

FASHION BOUTIQUES AND SOCIAL MEDIA: A USES AND GRATIFICATION  
APPROACH TO CONVERGENT ANALYSIS FROM SMALL BUSINESS AND CUSTOMER  
PERSPECTIVES

by

CATHERINE SINCLAIR MCCLURE

(Under the Direction of Yoo-Kyoung Seock)

ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of social media and its prevalent use by small businesses and consumers is hard to deny. Consequently, much research has discussed the importance of small businesses participating on social media platforms and have offered suggestions for how small businesses should implement a social media strategy. Yet little research has focused on how small businesses use social media once they are active participants on the platform. This study sought to investigate the use of social media by Athens fashion boutiques and their customers' responses to this social media activity. Following a Uses and Gratification theoretical framework and a mixed methods convergent parallel design, this study employed qualitative interviews of the fashion boutiques and a quantitative survey of the boutique's customers. Four Athens fashion boutiques were interviewed with a semi-structured interview and 1,142 UGA millennial females were surveyed as part of the data collection for this study. The interviews were analyzed for a constant common theme method, and the hypothesized relationship were investigated using

regression data analysis. The findings of this study indicate a convergent analysis of common themes within the qualitative interviews and the quantitative constructs. In particular, the themes of utilizations of social media, process and pressures, and metrics of success emerged from the qualitative interviews. All hypothesized relationships were deemed significant between the constructs of the quantitative survey including social media use, customer-based store equity, satisfaction, store preference, and purchase intention. These findings give important theoretical and managerial implications. This study adds to the body of knowledge grounding a connection between social media use and customer-based store equity. In addition, the merged analysis shows a comparable overlap between the uses and measures of customer responses from the fashion boutique perspective and the customer perspective. Fashion boutiques should create social media content that is satisfying the needs of their customers to foster store equity, which can in turn promote store preference and purchase intention.

INDEX WORDS: social media use, customer-based store equity, small business, fashion boutiques, Uses and Gratification theory, convergent parallel design, mixed methods

FASHION BOUTIQUES AND SOCIAL MEDIA: A USES AND GRATIFICATION  
APPROACH TO CONVERGENT ANALYSIS FROM SMALL BUSINESS AND CUSTOMER  
PERSPECTIVES

by

CATHERINE SINCLAIR MCCLURE

B.S. Clemson University, 2009

M.S. University of Georgia, 2011

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in  
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GA

2017

© 2017

Catherine Sinclair McClure

All Rights Reserved

FASHION BOUTIQUES AND SOCIAL MEDIA: A USES AND GRATIFICATION  
APPROACH TO CONVERGENT ANALYSIS FROM SMALL BUSINESS AND CUSTOMER  
PERSPECTIVES

by

CATHERINE SINCLAIR MCCLURE

Major Professor: Yoo-Kyoung Seock

Committee: Brenda Cude  
Soyoung Kim  
Laura McAndrews

Electronic Version Approved:

Suzanne Barbour  
Dean of the Graduate School  
The University of Georgia  
May 2017

## DEDICATION

For my dad, who from my earliest memory spoke this word over my life,

and

for Gordon, once my student and now my dear friend, who taught me more than I  
could ever teach him.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Much appreciation must be given to my stellar committee members Yoo-Kyoung Seock, Brenda Cude, Soyoung Kim, and Laura McAndrews. Each of you provided expertise which helped refine this project. Thank you Dr. Cude for being the most conscientious proofreader and for challenging me to make this dissertation better. Laura, you kept me sane and added support in multiple areas of this dissertation. Dr. Kim, the quantitative analysis expertise you brought to this committee was incredibly beneficial. Finally, Dr. Seock you have always believed in me and walked alongside me for many years providing the backbone of my support.

While my committee was instrumental in shaping this dissertation, there are others who were crucial in my doctoral journey. Dr. Patti Hunt-Hurst, thank you for the years of mentorship and the accountability you provided as I worked on my dissertation. Sarah Bingham, I feel so grateful that you were willing to assist with this project, without you I am not sure this would have been completed on time. To Diane Kesler and Katrina Neidlinger, you both are amazing and have helped me in so many ways. Briana Martinez – we have known each other since our first day freshman year at Clemson, and it is an honor to have done this with you. You're next! To all of my wonderful students past, present, and future, you are the reason for all of this.

My family has been amazing through this process. To my parents: mom and Bill, dad and Pam, and my in-laws Pamela and Lamar – you have always provided a

solid foundation for me to pursue my dream. The greatest appreciation goes to my husband Jeremy. I am convinced you deserve an honorary degree for keeping our little family together while I completed my PhD and with great patience listening to every draft and version of this dissertation. If this is “as good as it gets”, I couldn’t possibly ask for more!

“Now to HIM who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of HIS glory with exceeding joy to GOD our SAVIOR, be glory and majesty, both now and forever” (Jude 1:24, 25). All that is good in me comes from YOU!



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	v
LIST OF TABLES .....	ix
LIST OF FIGURES .....	x
CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION .....	1
Background & Problem.....	1
Justification.....	7
Purpose of Study.....	9
Research Objectives .....	10
Conceptual Definitions.....	11
II LITERATURE REVIEW.....	13
Small Business and Social Media.....	13
Customer’s Social Media Use .....	18
Customer-based Store Equity.....	26
Satisfaction .....	36
Store Preference .....	40
Merged Convergent Parallel .....	43
III THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK .....	45
Uses and Gratification Theory.....	45

Conceptual Framework – Qualitative Study .....	47
Conceptual Framework – Quantitative Study .....	48
Qualitative + Quantitative – Convergent Parallel .....	53
IV METHODOLOGY.....	56
Pre-Test: Identifying Athens Fashion Boutiques .....	56
Qualitative Study: Interview with Athens Fashion Boutiques.....	57
Quantitative Study: Survey.....	62
Merged Convergent Parallel .....	69
V RESULTS .....	70
Theme Interpretation.....	70
Quantitative Survey Results.....	85
Merged Convergent Parallel Analysis .....	102
VI DISCUSSION.....	105
Summary of the Study .....	105
Conclusions and Implications.....	109
Limitations and Future Research.....	116
REFERENCES .....	120
APPENDICES	
A Interview and Survey Consent Forms.....	133
B Interview Script .....	139
C Survey .....	142
D Multiple Regression of H1, H3, H4.....	150

## LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 4.1: Pre-Test: Athens Fashion Boutiques Followed on Social Media .....	57
Table 4.2: Survey Instrument Items and References.....	66
Table 5.1: Demographic Characteristics of Interviewees .....	71
Table 5.2: Demographic Profile of Sample.....	88
Table 5.3: Boutique Frequency.....	89
Table 5.4: Descriptive statistics and reliability for all variables .....	91
Table 5.5: Pearson Correlation Analysis.....	92
Table 5.6: Confirmatory Factor Analysis All Items.....	95
Table 5.7: Confirmatory Factor Analysis on SMU and CBSE.....	97
Table 5.8: Linear Regression for Satisfaction – H1.....	98
Table 5.9: Linear Regression for Satisfaction – H2.....	99
Table 5.10: Linear Regression for Store Preference – H3.....	100
Table 5.11: Linear Regression for Purchase Intention – H4.....	100
Table 5.12: Linear Regression for Store Preference – H5.....	101
Table 5.13: Linear Regression for Purchase Intention – H6.....	101
Table 5.14: Linear Regression for Purchase Intention – H7.....	101
Table 5.15: Summary of Hypotheses Tests.....	102
Table 5.16: Joint Display Comparison QUAL+QUAN.....	104

## LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1.1: Downtown Athens fashion boutiques.....	6
Figure 3.1: The uses and gratification of Internet usage.....	49
Figure 3.2: Conceptual framework of brand equity .....	50
Figure 3.3: Research Model.....	51
Figure 3.4: Convergent Parallel Research .....	55
Figure 5.1: Member Check Response.....	85

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter introduces the background and problem, justification, and purpose of the study followed by the research objectives and conceptual definitions used in the study.

#### **Background and Problem**

Social media is a phenomenon that has experienced exponential growth from the origin of weblogs in the late 1990s to the emergence of Facebook in 2004 (Bakeman & Hanson, 2012). Because of its growth in popularity there is a need to understand how social media is being used by small businesses. The prevalence of mobile devices, laptops, and tablets now brings social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and Snapchat right to the fingertips of social media users. While these sites present an opportunity for individuals to connect with one another, there is a growing pressure for companies, celebrities, tv shows, and retail stores to use social media platforms as an equity building tool (Bakeman & Hanson, 2012). It is easy to observe the large companies and brands which build significant followings on their social media. Top Corporate Brands on Facebook (2016) lists such popular companies as McDonald's, Disney, and MTV in the top 20 brands with the most Facebook and Twitter followers, while Instagram as of October 2016 lists Nike, National Geographic, and Victoria's Secret as the brands with the most

followers (Statista, 2016). These companies have the finances and expertise to hire web designers and content managers whose primary focus is to grow, facilitate, and maintain a company's social media. Much research has focused on the social media concept as a whole, but little is known about how small businesses are harnessing the power of social media to promote and grow their business and how customers are using the social media (Atanassova & Clark, 2015; Bakeman & Hanson, 2012; Bulearca & Bulearca, 2010; Buil, Martinez, & de Chernatony, 2014; Lacho & Marinello, 2010).

Social media provides advantages for small businesses but there are still questions on if the return on investment of utilization is successful. Some advantages for a small business are summed up in this quote about the characteristics of social media being, "quick, inexpensive, and [an] effective means of communication between organization and customers" (Calabro, 2010, p. 36). These intuitive advantages and suggested frameworks for implementation are clear to small business owners and often result in a pressure to be present on social media sites based on the "everybody is doing it" mentality (Braojos-Gomez, Benitez-Amado, Llorens-Montes, 2015; Cesaroni & Consoli, 2015). However, questions still arise about the return on investment of utilizing social media sites to build equity for a small business. While opening a social media account is straightforward and relatively inexpensive (or free), an investment of time and expertise is needed to maintain the content on social media sites and grow a solid base of fans and followers (Bakeman & Hanson, 2012; Calabro, 2010; He & Lu, 2016).

As social media grows in prevalence, it is becoming clear that small businesses may need direction when it comes to social media marketing. In an analysis report from Constant Contact, a leading online marketing host for small businesses, data indicated that social media is one of the main marketing activities handled in-house by small businesses, is the area that most small businesses feel they need major help, and is a marketing activity new small businesses are willing to try within the next year (Constant Contact, 2016). Because social media can be inexpensive and effective if done correctly (Atanassova & Clark, 2015; Bakeman & Hanson, 2012; Calabro, 2010; Zeiller & Schaurer, 2011), it becomes important to keep social media marketing in the hands of the small business. By better understanding effective promotion on social media platforms and identifying customer uses and responses, small business owners can retain autonomy over their social media activities, continue to personally connect with their followers, and eliminate the cost of outsourcing while seeing measurable outcomes for their business.

This phenomenon of social media is primed for more specific information from the small businesses perspective as to how they are using social media and what their measurable outcomes are when engaging with their customer base on these platforms. Small businesses and entrepreneurs do utilize a nuanced approach when participating in social media activities for the purposes of image and relationship building, networking, and facilitating word of mouth (Cope, 2005; Kahar, Yamimi, Bunari, & Habil, 2012). *The Baylor Business Review*, in a special edition focusing on small businesses, states, "As social networks continue to bridge

the gap between online and offline, small businesses need to take advantage of this avenue as a way to reach more customers and increase revenue” (Krell, 2011, p. 9). Very little research thus far has given attention to both the small business and customer perspectives within the realm of social media. Thus this area is ready for research to examine both small businesses’ use of social media and the customer experience using the social media.

### **Why Athens?**

The current research will focus specifically on small businesses operating in Athens, GA, a Southeastern college town, home of the University of Georgia. Athens, GA is a creative town with a geographic location that is relatively inexpensive to start a business and an environment which fosters and supports entrepreneurial ventures (Johnston, 2015). This has led to many small businesses across various industry sectors finding their home in this college town. The unique demographics of UGA lend themselves specifically to the longevity and success of women’s fashion boutiques as nearly 60% of the UGA student population is female with 77% classified as above low income indicating a level of disposable income that can be spent on fashion items (College Portrait, 2015), and as of spring 2016, 4,600 females were active in Panhellenic sororities on campus (Greek Life Office, 2017). As of 2015, 15% of the industry sector in Athens Clarke County is comprised of retailing, employing over 7,800 people (Georgia Labor Market, 2015). Unique to Athens are the many fashion boutiques which can be found in pockets of the city such as Normal Town, Five Points, and downtown.



A review of the Downtown Athens website reveals many boutique shops including apparel, vintage, specialty, music, and jewelry (Downtown Athens, 2016). Of the downtown Athens shopping options, approximately 25 women's fashion boutiques can be found in a 10-block area with 14 of these boutiques non-franchised and owned by local entrepreneurs (Adams, Johnson, & Murren, 2016). Many of these Athens fashion boutiques have found success locally such as Heery's a high-end specialty women's fashion boutique which has been in Athens since 1959 and operates a second location, Heery's Too, focused on gifts and housewares (Heery's, 2016). There is also Cheeky Peach, a trendy, fast fashion boutique store which opened during the recession of 2010 and recently expanded from 3,000 to 6,000 square feet even in the presence of increased competition from corporate chains (Cheeky Peach, 2016; K. Jacobs, personal communication, October 21, 2016).

One Athens fashion boutique has even been recognized nationally for their use of social media to propel their small business. In 2014 the owners of Red Dress Boutique were featured in an episode of ABC's *Shark Tank* (Shark Tank Blog, 2016). After successfully leveraging a significant social media following reaching beyond Athens, GA to a global audience, the boutique saw customers repurchase up to 5 times annually and in the year prior to their *Shark Tank* debut the store had \$8 million in sales. Red Dress Boutique did secure an investment from "shark" Mark Cuban and brought national attention to women's fashion boutiques in Downtown Athens. Since *Shark Tank*, the owners of Red Dress Boutique have parlayed their expertise into the opening of another women's fashion boutique, Fringe, located around the corner from Red Dress Boutique in downtown Athens (Harbour, 2016).

Athens fashion boutiques targeted to women will serve to frame the scope of this study. While the overarching goal of the research is to understand social media and small business, this study will focus on the unique sector of fashion boutiques which have found such success and popularity in Athens. By examining Athens fashion boutiques' use of social media and customers' use of their social media, there will be suggestions and implications which can perhaps be generalized to other women's fashion boutiques in college towns, but will have direct implications for the small businesses which are so prevalent in Athens, GA. Below is a map taken from Adams, Johnson, and Murren (2016) showing the locations of the downtown Athens fashion boutiques (Figure 1.1):

*Downtown Athens has 25 women's retail locations within 10 city blocks.*



*Figure 1.1 Downtown Athens fashion boutiques*

## **Justification**

To better understand how social media is being harnessed by Athens's fashion boutiques, information will be best gleaned from the firsthand experience of individuals responsible for social media content creation in convergence with the customer perspective. Employing a phenomenological approach and the Uses and Gratification (U&G) theory, interviews with Athens fashion boutiques' social media managers will give rise to rich information about how each boutique is using social media to grow their small business and the metrics used to determine customer response. Understanding the perspective of the boutiques' social media presence will be enhanced by also quantitatively investigating customers' uses of the boutiques' social media and examining both strands of data in a convergent parallel analysis.

The Uses and Gratification Theory (U&G) has established that individuals approach the choice and function of media directed by behavioral uses and motivations often mediated by social or psychological factors unique to that form of media (Blumler & Katz, 1974). U&G provides a valid theoretical perspective to guide both the qualitative and quantitative sides of this convergent mixed methods study. Building on this theory, the construct of brand equity drawn from Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993) will be applied with U&G to further understand customer responses with social media use as an antecedent. Based on this, U&G with brand equity is an appropriate theory to apply to investigate customers' use of the Athens fashion boutiques' social media.

First to consider are the behavioral use motivations that a user expects when choosing a form of media. The current research is interested in the effect social media uses may have for both the Athens fashion boutiques and the customer's perceived satisfaction with the social media page and customer-based store equity (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). Many clothing stores maintain and update their social media much more frequently than their websites. One frequency guide suggests updating Twitter at least 14 times per day and Facebook two times per day every day of the week (Park & Lee, 2014). Social media often acts as a catalyst to drive traffic that results in measureable outcomes. Thus, it is important and necessary to understand Athens fashion boutiques and their consumers' use of social media and how that influences satisfaction and customer-based store equity.

Customer-based store equity and satisfaction are constructs which will be explored in the presence of the U&G theory. Store equity is a construct which expands the typically used brand equity construct to better understand the overall success of the store as related to consumer behavior (Hartman & Spiro, 2005; Yoo & Donthu, 2001). Customers' satisfaction is also necessary to measure as this study is framed in the U&G theory. It is important to investigate other consumer responses such as satisfaction as U&G is underpinned by motivators in the form of uses which should relate directly to a response without being mediated by attitudinal behaviors (Dolan et al., 2015; Luo et al., 2011; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000).

The influence of customer-based store equity on preference toward the Athens fashion boutique and ultimately purchase intention will be investigated and the construct of satisfactions and its influence on preference toward the Athens

fashion boutique and purchase intention will be explored. As suggested by Hartman and Spiro (2005), store choice and purchase intention should be considered as outcomes of customer-based store equity, thus giving justification to investigate the relationship between the constructs of store equity and satisfaction as indicators of store preference and purchase intention. By drawing together these constructs to better understand Athens fashion boutiques' social media use from the small business and customer perspectives, there may be significant implications for Athens fashion boutiques to better enhance their social media strategies.

### **Purpose of Study**

Based on this discussion above, the purpose of the study is two-fold, utilizing a mixed methods convergent parallel design. The first is to explore the social media uses of Athens fashion boutiques from the perspective of their social media managers. The second is to understand the customers' uses of Athens fashion boutiques' social media by examining the dimensions of social media uses as it influences store equity and satisfaction thus leading to customers' store preference and purchase intention. The study is meant to add to the body of knowledge in the areas of small business, expanding U&G theory, and store equity to consider consumer responses. Practical implications from the qualitative and quantitative approach may hold significant suggestions for Athens fashion boutiques.

## Research Objectives

The main objectives of this study are:

*Qualitative: Phenomenological interviews with Athens fashion boutiques*

- To explore how Athens fashion boutiques use social media in their small businesses.
- To ascertain the metrics these Athens fashion boutiques use to measure their customer responses to their social media activity.

*Quantitative: Uses and Gratification with Store Equity*

- To examine how the customers' social media uses of Athens fashion boutiques' social media will affect customers' satisfaction with the social media.
- To examine how the customers' social media uses of Athens fashion boutiques' social media affect customer-based store equity.
- To examine the effect of customer-based store equity on customers' store preference.
- To examine the effect of customer-based store equity on customers' purchase intentions.
- To examine the effect of customer satisfaction with the Athens fashion boutique social media on their store preference.
- To examine the effect of customer satisfaction with the Athens fashion boutique social media on their purchase intentions from that boutique.
- To determine if a customer's store preference for an Athens fashion boutique influences their purchase intention from that boutique.

- To synthesize the qualitative interview data from Athens fashion boutiques' use of social media with the quantitative survey of the boutiques' customers' use of the social media and subsequent consumer responses.

### **Conceptual Definitions**

1. **Social media uses** – “general dispositions that influence people’s actions taken to fulfill a need or want which include the factors of interpersonal utility, information seeking, entertainment, convenience, and pass time” (Luo et al., 2011, p. 28)
  - a. **Interpersonal utility** – use of social media to meet the need of inclusion, affection, expression, and social interaction (Luo et al., 2011)
  - b. **Information seeking** – use of social media as a tool to learn about people, places, and things (Luo et al., 2011)
  - c. **Entertainment** – use of social media as a form of amusement and enjoyment (Luo et al., 2011)
  - d. **Convenience** – use of social media as easy and cheap access to information or other users (Luo et al., 2011, p. 28)
  - e. **Pass time** – use of social media when there is nothing to do, to occupy idle time, and to relieve boredom (Luo et al., 2011)

2. **Customer-based store equity** – the level of customer store awareness, association, loyalty, and perceived store quality (Aaker, 1991; Hartman & Spiro, 2005; Keller, 1993, Yoo & Donthu, 2001)
3. **Satisfaction** – the customer’s gratification with the boutiques’ social media (Hsu et al, 2015)
4. **Store preference** – the consumer’s attitude toward a store as their primary choice of store over others (Buil et al., 2014)
5. **Purchase intention** – the consumer’s likelihood of making a purchase from the store (Arnett et al., 2003; Buil et al., 2014)



## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter provides a review of literature exploring the main constructs of this study including small business and social media, social media use, customer-based store equity, satisfaction, store preference, and purchase intention.

#### **Small Business and Social Media**

Social media is a prevalent phenomenon that dominates the way consumers take in and exchange content, and it is through this platform that small businesses are offered an opportunity to connect directly with their customer. Social media has become a source of interaction, entertainment, and information (Taneja & Toombs, 2014). Large companies have the capacity to actively monitor and promote social media campaigns through digital marketing teams while small businesses face the task of handling the social media activities of their establishment in house (Bakeman & Hanson, 2010; Braojos-Gomez et al., 2015; He, Wang, & Zha, 2014). While social media content generation and management may seem like a daunting task, small businesses are not deterred. Small businesses are using social media technology and seeing impacts on their overall performance metrics (Atanassova & Clark, 2015; Cesaroni & Consoli, 2015). Small businesses can use social media to increase “visibility, viability, and sustainability to achieve superior competitive advantage” (Taneja & Toombs, 2014, p. 259). Findings have indicated that small

businesses see benefit in improving their efficiency when employing the techniques of social media and are faced with both advantages and disadvantages of social media implementation (Atanassova & Clark, 2015; Zeiller & Schaurer, 2011).

### **Advantages and Disadvantages**

While growing in its popularity and application among small businesses social media provides a unique set of challenges and opportunities that are necessary for discussion. Atanassova and Clark (2015) outline some specific benefits of social media use for the small business including improved productivity and reduced cost, connecting knowledge and expertise, communication, and customization. Other research has examined the benefits of using the social media sites Facebook and LinkedIn with the main advantages being the exposure of new products and services to a wide audience and maintaining a personal interaction through the social media platforms (Lacho & Marinello, 2010). Another significant advantage for small businesses using social media is the minimal financial obligation attached to creating a social media footprint. The cost to open social media accounts across multiple platforms is typically free or a nominal fee (He & Lu, 2016). This creates a very attractive opportunity. Yet while the cost may be low to create a social media presence, there is still an effort of time and resources attached to maintaining a social media presence (Hassan, Nadzim, & Shiratuddin, 2014; Taneja & Toombs, 2014).

If pursued with little direction, there is the potential for loss of resources with a very small return on investment when using social media. This challenge was

investigated in prior research which reported that social media competence was particularly of high importance for the smallest of firms (Braojos-Gomez et al., 2015; Schaupp & Belanger, 2014). Specifically, Braojos-Gomez et al. (2015) found that social media is more crucial for small businesses with limited financial resources than large firms. Another study from He and Lu (2016) compared company Facebook pages with annual sales revenue to see the influence of engaging a Facebook community on financial outcomes. Findings indicated that consistent use of social media can leverage brand-centric communities and in turn lead to increases in annual sales revenue (He & Lu, 2016). Thus careful attention should be given to a social media strategy in order to achieve success.

