Community Consumer Research Based on Place Attachment and Consumer Satiation Theory

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Abstract

As traditional shopping centers have reached maturity, and with consumers' consumption radius contracting under pandemic conditions, community commerce is increasingly favored by capital and valued by government. However, research on community commerce, particularly regarding community consumers, has yet to enter the mainstream research purview of marketing scholars and consumer behavior researchers, leaving the characteristics of community consumers inadequately understood. Addressing this gap, this paper delves deeply into the core concept of "community," systematically characterizes six major features of community consumers, and proposes research propositions and theoretical constructions centered on two key dimensions: enhancing community consumers' place attachment and mitigating community consumer satiation. The ten propositions advanced herein will facilitate theoretical development in community consumer and community commerce research, enrich the application contexts of place attachment theory and consumer satiation theory, and ultimately provide guidance for resolving challenges in community commerce marketing practice.

Full Text

Abstract

As traditional shopping centers mature and consumer shopping radii shrink under the COVID-19 pandemic, community commerce has increasingly attracted capital investment and government attention. However, research on community commerce—particularly studies of community consumers—has yet to enter the mainstream of marketing and consumer behavior scholarship, leaving the distinctive characteristics of community consumers poorly understood. This paper delves into the core concept of "community," systematically delineates six key features of community consumers, and proposes research propositions

and theoretical frameworks centered on two primary objectives: enhancing community consumers' place attachment and alleviating their satiation. The ten propositions advanced herein will not only propel theoretical development in community consumer and community commerce research but also enrich the application contexts of place attachment theory and consumer satiation theory, ultimately providing guidance for resolving practical marketing challenges in community commerce.

Keywords: Community Consumer, Place Attachment, Consumer Satiation, Community Commerce, Offline Community

1 Introduction

Community commerce typically refers to localized businesses that satisfy residents' daily material and spiritual needs (Shen Mengmeng, 2003), encompassing various formats such as community fresh food markets (e.g., Qian Da Ma), convenience stores (e.g., Good Neighbor), education and training services (e.g., First Leap English), and lifestyle services (e.g., Fornet, Lianjia). The sudden outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020 further accelerated the development of community commerce: consumption beyond one kilometer came to an abrupt halt, inflicting unprecedented damage on traditional shopping malls, entertainment venues, and hotels (China Minshang, 2020). In stark contrast, community businesses located "on the way home" demonstrated vibrant resilience. For instance, Freshippo community stores achieved year-over-year growth exceeding 200% in 2020 (Wang Chengrong & Wang Chunjuan, 2020), while Lawson community convenience stores saw sales increase by 70-80% compared to 2019 (Zhang Sheng, 2020). As consumer dependence on community commerce has grown significantly, the domestic community commerce market has reached trillion-yuan scale, approximately 13.5 trillion yuan in 2020 (New Trends in China Community Commerce Development, 2020). Similar trends have emerged in Europe and America; according to an eMarketer (2021) survey, 50% of European respondents reported a greater willingness to shop at nearby community stores compared to pre-pandemic times. Nevertheless, community commerce has yet to establish a positive image among most community consumers. A survey by the China Community Commerce Working Committee revealed that only 45.46% of consumers expressed satisfaction with neighborhood businesses (cited in Wang Chengrong & Wang Chunjuan, 2020), with persistent issues including inadequate commercial functions, low chain store penetration, outdated brand images, and impressions of being "dirty, chaotic, and low-end" (Hu Xuanqing, 2020). This insufficient understanding of community consumer psychology and characteristics has caused even established community brands to falter; for example, Yonghui's community mini-stores—the earliest entrants in community commerce—closed 88 locations with losses of 130 million yuan, effectively retreating from the community commerce battlefield (Yiou.com, 2020). As a senior executive from Bianlifeng noted, "Everyone realizes community is an unmissable scenario, but nobody knows exactly what to do."

Existing community consumer research carries strong sociological and economic overtones and has not yet entered mainstream marketing scholarship, with literature related to marketing, consumer behavior, and psychology being extremely scarce. The limited community consumer research primarily focuses on motivations for adopting community commerce (e.g., Anić & Radas, 2016) without deeply exploring the distinctive traits of community consumers, making its perspective largely indistinguishable from general consumer research. For instance, Bates and Robb (2008) found that community convenience stores serving Black neighborhoods had lower profits and higher closure rates than those serving White consumers. Evidently, current community consumer research fails to center on the keyword "community," preventing a profound and comprehensive understanding of community consumer characteristics.

Accordingly, this paper begins by excavating community consumer characteristics, proposing six defining features: geographic proximity, high membership enrollment willingness, strong word-of-mouth influence, satiation proneness, place attachment proneness, and family-oriented consumption. Among these six characteristics, we argue that place attachment proneness and satiation proneness constitute the core, essential dimensions. The close proximity between community consumers and merchants, coupled with high purchase frequency, represents a double-edged sword: on one hand, frequent interactions may increase familiarity, which serves as an important source of positive emotions including place attachment (Fang et al., 2007); on the other hand, high-frequency repeat consumption may generate negative effects, namely consumer satiation. These opposing mechanisms may trigger complex cognitive and emotional responses among community consumers, subsequently affecting their repurchase behavior. Therefore, this paper develops research propositions and theoretical frameworks from dual perspectives: enhancing community consumer place attachment and alleviating community consumer satiation.

