



Why do consumers participate in brand microblogs?



Yue Jin, Jinghua Huang*

Research Center for Contemporary Management, School of Economics and Management, Tsinghua University, Beijing 100084, China

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 23 August 2016

Received in revised form 5 May 2017

Accepted 6 May 2017

Available online 8 May 2017

Keywords:

Brand microblog
Community participation
Social identity
Perceived value
Multilevel modeling
Microblog matrix

ABSTRACT

Many firms have adopted brand microblogs, which are a form of social media brand community. Consumer participation is essential to the development of brand microblogs. However, given the new features of brand microblogs, determining how to encourage the continued participation of consumers is challenging and thus worth exploring. This study draws on social identity theory to examine the antecedents of continued participation in brand microblogs from a multilevel perspective. Questionnaires were distributed to consumers who followed brand microblogs. A total of 345 valid responses were collected for empirical analysis. Our results reveal that, at the individual level, purposive value directly influences participation intention, whereas social value and entertainment value indirectly influence participation intention through the mediation of microblog identification; at the brand level, microblog matrix size affects participation intention through microblog identification. Moreover, the effect of microblog matrix size on microblog identification is moderated by brand popularity.

© 2017 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

In recent years, an increasing number of firms have embraced social media by creating communities, such as Facebook fan pages, Twitter brand microblogs, and YouTube channels (Hoffman and Fodor, 2010; Miller and Tucker, 2013; Li et al., 2013; Malhotra et al., 2013). The brand communities established on a social media platform are called social media brand communities (Goh et al., 2013). Among them, brand microblogs are the most frequently used because of the advantages of the microblogging platform, such as immediate communication, information sharing, community interaction, and interpersonal ties (Culnan et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2016).

Consumer participation in social media brand communities, such as brand microblogs, is important in helping firms increase sales, gain customer insights, improve brand awareness, and disseminate word-of-mouth (Hoffman and Fodor, 2010; Barwise and Meehan, 2010; Aral et al., 2013; Goh et al., 2013; Rishika et al., 2013). Even though customers may sometimes complain or criticize, their negative feedback helps firms improve their products and services. However, determining how to encourage the participation of consumers in brand microblogs is challenging and hence worth exploring, because brand microblogs have features that differ from traditional virtual brand communities (Aral et al., 2013). First, a brand microblog is situated in an enriched social context,

which means that the activities of the microblog followers are integrated with the microblogging platform (Piskorski, 2011; Habibi et al., 2014). Second, a brand microblog may belong to a microblog matrix, that is, the firm can create multiple accounts for a brand on the microblogging platform (Li et al., 2013). Finally, a brand microblog has a star typology, that is, the brand or the firm is the center of the microblog, and consumers interact more with the brand than with other consumers (Kwon et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2015).

Empirical studies on how to promote consumer participation in brand microblogs are still limited. First, although researchers have confirmed that community identification and perceived value are important antecedents of participation (Algesheimer et al., 2005; Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006; Nambisan & Baron, 2010; Muntinga et al., 2011; Kwon et al., 2014), they have not considered the aforementioned unique features of brand microblogs in their studies. These features may challenge the definition and operationalization of related constructs and offer new insights into our understanding of consumer participation. Second, prior studies have proved the importance of firms' efforts in social media brand communities (Miller and Tucker, 2013; Goh et al., 2013). However, there exists a great deal of complexity and subtlety in terms of how firms should interact with their various constituencies through social media (Aral et al., 2013). Thus, analyzing how firms should engage in brand microblogs to boost consumer participation is necessary. Third, although some researchers have observed that microblog matrix is a unique feature of brand microblogs (Li et al., 2013), the academic meaning of this feature has not been explored. Finally, prior studies on participation in virtual communities have

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: huangjh@sem.tsinghua.edu.cn (J. Huang).

investigated either consumer behavior at the individual level or community dynamics at the aggregated level (e.g., community or brand level), but they have scarcely explored both. In fact, factors at the aggregated level may also affect individual behaviors (Bock et al., 2015). As followers of brand microblogs are nested in brands, microblog matrix is a brand level feature that may influence individual consumers' behaviors, such as participation.

In brand microblogs, the enriched social context makes the importance of considering identity issues salient because identity, as constituted by society, is embedded in the social context (Carter and Grover, 2015). Accordingly, in our study context, the fact that the participation of consumers is visible to their followers and friends would substantially boost their need of maintaining a consistent and positive identity. Although researchers could theorize identity in different ways, social identity theory, which is built on the collective level and focuses on group processes and inter-group relations, is more suitable to our study context than individual-level identity theories (Carter and Grover, 2015).

