Out of Office: What Type of Employee is Best Suited for Remote Work?
Sara Jansen Perry, PhD, Cristina Rubino, PhD, and Emily M. Hunter, PhD

If You Want More than Just “Likes,” Attachment is Better than Attitude
Rebecca VanMeter, PhD, Holly A. Syrdal, PhD, Susan Powell Mantel, PhD, Douglas B. Grisaffe, PhD, and Erik T. Nesson, PhD

The Closer the Message, the Better
Yanli Jia, PhD, Yunhui Huang, PhD, Robert S. Wyer Jr., PhD, and Hao Shen, PhD

Watch Your Tone on Social Media
Renato Hübner Barcelos, PhD, Danilo C. Dantas, PhD, and Sylvain Sénécal, PhD

Intellectual Humility
Maria Arauz, MBA Candidate

INSIDER: Leaders Eat Last
Zack Snider, MBA Candidate

INSIDER: Rise and Grind
Jackson Price, MBA Candidate
If You Want More than Just “Likes,” Attachment is Better than Attitude

Rebecca VanMeter, PhD, Holly A. Syrdal, PhD, Susan Powell Mantel, PhD, Douglas B. Grisaffe, PhD, and Erik T. Nesson, PhD

In recent years, there has been a lot of discussion about social media’s potential to help drive desired business outcomes. Businesses that rely heavily on word-of-mouth referrals, like real estate (Riggs 2016), can benefit substantially from supportive social media posts because of social media’s multiplied reach and frequency. For example, a single positive recommendation can result in repeated exposures with hundreds of friends and followers on Twitter and Facebook (VanMeter et al. 2018). The rise of this technological networking power has been recent and rapid. Only about a decade after Facebook became available to the general public, nearly one third of the world’s population had some form of active social media account (Kemp 2015).

However, for marketers juggling multiple media channels, insight is still lacking about how they should use social media to help achieve results. Which content should be directed at which people with what frequency? Which consumer behaviors on social media will truly impact business performance?

Our research was aimed at providing answers to some of those questions. We wanted to understand behavioral differences in people who feel generally positive about social media but are not necessarily bound to it in any strong emotional way, compared to people who are emotionally attached to it, feeling a deep personal resonance with social media.

Attachment to Social Media

Developmental psychologists have long described implications of deep bonds vs. the lack thereof, particularly regarding attachments between mothers and infants (e.g., Bowlby 1980). Different levels of attachment play out with different responses and behaviors. Those more deeply bonded have a sense of security and comfort while in connection, and anxiety and distress in separation. In adults, attachments also can form with intangible things like brands, and services (Mende, Bolton, & Bitner 2013; Thomson, MacInnis, & Park 2005). We used attachment as a lens through which to look at people’s social media behaviors. The core idea was
that positive attitudes toward social media might be associated with more “cursory” social media behaviors, whereas people with deeper attachment to social media would display actions more valuable and impactful for organizations.

**Study 1: Token vs. Meaningful Social Media Behaviors**

In Study 1, we surveyed over 400 people regarding social media actions toward a group of establishments in a restaurant district. We measured both attitude toward social media and attachment to social media and asked respondents to complete a behavioral checklist of social media actions they had taken. Some behaviors were more cursory, such as looking, learning, or liking on social media. Others were more consequential, such as advocating, sharing company posts, or purchasing.

We found that people with positive attitudes toward social media tend to engage in cursory behaviors, such as simply looking at or liking social media content. But, people with deeper emotional bonds to social media were more likely to engage in behaviors like sharing, actively promoting, and purchasing. In line with other consumer research (Kristofferson, White, & Peloza 2014), we labeled the former actions, “token behaviors,” and the latter “meaningful behaviors.” Our study supported the notion that token social media behaviors may be driven by positive attitude, but more meaningful social media behaviors are driven by attachment.

**Study 2: Traditional Word-of-Mouth vs. Recommending on Social Media**

In Study 2, we asked over 500 respondents to express personal attitudes and attachments to several prominent brands (e.g., Wal-Mart, Coke, AT&T). We also asked how likely they would be to recommend those brands in general (i.e., traditional word-of-mouth), and how likely they would be to use social media to recommend the brands.

We found that recommending a brand, in general, is influenced by both attachment and attitudes toward the brand. However, depth of attachment to social media—not attitude toward social media—influences whether recommendations will be expressed on social media platforms. Our study supported the notion that attachment to social media augments the likelihood of recommendation on social media, but generally positive attitudes toward social media do not. Again, a deep sense of bonding with social media was better than positive attitudes in catalyzing social media behaviors that matter.