The advantages and disadvantages of using social media sites to promote a small business have been well researched in previous research. These studies discuss some reasons why small businesses should network online and also discuss the heavy investment of time that social media sites require. Lacho and Marinello (2010) provide a very astute suggestion for small business to “create a limit of how much time you will spend on these sites and make that time preferably during your non-busy hours or outside of your ‘golden sales hours’” (p. 132).

### **“Everyone is doing it”**

The fact remains that failing to participate on social media platforms can cause adverse effects and create a missed opportunity. Thus, much research has focused on the positioning of small businesses in the realm of social media. In a study which considered 48 Italian small firms using data collected through content

analysis of the firms' website along with a survey and interview with the Italian entrepreneurs, results emerged which indicated social media use is prevalent for small businesses but often driven by competitor pressure or the feeling of "everyone is doing it" with few resources to see a profitable return (Braojos-Gomez et al., 2015; Cesaroni & Consoli, 2015). Cesaroni and Consoli (2015) surmised that examining frequency of social media by small businesses falls short in understanding this tool and suggested investigating not only frequency but also how social media is being used by small businesses. Interestingly, Cesaroni and Consoli (2015) found that the entrepreneurial spirit often present in small businesses does lend itself to the nuances of understanding social media management. Alternative to the findings in Cesaroni and Consoli (2015), Schaupp and Belanger (2014) found competitive pressure is not a significant predictor of social media use but customer pressure was the strongest predictor. These findings are interesting and lend validation to pursuing the investigation of both the small business and customer perspectives when using social media.

When researching the unique aspects of employing social media use by small businesses, several studies have used interviews with small business owners and entrepreneurs to glean information about the businesses' social media activities (Atanassova & Clark, 2015; Bulearca & Bulearca, 2010; Cesaroni & Consoli, 2015; Hassan et al., 2014; Roy et al., 2014; Schaupp & Belanger, 2014). Hassan et al. (2014) interviewed 22 participants from a wide range of companies including a beauty salon, wedding planning, advertising, and health products with several fashion-related companies. From this a suggested model was developed for small business

owners to employ when approaching entry into the realm of social media. However, the researchers note that more empirical research using other validated conceptual frameworks should be considered.

Through this review of literature only one study emerged which considered the use of social media by small businesses in a specific geographic location, which was central Arkansas (Roy, Maxwell, & Carson, 2014). This is comparable to the scope of the current research focused on Athens fashion boutiques. Findings from Roy et al. (2014) indicate that the four small businesses examined had similar social media behaviors even though the small businesses operated in disparate industries including restaurant, tourism, and festival. Ease of use and affordability were indicators of social media use by these small businesses and Facebook was used most often because it was a common platform to reach current and future customers (Roy et al., 2014).

Much of the literature has focused on creating action plans and recommended models to implement social media strategies in small businesses (Braojos-Gomez et al., 2015; Hassan et al., 2014; He & Lu, 2016; Toombs & Harlow, 2014). For instance, many of these studies suggest future research to pursue both qualitative and quantitative methods highlighting specific processes and variables in regards to social media marketing activities (Atanassova & Clark, 2015; Bulerca & Buleraca, 2010; Cesaroni & Consoli, 2015; Hassan et al., 2014; Roy et al., 2014; Schaupp & Belanger, 2014). These studies make suggestions about how small businesses can leverage a social media presence and compete in the market. It is clear that the implications and suggestions made from these studies have been

headed. The small business sector is no longer asking the question “how do we participate on the platforms of social media?” Small businesses are on social media platforms, and it is important to move the body of knowledge to the next stage by examining *how* social media is being used by small businesses and if it is achieving measurable results from the customer group accessing the social media.

From this several research questions have been developed to guide the phenomenological interviews of Athens fashion boutiques. These research questions address the specifics of the qualitative strand of this study while drawing on the overarching theory of U&G to address the study as a whole:

RQ1: To explore how Athens fashion boutiques are using social media in their small businesses.

RQ2: To discover what metrics the Athens fashion boutiques utilize to gauge customer responses from their social media activity.

## **Customers’ Social Media Use**

### **Development of Social Media Use Dimensions**

The Uses and Gratification Theory is based on the assumption that users are actively choosing a form of media from a set of motivations to best gratify their needs (Blumler & Katz, 1974), thus behavioral usage motivations within the scope of social media is necessary for investigation. This study is specifically interested in how customers are using the social media of the Athens fashion boutiques, and guided by U&G most researchers identify five behavioral motivations for social media use. Taken from Papcharissi and Rubin (2000), these five behavioral

motivations are identified including: interpersonal utility, information seeking, entertainment, pass time, and convenience. *Interpersonal utility* as framed within the realm of social media is meant to examine the individual's use of social media to meet the needs of inclusion, affection, expression, social interaction, and surveillance. The motivator of *information seeking* is the process of using social media as an avenue to collect relevant facts about particular people, places, and events. In addition to this an individual would be motivated to use social media for *entertainment* when looking for items which provide amusement and enjoyment. Two other motivations are *pass time* and *convenience*. *Pass time* relates to the inherent nature of social media to fulfill boredom and occupying otherwise unencumbered time, while *convenience* is the tangible, inexpensive nature of social media to glean information or access other users (Luo, Chea, & Che, 2011). Specifically, Luo et al. (2011) posit that a U&G approach directly influences consumer behavior outcomes without the traditional mediator of attitude, as uses is driven from a personal motivation.

These five motivators of usage were further investigated in context of the "New(er) Sociability" of Facebook (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011). Social media is an alternate avenue for communication and meet needs in individuals that are often not met in other environments. Papacharissi and Medelson (2011) collected data via 344 students surveyed about their Facebook uses and the social capital brought about by engaging in Facebook. The goal was to create a framework which brought together individual orientation and social media use online (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011). From the data, researchers found the emergence of nine unique

factors: expressive information sharing, companionship, relaxing entertainment, habitual pass time, escape, cool and new trend, professional advancement, social interaction, and new friendships (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011). The researchers concluded that U&G theory is helpful to make connections between social media use, motivations, orientations, practices, and outcomes. Of the five overarching themes of Papcharissi and Mendelson's (2011) study, these three are specifically relevant to the current research:

1. "socially motivated behaviors, including media selection and use, are both purposive and ritualistic"
2. "people adopt or adapt the affordances of convergent media to satisfy felt needs and to form and maintain social networks"
3. "media compete and converge with other forms of communication for selection, attention, and use to gratify our individual and collective needs." (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011; p. 225)

From these studies Whiting and Williams (2013) took the body of knowledge a step further by investigating four models of U&G previously used in the literature and compiling a list of identified uses (Barton, 2009; Leung, 2007; Palmgreen & Rayburn, 1979; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). Their list from the prior studies included seven use motivators – social interaction, information seeking, pass time, entertainment, relaxation, communicatory utility, and convenience utility. After interviewing 25 research participants, Whiting and Williams (2013) found that the data revealed the seven expected usage themes with the emergence of three unexpected themes. The additional themes were: expression of opinions,



information sharing, and surveillance/knowledge about others (Whiting & William, 2013). Suggestions were given to focus more attention to the U&G theory in social media research and to use this list of usage motivations as a guide in future research.

This previous literature sets a guide to investigate social media through the lens of the U&G theory. Building upon research that first examined Internet usage (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000), further studies moved the body of knowledge toward social media usage (Luo et al., 2011; Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011; Whiting & Williams, 2013). Some identified factors of social media use beyond the five set forth at the beginning of this chapter (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011; Whiting & Williams, 2013): interpersonal utility, information seeking, entertainment, pass time, and convenience. Yet these five motivators have been used extensively in other studies to measure customer's social media use and further discussion will give justification for the application of these five behavioral use motivators in the current research.

### **Social Media Use in Application**

The dimensions of interpersonal utility, information seeking, entertainment, pass time, and convenience have been used as antecedent constructs across studies to measure media use. One study which surveyed 63 business undergraduate students at a U.S. university found interpersonal utility, information seeking, and entertainment to be significant predictors of Internet usage while pass time and convenience were not significant (Luo et al., 2011). Another study surveying 267

undergraduate students at a Midwestern university, identified all five dimensions as important factors when considering users' Facebook activity (Smock, Ellison, Lampe, & Wohn, 2011). Alternatively, other studies have used only four of the dimensions (information, convenience, entertainment, and social interaction) and found a significant effect of these four dimensions of use motivations on the customer responses of attitude, satisfaction, and purchase intention (Hsu, Chang, Lin, & Lin, 2015; Ko, Cho, Roberts, 2005). Hsu et al. (2015) state that their study is one of the first to expand the U&G theory to include motivators as predictors of interactivity for social media use. Park and Lee (2014) quantitatively examined motivators of entertainment, relationship maintenance, self-expression, and communication on Facebook usage through an online survey of 246 students at a Southwestern university. The researchers reported that these motivators of Facebook use contributed to a sense of belonging and satisfaction leading to more validation that the motivators of social media use are well established both qualitatively and quantitatively in the body of literature (Park & Lee, 2014).

Further theoretical application of social media uses created a conceptual model to increase individuals' social media engagement behavior (Dolan, Conduit, Fahy, & Goodman, 2015). The items of information, entertainment, relational, and remunerative content were suggested as predictors of either positive or negative brand engagement behaviors impacted by the social media content presented by brands. The study presented a framework of how brands could create content to increase brand engagement. One of the greatest contributions of the study as noted

by Dolan et al. (2015) was the extension of U&G theory as not just a passive but also an active theory which explains customers' engagement on social media platforms.

### **Connection with Satisfaction and Customer-Based Store Equity**

Taken from the suggestion of previous literature the current study is interested in expanding the knowledge of social media use by connecting this construct to measurable consumer responses, in particular satisfaction with the social media and customer-based store equity. In investigating the connection of social media use with satisfaction a study of micro-bloggers gauged user satisfaction and information dissemination (Liu, Chen, & Lee, 2016). Content, social, process, and technology gratification were investigated as predictors of user satisfaction. Through a quantitative survey of 230 microbloggers the researchers determined that it is the quality of information rather than the networking on social media sites which leads to greater satisfaction. Additionally, a study examining Twitter use by journalists found the motivator of information was significantly related to relational satisfaction both directly and mediated by Twitter use (Kim, Kim, Wang, & Lee, 2016).

Two studies conducted in the hotel industry have connected social media use with customer satisfaction and intention to visit the hotel (Aluri, Slevitch, & Larzeler, 2015; Choi, Fowler, Goh, & Yuan, 2016). Choi et al. (2016) chose to use adapted motivators of usage as outlined by Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) including information seeking, convenience, entertainment, social interaction, and self-expression. The study found information seeking, convenience, and self-expression

to be predictors of satisfaction with the hotel's Facebook page and also found satisfaction with the hotel's Facebook page to have a significant effect on intention to visit the hotel (Choi et al., 2016). Another study focused on the hotel industry compared users' experience with hotel websites and their social media. Results showed that perceived enjoyment, informativeness, and social interaction directly influenced satisfaction (Aluri et al., 2015). These studies indicate that there is a theoretically supported relationship between social media usage and satisfaction yet a need to branch beyond the hotel service industry to investigate this relationship.

Based on this, the relationship between social media use and customer-based store equity will be examined to further expand the body of knowledge around U&G theory and to offer a rich and well-rounded picture of how social media use influences aspects of consumer behaviors. In the research previously discussed (Hsu et al. 2015; Ko et al., 2005), U&G theory was expanded to include human-human interaction, human-message interaction, and personal interactivity. It is clear from these two studies that an opportunity exists to expand beyond the U&G theory by integrating other consumer outcomes to predict behaviors of social media use as a way to enrich the literature and establish more specific practical applications.

While social media use and customer-based store equity is a relationship not well explored in the literature at least two studies have investigated this connection thus far. One study examined cross promotion of web references in print advertisements and customer engagement (Lepkowska-White, Parsons, & Ceylan, 2014). The researchers approached the collected the data using a content analysis of

web based advertisements from two time periods in 2008 and 2012, guided by the U&G theory (Lepkowska-White et al., 2014). While not specifically examining social media, the study offers interesting insights connecting social media use and engagement in the form of customer-based store equity. Lepkowska-White et al. (2014) concluded that often advertisements are generic and not targeting those usage motivators of information seeking, personal identity, social, and entertainment needs. These findings are highly important for Athens fashion boutiques to consider as they attempt to meet the needs of customer social media uses and see effects on customer engagement through the form of customer-based store equity. By examining both the qualitative and quantitative questions in the current research there will be an opportunity to evaluate both the fashion boutiques' approach and the customer approach. It will be interesting to see if like Lepkowska-White et al. (2014) the fashion boutiques are presenting vague and generic information not fostering customer-based store equity or if their approach has overcome this hurdle.

Another study specifically researched the impact of social media use on brand equity using the U&G theory as a guiding theory (Blanchflower & Watchravesringkan, 2014). Analysis of the 172 responses indicated a significant relationship between social media usage and attitude toward the social media brand page and a significant relationship between attitude toward the social media brand page and brand equity. The researchers stated, "consumers that favor a brand's SNS [social media] will positively influence brand equity" (Blanchflower & Watchravesringkan, 2014, p. 23). The findings add to the expansion of the U&G

theory to directly tie in significant value for the brand by establishing a significant relationship from a brand's social media presence to brand equity. The findings of Blanchflower and Watchravesringkan (2014) give adequate validation for the proposed relationship in the current research, although this current study will posit a direct relationship between social media use and store equity. This direct relationship is an appropriate approach as prior studies have noted U&G theory lends itself to predict behavioral outcomes without the need for an attitudinal mediating effect (Dolan et al., 2015; Luo et al., 2011; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000).

From the review of previous studies, the following hypotheses have been developed:

H1: Social media use of a boutique's social media will have a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction.

H2: Social media use of a boutique's social media will have a significant positive effect on customer-based store equity.

### **Customer-Based Store Equity**

The application in this study of the multi-dimensional construct customer-based store equity draws from the literature of brand equity. Brand equity includes customer's awareness, association, perceived quality, and loyalty. Thus many researchers refer to brand equity with the prefix of "customer-based" to wholly indicate from what perspective this brand equity is being measured. In addition, many studies have treated customer-based brand equity synonymously with retailer or store equity. As this study is interested in specific fashion boutiques

which carry multiple brands within their store, it was necessary to follow the literature and use the adapted customer-based store equity as a main research construct. The following section will introduce the construct of customer-based brand equity, the use of customer-based brand equity as store equity, and its connection to customer response outcomes of store preference and purchase intention.

### **Customer-Based Brand Equity**

Brand equity as a construct has been well researched in the literature and was initially approached using two perspectives from Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993). The basis for customer-based brand equity is first found in the research by Aaker (1991). This approach is from a cognitive psychology lens which asserts that the construct as a whole revolves around a group of assets and liabilities attached to the brand. Essentially the brand name and symbol act as a tool to make additions or subtractions from the value of the product or service as experienced and inferred from the recipient (Aaker, 1991). The research establishes that assets of brand equity arise from factors of awareness, association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. These dimensions of brand equity will be discussed in greater detail in the following section.

Keller (1993) takes a slightly different approach and views brand equity as related to the differing effect of brand knowledge on consumers' response to the marketing of the brand. Brand knowledge is measured by brand awareness and brand image to capture the construct of customer-based brand equity. Brand

awareness relies on recall and recognitions while brand image draws on characteristics and relationships among brand associations or the favorable and memorable links in the customer's mind (Keller, 1993). Customer-based brand equity is present when a brand is known to a consumer and the consumer views that brand as favorable. Keller (1993) surmises that research about customer-based brand equity will be helpful when addressing challenges to the marketing environment in the presence of new media alternatives including sponsorship, promotions, and product placement. Suggestions are also given to consider customer-based brand equity from a broader perspective to add to the body of knowledge on this construct. Further in this chapter the transposition of customer-based brand equity to customer-based store equity will be discussed and it is foundational research such as Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993) which give credence to the importance of investigating customer equity.

### **Dimensions of Customer-Based Brand Equity**

Researchers identified a need for an established, measureable scale of customer-based brand equity drawing on the literature which had already well discussed the construct (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993). Yoo and Donthu (2001) examined customer-based brand equity to empirically establish a reliable and valid measure of brand equity. The study included a multi-step approach to validate a multi-dimensional customer-based brand equity scale using survey data from 1,530 respondents who were asked to evaluate 12 brands in the product categories of shoes, film for cameras, and color television sets (Yoo & Donthu, 2001). The mutli-



step psychometric theoretical tests to validate the scale and overall construct found that the measures are both highly valid and reliable when measuring customer-based brand equity.

Yoo and Donthu (2001) investigated a multi-dimensional brand equity scale including the dimensions: brand association with awareness, perceived quality, and loyalty which follows Aaker's (1991) description of this construct. It is interesting to note that Yoo and Donthu's (2001) findings indicated that brand awareness and association were one-dimension underlying customer-based brand equity. *Brand awareness* is a reference to recognition and recall on the part of the consumer while *association* (sometimes referred to as brand image in other studies, i.e. Kim, Kim, & An, 2003) links the brand to the consumer's memory (Aaker, 1991; Yoo & Donthu, 2001). *Perceived quality* is the consumers' evaluative criteria of the brand and *brand loyalty* is the consumers' propensity to remain loyal to the brand (Aaker, 1991; Yoo & Donthu, 2001). This multi-dimensional scale for brand equity is used often in research with varying results as to the significance of each dimension.

One study which used Aaker's (1991) framework for brand equity explored customer-based brand equity's effect on the financial outcomes for the hotel industry (Kim, Kim, & An, 2003). The study drew on the four dimensions of brand equity (brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand image) to gauge customer-based brand equity and the ultimate outcome of financial success. After collecting data from 600 respondents who were customers of 12 luxury hotels, the significant dimensions were brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand image underlying customer-based brand equity but not brand awareness. In subsequent

analyses, brand equity was significantly and positively related to financial performance (Kim et al., 2003).

Another study has suggested that awareness and association can be grouped together as one dimension (Hartman & Spiro, 2005), but Papu and Quester (2006) in adapting brand equity to retailer equity found that retailer equity is a four-dimensional construct. Overall, Papu and Quester (2006) found strong validity and reliability to suggest that customer-based retailer equity is comprised of the following dimensions: retailer awareness, retailer association, perceived retailer quality, and retailer loyalty.

A more recent study investigated the reliability and validity of customer-based brand equity in the Indian luxury market (Sharma, 2016). This study surveyed 520 consumers applying the previously used constructs of consumer based brand equity (Aaker, 1991; Yoo & Donthu, 2001). The results validate the multi-dimensionality of customer-based brand equity to include brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. Sharma (2016) also found opposing results to Yoo and Donthu's (2001) and Hartman and Spiro's (2005) suggestion that awareness and association can be treated as one dimension. Thus the research supports that brand equity is a four-dimension construct with brand awareness and brand association as independent dimensions (Papu & Question, 2006; Sharma, 2016). Sharma (2016) suggests further empirical study to validate the strength of each dimension of customer-based brand equity and across multiple categories. The current research will follow Papu and Quester (2006) and Sharma

(2016) and examine four unique dimensions of brand equity including awareness, association, perceived quality, and loyalty.

### **Customer-Based Brand Equity as Customer-Based Store Equity**

Customer-based brand equity has been operationalized in previous studies as customer-based store equity with store equity being a more relevant construct for the current research focused on Athens fashion boutiques. One study interested in conceptualizing customer-based store equity as a construct proposed that store image is not a complete construct to understand store performance and consumer behavior thus introducing the construct of store equity (Hartman & Spiro, 2005). The study drew on past research for its theoretical grounding and to give validation for investigating more closely equity in other perspectives beyond brand equity (Keller, 1993; Yoo & Donthu, 2001). In operationalizing store equity, the researchers suggest using Yoo and Donthu's (2001) approach and explicitly stated the following, "The indirect approach to measuring store equity would include measurements of store awareness and store loyalty" (Hartman & Spiro, 2005, p. 1117). Specifically, Hartman and Spiro (2005) suggested future research investigate how operationalization of customer-based store equity helps predict consumer behavior.

It is thought that customer-based store equity will better predict consumer responses relative to store image because it takes into account store awareness and associations with the store name. Overall Hartman and Spiro (2005) provide solid validation for the use of customer-based store equity in more empirical studies.

There is also the suggestion that this construct might be helpful across

nontraditional retail mediums which would make customer-based store equity a valuable construct when considering the consumer's uses of social media and how those use motivations might influence overall store equity.

There was an underlying assumption in previous research that brand equity could be transferred to retailer equity (Arnett et al., 2003; Yoo & Donthu, 2001), but Papu and Quester (2006) chose to validate that assumption through their research. Papu and Quester's (2006) study attempted to examine equity as it was related to retailers. At the time of its publication, it was the first study to investigate retailer equity (Papu & Quester, 2006). The researchers used a four-dimensional retail equity construct; the constructs were retailer awareness, retailer associations, perceived retailer quality, and retailer loyalty. Two retailer categories of department stores and specialty stores were investigated by surveying 601 Australian customers. The researchers note that there was a lack of empirical evidence on the similarity or disparity between brand equity and retailer equity. By employing confirmatory factor analysis Papu and Quester (2006) did in fact build on past research to confirm that the framework for customer-based brand equity can be adapted to examine retailer equity using the four unique dimensions mentioned previously.

### **Connections with Store Preference and Purchase Intention**

There is a need in the literature to examine how customer-based store equity influences certain consumer responses (Espallardo & Bailon, 2008; Hartman & Spiro, 2005; Kim et al., 2003; Sharma, 2006; Yoo & Donthu, 2001). A study

previously discussed in this review of literature did investigate social media uses influence on brand equity and brand equity's influence on purchase intention (Blanchflower & Watchravesringkan, 2014). The study found that brand equity had a significantly and positively influenced purchase intention from the brand (Blanchflower & Watchravesringkan, 2014). Kim and Ko (2012) also investigated social media marketing activities influence on customer-based brand equity. This study looked into the connection between social media activities effect on customer-based brand equity and customer-based brand equity's effect on purchase intention for luxury products (Kim & Ko, 2012). The researchers found that social media activities did influence equity and that there was a significant and positive relationship between brand equity and purchase intention. The researchers draw conclusions that social media marketing contributes positively to building customer-based brand equity and brand equity significantly influences purchase intention from the brand making managerial suggestions that brands should participate on social media platforms to foster equity and ensure purchase intention (Kim & Ko, 2012).

Discussed previously, Yoo and Donthu's (2001) research on the multi-dimensional brand equity scale suggested a need for further study to investigate customer-based brand equity's influence on consumer response variables. Buil, Martinez, and Chemantony (2014) followed this suggestion by exploring both the dimensions of brand equity and the consumer responses. The dimensions used followed previous research and included brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty (Aaker, 1993; Yoo & Donthu, 2001). The study

found support for brand awareness, perceived quality and brand loyalty as dimensions of brand equity adding further validation that these dimensions are important when investigating equity (Buil et al., 2014).

