Exploring the factors influencing the usage intention of Facebook fan page – A preliminary study

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ABSTRACT
With its substantial user base, Facebook has been an influential marketing tool that marketing practitioners seek to exploit. Facebook provides brand or business fan page for business to recruit fans and build direct and interactive communication means with them. Despite major brands have created their respective fan page and have drawn substantial amount of users, relatively little attention has been devoted in exploring factors that affect users’ intention to engage with the brand fan page. To fill this research gap, this study proposed a framework to look into this phenomenon. A preliminary collected data was analyzed using PLS. Results suggested that relationship quality is an influential factors of users’ usage. Moreover, both utilitarian and hedonic value should be considered for brand fan page to maintain high quality relationship with their fans.

Keywords
Facebook, relationship quality, information quality, fan page, social media

INTRODUCTION
In recent years, social media, such as Facebook or Twitter, have shown exponential growth in the number of its users. As a prominent example, Facebook currently has approximate one billion registered users around the world according to CheckFacebook.com. Social media provides functions that enable people to maintain relationship with their significant others by sharing information or thoughts of daily live and communicating with each other. With the proliferation of information technology and mobile networking, people can check the social media using various digital devices when on the go. This situation further strengthens the “stickiness” between social media and its users. Nowadays, social media has been an essential media that people assess everyday. Despite the social media was originally used for people to socialize with each other, witnessing the explosive success of it, marketing practitioners also seek to exploit it as direct means to communicate with their customers.

Instead of maintaining a personal account, Facebook (FB) provides fans page for user, either individual or organization, to create and present information related to a specific subject such as brands, celebrity, or sports. Once the fan page has been created, the fan page owner can then upload pictures, videos, or post messages in it. For people who are interested in the subject of the fan page, they can easily subscribe it by clicking the ‘Like’ button and post message in it to communicate with the business or other fans. Once subscribed, the updates of fan page will be automatically shown in subscribers’ personal page for them to browse or leave comments afterward. In this manner, FB fan page creates a social space for people to conveniently interact and share information with each other. Considering the massive user base of FB and their intensive usage, major brands, such as Dell, Samsung, Starbucks, have created dedicated FB Page to increase their presence in the cyberworld and expect to build direct relationship with their customers. A recent check of the fan page of Starbucks, its fans, or users who clicked the ‘Like’ button of the fan page, have reached 34 millions. As aforementioned, FB fan page can be regarded as an information outlet for brands to reach massive potential customers who have exhibited interest in the brand as they actively clicked and subscribed the Page.

Witnessing the explosive growth of Facebook and its marketing potential, both researchers and practitioners started exploring this phenomenon and its potential applications. Previous studies have focused on users motivation to use FB (Dogruer et. al., 2011; Nadkami & Hofmann, 2012) or the applications of FB such as marketing (Casteleyen et. al., 2009; LaPointe, 2012), education(Baran, 2010; Kabilan et. al., 2010). However, to date, research the addressed users’ perception toward the FB fan page is still limited. FB fan pages were considered a powerful tool to reach massive potential customers with relatively low cost. Meanwhile, It could be beneficial to maintain customers’ loyalty as well as profitability (Piskorski, 2010). Moreover,
one core value of social media is the information sharing through the personal social networking. Marketing campaign could turn to viral in the cyberworld once people are willing to actively share it with others. Therefore, exploring the factors that affect FB fan page users’ participation and sharing intention could be helpful in depicting a clearer picture of people’s perception toward fan page. As a result, this study could propose practical suggestions for businesses to better manage their fan page.

To fill the aforementioned literature gap, this study seeks to propose a research framework to address the following research question:

1. What are factors that affect the sharing intention of the information posted in the Facebook fan page.
2. What are factors that affect the continuing participation intention of the Facebook fan page.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Facebook creates a social space for people to easily exchange various format of information. From the utilitarian perspective, one major FB activity that people engage in is seeking personal information by reading others’ personal page or posts (Park et. al., 2009). For brand fan page, people might subscribe it for receiving news from a particular brand, such as marketing campaign or product tips. In this context, brand fan page can be regarded as a web service that automatically delivers information to its subscribers. Therefore, the quality of the conveying messages could be an influential factor for the usage intention of fan page users. DeLone & McLean (2004) proposed information quality as a key factor that influencing users’ satisfaction and perceived benefits of an information system, which can further lead to improve their usage intention. Moreover, people are more likely to share information when they feel the information is helpful to others (Sun et. al., 2006). Hence, this study proposed hypotheses as following:

H1a: Information quality is positively associated with sharing intention.
H1b: Information quality is positively associated with continuing participation intention.

On the other hand, from the hedonic perspective, positive affective experiences could be a major drive in human behaviors (Babin et. al., 1994; Childers et. al., 2001). People use social media to socialize with their friends to share information of their interest. Previous research suggested that one primary function of using Facebook is entertainment (Dogruer et al., 2011). Therefore, the enjoyment that users derived from the process of interaction with the fan page may lead to their intention to engage with fan page which could further lead them to share information with their friends. Thus, this study proposed following hypotheses:

H2a: Perceived enjoyment is positively associated with sharing intention.
H2b: Perceived enjoyment is positively associated with continuing participation intention.

