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COMMERCIAL EXPLOITATION OF FACEBOOK: HOW COMPANIES ADOPT FACEBOOK AS A MARKETING TOOL

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Abstract

As the population of Facebook users is growing fast, companies are paying more attention to the influence of social networks to promote brands and are using this rising platform to carry out many marketing activities, such as operating a Facebook Page, and hosting on-line events via such pages. However, few studies have discussed the benefit, which brands could attain by operating on Facebook Pages. This study took place in Taiwan where Facebook has been very popular and aims to understand the motivation and results regarding brand experience of consumers when using social networks and the reasons affecting consumers' willingness to use companies' Facebook Pages. In doing so, we propose a model to discuss the influence from intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: brand experience and E-Word of Mouth (E-WOM). Our results show that perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness positively influence brand experience; brand love and customer effort both directly influence brand experience. Yet, brand experience influences E-WOM directly and through Facebook pages such as loyalty. We believe that our results could be useful for companies looking to exploit Facebook as a marketing tool.

Keywords: Facebook, Virtual Community, Brand Love, Brand Experience, Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Ease of Use, Customer Effort, E-Word of Mouth, Customer Loyalty.

1 Introduction

Facebook, a social website, provides a platform for people to use as a means of interacting, communicating and sharing, thereby enhancing human connections and sociability (Nie, 2001).

Facebook is the most visited website in most countries and according to the survey reported by Facebook itself, over 4 billion global users are active on Facebook every month, more than 20 million people connect to pages every day, and more than 5 billion pieces of content (event, news stories, blog posts, notes, photo albums, etc) are shared each week (Facebook, 2010).

The popularity of Facebook has also attracted companies' attention and inspired marketing activities via this new platform. However, limited academic work has been done in this area. For example, only a few studies have pointed out that the community enhances brand equity by improving brand word of mouth (Adjei *et al.*, 2009), and even fewer studies focus on the use of the Facebook platform by companies. Most academic researches on Facebook have focused on the concerns of identity and privacy (Dwyer and Passerini, 2007; Wellman, 1996). Other recent researches have looked at the relationship between the profile structure and friendship articulation (Lampe *et al.*, 2007) and social capital accumulation through line site use (Ellison *et al.*, 2006); fewer studies have discussed the benefits which brands would gain by interacting, communicating and sharing with their fans. According to Tsai (2005) in order to improve customer experience, brands need to manage their media image, such as through interaction between media and customer. As Barwise and Meehan's (2010) article in Harvard Business Review, Facebook, as a very popular social network website, could help brands to disseminate word of mouth, whether positive or negative, with amazing speed. Therefore, we consider that determining how to operate brand communities on Facebook, and the reasons affecting customers' intention to use the brand's Facebook Pages are both important issues.

Based on above discussion, in this study, we aim to understand how companies enhance their profile by providing positive brand experiences to consumers via Facebook Pages, and the reasons affecting consumers' willingness to use companies' Facebook Pages, in order to provide guidance to marketers in managing this fashion trend and powerful new internet venue. The paper is organised as follows: The next section will provide a literature review, which leads to hypothesis building. Then, an overview of the research method will be provided. After that, the findings will be presented and discussed in subsequent sections. The last section of this paper will outline conclusions, limitations and future research directions.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS BUILDING

2.1 Perceived Ease of Use, Perceived Usefulness, Brand Experience and Brand Love

Consumer and marketing researches have shown that experience occurs when consumers search and consume for products or services (Brakus *et al.*, 2008). However, experience can also occur indirectly, such as: when consumers are exposed to advertising and marketing communications from both physical or virtual channels and platforms (Brakus *et al.*, 2009). Brand experience comprises all of the brand-related stimuli, such as: brand-identifying colours (Gorn *et al.*, 1997), Shapes (Veryzer and Hutchinson, 1998), typefaces, background design elements (Mandel and Johnson 2002), slogans, mascots and brand characters (Keller, 1987). Brand experience is related but also conceptually distinct from other brand constructs. In particular, brand experience differs from evaluative, affective and associative constructs, such as brand attitudes, brand involvement (Zaichkowsky, 1985), brand attachment (Thomson *et al.*, 2005), customer delight (Oliver, 1997) and brand personality (Aaker, 1997). A long-lasting brand experience stored in consumers' memory would affect consumer satisfaction and loyalty (Reicheld, 1996). In our study, we defined the Brand Experience is the response from user sensory, affective, behaviour, and intellectual of the brand's Facebook Page. In considering how to operate a good web site as a virtual community to provide users with good experiences when they connect to the Facebook Pages, we adopted a concept from Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989) which has been introduced previously and has been widely recognised as one the most famous and powerful models to explain and predict user acceptance of

