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Effect of social support on customer satisfaction and citizenship behavior in online brand communities: The moderating role of support source

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ABSTRACT

Customers often join online brand communities to seek support from others when they encounter product problems. Some customers who receive good social support exhibit customer citizenship behavior. This study develops a theoretical model to investigate how social support influences customer citizenship behavior through customer satisfaction with firms in online brand communities. Moreover, the moderating role of support source (i.e., firms vs. other customers) is measured. The research model is tested by using the Partial Least Squares technique. The results show that informational and emotional support significantly affects the customer citizenship behavior of providing feedback to the firm, recommendations, and helping other customers through customer satisfaction in online brand communities. Moreover, informational and emotional support from firms and other customers exert different effects on customer satisfaction.

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1. Introduction

In the past, customers talked about products mainly with acquaintances and shop assistants. The scope of communication was limited by time and place (Wu et al., 2015) and was small for customers. The development of social media technology has brought huge changes. Today's consumers can freely talk about products with acquaintances at a distance and like-minded strangers with common product interests in online brand communities. Online brand communities, which provide venues for customers to talk about products, have undergone a recent unprecedented development (Jung et al., 2014; Ho, 2015).

Customers often join online brand communities to seek support from others when they encounter product problems (Johnson and Lowe, 2015). Some customers who receive good social support exhibit pro-social actions, such as assisting other members in trouble, giving valuable feedback about shopping experience to the firm, and recommending the product to others. Groth (2005) called the voluntary and discretionary pro-social actions as customer citizenship behavior (CCB). Previous studies have proven that customers exhibit CCB after other customers give them social-emotional and instrumental support in a service establishment (Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2007). Social support is a context-specific construct (Trepte et al., 2015). The pressure from social presence in online brand communities is low, and instrumental support from others is scanty because of the virtuality and anonymity of the network society. How social support influences CCB in online brand communities may differ from that in traditional service organizations. However, how social support precisely influences CCB in online brand communities remains unclear. Moreover, customers can obtain social support both from firms and other customers in online brand communities because of the openness of the network society. Firms and other customers are different support sources. Social support is a multi-dimensional construct (Chiu et al., 2015). Different kinds of social support from different sources exert different influences on people (Mendonca and De Farias Junior, 2015). However, the different influences of different social supports on CCB of firms and other customers in online brand communities are not well understood.

Today, online brand community is a popular platform for customers to obtain social support when they encounter product problems. CCB provides extraordinary value to firms (Ho, 2015). In addition, previous studies find customer satisfaction is an important antecedent of CCB (Bettencourt, 1997; Anaza, 2014). In order to understand how social support drives CCB in online brand communities when customers encounter product problems, this study develops a theoretical model to investigate the influence of social support on CCB through customer satisfaction. Moreover, the moderating role of support source (i.e., firms vs. other customers) is measured. Our findings can help companies take

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advantage of online brand communities to improve their business performance.

2. Conceptual background and hypotheses

2.1. CCB

The concept of CCB is derived from organizational citizenship behavior. Scholars increasingly consider customers to be "partial employees" of the organization (Mills and Morris, 1986; Bowen et al., 2000). Groth (2005) formally proposed the concept of CCB by treating customers as "part-time employees." According to Groth (2005), CCB is "voluntary and discretionary behaviors that are not required for the successful production and/or delivery of the service but that, in the aggregate, help the service organization overall" (p.11).

The antecedent of CCB has recently gained increasing focus in numerous contexts. Nguyen et al., (2014) examined the impact of service scripts on CCB. Curth et al., (2014) analyzed how affective commitment to fellow customers influences CCB. Yi et al., (2013) investigated how other customers' CCB drives the CCB of focal customers. Anaza and Zhao (2013) examined the influence of e-store familiarization and facilitating conditions on CCB in the context of e-retailing. Rosenbaum and Massiah (2007) explored the influence of intercustomer social support on CCB in a service establishment. However, knowledge of how CCB is shaped by social support in online brand communities remains scarce. The present study focuses on the influence of social support on CCB in online brand communities.

Groth (2005) identifies that CCB has three dimensions: (a) recommendations, (b) providing feedback to the firm, and (c) helping other customers. These dimensions have been widely accepted by other scholars (Anaza, 2014; Bove et al., 2009). The present study also employs these three dimensions.