What is most valuable from Buil et al. (2014) in regards to reviewing it for the current research is the connection between brand equity and certain consumer responses including price premium, brand extension, brand preference, purchase intention and consequently brand preference on purchase intention (Buil et al., 2014). The current study will draw on Buil et al. (2014), but only focus on a relationship between customer-based store equity its influence on store preference and purchase intention. Brand extension and willingness to pay a higher price are beyond the scope of this research and are not directly related to measuring consumer responses in the presence of customer-based store equity. Specifically, Papu and Quester (2006) are critical of the use of price premiums as a consumer response to retailer equity. They state, “while consumers might pay a price premium for certain high equity brands, there is no extra premium consumers are willing to pay to shop at a particularly high equity retailer” (Papu & Quester, 2006, p. 327).

Other research conducted in the sector of IT software investigated the efforts of the marketing mix on customer-based brand equity (Kim & Hyun, 2011). Like Yoo and Donthu (2001), Kim and Hyun (2011) used the dimensions of brand awareness with association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. The study found customer-based brand equity had a significant influence on the marketing mix metrics such as channel performance, price, promotions, and service (Kim & Hyun, 2011). Hoeffler and Keller (2003) posit that strong brands are more highly preferred by consumers.

They found that a brand with high equity was viewed as valuable and as having a fair price by consumers (Hoeffler & Keller, 2003). Aaker (1991) established the connection of consumer perception of a brand as valuable leading to willingness to buy that brand, and Erdem, Swait, and Valenzuela (2006) found a significant relationship between brand equity and brand choice. Following with the literature Buil et al. (2014) also found support for the hypothesized relationships between brand equity and brand preference and brand equity and purchase intention. A main contribution of Buil et al.'s (2014) study was the empirical examination of customer-based brand equity and consumer responses. The researchers note that much of the body of literature assumes that higher brand equity leads to higher consumer responses but few quantitative studies have investigated this assumption. The outcomes of their study suggest a strong framework to quantitatively investigate these relationships.

Based on the extensive review of literature about the construct of customer-based brand equity which has been clearly justified for adaptation to customer-based store equity the following hypotheses are proposed in an effort to explore the connection between customer-based store equity and certain consumer responses:

H3: Customer-based store equity will have a significant positive effect on customer's store preference.

H4: Customer-based store equity will have a significant positive effect on purchase intention.

## **Satisfaction**

### **Customer's Satisfaction with Fashion Boutique's Social Media**

Satisfaction is an integral construct in the current research as there remains an underlying assumption that satisfaction will have a significant influence on the outcome of store metrics, yet this is an area for further exploration. Prior studies have suggested the need for more research to expand the U&G theory and incorporate empirical investigations of consumer responses in the presence of social media use (Dolan et al., 2015; Luo et al., 2011; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Whiting & Williams, 2013). Hoeffler and Keller (2003), which was previously discussed, surmise that the responses in consumer's perceptions, preferences, and behaviors and the wide range of these responses both positive and negative are often due to the marketing from the brand. Thus the current research is concerned with consumer's response of store preference and purchase intention as influenced by their satisfaction with the fashion boutiques' social media, which could reasonably be considered a marketing activity. Drawing these connections will provide unique insights for Athens fashion boutiques that express measurable outcomes from their active participation on social media platforms.

Additional research by Tolba and Hassan (2009) established a connection between customer-based brand equity with market performance including satisfaction, preference, and purchase intention (Tolba & Hassan, 2009). The study collected survey data from customers of the luxury automotive industry. The researchers found that satisfaction was the strongest predictor of preference and purchase intention (Tolba & Hassan, 2009). Because satisfaction was such a strong



indicator of preference and purchase intention, suggestions were made that future studies investigate which marketing or branding activities would influence consumer satisfaction (Tolba & Hassan, 2009). It is research such as this which gives proper validation to consider satisfaction, preference, and purchase intention through the lens of fashion boutiques' social media and the measurable consumer responses.

### **Connection to Store Preference and Purchase Intention**

To understand satisfaction and store preference a study was conducted researching the relationship of card loyalty programs and the programs' effect on these metrics (Omar, Aziz, & Nazri, 2011). The researchers measured store preference as an attitudinal aspect of loyalty to the stores. There were 400 loyalty card holders respondents to the research survey and the results indicated a highly positive correlation between the constructs of satisfaction and store preference. Interestingly while these items were highly correlated based on further data analysis there was no significant influence of satisfaction on store preference (Omar et al., 2011). Even still Omar et al. (2011) noted the importance of satisfaction as a necessary component of staying competitive, thus it is not a construct which should be dismissed.

Another investigation into satisfaction considered 10 consumer mindset metrics including items such as satisfaction, preference, and purchase intention which will also be used in the current research (Anselmsson & Bondesson, 2015). Through survey data and household purchase data in the Swedish fast moving

consumer goods market the researchers attempted to draw connections directly between the consumer mindset metrics and industry-specific data. Anselmsson and Bondesson (2015) posit there is typically an assumed link between customer-based brand assets and long-term market performance. Their findings indicate that this is in fact a correct assumption as satisfaction has a highly positive correlation with both preference and purchase intention (Anselmsson & Bondesson, 2015).

From a different perspective store atmospherics were explored as the main influencer of satisfaction leading to re-patronage intention and purchase intention (Gauraus, 2016). Findings indicate that store atmospherics do enhance consumer responses and suggestions are made to expand this research beyond store atmospherics to determine other environments' effect on consumer behavior (Gauraus, 2016). Chang et al. (2014) also examined store attributes and the effect on customer satisfaction, word-of-mouth, and store patronage. Customer satisfaction as a customer response to sales employees and store atmospherics influenced both word-of-mouth and re-patronage intention (Chang, Cho, Turner, Gupta, & Watchravesringkan, 2014). While the current research will not investigate in-store atmospherics, Gauraus (2016) and Chang et al. (2014) indicate the importance of connecting antecedents to consumer responses such as satisfaction, preference, and purchase intention to fully understand how efforts on the part of businesses relate positively or negatively to these responses.

Research conducted in the hotel industry and previously discussed in this review of literature connects the construct of satisfaction with certain consumer responses. Aluri et al. (2016) examined satisfaction and purchase intention in the

presence of social media influences. By examining hotel websites with embedded social media threads the researchers found that in the presence of higher perceived enjoyment, informativeness, and social interaction there was a significantly positive influence on respondents' satisfaction (Aluri et al., 2016). The researchers also found that dimensions of U&G had an influence on purchase intention through the path of satisfaction (Aluri et al., 2016). Choi et al. (2016), also within the realm, of the hotel industry noted that customer satisfaction is commonly used as an indicator of behavioral intention and found that there is a strong positive effect of satisfaction on hotel visit intention. The researchers stated, "the findings of this study provided a reason for companies to pay attention to SNSs [social media], because users who are more satisfied with a hotel's Facebook page are more willing to stay at the hotel, which is the main goal of marketers" (Choi et al., 2016, p. 789). Findings such as this give credence to the proposed relationship investigated in the current study.

The connection between satisfaction and store preference and satisfaction and purchase intention will be framed in a novel way for the current study that has not yet been examined in the literature. For instance, most studies draw a direct connection between satisfaction *with* the store and preference *for* the store (Chang et al., 2015; Omar et al., 2011; Tolba & Hassan, 2009). The current research is interested not in satisfaction with the store but satisfaction with the fashion boutiques' social media as an indicator of store preference and purchase intention somewhat in line with the approach of Choi et al. (2016). This adds to the body of knowledge about satisfaction and will be helpful in drawing conclusions of the effect

social media use has directly on satisfaction with the social media and ultimately store preference and purchase intention.

The review of literature surrounding satisfaction and certain consumer behavior outcomes, the direction of this study, and the unique approach to better understanding satisfaction with fashion boutiques' social media has given rise to the following hypotheses:

H5: Customer's satisfaction will have a significant positive effect on store preference.

H6: Customer's satisfaction will have a significant positive effect on purchase intention.

## **Store Preference**

### **An Overview**

The final construct for this study to discuss is store preference as it relates to purchase intention. From this literature review store preference is a relevant and valuable construct to investigate in relationship to customer-based store equity and satisfaction with the boutique's social media (Anselmsson & Bondesson, 2015; Buil et al., 2014; Choi et al., 2016; Omar et al., 2011). Based on the prevalence of social media use for small businesses it is helpful to draw conclusions as to how this may influence a measurable outcome for the business through purchase intention. Thus a relationship between store preference and purchase intention will be helpful for owners and managers of Athens fashion boutiques as they choose to situate their social media presence.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is the overarching framework which has established a connection with intention being an outcome of attitude as the TPB suggests that from this, intention can be an indicator of actual behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Buil et al. (2014) drew on the TPB and found a significant relationship between brand preference and purchase intention. A main objective of the current research is to establish purchase intention as an empirically sound outcome of a customer's preference for a store. The operationalization of store preference for the purpose of this study essentially examines the consumer's attitude toward choosing one particular store over another. From the perspective of the TPB and based on Buil et al. (2014) it is appropriate to investigate the connection between store preference and purchase intention (Ajzen, 1991). Several studies have applied this theory or an adaptation of the theory to consumer responses which fit within the objectives of the current research.

### **Connection with Social media and Purchase Intention**

Chu, Chen, and Sung (2016) used the TPB to investigate followers of brands on Twitter and measurable outcomes for the brands. The researchers found by surveying 351 respondents that attitude toward the brand had a significant and positive influence on following the brand on Twitter and brand following had a significant and positive influence on purchase intention from the brand (Chu et al., 2016). The researchers suggest that more studies build on consumer relationships and what social media messages are effective on platforms such as Twitter (Chu et al., 2016). The current research will attempt to do this by examining customers'

social media use of fashion boutiques' social media and how this ultimately affects intention to purchase.

Several other studies have applied adaptations of the TPB to explore the topics of visual merchandising in fashion retail stores, mobile recommendation agents, and social media platforms and their influence on consumer responses and intentions. (Farhangi, Abaspour, Farahani, & Ghasemi, 2014; Kowatch & Maass, 2010; Park, Jeon, & Sullivan, 2015). Following the findings of other studies, the TPB, and the well-established relationship between consumer responses and intention, Farhangi et al. (2014), Kowatch and Maass (2010) and Park et al. (2015) also found support for a significant relationship between attitude and intention.

Building on this and drawing toward more specifics of store preference and intention one study examined store brand evaluative process (Gomez-Suarez, Quinones, & Yague, 2015). The researchers surveyed 1,118 shoppers to measure their attitude, preference, and purchase intention and found that store brand preference indicated a significant relationship with store brand purchase intention (Gomez-Suarez et al., 2015). The findings indicate that brands can enhance the customer experience with the store to increase purchase intention and increase brand image. Brands should engage in social media activities to inform customers of brand value which may influence store preference and purchase intention from that store (Gomez-Suarez et al., 2015).

Based on the previous review of literature and the well-established connection between preference and intention there is sound support for investigating the following hypothesis:

H7: Customer's store preference will have a significant positive effect on their purchase intention.

### **Merged Convergent Parallel**

The convergent parallel design of this study will explore both Athens fashion boutiques' and customers' use of social media through qualitative and quantitative data streams. Of importance is the investigation into the use of social media by Athens fashion boutiques and their metrics to examine customer responses (RQ1 and RQ2). In addition, as individuals have certain motivations when using social media, this study is interested in how specifically customers' social media use is influencing satisfaction with Athens fashion boutiques' social media and contributing to customer-based store equity (H1 and H2). Satisfaction and customer-based store equity will be explored to give insight into how these items ultimately influence the consumer responses of store preference and purchase intention (H3-H7). This is of importance for small businesses to understand and by shedding more light on the motivations for how using the social media manifests into behaviors and satisfaction, small businesses may be able to answer pertinent questions as to relevant content, functionality, entertainment, and appearance for their social media.

The purpose of research, justification, and review of literature gives rise to a combined mixed methods research question addressing the convergent parallel approach:

MRQ: To what extent do the qualitative interview results from Athens fashion boutiques' use of social media synthesize with the results of the quantitative survey of the boutiques' customers' use of these social media and response?



## **CHAPTER III:**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This chapter includes a brief historical overview of the Uses and Gratification Theory, application of this framework to the qualitative stream of research followed by the research questions, and an application of U&G to the quantitative stream of research with a proposed model and hypotheses, it concludes with an explanation of the convergent parallel merging of the qualitative and quantitative streams.

#### **Uses and Gratification Theory**

The Uses and Gratification (U&G) Theory takes its historical roots from the discipline of mass communications. It was first used by Herta Herzog in 1944 to investigate the prevalence of radio soap operas and their listeners (West & Turner, 2010). Around this same time and drawing a clear parallel to the U&G Theory emerged Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs which suggests that individuals require basic needs to be satisfied before they move to their next level of needs (Maslow, 1943). At its theoretical core the application of the U&G theory posits that needs and benefits are achieved from engaging with forms of media (West & Turner, 2010). The focus in this theory is on the audience or user and asks the question "What do people do with media?" assuming that the user of media is not a passive participant but actively integrates media into their choices to achieve benefits or gratifying outcomes (Katz, 1959).

This theory was solidified by Blumler and Katz (1974) who posit that users exercise their free will to choose any number of media forms to fulfill their needs with the assumption that the user makes their choice in the presence of alternative forms of media. The application of the U&G theory from Blumler and Katz's contemporary approach has been possible because of its strength in use for multiple psychological needs, motivations, and channel mediums, including beyond the discipline of mass communications (Lin, 1994). A critique and examination of the U&G theory by Lin (1994) states that, "the theory's staying power is unequivocal as evidenced by its continually evolving application venues" (p. 574). More recently and applicable to this study, Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) expanded U&G to investigate social media use (Papachariss & Mendelson, 2011). Other research has examined individuals' use of social media and found that the U&G theory "has specific relevance and should be given more prominence in social media research and social media marketing" (Whiting & Williams, 2013, p. 368).

This theory provides a sufficient framework to examine both the qualitative and quantitative streams of the current research as discussed in great detail further in this chapter. While studies have established that individuals are using social media by applying the U&G theory there has been little research which investigates this phenomenon further. The question arises as to what happens once an individual is using the social media platforms. It is this gap which the current research will address. The U&G theory will be used to frame the interviews with small businesses about their social media use and the survey of the customers using the social media.

The following sections specifically apply the U&G theory to each stream of research examined in the current study.

### **Conceptual Framework - Qualitative Study**

This portion of the mixed methods study will be a qualitative interview seeking to enhance the understanding of Athens fashion boutiques' use of social media influenced by a phenomenological philosophical approach and guided by the Uses and Gratification (U&G) theory. deMarrais (2004) in reference to phenomenological interview studies states, "...the researcher assumes the role of learner in that the participant is the one who has had the experience, is considered the expert on his or her experience, and can share it with the researcher" (p. 57). The approach of phenomenology is appropriate as the purpose of the current study is understanding how Athens fashion boutiques are using social media and the outcomes experienced by being active on social media platforms. This information will be best gleaned from the firsthand experience of individuals responsible for social media content creation within each fashion boutique.

Past research has suggested the importance and necessity of utilizing the framework of phenomenological inquiry when investigating entrepreneurial and small business ventures (Cope, 2005). Cope (2005) utilized phenomenology not to diminish the merits of quantitative approaches yet posits the qualitative approach of phenomenological interviews adds to the richness of understanding an overall perspective of the small business. Thus the interviews with Athens fashion boutiques will be conducted to answer the research questions outlined below and as

a convergent analysis to the quantitative investigation into consumers' use of the boutiques' social media. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) state that this approach can be helpful to "synthesize complementary results to develop a more completed understanding of a phenomenon" (p. 77).

### **Research Questions**

From this and the review of literature the following research questions have been developed:

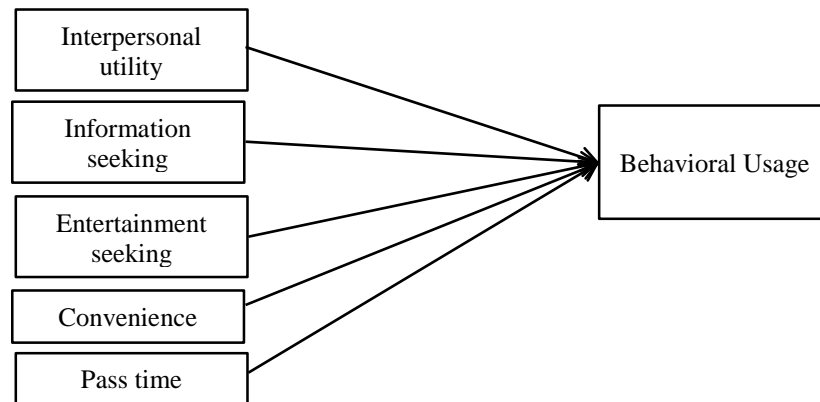
RQ1: To explore how Athens fashion boutiques are using social media in their small businesses.

RQ2: To discover what metrics the Athens fashion boutiques utilize to gauge customer responses from their social media activity.

### **Conceptual Framework - Quantitative Study**

The purpose of this research is to examine customers' social media use of boutiques' social media and its effect on satisfaction and customer-based store equity and further the relationship between satisfaction and store preference and purchase intention as well as customer-based store equity and store preference and purchase intention. Several studies have utilized the U&G theory when examining alternative platforms of media. For instance, Whiting and Williams (2013) compiled a list of uses from four prior studies drawing on literature which had used U&G theory in regards to television and the Internet (Ko et al., 2005; Korgaonkar & Wolin, 1999; Palmgreen & Rayburn, 1979; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). The

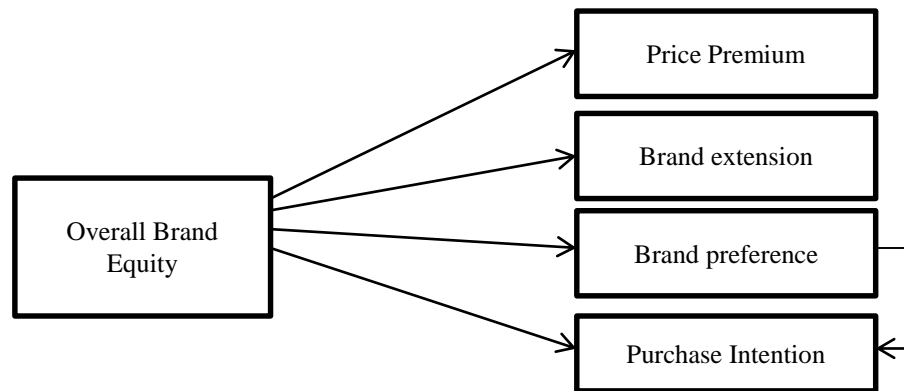
framework for this study will be specifically guided by the framework of Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) which was also applied by Luo et al. (2011) when investigating the use of online newspapers (Figure 3.1). The items used by Papacharisi and Rubin (2000) and Luo et al. (2011), were applied in a quantitative structured survey. The choice of this framework from Luo et al. (2011) to guide the current research is in line with the research objectives and hypotheses. Figure 3.1 below shows the motivations indicating Internet usage, which for the purposes of this study will be use of the fashion boutiques' social media:



*Figure 3.1: The uses and gratification of Internet usage from Luo et al., 2011*

Building upon the U&G theory, the construct of customer-based store equity is investigated as it influences both social media use and customer responses. Buil et al. (2014) used a conceptual framework (Figure 3.2) which investigated the influence of brand equity following prior findings about store equity on consumer responses (Hartman & Spiro, 2005; Yoo & Donthu, 2000). Overall brand equity had a positive influence on price premium, brand extension, brand preference, and purchase intention, in addition to brand preference having a positive influence on

purchase intention (Buil et al., 2014). As the current study is focused solely on customer-based store equity, only store preference and purchase intention will be included in the conceptual model. Figure 3.2 below shows the model used by Buil et al. (2014).



*Figure 3.2: Conceptual framework of brand equity from Buil et al. 2014*

Bringing together U&G theory and brand equity, Lepkowska-White et al. (2014) posit that building brand equity through advertising is effective in increasing online traffic and sales. As social media platforms offer an avenue to both push and pull advertising content to followers who are using social media it follows that social media use of a boutique's social media would have an effect on customer-based store equity. To investigate the outcomes of the U&G theory and the importance of equity as a predictor of consumer behavior discussed previously, the following research model has been adapted to address the objectives of this study (Figure 3.3):

## Research Model

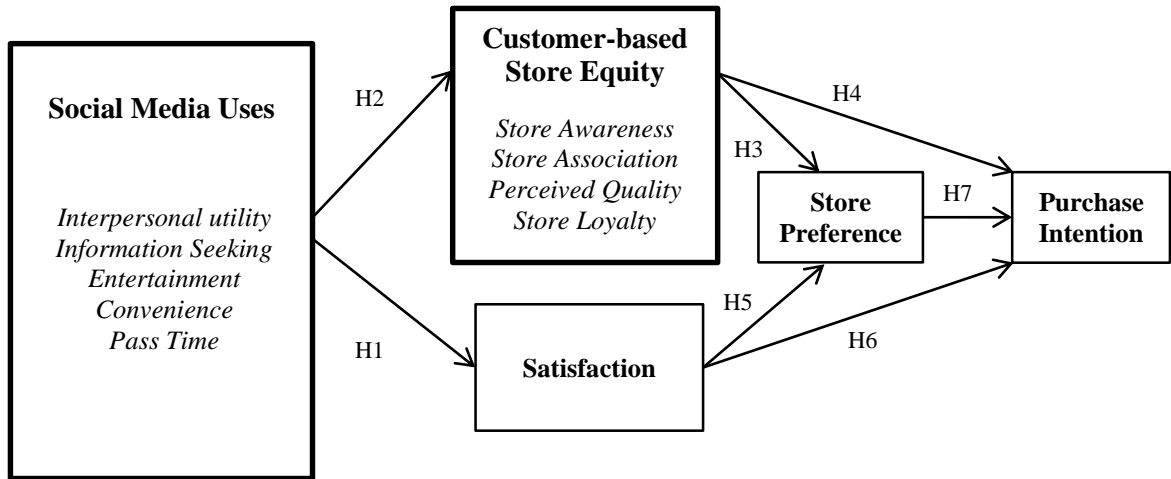


Figure 3.3: Research Model

## Research Hypotheses

Consequently, from this model and the review of literature the following hypotheses have been developed:

H1: Social media use of a boutique's social media will have a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction.

H2: Social media use of a boutique's social media will have a significant positive effect on customer-based store equity.

H3: Customer-based store equity will have a significant positive effect on customer's store preference.

H4: Customer-based store equity will have a significant positive effect on purchase intention.

H5: Customers' satisfaction will have a significant positive effect on store preference.

H6: Customers' satisfaction will have a significant positive effect on purchase intention.

H7: Customers' store preference will have a significant positive effect on their purchase intention.