Place Attachment Theory refers to the emotional bond individuals establish with specific places (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001). Historically, place attachment has been used to investigate emotional connections between individuals and their homes, communities, cities, regions, and nations (Lewicka, 2011). For example, Hidalgo and Hernandez (2001) found that place attachment levels vary across Spanish regions and change with gender and age. Borghini et al. (2021) recently advocated in the *Journal of Consumer Research* for studying place attachment that consumers develop toward retail environments. Existing literature concentrates on place attachment formation mechanisms, emphasizing that creating physical environments matching target consumers' identities and facilitating social interaction among consumers or between consumers and employees can enhance place attachment (Brocato et al., 2015), but pays less attention to the effectiveness of specific place attachment enhancement strategies—precisely the focus of this paper. We will examine a series of strategies including community brand naming (with vs. without the character "home"), service staff image (warmth vs. competence), value-added services (provided vs. not provided), and member activities (experiential vs. material).

Consumer satiation is described in psychology as an unpleasant feeling resulting from conflict between the desire for stimulation and lack of stimulation (Eastwood et al., 2007), representing the inevitable outcome of hedonic adaptation in repeat consumption. High-frequency consumption may generate not only place attachment but also consumer satiation. Similarly, existing consumer satiation literature typically focuses on consequences of satiation (e.g., consumers reducing satiation through variety-seeking) while offering few specific strategies for satiation reduction. Accordingly, this paper proposes research hypotheses regarding satiation reduction strategies from perspectives of resource endowment factors (cross-industry alliances) and contextual factors (shareable coupons).

2 Literature Review

2.1 Community Commerce and Community Consumers

Community commerce is defined as localized business that serves community residents within a specific geographic area, aiming to improve residents' comprehensive quality of life by providing daily material and spiritual goods and services through the aggregation of various business formats (Shen Mengmeng, 2003). In foreign literature, "community" closely resembles the concept of "neighborhood." Neighborhood Business District refers to spaces within or near residential areas for shopping, socializing, entertainment, and leisure (Mehta & Mahato, 2019). Another related term is "Main Street" (Mehta & Mahato, 2019), visually manifested as one or a group of primary retail streets containing multiple commercial functions that primarily respond to local consumer needs and serve community residents (Talen & Jeong, 2019).

Current community commerce research concentrates on three aspects: (1) socioeconomic perspectives, such as examining historical evolution and socioeconomic impacts. For example, Yancey and Ericksen (1979) found that successful community commerce generates positive benefits, promoting social interaction and community stability, whereas shopping malls and online platforms like Amazon contribute much less to such interconnectedness (Talen & Jeong, 2019). (2) Business perspectives, such as reciprocal relationships between enterprises and communities, corporate social responsibility, community convenience store research, store location selection, and community O2O models. For instance, Niehm et al. (2008) discovered that corporate social responsibility enhances community business performance, but only up to a point. (3) Community consumer perspectives, such as motivations for adopting community commerce, which we discuss in detail below.

Community consumers' motivations for adopting community commerce stem from its provision of both shopping venues and social interaction spaces. Social connection and interaction (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003; Baker & Wakefield, 2012; Moore & Homer, 2000), sensory stimulation (Huang et al., 2019; Inman, 2001), and other leisure activities (Guiry et al., 2006; Hightower Jr et al., 2002) constitute fundamental and important motivations. Beyond purchasing goods

and services, people shop to browse, observe, wander, or meet friends. As community commercial districts form the core of residential areas, they generate diverse and complex neighborhood activities where residents may converse with neighbors or shop owners, fostering a sense of place and contributing to neighborhood identity. Consequently, Pendola and Gen (2008) found that community consumers with (vs. without) community commercial districts typically exhibit stronger community identity. However, because shopping malls offer more choices, community residents sometimes bypass local commerce for more distant locations (Artz & Stone, 2006; Lichter & Brown, 2011). Nevertheless, high levels of community attachment from social interaction help consumers overcome dissatisfaction with local communities, choosing nearby community commerce over more distant commercial centers (Sanders et al., 2017). Anić and Radas (2016) also found that consumers choose nearby purchases even when more distant options offer lower prices.

Notably, social interaction is not necessarily 越多越好 (the more the better); excessively close relationships may negatively impact commercial activity (Boschma, 2004, 2005; Uzzi, 1997), as some consumers may have social avoidance motivations. Community consumers exhibit geographic proximity characteristics that significantly influence preferences (Hamrick & Hopkins, 2012; Meyners et al., 2017). Meyners et al. (2017) found that physical distance dimensions matter more than gender and age, as geographic proximity most likely stimulates social proximity—people perceive that physical closeness facilitates social interaction and trust-building (Boschma, 2005). Tendencies toward mutual trust and communication among neighbors can promote social learning processes that indirectly affect product sales (Lee & Bell, 2013). Because geographic proximity may induce perceptions of homogeneity among consumers, Meyners et al. (2017) discovered that online reviews from geographically close consumers have greater influence, and customers are willing to pay higher prices for products with such reviews.

