at the RAND Corporation, an American nonprofit global policy think tank created in 1948 by Douglas Aircraft Company to offer research and analysis to the United States Armed Forces. The U.S. Armed Forces War Department, the Office of Scientific Research and Development created RAND in 1948 to connect private operational research with military research and development decisions. At the time, the threat of nuclear war loomed. The Prisoner's Dilemma was one of a number of game theories created at RAND leading to the doctrine of nuclear deterrence by mutually assured destruction (MAD), developed under the guidance of-Defense Secretary Robert McNamara and based upon these game theories developed at RAND. Albert W. Tucker formalized the game with prison sentence rewards. The premise of the game is that two members of a criminal organization are imprisoned. Each prisoner is in solitary confinement and cannot communicate with the other to cooperate. The prosecutors lack

sufficient evidence to convict the pair on the principal charge, but they have enough to convict both on a lesser charge. Simultaneously, the prosecutors offer each prisoner a bargain. Each prisoner is given the opportunity either to betray the other by testifying that the other committed the crime. If they each betray the other, each of them serves two years in prison. If only one betrays the other remain silent, A will be set free and B will serve three years in prison. If they both remain silent, both of them will serve only one year in prison. If two players play the Prisoner's Dilemma game more than once in succession, remembering previous actions of their opponent and changing their strategy, the game is called iterated prisoner's dilemma. Reciprocal Altruism explains the cooperation between the two prisoners in the game. “The idea that reciprocal altruism can explain cooperation in PD games has been proposed by game theorists and social scientists” (Kiyonari et al., 2000, p. 413). Game theorist Robert Axelrod held strategists’ tournaments in which strategists would compete in an iterated Prisoner’s Dilemma. In the game, if one side makes a selfish choice, both parties suffer. If the two sides cooperate, then they succeed. “The distinguishing feature of the Prisoner's Dilemma is that in the short run, neither side can benefit itself with a selfish choice enough to make up for the harm done to it from a selfish choice by the other. Thus, if both cooperate, both do fairly well … therefore the Prisoner's Dilemma embodies the tension between individual rationality (reflected in the incentive of both sides to be selfish) and group rationality (reflected in the higher payoff to both sides for mutual cooperation over mutual defect)” (Axelrod, 1980, p. 4). These findings suggest that humans thrive when using group rationality in a cooperative altruistic manner rather than in a selfish individual rationality.

Reciprocal altruism reflects the driving force in sharing branded content with one's followers. Consumers share branded content with friends and followers in part to help them receive a discount, and to themselves receive a benefit in return. "Ad referral is driven by reciprocal altruism wherein the person sharing the ad seeks to help others, but must receive benefits in return" (Hayes et al., 2016, p. 33). Reviews written and posted on online social media by users can help others and be a form of reciprocal altruism (Parra-Lopez et al., 2011). The act of consumers helping each other on various websites can also be reciprocal altruism (Ma & Chan, 2014). Group and interpersonal attachments of online communities can create this reciprocity (Fiedler & Sarstedt 2010; Ren et al., 2007). Reciprocal altruism can be the very thing that motivates users to help others in social networks (Leider et al., 2009; Mohtashemi & Mui, 2003). Kim et al. (2014) found that shoppers enjoy social functions while shopping thus brands should encourage consumers to engage in social functions in both physical and digital retail spaces.

Researchers are beginning to find more and more connections between reciprocal altruism and social media. Bellotti et al. (2013) sought to use social media and reciprocal altruism to match up those in need with those who can do a good deed in the moment in a "call to action to researchers, innovators, technologists, funders and investors to consider opportunities for technologies that can radically improve our capacity to perform random acts of kindness" (2013, p. 1). Kim et al. (2016) examined smartphones shoppers helping one another through reciprocal altruism seeking to identify motivations for engaging in online reciprocal altruism. "The act of consumers helping each other, is a key aspect in websites' successes. Accordingly, it would be useful to identify why consumers engage in online reciprocal altruism, to understand consumers' motivations for engaging in

online reciprocal altruism, and to evaluate the factors that influence consumers to engage in online reciprocal altruism. Hence, this study examines motivations for engaging in reciprocal altruism in the online environment" (2016, p. 921). Khurana (2021) examined reciprocal altruism in donation-based crowdfunding seeking to "build upon the economic theory of charitable giving and extend the framework of legitimacy and reciprocal altruism to examine the factors that impact the success of donation-based crowdfunding campaigns" (p. 2).

Though many researchers have examined how consumers can help one another via reciprocal altruism, few have examined how brands can help consumers and better connect with consumers via reciprocal altruism. Therefore, this study will examine reciprocal altruism and brand personality in tandem to discover how brands can help consumers better connect with them with specific personalities and altruistic behaviors.

2.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Given that brand personality is linked to evocation of emotions, increasing levels of trust, brand loyalty, brand equity, brand identification, and purchase intention, and given that "brands cohere into systems that consumers create not only to aid in living but also to give meaning to their lives" (Fournier, 1998, p. 367), this study asks what kind of relationship exists between unique brand personalities and engagement on Twitter:

RQ1: Is there a relationship between brand personality and engagement on Twitter? If so, what kind?

Given that reciprocal altruism can be the very thing that motivates users to help others in both large real-world and digital social networks (Leider et al., 2009; Mohtashemi & Mui, 2003), and given that humans thrive when using group rationality in

a cooperative altruistic manner (Axelrod, 1980, p. 4), this study asks what kind of relationship exists between reciprocal altruism and engagement on Twitter:

RQ2: Is there a relationship between reciprocal altruism and engagement on Twitter? If so, what kind?

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 DESIGN AND SCOPE

Content analysis is a “systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding” (Stemler, 2000, p. 1). Holsti (1969) defined content analysis as "any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages" (p. 14). Finally, Krippendorff (1980) defined content analysis as "research motivated by the search for techniques to infer from symbolic data what would be either too costly, no longer possible, or too obtrusive by the use of other techniques" (p. 51). Benefits of content analysis include the fact that it is a systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories, it is unobtrusive, and it is useful in dealing with large volumes of data (Stemler, 2000). Content analysis is appropriate for this study because “compared with techniques such as interviews, content analysis usually yields unobtrusive measures in which neither the sender nor the receiver of the message is aware that it is being analyzed. Hence, there is little danger that the act of measurement itself will act as a force for change that confounds the data” (Weber, 1990, p. 10). Neither the sender (brands) nor receiver (consumers) are aware of this analysis, nor will they confound the data in this methodology. Content analysis is used in this study because, as Kerlinger (1964) illustrated, it is a “a method of observation” akin to observing people’s behavior or “asking them to respond to scales,” except that the

investigator “asks questions of the communications” (p. 544). As Lasswell et al. (1952) argue, content analysis can’t tell us whether a work of art is good or not, or whether a writing is subversive or not. Content analysis tells us objective, systematic, and quantitative frequency of traits. “Content analysis will not tell us whether a given work is good literature; it will tell us whether the style is varied. It will not tell us whether a paper is subversive; it will tell us if the contents change with party line” (Lasswell et al., 1952, p. 45). This study seeks to discover traits of brand personality, reciprocal altruism, and engagement on Twitter.

