Exploring Facebook Users’ Continuous Visiting Behaviors: Conceptual Incorporation of Facebook User Perceptions toward Companies’ Facebook Fan Page Usage

Research-in-Progress

Soo Il Shin
Auburn University
szs0036@auburn.edu

Kyung Young Lee
Bishop’s University
klee@ubishops.ca

Dianne J. Hall
Auburn University
halldia@auburn.edu

Abstract

This study proposes a conceptual model that identifies motivating determinants of Facebook user’s continuous visiting behaviors to company’s fan pages. We formulate a research model on the impact of individuals’ uncertainty reduction strategies, reduced uncertainty, perceived usefulness, on continued visiting behavior to Facebook fan pages. The conceptual model hypothesizes that that uncertainty reduction strategies are positively associated with reduced uncertainty, which in turn influence perceived usefulness of fan pages and continued visiting behavior. This study also hypothesizes that satisfaction with and loyalty toward Facebook positively moderates the positive impacts of perceived usefulness and reduced uncertainty on users’ continued visiting behavior. Lastly, its potential contributions are discussed.

Keywords

Uncertainty reduction theory, Facebook fan page, satisfaction, loyalty, social media advertising, IS continued use

Introduction

Given the prosperous trend of Facebook (facebook.com) use among the public, organizations have become one of the primary users of Facebook for their marketing and business strategies. Facebook provides several services for organizations to use for their business activities (Narayanan et al. 2012). First, companies pay for ‘promoted posts’, visible to individual users on their timelines. Second, commercial advertising services are also available on the newsfeeds or the main page in Facebook. Last, Facebook provides companies with the option of creating ‘Facebook fan pages’ (fan pages henceforth), free of charge. All posted contents on fan pages are released to either public users or users who subscribe to fan pages by clicking on the ‘Like’ icon of the companies’ postings or fan page.

Companies that open their fan pages primarily may benefit from a large number of followers of these fan pages. Additionally, friends of companies’ fans may become another group of potential customers by the power of the word-of-mouth effect from existing fans in social networking sites (SNS) (Jansen et al. 2009). Furthermore, companies’ fan pages can be an important communication medium that facilitates interactions directly with their fans by exchanging feeds, comments and feedback, thus resulting in better access to potential customers than before. However, all these benefits from fan pages are available for the companies, only if they have many followers who continuously visit and interact with the fan pages. Actually, anecdotal evidences show that some fan pages (e.g. Coleman USA with over 200,000 followers)
have a lot of followers who visit and interact with the pages while others are not much facilitated with only a few followers.

Thus, in order to maximize the benefits of fan pages, the companies who run fan pages have to attract and retain as many potential customers as possible because currently Facebook is no doubt the most important social media. Social media marketing is regarded as the number one choice for content marketing by Business-to-Consumer marketers (eMarketer 2013). Therefore, it is important for companies’ fan page owner to know what psychological and behavioral factors lead individual users to continue to visit the fan pages.

While a few researchers have paid particular attention to companies’ use of fan pages or brand pages in different SNS, along with page subscribers, few studies have examined the salient antecedents of current fan page subscribers’ continued visiting behaviors to these fan pages. Notably, little considerable effort has been made to identify the specific cognitive states involved in, and thus possibly influential in substantial behavioral action with respect to companies’ fan page use and individual Facebook users. To fill this research gap, we consider how page followers reduce their curiosities or uncertainty of products or services in a company’s fan page as a starting point of the current research. Then, we focus on how such reduced uncertainty affect page subscribers perceptions of company’s postings and use of fan page, eventually those perceptions impacting on visiting behaviors. Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to identify impacts of users’ psychological and behavioral factors with regard to both fan pages and Facebook that influence their continuous visits to their subscribing companies’ fan pages.

In order to provide implication to the companies who own fan pages, individual users, and Facebook as a social marketing media, this study proposes the following research questions: 1) How do Facebook users’ efforts to reduce their uncertainty regarding products or services in a company’s fan page influence users’ continuous visiting behaviors to fan pages?, 2) What are the impacts of reduced uncertainty on Facebook users’ perceptions of postings and their visiting behaviors? and 3) What are the roles of users’ beliefs about Facebook itself in intensifying users' continued visiting behaviors?

To answer these research questions, we incorporate the underpinnings of uncertainty reduction theory (URT) and its strategies to reduce uncertainty into our research model. Additionally, this study adopts the concept of expectation confirmation model of information systems use (ECM) and its theoretical application by modifying it to fit our research context. In considering Facebook users’ internal beliefs and emotional states about Facebook, the concept of satisfaction with and loyalty toward Facebook are employed as salient moderating factors for the relationship between users’ beliefs about fan page postings and their continued visiting behavior to these fan pages.

