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The effect of online fan community attributes on the loyalty and cooperation of fan community members: The moderating role of connect hours

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ABSTRACT

Global fans spontaneously look up their favorite celebrity-related news coverage via the online community and/or by subscribing to fan pages on social media. Unlike social media, which is an open space for everyone including fans and anti-fans, the online fan community is a closed space only for avid fans who are willing to pay an annual membership fee. Since online community users tend to have a common identity and purpose, they feel a bond with the other members. In the meantime, the members may have different motivations for feeling attachment. For the study, the sample was collected from the “Girls’ Generation” (GG) online fan community. The empirical results showed that *social interaction* significantly influenced *fan community identification* (FCI) and *fan community trust* (FCT). *Information quality* had positive effects on FCI, FCT, and *celebrity trust* (CT). *Contents* significantly affected CT and FCT. FCI had positive effects on CT, FCT, *loyalty*, and *cooperation*. CT and FCT significantly influenced *loyalty* and *cooperation*, respectively. Further, *connect hours* moderated the paths between FCI to CT; FCI to FCT; FCI to *loyalty*; and FCT to *cooperation*. This study provides added value for online fan community members and improves marketing strategies for entertainment management agencies.

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1. Introduction

Korean dramas and music have been gaining popularity in Asia for over a decade. This popularity is linked to an interest in Korean culture, including everything from language to commodities such as fashion and beauty. The Korean cultural wave, known as “Hallyu,” has now spread to Europe, America, and other countries. For example, Girls’ Generation, a Korean girl band, had its breakout hit “Gee” in 2009. As of 2016, the music video has received over 170 million views on YouTube and has been viewed all over the world. CNN (2013) reported that at the first YouTube awards, Girls’ Generation beat famous singers such as Justin Bieber, Miley Cyrus, and Lady Gaga. With the rise in popularity of Korean culture, several scholars have begun to research and investigate what makes Korean culture so popular (Choi, Meza, & Park, 2014; Yoon, 2014). While there are various reasons for this phenomenon, it cannot be

discussed without considering the influence of internet media, especially for young generations (Yoon, 2014). Global fans spontaneously look up K-Pop news coverage via the online community and/or by subscribing to fan pages on social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. As online fans become influential, a growing number of researchers have focused on the communal aspect of online fans and have made an attempt to address the question of how to develop and manage fandom (Théberge, 2006). Specifically, some empirical research has provided support for online fan communities’ ability to engage, collaborate, and build a strong relationship with celebrity and other fan community members as well (Han, Kim, Kim, Jun, & Kim, 2014; Marwick, 2011).

In contemporary society, people maintain their networks via online media with less restriction of time and space. For example, people maintain old friendships or long-distance friendships through online media such as online message boards, blogs, and social media. Although social media has been evaluated as an innovative vehicle for bonding, bridging, and maintaining social capital (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2011), the other online media also provide an opportunity to build social networks. In terms of K-Pop message boards, fans interact with others to share information

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about their favorite celebrities. From K-pop celebrities' stage performance and fashion to official schedules or even private life, fans share information and opinions with the online fan community. As a result, mutual interests allow fans to communicate frequently and become intimate with each other. Thus, bonding through online interaction builds a social tie among fan community members, even if it is not very strong (Phua, 2012). Unlike social media, which is an open space for everyone including fans and anti-fans, the online fan community is a closed space only for avid fans. In terms of official fan communities, an annual membership fee is often required. Even if there are no membership fees, web administrators can expel anti-fans in order to secure their "robust fan castle."

The online community consists of individuals who want to share a common purpose, common interests, and/or common needs with other members (Joyce & Kraut, 2006; Ren, Kiesler, & Kraut, 2007). Fans communicate with other members by posting videos/pictures and leaving a comment on the posts (Fiedler & Sarstedt, 2014). Since online community users tend to have a common identity and purpose, they feel a bond with the other members. In the meantime, the members may have different motivations for feeling attachment. Some members are committed to the purpose of the online community (identity-based attachment), while others feel social and emotional attachments to specific members in the community (bond-based attachment) (Fiedler & Sarstedt, 2014). That is to say, fan community users who have an identity-based attachment may focus on the fundamental purpose of the fan community such as information quality and contents adequacy. Meanwhile, the users who feel a bond-based attachment may emphasize their relationship with the celebrity or members in the community.