### **Operational Definitions**

1. **Social media uses** – For the purpose of this study social media use refers to use of Athens fashion boutiques' social media to fulfill motivators following the factors of interpersonal utility, information seeking, entertainment, convenience, and pass time
  - a. **Interpersonal utility** – use of Athens fashion boutiques' social media to meet the need of inclusion, affection, expression, and social interaction
  - b. **Information seeking** – use of Athens fashion boutiques' social media as a tool to learn about people, places, and things
  - c. **Entertainment** – use of Athens fashion boutiques' social media as a form of amusement and enjoyment
  - d. **Convenience** – use of Athens fashion boutiques' social media as easy and cheap access to information or other users
  - e. **Pass time** – use of Athens fashion boutiques' social media when there is nothing to do, to occupy idle time, and to relieve boredom



6. **Customer-based store equity** – For the purpose of this study, customer-based store equity will indicate store awareness, store association, perceived store quality, and store loyalty from the customer
7. **Satisfaction** – For the purpose of this study, satisfaction will indicate the consumer's perceived level of gratification with the boutiques' social media
8. **Store preference** – For the purpose of this study store preference indicates the consumer's primary choice of store over others
9. **Purchase intention** – For the purpose of this study purchase intention is the consumer's likelihood of making a purchase from the boutique

### **Qualitative + Quantitative: Convergent Parallel**

The framework for mixed methods research brings together strands of qualitative and quantitative data to generate findings which would not be known with only one type of data. This provides a greater validity between the corroborated data (Bryman, 2006). Specifically, this study will follow a convergent parallel design. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), a convergent parallel approach involves collecting both qualitative and quantitative data at the same time for a complete understanding of a phenomenon by drawing comparisons between the data. In convergent parallel design, the qualitative and quantitative data are “concurrent but separate, one does not depend on the results of the other, and they are treated with equal importance” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 78). The data are then merged to identify any overlaps or deviations as well as complementary or contradictory findings between the two datasets (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011;

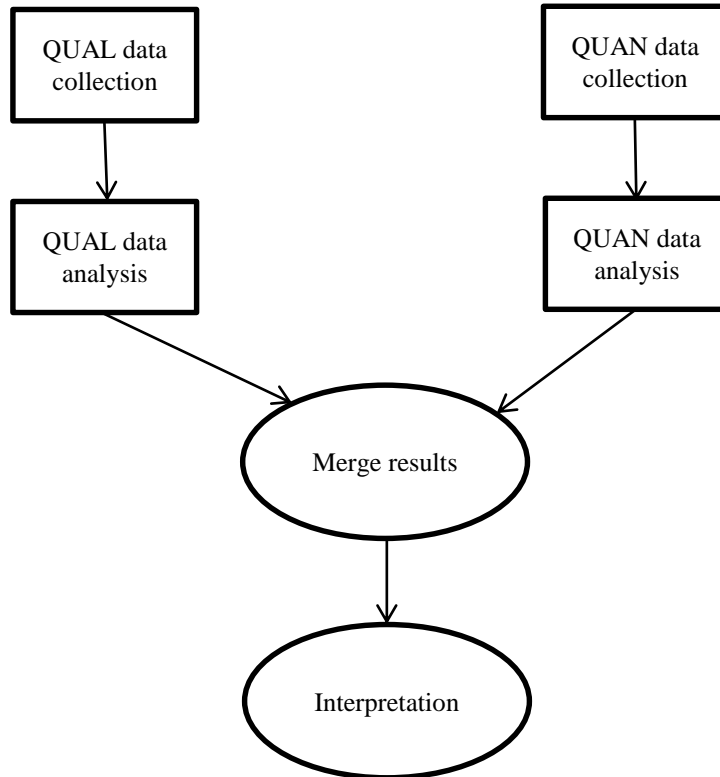
Sauro, 2015). Because of this it is important to design a convergent parallel study to focus on the same concepts as this ensures inferences can be made during data analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). It is this guidance which has led the current study to be framed within the Uses and Gratification theory from the perspective of Athens fashion boutiques and their customers.

Snelson (2016) conducted a review of the literature about social media research which revealed many studies' use of convergent parallel design when using mixed methods. From 2007 to 2013, 55 research articles were identified that had used mixed methods in social media research (Snelson, 2016). Of this subset, 23 either implicitly or explicitly used a convergent parallel design. These studies often drew on a strand of research collected from either social media content or directly from research participants and/or a combination of both (Snelson, 2016). The current research will follow the format of these previous studies while building on the existing literature by examining qualitative data from Athens fashion boutiques and quantitative data from the customers using the social media. Figure 3.4 below is a procedural diagram for how convergent parallel research is conducted.

### **Merged Research Question**

From this and the review of literature the following research question has been developed:

MRQ: To what extent do the qualitative interview results from Athens fashion boutiques' use of social media synthesize with the results of the quantitative survey of the boutiques' customers' use of the social media and responses?



*Figure 3.4 Convergent Parallel Research, adapted from Creswell & Plano Clark (2011)*

## **CHAPTER IV: METHODOLOGY**

This chapter will discuss the pre-test which identify Athens fashion boutiques for use in this study, the qualitative interviews with these boutiques, and the quantitative survey of the boutiques' customers along with data collection and analysis methods.

### **Pre-Test: Identifying Athens fashion boutiques**

To identify fashion boutiques in the Athens area which are well followed on social media platforms by the target demographic, which was millennial female college students in Athens, GA, a small pre-test was conducted. Fifty-one students enrolled in undergraduate courses at University of Georgia during fall 2016 were asked to identify the top two Athens fashion boutiques they follow on social media platforms. They were instructed to consider only local Athens businesses that have a social media presence which they follow. The responses were compiled to generate a consensus of the top three most frequently identified Athens fashion boutiques. Some respondents indicated they followed no Athens fashion boutiques, others indicated only one boutique, and the remainder identified two Athens fashion boutiques. There were 18 unique responses listed with three non-boutique responses, five responses of no boutiques followed, and four non-local boutiques. The three non-boutique responses and four boutiques which are not operated by a

local entrepreneur in Athens were dropped from the responses. From there the most frequent responses were recorded for the 13 remaining fashion boutiques. See

Table 4.1 below:

*Table 4.1  
Pre-Test: Athens Fashion Boutiques Followed on Social Media*

Boutique	Response	Type of boutique
Cheeky Peach	19	womens fashion, accessories, apparel, shoes, gifts
Dynamite	8	vintage and current fashion, clothing, accessories, shoes, gifts, homegoods
Community	6	womens fashion, accessories, gifts, vintage, repurposed, new apparel
Heery's	6	womens fashion apparel, accessories, shoes
Entourage	6	womens fashion, accessories, gifts
Indigo Child	5	womens fashion apparel, accessories, shoes
Red Dress	5	womens fashion apparel, accessories, shoes
Fringe	5	womens fashion apparel, accessories, shoes
Sonia Says	3	Womens high end fashion, accessories, gifts
Atomic	3	vintage specialty, apparel, home goods, accessories, gifts
Epiphany	3	womens fashion, apparel, accessories, gifts
Empire South	3	apparel, accessories, gifts
Agora	2	high end vintage, apparel, shoes, accessories, home goods, gifts

## **Qualitative Study: Interview with Athens Fashion Boutiques**

### **Instrument and Development**

This study used semi-structured interviews to gather data from Athens fashion boutiques' social media managers. The interview script (Appendix B), created from the U&G theory and in line with the research objectives, began with a consent statement followed by eight guiding questions and several possible probes. For this study, the qualitative research questions were: RQ1 To explore how Athens fashion boutiques are using social media in their small businesses and RQ2 To

discover what metrics the Athens fashion boutiques utilize to gauge customer responses from their social media activity. Questions like “Tell me about your experience using social media for the boutique.” and following probe questions like “What would you say is the main purpose for the boutique to use social media?” were aimed to answer RQ1. Questions like “How have you experienced social media’s impact at the boutique?” and following up probe questions like, “Tell me about the measures you use to gauge customer responses to the boutiques’ social media activities.” were aimed to answer RQ2. In qualitative research, following up probing questions are used to elicit more in-depth and thoughtful response of the participants.

This study was focused on the social media presence of Athens fashion boutiques’, thus, it was important to establish that the interviewee holds a position of authority within the boutique and is in fact responsible for a significant amount of the boutique’s social media activity. Screening questions were “What is your position at the boutique?” and following probe “Are you primarily responsible for the social media activity of this boutique?”, to ensure that the participant was one of authority for the social media of the boutique. Going further, questions like, “How do you manage the content and frequency of your boutique’s social media pages?” explored the interviewee’s experience using social media for the fashion boutique, interacting with followers through social media, management of social media content and frequency, and the impact social media has had at the boutique through metrics of customer responses. In general, the interviews followed the structure and topics brought up by the interviewee, but the guiding questions were in place to

gauge the social media use of the boutique and outcomes which they have experienced. From this initial phase of data collection, it was possible to see themes that strongly relate to the quantitative variables of the broader study. By understanding each interviewee's particular experience with social media, certain conclusions were made as to the influence social media activities have had to promote Athens fashion boutiques and the subsequent benefits and drawbacks.

### **Data Collection**

After approval by the university's Institutional Review Board, a recruitment email was sent to the top five Athens fashion boutiques identified from the pre-test. As the pre-test revealed three boutiques, equally identified as the third most common Athens fashion boutique followed, the top five were recruited to participate in this interview. The recruitment email indicated the necessity of interviewing a primary social media contributor for the fashion boutique. A two-week time frame during February 2017 was set aside to recruit and conduct the interview meetings. During this time one reminder email was sent to the Athens fashion boutiques. Four of the five boutiques responded with interest in participating in the study.

For the interviews, each of the boutiques provided a participant who was responsible for a significant portion of the social media activities. One of the boutiques allowed us to interview two of their employees who handled social media activities. The positions of each participant were two store owners, one social media director, one creative director and a retail specialist. It was important that these

interviewees were a main contributor to the boutiques' social media. Interviewees gave a full recounted experience of using social media for their fashion boutique and the outcomes they perceive from these activities. Constant Contact (2016) reported that only 3% of small businesses outsource their social media marketing while most is handled in house. This provides justification that the participants be involved in a significant portion of the fashion boutique's social media activities.

Interviews were scheduled with each boutique at a time and location convenient for the participant. The interviews took place at the following locations: boutique's corporate office, quiet outdoor park, private room at a coffee shop, and on location at the boutique. It was essential that the site of research be one that is private, quiet, and uninterrupted for the duration of the interview but also convenient for the participant. Interviews were schedule in two hour increments with the interviews ranging from 21 to 45 minutes. The 45-minute interview was with Clique boutique and two interview participants, thus accounting for the extended length.

At the start of the interview session each participant was given informed consent and asked to sign and retain a copy of the consent document. In this consent the participant agreed to have their interview audio recorded. The researcher also provided a brief overview of the purpose of study to the participant. At the beginning of each recording the interviewee was asked to give their verbal consent. The interview followed the guide provided in the Appendix B, yet each followed the conversation flow of the participant and unique probes were used based on the pace and nature of the interview.



## **Data Analysis**

After all of the data were collected the audio recordings were downloaded and transcribed using oTranscribe into Microsoft Word documents with help of an undergraduate research assistant. Following the IRB's requirements all names of boutiques and participants were changed to pseudonyms and coded to ensure anonymity. The audio recordings were listened to following along with the transcription document and analyzed with a constant common theme approach. Common themes were denoted using a coded color for each particular theme. As these themes began to emerge, they were organized in a categorical manner. Each individual colored theme was organized and investigated for subthemes within each theme category. The phenomenological approach of evaluating participants' experience using social media for the fashion boutique drove the data analysis process and shed light on answering the research questions of this study. The researcher was especially attuned to identifying any emerging themes which were consistent with the quantitative variables of the broader study and for synthesizing the qualitative and quantitative data in the merged data analysis.

To ensure validity in this study the validation strategies of data triangulation, low inference descriptors, and member check were utilized. Data triangulation was achieved by comparing the qualitative and quantitative streams of data. Low inference descriptors used lengthy, direct quotes without paraphrasing to retain the data in context. This enabled the researcher to evaluate the phenomenon of social media use by small businesses with rich information from each participant. This validated the emerging themes and avoided any internal "cherry-picking" of quotes

or phrases to fit the themes. Member check allows the participants in the study to review the common themes and externally confirm the data analysis process. This allows the interviewee an opportunity to review their responses organized into common themes and confirm that these themes represent their statements accurately.

### **Quantitative Study: Survey**

#### **Instrument Development**

The quantitative study in this convergent parallel mixed methods approach investigated the effect of social media use of a boutique's social media on factors that influence purchase intention from that store. There were three variables examined which were hypothesized to influence purchase intention including satisfaction, customer-based store equity, and store preference. To ensure respondents completed the survey considering only one Athens fashion boutique, they were given this prompt at the beginning of the survey, "Which one of these Athens fashion boutiques stands out to you on social media?". The boutiques listed were the four which participated in the qualitative study. If the respondents chose "I do not follow any of the boutiques listed," they were sent to the end of the survey. All other respondents were asked to consider the boutique they chose as they proceeded through the survey.

Prompting the respondents in such a way was consistent with prior research which posits that when measuring customer-specific perceptions it is necessary to use a named store and not a fictitious prompt, as store awareness and store

association (key dimensions of equity) would break down in the presence of a fictitious stimuli (Buil et al., 2014; Dabija, Pop, & Szentesi, 2014; Hartman & Spiro, 2005). Respondents were also asked to list the top three social media platforms they access and to provide selected demographic information. All constructs in this instrument were drawn from previous research and are adapted to appropriately fit the scope of this study and can be found in the Appendix (Arnett et al., 2003; Buil et al., 2014; Erdem et al., 2006; Hartman & Spiro, 2005; Hsu et al., 2015; Ko et al., 2005; Lu et al., 2010; Papcharissi & Mendelson, 2011; Yoo et al., 2000)

Social media use was measured with the factors of information seeking, interpersonal utility, entertainment, pass time, and convenience as established by Papcharissi and Rubin (2000). Originally these factors were employed in regards to use of the Internet but have been applied to social media usage on platforms such as Facebook in more recent studies (Papcharissi & Mendelson, 2011). In the original research, motives for using the Internet loaded onto five factors (information seeking, interpersonal utility, entertainment, pass time, and convenience) which have since been used subsequently in studies investigating Internet and social media usage and behavioral outcomes (Lu et al., 2009; Papcharissi & Mendelson, 2011; Smock et al., 2011). Overall, the construct of social media use is measured with 27 items, 26 of which were appropriate for this study. The factor of information seeking was measured with five items, the factor of interpersonal utility was measured with 12 items, the factor of entertainment was measured with three items, the factor of pass time was measured with three items, and the factor of convenience was measured with three of its original four items (Papacharissi &

Rubin, 2000; Lu et al., 2009). One item of convenience, “I use the Internet because people don’t have to be there to receive email,” was deemed not appropriate within the scope of social media use and was removed from the overall items measuring this construct. All of the items were measured on a five-point Likert type scale (1=strongly disagree; 7=strongly agree).

Satisfaction was examined in this study, drawing on prior research which has investigated social media usage and satisfaction. Thus the items chosen for the construct were adapted in semantics from other studies which have used this variable. Three items were adapted from previous research to measure satisfaction with the boutiques’ social media page (Hsu et al., 2015; Ko et al., 2005; Lu et al., 2010). These three statements were measured on a five-point Likert type scale (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree).

Customer-based store equity was adapted from previous studies which have investigated the constructs of both brand equity and store equity. Hartman and Spiro (2005) suggest several ways to measure customer-based store equity depending on the nature of the research study. The most appropriate measurement is adapted from Papu and Quester (2006) and Sharma (2016) who considered store awareness, store association, perceived store quality, and store loyalty to capture customer-based store equity. These factors, which make up the customer-based store equity construct, were measured with 13 items total, three each measuring store awareness, perceived store quality, and store loyalty and four measuring store association (Papu & Quester, 2006; Sharma, 2016). All items were measured on a 5-point Likert type scale (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree). As the current

research draws on the concept of brand equity translated to accommodate for customer-based store equity, the construct of store preference was adapted from the original variable of brand preference. Store preference was measured with three items on a 5-point Likert type scale (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree) (Buil et al., 2014; Sirgy et al., 1997).

Prior research which has examined the variables of equity whether that be brand equity or store equity have used similar dependent variable constructs often referred to as purchase intention or shopping intention. The items within both purchase intention and shopping intention are similar and thus were combined as appropriate for this study. Purchase intention as it is operationalized for the current research was measured with five items on a 5-point Likert type scale (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree) (Arnett et al., 2003; Buil et al., 2014; Erdem et al., 2006). General demographic information, including age, level of education, ethnicity, how often social media sites are accessed, and the technology used to access social media sites was also included in the survey. The scales adapted from previous research can be found in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2  
Survey Instrument Items and References

Dimensions & Reliability from past studies ( $\alpha$ )	Construct	Reference
<b>SOCIAL MEDIA USE: <i>I use the boutique's social media pages...</i></b>		
Information seeking (.87)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• because it is a new way to do research (IS1)</li> <li>• because it is easier (IS2)</li> <li>• to get information for free (IS3)</li> <li>• to look for information (IS4)</li> <li>• to see what is out there (IS5)</li> </ul>	(Luo et al., 2011; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Smock et al., 2011)
Interpersonal utility (.93)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to help others (IU1)</li> <li>• to participate in discussions (IU2)</li> <li>• to show others encouragement (IU3)</li> <li>• to belong to a group (IU4)</li> <li>• because I enjoy answering questions (IU5)</li> <li>• to express myself freely (IU6)</li> <li>• to give my input (IU7)</li> <li>• to get more points of view (IU8)</li> <li>• to tell others what to do (IU9)</li> <li>• because I wonder what other people said (IU10)</li> <li>• to meet new people (IU11)</li> <li>• because I want someone to do something for me (IU12)</li> </ul>	
Entertainment (.85)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• because it is entertaining (E1)</li> <li>• because I just like to use it (E2)</li> <li>• because it is enjoyable (E3)</li> </ul>	
Pass time (.85)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• because it passes time when bored (PT1)</li> <li>• when I have nothing better to do (PT2)</li> <li>• to occupy my time (PT3)</li> </ul>	
Convenience (.78)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to communicate with friends, family (C1)</li> <li>• because it is cheaper (C2)</li> <li>• because it is easier (C3)</li> </ul>	
<b>SATISFACTION</b>		
(.87)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I find this boutique's social media pages easy to use (SAT1)</li> <li>• I am satisfied with the functionality of this boutique's social media pages (SAT2)</li> <li>• Overall, I am satisfied with my experience using this boutique's social media pages (SAT3)</li> </ul>	(Hsu et al., 2015; Ko et al., 2005; Lu et al., 2010)
<b>STORE EQUITY</b>		
Store awareness (.74)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This boutique is very well known to me (AW1)</li> <li>• This boutique is not known to me (<i>R</i>) (AW2)*</li> <li>• I am aware of this boutique (AW3)</li> </ul>	(Papu & Quester, 2006; Sharma, 2016)
Store association (.87)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I can quickly recall the symbol or logo of this boutique (AS1)</li> <li>• This boutique is associated with sophistication (AS2)</li> <li>• I have a clear impression of the type of people who shop at this boutique (AS3)</li> <li>• Some characteristics of this boutique come to my mind quickly (AS4)</li> </ul>	

Perceived store quality (.87)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This boutique is a store characterized by its continuous innovation (SQ1)</li> <li>• This boutique appears to be of very poor quality (R) (SQ2)*</li> <li>• This boutique is of high quality (SQ3)</li> </ul>	
Store loyalty (.83)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I will suggest this boutique to other consumers (SL1)</li> <li>• I will not buy from other stores if I can find what I'm looking for at this boutique (SL2)</li> <li>• This boutique would be my first choice (SL3)</li> </ul>	
<b>STORE PREFERENCE</b>		
(.93)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I like this boutique better than other boutiques. (SP1)</li> <li>• I would shop at this boutique more than other boutiques. (SP2)</li> <li>• For boutiques, this one is my preferred store. (SP3)</li> </ul>	(Buil et al., 2014; Sirgy et al., 1997)
<b>PURCHASE INTENTION</b>		
(.92)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am very likely to purchase merchandise from this boutique in the future. (PI1)</li> <li>• I would be willing to buy gifts from this boutique. (PI2)</li> <li>• I would buy from this boutique. (PI3)</li> <li>• I would seriously consider buying from this boutique. (PI4)</li> <li>• It is very likely that I would buy from this boutique. (PI5)</li> </ul>	(Arnett et al., 2003; Buil et al., 2014; Erdem et al., 2006)
* (R) indicates the item was reverse coded to ensure consistency within the scale		

## Data Collection

After approval by the university's IRB, the data for the quantitative study were collected. The population for this research included millennial females who are customers or followers of the Athens fashion boutiques identified in the qualitative study. As this study is focused solely on Athens area fashion boutiques, it was appropriate to use a sample of UGA female college students who are customers and followers of these boutiques through the recruitment of direct email. The sample was recruited during spring 2017. A list of all female students enrolled at UGA was requested from the registrar. The registrar does not categorize based on gender; thus, the full email list of all students enrolled at UGA was provided. The first survey question prompted respondents to choose their gender. Any respondents who chose male or prefer not to answer were sent to the end of the

survey. Participants in this research were recruited by a direct email to complete an online survey and were offered an incentive to be entered to win a small gift that included “swag” merchandise from the four participating boutiques through a random drawing. The recruitment emails were sent in batches over four days and the survey remained open for two weeks. Data were collected using an online structured questionnaire created through Qualtrics. Dillman (2014) supports the use of online surveys as a cost and time efficient tool which helps lessen the frequency of coding errors in importing data. The survey drew on the items mentioned above in the section of instrument development. The survey items for this study can be found in the Appendix C.

### **Data Analysis**

Upon collection of the data it was first analyzed using SPSS software. Demographics, reliability using Cronbach’s alpha, and correlation analysis were completed. Confirmatory factor analysis using IBM’s AMOS statistical software was carried out on the construct of social media use to confirm the emergence of five unique factors of information seeking, interpersonal utility, entertainment, convenience, and pass time as past research has found these to be significant dimensions of this constructs. Confirmatory factor analysis was also conducted on the construct of customer-based store equity seeking the potential emergence of up to four dimensions including store awareness, store association, perceived store quality, and store loyalty. Any items or dimension of the overall construct shown to have a low factor loading of below 0.40 were eliminated from further analysis.



Regression analysis carried out in SPSS was used to test the research hypotheses of this study.

### **Merged Data Analysis**

As these studies were carried out following the convergent parallel research design, it was appropriate to examine the data both individually for significant findings as described above and also as merged data to produce a synthesized view of the information collected. A general analysis comparing the entire dataset of qualitative findings to the whole dataset of quantitative findings was presented. Any converging or diverging themes were noted in addition to any alternative characteristics or overlapping data. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) suggest the use of a side-by-side or joint comparison matrix to present the analyzed findings. This was an opportunity to merge and analyze the data from the qualitative and quantitative streams following the convergent parallel design.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **RESULTS**

This chapter is a presentation of the study results including theme interpretations of the qualitative interviews, testing of research hypotheses, and convergent parallel results.

#### **Theme Interpretation**

The study was focused on investigating the phenomenon of social media use in Athens fashion boutiques and the metrics used to measure customer responses to the social media activity. Emergent themes shed light on how and why Athens fashion boutiques are using social media in their small business (RQ1) and the metrics of success these boutiques use to gauge customer response (RQ2). Drawing on the expertise and experience of prominent role players in the Athens fashion boutiques through the interview process, data were generated which led to three theme categories which were (a) “utilizing social media”; (b) “process and pressure”; and (c) “measures of success”. Within each theme category were sub-themes, so in “utilizing social media the sub-themes were (a) selling a lifestyle, (b) promotion, and (c) customer relationships. For “process and pressure” the sub-themes were (a) process, (b) time, and (c) change. Finally, for “measure of success” the sub-themes were (a) tangibles and (b) intangibles. all emerged as prominent themes with several subthemes under each.