Theoretical Background

Uncertainty Reduction Theory

Uncertainty reduction theory (URT) has been well known for its nature to identify the development of initial relationships and the formation of impressions in face-to-face environments (Berger and Calabrese 1975). URT claims that perceived uncertainty between two parties involved in behavioral interactions involves “an interactant’s subjective sense of the number of alternative predictions available when thinking about a partner’s future, for example, or the number of alternative explanations available when thinking about a partner’s past behavior” (Bradac 2001, p. 458).

URT suggests three types of uncertainty reduction strategies to alleviate the uncertainty associated between communicating parties: passive, active and interactive strategies. First, the purpose of passive uncertainty reduction strategies is to obtain required information unobtrusively by observing a target person’s behaviors. For example, in the context of Facebook, users are able to simply read their friends’ postings (e.g., text, photos, videos, etc.) on their Facebook timeline without direct interaction with the target users. Additionally, Facebook provides the option of opening personal profiles to the public, depending on the user’s preference. Second, active uncertainty reduction strategies are those in which desired information is gathered about a target person by proactive ways without facing or confronting the target person. For example, an individual may ask about a target person’s profile to other people who are related with the target person without letting that target person know that his/her profile is being solicited. Since CMC is categorized as a cue-rich communication environment that supports multiple
types of informational cues such as videos and pictures (Antheunis et al. 2010), active strategies are useful in getting to know a target person’s profile or recent activities in a less effortful way than cue-poor CMC (e.g., an instant messenger service, where all messenger users should participate in communication). Last, the goal of interactive uncertainty reduction strategies is to collect information by direct interaction with a target person, such as self-presentation and direct questioning to the target person (Antheunis et al. 2010). For example, users may ask questions to target users directly if any information is needed by posting messages on Facebook timelines. Alternatively, users have the option to contact (self-disclose voluntarily) target users directly via instant messaging on Facebook.

Among the three uncertainty reduction strategies, we employed only passive and interactive uncertainty reduction strategies in our research context. We did so because active strategies are not feasible in our research setting: gathering information regarding subscribed companies’ product or service information from other third-parties’ fan pages or other Facebook users is not possible, in most cases.

**Satisfaction and Loyalty in SNS Media**

As an e-marketing strategy, companies that open their fan pages provide (potential) customers with various benefits, such as freebies and e-coupons and announce their marketing promotions through fan pages. As such, for those companies, Facebook is a type of online advertising media, where individual users who participate in these fan pages are attracted by the postings of the fan pages, and eventually are encouraged to become their customers.

This study focuses on two psychological factors (satisfaction and loyalty) of Facebook that have been frequently investigated as important antecedents of post-adoption intention (behavior) for SNS (Chiu et al. 2013). That is, we will incorporate these factors into our research model as important media characteristics for the relationship between individuals’ beliefs about fan page postings and continuous visiting to such fan pages, since users’ positive perceptions about media have been found to have a positive impact on their positive reactions to advertisements published in the media (Bae et al. 2008).

An individual’s satisfaction with a product/service refers to the perception of pleasurable fulfillment of one’s expectation from the product/service after the individual has evaluated it (Oliver 1999), while loyalty refers to both attitudinal and behavioral commitment to the product and service (providers) (Day 1969). Although satisfaction and loyalty are often found to be significantly related (Chiu et al. 2013), it is suggested that these two concepts are not surrogates for each other (Shankar et al. 2003). That is, it is possible that not very satisfied customers can be loyal to a product/service when there are few other choices, and also that very satisfied customers may not show much loyalty toward a product when there are many alternatives that provide a similar level of satisfaction (Shankar et al. 2003).

Since Bhattacharjee (2001a) investigated the moderating role of loyalty on the relationship between perceived usefulness and continuance intention, most studies on the roles of loyalty and satisfaction have looked at either the relationship between loyalty and satisfaction or the direct impact of loyalty or satisfaction on users’ post-adoption intentions (or behaviors). However, little effort has been made to consider them as characteristics embedded in SNS media (as a type of advertising media) or to look into their moderating roles on the relationship between users’ perceived beliefs about postings and their adoption behaviors in the context of companies’ fan pages.