Social relationship is the core element of social networking services. In social media, the content can be actively pushed to those who have established connections. With relationship marketing approach, maintaining high quality relationship is known to be helpful in promoting positive word-of-mouth and loyalty (Palmatier et. al., 2006). Relationship quality was regarded as customers’ evaluation of their commitment, trust and satisfaction with the relationship (Palmatier et al., 2006) and satisfaction is known to be an influential factor of loyalty (de Matos & Rossi, 2008). Moreover, Li et al. (2006) found that both commitment and trust are significant factors in affecting users’ usage intention to the e-commerce website. The antecedents of relationship quality can be utilitarian and hedonic. Henning-Thurau et. al. (2002) pointed out that benefits, such as getting up-to-date information or helping decision making, derived from a relationship could affect customers’ evaluation of the relationship. Moreover, the enjoyment, such as positive affective experience, derived during the interaction with the business could also be beneficial to customers’ evaluation of the relationship (Palmatier et al., 2006). The positive experience and evaluation of the relationship built with a brand could further lead to users’ intention to share the experiences with their significant others. Concluding from above, following hypotheses were proposed. Hypotheses of this study were presented in Figure 1:

H3: Information quality is positively associated with relationship quality.
H4: Perceived enjoyment is positively associated with relationship quality.
H5a: Relationship quality is positively associated with sharing intention.
H5b: Relationship quality is positively associated with continuing participation intention.
RESEARCH METHOD

Instrument

This study employed web survey to collect empirical data for testing the hypotheses. Instruments used in this study were primarily adapted from validated scale of previous research. Scale items were slightly modified to fit the context of this study and measured with seven-point Likert scale. Operational definition and adapted sources of each research variables are as shown in Table 1. In addition to research variables, demographics, Internet experience and Facebook experience of respondents were also collected in the survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Operational definition</th>
<th>References</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Enjoyment (2 items)</td>
<td>The extent of user’s perception of the enjoyment in the process of interaction with the brand fan page.</td>
<td>Santosa et. al. (2005)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Information quality (5 items)</td>
<td>The user’s evaluation on the completeness, timeliness and usefulness of the information provided by the brand fan page.</td>
<td>Delone (2004)</td>
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<td>Relationship Quality (11 items)</td>
<td>The extent of user’s overall evaluation on the strength of relationship that user and brand built via brand fan page.</td>
<td>De Wulf et al. (2001); Palmatier et al. (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing Intention (3 items)</td>
<td>The extent of user’s intention to share the information related to the brand fan page in the Facebook personal page.</td>
<td>Chen et. al. (2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuing participation intention (3 items)</td>
<td>The extent of user’s intention to continuing participated in the brand fan page in the future.</td>
<td>Hsu &amp; Lin (2008)</td>
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Participant and Data collection

To collect the empirical data, message that convey the purpose of this study and a link to the online questionnaire was posted on a popular Bulletin Board System (BBS) in Taiwan and a Facebook personal page of a research assistant (college student). Opportunities to win a set of flash drive and branded stationary were offered as incentive to improve response rate. The primary purpose of this study is to explore the users’ perception toward brand fan page and its effect. Therefore, Respondents were asked if they have subscribed Facebook fan page of brand or business. Those who don’t subscribe any fan page or subscribe only fan page of individual or celebrity were excluded from the subsequent analysis. This study adopting snowball sampling, respondents were encouraged to share the survey message with their friends.

A preliminary data collection results in 72 responses before this manuscript was written. 48% (n=35) of the participants are female. Participants of this study are mostly college students (83.3%) and of age between 18 to 26 (88.3%). Participants generally have Internet experience of more than 5 years (86.1%, n=62). Regarding Facebook experience, over half of the participants have used FB for more than two years (55.6%). In general, the participants check FB on a daily basis.
DATA ANALYSIS

Research model was analyzed using SmartPLS 2.0 M3 (Ringle et al., 2005) to examine the reliability and validity of measurements used in and test the hypotheses proposed by this study. SmartPLS 2.0 M3 can be used to test the measurement model and Path model simultaneously. Moreover, it produces HTML format report, which contains common indicators of the model reliability and validity, such as composite reliability and Average variance extracted (AVE) for each variable. Aside from PLS (Partial least squares) algorithm, SmartPLS also provides resampling techniques such as bootstrapping or jackknife for calculate the significance level of path coefficients in the structural model.

For measurement model, composite reliability of research variables for this study were of range between 0.916 to 0.956, suggesting high reliability (Nunnally 1978). Average variance extracted (AVE) for each variables were of range between 0.668 (Relationship quality) to 0.906 (Perceived enjoyment) which suggesting satisfying convergent validity (Fornell et al. 1982). For discriminant validity, despite results showed adequate discriminant validity, i.e. each AVE of variables is larger than its squared correlation with other variables (Sanchez-Franco et al. 2005).