Information System (IS). According to the TAM model, we can see that Perceived Ease of Use and Perceived Usefulness influence the user's behaviour to use new IS by influencing intention. Combining the TAM model with literature review, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1: Perceived Ease of Use and Brand Experience are positively correlated.

H2: Perceived Usefulness and Brand Experience are positively correlated.

H3: Perceived Ease of Use and Perceived Usefulness are positively correlated.

Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) defined love for a brand as “the degree of passionate emotional attachment that a person has for a particular trade name.” and conceptualised it as a type of satisfaction. According to their study, Brand love differs from the satisfaction construct in several key views. The differences between brand love and satisfaction concepts are: (1) while satisfaction generally is conceptualised as a cognitive judgment, brand love has a much stronger affective focus on brands; (2) Brand love is often the result of a consumer's long-term relationship with the brand as satisfaction typically is considered as a transaction-specific outcome; (3) While satisfaction frequently is linked to the expectancy disconfirmation paradigm, brand love requires neither expectancy nor disconfirmation, and (4) Brand love includes a willingness to declare love such as consumers would say: “I love this brand!” and involves integration of the brand into the consumer's identity, neither of which is requisite in regard to satisfaction. From Albert *et al.* (2007), consumers' love includes the following characteristics: (1) passion for a brand, (2) brand attachment, (3) positive evaluation of the brand, (4) positive emotions in response to the brand, and (5) declarations of love toward the brand.

By combining the characteristics of Brand Love and TAM, we study how consumers like to access the Facebook Pages hosted by the brand they love to explore information and interact with the brand. Hence, we propose the following hypotheses:

H4: Brand Love and Perceived Ease of Use are positively correlated.

H5: Brand Love and Perceived Usefulness are positively correlated.

H6: Brand Love and Brand Experience are positively correlated.

2.2 Facebook Pages Loyalty

According to Anderson and Srinivasan's (2003) study, e-loyalty is defined as the customer's favourable attitude toward an electronic business resulting in repeat buying behaviour. Schultz (2000) saw customer loyalty or brand loyalty in cyberspace as an evolution from the traditional product driven, marketer controlled concept towards a distribution driven, consumer controlled and technology-facilitated concept. Additionally, Corstjens and Lal (2000) pointed out that e-loyalty also has several similar terms to the “store loyalty” concept, such as: building repeat store visiting behaviour as well as the purchase of established brand name items in the store. From the above studies, we can see that the concept of e-loyalty extends the traditional brand loyalty concept to online consumer behaviour. Oliver (1997) and Reicheld (1996) posited that a long-lasting brand experience, stored in consumers' memory, would affect consumer satisfaction and loyalty. Thus we propose that brand experience would affect Facebook Pages loyalty through its reinforcement of consumers' satisfaction and loyalty. Therefore, hypothesis **H7** is provided as follows:

H7: Brand Experiences and Facebook Pages Loyalty are positively correlated.

2.3 E-Word of Mouth

Word-of-Mouth (WOM) is commonly defined as informal communication about the characteristics of a business or a product which occurs between consumers (Westbrook, 1987). WOM also refers to information communications between private parties regarding goods and services evaluations (Dichter, 1966; Singh, 1988;). Most importantly, WOM allows consumers to exert both informational and normative influences on the product evaluations and purchase intentions of fellow consumers (Ward and Reingen, 1990). Hennig-Thurau *et al.* (2004) identified four motives of WOM: concern for others, helping the company, social benefits and exerting power. Among these four motives, helping the company is the result of consumers' satisfaction with a product and their subsequent desire to help the company (Sundaram *et al.*, 1998). Thus, we suggest that brands with a high degree of satisfied consumers would obtain WOM attestation from their consumers and thus to defined the E-WOM in our study as the willing of users like to provide positive WOM for the Facebook Page. Referring to WOM as above, we proposed the following hypothesis:

H8: Facebook Pages Loyalty and E-Word of Mouth are positively correlated.