In the context of the fan page environment, users can opt-into (by clicking “Like”) and opt-out of fan pages. Also, they can look into the details of messages in postings by visiting the fan pages and even interacting with them (e.g., adding comments) (Pavlou et al. 2007). In this case, we argue that the media characteristics (i.e., loyalty and satisfaction) in this interactive environment will play even more significant roles in the ways users adopt what fan pages provide them, than the media characteristics of traditional (non-interactive) media, because these two media characteristics are found to be significantly related to the actual participation behavior of SNS media themselves (Chiu et al. 2013).

**Research Model and Hypotheses**

Figure 1 illustrates our research model. Based on the literature review, this section presents the research model and related hypotheses for our study.
In terms of information seeking behaviors, one communicating party adopts a variety of ways to gather social information regarding his or her communicating partner. Such an ‘interaction’ to acquire information can be approached in two ways: 1) physical and structural features; and 2) perceptual and behavioral aspects of interaction (Ramirez and Burgoon 2004). In terms of physical communication features, Facebook as a very well-known SNS supports a variety of communication tools for users, which enables users to communicate and interact with their Facebook friends or organizations instantly and conveniently. From the behavioral aspect of the interaction perspective, information seekers, namely Facebook users in our research context, can employ multiple tactics, which include uncertainty reduction strategies to know other parties’ future behaviors.

The Impact of Uncertainty Reduction Strategies

First, interactive uncertainty reduction strategies aim to gather information to predict the communicating partner’s future attitudes and behaviors by direct questioning or voluntary self-disclosure (Antheunis et al. 2010). Antheunis et al. (2010) found that interactive strategies have a positive effect on lowering levels of uncertainty, resulting in much social attraction in the context of SNS use. Along the same lines with similar reasoning, we postulate that individual Facebook users are able to lower their levels of uncertainty regarding products or services posted on companies’ fan pages by using interactive strategies. Because all fan pages provide features that facilitate direct communication with their fan page subscribers, they freely post their opinions, feedback or direct questioning on Facebook timelines. Accordingly, once direct interrogation expedites the flow of communication between two parties (page subscribers and managers of fan pages), the disclosed information aids in lessening information seekers’ curiosity or uncertainty, thereby resulting in reduced levels of uncertainty experienced by the communicating parties.

Second, passive uncertainty reduction strategies are some of the simplest ways to gather information about a target party, which is applicable to our research hypothesis; we postulate a positive relationship between individual Facebook users’ (who subscribe to companies’ fan pages) use of passive strategies and reduced levels of uncertainty. Since Facebook is continuously implementing user-friendly web-applications and tools that allow users to upload multiple types of contents, all Facebook users (including both individuals and organizations) are able to share rich informational cues with one another. For example, organizations use video clips on their fan pages to describe their products or services more in detail and to introduce specific functionalities to their subscribers. Pictures or photos are also preferable to gratify information seekers’ curiosity visually than merely simple plain text or text-based descriptions. Given the usefulness of passive strategies in reducing uncertainty, we assume that reading postings and
watching video clips or photos on fan pages play an important role in decreasing Facebook users’
uncertainty regarding products or services posted on companies’ fan pages. Therefore, we posit that:

**H1:** An individual Facebook user’s interactive (H1a) and passive (H1b) uncertainty reduction strategy are
positively associated with that individual’s perceived reduced uncertainty of products or services.

**The Impact of Reduced Uncertainty**

In the context of fan pages, there are benefits for individual users when they follow these pages by clicking
“Like” on the fan pages at any time without additional cost. However, individual users may be uncertain
about these fan pages because of intrinsic questions: What kinds of services will be provided? How many
postings will show up, or how much benefit can they earn from subscribing to the fan pages? Since
individuals’ levels of uncertainty could be reduced over time by their uncertainty reduction strategies
(Antheunis et al. 2010), we propose that reduced uncertainty (Pavlou et al. 2007) should be a more
relevant factor, not only for the perceived usefulness of the postings, but also for continued visiting
behaviors in the context of individuals’ fan page use for the following reasons.

First, URT posits that reduced uncertainty with a certain target (e.g., a person) is positively associated
with posterior social interaction with the target (Berger and Calabrese 1975). Under similar reasoning,
Antheunis et al. (2010) found that a low level of uncertainty about a target person is positively associated
with social attraction to the target person in the context of online communication environments. Given
the description of URT, we argue that perceived usefulness, which is defined as the degree to which an
individual user believes that system use will result in benefit accrual to the user (Davis 1989), should be
affected by reduced uncertainty. For those who are not certain about what they can expect from products
in fan pages, they are likely to feel that using (clicking on) the postings may not be very attractive or useful
for them. On the other hand, if individuals experience reduced uncertainty about the products produced
by these companies, they will be able to know what kinds of benefits they can get by using the products.
Usually, the postings from fan pages are designed to attract and benefit customers by providing various
perks (e.g., e-coupons) to their potential consumers. Thus, reduced uncertainty increases the
attractiveness of the postings perceived by individual users, which will result in higher levels of
usefulness. Therefore:

**H2:** An individual Facebook user’s perceived reduced uncertainty about products or services in a
company’s fan page is positively associated with perceived usefulness of the postings.