**Study 3: A Surprising Online Bump for People Generally Less Likely to Recommend**

In Study 3, we collected data from a new sample of over 900 respondents. A different analytical approach was applied involving statistical interactions of some of the measures from Study 2. Specifically, we wondered how general recommendation tendencies might be expressed on
social media platforms under conditions of deeper or less deep attachments to social media. We found that people who are likely to recommend offline also did so online, whether they were attached to social media or not. Surprisingly however, people lower in likelihood to recommend in general show an increase in social media recommendation only if they are strongly attached to the medium. Stronger attachment to social media gave traditionally less-vocal people a comfortable platform on which to recommend. Once again, attachment to social media led to more consequential outcomes.

**Conclusions**

Across three studies, we found that individuals with strong attachment to social media are more likely to engage in actions that matter to marketers. Marketers certainly should continue to think about the *what* in social media marketing—i.e., content. But emphasis also should be placed on *who* receives that content. A segment of individuals deserves special effort and attention—those who find deep security and connection in social media.

In a real estate context, those individuals would be more likely to use social media to recommend specific agencies or brokers, share with their network positive posts about specific properties, and be more willing to give strong online testimonials. Given that real estate is a heavily referral-based business, a logical conclusion is that people strongly attached to social media can open “social” doors that lead to more inquiries in shorter amounts of time, increased showings, increased annual sales, and enhanced efficiencies for agents and brokers.

**Recommended Reading**


**References**


**About the Authors**

**Rebecca VanMeter, PhD**
**Assistant Professor of Marketing, Ball State University**

Dr. VanMeter (PhD – University of Texas at Arlington) teaches undergraduate marketing research, principles of marketing, and the master's level survey of marketing at Ball State University. Her research focuses on issues related to social media, consumer behavior, servant leadership, ethics, and research methods. She has published papers in the *Journal of Business Ethics, Journal of Personal Sales & Sales Management, Journal of Interactive Marketing, Academy of Marketing Science Review* and various conference proceedings. She is currently serving as the Executive Director for the Society for Marketing Advances (SMA).

**Holly A. Syrdal, PhD**
**Assistant Professor of Marketing, The University of Southern Mississippi**

Dr. Syrdal (PhD – University of Texas at Arlington) teaches digital marketing, marketing management, social media marketing, and services marketing at the University of Southern Mississippi. She is a doctoral fellow of the Academy of Marketing Science (2015), the Society for Marketing Advances (2014), and the Marketing Management Association (2013 and 2014). She also has five years of industry experience working for a national service provider and a regional hospital. Her research interests include digital marketing, as well as services and non-profit marketing, ethics, and marketing pedagogy. Her research has been published in various conference proceedings and journals including *Journal of Interactive Marketing, Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice, Journal of Retailing, and Journal for Service Science*. 
Susan Powell Mantel, PhD
Associate Dean for Undergraduate Programs and Professor of Marketing, University of Cincinnati

Susan Powell Mantel (PhD – University of Cincinnati) is the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Programs at the University of Cincinnati. Prior to joining Cincinnati, she served as Professor and Chairperson of the Department of Marketing at Ball State University and she also spent time on the faculty of Indiana University’s Kelley School of Business and the University of Toledo. Mantel's research interests include consumer information processing, influences of effect on consumer responses, judgment and inference processes, decision making in a sales setting, and marketing and sales strategy. She has authored articles in these areas which have been published in various business and marketing journals such as *Journal of Consumer Research, Journal of Marketing, Journal of Consumer Psychology, Journal of Operations Management, Journal of Business Research, Psychometric Bulletin and Review, Psychology & Marketing*, as well as several book chapters and national conference proceedings.

Douglas B. Grisaffe, PhD
Associate Professor of Marketing, University of Texas at Arlington

Dr. Doug Grisaffe (PhD – Vanderbilt University) is the former Vice President, Chief Research Methodologist for a customer experience measurement consulting firm. He taught as an adjunct faculty member at Vanderbilt University and Southern Methodist University. At the University of Texas at Arlington he teaches a variety of marketing and analytics courses at the undergraduate, masters, doctoral, and executive levels. He won the UT System Regent's Outstanding Teaching Award, the College of Business Outstanding Undergraduate Teaching Award, and the College of Business Outstanding Graduate Teaching Award. Doug’s research has been published in a variety of journals including *Journal of Service Research, Journal of Advertising Research, Journal of Business Ethics, Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management, Journal of Business Research, Marketing Letters, Journal of Interactive Marketing, Journal of Marketing Analytics, and Human Resource Management Review*.

Erik T. Nesson, PhD
Associate Professor of Economics, Ball State University

Dr. Nesson (PhD – Emory University) joined Ball State University in 2012. His research interests include health economics, law and economics, and labor economics. Dr. Nesson’s current projects include measuring the effects of the effects of public policies on risky behaviors such as smoking, alcohol use, and tobacco use, examining the relationship between education and health, and developing new methods to measure health inequality. His research has been published in the *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy, Health Economics, the American Journal of Health Economics, and Economics and Human Biology* and has been covered by the *Washington Post* and the *Wall Street Journal*.