Twitter was chosen to retrieve a sample for study because Twitter is a medium that allows for interactions between brands and consumers. Twitter provides a dyadic relationship between brands and consumers wherein consumers can “talk back” to brands. “Through Twitter, consumers are now not only able to ‘talk back’ to companies—even very large global corporations—but to do so in public; they can share their pleasure, or displeasure, with potentially millions of other consumers without significant effort” (Nitins & Burgess, 2014, p. 294). Not only can consumers “talk back” to brands on Twitter, they can also find a space to congregate and “play” with the brand. “Twitter provides an open space for consumer engagement and participation. Instead of trying to control or silence these conversations through heavy-handed measures, some businesses have successfully maximized the impact of this online participation and engagement by providing them with an official space to congregate and ‘play’ with their brand” (Nitins & Burgess, 2014, p. 295). In the last reported quarter (Q2 2021), the number of global monetizable daily active users (mDAU) on Twitter amounted to 206 million daily active users worldwide (Statista, 2021). Individual Twitter messages

between users and followers are called tweets, and a culture of sharing or "retweeting" emerged from the microblogging site. "Common practice of responding to a tweet has evolved into well-defined markup culture: RT stands for retweet,'@' followed by a user identifier address the user, and '#' followed by a word represents a hashtag" (Kwak et al., 2010, p. 591).

3.2 SAMPLE

The relationships between brand personality and engagement and reciprocal altruism and engagement are studied through a content analysis of a sample of Twitter posts, also called tweets. The sample is comprised of posts from the 32 most valuable brands across 16 industries, as defined by Forbes (Badenhausen, 2018). The most commercially successful company, Apple ($182.8 billion), was omitted from the study because they do not post anything to their Twitter account.

The companies were: Google ($132.1 billion), Microsoft ($104.9 billion), Coca-Cola ($57.3 billion), Disney ($47.5 billion), Toyota ($44.7 billion), AT&T ($41.9 billion), McDonalds ($41.4 billion), GE ($37.2 billion), Mercedes Benz ($34.4 billion), Louis Vuitton ($33.6 billion), Nike ($32 billion), Verizon ($31.4 billion), Budweiser ($25.5 billion), Walmart ($24.9 billion), Visa ($24.5 billion), American Express ($23.1 billion), Pepsi ($18.4 billion), L'Oréal ($17.2 billion), Gillette ($17.1 billion), Home Depot ($16.4 billion), Starbucks ($16.2 billion), Hermes ($15.3 billion), Accenture ($14.8 billion), ESPN ($14.6 billion), UPS ($13.3 billion, Siemens ($12.8 billion), Fox ($11.7 billion), Chase ($10.2 billion), Adidas ($9.5 billion), Corona ($8.8 billion), Lego ($8.6 billion), and FedEx ($8.3 billion).

3.3 CODING AND VARIABLES

A coding instrument was developed to analyze each tweet and each reply to the tweet (see Appendix B). The researcher accessed each brand's unique twitter page via a desktop web browser, then took a screenshot of each tweet. After intercoder training, the tweets of a random subsample of 480 (15% of the total) were coded by two coders to determine intercoder reliability on variables in the study. The researcher measured intercoder reliability using Krippendorff's alpha. The alpha for brand personality was .802; the alpha for reciprocal altruism was .809, both of which are acceptable scores.

3.4 VARIABLES

This study has three primary variables: brand personality, engagement, and reciprocal altruism. Each is operationalized as follows.

3.5 BRAND PERSONALITY VARIABLES

Building on Aaker's (1997) operationalized brand personality scale, this study looks for the brand personality on each Twitter posts from each of the most valuable brands. Brand personality was coded based on the content of the tweet, including the image, text and hashtags employed, using the personality definitions of Aaker (1997) and further explicated by Brakus et al. (2009). The following brand personalities were coded:

- Sincerity
- Excitement
- Competence
- Sophistication
- Ruggedness

The brand personality "sincerity" has the characteristics of "down-to-earth," "honest," "wholesome," and "cheerful" (Brakus at al., 2009, p. 64) and "captures the idea of warmth and acceptance" (Aaker, 1997, p. 353). An example of sincerity is Google taking on wholesomeness and honesty by trying to help the opioid crisis or committing $5 million toward new grants helping to bring coding education to 1 million Latino students (see Appendix A, figures A.1 and A.2). Sincerity can also be Budweiser putting on personality traits of down-to-earthiness and wholesomeness committing to brew beer with 100% renewable electricity from wind power, or Adidas committing to take a stand for women's equality by committing to equal pay for women athletes at the FIFA Women's World Cup (see Appendix A, figures A.3 and A.4).

The brand personality "excitement" has the characteristics of "daring," "spirited," "imaginative," and "up-to-date" (Brakus et al., 2009, p. 64) and "connotes the notions of sociability, energy, and activity" (Aaker, 1997, p. 353). Excitement can be Disney putting on energy, spiritedness and imagination by using many exclamation points, emoji, slogans such as "hip, hip hooray" and "drum up some excitement" and lively graphics to display that spiritedness (see Appendix A, figures A.5 and A.6).

The brand personality "competence" has the characteristics of "reliable," "intelligent," and "successful" (Brakus et al., 2009, p. 64) and "encapsulates responsibility, dependability, and security" (Aaker, 1997, p. 353). Competence can be car companies like Toyota putting on reliability and safety by emphasizing award winning pedestrian detection systems and safety feature (see Appendix A, figure A.7). Competence can also be Microsoft putting on successfulness and reliability by bragging about Windows 10 running on more than 800 million devices worldwide (see Appendix

A, figure A.8). Competence can also be AT&T putting on successfulness and reliability by bragging about being the first company to offer mobile 5G in 12 cities and plans to go nationwide (see Appendix A, figure A.9).