Second, according to the relationship between sellers and buyers in online exchange environments
(Pavlou et al. 2007), an individual’s perceived transaction risk originates from the uncertainty of a
complete transaction with sellers. When engaging in an initial transaction with sellers, buyers tend to
overestimate the potential future risk from sellers, which intensifies the level of perceived risk. Therefore,
this degree of uncertainty tends to result in buyers hesitating to engage in further transactions with the
sellers (Pavlou et al. 2007).

In the case of individual Facebook users, individuals may be exposed to uncertainty about products from
companies that open fan pages such as exaggerated customer benefits or fraudulent claims about their
proposed products or services. Such perceived uncertainty and potential risks may prevent them from
visiting the companies’ fan pages. On the other hand, if they experience reduced perceived uncertainty
and risk from interacting with the fan pages, they will eventually tend to visit these fan pages more often.
Therefore:

**H3:** An individual Facebook user’s perceived reduced uncertainty about products or services in a
company’s fan page is positively associated with continued visiting behavior to the fan page.

**The Impact of Perceived Usefulness**

The relationship between the perceived usefulness (PU) of information systems and continued usage has
been proposed and tested with various contexts since Bhattacharjee (2001b)’s expectation-confirmation
model (ECM). ECM posits that the relationship between perceived usefulness and intention to use an
information system will hold true, both in the initial acceptance stage and in continued use contexts
(Bhattacharjee 2001b).
In the context of SNS, several studies have proposed a relationship between perceived usefulness and continued use intention or behavior. For example, Kang et al. (2013) found a positive relationship between PU and SNS continuance intention and between continuance intention and continued use of SNS. In another instance, Kwon and Wen (2010) found a direct relationship between PU and continued use of SNS. We propose that this relationship will also hold in the context of individuals’ fan page visiting behavior. When users find that the information (e.g., information about marketing promotions) or any benefit (e.g., e-coupons) provided by a fan page is useful, they will continue to visit the page. Therefore:

**H4:** An individual Facebook user’s perceived usefulness of the postings on a company’s fan page is positively associated with continued visiting behavior to the fan page.

### The Moderating Impact of Satisfaction

Satisfaction with SNS is defined as individual users’ perceptions of pleasurable fulfillment of their expectations of SNS after continuously evaluating the service from SNS (Shankar et al. 2003). Thus, if an individual’s satisfaction is high, it means that his/her expectations of the SNS are continuously fulfilled.

Under the condition that users are satisfied with the services from Facebook, so that they are willing to keep interacting with Facebook postings, they will have a favorable attitude toward all postings provided by any entities on Facebook. Also, unlike other types of Internet advertisements (e.g., text, banner, or multimedia ads), the postings provided by fan pages look similar to other postings that are posted by other individuals, and they are often listed in the middle of users’ timelines. Therefore, if satisfied users find fan page postings as useful or experience reduced uncertainty about products or services, they will visit the fan pages more actively due to their favorable attitudes toward the overall postings of Facebook and products, formed by satisfaction with the medium itself.

Also, simply because more satisfied users will visit the SNS more often (Kang et al. 2013), their chance to see any postings (including postings from fan pages) from Facebook will be higher than those who are less satisfied. As a result, the relationship between perceived usefulness (or reduced uncertainty) and continued visiting behavior to fan pages will be stronger if they are satisfied with Facebook. Therefore, we posit that:

**H5:** An individual Facebook user’s satisfaction with Facebook positively moderates the relationship (H5a) between perceived usefulness and continued visiting behavior to a company’s fan page and (H5b) between reduced uncertainty and continued visiting behavior to a company’s fan page.

### The Moderating Impact of Loyalty

The marketing and communication literature have found that those possessing positive attitudes toward a medium will also form positive attitudes toward advertisements in that medium (Choi and Rifon 2002). In the SNS environment, loyalty toward media will positively affect the way users accept advertisements (e.g., marketing communication) published in SNS media for the following reasons.

