Impact of Social Support on Social Loafing in Online Brand Community

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Abstract. Members who behave social loafing are a special group of website users who regularly login to online communities. We construct a model of social support through community commitment affecting social loafing in online brand community, social support is composed of information support and emotional support. The conceptual framework not only can extend social loafing theory to the field of online brand community, but also can facilitate managers attracting participation of members.

Introduction

Online brand communities have become a major medium amongst Internet users. Many businesses are thinking about how to successfully create an online brand community. Participation is the key to community survival and development. However, lurkers are among the larger members of the online community. Shiue et al. (2010) suggest that members who exhibit social loafing behavior are so-called lurkers.

Therefore, it is important to understand the factors that affect the social loafing in online brand community members. Based on the perspective of social exchange theory, we construct a model of social support affecting social loafing in online brand community, social support is composed of information support and emotional support. This study has important guiding significance for community managers to ease social loafing.

Literature Review

Social Support

Social support is defined as the social resources that people obtain through formal or informal organizations (Hajli, 2014). Social support is a context specific construct. In fact, online brand community is an important context where social support may happen (Zhu et al., 2016). Members often perceive support from the community by browsing the postings and getting solutions (Hua et al., 2016). At the same time, members perceiving support became more active and shared their information and support other people (Hajli, 2014).

Social support is a multidimensional construct, but its dimension depends on research situation. In health communities, Love et al. (2012) studied how cancer patients use emotional support, information support, and esteem support to meet cancer patients' psychological needs. However, most scholars believe that social support only includes emotional support and information support in the online brand community. Therefore, these two constructs, informational and emotional supports, have been adopted in this study.

Community Commitment

A central focus of research in organizational behavior is why individuals choose to join organizations, and why they stay (Bateman et al., 2006). Those studies fully reflect the enthusiasm of employees and the commitment to the organization. However, community members are not employees who are more freedom to choose whether to participate in the community (Bateman et

al., 2010). It is the setting of online context so that members are free to participate and the information content provided by the online community is substitutable. Thus, the participant's participation is voluntary. In order to explain the voluntary behavior of community members, this paper chooses community commitment as an intermediary variable.

The emotional bond that captures members to pursue their relationship with the community is called community commitment (Raïes et al., 2015). Community commitment refers to each community member's attitude toward the community, which can be used as predictor of behavior of members in the online community, such as participating in community activities, helping other members to solve problems (Munnukka et al., 2015).

Social Loafing

Online brand community that is a virtual platform for individuals with common interests in a brand who communicate each other (Sicilia and Palazon, 2008). Whether they are marketer-sponsored brand communities or pure social communities without transactional intent, this community must be energetic and ensure the active participation of members (Kang et al., 2007). In fact, Members' participation behavior in online brand communities can be interactive or non-interactive, non-interactive behaviors are also referred to as lurking (Burnett, 2000). Shiue et al. (2010) argue that members who exhibit social loafing behavior are so-called lurkers. Social loafing is the tendency for individuals to expend less effort when working collectively than when working individually (Karau and Williams, 1993). At the same time, most of the members are lurkers, they just browse the information, not post.

Hypothesis Development

Effect of Social Support

The rapid development of the internet facilitates interactive activities between consumers. When customers encounter product problems, they often join online brand communities to seek support from others (Zhu et al., 2016). Then, other members will help them solve the problem, making them feel the informational support and emotional support. Additionally, an affective bond with a community may be formed when members see that they are friendly treated (Bateman et al., 2006). Accordingly, this research hypothesizes:

H1. Informational support is positively associated with the members' community commitment.
H2. Emotional support is positively associated with the members' community commitment.

Effect of Community Commitment

Commitment affects one's motivation and behavior for participation (Bateman et al., 2010). Individuals who perceive community support experience a sense of responsibility, and hence are motivated to making contributions to the community (Hua et al., 2015).Therefore, higher levels of commitment to a community are likely to foster members' information-sharing behavior, encourage value creation for community members (Munnukka et al., 2015). In a similar vein, members who have a high commitment to the brand community will reduce social loafing. Accordingly, this research hypothesizes:

H3. Community Commitment is negatively associated with the members' community commitment.

Research Methodology

Data Collection and Sample

This study adopts the questionnaire method and selects online brand communities as research background, such as Apple community, Millet community and so on. The survey received a total of 279 valid questionnaires.

Measurement

A questionnaire developed to test the model and the items were measured on a Likert-scale. A seven-point has been chosen, from 1 'strongly disagree' to 7 'strongly agree'. Moreover, the questionnaire items were adopted from previous studies. Social support mainly uses two-dimensional scale from Zhu et al. (2016), and the community commits adopts Bateman et al.'s (2010) scale, social loafing's measurement was based primarily on the scale developed by Shiue et al. (2010).