Utilizing social media, process and pressure, and measures of success all emerged as prominent themes with several subthemes under each. Below is a discussion of these overarching themes. Table 5.1 shows a demographic profile of the individuals interviewed for this portion of the study.

*Table 5.1  
Demographic Characteristics of Interviewees*

Name*	Boutique*	Current Position	Years Worked at Boutique	Boutique Description
Kate	Clique	Social Media Coordinator	2	Women's fashion, accessories, gifts
Sally	Clique	Creative Director	2	Women's fashion, accessories, gifts
Malli	Sunshine	Owner	7	Women's fashion, accessories, gifts, vintage, repurposed, new apparel
Sloan	Crackle	Retail Specialist	4	Vintage and current fashion, clothing, accessories, shoes, gifts, home goods
Kourtney	Butterscotch	Owner, buyer, creative director	7	Women's fashion, accessories, apparel, shoes, gifts

\*All names have been changed to protect privacy

## **Utilizing social media**

***Selling a Lifestyle.*** As the researcher explored how these Athens fashion boutiques use social media, several themes emerged. One prominent thread throughout was the identification that while selling to their customers is a top priority there is a deeper level to the effort expended on social media. The general consensus was that social media can be harnessed as a tool for measurable outcomes like driving foot traffic and moving inventory. Ultimately these are the goals, but the path from social media use to selling a product is less direct than one might think. Participants all mentioned the motivation of conveying a lifestyle.

There was a common response that social media offers an empowering opportunity for small businesses to sell not just their product but to evoke a sense of fun, highlight what is cool, and be relatable, with one participant saying, “we’ll get kind of goofy.”

Sally is the creative director for Clique boutique which operates out of Athens, GA. She started as the social media manager and now coordinates their entire creative team. Sally made an interesting observation as to how social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram were originally being used by Clique as a “quite literal flyer” with everything having a price on it and all merchandise items identified as for sale. She sees now that the boutique has taken a shift away from this explicit type of selling to create a more relatable conversation with their customers which evokes a connection to the Clique lifestyle. Approaching the utilization of social media in this way has even changed the directions of their creative meetings and the content the team decides to use across their social media platforms.

**Sally:** But I think that so many people are used to be marketed to 24/7, we wanted to take our platform in a different direction, and I think Kate [Sally’s colleague who also participated in the interview] has had a really good hand in doing that, in making us feel more like a brand, in such that we’re talking to people and selling more of a lifestyle versus just a product. And that is also reflected in the type of imagery creative that we’re beginning to use.

Interestingly while the approach to how and why these boutiques are using social media may not be explicitly for sales dollars each boutique did mention the importance of selling. Kourtney opened her boutique, Butterscotch, in downtown Athens in 2010 and has seen great success even in the face of a changing retail landscape in the downtown area. She sees the purpose of using social media as

“multifaceted.” Kourtney has thought through the process of how social media has the power to brand a lifestyle for her boutique and ultimately how social media becomes a way to answer questions about their customer. She notes that even if a customer does not spend money she hopes the message of the Butterscotch lifestyle has enticed the customer so they will come back.

**Kourtney:** So, the main purpose is to sell, right? So, we're in business to sell clothing, jewelry, home goods, all that good stuff. But there's an underlying current of lifestyle, of culture, of who we are, and what we do. And our goal is to not only sell clothing, but to sell it in a way that we're also translating who our girl is, who our customer is, who is shopping here, what are they doing? And for me, that's part of this whole process, is understanding who that person is and what they do, and if we can connect them to the way we do that, is by putting it out there on social media as branding, essentially. That's how we connect all the pieces of the puzzle. So yeah, first and foremost, do we want to sell? Heck yeah.” – Kourtney

**Promotion.** Another subtheme in the utilization of social media was the prevalence of promotion that social media affords these small businesses. Several of these businesses work on a limited budget to staff a social media team, while one of the boutique’s social media is handled solely by the owner, and another boutique does not have Wi-Fi capabilities in their store. Yet they have all successfully implemented social media to promote their business. There was generally an aversion to “paying for clicks” or “paying for followers” through the paid advertising options offered on social media platforms. While some of these boutiques did allocate a budget for paid advertising many were proud of their organic following built through true promotion of the boutique.

Malli owns and operates Sunshine boutique which specializes in women’s new and vintage apparel and also offers services such as alterations and sewing classes. She viewed social media as “empowering” as a small business owner who

had limited financial resources especially when she opened her boutique in 2010. She uses social media to promote the extra services offered at the boutique, the sustainable aspects of the products she sells, and incorporates an educational aspect of sustainable fashion in her posts. Malli noted that it is less about “if I post this now then we'll sell it today,” but a more promotional goal of highlighting special events at the store and exciting customers by appealing to their interest.

**Malli:** I've always used social media as the primary way of advertising for my business. When we first opened the store in 2010, we were in an upstairs location where we had very little visibility and no store front really. And so, social media was a really great tool to get images out there of our product but also of our store space, since, people couldn't just see it walking by. I didn't have an advertising budget to start with and social media was free just required a lot of work, and so we just went that route and that has been the case ever since really.” – Malli

Sloan, an employee at Crackle boutique, originally volunteered to be the boutique's social media intern after purchasing a necklace from Crackle and realizing they had no Instagram she could tag after making her purchase. Now a full-time employee she helped grow the Instagram following to 5,300 followers. Crackle uses social media to promote special events at their boutique and highlight their interesting one-of-a-kind pieces. They recently closed down the store for three days to repaint, fixture, and restock. Sloan and her fellow employees heavily promoted the reopening of Crackle to their Instagram followers and she describes the reopen as:

**Sloan:** We do this annual thing, we close for 3 days, and we completely restock the entire store with new stuff. We've done that every year, and I worked that event for the past 3 years, and this year was the craziest, like, the craziest time to work it, because, we have all of these followers on Instagram now, and we made it kind of like a stay tuned, we'll be open soon, and we had people waiting outside of the door the day that we said we were going to open. And, it's just to see new clothes!

***Customer Relationships.*** Continuing to explore the theme of utilization a subtheme of customer relationship emerged and was mentioned as a top priority by all interviewees. Many equated social media as a tool used to create a friendship with their customers and to connect their customer to a feeling or “all the feels” as Kate of Clique boutique put it. The boutique representatives see social media as a way to be accessible to their customers. This is an opportunity to speak directly with their customers and have their customers talk back. In creating this customer relationship aspect, boutiques are hoping to tap into the awareness of their store in the minds of their customers through the established relationship.

Sloan from Crackle boutique sees building a customer relationship and filling the boutique’s Instagram feed with “shout outs” to and from their customers as an important part of the equity built between boutique and patron. She credits herself and her fellow employees for creating a personable and genuine conversation with their customers through the Crackle social media presence on Instagram. By facilitating this relationship with their customers, Crackle hopes their current customers will spread the word about their love for the boutique and encourage others to shop the store and participate in the Crackle community.

**Sloan:** Create a community that loves Crackle. So we repost people's pictures with them wearing something from our store. That makes people feel like they're wanted there, but it's not disingenuous on our end at all. We want our customers to know that we really, really like them, and they're super awesome. And so, we'll repost stuff that people put up. They're giving us love, we'll give them love back. We'll comment on everything that people put up. Our Instagram makes it feel very personable.

In addition to creating a customer relationship that results in a back and forth conversation there is the opportunity to use that conversation to understand

the customer better. As Kourtney notes she wants to know the “girl” who shops at Butterscotch, understand that customer’s behaviors, and meet her shopping needs. Because of this Butterscotch like Crackle strives to create a genuine relationship with their customers through their social media presence. They feature personalized live styling sessions on Facebook and Instagram where Kourtney, the boutique owner, is able to hear directly from her customers what colors, sizes, and styles they might want. In real time she can get customer feedback through this relationship on social media.

**Kourtney:** I think of my customer, she's savvy, she's smart, she's no nonsense, she's no BS and I think if she sees BS, she's going to walk away. And that's why she's my customer and that's why she's my VIP and that's why she shops with me every week. So, she's important to me and I want to be totally up front and clear with her and have it be very, natural and organic and created from this place.

### **Process and Pressure**

**Process:** Through this analysis another major theme of process and pressure emerged with a significant subtheme of the process employed by the boutiques to execute their social media strategy. All of the interviewees spent a significant amount of time recounting how they manage their social media presence and the process this takes. The boutiques all have a unique approach, but it is clear that each maintains their own system whether that is tightly structured, semi-structured, or free-form. Clique and Butterscotch boutiques both take a structured approach where they meet with other creative team members to determine the agreed-upon theme and a schedule for their social media content. In contrast Sunshine and



Crackle have goals in mind for how frequently to post but do not follow a regimented plan.

Kate recalls how she, as the social media manager of Clique, meets with Sally, their creative director, to plan for their social media strategy. They coordinate with the Clique photographers and stylists to plan photo shoots. These photos are then edited and enhanced with the addition of specific copy from their advertising team. It is then that these images are ready to be featured on Clique's social media platforms. Kate sees herself as the end of the funnel that receives the finalized content from the Clique creative team and disseminates it to their customer. While this is planned, Kate takes the time to also edit and choose the images and content relevant for each social media platform to reach their different audiences.

**Kate:** Each platform has its own schedule of specific time slots that a post is required to go up. They're all pretty similar, but they may vary a little bit by an hour or couple of hours, something like that. I pre-schedule everything to go up and every day is pretty much the same time slots, and, we just try to keep a good variation of what kind of post in terms of the graphics, and kind of come up with a plan to target each audience, 'cause, each platform has a different audience, and so we try to target it to what they seem to respond best to." – Kate

Malli from Sunshine takes a different approach to the social media process. As the owner of the store who is primarily responsible for the social media activity and the other tasks of running the boutique, she posts on social media with little consistency. As a specialty boutique which hosts multiple vendors, Malli's strategy is to make sure each vendor gets equal attention on the Sunshine social media. With a personal goal of three posts a day, this often falls to the bottom of the to-do list. Malli feels the pressure to post on Instagram but finds that it may get overlooked for several days.

**Malli:** It's not very structured at this point. I think a lot of it is spur of the moment and like, oh what new great item did we get in that we could post on Instagram, today. I try to definitely think about w- 'cause we sell handmade items from about 40 different vendors, so I try to, regularly post, some of the items of all of them so it's not just one person all the time that gets the exposure and I try to keep that in mind but I don't have a regular schedule. I have a, a kind of a goal of maybe three posts a day but sometimes I get overwhelmed with other things and then I don't post at all for a day or two, and then I'll just try to be ok with that.

**Time.** Like the pressure Malli feels to keep to her schedule in the social media process, other boutique interviewees indicated the effort of time that bears on their social media activities. This time is allocated from the planning process and dictated by the intention to post and disseminate their social media messages to their customers. For Crackle, social media posting is something allocated to the daily tasks of the sales associates. In the case of Sunshine, Malli as noted above feels the pressure to generate interesting and new content which leads to a feeling of being “worn out.” Sloan from Crackle was the only boutique representative interviewed who did not feel there was a significant effort of time allocated for the social media activities of her boutique.

Both Sally and Kate from Clique noted the amount of time required to create compelling social media content which is also in line with the intense process the boutique undertakes to plan their social media. Both agreed that several times they have tried approaches on social media that required significant amounts of time with very little return. One example was uploading to Facebook all new arrivals in individual images with individual product descriptions that was “time consuming” and “not sustainable.” Sally also notes the amount of time and effort expended on social media activities that others do not understand:

**Sally:** There's a lot that happens behind the scenes. I remember when I first started working here my friends would ask me, "oh so you are doing social media for Clique, that's great, but what do you do the rest of the day?" I think there's a big misconception of how much time and energy, blood sweat and tears, is put into orchestrating the structure of it.

Regarding the amount of time needed to execute the social media strategy at

Butterscotch, Kourtney articulated the number of employees and time each puts in to managing the social media messaging. Kourtney mentioned that managing the frequency of Butterscotch's social media posting was the "bane of my day." She is often overwhelmed by the amount of research that can be spent to plan for the social media posting and the time this requires. When asked specifically about the time allocated for managing social media Kourtney responded:

**Kourtney:** I have a full time manager, full time salaried employee, who manages our marketing messages. Then we have a team of 5 people who are part time employees so 5 people who probably work anywhere from 12 to 18 hours a week, working on it.

**Change.** Taken together with the subthemes of process and time required for managing social media, there was a subtheme of change. There is a changing nature to these social media platforms which adds a level of pressure to the process. Each respondent mentioned how they are affected by the changes frequently made to the search algorithms of each platform. When Facebook recently changed their algorithm Malli's 2,500 followers were no longer able to see her posts unless she paid Facebook for specific advertising. She was unwilling to pay for this advertising and wanted to rely on the organic nature of building followers so began focusing more attention to the Sunshine Instagram presence. Not only are their changes from the social media platforms but the customer tastes and interests change. Customers

of these boutiques often change their preferred social media platform and can easily be enticed by other more interesting content from a competing boutique.

While Sally and Kate allocated much time to the planning process of utilizing social media to sell their merchandise, promote their store, and connect with their customers, they understand the need to be flexible. There is only so much you can plan for in their opinion, and you have to be willing to change your approach if you realize it is not working or your customer has moved on to something else. Clique feels if the goal is to build a customer relationship you might have to go where your customer is.

**Kate:** It's a general openness to changes because it is an ever changing I mean, literally every week Facebook will change their algorithm and I'm like, oh my god now I have to learn how to get around this, and actually reach our people. It's kind of hard to have a plan honestly, because it does change so much and people change so much, and culture changes and what's trendy...by next week, people have already forgotten about it. While we do definitely have a plan and we have a schedule, and we try to make sure that we're on top of things, and ahead of things, it's also hard to do that because you have to be flexible, and realize that something might change, and throw that off.

When considering the time and pressure that arises from this process it can become overwhelming as noted by several of the interviewees. With the changes which are implemented from the social media platforms themselves and the fickle nature of customers, one might assume that the boutiques would be deterred from continuing in their social media process. Kourtney from Butterscotch sees the changing nature of both the platforms and her customers as a challenge that is imperative to address. She sees opting out of social media as an unsuitable option for the current realm of social media for fashion boutiques.

**Kourtney:** I think you have to do it. There is a saying that, 'perception is reality.' If people perceive us to not be posting as much, that our quality goes down, that we're not putting as much on our website, then we're perceived to be not as busy, not as important, not as new and fresh, and you have to be hitting the refresh button every day. So I think you've got to do it. You just have to. So important.

## **Measures of Success**

**Tangibles.** Each boutique analyzes their success and failures on social media differently with some focusing on tangible quantifiable data and others using intangible results to determine their success. Considering the main theme - measures of success - it is important to assess the tangible measures many of these boutiques use. Most of the boutiques consult the built-in analytics of platforms such as Facebook and Instagram as well as Google Analytics. From this they can see trends in what social media content was a success by reviewing click-throughs, likes, comments, and trending items.

All of the boutiques use these analytics to inform their decision making for future social media content except Malli from Sunshine. She noted that she usually posts what is convenient for her, not what will have the most impact. While she often looks at the analytics for Sunshine it does not change her posting habits. On the other hand, Kate from Clique notes how important social media is for their planning process and ultimate utilization. They closely monitor these analytics as tangible outcomes of success and will make adjustments accordingly.

**Kate:** Twitter has its own built-in analytics and those are really just like the easiest way for me to look at what is working and same for Facebook, it has its own built-in analytics and then we look into Google analytics as well as in our Shopify app kind of where traffic's coming from, and go from there.

Some of the boutiques also see direct tangible success of sales from social media. Butterscotch will often create fun games on social media where customers can screenshot a coupon code and bring it in for a percentage off their purchase. Kourtney sees the direct implications of using social media on sales dollars for Butterscotch. Sloan at Crackle has seen a direct correlation between what is posted on the store's Instagram and sales. Crackle boutique does not have an e-commerce presence nor do they have Wi-Fi capabilities in the store yet they will often sell their unique merchandise through their social media platform leading to a direct tangible measure of success.

**Sloan:** We sell a lot more from the Instagram. I think that might be the reason that my boss hasn't paid to get a website yet, is because we're doing fine with just selling off of the Instagram. The other day, I posted a picture of a mannequin that I did, and I sold the entire mannequin to this woman. She hit me up on Instagram and was like 'Hey I live in Texas, and I want every single piece that you have on that mannequin'. And I was like, that's insane, you know!

**Intangibles:** There are other measures of success which are not as tangible as an analytics report or direct implications from followers, clicks, and likes. Not every social media post is related directly to sales. This is in line with the earlier discussion about the theme of utilization which goes beyond sales to selling more of a lifestyle, promoting the store, and building customer relationships. Many of the boutiques are surprised by their success through nontraditional, intangible metrics. Because social media is a unique platform, the satisfaction of intangible success comes in many different forms. As Malli recalls about a snapshot picture she posted from a special event in Athens which was one of the posts she noticed got the most interest from her followers:

**Malli:** I was probably surprised because I usually expect the good photographs to get a lot of likes, so when we do a model shoot, and I have pictures that I think turned out really well and I put it on there, then I expect that to get a lot more likes than just a snapshot that I took in the store, that I took at an event but it often is actually the opposite.

There is also an essence of empowerment and inner satisfaction that is achieved in the small business owner who participates on social media. By having a connection with their customers and feeling autonomous over their social media content, other intangible successes emerge. Having just returned from Magic (a large apparel trade show in Las Vegas), Kourtney noticed the power of the boutique and felt a sense of personal satisfaction about how many orders she was able to place at Magic. She sees social media as the platform to compete with national brands and reach a wide audience which translates to greater success for her boutique.

**Kourtney:** I think these small boutiques are taking over these trade shows, and you know, taking 12 cases of shoes and competing with a national, that's crazy! So, there's a lot of power and I think that's from social media, that's a byproduct of social media, we've got the power and the agility.

Through the analysis of the four interviews with Athens fashion boutiques, insightful themes emerged as to how the boutiques use social media and the metrics that determine their success. Three overarching themes were utilization of social media, process and pressure, and metrics of success. Each of these had subthemes which gave rise to greater clarity about the major themes. Utilization of social media was supported by the subthemes of selling a lifestyle, promotion, and customer relationships. Process and pressure saw the subthemes of process, time, and change as important aspects of the major theme. Finally, the theme measures of success were analyzed for both tangible and intangible success factors. This analysis

provides proper justification to answer the current research questions of this study which sought to investigate how Athens fashion boutiques were using social media (RQ1) and the metrics of success they used to gauge customer responses (RQ2).

### **Validation Strategies for Qualitative Interviews**

To further establish the external validity of the data analysis conducted on the Athens boutique interviews, member check was utilized. Each respondent was contacted by email and provided with the main themes and subthemes which emerged during data analysis. The themes were accompanied by a synopsis and the supporting low inference descriptors in the form of long, full quotes for their review. Three respondents were able to review the information provided and respond with their reaction (Figure 5.1). Having the respondent examine these themes helps strengthen the findings and provides justification for the data analysis used.



<b>Figure 5.1. Member Check Response</b>
<p>Wow this is interesting, here's my reaction!</p> <p>The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. We need all of these channels in order to get the message across; be it who we are, what we do, what we sell, or our company culture. It's all so important, it's all so exhausting. It's ever changing. But we recognize the important nature of social media and the crucial synergy it creates for our businesses.</p> <p>- Kourtney of Butterscotch</p>
<p>Hi,</p> <p>yes, I think my experience is well represented in the themes.</p> <p>Thanks again for including me!</p> <p>All the best, Malli of Sunshine</p>
<p>Everything looks great! Thanks. -Sloan of Crackle</p>

### **Quantitative Survey Results**

Data for the present research were collected using the online survey tool Qualtrics. Initially there were 2,491 female respondents who consented to take the survey. Based on a UGA female population of 57% of the total student body this constitutes a 12.6% response rate. When prompted with the screening question, “Which one of these Athens fashion boutiques stands out to you on social media?”, 1,111 chose the response, “I do not follow any of the boutiques listed” and were sent to the end of the survey. All remaining responses were examined for 100% completion and response time was noted to ensure an appropriate time spent

during each survey. These responses were then investigated for missing items, straight lining responses, and repeated IP addresses. Any abandoned survey responses with a significant amount of missing items were deleted from further analysis leaving a total of 1,142 usable responses. Demographics, descriptive statistics, along with scale reliabilities and correlation were analyzed. Confirmatory factor analysis and regression analysis were carried out using the research variables to test the hypothesized relationships.

### **Demographics**

The final section of the survey instrument provides a demographic profile of the study's sample. Respondents were asked to indicate their age, education level, ethnicity, frequency accessing social media sites, and the most common technology they use to access social media sites. These items and the responses are found in Table 5.2.

Gender was not included in the demographic questions as it was asked as a screening question at the beginning of the survey. The UGA registrar was unable to provide exclusively female email addresses; thus, all UGA students were recruited for this survey and the demographic question of gender was asked as a screening question following the consent prompt. Any responses of male or prefer not to answer were sent to the end of the survey. Following this, 100% of the respondents in this survey were female. The most common age ranges of respondents were 18 – 20 at 42.9% and 21 – 23 at 43.9%. A smaller percentage of respondents fell into the ranges of 24 – 26 at 7.5%, 27 – 29 at 3.5%, 30 – 32 to .7% and 1.4% at 33 and above.

This sample is in line with the proposed research to survey millennial UGA female students.

Education level ranged from college freshman to post graduate degree. As all email addresses for UGA students were obtained this also included graduate students. College freshmen made up 15.7% of responses, sophomores were 15.6%, juniors were 24.5%, while seniors were 25.6%. Additionally, 4% had completed their four-year degree, 12.7% had a graduate degree, and 1.9% had a post graduate degree. Ethnicity was primarily white at 81.8% followed by Asian/Pacific Islander at 5.8%, African-America at 5.4%, Multi-racial with 3.5%, Hispanic with 2.5%, Other at 1.0% and Native American at .2% of respondents.

Also part of the demographic profile, respondents were asked to indicate their frequency accessing social media sites and the technology used to access the social media sites. Regarding frequency, 54% of survey respondents indicated they access social media daily. While 39.1% of respondents indicated they checked social media hourly. The remainder of respondents indicated they accessed social media weekly at 3.7% and 2 – 3 times a week at 3.2%. Respondents indicated they accessed social media “majority by smartphone”, 61.4%, followed by 18% accessing social media only from a smartphone. Alternatively, 17.5% of respondents said they used a computer/laptop/tablet and smartphone equally when accessing social media sites followed by 2.2% choosing “majority computer/laptop/tablet” for their social media access and only 1% stating they only used a computer/laptop/tablet.