First, in SNS (e.g., Facebook), where users’ participation is interactive (i.e., they can read the actual contents of postings and provide their comments) and collaborative, (i.e., they can share the postings with their Facebook friends if they find the information within the posting to be helpful and relevant for their friends). In these collaborative and interactive SNS media, if a user with a high level of loyalty toward these media finds the postings from fan pages to be useful, or if she or he experiences reduced uncertainty about the postings via various uncertainty reduction strategies, she or he will participate in the fan pages more often than those who have a low level of loyalty. This is accounted for the fact because his or her positive attitude about the media (formed by a high level of loyalty) could increase the believability of the postings that contain information regarding promotion and marketing communication from the companies (Choi and Rifon 2002). That is, users with a high level of loyalty find it more credible to continue visiting company-sponsored pages, as long as they feel the information in the pages is not ambiguous (less uncertain) and useful for both themselves and their friends.

Also, the concept of loyalty toward SNS media includes not only attitudinal commitment, but also behavioral manifestation toward the SNS media (Day 1969). Therefore, highly loyal users toward Facebook tend to visit Facebook more often than those who are less loyal (Chiu et al. 2013). Therefore, we posit that:
H6: An individual’s Facebook loyalty positively moderates the relationship (H6a) between perceived usefulness and continued visiting behavior to a company’s fan page and (H6b) between reduced uncertainty and continued visiting behavior to a company’s fan page.

**Tentative Methodology**

Our hypotheses will be tested using the survey data collected from individuals who use Facebook, have experience visiting company’s Facebook fan pages and click ‘like’ the pages. When not available, scales for the different constructs are developed. The survey items of our constructs will be presented in the conference.

A pilot data will be analyzed for presentation at the conference. The analysis will test the measurement and structural model using Partial Least Squares (PLS) analysis (Chin 1998) with SmartPLS (Ringle et al. 2005). PLS analysis is chosen because we have a multi-path research model. In addition, the data for this study contain non-normal data, and PLS analysis also supports testing moderation effects (Chin et al. 2003; Henseler et al. 2010). To minimize common method bias because self-reported survey the current research use, two common method bias (CMB) tests will be employed and analyzed using 1) Harman’s one-factor test and 2) single-method factor approach (Liang et al. 2007; Podsakoff et al. 2003).

**Conclusion and Potential Contributions**

Although we have not analyzed our data yet, we believe that the prospective results of the empirical study will have several implications for theory and practice in the following ways.

First, we will investigate both the direct impact of individuals’ psychological states about the postings of fan pages (PU and uncertainty) and the moderating impact of their psychological states about social media themselves (satisfaction and loyalty) on continued visiting behavior to fan pages. We believe that our results will show both the direct impact of individuals’ psychological states regarding a firm’s promotional messages and the indirect impact of individuals’ positive psychological states regarding social media themselves. To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first attempts to examine the role of interactive factors between psychological states toward two entities (fan pages and Facebook itself). Therefore, the prospective results of this study will contribute to the body of knowledge on social media adoption, and more broadly, post-adoption behaviors for information systems.

Second, our study offers insights regarding advertising media from the marketing discipline along with various theoretical perspectives (e.g., URT, ECM). Our research is also specifically focused on specific groups of social media users – companies via fan pages and individual followers of companies’ fan pages. We believe that our interdisciplinary approach in building our theoretical framework, along with our prospective empirical results, will help provide a rich understanding of users’ behavior in responding to fan page postings and continued visiting behavior to fan pages.

Third, the prospective results will also provide practical implications to firms who choose to use Facebook fan pages. We believe that our prospective results highlight the importance for companies’ fan page to not only provide their followers with useful information and offerings, but also to keep providing prompt responses to their followers’ diverse forms of feedback. Therefore, such companies’ timely actions can spur followers’ active use of interactive uncertainty reduction strategies, encouraging more frequent visits to fan pages, mediated by the impact of the perceived usefulness of postings.

Finally, our prospective empirical findings will provide an important practical implication to Facebook itself as a valuable advertising medium. Our assumptions of the positive moderating impact of satisfaction and loyalty on two relationship chains (perceived usefulness – continued visiting behaviors and reduced uncertainty – continued visiting behaviors) hints at another source of Facebook’s profit streams. As such, our study may imply that a high degree of loyalty and improved customer (e.g., Facebook users) satisfaction with the medium itself (e.g., Facebook) heightens the value of advertising media. Then, Facebook may attract more companies as fan page users, or those companies may become primary sponsors by paid-based posting services, eventually generating advertising income.
References