Based on this literature review, it is evident that community consumer and community commerce research has not entered mainstream marketing scholarship, with extremely scarce literature related to marketing, consumer behavior, and psychology, far lagging behind community commerce development practice. Moreover, existing research lacks understanding of community consumer characteristics, resulting in an unclear consumer profile. Past research conclusions on community consumers appear fragmented, with perspectives largely indistinguishable from general consumer research. In other words, current community consumer research fails to center on the keyword "community," preventing community merchants from obtaining effective guidance from research conclusions and correctly understanding community consumers. Therefore, this paper begins by excavating the essential characteristics of community consumers, identifying two relevant theories closely connected to community consumers—place attachment theory and consumer satiation theory—based on community commerce' s primary features of single consumption scenarios and repeat consumption.

2.2 Place Attachment Theory

2.2.1 Definition and Formation of Place Attachment Place attachment refers to the emotional bond individuals establish with specific places or locations (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001), comprising perceived physical, social, historical, and cultural meanings accumulated through long-term experiences in places or environments (Low & Altman, 1992; Scannell & Gifford, 2010; Tuan, 1977). Previous research has frequently used place attachment to investigate emotional connections between individuals and their homes, communities, cities, regions, nations, and even continents (Lewicka, 2011). However, people also develop place attachment toward retail environments (Debenedetti et al., 2014), though existing research has rarely examined this phenomenon (with exceptions including Borghini et al., 2021; Brocato et al., 2015; Debenedetti et al., 2014; Rosenbaum et al., 2007; Styven et al., 2020).

Place attachment helps increase consumer repurchase rates and can even transform customers into ambassadors who attract more friends to experience and patronize the store (Park & MacInnis, 2006). Existing research finds that as attachment levels increase, consumers more readily forgive brand mistakes while simultaneously increasing resistance to competing brands (Park & MacInnis, 2006). Additionally, Debenedetti et al. (2014) found that place attachment can trigger three consumer behaviors: volunteering, over-reciprocation, and ambassadorship.

Place attachment differs from brand attachment, which has received substantial attention in domestic and international literature (e.g., Fournier, 1998; Thomson, 2006; Thomson et al., 2005; Jiang Yan & Dong Dahai, 2008). Brand attachment represents a strong cognitive and emotional connection between consumers and brands that helps consumers shape their self-image (Park et al., 2006) and constitutes a unique and important marketing construct (see Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Dick & Basu, 1994; Park et al., 2006, 2010; Reinartz & Kumar, 2002; Thomson et al., 2005). Place attachment, by contrast, is attachment consumers develop toward specific locations or retail environments (Kleine & Baker, 2004). Brand attachment has broader connotations, as consumers may exhibit different attachment levels to different stores under the same brand. For example, Brocato et al. (2015) found that members of a gym brand would travel farther to visit a preferred location of the same brand. Essentially, brand-attached consumers care more about tangible products the brand provides, whereas place-attached consumers focus more on social interactions among members within the location or retail environment and the association between the physical space and their self-image, though product or service quality remains a prerequisite for place attachment (Brocato et al., 2015).

Literature indicates that place attachment formation may derive from temporal and non-temporal dimensions. The temporal dimension suggests that consumers' emotions and cognitions toward retail environments deepen over time through interaction (Brocato et al., 2015). The non-temporal dimension indi-

cates that firms can enhance place attachment by creating retail environments matching target consumers' identities and facilitating social interaction among consumers or between consumers and employees (Brocato et al., 2015).

Regarding retail space environment, Brocato et al. (2015) emphasize that retail decoration should not simply be more luxurious but should instead build physical environments consistent with target consumers' self-concept (i.e., place identity) to help generate place attachment. When consumers' self-image matches the retail environment, the environment becomes part of individuals'self-identity (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001), enabling them to express themselves or use the location as a vehicle for self-image communication (Sirgy et al., 2000), thereby generating or increasing place attachment. Additionally, if a retail environment satisfies more consumer needs, functional attachment may develop (Milligan, 1998; Stokols & Shumaker, 1981). Finally, enhancing retail environment uniqueness helps strengthen place attachment (Gustafson, 2001).

Social interaction represents an important source of place attachment (Guest & Lee, 1983; Pretty et al., 2003). Debenedetti et al. (2014) argue that familiarity, authenticity, and security generated through interaction contribute to place attachment. Second, increasing consumers' memories in retail spaces (e.g., through activities) promotes place identity, as experiential memories foster belongingness and enhance self-identity, leading to environmental identification. Simultaneously, creating shared and memorable recollections among retail space members strengthens emotional bonds and promotes social connection (Gustafson, 2001). Finally, retail environments (including employees) compensating for loneliness through emotional support or companionship also generate place attachment (Rosenbaum et al., 2007).