The brand personality “sophistication” has the characteristics of “upper-class” and “charming” (Brakus et al., 2009, p. 64) and “aspirational associations such as upper class, glamorous, and sexy are a focus” (Aaker, 1997, p. 353). Sophistication can be Chanel putting up upper-class glamor by referencing rare ingredients in their perfumes and particular musks and luminosity and hashtags that are in French even though the body text of the tweet is English (see Appendix A, figure A.10). Sophistication can also be Starbucks putting on upper-class glamor and luxuriousness by emphasizing the rich qualities of their new cold brew drink, calling it smooth, bold, rich, and velvety (see Appendix A, figure A.11). Finally, sophistication can also be Hermes putting on luxuriousness and glamorousness by referencing their fine silk blouse materials and calling the scarf design the “couvertures et tenues de jour” (see Appendix A, figure A.12).

The brand personality **“**ruggedness” has the characteristics of “outdoorsy" and "tough" and “tends to glamorize American ideals of Western, strength, and masculinity” (Aaker, 1997, p. 353). Ruggedness can be Ralph Lauren putting on outdoorsyness and tough Americana referencing patriotism and western cowboy culture (see Appendix A, figure A.13).

3.6 RECIPROCAL ALTRUISM VARIABLE

Each tweet or retweet was coded for the presence or absence of a reciprocal altruism variable. To determine if the variable was present, coders were instructed to look

for characteristics of "cooperative interactions. It involves acting in such a way that another individual is benefited" (Ashton et al., 1998, p. 244). Reciprocal altruism was examined in "situations in which the behavior of each partner influences the outcomes of the other partner" (Zayas et al., 2002, p. 884) where "people feel an obligation to repay when they receive a certain value of resources from others" (Wang et al., 2003, p. 515). In this dissertation, reciprocal altruism was measured as a brand-consumer dialogic relationship on Twitter when the consumers (followers) are encouraged by brands (social media marketing managers) to repay coupon codes, offers, rewards, giveaways, raffles, et cetera with likes, retweets and comments on social networking sites. Reciprocal altruism can be Amazon offering the chance to win free Fire TV sticks by following their @amazonfiretv account and replying with the number of remotes you have (see Appendix A, figure A.14). Amazon tweeted the following to their followers: Fire TV wants to help with #RemoteOverload. Reply with the number of remotes you have & #sweepstakes to enter for your chance to win a Fire TV Stick, now with power & volume control. Follow @amazonfiretv, they will DM 10 lucky winners. Learn more: amazon.to/FxqZiK. In this dissertation, reciprocal altruism is present when a brand (e.g. Amazon) offers some kind of reward (e.g. a free Fire TV Stick) to consumers in exchange for comments (e.g. reply with number of remotes you have), or follows (e.g. follow @amazonfiretv), or likes or retweets on Twitter.

3.7 ENGAGEMENT VARIABLES, INDEXES, AND SCORES

Engagement was measured in this study by the number of likes, retweets, and comments on an individual Tweet. The content of the tweets and retweets was not taken into account or evaluated in creating engagement variables; only the frequency of likes,

comments and retweets were used. The average number of likes, comments, and retweets for each brand personality type was summed across the three types of engagements to create Engagement Variables totals. Twitter likes are represented by a heart symbol. Twitter comments feature a “reply” speech balloon. Twitter has a share button called “retweet” and asks if you want to “Retweet this to your followers?” while allowing you to “Add a comment …” to the retweet. Engagement associated with the presence of reciprocal altruism was determined by calculating the average number of likes, comments, and retweets for the posts to create an Engagement Variables Total (M). That total was divided by the total number of posts, which created the Engagement Altruism Index Score, which represents level of altruism.

3.8 ANALYSIS

The relationship between brand personality type and level of engagement was assessed through a number of steps. First, the number of tweets for each personality type was summed. Second, the average number of likes, comments, and retweets for each personality type was summed to create an engagement-variable total. Finally, the engagement-variable total number was divided by the number of tweets on each personality to develop a personality-to-engagement index score. The scores for each personality could then be compared to one another to determine which personality types are associated with higher levels of overall engagement.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

4.1 BRAND PERSONALITY RESULTS

The results show there is a relationship between brand personality and engagement. Consumers on Twitter are more engaged with valuable branded tweets with the personalities excitement and sophistication. Sophistication had 2.5 times the mean engagement index score. Excitement had 1.6 times the mean engagement index score. The mean engagement index score was 3.3 times higher than Sincerity, and 1.7 times higher than Competence. Ruggedness was not a personality used by valuable brands. Different personalities are related to different levels of engagement. The brand personalities with the highest overall Engagement Personality Index score were sophistication (10.66) and excitement (6.90), followed by competence (2.58), sincerity (1.29), and lastly, ruggedness (0).

Valuable brands used the brand personalities sincerity and competence more than any other personalities. The brand personality sincerity was used the most, with 1,435 branded tweets (50.6%), followed by the personality competence with 752 tweets (26.5%), excitement with 433 tweets (15.3%), sophistication with 214 tweets (7.6%), and lastly, ruggedness was not a personality trait used by any of the brands in the sample (0 tweets, 0%).

An index for individual likes, comments, and retweets was also created to examine more nuanced aspects of each brand personality's level of engagement. The brand personalities with the highest engagement for likes reflected the overall Engagement Personality Index score. The highest engagement index scores for likes were sophistication (8.60) and excitement (5.59), followed by competence (1.99), sincerity (.91) and ruggedness (0). The order of engagement level for comments and retweets was similar. The brand personalities with the highest comments were sophistication (.21) and excitement (.16), followed by sincerity (.07), competence (.04), and ruggedness (0). The brand personalities with the highest engagement for retweets were sophistication (1.84) and excitement (1.14), followed by competence (.54), sincerity (.31), and ruggedness (0). See Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Relationship Between Brand Personality and Engagement

Personality	*N* (% total)	*M* Likes (Engagement Index)	*M* Comments (Engagement Index)	*M* Retweets (Engagement Index)	Engagement Variables *M* totals	Engagement Personality Index Score
Sincerity	1,435 (50.6%)	1309.05 (.91)	99.34 (.07)	446.09 (.31)	1,854.48	(1.29)
Excitement	433 (15.3%)	2421.41 (5.59)	68.97 (.16)	495.64 (1.14)	2,986.02	(6.90)
Competence	752 (26.5%)	1500.08 (1.99)	33.09 (.04)	406.24 (.54)	1,939.41	(2.58)
Sophistication	214 (7.6%)	1840.90 (8.60)	45.90 (.21)	393.80 (1.84)	2,280.60	(10.66)
Ruggedness	0 (0%)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	(0)
	2,834 (100%)					

