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FACEBOOK EWOM MARKETING STRATEGY: A SOCIAL SUPPORT THEORY PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Today, social media is a major communication medium for online users. Along the use of social media, electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM) is a common user behavior. To understating the Facebook marketing and form marketing strategy has become an increasingly important issue. Facebook ranks at top one social medium where the posts on food and dining ranks at top 5 topics. To understand the EWOM behavior, this study investigates that positive and negative EWOM over Facebook. Both social exchange theory and social support theory are applied in our study. The results suggest that trust and social support are the major reason that influence customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction of Facebook, which in turn influence the positive and negative EWOM intention respectively. The theoretical contribution of our study lies in the application of two social theories in online context. The empirical contribution is to provide our findings to e-retailers to create positive EWOM meanwhile to avoid negative EWOM. The results of our study

benefits e-retailers to build up positive reputations and form marketing strategy for business growth.

Keywords

E-Word of Mouth, Social Exchange Theory, Social Support Theory, Facebook, Social Media

1. Introduction

The development of the Internet makes e-commerce possible. Making purchase online and social networking is part of everyday life. Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM), refers to form of communication has taken on special importance with the emergence of online platforms, which have made it one of the most influential information sources on the Web (Abubakar and Ilkan, 2016). EWOM influences customers' purchase behaviors. For instance, a customer will read Amazon customer feedback before make purchase decision. Youtube influencers also play an important role in customer purchase decision. In this study, we study what are the factors influence EWOM and how these factors has impact to marketing strategy. Traditional word of mouth plays an important role in customers' purchase behaviors. Thanks to the Internet, the WOM has developed into electronic form in social media such as Facebook, customer review in ecommerce website like Amazon. Online discussion forum also has a lot of EWOM. Statistics suggest that 50% of online shoppers will read online review before they make purchase (Djordjevic, 2020). About 6% of customers will always leave online comments (Review trackers, 2018) whereas most of customers will leave comments only when they are angry or extraordinarily delighted.

Facebook is the major social media. In 2017, they have 2 billion active users (Constine, 2017). Many users post comments on Facebook and perform EWOM communications. In this study, we use Facebook fan page as our research context to test how EWOM have impact to customers' purchase decisions and business marketing strategies.

The objective of this study is to understand understand the EWOM behavior, this study investigates that positive and negative EWOM over Facebook. Both social exchange theory and social support theory are applied in our study. By using focus group study, we intend to explain how EWOM is formed in Facebook.

2. Literature Review

The popularity of Facebook makes EWOM in social media possible. Marketers use Facebook as a major way of marketing campaign. It is an important issue for marketers on how wisely use Facebook marketing to create visibilities. We study what are the factors influence Facebook fan pages users' purchasing behaviours. Especially how positive EWOM can be created. Business can

use our results to create positive EWOM over Facebook and ultimately increase the purchase intentions of customers.

2.1 Social Exchange Theory (SET)

Social exchange theory was proposed by Homans (1958) and was originated from psychology. He asserts that the reason of social exchange is to interact with the society and use least cost to gain the most (Salam, Rao, & Pegels, 1998). The theory was developed initially to study the human behaviors and then it was used to study organization behavior such as employee performance and work attitude (DeConinck, 2010; Aryee, Walumbwa, Mondejar, & Chu, 2015). For instance, perceived organizational supports is the mediator of process justice and organizational trust (DeConinck, 2010). Self-determinism and social exchange theory are used to study the organizational justice and work performance. It was found that satisfaction mediates the organizational justice, internal relationship, and relationship between justice and trust in an organization (Aryee et al., 2015). Based on social exchange theory, researchers study sales persons and customer-oriented performance and how the performance can reduce conflicts. They also study while sales persons have conflicts, how the conflicts create negative impact to work performance and how the negative impact will have implications to employee turnover (Mulki & Wilkinson, 2017). Social exchange theory is also widely used in e-commerce research. For instance, researchers found that trust and receptivity in social exchange theory have positive influence to customer satisfaction (Shiau & Luo, 2012). Researchers also found that online store image and purchase intention has positive relationship. Settlement performance, usefulness, and customer purchase intention are positively correlated (Chen & Teng, 2013). Below we describe constructs in social exchange theory.

2.1.1 Reputation

Reputation refers to a person believe that social interaction can potentially increase level of personal reputation (Shiau & Luo, 2012). It is considered a mean to maintain or gain social status (Marett & Joshi, 2009). When an individual perceives that social participation can increase their online reputation, they will be inspired to contribute their knowledge (Wasko & Faraj, 2005).

2.1.2 Reciprocity

Reciprocity is considered to be the benefits of social exchange. Providing help to other is to get rewards in the future (Lakhani & Von Hippel, 2003). It is an internal social norm and a benefit of social participation (Perugini, Gallucci, Presaghi, & Ercola, 2003). Recent studies show that receptivity is a reason that people share information.