For structural model, this study used bootstrapping technique to assess the significance level of path coefficient. Results are summarized in table 2. All hypotheses were supported except H1a and H4. In specific, information quality is positively associated with relationship quality (β=.597, p < 0.01). For sharing intention, results showed that perceived enjoyment (β=.334, p < 0.05) and relationship quality (β=.428, p < 0.01) are the two influential factors. On the other hand, for continuing participation intention, both information quality (β=.332, p < 0.05) and relationship quality (β=.428, p < 0.01) are influential factors of it. Nonetheless, due to the preliminary stage of this study is in and small sample size, these results should be taken as tentative. This study will further the data collection to increase the sample size to gain more stable results.

Table 2: Results of hypotheses testing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypotheses</th>
<th>beta</th>
<th>results</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1a Information quality is positively associated with sharing intention.</td>
<td>0.191ns</td>
<td>Not support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1b Information quality is positively associated with continuing participation intention.</td>
<td>0.332*</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2a Perceived enjoyment is positively associated with sharing intention.</td>
<td>0.334*</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2b Perceived enjoyment is positively associated with continuing participation intention.</td>
<td>0.208*</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3 Information quality is positively associated with relationship quality.</td>
<td>0.597**</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4 Perceived enjoyment is positively associated with relationship quality.</td>
<td>0.080ns</td>
<td>Not support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5a Relationship quality is positively associated with sharing intention.</td>
<td>0.428**</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5b Relationship quality is positively associated with continuing participation intention.</td>
<td>0.428**</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*: p < 0.05, **: p < 0.01, n.s: not significant

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

With the substantial user base of Facebook, fan page was considered a powerful marketing tool as it provides an opportunity for business to convey brand messages to and directly communicate with their prospect customers. This preliminary exploration yielded following research findings:

First of all, information quality is positively associated with relationship quality and users’ continuing participation intention. High information quality means that the information of a business fan page is complete and useful in a timely fashion. From the utilitarian aspect, people could regard that maintaining the relationship with the fan page as a valuable and rational choice. However, results also indicated that users’ sharing intention was not affected by information quality. One plausible
explanation is that the major purpose of people’s engaging in social media is for fun (Dogruer et. al., 2011; Wang et. al., 2012). From the hedonic aspect, people could be more likely to share interesting things or experiences with friends instead of sharing information of high utilitarian value.

Results of this study supported the hedonic perspective. Perceived enjoyment was positively associated with both sharing and continuing participation intention. Suggesting that the more hedonic value, such as positive affective experience, that user derived from interacting with the fan page, they are more likely to propagate the fan page to their friends and stay with the fan page. However, result showed that perceived enjoyment is not significantly associated with the relationship quality. This finding implied that enjoyment itself might not contribute to customers’ trust, commitment, or satisfaction to a relationship, whereas the utilitarian value of information does contribute to customers’ positive perception of relationship quality with a brand. These findings suggested that it is important for a fan page to provide information of both hedonic and utilitarian value. Nonetheless, further analysis and the inclusion of more research variables are required to explore this issue.

Lastly, previous study pointed out that relationship quality is a significant factor that influences human behavior in the context of social networking (Liang et. al., 2011). Results of this study echoed this point of view. In this study, relationship quality is positively associated with users’ sharing and continuing participation intention of the fan page. Previous studies suggested that high relationship quality is helpful in maintaining customers’ loyalty and positive word of mouth (de Matos & Rossi, 2008; Hennig-Thurau et. al., 2002; Palmatier et. al., 2006). As high relationship quality indicates that user is satisfied with the relationship they built with fan page, they are more likely to remain loyal to the fan page and spread positive word of mouth.

Concluding from above, implications of the research findings are two-fold. First, to maintain quality relationship with FB page fans, brands should provide up-to-date, complete, and useful information, such as product updates, tips, or sales campaign, to them. This could help maintaining users’ evaluation of relationship quality with the brand fan page. Second, simply promoting utilitarian value might be not sufficient, in the context of social media, funny things or experiences could spread more rapidly and extensively than useful information could. To utilize the power of social networking, hedonic value, such as positive affective experience, could not be ignored besides the utilitarian value. Marketing practitioner should emphasize both the utilitarian and hedonic value of a fan page can deliver in order to build quality relationship with their fans, or prospect customers in other words.

Future research and research limitation

As exploratory and preliminary nature of this study, factors proposed by this study is apparently not exhaustive. Based on the framework of this study, future research is encouraged to incorporate factors from diverse perspectives to further the understanding of the phenomenon. Moreover, future research can focus on one particular brand and design a longitudinal research to extensively examine the interaction of users and brand fan page. For research limitation, clearly, small sample size posed a major constraint to interpret the results of this study. Nonetheless, this study employed PLS with bootstrapping technique to address this issue. Based on these preliminary findings, this study is to proceed to the refinement of the variable measure and sample collection to depict the clearer picture of this phenomenon.

REFERENCES