4.2 RECIPROCAL ALTRUISM RESULTS

The results show that there is no relationship between reciprocal altruism and engagement. Consumers had similar levels of engagement with valuable branded tweets whether reciprocal altruism was present or not. Valuable brands did not employ reciprocal altruism often in their tweets to consumers. Reciprocal altruism was only present in 15.8% of the most valuable brand's tweets (N=447). Engagement from likes, comments, and retweets was similar between presence and non-presence. Reciprocal altruism did not create greater consumer engagement levels. The altruism-engagement index for reciprocal altruism was similar for present (1.10) versus not present (.99). Likewise, the engagement index for likes (.79 present versus .75 not present), comments (.10 present versus .03 not present), and retweets (.21 present and .21 not present) were very similar for present versus not present. See Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Relationship Between Reciprocal Altruism and Engagement

Altruism	*N* (% total)	*M* Likes (Engagement Index)	*M* Comments (Engagement Index)	*M* Retweets (Engagement Index)	Engagement Variables *M* totals	Engagement Altruism Index Score
Present	447 (15.8%)	354.88 (.79)	43.09 (.10)	94.19 (.21)	492.16 (1.10)	(1.10)
Not Present	2,387 (84.2%)	1,797.38 (.75)	78.70 (.03)	503.74 (.21)	2,379.82 (.99)	(.99)
	2,834 (100%)					

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Noting the links between brand personality and various positive outcomes, this study first set out to find whether there was a relationship between the specific brand personality and the level of engagement on social media. Many researchers have demonstrated the value of specifically crafted brand personalities (e.g. Aaker, 1997; Blackston, 1993; Kim et al., 2001; Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003; Freling & Forbes, 2005; Ekinci & Hosany, 2006; Geuens et al., 2009; Grohmann, 2009; Sung & Kim, 2010; Singh, 2013). Still, no research had yet looked at the link between specific brand personalities and level of engagement on social media. On social networks, engagement is a measure of user-initiated action (Gluck, 2012) and is typically measured through follows, likes, shares, and comments on content (Chang & Chieng, 2006). Using this measure of engagement and Aaker's (1997) five dimensions of brand personality, this study fills a gap in the literature concerning the two-way, dyadic relationships between brands and consumers by revealing a relationship between specific brand personalities and level of engagement on Twitter.

A second gap in the literature that is addressed in this dissertation is the relationship between reciprocal altruism and engagement on brands on social media. One method that brands employ to provoke engagement includes offers of discounts or other benefits reflecting the concept of reciprocal altruism, which is: "a situation that forms among or is adopted by the participants in an exchange relation" (Emerson, 1976, p. 351).

Reciprocal altruism has previously been used to explain this kind of exchange in contexts outside of the context of brand-consumer relations on social media (e.g. Social Exchange Theory [e.g. Emerson, 1976; Molm, 1994; Ashton et al., 1998], game theory [e.g. Axelrod, 1980; Hamburger, 1973; Rapoport, et al., 1965], and biology [e.g. Altmann, 1956; Curio, 1978; Dominey, 1983; Pitcher, 1986; Shedd, 1983]). While the relationship between brands and consumers on social media is often one where both actors are constantly cooperating, reciprocating, and attempting to benefit from the other actor, much like the ideas espoused by reciprocal altruism, no researchers–to the author's knowledge–have yet applied the concept of reciprocal altruism to brand engagement on social media. The present study aimed to see whether reciprocal altruism is related to greater engagement from consumers following the brand on social media.

The broad results of this study show that, consistent with previous research, brands do exude unique brand personalities to consumers. Consumers engaged more with valuable branded tweets containing the personalities excitement and sophistication. This finding is consistent with Sung and Kim's (2010) finding that "both exciting and sophisticated brand personality traits influence brand affect …the results still suggest that consumers' perceptions of a brand's excitement and sophistication characteristics can positively and significantly influence and contribute to the level of brand affect" (p. 657). This brand affect can lead to brand loyalty and repurchase intention (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Berry & Parasuraman, 2004).

Sung and Kim examined the link between brand personality dimensions, brand trust, and brand affect and found that both exciting and sophisticated brand personality traits influence brand affect more strongly than brand trust, which is consistent with the

presents study's findings. The literature suggests that traits that have positive affect such as charming or romantic tend to lead to a greater emotional connection, which might translate to greater engagement. Sophistication, for example, has been called charming and romantic (Berry and Willingham, 1997). Harker and Keltner (2001) also found the positive trait of "charming" as a trait connected to sophistication. Applied to marketing, this finding suggests that consumers might be more emotionally engaged with a brand that is sophisticated because consumers want to be seen as charming and romantic (Sung and Kim, 2010, p. 646). Similarly, Ang and Lim (2006) found that symbolic and hedonic products are more strongly associated with a brand's sophistication and excitement personalities. Brands that are associated with sophistication and excitement provide an enjoyment and pleasure experience to consumers. Applied to the present study, it could be posited that the brand personalities excitement and sophistication lead to greater engagement index scores on Twitter because consumers are looking for this self-same enjoyment and hedonic pleasure experience.

Brands in this study used the personality sincerity the most on Twitter (50.6%). Sincerity is a brand personality "related to warmth and honesty that also are present in agreeableness" (Aaker at al., 2001, p. 3), and may capture "brand perceptions associated to conservatism needs (emphasis on family security and safety, being stable and polite)" (Aaker et al., 2001, p. 3). Brands are using the personality sincerity to create a sense of safety and security and warmth in their brand identity and in their online brand communities.

Valuable brands used the personality competence the second-most behind sincerity (26.5%). Competence is a brand personality with "dependability and

achievement similar to conscientiousness" (Aaker at al., 2001, p. 3), and is related to "mastery needs (emphasis on being capable and successful, demonstrating competence)" (Aaker et al., p. 3). Brands are using the personality competence to appear successful and capable in their brand identity and in their online brand communities.

Conceivably, the reason brands are using sincerity and competence the most on Twitter (combined 77.1% of tweets) falls in line with Maehle and Supphellen's (2011) finding that competence and sincerity are company-level sources reflecting the identity and personality of managing directors and leadership within a brand. "As we expected, the most important sources of competence and sincerity are company-level sources, such as company's moral values, company's managing director and company employees. In contrast, symbolic sources such as endorsers, typical brand users, brand name and brand logos are more relevant to sophistication and ruggedness" (Maehle & Supphellen, 2011, p. 101). The personalities of competence and sincerity found in the individual leaders and managers of brand and a brand's image could be translating to the brand's personality on Twitter and other social networking sites, hence the majority of valuable brand tweets (77.1%), and the majority of industries containing valuable brands (75%) are consciously using these personalities.