Table 5.2  
Demographic Profile of Sample

		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	0	0
	Female	1142	100.0
Age	18-20	490	42.9
	21-23	501	43.9
	24-26	86	7.5
	27-29	40	3.5
	30-32	8	.7
	33 and above	16	1.4
	Education Level	College freshman	179
College sophomore		178	15.6
College junior		280	24.5
College senior		292	25.6
Completed 4 year college degree		46	4.0
Graduate degree		145	12.7
Post graduate degree		22	1.9
Ethnicity	African-American	61	5.4
	Asian/Pacific Islander	66	5.8
	Hispanic	28	2.5
	Native American	2	.2
	Multi-racial	40	3.5
	White	932	81.8
	Other	11	1.0
Frequency Accessing Social Media Sites	Hourly	446	39.1
	Daily	616	54.0
	2-3 times a week	36	3.2
	Weekly	42	3.7
Technology Used to Access Social Media Sites	Only by computer/laptop/tablet	11	1.0
	Only by smartphone	205	18.0
	Majority computer/laptop/tablet	25	2.2
	Majority smartphone	701	61.4
	Both equally	200	17.5

Table 5.3 shows the frequency of respondents across boutiques for this survey. Butterscotch and Clique boutique had comparable respondent frequencies at 38.5% and 37.1% respectively. Crackle had a response rate of 17.9%, and Sunshine saw only 6.5% of respondents choose this boutique when answering the survey.

*Table 5.3*  
*Boutique Frequency*

	Boutique	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
1	Butterscotch	440	38.5%
2	Sunshine	74	6.5%
3	Crackle	204	17.9%
4	Clique	424	37.1%
	Total	1142	100.0%

### **Reliability Tests and Correlation Analyses**

Reliability tests were conducted on the scales used for this survey instrument to ensure each was appropriately measuring the necessary information for the present research and to establish a level of internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha is well established as the marker for repeatability and internal consistency of a scale and a value of .60 or higher is acceptable (George & Mallery, 2003; Hair, etc., 2006; Kline, 2000). Table 5.4 shows descriptive statistics for each scale including the Cronbach's alpha for each scale which are all above the acceptable value of .60. It should be noted that some scales have variability in the total responses (N) as surveys with minimal missing items were retained for data analysis following initial screening of the data and no value was assigned to missed items.

Social media use as a construct is established from past research to have five unique dimensions - information seeking, interpersonal utility, entertainment, pass time and convenience (Luo et al., 2011; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Smock et al., 2011). Each of these scales was tested for an appropriate Cronbach's alpha.

Information seeking with five items initially had a Cronbach's alpha of .609. With item 1 of the scale, "...because it is a new way to do research." removed the Cronbach's alpha increased slightly to .611. Interpersonal utility with 12 items had a Cronbach's alpha of .913, entertainment with three items had a Cronbach's alpha of .893, pass time with three items had a Cronbach's alpha of .865, and convenience had a Cronbach's alpha of .660.

Customer-based store equity has been noted for having four dimensions - store awareness, store association, perceived store quality, and store loyalty (Papu & Quester, 2006; Sharma, 2016). Store awareness with three items had a Cronbach's alpha of .656. Store association with four items had a Cronbach's alpha of .660. Perceived store quality with three items had a Cronbach's alpha of .670 and store loyalty had a Cronbach's alpha of .714.

The scales measuring the constructs of satisfaction, store preference, and purchase intention were also tested for appropriate reliability and internal consistency. Satisfaction with three items had a Cronbach's alpha of .920. Store preference with three items had a Cronbach's alpha of .915, while purchase intention with five items had a Cronbach's alpha of .915. The reliabilities for satisfaction, store preference, and purchase intention indicated excellent reliability at an alpha higher than .90.

Table 5.4  
Descriptive statistics and reliability for all variables

	N	Mean	St. Deviation	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Social Media Use (5 dimensions)				
<i>Information Seeking</i>	1132	3.16	.59	.611
<i>Interpersonal Utility</i>	1127	2.16	.72	.913
<i>Entertainment</i>	1138	3.91	.80	.893
<i>Pass Time</i>	1137	3.52	.92	.865
<i>Convenience</i>	1136	2.77	.81	.660
Customer-based Store Equity (4 dimensions)				
<i>Awareness</i>	1139	4.25	.64	.656
<i>Association</i>	1139	4.05	.67	.690
<i>Store Quality</i>	1139	3.87	.62	.670
<i>Store Loyalty</i>	1140	3.28	.80	.714
Satisfaction	1136	4.06	.61	.920
Store Preference	1141	3.40	.92	.915
Purchase Intention	1135	4.03	.71	.915

Based on a 5-point Likert scale; (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree)

Following the examination of scale reliabilities each of the main constructs of the study were investigated with Pearson's correlation analysis to determine any relationship between the research variables. The variables included were social media use as a whole construct, customer-based store equity as a whole construct, satisfaction, store preference, and purchase intention. A p-value of  $p < 0.05$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , or  $p < 0.001$  is said to reflect a significant relationship between variables.

Social media use was shown to have a positive, correlated relationship with the variables of store equity ( $r = .320$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), satisfaction ( $r = .399$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), store preference ( $r = .286$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and purchase intention ( $r = .276$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Store equity had a strong, positive correlated relationship with the variables of satisfaction ( $r = .573$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), store preference ( $r = .572$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and purchase intention ( $r = .689$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Satisfaction also had a correlated positive relationship with store preference ( $r = .410$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and purchase intention ( $r = .530$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Finally store

preference had a positive correlated relationship with purchase intention ( $r = .622$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). These correlation results are noted in Table 5.5.

*Table 5.5*  
*Pearson Correlation Analysis*

	Mean	Social Media Use	Customer-based Store Equity	Satisfaction	Store Preference	Purchase Intention
Social Media Use	3.09	1				
Customer-based Store Equity	3.86	.320**	1			
Satisfaction	4.06	.399**	.573**	1		
Store Preference	3.40	.286**	.572**	.410**	1	
Purchase Intention	4.04	.276**	.689**	.530**	.622**	1

\*\* $p < .01$ . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

### **Confirmatory Factor Analysis**

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using IBM's AMOS software was conducted on all scales for each of the research constructs. As the literature has well established the dimensions of these variables, CFA was used to determine the underlying validity of the items for each latent construct. Factor loadings with a value of .40 or higher were determined to be appropriate factor loadings and items with an Item-total Correlation (ITC) greater than .30 were acceptable items for the scale (Matsunago, 2010; Squires et al., 2011). In particular, each item for each dimension of the constructs social media use and customer-based store equity was examined using CFA.

The dimensions of social media use including information seeking, interpersonal utility, entertainment, pass time, and convenience and their subsequent items in each scale were investigated with CFA. Each of the five items in the information seeking scale had factor loading greater than .40 except item 1



which had a factor loading of .39. This is in line with the reliability test which suggested dropping item 1 for information seeking to increase the Cronbach alpha value. Following this item 1 was dropped from the information seeking scale. The final measurement scale of information seeking after removal of item 1 had a Cronbach's alpha of .611 and an ITC for all items greater than the required .30. The interpersonal utility scale with 12 items saw three items with factor loadings above .50 and nine items load in the higher range with factor loadings of above .60 with a Cronbach's alpha of .913 and all item ITC's greater than .30. The three items in the entertainment scale loaded above .80 with a Cronbach's alpha .893, the three items in the pass time scale had factor loadings above .70 with a Cronbach's alpha of .865, and the three items in the convenience scale had factor loadings above .40 with a Cronbach's alpha of .660 with all of these having an ITC greater than .30 for all items.

The dimensions of customer-based store equity including store awareness, store association, perceived store quality, and store loyalty and their subsequent items in each scale were investigated with CFA. The three items in the store awareness scale had factor loadings greater than .50 with a .656 Cronbach's alpha for the scale and ITC greater than .30 for all items. The four items in the store association scale had factor loadings above .50 except item 2 which had a factor loading of .32. This is comparable to the reliability tests which indicated dropping item 2 in the store association scale from further analysis thus increasing the Cronbach's alpha of this scale to .690 and ITC of greater than .30 for all items. Because of the results from the reliability test and CFA it was determined to

eliminate item 2 in the store association scale. The three items in the perceived store quality scale each had factor loadings above .40 and a Cronbach's alpha of .670 and ITC greater than .30 for all items. The three items in the store loyalty scale each had factor loadings greater than .50 and a Cronbach's alpha of .714 and ITC greater than .30 for all items.

The constructs of satisfaction, store preference, and purchase intention, each measured with multiple items, were analyzed with CFA. The three items in the satisfaction scale had factor loadings greater than .80 had a Cronbach's alpha of .920, the three items in the store preference scale had factor loadings great than .80 and a Cronbach's alpha of .915, and the five items in the purchase intention scale had factor loadings greater than .60 and a Cronbach's alpha of .915. The items of satisfaction, store preference, and purchase intention all had an ITC greater than .30. The results of this CFA can be found in Table 5.6.

Table 5.6  
Confirmatory Factor Analysis All Items

Construct and measurement items <sup>a</sup>	Standardized factor loading	Cronbach's $\alpha^b$	ITC
<b>SOCIAL MEDIA USE (5 dimensions)</b>			
<i>Information Seeking (5 items)</i>			
Because it is a new way to do research (IS1)	<b>.39</b>	.611	--
Because it is easier (IS2)	.57		.406
To get information for free (IS3)	.54		.400
To look for information (IS4)	.51		.385
To see what is out there (IS5)	.52		.391
<i>Interpersonal Utility (12 items)</i>			
To help others (IU1)	.74	.913	.705
To participate in discussions (IU2)	.79		.739
To show other encouragement (IU3)	.74		.698
To belong to a group (IU4)	.74		.707
Because I enjoy answering questions (IU5)	.77		.718
To express myself freely (IU6)	.73		.697
To give my input (IU7)	.76		.716
To get more points of view (IU8)	.57		.573
To tell others what to do (IU9)	.64		.592
Because I wonder what other people said (IU10)	.50		.504
To meet new people (IU11)	.79		.736
Because I want someone to do something for me (IU12)	.57		.536
<i>Entertainment (3 items)</i>			
Because it is entertaining (ENT1)	.82	.893	.765
Because I just like to use it (ENT2)	.83		.773
Because it is enjoyable (ENT3)	.93		.835
<i>Pass Time (3 items)</i>			
Because it passes time when bored (PT1)	.89	.865	.785
When I have nothing better to do (PT2)	.80		.725
To occupy my time (PT3)	.79		.718
<i>Convenience (3 items)</i>			
To communicate with friends, family (CON1)	.48	.660	.399
Because it is cheaper (CON2)	.86		.565
Because it is easier (CON3)	.56		.457
<b>CUSTOMER-BASED STORE EQUITY (4 dimensions)</b>			
<i>Store Awareness (3 items)</i>			
This boutique is very well known to me (AW1)	.75	.656	.521
This boutique is not know to me (AW2)	.51		.419
I am aware of this boutique (AW3)	.64		.492
<i>Store Association (4 items)</i>			
I can quickly recall the symbol or logo of this boutique (AS1)	.54	.690	.462
This boutique is associated with sophistication (AS2)	<b>.32</b>		--
I have a clear impression of the type of people who shop at this boutique (AS3)	.68		.524
Some characteristics of this boutique come to my mind quickly (AS4)	.84		.602
<i>Perceived Store Quality (3 items)</i>			
This boutique is a store characterized by its continuous innovation (SQ1)	.46	.670	.401
This boutique appears to be of very poor quality (SQ2)	.61		.481
This boutique is of high quality (SQ3)	.90		.592
<i>Store Loyalty (3 items)</i>			
		.714	

I will suggest this boutique to other consumers (SL1)	.64	.525
I will not buy from other stores if I can find what I'm looking for at this boutique (SL2)	.55	.477
This boutique would be my first choice (SL3)	.89	.628
SATISFACTION (3 items)		.920
I find this boutique's social media pages easy to use (SAT1)	.88	.831
I am satisfied with the functionality of this boutique's social media pages (SAT2)	.90	.841
Overall, I am satisfied with my experience using this boutique's social media pages (SAT3)	.90	.842
STORE PREFERENCE (3 items)		.915
I like this boutique better than other boutiques (SP1)	.89	.831
I would shop at this boutique more than other boutiques (SP2)	.90	.841
For boutiques, this one is my preferred store (SP3)	.86	.815
PURCHASE INTENTION (5 items)		.915
I am very likely to purchase merchandise from this boutique in the future (PI1)	.83	.783
I would be willing to buy gifts from this boutique (PI2)	.69	.658
I would buy from this boutique (PI3)	.87	.826
I would seriously consider buying from this boutique (PI4)	.89	.840
It is very likely that I would buy from this boutique (PI5)	.90	.850

*Note.* Factor loadings < .4 in bold and deleted for final measurement. Additional factor values are reported considering the item dropped.

<sup>a</sup> All items tested in confirmatory factor analysis

<sup>b</sup> Cronbach's  $\alpha$  after deletion of bolded items

To further analyze the two constructs in this study with multiple dimensions, social media use and customer-based store equity were treated as latent constructs and their dimensions investigated as to the contribution of each using CFA. Four of the five dimensions of social media use were significant meeting the minimum factor loading standard of .40 used in this study. The dimension of information seeking had a factor loading of .39. As the required cut-off for factor loadings was .40, it was determined to eliminate this dimension as a contributing factor of social media use. After information seeking was deleted, the factor loadings for the remaining dimensions were interpersonal utility with a factor loading .61, entertainment with a factor loading .56, pass time with a factor loading of .48, and

convenience with a factor loading of .66. For the remainder of the data analyses social media use as a construct was measured with the underlying dimensions of interpersonal utility, entertainment, convenience, and pass time.

The four dimension of customer-based store equity, store awareness, store association, perceived store quality, and store loyalty, were also examined using CFA. The standardized factor loading for store awareness was .66, for store association it was .74, .54 for perceived store quality, and .55 for store loyalty. Thus, for the remainder of the data analyses customer-based store equity as a construct was measured with the underlying dimensions of store awareness, store association, perceived store quality, and store loyalty, which is in line with previous research (Papu & Quester; 2006; Sharma, 2016). The CFA results on the constructs of social media use and customer-based store equity are found in Table 5.7.

*Table 5.7*  
*Confirmatory Factor Analysis on SMU and CBSE*

Construct and measurement items <sup>a</sup>	Standardized factor loading
<b>SOCIAL MEDIA USE (5 dimensions)</b>	
Information Seeking	<b>.39</b>
Interpersonal Utility	.61
Entertainment	.56
Convenience	.48
Pass Time	.66
<b>CUSTOMER-BASED STORE EQUITY (4 dimensions)</b>	
Store Awareness	.66
Store Association	.74
Perceived Store Quality	.54
Store Loyalty	.55

*Note.* Factor loadings < .4 in bold and deleted for final measurement.

<sup>a</sup> All items tested in confirmatory factor analysis

## Hypotheses Testing

### *Hypothesis 1 and 2*

Regression analysis was used to analyze the hypothesized relationship between social media use and satisfaction (H1) and social media use and customer-based store equity (H2). The results of this analysis can be seen in Table 5.8 and Table 5.9. The regression analysis to explain the variance in satisfaction based on the independent variable social media use was significant with  $F(1, 1140) = 215.593$  and  $p < .001$ , and 15.9% of the variance in satisfaction explained by the independent variable of social media use ( $\beta = .399$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In a second regression analysis to explain the variance in customer-based store equity, the model was significant with  $F(1, 1138) = 129.966$  and  $p < .001$ . Social media use accounted for 10.2% of the variance explained ( $\beta = .320$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In both analyses the coefficients were positive and approximately the same magnitude. These analyses provide support for H1 and H2. For a further analysis of H1, multiple regression of the social media use dimensions and satisfaction was conducted. The results of this analysis are in Table D.1 in Appendix D.

*Table 5.8*  
*Linear Regression Results for Satisfaction – H1*  
*(N=1141)*

	( $\beta$ )	t Value
Intercept	2.734***	29.820***
Social media use	.399***	14.683***

\*\*\* $p < .001$   
 $R^2 = .159$ ;  $F = 215.593$ \*\*\*

Table 5.9  
 Linear Regression Results for Satisfaction – H2  
 (N=1139)

	( $\beta$ )	t Value
Intercept	2.987***	38.389***
Social media use	.320***	11.400***

\*\*\*p<.001  
 R<sup>2</sup> = .102; F = 129.966\*\*\*

### **Hypothesis 3 and 4**

Further regression analysis was used to analyze the hypothesized relationship between customer-based store equity and store preference (H3) and customer-based store equity and purchase intention (H4). The regression analysis between customer-based store equity and store preference was significant with F (1, 1139) = 554.548 and p<.001, and 32.8% of the variance in store preference explained by the construct of customer-based store equity ( $\beta$  = .572, p<.001). The regression analysis between customer-based store equity and purchase intention was also significant with F (1, 1139) = 1,029.759 and p<.001, with customer-based store equity accounting for 47.5% of the variance explained in purchase intention ( $\beta$  = .689, p<.001). Both coefficients were positive and the coefficient for purchase intention was somewhat larger than the coefficient for store preference. These analyses provide support for H3 and H4 and can be found in Tables 5.10 and 5.11 below. For a further analysis of H3 and H4, multiple regression of the customer-based store equity dimensions and store preference was conducted along with a multiple regression analysis of the customer-based store equity dimensions and purchase intention. The results of these analyses are in Table D.2 and Table D.3 in Appendix D.

*Table 5.10*  
*Linear Regression Results for Store Preference – H3*  
*(N=1139)*

	( $\beta$ )	t Value
Intercept	-.601***	-3.596***
Customer-based store equity	.572***	23.549***

\*\*\*p<.001  
R<sup>2</sup> = .328; F = 554.548\*\*\*

*Table 5.11*  
*Linear Regression Results for Purchase Intention – H4*  
*(N=1139)*

	( $\beta$ )	t Value
Intercept	.287***	2.431*
Customer-based store equity	.689***	32.090***

\*p<.05; \*\*\*p<.001  
R<sup>2</sup> = .475; F = 1029.759\*\*\*

### **Hypothesis 5 and 6**

Regression analysis was also used to examine the hypothesized relationship between satisfaction and store preference (H5) and satisfaction and purchase intention (H6). The results of these analyses can be seen in Table 5.12 and Table 5.13. The regression analysis between satisfaction and store preference was significant with  $F(1, 1140) = 229.925$  and  $p < .001$ , and 16.8% of the variance in store preference explained by the variable of satisfaction ( $\beta = .410, p < .001$ ). The regression analysis between satisfaction and purchase intention was also significant with  $F(1, 1140) = 445.170$  and  $p < .001$ , and satisfaction accounting for 28.1% of the variance explained in purchase intention ( $\beta = .520, p < .001$ ). Both coefficients were positive and the coefficient for purchase intention was somewhat larger than the coefficient for store preference. These analyses provide support for H5 and H6.



Table 5.12  
 Linear Regression Results for Store Preference – H5  
 (N=1141)

	( $\beta$ )	t Value
Intercept	.928***	5.629***
Satisfaction	.410***	15.163***
***p<.001		
R <sup>2</sup> = .168; F = 229.925***		

Table 5.13  
 Linear Regression Results for Purchase Intention – H6  
 (N=1139)

	( $\beta$ )	t Value
Intercept	1.545***	12.940***
Satisfaction	.530***	21.099***
***p<.001		
R <sup>2</sup> = .281; F = 445.170***		

### Hypothesis 7

Finally, regression analysis was used to examine the hypothesized relationship between store preference and purchase intention (H7). The regression analysis between satisfaction and store preference was significant with  $F(1, 1140) = 719.635$  and  $p < .001$ , and 38.7% of the variance in purchase intention explained by the variable store preference ( $\beta = .622$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This analysis provides support for H7. The results of this analysis can be seen in Table 5.14.

Table 5.14  
 Linear Regression Results for Purchase Intention – H7  
 (N=1141)

	( $\beta$ )	t Value
Intercept	2.388***	37.529***
Store Preference	.622***	28.826***
***p<.001		
R <sup>2</sup> = .622; F = 719.635***		

### Summary of Hypotheses Test

Table 5.15 represents the summary of the research hypotheses for this study. Based on the regression analysis for all hypothesized relationships, there is support

both in the statistical significance and direction of the relationships for each of the seven hypotheses.

*Table 5.15  
Summary of Hypotheses Tests*

Hypotheses	Results
<b>H1:</b> Social media use of a boutique’s social media will have a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction	Supported
<b>H2:</b> Social media use of a boutique’s social media will have a significant positive effect on customer-based store equity	Supported
<b>H3:</b> Customer-based store equity will have a significant positive effect on customers’ store preference	Supported
<b>H4:</b> Customer-based store equity will have a significant positive effect on purchase intention	Supported
<b>H5:</b> Customers’ satisfaction will have a significant positive effect on store preference	Supported
<b>H6:</b> Customers’ satisfaction will have a significant positive effect on purchase intention	Supported
<b>H7:</b> Customers’ store preference will have a significant positive effect on their purchase intention	Supported

### **Merged Convergent Parallel Analysis**

The research design of this study requires examination of the results found in the qualitative and quantitative strands and comparing through the convergent parallel method. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) provide guidelines for merged data analysis which includes merging the results and determining how the two strands of data are comparable or dissimilar. Table 5.16 shows a joint display of the main themes and subsequent subthemes from the qualitative interviews as compared to the significant constructs from the quantitative survey.

It is important to note that each of the main constructs of the quantitative study was identified as within a relevant theme in the qualitative study. The theme of utilization had subthemes of selling a lifestyle and promotion which were comparable to the dimensions of social media use including interpersonal utility, entertainment, pass time and convenience. This indicates that the primary use of

social media by the boutiques is relevant to the customer and their motivations for social media use. Another subtheme of utilization was the customer relationship which was a relevant construct in the quantitative study as customer-based store equity. Customer-based store equity with factors of store awareness, store association, perceived quality, and store loyalty significantly influenced both store preference and purchase intention in the quantitative study.

Process and pressure was an emerging theme of the qualitative interviews. This and its subthemes of process, time, and change are based on the direct experience of the boutique representative, and how they manage their boutique's social media presence. The merged analysis shows a convergent relationship with the construct of satisfaction. Survey respondents were asked about their satisfaction with the boutique's social media. A level of satisfaction with the boutique's social media is related to the effort, time, and planning process of the boutique to manage their social media content and make adjustments as social media platforms are often changing.

All respondents in the qualitative interviews maintained tangible and intangible metrics in the form of analytics, monitoring likes, clicks, and comments, along with seeing direct sales from activity on social media. The metrics of success these boutiques use whether quantifiable or less formal are linked to the consumer response constructs including store preference and purchase intention. In addition the quantitative survey results indicated that both store preference and purchase intention were statistically significant. Many of the boutiques noted that you must "spend money to make money" and were not deterred from utilizing social media to

build equity with their customers as they saw this as an opportunity to have measurable outcomes such as store preference and purchase intention. Based on this analysis the merged data including the qualitative themes and quantitative data do synthesize thus providing support for the merged research question (MRQ).

Table 5.16  
Joint Display Comparison QUAL + QUAN

Qualitative Themes	Quantitative Constructs				
	Social Media Use (SMU)	Customer-based Store Equity (CBSE)	Satisfaction (SAT)	Store Preference (SP)	Purchase Intention (PI)
Utilization -Selling a lifestyle -Promotion -Customer relationship	Dimensions of SMU interpersonal utility, entertainment, convenience and pass time coincide with the theme of promotion and selling a lifestyle.	CBSE with factors of awareness, association, quality and loyalty complimentary to building customer relationships by boutiques.			
Metrics of success -Tangible -Intangible				The consumer responses SP and PI complement both the tangible and intangible metrics of success. Boutiques attempt to not only sell but create a relatable environment on their social media platforms.	
Process & Pressure -Process -Time -Change			Boutiques noted they constantly must keep up with the effort of planning the frequency of content and the changing nature of SM. Managing this is tied to a customer's SAT.		