2.3 Consumer Satiation Theory

Psychology describes consumer satiation as an unpleasant feeling resulting from conflict between the desire for stimulation and lack of stimulation (Eastwood et al., 2007), emphasizing that satiation represents a dynamic conflict within individual emotions. Therefore, consumer satiation refers to the subjective emotional experience where consumers' perceived utility, hedonism, or satisfaction significantly declines through repeated consumption of the same product or service, with negative perceptions gradually suppressing positive ones (Redden, 2008, 2015). By attribute type, satiation can be divided into sensory-specific satiation and nonsensory-specific satiation. Sensory-specific satiation involves product attributes consumers can physically contact that continuously influence behavior, such as taste and texture; nonsensory attributes include brand and reputation (Inman, 2001; Redden, 2008). Research indicates consumers are more sensitive to sensory attributes, satiating faster on them and more readily triggering variety-seeking (Inman, 2001). In restaurant consumption literature, Line et al. (2016) divided consumer satiation into food satiation, service satiation, and environment satiation, while Ha and Jang (2013) distinguished between overall dining experience satiation and restaurant attribute satiation

(including food, service, and environment attributes), all belonging to sensory-specific satiation. By perceptual state, satiation can be divided into actual satiety and future satiety. Actual satiety refers to currently perceived satiation, whereas future satiety refers to anticipated satiation based on past experience. When consumers foresee satiation occurring, they adopt prospective behaviors (e.g., reducing consumption or controlling consumption cycles) to avoid future satiation from excessive consumption (Kahnx et al., 1997).

Hedonic adaptation theory explains consumer satiation formation, describing the sensory adaptation process where emotional arousal from new experiences returns to baseline levels after repeated exposure, representing consumers' gradual reduction of emotional responses to products through repeated contact (Coombs & Avrunin, 1977). As consumers increasingly obtain hedonic benefits from products or services, they first adapt and subsequently develop satiation; when perceived benefits of a given product or service decline to a certain level, they begin seeking alternative hedonic stimulation (Line et al., 2016; Park & Jang, 2014). Thus, satiation represents the inevitable result of hedonic adaptation in repeat consumption. Due to hedonic adaptation, satiation is unavoidable even when encountering high-quality services or products (Park & Jang, 2014).

Consumers typically eliminate satiation through variety-seeking. Controlling consumption cycles—reducing frequency or increasing intervals—also helps alleviate satiation (Galak et al., 2013), as controlling consumption frequency and increasing time intervals help individuals recover from hedonic adaptation levels, thereby supplementing hedonic value (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2012). Additionally, receiving interruptions during consumption can reduce satiation and increase overall hedonic value (Galak et al., 2013; Nelson & Meyvis, 2008; Nelson et al., 2009). For example, scheduling more activities over longer time periods helps individuals perceive higher stimulation and increases hedonic value, whereas scheduling more activities within shorter periods reduces hedonic value, accelerates satiation speed, and increases satiation (Etkin & Mogilner, 2016).

3 Research Framework

This paper first excavates "community" consumer characteristics to propose general features of community consumers (e.g., proximity, satiation proneness). It then develops research propositions based on two main threads: strategies for enhancing community consumer place attachment and strategies for alleviating community consumer satiation.

3.1 General Characteristics of Community Consumers

Ontological Security Theory posits that when consumers' normal and expected lives are disrupted, they experience ontological insecurity, uncertainty, or anxiety, reflecting the degree to which consumers feel their personal lives are safe and predictable (Cannon et al., 2019; Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2018; Rossdale, 2015). These threats may trigger cognitive and behavioral responses to compensate

for lost ontological security (Campbell et al., 2020). The pandemic threatened consumers' health (Huckins et al., 2020), creating concerns about potential COVID-19 infection (Gruchoła & Sławek-Czochra, 2021), with fear of the virus even surpassing fear of cancer (Somashekhar et al., 2020), demonstrating disruption of normal and expected life. According to ontological security theory, the pandemic destroyed consumers' ontological security, prompting compensatory cognitive and behavioral responses. Consumers threatened by COVID-19 developed "travel fear" (Zheng et al., 2021), activating their behavioral immune systems (Neuberg et al., 2011). To avoid infection risk, consumers may actively shorten their shopping activity radius to reduce contact with unsafe mobile factors (e.g., undiagnosed COVID-19 carriers). According to eMarketer (2021), 50% of respondents reported greater willingness to shop at nearby community stores compared to pre-pandemic times. Therefore, we propose:

Proposition 1: Consumers' shopping radius has shortened after the pandemic compared to before.