Based on the above discussion, this study draws on social identity theory to analyze consumer participation in brand microblogs from a multilevel perspective. We propose that, at the individual level, the firm's effort perceived by consumers (i.e., perceived values) directly and indirectly influences their participation intention through their identification with the microblog (i.e., microblog identification). At the brand level, the firm's effort to operate social media based communities (i.e., microblog matrix size) influences the participation intention of consumers through microblog identification. Moreover, the effect of microblog matrix size is moderated by brand popularity.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews related theory and literature. Section 3 introduces our hypotheses and proposes our research model. Sections 4 and 5 discuss the data collection method and the analysis process, respectively. Finally, Section 6 concludes this paper with a summary of our results and further research directions.

2. Literature review

2.1. Virtual brand community participation

Virtual brand communities are brand communities established via a virtual platform. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) first introduced the concept of brand community, which they defined as a specialized, non-geographically bound community based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand. They suggested that brand communities exhibit three traditional markers of communities: shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Furthermore, McAlexander et al. (2002) proposed that brand communities represent a consumer's relationship with four entities (i.e., brand, product, firm, and other consumers), which is also called "brand community integration".

Previous studies on consumer participation in virtual brand communities have mainly used the theory of planned behavior and the social identity theory, and discussed consumer motivations to participate from the perspective of perceived values. For example, Bagozzi and Dholakia (2006) proposed attitude, anticipated emotions, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and social identity as antecedents of community participation. Algesheimer et al. (2005) considered brand relationship quality and community identification as the driving factors of participation. Nambisan and Baron (2010) reported that responsibility to the community, self-image enhancement, expertise enhancement, and community identification shape the contributions of community members. Muntinga et al. (2011) determined that entertain-

ment, social interaction, social enhancement, personal identity, information, and monetary value are motivations for consumers to participate.

The above studies were conducted at the individual level and confirmed that community identification and perceived value are the most mentioned antecedents of participation. However, brand microblogs are a new type of virtual brand community that possesses some new features. These features may challenge the development of community identification, and the definition and operationalization of perceived values. Therefore, the next section discusses the new features of brand microblogs.

2.2. New features of brand microblogs

Brand microblogs are a type of social media brand community that differ from traditional virtual brand communities (Barwise and Meehan, 2010; Habibi et al., 2014; Manchanda et al., 2015). The firm-sponsored online community studied by Manchanda et al. (2015) is a prototypical example of traditional virtual brand communities, where consumers share information and engage in discussions on chat boards. Note that this community is an independent website, whereas a brand microblog is created on a third-party website, i.e., the microblogging platform, which offers three new features for brand microblogs.

The first feature is the enriched social context, i.e., the activities of brand microblog followers are integrated with the microblogging platform (Habibi et al., 2014; Piskorski, 2011). For example, followers can gain information about one another by checking their daily updates on the microblogging platform, and can establish a relationship by following one another outside the brand microblog. They can also interact with their own followers on the microblogging platform by forwarding posts from the brand microblog. Consequently, the perceived values of brand microblogs may differ from those of previous studies. Moreover, this feature indicates that the participation behaviors of consumers are observable to their friends and followers and can influence their self-image (Aral et al., 2013). To differentiate themselves from others and sustain a consistent self-image, consumers need to participate in microblogs similar to their personalities, i.e., those that they identify with (Tajfel, 1978). As a result, the importance of identification increases.

The second feature is the microblog matrix, that is, firms can open multiple accounts for a brand on the microblogging platform (Li et al., 2013). For example, BMW has several Twitter accounts, such as BMW Motorsport, BMW Motorrad, Classic BMW, BMW Championship, and BMW USA. These accounts support one another, yet they have different roles and serve different groups of people (Barwise and Meehan, 2010). Therefore, the microblog matrix enables the firm to strategically segment consumers. Generally, brand popularity is the extent to which a brand has been widely sought after and purchased by the population at large (Kim and Chung, 1997). A popular brand has a great need to divide consumers into different groups and, thus, a great need for a microblog matrix. This indicates that microblog matrix may influence consumers' identification with the microblog that they follow, contingent on the popularity of the brand. However, this effect has not been explored in academic research.

The third feature is the star typology. Traditional virtual brand communities generally have a peer-to-peer network typology, wherein every consumer can initiate a thread on the discussion board and interact with one another (Manchanda et al., 2015). By contrast, in a brand microblog, only the firm can post tweets, and consumers can only respond to these tweets as peripheral participants. Therefore, brand microblogs possess a brand-centered star typology in which consumers interact more with the brand and less with other consumers (Kwon et al., 2014; Zhang et al.,

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4942508>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4942508>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)