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **DISCUSSION**

The following chapter discusses a summary of the current research and relevant conclusions from the findings of the qualitative interviews, quantitative survey, and the merged results. Both theoretical and managerial implications will be highlighted. Finally, the limitations and suggestions for future research are presented.

#### **Summary of the Study**

The prevalence of social media for both business and customer has led to a unique opportunity for small businesses to harness this tool and compete with large corporations. Based on the intuitive advantages social media provides such as inexpensive and quick implementation, effective communication, and agility to disseminate information, many small businesses have utilized these popular platforms (Calabro, 2010). Customers rely on using social media to gratify specific needs. Athens, GA provides a unique backdrop to focus this study as Athens fashion boutiques have found great success in this town and many rely on the channel of social media to encounter their customers.

This research study examined the social media phenomenon by investigating parallel perspectives from both the Athens fashion boutiques and their customers. The U&G theory which originates out of the discipline of mass communications was utilized to undergird both streams of research (Blumler & Katz, 1974). U&G theory

framed within a convergent parallel research methodology provided a foundation for investigating the uses of social media and ultimate outcomes of those uses from the boutique and the customer.

Because of the convergent parallel mixed methods approach, both qualitative and quantitative studies were developed for the broader merged investigation into social media use. The qualitative stream was focused on the use and metrics of success related to social media as defined by a representative from the Athens fashion boutique. Concurrently the customer perspective was explored as to social media uses connection to customer-based store equity and satisfaction with customer responses of store preference and purchase intention. From this, research questions, several hypotheses and a merged research question were developed to guide the study.

### **Research Questions**

RQ1: To explore how Athens fashion boutiques are using social media in their small businesses.

RQ2: To discover what metrics the Athens fashion boutiques utilize to gauge customer responses from their social media activity.

### **Hypotheses**

H1: Social media use of a boutique's social media will have significant positive effect on customer satisfaction.

H2: Social media use of a boutique's social media will have a significant positive effect on customer-based store equity.

H3: Customer-based store equity will have a significant positive effect on customer's store preference.

H4: Customer-based store equity will have a significant positive effect on purchase intention.

H5: Customer's satisfaction will have a significant positive effect on store preference.

H6: Customer's satisfaction will have a significant positive effect on purchase intention.

H7: Customer's store preference will have a significant positive effect on their purchase intention.

### **Merged Research Question**

MRQ: To what extent do the qualitative interview results from Athens fashion boutiques' use of social media synthesize with the results of the quantitative survey of the boutiques' customers' use of these social media and responses?

Data was collected from representatives of four Athens fashion boutiques with semi-structured interviews and through an online survey of Athens' boutique customers. A boutique employee from each store who was well versed in the store's social media activities was interviewed about their uses of social media, the management of content and frequency, and outcomes from their customer responses to their social media. Transcripts of the interviews were analyzed with a constant common theme approach. The online survey of customers utilized past scales for the constructs of social media use, customer-based store equity,

satisfaction, store preference, and purchase intention which consisted of 50 total items. For the online survey, 1,142 usable responses were analyzed using regression analyses to test each hypothesized relationship. Both streams of research were independently analyzed using appropriate methods and then merged to compare the quantitative and qualitative findings.

The study's results and analysis produced several important findings for the qualitative, quantitative, and merged data. The qualitative stream saw three overarching themes emerge - utilization of social media, process and pressure, and metrics of success. These major themes were then analyzed for subthemes. The utilization of social media theme had three subthemes of selling a lifestyle, promotion, and customer relationship. The process and pressure theme had three subthemes of process, time, and change while the measures of success theme included two subthemes of tangible and intangible. The boutique representatives provided unique responses, yet it was striking to note how the common themes and commentary surrounding these main concepts that emerged across all interviews. The boutiques' experience with social media is more similar than dissimilar regardless of the interviewee's position in the company, years with the boutique, type of boutique, or social media process and implementation. It is clear the common denominator here is the phenomenon of social media.

Jointly the quantitative results revealed significant relationships between all constructs of the quantitative study. After regression analysis was conducted all hypotheses were supported. This indicated that there was a significant relationship between social media uses and satisfaction with the boutique's social media along



with a significant relationship between social media use and customer-based store equity. Customer-based store equity had a significant relationship with store preference and purchase intention. Satisfaction also had a significant relationship with store preference and purchase intention. Finally store preference was significantly related to purchase intention. These findings are in line with the literature discussed in Chapter II and provide important theoretical and managerial implications.

Finally, the qualitative and quantitative results were merged following the convergent parallel design and interpreted as to how these results answered the merged research question. It was interesting to note that the very constructs of the quantitative study were in line with the three major themes which emerged out of the qualitative interviews. Specifically, the boutique's utilization of social media directly synthesized with the social media use by the boutique's customers and the construct of customer-based store equity. Process and pressure as a theme linked to the construct of satisfaction with the boutique's social media and metrics of success from the perspective of the Athens fashion boutique overlapped with the constructs of store preference and purchase intention.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

Following the review and summary of the study this section will discuss the relevant conclusions and implications both from the theoretical and managerial perspectives. The results of the qualitative and quantitative studies hold necessary contributions for the academic literature and the fashion boutiques themselves.

## **Theoretical Implications**

First the findings of the qualitative study and its emerging themes give rise to interesting implications for the academic literature surrounding small businesses and their use of social media. The themes which emerged in this study of process and pressure and metrics of success are in line with past research which has highlighted the advantages and disadvantages of using social media (Atanassova & Clark, 2015; Zeiller & Schaurer, 2011). Furthermore, several of the boutiques mentioned the necessity of using social media because of its low financial obligation (found in the subtheme of promotion) but noted the frustration with maintaining their presence in the face of changing tastes and the investment of time. These findings echo past research which noted the limited financial obligation with a high degree of time and effort attached to using social media for a small business (Hassan et al., 2014; He & Lu, 2016; Taneja & Toombs, 2014).

Second the qualitative findings address suggestions of prior research to not only investigate frequency of social media use by small businesses (Cesaroni & Consoli, 2015), but also to extend the body of knowledge as to how social media is being used by these small businesses. In fact, the results of this study suggest that a main theme of utilizing social media is supported by the subthemes of selling a lifestyle, promotion, and customer relationships. These findings indicate that the fashion boutiques see social media as a way to connect, build an image, and create a relationship. They agree that social media is meant to help with selling their merchandise but want to establish a genuine connection of equity with their customers in a fun and friendly environment. The customer relationship which was

a key subtheme to utilizing social media indicates a parallel with Schaupp and Belanger (2014) who noted that customer pressure is the strongest predictor of social media use for small businesses and not competitive pressure. It is interesting to note that not one of the boutiques interviewed mentioned their competition, yet continually brought the interview back to their customer.

Third and following from the quantitative results it should be noted that all hypotheses were supported with statistically significant relationships. These results are meaningful as few studies have connected the U&G theory to consumer response outcomes. Hsu et al. (2015) was one of the first studies to link the construct of social media use to satisfaction and purchase intention. Thus the significant findings of this study are comparable to the findings of Hsu et al. (2015), and provide validation that use motivators can be significant predictors of outcome responses.

Fourth is the finding that information seeking was not a significant dimension of the construct social media use. Confirmatory factor analysis revealed that only interpersonal utility, entertainment, pass time, and convenience were significant factors of social media use, while information seeking with a low factor loading was dropped from further analysis in this study. Whiting and Williams (2013) suggested further empirical analysis on the dimensions of social media use. The five factors most often employed to measure social media use were adapted from Papacharissi and Rubin's (2000) application of usage motivation to Internet usage. The findings of this study are important for the body of knowledge on the premise that simply adapting the same items for Internet usage to social media usage may be inadequate in capturing the underlying motivations of social media

use. It is possible that consumers are utilizing and searching for information differently on social media platforms than the Internet.

A fifth theoretical implication revolves around the connection of U&G theory to customer-based store equity for fashion boutiques. While the connection between uses and customer-based store equity is limited in the present research, the study by Blanchflower and Watchravesringkan (2014) did find a significant relationship between social media sites and brand equity. The findings of this study are comparable as there was a significant relationship between social media use and customer-based store equity. This builds on the current understanding of U&G and significantly connects this established theory to the construct of customer-based store equity. Considering the emergence of customer relationship as a significant subtheme in the qualitative interviews, it stands to reason that the contributions of this research finding are important and relevant for the current state of social media use by small businesses.

Sixth further analysis of H1, H3, and H4 and the multiple factors of social media use and customer-based store equity provide interesting results. Using multiple regression to predict satisfaction based on the factors of social media use (interpersonal utility, entertainment, pass time, and convenience) (H1) indicated that interpersonal utility has a significant and negative effect on satisfaction and pass time was not a significant predictor of satisfaction. The finding that pass time was not significant is consistent with prior research from Luo et al. (2011), but the significant, negative effect of interpersonal utility requires further empirical investigation. This outcome may indicate that customers using a boutique's social

media find interaction with other customers to negatively affect their overall satisfaction with the boutique's social media. Investigating the factors of customer-based store equity (store awareness, store association, perceived store quality, and store loyalty) and their significant relationship with store preference (H3) using multiple regression, all factors were significant except store awareness. For H4 all factors of customer-based store equity were significant predictors of purchase intention. As this is one of the first studies to connect U&G theory to customer-based store equity these results also suggest opportunities for further analysis.

Seventh this research has informed the greater understanding of how small businesses are utilizing social media, measuring its outcomes, and the customer perspective. It is clear from the findings that these boutiques are active participants on the platforms of social media. They are creating interesting, well thought out, entertaining content which then translates to how the customer is using and consuming their social media. An important construct and important theme within this study was the customer aspect of creating a relationship and examining store equity. It is clear the businesses understand the importance of this relationship and consequently when customers have a significant level of store equity there is a relationship to their store preference and purchase intention from that store. Also significant is the process and effort these boutiques put into making their social media satisfying for the customer, which also leads to positive outcomes such as preference for that store and intention to purchase.

## **Managerial Implications**

The managerial implications of this study are highly important, as a significant portion of this research examined specific Athens fashion boutiques. Thus any measurable conclusions and implications which could be beneficial for the boutique participants would be of great value to those individuals. Each respondent was presented with a summary of findings from the qualitative study for member check validations. Yet, beyond what the interview themes were it is necessary to consider the quantitative results of the customer survey and any overlapping or merged findings which indicate significant managerial conclusions.

First to consider is the theme of utilization of social media. It is clear that social media is being used by small businesses and the Athens fashion boutiques for multiple reasons. In turn the customer is responding to these uses through satisfaction and customer-based store equity. Social media managers of fashion boutiques should craft content which meets the needs of customers and social media users particularly content that is entertaining and convenient. Requiring too much interaction between customers may in fact have a negative effect on satisfaction with the social media and creating content which simply kills time and relieves boredom would not be helpful. As was noted in the interviews the content should be entertaining, relatable, and conversational to foster satisfaction from the customer and to feel a sense of store equity in order to prefer the store and intend to purchase.

Second, considering there is an intense level of process and pressure which comes from managing social media and accounting for the time, effort, and changing

nature, choices should be made to mitigate these pressures. The fashion boutiques that planned their social media content and frequency saw more clarity in their measurable outcomes. Thus social media managers should take note and consider creating at the minimum a semi-structured plan for the social media activities and begin to track the outcomes of this. As Clique boutique noted, they pivoted away from individually uploading all new arrivals on Facebook to a carousel advertisement and have seen three times more traffic with the carousel approach. By employing planned strategies which tie to clear outcomes social media managers can choose to utilize their time wisely and reach their customers more effectively.

Third it was clear from the qualitative and quantitative findings as well as the merged analysis that the customer is a core aspect to the phenomenon of social media. Fashion boutiques should consider the aspect of customer-based store equity which includes awareness, association, quality, and loyalty. This is important as customer-based store equity has a significant relationship with metrics of success including store preference and purchase intention. Specifically, social media managers should attend to building the factors of customer-based store equity including store association, perceived quality, and loyalty when interested in seeing outcomes of preference for their store. By building a relationship through social media with the customers there is the likelihood to engage those individuals to become lasting patrons of the fashion boutique. Customers enjoy social media and utilize the social media accordingly. This gives an opportunity for the fashion boutiques to continue their customer relationship building and communicating the lifestyle of the store. By promoting the image and lifestyle of the boutique these act

as underlying components tied to customer-based store equity and offer an opportunity for social media managers to tailor content to meet the needs of their customers.

Fourth the Athens fashion boutique representatives interviewed in this study understand that participating in the realm of social media is not always about a return in dollars. While success stories exist like Crackle selling a fully outfitted mannequin through Instagram and tracking sales through coupon codes offered on social media, the fashion boutiques know there is more to this phenomenon. Social media managers should understand that there is an investment of time, attention, and sometimes money to create a social media presence that is lasting and effective. Particular effort should be paid to meet the needs of the social media usage and tap in to a level of customer-based store equity. The return on investment in creating a satisfying experience may be equated to consumer responses such as purchase intention. The fashion boutiques know it is not always about the bottom line of a purchase, but more importantly about the customer and the relationship.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

While this research adequately answered the research questions and hypotheses set forth, there were several limitations which frame the scope of this study and give rise to suggestions for future research. First, while the sample size was deemed to be appropriate with 1,142 responses the location of recruitment for the sample and age range limit the generalizability of the results. The sample was recruited from UGA females within the age range for millennials of 18 – 35. As social media goes beyond the bounds of location it is possible that the fashion boutiques



interviewed have customers not concentrated in the vicinity of their Athens location. In addition, millennial females while prevalent users of social media are not the only individuals who follow Athens fashion boutiques and the majority of the sample in this study were younger millennials in the range of 18 to 23. Suggestions for future research would include widening the sample to encompass all followers or customers of these boutiques. Also it would be interesting to consider other age ranges. A recent Nielsen research report indicated that Generation X spends more time on social media than the millennial generation (Bromwich, 2017).

Second the location of the boutiques recruited for the interviews and subsequently used as prompts for the survey was limited to Athens GA. Again because social media crosses boundaries it is possible that the sample recruited in Athens, GA are followers of other fashion boutiques from various locations. The social media usage habits and following patterns for the boutiques used in this study might be completely different in a metropolitan area even in close proximity to Athens such as Atlanta, GA or Charlotte, NC. Regional differences might arise in how social media is used to follow fashion boutiques and how this translates to customer responses. This study was limited to a Southeastern college town. It would insightful to interview fashion boutique representatives in a more urban environment to see if the themes of this study are still present or even in a comparable college town. Future research should consider examining social media use of fashion boutiques in other locations and how the customer base in these locations interacts on social media.

A third limitation is the specific product category chosen for the study. Women's fashion boutique cannot be generalized to all types of retail boutiques. Future research should consider other boutiques which sell exclusively home goods, beauty, menswear, or specialty items. The product category of fashion boutiques also limited the sample to only female. The boutiques used in this study are primarily women's boutiques but men are consumers as well and they are active on social media. Future research should potentially consider a product category that is relevant for both genders to compare male versus female social media usage and to examine the application of the theoretical model used in this research to other product categories.

Fourth and following in line with the third limitation is the industry that was examined in this study. The fashion boutiques in this retail sector cannot be generalized to all small business types. To better understand the impact of social media use for small business future research should move beyond fashion boutiques and investigate other small businesses such as the service industry, restaurants, and hospitality. It would be notable to consider across the small business realm how social media places an impact on the customer relationship beyond fashion boutiques.

Finally, this research focused on the broad analysis of all the boutiques interviewed and the total response of customers to the quantitative survey. It was beyond the scope of this research to focus directly on the interview and survey responses for each boutique. There is an opportunity to look closer at how the findings of this overall study are comparable to the outcomes per boutique. Future

research should examine the data of individual boutiques and draw relevant conclusions for each Athens fashion boutique which would have direct implications for the participants.

Fashion boutique's use of social media and how their customer base uses the social media to gratify needs which then connect to responses providing measurable outcomes for the business is a timely topic for research. Social media as a tool for small businesses holds many great advantages and would benefit from continued research into this area. Considering the ever changing nature of social media and the unpredictable tastes of customers it is relevant to continue to examine the phenomenon.

## REFERENCES

- Aaker, D. A. (1991). *Managing brand equity*. New York, NY: The Free Press..
- Adams, P., Johnson A. C., & Murren, C. (2016). Women's boutique retail in downtown Athens. (Unpublished final paper). University of Georgia, Athens, GA.
- Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 179-211.
- Aluri, A., Slevitch, L., & Larzelere, R. (2016). The influence of embedded social media channels on travelers' gratifications, satisfaction, and purchase intentions. *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, 57(3), 250-267.
- Anselmsson, J., & Bondesson, N. (2015). Brand value chain in practise; the relationship between mindset and market performance metrics: A study of the Swedish market or FMCG. *Journal of Retailing & Consumer Services*, 2558-70.
- Arnett, D. B., Laverie, D. A., & Meiers, A. (2003). Developing parsimonious retailer equity indexes using partial least squares analysis: A method and applications. *Journal of Retailing*, 79, 161-70.
- Atanassova, I., & Clark, L. (2015). Social media practices in SME marketing activities: A theoretical framework and research agenda. *Journal of Customer Behaviour*, 14(2), 163-183.

- Bakeman, M., & Hanson, L. (2012). Bringing social media to small business: A role of employees and students in technology diffusion. *Business Education Innovation Journal*, 4(2), 106-111.
- Barton, K. M. (2009). Reality television programming and diverging gratifications: The influence of content on gratifications obtained. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 53(3), 460-476.
- Blanchflower, T. M., & Watchravesringkan, K. T. (2014). Exploring the impact of social networking sites on brand equity. *Proceedings Of The Marketing Management Association*, 20-24.
- Blumler, J. G., & Katz, E. (1974). *The uses of mass communications: Current perspectives on gratifications research*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Braojos-Gomez, J., Benitez-Amado, J., & Javier Llorens-Montes, F. (2015). How do small firms learn to develop a social media competence? *International Journal of Information Management*, 35(4), 443-458.
- Bromwich, J. E. (2017, January 27). Generation X more addicted to social media than millennials, report finds. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from: [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/27/technology/millennial-social-media-usage.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/27/technology/millennial-social-media-usage.html?_r=0)
- Bryman, A. (2006). Integrating quantitative and qualitative research: How is it done? *Qualitative Research*, 6(1), 97-113.
- Buil, I., Martínez, E., & de Chernatony, L. (2013). The influence of brand equity on consumer responses. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 30(1), 62-74.

- Bulearca, M., & Bulearca, S. (2010). Twitter: A viable marketing tool for SMEs? *Global Business & Management Research*, 2(4), 296-309.
- Calabro, A. (2010). Small businesses adopting social media technology. *O&P Business News* 19(6), 36.
- Cesaroni, F. M., & Consoli, D. (2015). Are small businesses really able to take advantage of social media? *Electronic Journal Of Knowledge Management*, 13(4), 257-268.
- Chang, H. J., Cho, H. J., Turner, T., Gupta, M., & Watchravesringkan, K. (2015). Effects of store attributes on retail patronage behaviors. *Journal Of Fashion Marketing & Management*, 19(2), 136-153.
- Cheeky Peach (2016). About us. Retrieved from <https://shopcheekypeach.com/pages/about-us>
- Choi, E., Fowler, D., Goh, B., & Yuan, J. (2016). Social media marketing: Applying the Uses and Gratifications theory in the hotel industry. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 25(7), 771-796.
- Chu, S., Chen, H., & Sung, Y. (2016). Following brands on Twitter: An extension of theory of planned behavior. *International Journal of Advertising*, 35(3), 421-437.
- College Portrait. (2015). The University of Georgia college portrait. Retrieved from <http://www.collegeportraits.org/GA/UGA/characteristics>

- Constant Contact. (2016, September 13). Small business owners express desire to outsource social media and other marketing activities, but have cost concerns. *Constant Contact Media Newsroom*. Retrieved from <http://news.constantcontact.com/research/9162013-small-business-ownersexpressdesire-outsource-social-media-and-other-marketing-act>
- Cope, J. (2005). Researching entrepreneurship through phenomenological inquiry-Philosophical and methodological issues. *International Small Business Journal*, 23(2), 163-189.
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Dabija, D., Pop, N., & Szentesi, S. (2014). A customer-oriented perspective on retail brand equity in the fashion industry. *Industria Textila*, 65(1), 37-46.
- deMarrais, K. (2004). Qualitative interview studies: Learning through experience. In K. deMarrais, & S. D. Lapan, (Eds.), *Foundations for research: Methods of inquiry in education and the social sciences* (pp. 51-68). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Dillman, D. A. (2014). *Mail and internet surveys*. 4<sup>th</sup> edition. New York: Wiley.
- Dolan, R., Conduit, J., Fahy, J., & Goodman, S. (2016). Social media engagement behaviour: A uses and gratifications perspective. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 24(3-4), 261-277.
- Downtown Athens (2016). Business directory. Retrieved from <http://www.downtownathensga.com/businesses.php?category=25>

- Erdem, T. & Swait, J. (1998). Brand equity as a signaling phenomenon. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 7*(2), 131–157.
- Espallardo-Hernandez, M. & Bailon-Navarro, M. A. (2009). Accessing retailer equity through integration in retailers' buying groups. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management, 37*(1), 43-62.
- Farhangi, A. A., Abaspour, A., Farahani, S. B., & Ghasemi, R. A. (2014). Analyzing the impact of social media on consumer attitudes toward the brand and their intention to purchase. *Global Media Journal: Persian Edition, 9*(2), 68-73.
- Garaus, M. (2016). Atmospheric harmony in the retail environment: Its influence on store satisfaction and re-patronage intention. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour.*
- Georgia Labor Market. (2015). Industry mix (Clarke County). Retrieved from <http://explorer.dol.state.ga.us/industrymix/>
- George, D. & Mallery, P. (2003). *SPSS for Windows step by step: A simple guide and reference 11.0 update (4<sup>th</sup> ed.)*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon
- Gómez-Suárez, M., Quinones, M., & Yagüe, M. J. (2016). Store brand evaluative process in an international context. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management, 44*(7), 754-771.
- Greek Life Office. (2017). University of Georgia Panhellenic Council. Retrieved from <http://panhellenic.uga.edu/>
- Hair, J., Anderson, R., Tatham, R., & Black, W. *Multivariate data analysis*. (2006). New Jersey: Pearson/Prentice Hall, Inc.
- Harbour, D. (2016). About us - our Red Dress Boutique story. Retrieved from <http://www.reddressboutique.com/our-story>.