Based on relevant literature, we propose the following general characteristics of community consumers compared to mall consumers: First, geographic proximity is a typical feature of offline communities. Due to close physical distance, consumers perceive lower risk from community merchants because problems can be easily resolved through returns or exchanges (Edwards et al., 2009). Benedikctus et al. (2007) proposed that nearby community merchants also enjoy greater trust online. Consequently, we expect community consumers exhibit higher membership enrollment willingness. Additionally, Meyners et al. (2017) found that reviews from geographically close sources have greater influence, suggesting neighborhood word-of-mouth may exert stronger impact on community consumers' purchase decisions. Geographic proximity may also increase consumption frequency and repeat purchase proportion, leading community consumers to experience satiation more readily than mall consumers according to consumer satiation theory. However, due to high-frequency shopping needs, community consumers may become familiar with community merchants through frequent interaction, and familiarity more readily generates positive emotional connections (Fang et al., 2007). Therefore, according to place attachment theory, we expect community consumers are more likely to develop attachment to community (vs. mall) merchants. Moreover, community commerce is depicted as being "on the way home" with "the warmth of home" (Tencent.com, 2020), and this "going home" perception may make community consumers more sensitive to "home"-related factors, such as purchasing family-size products (e.g., children's formula paired with elderly formula) or family matching outfits. Therefore, we expect family-oriented consumption represents a primary characteristic of community consumers.

Proposition 2: Compared to mall consumers, community consumers exhibit six characteristics: (a) closer distance, (b) higher membership enrollment willingness, (c) greater word-of-mouth influence, (d) greater satiation proneness, (e) greater place attachment proneness, and (f) family-oriented consumption.

Among these six characteristics, community consumer satiation and place attachment represent the core and essence, with stronger relevance to psychology. Therefore, this paper focuses on these two dimensions to develop research propositions.

3.2 Strategies for Enhancing Community Consumer Place Attachment

Brand name constitutes an important brand element, and brand naming represents a critical corporate decision. Marketing and consumer behavior literature demonstrates that brand names directly influence consumer purchase preferences. For example, Wu et al. (2019) found that Chinese consumers prefer semantically named cars (e.g., Nissan' s "Loulan") over phonetically and semantically named cars (e.g., Volkswagen' s "Touareg"), though luxury models benefit most from letter-combination naming (e.g., Mazda' s CX-7). Wang et al. (2019) discovered that Chinese consumers making financial investments prefer stocks containing "China" characters (e.g., "Zhong" prefix) over non-China prefix stocks, an effect termed the home-name effect. They further found that China-prefix stocks generate stronger psychological identification among individual investors, thereby increasing holding intentions, with self-enhancement motives strengthening this identification and holding intention. Community commerce is depicted as being "on the way home" with "the warmth of home" (Tencent.com, 2020), and proximity to home represents a typical feature of community commerce. Following Wang et al.' s (2019) logic, we propose that compared to community brands without "home" characters (e.g., "Fang Tian Xia"), community brand names containing "home" characters (e.g., "Lianjia," "Wo Ai Wo Jia") or home elements (e.g., "Good Neighbor" convenience stores) more readily generate positive emotional responses and purchase intentions among community consumers.

According to environmental psychology, store environments—including attractive signage, layout, lighting, color, and comfortable atmosphere—serve as stimuli shaping consumer experiences that imprint in memory over time (Lund & Marinova, 2014). Based on place attachment theory, stores that provide familiarity, authenticity, and a sense of home more readily generate place attachment. We propose that community brand names containing "home" characters help community consumers establish close connections with community merchants (e.g., reinforcing community and home values), creating perceptions of closeness and familiarity that facilitate place attachment. Place attachment positively influences purchase intention (Brocato et al., 2015). Therefore, we propose:

Proposition 3_1: Community consumers exhibit higher purchase intentions toward community merchant brands whose names contain (vs. do not contain) "home" characters.

Proposition 3_2: Place attachment mediates the relationship between community brand naming type and purchase intention, such that consumers show

higher purchase intentions toward community brands whose names contain (vs. do not contain) "home" characters because the former more readily generates place attachment.

When entering community brands are already well-known (e.g., Freshippo), consumers tend to rely on past experiences as primary purchase decision criteria (Edwards et al., 2009). In such cases, whether the community brand name contains "home" characters/elements has minimal impact. Conversely, when consumers are unfamiliar with a community brand (i.e., startup community brands), brand names more likely influence decisions subconsciously. As previously argued, community brand names containing "home" characters generate greater perceived trust and familiarity, leading to higher place attachment and consequently higher purchase intention.

Proposition 3_3: Brand awareness moderates the effect of community brand naming type (with vs. without "home" characters) on consumer purchase intention. Specifically, when brand awareness is low upon community entry, consumers exhibit higher purchase intentions toward community brands whose names contain (vs. do not contain) "home" characters; however, when brand awareness is high upon community entry, the presence (vs. absence) of "home" characters shows no significant difference in purchase intention.

