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The effects of consumers' perceived benefits on attitudes and revisit intentions in an online brand community

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Keywords: Online brand community, perceived benefits, attitude, revisit intention

As the Internet greatly enhances people's abilities to interact and communicate with each other, the online brand community has become a dominant venue in the marketplace through which to share individual information and experiences (McWilliam, 2000). This study aims to examine the relationships between consumers' perceptions of benefits in using online brand communities and their attitudes and revisit intentions toward those communities. In addition, this study investigates the differences in these relationships between two types of online brand communities (marketer-created and consumer-created).

Prior studies have revealed that consumers participate in online brand communities to obtain useful information (Porter, Donthu, MacElroy, & Wydra, 2011) and build social relationships with others (Dholakia & Bagozzi, 2004). Accordingly, the benefits that consumers perceive in these communities can be organized into social and informational categories. Thus, this study has developed the following hypothesis: Consumers who more strongly believe that an online brand community offers social benefits (H1) and informational benefits (H2) will be more likely to have a positive attitude toward an online brand community. Prior studies have suggested that a positive attitude toward a Web site or a retailer results in revisit intentions (Huang & Hsu, 2009). Hence, this study proposes the following hypothesis: Attitudes toward an online brand community will significantly influence revisit intentions (H3). Consumers' initial brand attitude is also expected to significantly influence their attitudes toward an online brand community (H4) and revisit intentions (H5). As consumer trust is another variable that may reflect a positive attitude toward a brand (Yuan-shuh & Monle, 2012), we propose the following hypothesis: Consumers' brand trust will significantly influence their attitudes toward an online brand community (H6) and revisit intentions (H7). Online brand communities are generally classified into marketer-created (MOC) and consumer-created communities (COC) (Lee, Kim, & Kim, 2011). Thus, this study also examines how these two types of online brand communities influence relationships (H8).

Researchers conducted a survey-based experiment using two Nike online brand community Web sites on Facebook. The sample for this research consisted of 239 participants comprising 12% men and 88% women with an average age of 23 years. To investigate the robustness of the measurement items of each variable, researchers conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Overall, the measurement model fit the data well: The comparative fit index (CFI) value was 0.954; the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was 0.079; the standardized root mean square (SRMR) value was 0.035. To examine the hypothesized relationships between the two groups of online communities, we conducted multigroup SEM using Mplus. Overall fit indices represent an acceptable model fit of the structural model in this

study with the following results: CFI and Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) were valued 0.924 and 0.915, respectively; and the SRMR index was 0.073.

Social benefit ($r = 0.187$, $p < .01$) and information benefit ($r = 0.651$, $p < .001$) significantly influenced attitude toward an online brand community, and attitude consequently influenced revisit intentions ($r = 0.980$, $p < .01$). Whereas consumers' initial brand attitude showed no significant effects on attitude toward an online community and revisit intentions, brand trust significantly affected attitude toward an online brand community ($r = 0.221$, $p < .05$). Accordingly, H1, H2, H3, and H6 were supported. The results revealed that the information benefit influenced attitudes toward an online brand community ($r = 0.644$) in the MOC group, whereas both social and information benefits influenced attitudes toward an online brand community in the COC group ($r = 0.225$ and $r = 0.620$, respectively). The relationship between attitudes toward an online brand community and revisit intentions was significant in both MOC ($r = 1.024$) and COC ($r = 0.989$) groups. Consumers' initial brand attitude had no significant effect on attitude toward an online brand community or revisit intentions in both MOC and COC groups. However, consumer brand trust had a significant effect on the attitude toward an online brand community of the MOC group ($r = 0.426$) but not in the COC. Thus, H8 was supported.

Overall, the main body of consumers' cognitive processes of perceived benefits, attitudes, and revisit intentions was significantly supported. The relationship between benefits and attitudes toward an online brand community varied significantly by the type of community. This result implies that consumers visiting the MOC are significantly influenced by their perceived information benefits than social benefits. On the other hand, brand attitudes and intention of those who visit the COC are influenced by their perceptions of both benefits. In addition in this study, brand trust was a stronger predictor of attitude toward an online brand community for an MOC than for a COC, suggesting that improving brand trust is important for an online community created by the company itself. This study ultimately supports the importance of managing online brand communities as part of a total brand strategy for marketers.

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