We also observed that Facebook Page users like to click "Like" to post any information they liked or interested (Positive Experience) to share with their Facebook friends. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H9: Brand Experience and E-Word of Mouth are positively correlated.

As we mentioned previously, customers would perceive positive Brand Experience while their Perceived Ease of Use and Perceived Usefulness are positive. Thus, we inferred that the positively Perceived Ease of Use and Perceived Usefulness would influence E-WOM positively. Accordingly, we propose the following hypotheses:

H10: Perceived Usefulness and E-Word of Mouth are positively correlated.

H11: Perceived Ease of Use and E-Word of Mouth are positively correlated.

2.4 Consumer Efforts

A new concept of customer effort was raised by Dixon *et al.* (2010) in the Harvard Business Review. They considered that the most important thing for business is to help consumers solve their problems with the services or products which the companies provide. They also suggested that offering consumers more convenience is vital for ensuring customer loyalty. In their study, they discovered that rather than rewarding the company which provides good experience, consumers are more likely to punish the company for bad service. Their research discovered that reducing customer efforts is important. Following their viewpoints, we also think that increasing customer effort might reduce user intention to use brand Facebook Pages and thus to defined the Customer Efforts in this study as the efforts that users spend for interact with brand by Facebook Page. For example, companies hosting promotion activities on Facebook may require participants to provide detailed information or to make extra effort to engage in some activities or cause users to feel uneasy about providing the utilitarian information they seek. These extra efforts may lead consumers to reduce their intention to use the Facebook Pages due to less positive brand experience, perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness. Thus, we propose the following hypotheses:

H12: Consumer Efforts and Perceived Ease of Use are negatively correlated.

H13: Consumer Efforts and Perceived Usefulness are negatively correlated

H14: Consumer Efforts and Brand Experience are negatively correlated.

Based on the above analysis, a model is proposed and is illustrated in figure 1. We provide a model (Figure 1) whose inferences are based on Social Influence Model proposed by Dholakia *et al.* (2003). The proposed model focuses on the effectiveness of Facebook Pages in regard to E-WOM of the brand, Brand Experience and Facebook Pages Loyalty. It also takes into consideration the new concept of Consumer Effort to estimate its effect on E-WOM.