When managers seek to create place attachment, they must consider the entire "place," including social elements that enhance consumer attachment to the company beyond physical environment aspects. We observe that many community merchants utilize store resources to provide free value-added services for community consumers. For example, Lianjia offers free copying, printing, emergency internet access, and emergency phone calls, while JD's 7Fresh community supermarkets provide parcel collection services. These services benefit consumers at minimal cost (Mahar et al., 2014). Community stores offering value-added services provide greater functional convenience, facilitating functional attachment to retail environments (Rosenbaum et al., 2007). Through comparison with other retail environments, if a retail environment satisfies more consumer needs, consumers more readily develop dependence, reduce perceived substitutability, and generate attachment (Milligan, 1998; Stokols & Shumaker, 1981). Therefore, we propose:

Proposition 4: Community consumers develop stronger place attachment and consequently higher purchase intentions toward community merchants that provide (vs. do not provide) additional functional services.

Social interaction constitutes a primary reason consumers develop place attachment toward retail environments. This study posits that interaction between service staff and community consumers influences community consumer place attachment, subsequently affecting purchase intention. Research shows that people frequently perceive and evaluate others along two dimensions: warmth and competence (Chen Zengxiang & Yang Guangyu, 2017). Warmth and competence reflect different perceptions of others' intentions and motives in social

interaction. Specifically, warmth is other-oriented, characterized by kindness, trustworthiness, patience, friendliness, and sincerity, whereas competence is self-oriented, demonstrating ability, skill, wisdom, and confidence to influence others (Chen Zengxiang & Yang Guangyu, 2017).

We argue that community merchant service staff displaying warmth (vs. competence) images more effectively generate place attachment and consequently greater sales increases. According to place attachment theory, positive emotional connections form the basis of place attachment. Communities represent small societies maintained by "acquaintance relationships," and we believe salespeople displaying warm images more readily generate familiarity, authenticity, and security during interactions (Debenedetti et al., 2014), thereby increasing place attachment. Warm images also better facilitate "commercial friendships" with employees or other consumers in retail environments, compensating for loneliness and generating place attachment (Rosenbaum et al., 2007). Conversely, community merchant salespeople displaying competence images may increase perceived distance, reduce emotional connection, and decrease place attachment. Furthermore, from a product attribute perspective, community merchants primarily provide daily necessities (e.g., fresh food, grains and oils) that are low-involvement products, with product information better matching warmth perceptions (Aaker et al., 2000; Xu et al., 2013). From a power perspective, communities with harmonious neighbor relationships represent low-power environments compared to power-competitive workplaces, and low-power information recipients are more easily persuaded by warmth information (Dubois et al., 2016), making community residents more susceptible to warmth-based persuasion. Guentuerkuen et al. (2020) found that service staff displaying warm and enthusiastic images help enterprises build strong emotional relationships with consumers, generating repurchase and promoting word-of-mouth (Huang & Ha, 2020). Chang et al. (2019) discovered that first-person narration combined with warm brand images generates more likes on social media. Therefore, we propose:

Proposition 5: Community consumers develop stronger place attachment and consequently higher purchase intentions toward community merchants whose service staff display warmth (vs. competence) images.

Social interaction represents a primary reason consumers develop place attachment, and we believe this interaction extends beyond the retail environment. Brocato et al. (2015) argue that social bonds between consumers and employees particularly influence place attachment, and strengthening social connections among retail environment members (employees, consumers) helps form consumer place attachment. They further note that creating shared and memorable recollections between consumers and employees strengthens social bonds, which can be achieved through interesting activities. For example, a well-known tea brand's mini-program organizes small-scale member camping registrations. We propose that compared to material member activities (e.g., discounts, free gifts), experiential member activities (e.g., outings, picnics, board games) bet-

ter facilitate interaction and create memorable recollections among community consumers, employees, or other consumers, thereby enhancing place attachment. Positive psychology research finds that material products readily generate hedonic adaptation, with experiential purchases generating greater happiness than material purchases (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000). We even anticipate that awareness of such activities may increase community consumers' perceptions of community merchants' sincerity and generate place attachment regardless of actual participation. Therefore, we propose:

Proposition 6: Experiential (vs. material) member activities more effectively help community consumers develop place attachment toward community merchants, consequently generating higher purchase intentions.

3.3 Strategies for Alleviating Community Consumer Satiation

High-frequency consumption may generate not only place attachment but also consumer satiation. Community consumers likely anticipate satiation and adopt prospective behaviors (e.g., reducing consumption or controlling consumption cycles) to avoid future satiation from excessive consumption (Kahnx et al., 1997). This study argues that anticipated satiation represents one reason consumers are unwilling to enroll in memberships, and proposes that cross-industry membership alliances among community merchants can alleviate consumer satiation.