The brand personality ruggedness was not present in any tweets from any of the brands. This finding is also consistent with Sung and Kim's (2010) finding that "rugged brand personality characteristics (e.g., tough, rugged, masculine, outdoorsy) may not elicit a positive emotional response in the average consumer" (p. 657). The authors suggest that one explanation could be that consumers may not develop considerable levels of emotional ties with these brands (p. 657). That could be the case in the present

study; the most valuable brands may not be using the brand personality ruggedness because of the lack of emotional ties to that particular brand personality. Aaker (1997) showed that brands like Marlboro cigarettes and Levi's Jeans used the personality ruggedness extensively. Brands like Levi's would use ruggedness in their ads so that "every man exposed to this ad should naturally see themselves in the faceless cowboy, wearing rugged Levi's on a rugged horse in the rugged wild west. They are the manly cowboy … the linguistic message of the ad is another element enforcing this traditional brand of masculinity: Levi's: America's Finest Overall. Rugged as the men who wear 'em!" (Peterson, 2020, p. 42). Many brands like Levi's have shifted away from the rugged personality. "The modern-day Levi's ad does not offer a straightforward substitute for the 'All-American Man' trope, nor is it trying to … this evolution has, in part, caused the All-American Man trope to be regarded differently today than it was in the mid-twentieth century" (Peterson, 2020, p. 47). The All-American Man trope found in both Levi's Jeans and the figure of the Marlboro man cowboy used to evoke "a specific culture of masculinity which, in turn, was associated with a particular set of virtues" (White et al., 2012, p. 536). The shifting ideals of masculinity have translated to shifting brand personalities.

Another reason for the lack of ruggedness in the sample is that Twitter does not allow the promotion of tobacco products like Marlboro that tend to have a rugged personality. Twitter's tobacco and tobacco accessories ad content policy states that Twitter prohibits the promotion of tobacco products, accessories, and brands globally. Examples of tobacco products, accessories, and branding include: Tobacco of any kind, including chewing tobacco and imitations, All cigarettes, including alternatives which

imitate the act of smoking, Cigars, Tobacco pipes, rolling papers, and filters, Cigar bars and hookah lounges, Tobacco manufacturers, and events sponsored by tobacco manufacturers. Finally, these brands were not included in the sample of this dissertation, and perhaps it is the nature of the valuable-brands sample that rugged brands were not present.

The high engagement levels associated with sophistication and excitement personality brands are partially inconsistent with previous research on the difference between aspirational and already-possessed self-concepts. Consumers either seek to enhance their self-concept via a personality they aspire to, or seek to verify a self-concept via a personality they already feel like they possess (Aaker, 1997; Escalas & Bettman, 2003). Brand personality matters because of this congruence between a realized (innate) or unrealized (aspirational) self and the brand. Aaker applied this concept to his five-personality traits, saying that "Whereas Sincerity, Excitement, and Competence tap an innate part of human personality, Sophistication and Ruggedness tap a dimension that individuals desire but do not necessarily have" (Aaker 1997, p. 353). The results of this dissertation are not entirely consistent with what Aaker found in 1997; one of the most-engaging personalities was aspirational (sophistication) and one of the most-engaging personalities was innate, or already possessed (excitement). Escalas and Bettman (2003) found consumers motivated to enhance their self-concept form connections to brands that have the aspirational personalities of ruggedness and sophistication, whereas people motivated to verify their self-concept form connections to brands using the personalities of sincerity, excitement and competence (Escalas & Bettman, 2003, p. 346).

The relationship between reciprocal altruism and engagement in the present study was not as great as previous literature suggests (Hayes et al., 2016; Kim et. al, 2016; Korgaonkar & Wolin, 1999) and perhaps for good reason. Reciprocal altruism was present in only 15.8% of the tweets (447), and whether present or not, engagement levels were similar (1.10 present versus .99 not present). Hayes et al. (2016) illustrated that building consumer-brand relationships requires multiple satisfactory interactions. "Similar to interpersonal relationships, building consumer-brand relationships requires multiple satisfactory interactions; brand satisfaction is an antecedent to brand trust through which personal connections to the brand occur. Brand satisfaction and brand trust, then, combine to determine the level of commitment the consumer has to the brand" (p. 32). If the reciprocal altruism employed by valuable doesn't create greater engagement from consumers, the consumers will not have these satisfactory interactions leading to brand trust, brand loyalty, and repurchase intention.

5.1 LIMITATIONS

As with all research, there are several limitations to the present study. For example, all methods have strengths and limitations. Quantitative content analysis can neglect to account for subtleties in visuals and language. "Algorithmic analyses of content remain limited in their capacity to understand latent meanings or the subtleties of human language" (Lewis et al., 2013, p. 3). The present study may feature an overemphasis on quantification "obliged to isolate and process the more intricate characteristics of a sample … commonly attempting to determine the 'direction' of a communication, i.e., the extent to which it is 'for,' 'against,' or 'neutral' in regard to a given subject" (Kracauer, 1952, p. 631).

Another potential limitation is the focus on the most valuable brands as designated by Forbes. Many brands outside of this purview may be utilizing the brand personality ruggedness, for example, on social networking sites. It is possible that other brands have an overall different personality distribution. Another limitation is the omission of Apple. At the time of data collection Apple as a brand was worth $182.8 billion and by the end of 2020 their value was $241.2 billion. The addition of the world's most valuable brand would provide key insights into brand personality and reciprocal altruism. Finally, the present study is examining only Twitter, and brands communicate with consumers on many varied platforms, social and traditional.

5.2 FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research can extend these findings in several ways: explore brand personality and reciprocal altruism on other social networking sites like Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, Tik Tok, YouTube, and Twitch; explore intercultural and cross-cultural differences of engagement with a particular brand personality; and explore the psychological mechanisms by which brand personality and reciprocal altruism operate. Scholars can explore brand personalities across cultures, as Aaker et al. (2001) demonstrated that brand personality dimensions are not uniformly salient across cultures, and many of these personalities are culture-specific (Aaker et al., 2001). Reciprocal altruism can be examined outside of social networking sites, such as in direct marketing via email, mobile, couponing, direct response marketing, direct mail, insert media, and community marketing. Relationships may exist between consumers who are motivated to use the Web and Social Networking Sites to avoid loneliness (as demonstrated by Korgaonkar & Wolin, 1999), and preference for one particular brand personality.