Reliability and Validity

Examining each item's loading on its corresponding construct assesses reliability of items (Loading > 0.7). In this study, the loading of each item meets this criterion.

Average variance extracted (AVE) values, which should be at least 0.50, were the source for convergent validity, indicated in Table 1. All of the constructs achieved this criterion.

Table 1. Reliability and convergent validity.

| Codes	Scales	Factor loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
	Informational support				
SI1	Some people comforted and encouraged me to face the difficulty.	0.851	0.787	0.876	0.702
SI2	Some people listened to me talk about my private feelings about the difficulty.	0.772			
SI3	Some people were on my side with me to face the difficulty.	0.869			
	Emotional support				
SE1	Some people offered me suggestions to solve the problem.	0.856	0.823	0.894	0.739
SE2	Some people gave me information to help me overcome the problem.	0.841			
SE2	Some people told me the way to solve the problem	0.881			
	Community commitment				
CC1	I feel a strong sense of belonging to this community.	0.881	0.821	0.893	0.736
CC2	I feel like a part of the group at this community.	0.853			
CC3	I have a real emotional attachment to this community.	0.840			
	Social loafing				
SL1	I am contributing less than full effort.	0.905	0.897	0.935	0.828
SL2	I am free-riders.	0.915			
SL3	I avoided responsibility.	0.910			

We also noted that the square root of AVE for each construct (see Table 2) exceeded all respective inter-construct correlations, providing further evidence of discriminant validity.

Table 2. Discriminant Validity.

	Informational support	Emotional support	Social loafing	Community commitment
Informational support	0.838	0	0	0
Emotional support	0.5841	0.859	0	0
Social loafing	-0.2534	-0.237	0.910	0
Community commitment	0.6321	0.6986	-0.334	0.858

Structural Model

We tested our hypotheses by examining the size and significance of structural paths in the Smart PLS analysis. These results are reported in Figure 1.
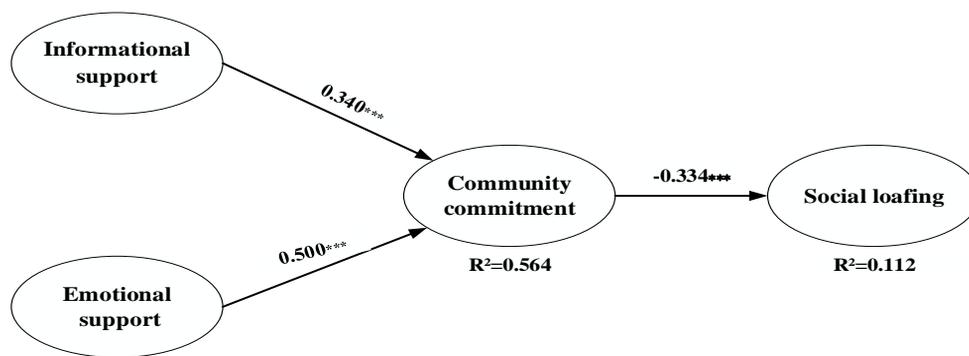
Significance of path coefficients
*** P<0.001,**P<0.01,*P<0.05

Figure 1. Path model.

First, informational support (H1, ß= 0.340, p<0.001) and emotional support (H2, ß = 0.500, p<0.001) both significantly influenced community commitment as hypothesized. Second, the model explained 56.4% of community commitment. Lastly, the model explained 11.2% of the social loafing. Community commitment (H3, ß= -0.334, p<0.001) negatively affect social loafing.

Summary

The rapid development of network technologies is expected to continue to increase the usage of online communities. However, online brand community has the phenomenon of social loafing, such as lurkers who browse information and seldom post information. Based on the theory of social exchange, this paper examines the impact of information support and emotional support on community commitment and social loafing. Conclusion as below:

First, information support and emotional support have a positive impact on community commitment. Social exchange theory suggests that members will offer rewards to community who perceived social support (Hua et al., 2015), which strengthen the emotional connection between members and the community. Second, community commitments will negatively affect social loafing. This is because highly committed members place community interests above personal interests, and they communicate the product or brand message and create a good community atmosphere (Kang et al., 2007).

This article enriches the study of online community engagement. Burnett (2000) argues that online community participation is divided into two types: interactive and non-interactive. The existing literature mainly includes a large amount of empirical analysis on the motivation of

interactive behavior and the contribution made by members actively participating to the online community. In fact, there are few studies on non-interactive behaviors.

The research has some limitations in the following aspects: First, the scope of this discussion is limited to the explanation of mobile-related online brand community. The reason is that more than 200 valid samples are from the online brand community associated with the phone. Moreover, the study measures community commitment as a variable. In fact, community commitment is defined as a multidimensional construct.

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