Cross-industry alliance refers to a corporate strategy where two or more firms from different industries form long-term or short-term strategic alliances through resource sharing when facing the same consumer group to achieve win-win cooperation (Ruekert & Rao, 1994; Simonin & Ruth, 1998; Zhang Qianfan et al., 2018). Manifestations include brand alliances leveraging product advantages and joint promotions bundling products (Rao et al., 1999). This study examines cross-industry membership alliances among community merchants—i.e., membership cross-industry alliances (such as membership point alliances where points earned at Community A' s convenience store can be redeemed at Community B' s restaurant)—and their impact on community consumers' anticipated satiation. According to consumer satiation theory, when consumers experience negative satiation emotions (Redden, 2008, 2015), they typically reduce satiation through variety-seeking (Kahnx et al., 1997). By combining different products or services, membership cross-industry (vs. non-cross-industry) alliances can satisfy consumers' variety-seeking (Menon & Kahn, 1995), reduce anticipated hedonic adaptation states (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2012), and alleviate future satiation with single products or services (Nelson & Meyvis, 2008; Nelson et al., 2009). Therefore, we infer:

Proposition 7: Community consumers experience lower satiation and stronger membership enrollment intentions toward membership cross-industry (vs. non-cross-industry) alliances.

Given community consumers' high repurchase rates and greater satiation proneness, community merchants need to rapidly launch new products to meet con-

stantly changing consumer needs. McDonald's, Subway, and Domino's Pizza continuously develop new products annually (Gielens & Steenkamp, 2007). Successful new products are important drivers of firm performance, contributing 22%-49% of sales and 40% of profits (Ernst et al., 2011; Pauwels et al., 2017). We propose that community merchants should launch rich (vs. narrow) product lines to reduce consumer satiation. On one hand, rich product lines provide variety choices that satisfy consumers' novelty-seeking motivation and reduce satiation speed (Line et al., 2016). On the other hand, new product categories reduce repeat consumption probability of original categories, slowing satiation with original categories (Redden, 2008). However, research also shows that more product categories lead consumers to experience consumption stimuli across categories rather than focusing on single categories (Redden, 2008), potentially accelerating satiation with original categories and increasing variety-seeking across categories. Therefore, we infer:

Proposition 8_1: Rich (vs. narrow) product lines can reduce community consumers' satiation with community merchants.

Proposition 8_2: The number of new product categories exhibits a U-shaped relationship with consumers' satiation with original category products.

Shareable coupons represent a special marketing strategy where consumers can share obtained coupons with relatives and friends, who receive the same discount. Hanson and Yuan (2018) found that compared to traditional non-shareable coupons, shareable coupons make consumers feel empowered, generating higher purchase intentions. We propose that shareable coupons can reduce consumer satiation. First, because shareable coupons are not yet universally popular, they provide more differentiated experiences than traditional coupons, and attention to differentiation helps reduce satiation speed (Redden, 2008). Second, sharing coupons with neighbors helps shape friendly, caring, and respectful self-images, enhancing self-concept (Seo & Scammon, 2014). This process helps generate positive memories, and pleasant memories can alleviate negative impacts of satiation (Galak et al., 2009). In summary, shareable coupons can alleviate satiation resulting from hedonic adaptation. Therefore, we infer:

Proposition 9: Community consumers experience lower satiation and higher purchase intentions toward shareable (vs. traditional) coupons.

China's urbanization rate will exceed 70% by 2030, forming over 20,000 emerging communities (China Investment Consulting, 2016). Unlike older communities with stable commercial patterns, emerging community consumers have not yet formed community brand preferences, potentially offering enormous development space for community brands. As community commerce dividends further release, more startup community brands will emerge. Should relatively low-awareness startup brands enter emerging communities to seize first-mover advantage or enter older communities step-by-step? Existing research cannot answer this question.

Optimum Stimulation Level (OSL) Theory posits that consumers engage in

variety-seeking behavior to maintain optimal stimulation levels (Gu et al., 2016; McAlister, 1982), keeping obtained stimulation at the most pleasant level (Gu et al., 2016). Variety-seeking refers to individuals' tendency to seek diversity when selecting goods or services, representing consumer behavior that alleviates or prevents satiation, seeks novelty, demonstrates choice freedom, and pursues utility maximization (Givon, 1984; Levav & Zhu, 2009; Ratner & Kahn, 2002; Zhang Yi et al., 2020), with OSL theory being central to explaining variety-seeking tendencies (McAlister, 1982; Raju, 1980; Yu Hongyan et al., 2008). For traditional retail stores, OSL theory indicates that product and environmental changes are primary stimulation sources (Yu Hongyan et al., 2008), and that intermediate stimulation levels are perceived as most satisfying, while excessively high or low levels cause dissatisfaction. For example, when consumers feel bored, they generate new stimulation by changing routine purchase behaviors; when stimulation exceeds optimum, they reduce exploration of new things (Gu et al., 2016; Yu Hongyan et al., 2008).

Extending this logic to community commerce, due to high consumption frequency in communities, older community residents readily satiate with existing community brands, causing their psychological stimulation levels to fall below optimum and generating variety-seeking behavior, thereby creating greater opportunities for low-awareness community brands. However, in emerging communities, new environments and brands provide various stimuli that may raise consumers' psychological stimulation levels above optimum, causing them to prefer well-known brands to avoid risk. Therefore, we infer:

Proposition 10_1: Consumers in older (vs. emerging) communities exhibit higher satiation levels.