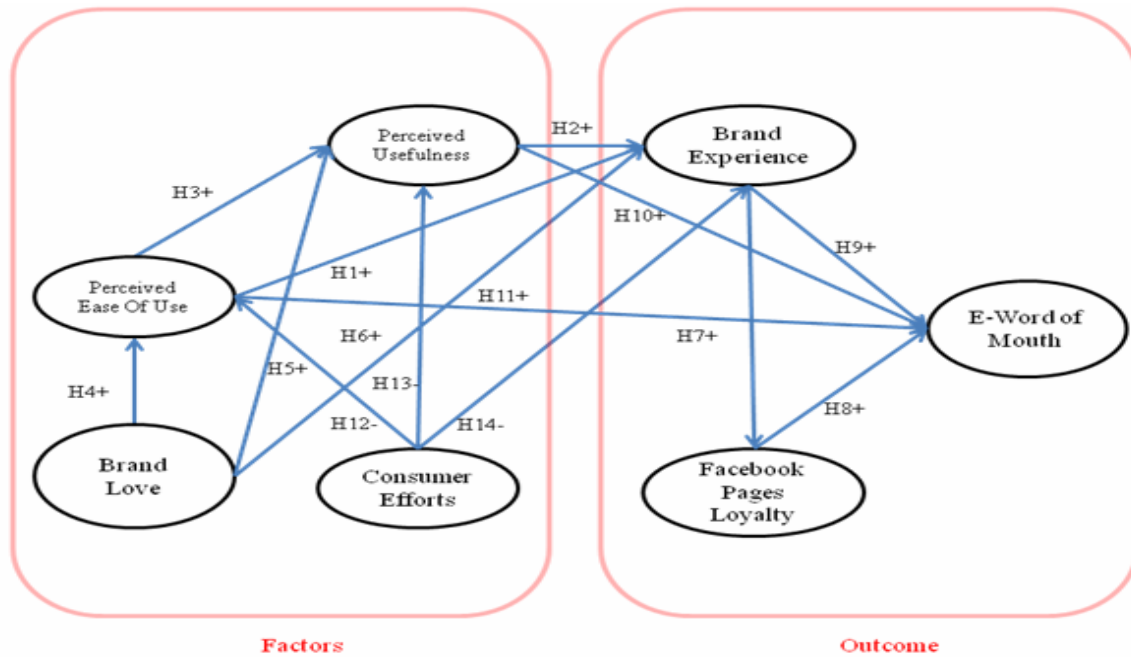


Figure 1. Virtual Brand Community – E-WOM Model

3 Methodology

Our main instrument in this study was an online user survey by questionnaire based on past studies and related academic research. The subjects we used for this study were Facebook users who have joined Facebook Pages and the study took place in spring 2011. They included males and females, domestic (from Taiwan) users. The subjects were chosen by convenient sampling method. To validate the model we proposed, we used the Structural Equation Model (SEM) to analyse the data we collected. In our study, the measured items were developed based on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = “not at all descriptive,” and 7 = “Extremely descriptive”). The questionnaire was distributed by e-mail, Facebook and Facebook Pages, while a lucky draw was offered as incentive.

The study had a pre-test when we collected 57 questionnaires, from 28 males and 29 females. In this stage, we adopted Cronbach’s α as reference to estimate the reliability of measures for each variable in our study. The results show that the Cronbach’s α for all of the variables are over 0.7, meaning the measures are consistent. In order to reduce the questionnaire quantity to improve the survey’s performance and quality, we referred to the “scale if the item deleted” while we processed the Cronbach’s α testing to cancel the measures with lower reliability, and modified the wording of some measures according to the feedback from participants to produce the final questionnaire edition for this study.

4 Research findings

The survey was introduced to participants as an “opinion survey regarding brand image towards WOM on Facebook Pages.” Participants were asked to indicate the Facebook Pages they most visited when they connect to Facebook. After we dropped the invalid samples, a total of 532 participants completed this survey. Of the entire sample, 39.5% were male, 60.5% were female. Respondents ranged in age from less than 15 years old to over 40 years old while most of participants (73.7%) were located in the range of 21 years old to 35 years old. On average, respondents had been using Facebook for 1~2 years, suggesting a high level of experience. This study uses Cronbach’s α and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to measure the questionnaire for each construct. Table 4.1 shows the analysis result of reliability for our final edition questionnaire.

Constructs	Measure Items	Cronbach’s α	CR	AVE
Brand Love	5	.942	.943	.768
Perceived Ease of Use	3	.950	.951	.865
Perceived Usefulness	4	.930	.931	.770
Brand Experience	12	.964	.931	.772
Facebook Pages Loyalty	3	.904	.913	.780
E-Word of Mouth	3	.921	.923	.800
Customer Effort	4	.960	.961	.861