- Hartman, K. B., & Spiro, R. L. (2005). Recapturing store image in customer-based store equity: A construct conceptualization. *Journal of Business Research*, 58(Special Section: Retailing Research), 1112-1120.
- Hassan, S., Nadzim, S. A., & Shiratuddin, N. (2015). Strategic use of social media for small business based on the AIDA model. *Procedia - Social And Behavioral Sciences*, 172(Contemporary Issues in Management and Social Science Research), 262-269.
- He, X., & Lu, H. (2016). Catch a fad or capture a value? Social media leverage in SMEs. *Journal of Organizational & End User Computing*, 28(3), 67-81.
- He, W., Wang, F., & Zha, S. (2014). Enhancing social media competitiveness of small businesses: Insights from small pizzerias. *New Review of Hypermedia and Multimedia*, 20(3), 225-250.
- Heery's. (2016). About the store. Retrieved from <https://www.heerys.com/About.aspx>.
- Hoeffler, S., & Keller, K. K. (2003). The marketing advantages of strong brands. *Brand Management*, 10(6), 421-45.
- Hsu, M., Chang, C., Lin, H., & Lin, Y. (2015). Determinants of continued use of social media: The perspectives of uses and gratifications theory and perceived interactivity. *Information Research*, 20(2), 1-14.
- Johnston, L. (2015). Athens Clarke County creative culture. *GeorgiaTrend*. Retrieved from <http://www.georgiatrend.com/October-2015/Athens--Clarke-CountyCreative-Culture/>

- Kahar, R., Yamimi, F., Bunari, G., & Habil, H. (2012). Trusting the social media in small businesses. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 66(The 8<sup>th</sup> International Language for Specific Purposes Seminar – Aligning Theoretical Knowledge with Professional Practice), 564-570.
- Katz, E. (1959). Mass communications research and the study of popular culture: An editorial note on a possible future for this journal. *Studies in Public Communication*, 2, 1-6.
- Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, measuring, managing customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Marketing*, 57(1), 1-22.
- Kim, J. H., & Hyun, Y. J. (2011). A model to investigate the influence of marketing-mix efforts and corporate image on brand equity in the IT software sector. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 40, 424-38.
- Kim, H., Kim, W. G., & An, J. A. (2003). The effect of consumer-based brand equity on firms' financial performance. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 20(4), 335-51.
- Kim, Y., Kim, Y., Wang, Y., & Lee, N. Y. (2016). Uses and gratifications, journalists' Twitter use, and relational satisfaction with the public. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 60(3), 503-526.
- Kim, A. J., & Ko, E. (2012). Do social media marketing activities enhance customer equity? An empirical study of luxury fashion brand. *Journal of Business Research*, 65(10), 1480-1486.
- Kline, P. (2000). *The handbook of psychological testing* (2<sup>nd</sup>. ed.) p. 13. London: Routledge

- Ko, H., Cho, C. H., & Roberts, M. S. (2005). Internet uses and gratifications: A structural equation model of interactive advertising. *Journal of Advertising*, 34(2), 57-70.
- Korgaonkar, P. K., & Wolin, L. D. (1999). A multivariate analysis of web uses. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 39(1), 53-68.
- Kowatsch, T., & Maass, W. (2010). In-store consumer behavior: How mobile recommendation agents influence usage intentions, product purchases, and store preferences. *Computers In Human Behavior*, 26, 697-704.
- Krell, E. (2011). The state of small business. *Baylor Business Review*, 30(1), 4-9.
- Lacho, K. J., & Marinello, C. (2010). How small business owners can use social networking to promote their business. *Entrepreneurial Executive*, 15, 127-133.
- Lepkowska-White, E., Parsons, A., & Ceylan, A. (2014). Cross promotion of web references in print ads. *Journal of Research In Interactive Marketing*, 8(4), 309.
- Leung, L., & Wei, R. (2000). More than just talk on the move: Uses and gratifications of the cellular phone. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 77, 308-320.
- Leung, L. (2007). Unwillingness-to-communicate and college students' motives in SMS mobile messaging. *Telematics and Informatics*, 24(2), 115-129.
- Liu, I. B., Cheung, C. K., & Lee, M. O. (2016). User satisfaction with microblogging: Information dissemination versus social networking. *Journal of The Association for Information Science & Technology*, 67(1), 56-70.

- Lin, C. A. (1996). Looking back: The contribution of Blumler and Katz's uses of mass communication. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 40(4), 574.
- Lu, H. P., Lin, J. C. C., Hsiao, K. L., & Cheng, L. T. (2010). Information sharing behaviour on blogs in Taiwan: Effects of interactivities and gender differences. *Journal of Information Science*, 36(3), 401-416.
- Luo, M. M., Chea, S., & Chen, J. (2011). Web-based information service adoption: A comparison of the motivational model and the Uses and Gratifications theory. *Decision Support Systems*, 51(1), 21-30.
- Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370-396.
- Matsunago, M. (2010). How to factor-analyze your data right: Do's, don'ts, and how to's. *International Journal of Psychological Research*, 3(1), 97-110
- Moore, A., Parahoo, K., & Fleming, P. (2010). Managers' understanding of workplace health promotion within small and medium-sized enterprises: A phenomenological study. *Health Education Journal*, 70(1), 92-101.
- Omar, N. A., Aziz, N., & Nazri, M. A. (2011). Understanding the relationships of program satisfaction, program loyalty, and store loyalty among cardholders of loyalty programs. *Asian Academy of Management Journal*, 16(1), 21-41.
- Palmgreen, P., & Rayburn, J. (1979). Uses and gratifications and exposure to public television. *Communication Research*, 16(2), 155-180.

- Papacharissi, Z., & Medelson, A. (n.d.). Towards a new(er) sociability: Uses, gratifications and social capital on Facebook. In S. Papathanassopoulos. (2011). *Media perspectives for the 21st century*, 212-230. London; New York: Routledge.
- Papacharissi, Z., & Rubin, A. M. (2000). Predictors of Internet use. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 44(2), 175-196.
- Pappu, R., & Quester, P. (2006). A consumer-based method for retailer equity measurement: Results of an empirical study. *Journal of Retailing And Consumer Services*, 13, 317-329.
- Park, H. H., Jeon, J. O., & Sullivan, P. (2015). How does visual merchandising in fashion retail stores affect consumers' brand attitude and purchase intention? *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research*, 25(1), 87-104.
- Park, N., & Lee, S. (2014). College students' motivations for Facebook use and psychological outcomes. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 58(4), 601-620.
- Roy, A., Maxwell, L., & Carson, M. (2014). How is social media being used by small and medium-sized enterprises? *Journal of Business & Behavioral Sciences*, 26(2), 127-137.
- Rubin, A. M. (1994). Media uses and effects: A uses-and-gratifications perspective. In J. Bryant, & D. Zillmann. (Eds.) , *Media effects: Advances in theory and research* (pp. 417-436). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

- Saee, J., & Mouzychenko, O. (2003). A phenomenological study of sub-contracting small and medium-sized enterprises and their globalization strategies and responses. *Journal of Transnational Management Development*, 9(1), 3-19.
- Sauro, J. (2015, April 29). 3 ways to combine quantitative and qualitative research. Measuring U. Retrieved from <http://www.measuringu.com/blog/mixing-methods.php>
- Schaupp, L. C., & Bélanger, F. (2014). The value of social media for small businesses. *Journal of Information Systems*, 28(1), 187-207.
- Schaupp, L. C., & Bélanger, F. (2016). Social commerce benefits for small businesses: An organizational level study. *Journal of Organizational & End User Computing*, 28(3), 49-66.
- Shark Tank Blog. (2016). Red Dress Boutique. Retrieved from <http://sharktankblog.com/business/red-dress-boutique/>
- Sharma, R. (2016). Assessing scale reliability and validity. *Journal of Management Research*, 16(2), 106.
- Sirgy, M. J., Grewal, D., Mangleburg, T. F., Park, J., Chon, K., Claiborne, C. B., ..., Berkman, H. (1997). Assessing the predictive validity of two methods of measuring selfimage congruence. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 25(3), 229-241.
- Smock, A. D., Ellison, N. B., Lampe, C., & Wohn, D. Y. (2011). Facebook as a toolkit: A uses and gratification approach to unbundling feature use. *Computers In Human Behavior*, 27(6), 2322-2329.

- Snelson, C. L. (2016). Qualitative and mixed methods social media research: A review of the literature. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1-15.
- Squires, J. E., Estabrooks, C. A., Newburn-Cook, C. V., Gierl, M. (2011). Validation of the conceptual research utilization scale: an application of the standards for educational and psychological testing in healthcare. *BMC Health Services Research*, 11(107).
- Statista. (2016). Instagram: Top brands followers 2016 statistic. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/253710/leading-brands-ranked-by-number-of-instagram-followers/>
- Sulistiyani, R., & Harwiki, W. (2016). How SMEs build innovation capability based on knowledge sharing behavior? Phenomenological approach. *Procedia - Social And Behavioral Sciences*, 219(3rd Global Conference on Business and Social Sciences (GCBSS-2016) on "Contemporary Issues in Management and Social Sciences Research", Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia), 741-747.
- Taneja, S., & Toombs, L. (2014). Putting a face on small business: Visibility, viability, and sustainability the impact of social media on small business marketing. *Academy of Marketing Studies Journal*, 18(1), 249-260.
- Tolba, A. H., & Hassan, S. S. (2009). Linking customer-based brand equity with brand market performance: A managerial approach. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 18(5), 356-366.
- Toombs, L. A. & Harlow, R. M. (2014). More than just "like": An entrepreneurial approach to creating a social media ethos in small firms. *Academy of Marketing Studies Journal*, 18(2), 275-286.

- Top Corporate Brands on Facebook Fan Page List. (2016). *Fan Page List - The List of Official Facebook Fan Pages & Twitter Users*. Retrieved from [http://fanpagelist.com/category/corporate\\_brands/](http://fanpagelist.com/category/corporate_brands/)
- U.S. News (2017). University of Georgia. Retrieved from <https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/university-of-georgia-1598>
- West, R. L., & Turner, L.H. (2010). *Uses and Gratification theory: Introducing communication theory analysis and application*. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.
- Whiting, A. ,& Williams, D. (2013). Why people use social media: A uses and gratifications approach. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 16(4), 362-369.
- Wimmer, R. D., & Dominick, J. R. (1994). *Mass media research: An introduction*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Xiaoyun, H., & Haibing, L. (2016). Catch a fad or capture a value? Social media leverage in SMEs. *Journal of Organizational & End User Computing*, 28(3), 67-81.
- Yoo, B., & Donthu, N. (2001). Developing and validating a multidimensional consumer based brand equity scale. *Journal of Business Research*, 52, 1-14.
- Zeiller, M., & Schauer, B. (2011). Adoption, motivation and success factors of social media for team collaboration in SMEs. *Proceedings of the 11th International Conference on Knowledge Management and Knowledge Technologies - I-KNOW '11*, 1.



## **APPENDIX A**

### **Interview and Survey Consent Forms**

**UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA  
INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM**

**FASHION BOUTIQUES AND SOCIAL MEDIA: A USES AND GRATIFICATION  
APPROACH TO CONVERGENT ANALYSIS FROM SMALL BUSINESS AND CUSTOMER  
PERSPECTIVES**

**Researcher's Statement**

We are asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

**Principal Investigator:** Yoo-Kyoung Seock  
Textiles, Merchandising and Interiors  
yseock@uga.edu; 706-542-4891

**Co-Investigator:** Clair McClure  
Textiles, Merchandising and Interiors  
cinabne@uga.edu; 843-443-1689

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the use of social media in Athens fashion boutiques and the subsequent consumer engagement and experience with these platforms. As an Athens fashion boutique and the expert on your boutique's social media activities you are being asked to participate in the interview portion of this study.

**Study Procedures**

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to ...

- Participate in a semi-structured interview with the researcher and answer questions related to the social media use and experience from the boutique's perspective.
- This should take approximately 1 to 1.5 hours of your time and will be conducted during a single interview session that will be audio recorded for further data analysis.
- The researcher has created general guiding questions to address in the interview, but the interview should take the direction of the interview

participant. No sensitive questions or information are expected to be part of this interview.

### **Risks and discomforts**

- We do not anticipate any risks from participating in this research.

### **Benefits**

- We do not anticipate any benefits directly to the participant from participating in this research.
- In general any findings from this research will benefit the greater knowledge of social media use within the realm of small businesses and generate information which may be useful to the academic discipline of fashion merchandising.

### **Incentives for participation**

There are no incentives for participating in this study.

### **Audio/Video Recording**

Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed for data analysis purposes. The data will be kept confidential and secured by the researchers and eventually archived after transcription.

Please provide initials below if you agree to have this interview audio recorded or not. You may still participate in this study even if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not want to have this interview recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_ I am willing to have this interview recorded.

### **Privacy/Confidentiality**

Researchers will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent unless required by law.

### **Taking part is voluntary**

Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to stop or withdraw from the study, the information/data collected from or about you up to the point of your withdrawal will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed.

### **If you have questions**

The main researcher conducting this study is Clair McClure a graduate student under the direction of Yoo-Kyoung Seock, a professor at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Yoo-Kyoung Seock at yseock@uga.edu or at 706-542-4891. If you have any



**UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA  
SURVEY CONSENT FORM**

**By continuing with this survey, you agree to participate in a research study titled "Fashion Boutiques Social Media Use: A Convergent Analysis from Small Business and Consumer Perspectives".**

**The purpose of this research is to improve understanding of customer's social media uses of Athens fashion boutiques social media pages. The research investigates females who are above the age of 18 and have experiences with social media and Athens fashion boutiques. If you volunteer to take part in this survey, you will be asked to do the following:**

- Provide information about Athens fashion boutiques you follow from a list provided**
- Indicate the social media platforms you use to follow Athens fashion boutiques**
- Answer survey questions related to your uses of the boutiques social media pages, store equity, satisfaction, store preference, and demographics**

**This survey should take approximately 10 minutes of your time and your participation will not benefit you directly from this research. Participation in this research is voluntary and you may withdraw your participation at any time. There are no foreseen risks in this research; however if at any time during this survey you feel any discomfort, you can exit the survey. You can be entered to win a gift bundle of swag from local fashion boutiques. One entry will randomly be picked as the winner of the raffle and participation is not required to be entered into the random drawing.**

**Internet communications are insecure and there is a limit to the confidentiality that can be guaranteed due to the technology itself. However once the materials are received by the researcher, standard confidentiality procedures will be employed. The data collected about the participant will be confidential as IP addresses are being stripped upon data submission. The data will remain secure by being sent as an encrypted file. The researcher's computer will also enable firewall that will block unauthorized access. The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, and can be reached by email at [cinabne@uga.edu](mailto:cinabne@uga.edu).**

**Clair McClure,  
Ph.D. candidate in International Merchandising  
The University of Georgia**

**Athens, GA 30606  
cinabne@uga.edu**

**Yoo-Kyoung Seock  
Associate Professor  
The University of Georgia  
Athens, GA 30606  
yseock@fcs.uga.edu**

***Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 206 Tucker Hall Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu.***

- YES I WILL HELP with this survey and would like to be entered for the raffle.
- NO I DO NOT WANT TO HELP with this survey but would like to be entered for the raffle.
- NO I DO NOT WANT TO HELP and would like to exit the survey now

**APPENDIX B**

**Interview Script**

## Interview Script

I'm Clair McClure and I will be interviewing you today about the use of social media at your Athens fashion boutique. This interview will be audio taped and transcribed for analysis. Your responses will remain anonymous and, you may discontinue the interview at any time and for any reason. Do you consent to take part in this interview?

1. What is your position at the boutique?

*Probe (control question)*

- Are you primarily responsible for the social media activity of this boutique?

2. Tell me about your experience using social media for the boutique.

*Possible Probes*

- What would you say is the main purpose for the boutique to use social media?
- How did you initially feel about using social media for the boutique?
- How have your feelings changed as you have used social media?
- Describe your experience interacting with followers on the boutique's social media pages.

3. How do you manage the content and frequency of your boutique's social media's?

*Possible Probes*

- Can you describe an example of the content you use on the boutique's social media pages.

4. How have you experienced social media's impact at the boutique?

*Possible Probes*

- Tell me about the measures you use to gauge customer responses to the boutiques social media activities.

5. What benefits for the boutique have you experienced from using social media?

6. What drawbacks for the boutique have you experienced from using social media?

7. Tell me about the future plans for the boutique's social media presence.



8. Is there anything I have not asked you that you would like to add?

Possible Follow-up Statements:

You mentioned \_\_\_\_\_, tell me more about that.

You talked about \_\_\_\_\_, describe that experience in as much detail as possible.

You mentioned \_\_\_\_\_, what was that like for the boutique?

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Survey**

Please select your gender:

- Female
- Male
- Prefer not to answer

Condition: Male Is Selected. Skip To: If you would like to be entered into ....

Condition: Female Is Selected. Skip To: Which one of these Athens fashion bou....

Condition: Prefer not to answer Is Selected. Skip To: If you would like to be entered into ....

Which one of these Athens fashion boutiques stands out to you on social media?

- Cheeky Peach
- Community
- Dynamite
- Entourage
- I don't follow any of the boutiques listed.

Condition: I don't follow any of the b... Is Selected. Skip To: If you would like to be entered into ....

Keeping in mind the boutique you chose, please answer each prompt 1-strongly disagree; 5-strongly agree. I use the boutique's social media pages...

	Strongly Disagree - 1	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree - 5
because it is a new way to do research.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
because it is easier.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to get information for free.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to look for information.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to see what is out there.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Keeping in mind the boutique you chose, please answer each prompt 1-strongly disagree; 5-strongly agree. I use the boutique's social media pages...

	Strongly Disagree - 1	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree - 5
to help others.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to participate in discussions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to show others encouragement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to belong to a group.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
because I enjoy answering questions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to express myself freely.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to give my input.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to get more points of view.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to tell others what to do.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
because I wonder what other people say.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to meet new people.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
because I want someone to do something for me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Keeping in mind the boutique you chose, please answer each prompt 1-strongly disagree; 5-strongly agree. I use the boutique's social media pages...

	Strongly Disagree - 1	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree - 5
because it is entertaining.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
because I just like to use it.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
because it is enjoyable.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I use the boutique's social media pages...

	Strongly Disagree - 1	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree - 5
because it passes time when I'm bored.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
when I have nothing better to do.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to occupy my time.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I use the boutique's social media pages...

	Strongly Disagree - 1	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree - 5
to communicate with friends and family.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
because it is cheaper.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
because it is easier.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Keeping in mind the boutique you chose, please answer each prompt 1-strongly disagree; 5-strongly agree

	Strongly Disagree - 1 (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree - 5 (5)
This boutique is very well known to me. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This boutique is not known to me. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am aware of this boutique. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Keeping in mind the boutique you chose, please answer each prompt 1-strongly disagree; 5-strongly agree.

	Strongly Disagree - 1	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree - 5
I can quickly recall the symbol or logo of this boutique.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This boutique is associated with sophistication.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have a clear impression of the type of people who shop at this boutique.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Some characteristics of this boutique come to mind quickly.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Keeping in mind the boutique you chose, please answer each prompt 1-strongly disagree; 5-strongly agree.

	Strongly Disagree - 1 (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree - 5 (5)
This boutique is a store characterized by its continuous innovations. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This boutique appears to be of very poor quality. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This boutique is of high quality. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Keeping in mind the boutique you chose, please answer each prompt 1-strongly disagree; 5-strongly agree.

	Strongly Disagree - 1	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree - 5
I will suggest this boutique to other customers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will not buy from other stores if I can find what I'm looking for at this boutique.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This boutique would be my first choice.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Keeping in mind the boutique you chose, please answer each prompt 1-strongly disagree; 5-strongly agree.

	Strongly Disagree - 1 (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree - 5 (5)
I find their social media pages easy to use. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am satisfied with the functionality of their social media pages. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overall, I am satisfied with my experience using their social media pages. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Keeping in mind the boutique you chose, please answer each prompt 1-strongly disagree; 5-strongly agree.

	Strongly Disagree - 1	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree - 5
I like this boutique better than other boutiques.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would shop at this boutique more than other boutiques.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
For boutiques, this one is my preferred store.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Keeping in mind the boutique you chose, please answer each prompt 1-strongly disagree; 5-strongly agree.

	Strongly Disagree - 1	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree - 5
I am very likely to purchase merchandise from this boutique in the near future.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would be willing to buy gifts from this boutique.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would buy from this boutique.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would seriously consider buying from this boutique.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is very likely that I would buy from this boutique.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

From the list below, indicate all of the boutiques you follow on social media.

- Cheeky Peach
- Community
- Dynamite
- Entourage

What social media platforms do you use to follow these boutique? Choose all that apply.

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- Snapchat
- Pinterest
- LinkedIn
- Other

Please select your age:

- 18-20
- 21-23
- 24-26
- 27-29
- 30-32
- 33 and above

What is your current level of education?

- College Freshman
- College Sophomore
- College Junior
- College Senior
- Completed 4-yr College Degree
- Graduate Degree
- Post-Graduate Degree

Please select your ethnicity:

- African-American
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Hispanic
- Native American
- Multi-racial
- White
- Other

How often do you access social media sites?

- Hourly
- Daily
- 2-3 times a week
- Weekly

How do you access social media sites?

- Only by computer/laptop/tablet
- Only by smartphone
- Majority computer/laptop/tablet
- Majority smartphone
- Both equally

If you would like to be entered into a random drawing to win a gift bundle of swag from the Athens fashion boutiques please provide a contact email address below:

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Multiple Regression of H1, H3, H4**

*Hypothesis 1: Social media use will have a significant positive effect on satisfaction.*

*Table D.1  
Multiple Regression Analysis Results for Satisfaction*

<i>Social Media Use</i>	$\beta$	<i>t Value</i>	Tolerance <sup>a</sup>	VIF <sup>b</sup>
Intercept	2.415***	27.657***	--	--
Interpersonal Utility	-.089**	-3.092**	.748	1.336
Entertainment	.158***	17.640***	.751	1.332
Pass time	.018	.630	.790	1.265
Convenience	.097***	3.316***	.729	1.371
**p<.01; ***p≤.001				
R <sup>2</sup> = .289; F = 115.818***				

<sup>a</sup>Tolerance >.10 meets the assumption of collinearity

<sup>b</sup>VIF < 10 meets the assumption of collinearity

*Hypothesis 3: Customer-based store equity will have a significant positive effect on store preference.*

*Table D.2  
Multiple Regression Analysis Results for Store Preference*

<i>Customer-based store equity</i>	$\beta$	<i>t Value</i>	Tolerance <sup>a</sup>	VIF <sup>b</sup>
Intercept	.334*	2.055*	--	--
Awareness	-.028	-1.073	.688	1.453
Association	.114***	4.224***	.643	1.556
Perceived Quality	.050*	1.970*	.731	1.368
Loyalty	.620***	24.757***	.747	1.339
*p<.05; ***p<.001				
R <sup>2</sup> = .468; F = 249.808***				

<sup>a</sup>Tolerance >.10 meets the assumption of collinearity

<sup>b</sup>VIF < 10 meets the assumption of collinearity

*Hypothesis 4: Customer-based store equity will have a significant positive effect on purchase intention.*

*Table D.3  
Multiple Regression Analysis for Purchase Intention*

	$\beta$	<i>t Value</i>	Tolerance <sup>a</sup>	VIF <sup>b</sup>
Intercept	.600***	4.891***	--	--
Awareness	.125***	4.948***	.688	1.453
Association	.194***	7.408***	.643	1.556
Perceived Quality	.162***	6.590***	.731	1.368
Loyalty	.442***	18.244***	.747	1.339
***p<.001				
R <sup>2</sup> = .501; F = 285.274***				

<sup>a</sup>Tolerance >.10 meets the assumption of collinearity

<sup>b</sup>VIF < 10 meets the assumption of collinearity