Thus, this study is based on social identity theory, which posits that an individual's identity is constructed of a personal and a social self (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). As members come to identify with an online community, they will try to modify their and others' behaviors to be consistent with their understanding of the social rules governing the online community (Mikal, Rice, Kent, & Uchino, 2014). Moreover, the concept of identification is at the intersection of many contemporary communication procedures closely related to online fan communities (Soukup, 2006): fandom (attachment), media consumption (contents), and virtual communities (attributes). Based on the notion, this study measured online fan community members' purpose of access (*social interaction, information quality, and contents*), attachment (*fan community identification, celebrity trust, and fan community trust*), and behavior (*loyalty and cooperation*).

In doing so, the goal of this study is twofold. First, it will explore the role of the online fan community in fostering *loyalty and cooperation* with an emphasis on Girls' Generation online fan community members. It is believed that *social interaction, information quality, and contents* are fundamental in stimulating behavioral outcomes in the context of online community settings (Elliot, Li, & Choi, 2013; Fiedler & Sarstedt, 2014; Wu, Chen, & Chung, 2010). This study also introduces online fan community members' *fan community identification* (social identification), *celebrity trust* (parasocial relationship), and *fan community trust* (in-group identification) as core mediators of the relationship between the elements and *loyalty* as well as *cooperation* (See Fig. 1). This study will contribute to the important body of online community research examining community members' levels of *identification* and *trust* (Ho, Kuo, & Lin, 2012; Kim, Lee, & Kang, 2012; Park & Chung, 2011).

The second goal of the study is to investigate the moderating role of time spent on *fan community identification, celebrity trust, fan community trust, loyalty, and cooperation*. This study compares empirical differences in online fan community members'

perceptions in terms of the interrelations between variables between 'heavy' and 'non-heavy users' (Seraj, 2012). As a result of these asserted differences across access times, this study will provide some suggestions about how best to manage online fan communities to enhance members' *loyalty and cooperation*.

2. Theoretical background

Social Identity Theory (SIT) implies that individuals self-conceptualize and spontaneously categorize themselves within certain social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Through the process of self-categorization, they establish their own social identity (Tajfel, Billic, Bundy, & Flament, 1971). Once individuals perceive themselves as a member of a particular social group, they feel a positive attachment to the in-group, contributing to the intragroup morale, cohesiveness, and cooperation (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). As a result, individuals are more likely to see their social groups and fellow members in a positive manner, and they tend to experience self-esteem and self-enhancement through the social identity process (Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Trepte, 2006). Meanwhile, an individual's social identity is not limited to one social group. For example, an individual might identify himself or herself as a Girls' Generation fan, while he or she just likes a specific member or even would become a fan of another girl band. Therefore, the in-group and out-group are changeable. As such, social identities are flexible rather than fixed. That is to say, fans may also stop following Girls' Generation for various reasons.

From the media selective exposure perspective, individuals tend to choose a media source on-demand in order to see the positive aspects of their in-group. The positive emotion for their social group leads the individuals to interact with in-group members and trust them more than those of out-groups (Trepte, 2006).

2.1. Fan community attributes

A paucity of research has examined the attributes of a successful online fan community, information which an entertainment agency can use as a guideline for building and evaluating its own online fan community. In order to effectively manage an online fan community, understanding the distinct dimensions of online fan community attributes is the first step. This effort to identify the dimensions of fan community attributes has been mostly conceptual (Mellins, 2008; Soukup, 2006). In addition, while online brand or product community attributes have been identified by several scholars (Adjei, Noble, & Noble, 2010; Brown, Broderick, & Lee, 2007), there have been few empirical studies that investigate the dimensions of an online-based fan community.

Based on the existing literature, this study proposes a new conceptual and empirical framework of attribute dimensions for online fan communities. First, members in an online community can recognize and associate with each other based on their common interest in a celebrity. This *social interaction* may make them visit their online community more frequently and regularly, due to their deep sense of connection to the community (Kim, Park, & Jin, 2008). Second, members in an online community are more likely to trust information from the community than they are from non-members, and these members remain twice as loyal as often (Brown, Tilton, & Woodside, 2002). Due to the importance of *information quality*, a company tries to manage its online community well in order to maximize its benefits. Third, an online community acquires not only a company and a competitor (e.g., another company), but also member-generated *contents*. Additionally, an online community may provide visual contents of a brand or product and offer a place to share it among members, such as a commercial or pictures of the brand or product (Friesen, 2004). Thus, this study

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