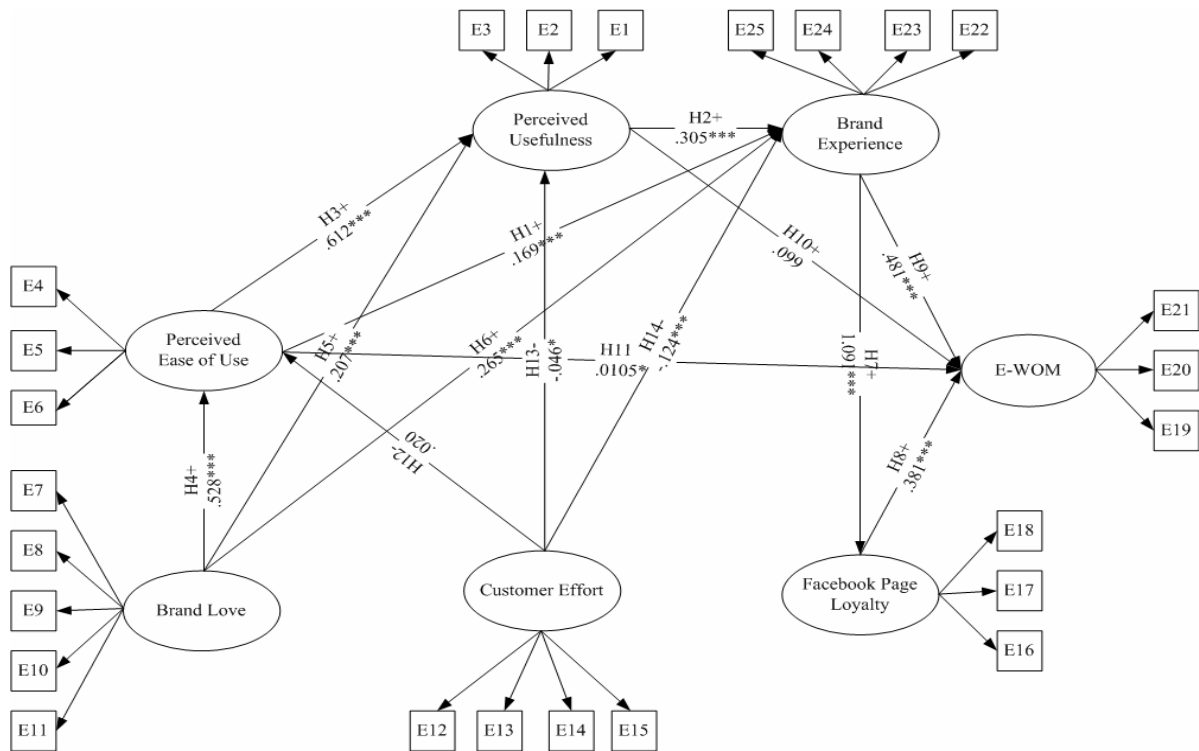
Table 4.1. Reliability for Each Construct

According to Table 4.1, the Cronbach’s α for all of the constructs are above 0.7: from .904 to .960, indicating excellent reliability. Construct Reliability (CR) for each construct is greater than 0.5 and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for most of constructs are greater than 0.5, above the standard suggested by Bagozzi and Yi (1988). Hence, the measures of constructs in our study are reliable. The AVE index was also used to estimate Convergent Validity. As we mentioned, the AVE for most constructs are greater than 0.5 in this study. Thus, the constructs we proposed could be measured effectively. We adopted the CFA to measure the validity for each construct. The goodness-of-fit of constructs models were assessed with chi-square tests, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), the non-normed fit index (NNFI), and the comparative fit index (CFI). Discussions of these indices can be found in Bentlar (1990), and Marsh *et al.* (1996). The indices of the constructs in our study all meet the standard as NFI, NNFI, CFI, IFI, RFI, GFI and AGFI are all greater than .90, meaning that the goodness-of-fit for each construct is good with SRMR close to 0 and RMSEA less than .50. Discriminant validity is supported when the AVE of each construct is greater than the shared variance between each pair of constructs i.e. the squared correlation between constructs. This criterion is met for all possible construct pairs.

Finally, this study uses SEM to process path analysis and to estimate if each hypothesis is valid and the relationships inside the model. We estimate an SEM using the AMOS to assess path coefficients and test relationships we proposed in conceptual Model. The structural Model shows a good fit to the data: NFI = .937, NNFI = .948, CFI = .954, IFI = .984, RFI = .928, SRMR = .0470, RMSEA = .067, GFI = .869, AGFI = .838, $X^2 = 968.441$ (df = 284) and $X^2/df = 3.410$.

4.1 Path Results for the Proposed Model

We estimate specific construct relationships and model fit of the data for the proposed model. The results are shown in Figure 2.



NFI = .937, NNFI = .948, CFI = .954, IFI = .984, RFI = .928, SRMR = .0470, RMSEA = .067, GFI = .869, AGFI = .838, $\chi^2 = 968.441$ (df = 284) and $\chi^2/df = 3.410$; * *P*-value < 0.05, ** *P*-value < 0.01, *** *P*-value < 0.001.