Empathic and unempathic behaviors can be observed on Twitter in tandem with brand personality and reciprocal altruism. The Harvard Business Review conducted a study of brands using empathic and unempathic behaviors on Twitter analyzing interaction with users, repetitious stock phrases, diverting users to non-social channels, and gender-based language used. They found that top-performing companies use "gender-neutral language or a slightly female tone of voice. Wal-Mart, for example, employs an empathic female tone, using evocative language and emotional ways of responding using emoticons" (Parmar, 2015). The valence of branded tweets, empathic versus unempathic behaviors, and gender-based language can be surveyed in tandem with brand personality and reciprocal altruism in brand consumer dialogic relationships on Twitter, the web, and other social networking sites.

5.3 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Brands may need to consider using the personalities excitement and sophistication more on Twitter given the high levels of engagement those personalities evoke. Typical brand users and consumers may see themselves as more sophisticated or excited than competent or sincere, as Maehle and Supphellen (2011) illustrate. Ang and Lim (2006) similarly found that consumers connect more readily and quickly with brands who use metaphors and symbolism and who also have the personalities sophistication and excitement. They found that consumers' perceptions of competence and sincerity may require many deeper interactions with a brand, whereas the personalities excitement and sophistication do not require the same reinforcement. Perhaps it is easier for a consumer to quickly connect with a brand on social networking sites using the personalities excitement and sophistication rather than the longer reinforcement required to connect

with competence and sincerity. Maehle and Supphellen (2011) further demonstrated that the brand personalities competence and sincerity are a reflection of the personality of "company-level sources, such as company's moral values, company's managing director and company employees" (p. 101). Brand managers may need to consider crafting a brand personality different from their own.

Brands are not using altruism and helping behaviors as well as consumers. Reciprocal altruism may be best understood as a consumer-driven behavior, rather than a brand-driven behavior. Previous research has examined reciprocal altruism from the perspective of the consumer, finding that ad referral and word of mouth is a process driven by consumer reciprocal altruism (Hayes et al., 2016). Consumers are engaged in reciprocal altruism when they are helping one another. This could be demonstrated in as simple of a task as sharing a viral ad to your friends as "viral advertising sharing behavior is partially a function of reciprocal altruism consistent with previous eWOM findings" (Hayes et al., 2016, p. 41). Kim et. al (2016) demonstrated that consumers help each other on mobile shopping sites, even when they have never met in real life, and that group and interpersonal attachments lead to a reciprocal altruism and helping behavior from consumer to consumer. But this might not translate to brand-consumer relationships.

Utz (2009) and Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) both found that reputation was not the main motivation for consumers helping one another by contributing to online consumer communities but instead, altruism and pleasure of interaction turned out to be the main motivations. "The helping the company motivation is the result of a consumer's satisfaction with a product and his or her subsequent desire to help the company …

Supporting companies is related to the general altruism motive and draws on the same psychological background as the first motive—concern for others. According to this interpretation, the consumer considers the company a social institution worthy of support" (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p.42).

As Johnson et al. (2013) illustrate, consumers are regularly engaged in helping one another by "providing assistance to other consumers by, for example, voluntarily assisting other consumers in finding or shopping for products, helping other consumers repair a product, or coaching others on the proper usage of products (e.g. Bettencourt, 1997; Groth, 2005; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). In whatever ways they voluntarily assist other customers, consumers simultaneously benefit other consumers and act on behalf of the organization to contribute to its success" (Johnson et. al, 2013, p. 122).

Consumers regularly help one another by developing or joining consumption communities (e.g. Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). These consumer-driven communities have emerged for brands like Apple (Muniz & Schau, 2005), Yamaha motorcycles (Felix, 2012), Nutella (Cova & Pace, 2006), European automobiles (Algesheimer et al., 2005), and Harley Davidson (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Throughout these examples, consumers are repeatedly engaging in helping behaviors and reciprocal altruism with one another. Conceivably consumers understand helping behaviors and reciprocal altruism better than brands. Brands can learn from consumer helping behaviors and the altruism occurring in these brand communities by consumers. Rather than a Grubhub coupon code, or a free Amazon Fire TV Stick, perhaps brands should be using social networking sites like Twitter to offer the kind of helping behaviors, friendship and altruism found in these consumer driven brand

communities. Can brands be more like your friends on social networking sites? Can brands have more empathic and carefully curated altruistic behavior on social networking sites?