Proposition 10_2: Low-awareness (vs. high-awareness) community brands achieve greater sales increases when located in older (vs. emerging) communities.

4 Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic catalyzed the rise of community commerce, and national policy advocates vigorously developing offline economic entities. However, research and theories on community consumers and offline communities remain scarce, with some community businesses struggling and even closing. Grounded in marketing, consumer behavior, psychology, and environmental psychology, this study deeply characterizes community consumer features and explores pathways to community commerce prosperity by focusing on enhancing community consumer place attachment and alleviating community consumer satiation.

This study' s theoretical framework appears in Figure 1, with main theoretical contributions as follows:

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

First, existing community consumer research primarily focuses on motivations for adopting community commerce (e.g., Anić & Rada, 2016) and geographic

proximity characteristics (e.g., Lee & Bell, 2013), with perspectives largely indistinguishable from general consumer research and lacking understanding of community consumer traits, resulting in unclear consumer profiles. This study deeply excavates the core concept of "community," constructing general characteristics of community consumers: compared to mall consumers, community consumers exhibit six traits—closer distance, higher membership enrollment willingness, greater word-of-mouth influence, greater satiation proneness, greater attachment proneness, and family-oriented consumption. These conclusions provide new knowledge and frameworks for community consumer trait research.

Second, marketing and consumer behavior literature contains numerous articles on brand attachment, and Borghini et al. (2021) advocate that marketing scholars should focus on place attachment research. Previous place attachment research has primarily investigated emotional connections between individuals and homes, communities, cities, regions, nations, and continents (Lewicka, 2011), paying less attention to place attachment's impact on consumer-retail space relationships (with exceptions including Borghini et al., 2021; Brocato et al., 2015; Debenedetti et al., 2014; Rosenbaum et al., 2007; Styven et al., 2020). After systematically reviewing place attachment concepts, differences from brand attachment, formation mechanisms, and effects, this study infers that community consumers exhibit higher purchase intentions toward community merchant brands whose names contain (vs. do not contain) "home" characters, toward community merchants whose service staff display warmth (vs. competence) images, toward those providing (vs. not providing) additional services, and toward those organizing experiential (vs. material) member activities, with higher purchase intentions resulting from higher place attachment. This study also explores boundary conditions for some relationships, with expected conclusions significantly advancing place attachment theory.

Finally, based on consumer satiation theory, this study infers that community consumers exhibit higher purchase intentions toward community merchants adopting membership cross-industry (vs. non-cross-industry) alliances, rich (vs. narrow) product lines, and shareable (vs. non-shareable) coupons, with higher purchase intentions resulting from more effective satiation alleviation. This study discusses boundary conditions for some relationships, exploring how resource endowment factors (multi-industry cross-industry alliances), contextual factors (social experiences from shareable coupons), and product factors influence consumer satiation, thereby enriching consumer satiation theory.

This study offers significant value for marketing practice, helping community merchants more profoundly understand community consumer psychology and behavioral characteristics. On one hand, place attachment is crucial for offline physical businesses, particularly small businesses unable to compete with large enterprises on price, such as community merchants. These community merchants can attract consumers and increase place attachment by creating positive social atmospheres in retail environments or shaping physical environments con-

sistent with consumer images—for example, selecting community brand names containing "home" characters, hiring affable staff, providing warm services, and organizing experiential member activities. On the other hand, alleviating community consumer satiation represents an important challenge for community commerce practice. Membership cross-industry alliances, rich product lines, and shareable coupons are expected to reduce community consumer satiation.

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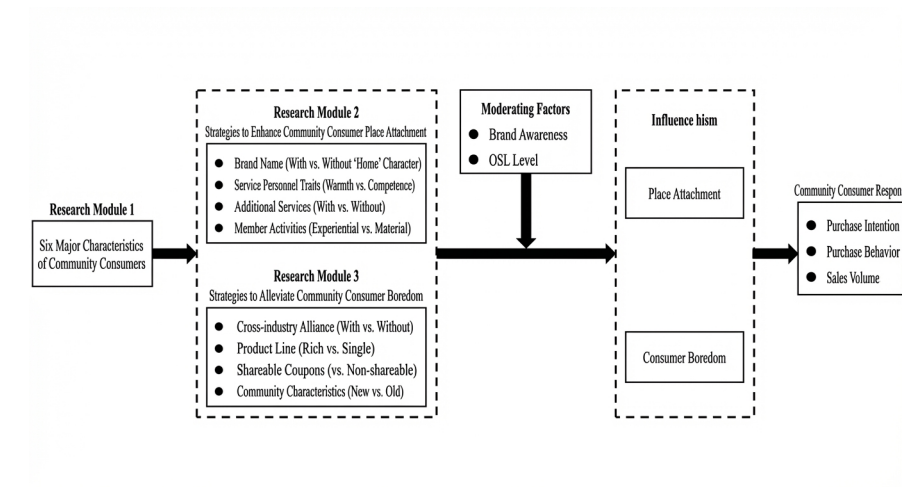
Figures

Figure 1: Figure 1

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