Figure 2. The Estimated Parameters for Model

Considering that the variables: Perceived Usefulness influenced Brand Experience (S.E. = .305; t value = 5.959), Perceived Ease of Use influenced Brand Experience (S.E. = .169; t value = 3.718) and Perceived Ease of Use influenced Perceived Usefulness. (S.E. = .612, t value = 15.754), the results echo the TAM model as both Perceived Usefulness and Perceived Ease of Use are positively influenced by Brand Experience, and Perceived Ease of Use influenced Perceived Usefulness. According to the results above, the high degree of perceived ease of use indicates that users perceive the Facebook Page as useful when they can easily achieve their goal by using the Facebook Page i.e. positive Brand Experience. Hence, our hypotheses **H1**, **H2**, and **H3** are supported.

We also found that Brand Love influenced Perceived Ease of Use (S.E. = .528, t value = 13.230), and Perceived Usefulness (S.E. = .207, t value = 5.947) as users would keep using the Facebook Pages while they remained attached to the brand, and would keep interacting with the brand. Due to their passion for the brand, users would perceive the Facebook Pages as useful and easy to use. Thus, hypotheses **H4** and **H5** are supported. Also, in considering the Brand Love influence Brand Experience (S.E. = .265; t value = 7.962), consumers would obtain positive Brand Experience when they perceived that using the Facebook Pages are worthwhile. Thus, hypothesis **H6** is supported.

Considering that Brand Experience influenced E-WOM (S.E. = .481, t value = 6.668) and Facebook Pages Loyalty (S.E. = 1.091, t value = 19.532), we found that positive brand experience would drive users to distribute positive E-WOM and keep using Facebook Pages, thereby enhancing Facebook Page loyalty. In addition, while these Facebook Page users keep using the Facebook Pages, they would also distribute the positive E-WOM for the brand by clicking “like”. Therefore, our proposed hypotheses **H7**, **H8** and **H9** are supported.

Considering the paths Perceived Usefulness to E-WOM (S.E. = .099; t value = 1.648) and Perceived Ease of Use to E-Word of Mouth (S.E. = .105; t value = 2.025), the results show that the customers would like to disseminate the E-WOM for the Facebook Pages if they think the contents or information provided by the Facebook Page are easy to use. However, they would not like to distribute

the E-WOM if they only think that the Facebook Pages are useful. Thus, hypothesis **H10** is supported whereas hypothesis **H11** is not supported.

Finally, in considering the influence of Customer Effort toward Brand Experience (S.E. = -.124, t value = -7.008), Perceived Usefulness (S.E. = -.046, t value = -2.385) and Perceived Ease of Use (S.E. = .020, t value = .439), we found that only the influence of Customer Effort toward Brand Experience is obvious, while the influences of Customer Effort toward Perceived Usefulness and Customer Effort toward Perceived Ease of Use are not. This is due to that the functions and interfaces of Facebook Pages provided to consumers to operate and interact with the brand and other fans are in a very easy way, e.g. click “like” and posting short messages similar to text cell phone message. Therefore, in regard to Facebook Pages’ interface and operating methods, the customer effort would not be perceived strongly, so the influence of Customer Effort in regard to Facebook Pages’ system function was not obvious. If the procedures and steps to participate in the events or activities on Facebook Pages would increase customers’ efforts in general, customers would still receive bad Brand Experience. Hence, hypotheses **H12**, **H13** and **H14** are supported. Table 4.2 shows the SEM results which supported our proposed hypotheses.

	S.E.	t value	P	Label
PE←BL	.528	13.230	***	Supported
PE←CE	.020	.774	.439	Not Supported
PU←PE	.612	15.754	***	Supported
PU←BL	.207	5.947	***	Supported
PU←CE	-.046	-2.385	*	Supported
BE←CE	-.124	-7.008	***	Supported
BE←PU	.305	5.959	***	Supported
BE←BL	.265	7.962	***	Supported
BE←PE	.169	3.718	***	Supported
FL←BE	1.091	19.532	***	Supported
EW←BE	.481	6.668	***	Supported
EW←FL	.381	8.497	***	Supported
EW←PU	.099	1.648	0.099	Not Supported
EW←PE	.105	2.025	*	Supported

Notes: PE = Perceived Ease of Use, BL = Brand Love, CE = Customer Effort, PU = Perceived Usefulness, BE = Brand Experience, FL = Facebook Pages Loyalty, EW = E-Word of Mouth;
 * P-value < 0.05, ** P-value < 0.01, *** P-value < 0.001

Table 4.2. The Evaluation of Model Fitting

5 Discussion and Implications

Our findings raised several interesting issues and contributions as discussed here.

