

DOCTORAL THESIS

Investigating trust and commitment on brand pages in social networking sites: the antecedents and outcomes

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Date of Award:
2014

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ABSTRACT

As the growing popularity of social networking sites (SNS) in recent years, many companies have recognized the potential of SNS as a competitive tool to connect with their customers and help them to achieve better business performance. The brand page is a popular product of SNS that allows companies to create their own profiles in SNS and provides companies with a platform to engage with their customers. The brand page can create added values for both companies and customers because it can help companies to increase brand awareness and also help customers to gain more brand knowledge. Past studies consider that increasing customers' commitment and trust on the brand page are central to improving companies' performance on the brand page. The aim of this thesis is to gain a better understanding of customers' commitment and trust on the brand page based on the Commitment-Trust Theory, and use customer values based on the Customer Value Theory to explain the antecedents of customers' commitment, trust, and relationship outcomes on the brand page. In particular, the thesis focuses on three customer values, namely, functional value, social value, and emotional value. This thesis focuses on four customer relationship outcomes: relationship durability, electronic word of mouth, continued interaction, and functional conflict.

To examine the above objectives, this thesis proposes a theoretical model which includes three model components: relationship antecedents (i.e., customer values), relationship mediators (i.e., brand page commitment and trust), and relationship outcomes (i.e., relationship durability, electronic word of mouth, continued interaction, and functional conflict). We propose positive relationships between relationship antecedents and relationship mediators, and between relationship mediators and relationship outcomes. We conceptualized functional value, social value, emotional value, brand page commitment, and brand page trust as second-order constructs. We identify their respective first-order constructs through an extensive literature review.

We verify our research model by using a data set collected in a Chinese social networking site – Sina Microblog. A total of 375 questionnaires are collected from users in Sina Microblog who have followed at least one brand page.

We adopt established measurement items in previous studies to measure the constructs in this thesis. All measurement items undergo vigorous tests of factor analysis and construct validity. We also assessed the validity of second-order constructs by using theoretical and statistical analysis.

We test our proposed model by using statistical technique of structural equation modelling (SEM). Partial least square (PLS) software package is used for data analysis. Our analysis confirms that social and emotional values significantly influence both brand page commitment and trust. Functional value is significantly

related to brand page trust but not brand page commitment. In term of relationship outcomes, our findings show that both brand page commitment and trust significantly affect customers' relationship durability, electronic word of mouth intention, continued interaction, and functional conflict. Our results also confirm the key mediating roles of brand page commitment and trust on the relationships between each of customer values and each of relationship outcomes.

In conclusion, this thesis makes two main contributions. First, it provides empirical evidence regarding the process of customer relationship development on the brand page. Our results reveal that customer values are salient drivers of customers' commitment, trust, and relationship outcomes on the brand page. Second, it contributes to the Commitment-Trust Theory and the Customer Value Theory by exploring the content of each customer values, commitment, and trust in the context of SNS brand pages.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Vincent W.S. Chow, for his tremendous support and invaluable guidance during the course of my study. Dr. Chow offered innumerable constructive and useful suggestions for the improvement of my research project. His help and encouragement during my study are valuable to me.

I would like to thank Dr. Ludwig M.K. Chang and Dr. Christy M.K. Cheung, for their valuable guidance and encouragement during the course of my study.

I would also like to thank Miss Clara Qin, Mr. Zach Lee, and Mr. Archie Guerra with whom I have spent very enjoyable three years at Hong Kong Baptist University. I would also like to thank my roommates, Miss Xiaoyu Zhou, Miss Yunzhu Liu, and Miss Yao Luo, for their encouragement and companionship during my stay in Hong Kong.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents (Mr. Zhongzhi Shi and Mrs. Xiulan He) and my boyfriend (Mr. Junchao Li) who have given me unlimited love, consistent support, and encouragement during the course of my study.

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