2.1.3 Altruism

Altruism is described to be an unconditional benevolence, not expecting any return (Fehr & Gächter, 2000). An individual provides help to other without expecting rewards and through the

action he/she will obtain satisfaction (Davenport & Prusak, 1998). Some people like to help others and they feel good to do that. Their motivation of providing help is to get fun by doing favors for others. They are more willing to provide information online and do not expect a direct return (Liu et al., 2016).

2.1.4 Trust

When both parties trust each other, they are more willing to share resources without being afraid to be used by others. It means the higher the trust, the more people will be willing to share knowledge with members in the community (Tsai & Cheng, 2012). A recent research shows that trust has been widely used in Facebook study of trust (Waldman, 2016).

2.2 Social Support Theory

Social support theory is originated from socio-psychology theory. Social support is defined as the experience where an individual is taken care of by social community, getting support, and to be responded (Cobb, 1976). Some scholars believe that there are four types of social support: informational, emotional, verbal, functional support (House, 1981). In contrast, some scholars believe that there are two types of social support: information and emotional support (Schaefer, Coyne, & Lazarus, 1981). Social support can provide warmth and understanding; thus, it is considered as a response to psychological needs. Support is regarded as a passionate reward. Even the support cannot directly resolve others' problems; it can make people feel good (Maslow, 1954).

Researchers found that social support and quality of relationship have an impact on social commerce use intention and website use intention (Liang, Ho, & Turban, 2011). Other researchers found that information seeking and acquiring, emotional support, and network maintaining are three major components of online social support. These aspects positively impact the user commitment and continuous use of the social media websites (Lin, Zhang, & Li, 2016).

3. Method

Currently, there is limited literature using social support theory to study the EWOM. Social support studies found a plenty of types of social supports. In the previous literature, various types of social supports were documented; however, none of them were identified in an e-commerce context. To identify social support in the e-commerce context, we first perform a focus group study to identify the dimensions of social support and we then perform regression analysis to figure out the causal relationship between social exchange, social support, and intention of social media communications. In addition, scholars agree that five-factor interpersonal psychology: openness, extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, and conscientiousness, are important to understand motivation and actions (Costa, & McCrae, 1985). We include some of these personality traits as moderators in our research model.

3.1 Research Design

The focus group study is conducted in a major university in Taiwan. Seven participants were recruited in college of management. They are four males and three females, age ranging from 21 to 25 years old. The seven participants are four undergrad and three graduate students who enroll IT courses in a major university in Taiwan. They are selected because they are 1) Facebook users, and 2) they post EWOM in past 6 months. They joined the focus group study voluntarily. They were instructed by a moderator to enter a lab in college of management building. The moderator who facilitates the focus group is a senior researcher in the Taiwan University. The data was collected via recording and note taking. Participants' responses were used only for research and their responses and identities will not to be disclosed to a third party.

3.2 Procedure

We collected the definitions of five factor interpersonal psychology: openness, extraversion agreeableness, neuroticism, and conscientiousness. We studied the definitions of social support across literature and focus group studies of EWOM. Three questions for focus group study emerges from the literature we studied (Sweeney, Soutar, & Mazzarol, 2008):

Question #1:

Please describe your recent experience of posting positive EWOM and receive positive EWOM.

Please describe your recent experience of posting negative EWOM and receive negative EWOM.

This question is asked to allow us understand the Facebook users' EWOM behaviors. It is also a question leads participants share their experiences.

Question #2:

Please describe the factors that have impact to yourself or others to perform EWOM communications.

We intended to find the social support related factors in the discussion of this question.

Question #3:

From your observation, who will be more likely to perform EWOM communications? Who will be less likely to perform EWOM communications?

We intended to understand the relationship between five factor interpersonal psychology: openness, extraversion agreeableness, neuroticism, and conscientiousness and EWOM communications. In other words, what are the personality trait directly associated with EWOM communications.

During the focus group session, we first explained the purpose, procedure, and issues regarding the focus group study. The instructor of the focus group then asked the three research questions in order. Participants may freely give responses. The focus group discussion was recorded. A coder performed a content analysis based on the data collected in the focus group discussion. A

two steps strategy was adopted for analysis. First, the data was carefully examined and a categorization strategy was developed. Second, content that appears in the group discussion were selected based on the purpose of our study.

4. Results

Through the data analysis, we conclude social support and five factor interpersonal psychology.

4.1 Type of Social Support

- **Emotional Support:** It refers to message that related to emotions including respect, feelings, trust, caring, and listening (House, 1981).
- **Instrumental Support:** This includes money, labour, time, change environment, or psychological supports (House, 1981).
- **Informational Support:** This refers to providing information, suggestion, knowledge and that helps to problem solving (House, 1981).
- **Appraisal Support:** This refers to assurance, giving feedback, and social comparison (House, 1981).
- **Esteem Support:** Through other and confirm themselves (Cobb, 1976).
- **Social Relationship:** Activity support including leisure and entertainments to pass the time with others (Sherbourne & Steward, 1991).