The more complete understanding of Brand Experience. This study proposed a model to discuss the relationships of Brand Experience on Facebook platform which were subject to little study before. The model yield high explained variance in Brand Experience in regard to the motivations. The emerging view of Brand Experience is recognises the confluence of evaluation and relational factors (Brakus *et al.*, 2009). The system of determinants have not been conceptually integrated or empirically tested before. As proposed in the model, intrinsic motivations, such as: *Brand Love* , and extrinsic

motivations, such as: *Perceived Ease of Use*, *Perceived Usefulness* and *Customer Effort* influence Brand Experience and consequently influence *Brand Loyalty* and *E-word of mouth*. We also discuss the outputs of Brand Experience. Our study shows that positive Brand Experience makes customers loyal and likely to employ WOM for the brand.

Customer Effort. In the past studies, scholars discussed topics related to online marketing focused on how to attract customers to use the system. Few studies have discussed systems' excessive offerings which negatively impacted customers' Brand Experience. In this new variable, we found that *Customer Effort* negatively impacts *Brand Experience* in many ways, as customers have to spend a lot of time and take many steps to achieve their goal. In addition, from a technology system perspective, Customer Effort also directly influences *Perceived Ease of Use* and *Perceived Usefulness*. As with the results from TAM model, customers have better experiences while they perceive the system is useful and easy to use. However, if customers love the brand, they will perceive the system is easy to use and useful, and have better brand experience as well. Hence, we can infer that a brand which is loved or supported by its fans will improve their Facebook Pages' operating quality. This result echoes the concept proposed by Jim Collins (2002) and suggests that the company not to treat the Facebook Page as a panacea to improve their brand equity. Company should operating their brand well, to make customers love their brand, and then by leverage the technology. On the other hand, *brand love* would also reduce the negative opinion that consumers perceived while they interact with a worse design.

In considering the new concept "Consumer Efforts", our study shows that it has a strong influence not only on the variables "Perceived Usefulness" and "Brand Experience" but also on "Perceived Ease of Use". This might due to the interface design on Facebook Pages being very easy to use, so that consumers feel the events or activities hosted by the brand on Facebook are easy to attend or respond to. However, if the content is difficult to read or to achieve the consumers' goal, this will reduce the "Perceived Usefulness" for consumers, and also reduce their Brand Experience. This result echoes the idea from Dixon *et al.* (2010) that consumers cared most about the effort required to achieve their goal and fulfil their needs. Hence, upon on the concept and result from our study, we suggest that when a brand hosts events or activities via Facebook Pages, it should not only pay attention to how fancy the system is or how rich the content, but also consider the purpose of connecting consumers to their Facebook Pages (e.g. joining to become fans) or to realise that too much waiting time or too many operation actions would push customer away, even not to access your Facebook Pages anymore.

6 Future Research Directions

Our study was an initial effort to understand companies' presence in Facebook. Some limitations that come from the fact that the study took place in a specific geographical context (Taiwan) and took a consumer rather than a company perspective could be examined in future work. Thus we suggest that future studies regarding Facebook may collect data from various geographical settings and emphasise on cultural issues. Additionally, we suggest that studies could focus to a specific brand/case to obtain business data taking a business rather than a consumer perspective. This study discusses intrinsic and extrinsic motivation factors influencing Brand Experience and its results. However, the factors of intrinsic motivation, such as: Brand Love, Entertainment Value, Social Norm, and Group Referent, and extrinsic motivation, such as: Perceived Ease of Use, Perceived Usefulness and Customer Effort are unable to be observed in a short period of time. We adopted a cross-sectional research method in this study to collect data from a time segment. Therefore, we suggest that following studies could adopt a longitudinal research method to support the results of cause and effect.

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