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APPENDIX A

EXAMPLE OF BRAND TWEETS

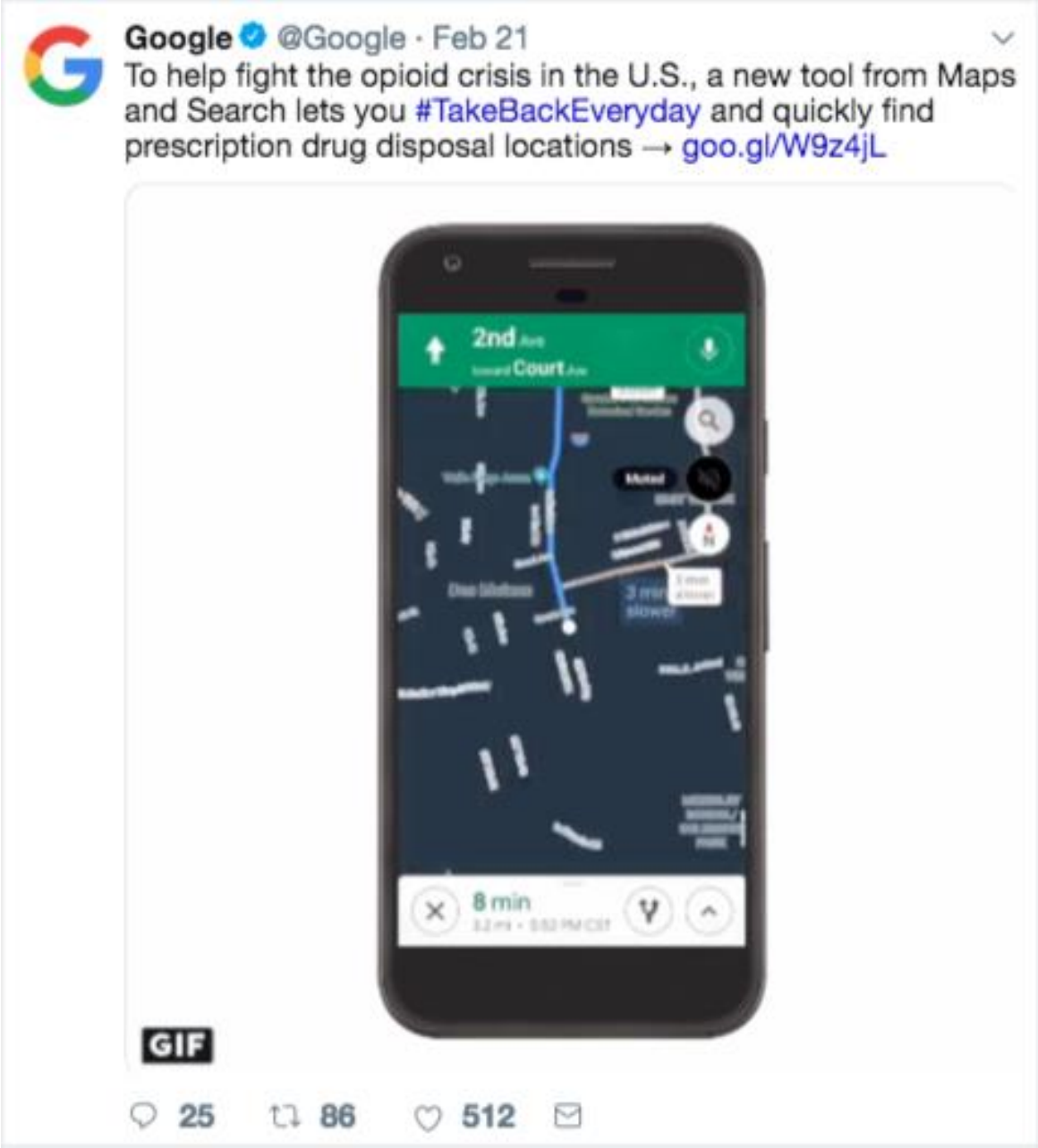

Figure A.1 An example of the brand personality “sincerity”.

Figure A.2 An example of the brand personality “sincerity”.

Figure A.3 An example of the brand personality “sincerity”.

Figure A.4 An example of the brand personality “sincerity”.

Figure A.5 An example of the brand personality "excitement".

Figure A.6 An example of the brand personality “excitement”.

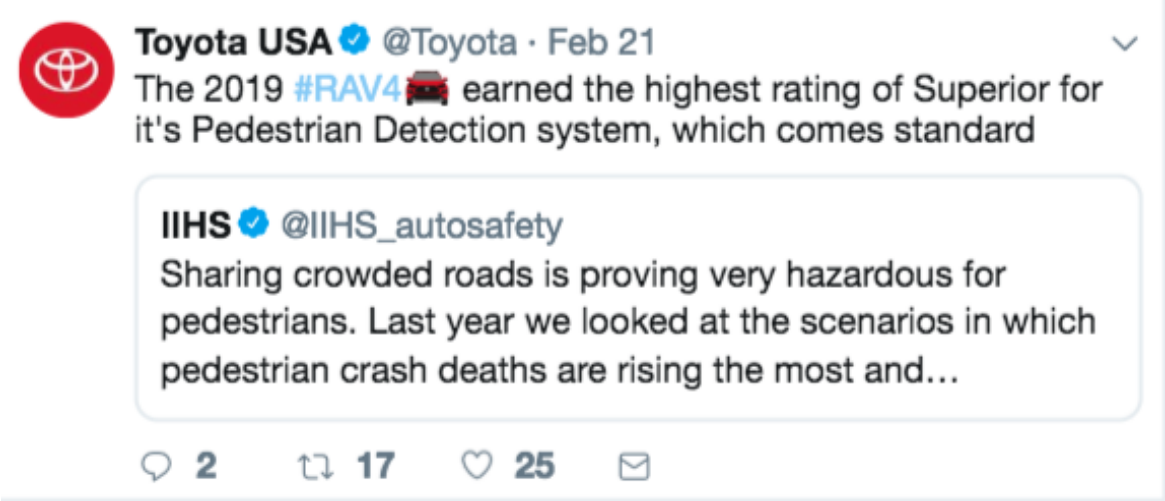

Figure A.7 An example of the brand personality “competence”.

Figure A.8 An example of the brand personality “competence”.

Figure A.9 An example of the brand personality "competence".

Figure A.10 An example of the brand personality “sophistication”.

Figure A.11 An example of the brand personality “sophistication”.

Figure A.12 An example of the brand personality “sophistication”.