2.2. Social support

According to Shumaker and Brownell (1984), social support is "an exchange of resources between at least two individuals perceived by the provider or recipient to be intended to enhance the well-being of the recipient" (p. 31). Social support is a context-specific construct (Trepte et al., 2015). The online brand community is a crucial context in which social support may happen.

With the development of social media technology, scholars have given considerable attention to the influence of social support in online communities. Chiu et al., (2015) explored the effect of social support on users' citizenship behaviors toward online communities. Yao et al., (2015) investigated the effect of social support on the life quality of patients in online health care communities. Rosenbaum and Massiah (2007) examined the direct relationship between social support that a customer receives from other customers and CCB in a service establishment. However, knowledge about the influence mechanism of social support on CCB in online brand communities is scarce.

Social support is a multi-dimensional construct (Chiu et al., 2015). Schaefer et al., (1981) classified social support into three types, namely emotional, informational, and tangible support. Cutrona and Russell (1990) suggested five major dimensions of social support, namely emotional, network, esteem, tangible, and informational support. Their classifications have been employed to study online social support in numerous contexts. Coulson et al., (2007) investigated social support in a Huntington's disease online support group based on the classification of Cutrona and Russell (1990). Evans et al., (2012) investigated social support in online postpartum depression discussion groups based on the classification of Schaefer et al., (1981). Hajli (2014) examined how social support affects SNS users' social commerce by classifying social support into emotional and information support. Most studies have demonstrated that emotional and informational supports are the main types of social support in the online context (Coulson et al., 2007; Coursaris and Liu, 2009; Liang et al., 2011; Evans et al., 2012; Hajli, 2014). Online brand community is a kind of network society (Chang et al., 2007). Useful information and emotional concerns may be the needs of customers who have product problems. Thus, the present study adopts emotional and informational support as the dimensions of social support. In addition, social support usually is intangible in online brand communities (Smedley et al., 2015). More casual friendships and self-esteem are not directly related to product problems encountered by customers. Thus, tangible, network, and esteem support are not employed in the present study.

2.3. Conceptual model

S-O-R theory explains that social stimulus affects a person's psychological reaction, which in turn influences his behavioral response (Mehrablan and Russell, 1974). Social support can be regarded as a stimulus. A previous study has demonstrated that social support (stimulus) can drive CCB (behavioral response) in a service establishment (Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2007). The present study is based on S-O-R theory and proposes that customers who receive social support in online brand communities generate related psychological reaction, which in turn exhibits CCB.

Given that previous studies find customer satisfaction as the important antecedent of CCB (Bettencourt, 1997; Anaza, 2014), the present study employs customer satisfaction to describe customers' psychological reactions. Sections 2.1 and 2.2 show that this study employs recommendations, providing feedback to the firm, and helping other customers as the dimension of CCB and uses informational and emotional support as the dimension of social support.

Moreover, the present study further examines the moderating role of support source in the relationship of social support and customer satisfaction given that different kinds of social support from different sources have different influences on people (Mendonca and De Farias Junior, 2015). Fig. 1 shows the research model.

2.4. Hypotheses

Consumers in online brand communities seek social support mainly about product problems they encounter. S-O-R theory states that CCB toward product provider (firm) is influenced by customers' psychological reaction to the firm. Customer satisfaction is an important psychological reaction in numerous CCB contexts. Porricelli et al., (2014) found that the job satisfaction of

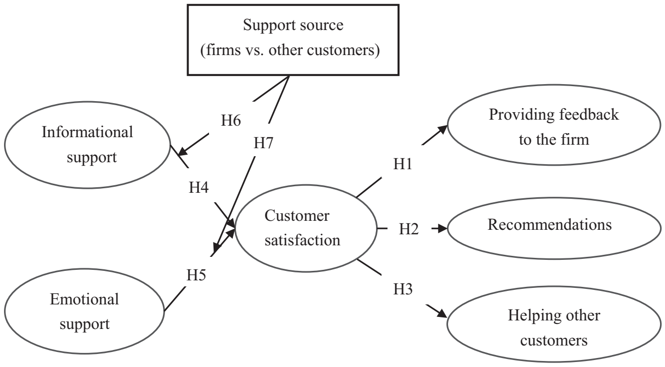

Fig. 1. Research model.

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