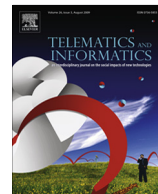




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How do uncertainty reduction strategies influence social networking site fan page visiting? Examining the role of uncertainty reduction strategies, loyalty and satisfaction in continuous visiting behavior [☆]

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, it is common for people to find product or service information from various information sources on social networking sites (SNS). Among many embedded communication tools in SNS, our study focuses on fan pages and page followers, highlighting their continuous visiting behavior to company fan pages in the context of Facebook. Based on uncertainty reduction theory, our study proposes a research model examining the relationship between uncertainty reduction strategies and continuous visiting behavior, mediated by the low level of uncertainty. In addition, we employ the perceived usefulness of postings on fan pages as a mediator between uncertainty and visiting behavior. Lastly, we adopt two moderating factors: SNS satisfaction and SNS loyalty. To test hypotheses, we analyzed survey data from 189 Facebook users who have subscribed to at least one fan page on Facebook using a partial least squares (PLS) method. We found that uncertainty reduction strategies are positively associated with a low level of uncertainty about information regarding products or services on fan pages. In addition, perceived usefulness of postings is significantly accounted for by the low level of uncertainty. Both the low level of uncertainty and usefulness of postings explain continuous visiting behavior jointly. Our research findings also revealed that SNS satisfaction and SNS loyalty have significant moderating effects on the relationships between the low level of uncertainty/perceived usefulness and continuous visiting behavior. Based on research findings, implications and limitations are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Using social networks has become a consistent part of our everyday lives. According to 'Wearesocial.net', as of January 2016, there are approximately 2.307 billion active social networking accounts worldwide, and by the end of 2016, it is projected that about one-third of the world's population will use social networks. Social networking sites (hereinafter 'SNS', such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) are defined as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public

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or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (Boyd and Ellison, 2007, p. 211). Thus, SNS were originally created to connect people online, so helping people get connected to their family, friends, alumni, colleagues, or other types of acquaintances. On top of the SNS role of connecting people, people have also recently been getting connected to various information sources in SNS, such as the news (e.g., The New York Times; Facebook.com/nytimes), free education (e.g., TED; Instagram.com/Ted), and various fan pages created by commercial companies (e.g., Apple and Samsung). As such, it is not surprising that people have come to consider an SNS as a good information source (Lampe et al., 2012).

Due to the popularity of SNS as information sources, over the course of a decade, numerous studies have investigated various topics related SNS, such as the information credibility of micro-blogging, the motivation for sharing information over SNS (e.g. Oh and Syn (2015)), and the impact of SNS information seeking on individual and organizational outcomes (e.g. Sin (2016)). In addition, extant studies have also investigated various topics on the corporate use of SNS, focusing on the use of Facebook fan pages. In a review of the literature, we identified that those studies primarily investigated the following four topics: (1) the antecedents of visiting fan pages (e.g. Kang et al. (2014), Lin and Lu (2011)), (2) the antecedents of users’ participation in fan pages (in terms of the number of likes and comments) (e.g. de Vries et al. (2012), Sabate et al. (2014)), (3) the motivating factors for brand loyalty and popularity through fan pages (e.g. de Vries et al. (2012), Hutter et al. (2013), Ruiz-Mafe et al. (2014)), and (4) the current status of fan page use by businesses (e.g. Hsu (2012), McCorkindale (2010)). To name a few, users’ shared value, trust, and socio-psychological and hedonic benefits are found to be positively associated with users’ intention to visit fan pages (Kang et al., 2014; Lin and Lu, 2011). The richness (e.g., using images and multi-media contents), interactivity, and timeliness of a fan page are positively associated with the number of likes and comments it receives (de Vries et al., 2012; Sabate et al., 2014). The perceived usefulness, trust, and dependency (users’ degree of engagement) of fan page postings as well as the proper positioning of the brand in the postings are positively associated with brand loyalty or popularity on fan pages (de Vries et al., 2012; Hutter et al., 2013; Ruiz-Mafe et al., 2014). As shown, the topics of fan pages have been studied recently in academia, and fan pages have been used actively by corporate SNS users not only to provide their (potential) clients with useful information that helps increase their brand loyalty, but also to market their products and services.

In general, there are three ways for an organization to promote their products and services through fan pages. First, ‘promoted posts’ is a means of promoting their products or services to individual SNS users’ timelines. Second, commercial advertising services are available on the main page of many SNS. Both promoted posts and advertising are done on a paid basis. Last, many SNS currently provide mini-blogs or webpages within it, which any member can use to open their own pages free of charge. For example, a company’s fan page in Facebook now becomes an important communication medium to facilitate direct interactions with customers by exchanging comments (posted content) on Facebook timelines, resulting in better access to potential customers. SNS users may become fans of such pages (‘fan page followers’ or ‘followers’ hereinafter) voluntarily by opting-in (e.g., by clicking ‘like’ button) if they want to subscribe to the postings from fan pages on their timelines. The users can also opt out (i.e., terminate fan page subscriptions) of a fan page if they decide not to view the postings any more.

Creators of fan pages and their motivations vary. For example, celebrities open their fan pages to interact with fans (e.g., Cristiano Ronaldo; Facebook page followers are 111,668,586, as of May 31, 2016), while organizations open their pages to release information to public (e.g., National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA); Facebook page followers are 15,867,986, as of May 31, 2016). Companies or for-profit firms are also one of the primary users who run fan pages in SNS in order to promote their products or services to SNS users, and even to sell digital items directly to online customers (Kim et al., 2011). Although firms’ main reason for maintaining fan pages is to promote and sell their digital or offline products, fan pages play an important role in providing various contents to their potential/existing customers, called page followers. For example, the fan page of Coleman USA (Instagram.com/colemanusa) posts information about its promotional events on a particular special day (e.g., Labor Day sale), and it also posts information about camping sites, camping recipes, and even tourist attractions seasonally. From SNS followers’ perspective, they follow various commercial fan pages not only because they are economically beneficial (i.e., thanks to promotional coupons, perks, and news on new product launches), but also because the fan pages release useful information for their everyday lives.

While companies enjoy benefits from a large number of fans who potentially become profitable customers (Jansen et al., 2009), such benefits are not always available for all companies when opening their fan pages in SNS. Anecdotal evidence shows that some fan pages (e.g., Coleman USA’s fan page with more than 200,000 followers) have a lot of followers or fans who visit and interact with the pages, whereas others have only a few followers. A fan page can become a dormant site if only a few active interactions are made among fans, or at least if it appears only to be one-way communication through advertisements or promotional posts. Thus, in order to maximize the benefits of fan pages, retaining current followers is a key success factor, as is attracting new potential fans. Regarding academic efforts to identify SNS users’ perceptions, prior studies have examined SNS user behaviors and their key antecedents (e.g. Tong et al. (2008)). However, from a fan page-specific research perspective, very few studies have examined the salient antecedents of page followers’ continuous visits to SNS fan pages. Notably, little is known about what role perception plays and how fan perceptions influence fans’ continuous visiting behaviors.

In terms of retaining as many fans as possible, and thus ensuring the page’s longevity, our research focuses on fan page followers’ frequency of visits and their underlying perceptions. To fill the research gap, we employ uncertainty reduction

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