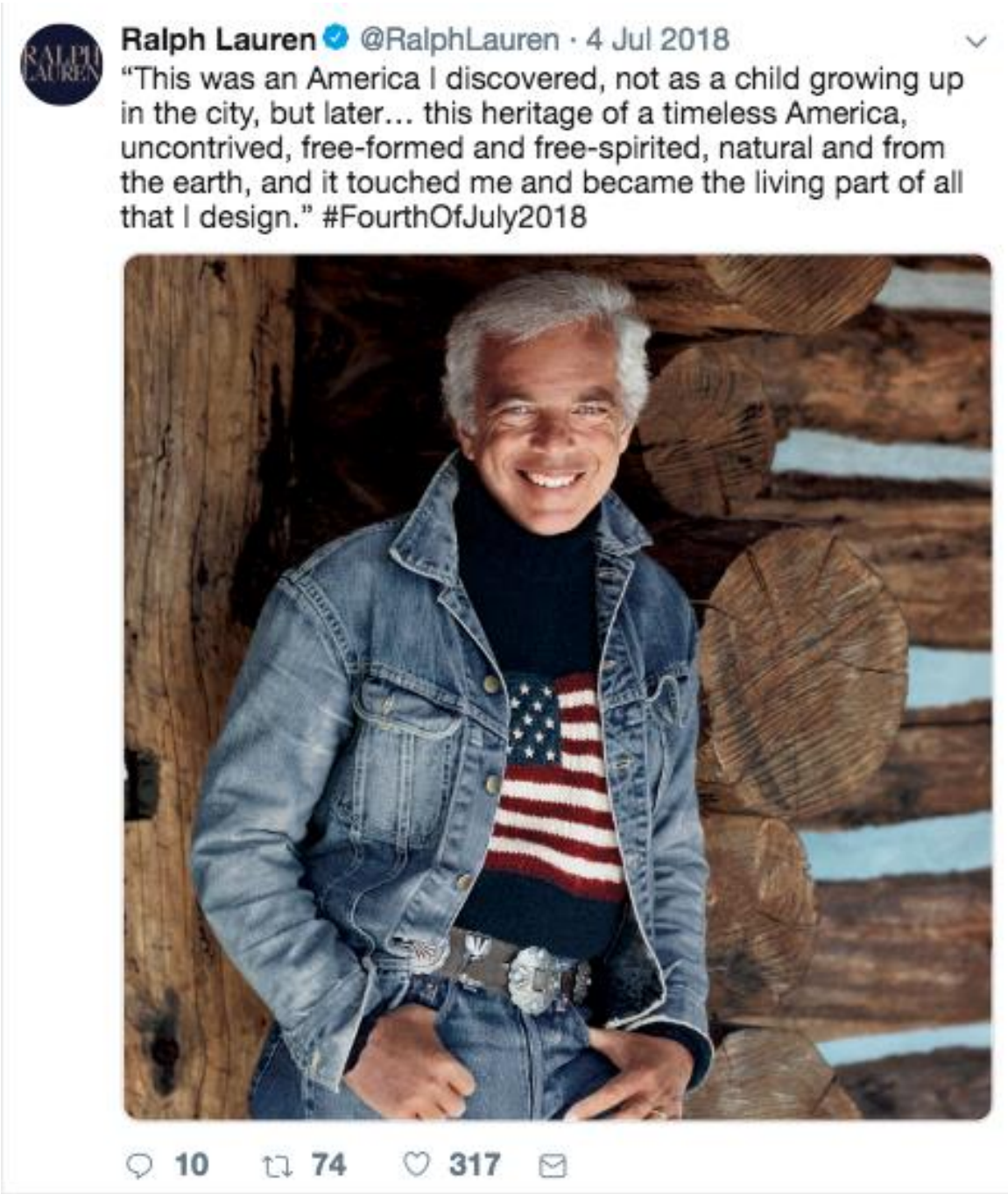

Figure A.13 An example of the brand personality "ruggedness".

Figure A.14 An example of reciprocal altruism.

APPENDIX B

CODING GUIDE

[Coder]

1. Coder 1
2. Coder 2

[Brand] Which brand is represented in the post?

1. Google https://twitter.com/Google
2. Microsoft https://twitter.com/Microsoft
3. Coca-Cola https://twitter.com/CocaCola
4. Pepsi https://twitter.com/pepsi
5. Disney https://twitter.com/Disney
6. Lego https://twitter.com/LEGO_Group
7. Toyota https://twitter.com/Toyota
8. Mercedes Benz https://twitter.com/MercedesBenz
9. AT&T https://twitter.com/ATT
10. Verizon https://twitter.com/verizon
11. McDonalds https://twitter.com/McDonalds
12. Starbucks https://twitter.com/Starbucks
13. GE https://twitter.com/generalelectric
14. Siemens https://twitter.com/Siemens_Energy

15. Louis Vuitton https://twitter.com/LouisVuitton
16. Hermes https://twitter.com/Hermes_Paris
17. Nike https://twitter.com/Nike
18. Adidas https://twitter.com/adidas
19. Budweiser https://twitter.com/budweiserusa
20. Corona https://twitter.com/corona
21. Walmart https://twitter.com/Walmart
22. Home Depot https://twitter.com/HomeDepot
23. Visa https://twitter.com/Visa
24. American Express https://twitter.com/AmericanExpress
25. Loreal https://twitter.com/Loreal
26. Gillette https://twitter.com/Gillette
27. Accenture https://twitter.com/Accenture
28. Chase https://twitter.com/Chase
29. Espn https://twitter.com/espn
30. Fox https://twitter.com/FOXTV
31. UPS https://twitter.com/UPS
32. Fedex https://twitter.com/FedEx

[Brand Personality] What is the brand personality of the tweet?

1. Sincerity (“down-to-earth," "honest," "wholesome," and "cheerful" (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009, p. 64) and “captures the idea of warmth and acceptance” (Aaker 1997, p. 353); “charity” “doing good” “philanthropy” “happiness” “for a good cause” “sustainable and renewable”)

2. Excitement (“daring," "spirited," "imaginative," (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009, p. 64) and “connotes the notions of sociability, energy, and activity” (Aaker 1997, p. 353); “may contain exclamation points or excessive use of emoji”)

3. Competence (“reliable," "intelligent," and "successful" (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009, p. 64) and “encapsulates responsibility, dependability, and security” (Aaker 1997, p. 353); “cutting edge, ahead of its time, speed, reliability” “powerful”)

4. Sophistication (“upperclass" and "charming" (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009, p. 64) and “aspirational associations such as upper class, glamorous, and sexy are a focus” (Aaker 1997, p. 353); “luxury, rich, velvety, smooth, elevating status, elegant, resort life”)

5. Ruggedness (“outdoorsy" and "tough" and “tends to glamorize American ideals of Western, strength, and masculinity” (Aaker 1997, p. 353);)

6. No brand personality

[Altruism] Is reciprocal altruism present in the branded tweet? (“tit-for-tat” “mutually altruistic acts” “creating happiness for twitter followers through promotions” “promo codes” “discounts” “contest for free gadgets and gizmos” “reply with xyz to enter for chance to win” “absolutely must benefit the followers of the twitter account, not and outside group of people”)

[Link] Is there a link in the tweet?

1. Yes
2. No

[Photo] Is there a photo embedded in the tweet?

1. Yes

2. No

[Video] Is there a video embedded in the tweet?

1. Yes

2. No

[Hashtag] Is there a hashtag in the tweet?

1. Yes

2. No

[Value] What is the value of the brand in billions?

[Industry] What industry encapsulates the brand?

1. Technology

2. Beverages

3. Leisure

4. Automotive

5. Telecom

6. Restaurants

7. Diversified

8. Luxury

9. Apparel

10. Alcohol

11. Retail

12. Financial services

13. Consumer packaged goods

14. Business services

15. Media

16. Transportation

[Joined] What date did the brand join Twitter?

[Number] How many tweets has the brand posted?

[Following] How many Twitter accounts is the brand following?

[Followers] How many Twitter accounts follow the brand?

[Comments] How many comments are replying to the branded tweet?

[Retweets] How many retweets are sharing the branded tweet?

[Likes] How many Twitter accounts liked the branded tweet?

[Year] What is the year of the branded tweet?