Based on focus group discussion, we performed a content analysis and we found four types of social support :

Appraisal Support: This includes give feedback, assurance, and social comparison. When Facebook users share EWOM, other users are expected to see assurance or “like” They expect to see positive feedback and supportive message, one participant said:

“I like to see mayday concert, I share my thoughts that their concert is so much fun. I saw the message that others envy me and say it is so hard to get the ticket. Or she/he wants to go. I am happy to see those comments....” (A 21 year old female student)

Emotional Support: Providing emotional support including respects, feeling, trust, caring and listening. Facebook users are expected to share their emotions or others can listen and care about his/her posts:

I booked a fine restaurant on mother’s day. I explain the restaurant my budget. We plan to spend 7000 Taiwanese dollars and we do not want to have raw fishes because kids do not eat uncooked food. The restaurant agrees but they does not do what we requested. I do not feel they provide us what we ask for. The service is not good. Conversely, their online reviews are mostly positive and I feel these reviews do not reflect the actual situation. They have high remarks and stars

in the online review forum. I therefore think that I shall share my experiences to the new customers who have never come to this restaurant. I make comments in Google review and Facebook to relieve my anger. (A 20 year old female student)

Informational Support: It means providing information, suggestions, knowledge, or experience. It might help to solve problems. When Facebook users share their EWOM, they hope to obtain information or suggestions from others. Or after sharing their experiences, they will wish others to provide experience to them:

I shared the bad experience over the Google review and Facebook. I got responses from the restaurant. They apologize to me that it was a mess on that day so they did not give me a good service. “Do you want to take back your negative comments?” a participant asks. No, I decided not to. I feel this is my real experience that gives others information to choose to go to this restaurant or not to go. I also realized why some high remark restaurant will have some negative comments. (A 19 year old female student)

Social Relationship: It refers to actively support or social interaction. When Facebook users share their EWOM. They will expect others interacting with them. It may be complaint together or sharing thoughts. These interactions are entertainments:

Sometimes when I purchase a nice bag or accessories. I will want to share with others and let them know that I buy a great thing. When I share my thoughts and feeling, I find it is very pleasant that other people also like my purchase. (A 20 year old male student)

4.2 Five Factor Interpersonal Psychology

We list three types of interpersonal psychology that is related to EWOM:

Neuroticism: An individual has this kind of personality often hard to control his emotion and impulse.

I went to a small city but do not know where to find the food. I search on the Internet and find that there is a 4 stars review vegetarian restaurant. I ordered pumpkin hot pot and found there were some worm poos. It was very disgusting. It is not taste as good as what the online review comments. I was hungry so I did eat a little there. I do not understand why there are some good comments about this restaurant. “Do you want to give negative comments?” Yes,, but I did not send them out. I am worried that they will know it was me. After a while, I feel calm, so I decided not to send the negative comments. (A 22 year-old male student)

Extraversion: An individual has this personality often to be optimistic. They are shy, like to be alone, and often escape from social anxiety. We can infer that this type of person like to share EWOM:

“Hey but if you do not send the bad review other people might get the same experience. Only you know how bad it is so you shall share your experience.” Yes, but I am afraid that other people do

not have bad experience like me and question me that is my problem. “Do you take picture? If so, you can prove you are making right comments.” Yes, I did, but I still have concern that it is a shall to leave negative comments. I decided not to post comments. Conservative people will not leave negative comments. (A 23 year old male student)

Conscientiousness: An individual has this personality think a lot, he/she is discipline and we can infer that they will not share EWOM. Unless they cannot bare it, otherwise they will not post comments.

I think those who think a lot wont share EWOM. They are deep and feel relieved after thinking. They will not comment thinking because of impulse. (A 22 year old female student)

Based on the results of the focus group, we performed regression analysis and we found that only Conscientiousness has direct effect to dissatisfaction of social media ($\beta=-0.663$; $p<0.001$). Reputation and Conscientiousness have stronger interaction effect. We conclude that personality has impact to social exchange and social support over social media. It is a mediator of social support and social exchange to satisfaction toward social media.

5. Discussion

In this study we perform focus group discussion and we found that social exchange and social support predict the satisfaction of social media. Users will post the EWOM to express their feelings. Personality mediates the effect of social exchange and social support to satisfaction. The results of this study may inform businesses to create the correct marketing strategy over social media. Thus, maintain and positive image of the businesses.

The results also help the Facebook fan page owners understand how to create positive EWOM communications. Creating positive EWOM communications may avoid businesses having negative image and thus increase the purchase intentions of customers.

This study helps social media develop their marketing strategies. Firstly, differentiating their services from other media by allowing customers fully express their emotions and feeling. Secondly, social media platforms shall also promote their services and allow more social exchange activities happen in the platforms. Thirdly, identifying customers' personality and link that with social media promotions.

We are constrained by the time and resources, so we collect only student samples. Future study may recruit non-student samples. To increase the generalizability, the participant shall not only to be the Facebook users but also have been post comments in past 6 months.

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