

Involvement and Stickiness in Online Brand Communities: An Organizational Citizenship Behavior Perspective

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Abstract

Advances in communication technologies geared toward helping people connect and collaborate with like-minded others have led to the rapid developments of online brand communities (OBComms). However, there are as yet few theoretical frameworks that conceptualize how to improve member involvement and retention. This study contributes to bridging this gap by applying organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) to the context of OBComms. More specifically, this study will explore the contribution of OCBs to member stickiness intentions as well as the role of the member-community relationship as a critical determinant of OCB (or member involvement) formation. Thus, from a theoretical standpoint, this study will illustrate how a well-established construct (i.e., OCBs) from organizational research can be applied to gain a more systematic understanding of OBComms. For practitioners, this study will provide insight into how to design and manage their OBComms.

Keywords: Online brand communities; community citizenship behaviors; perceived community support; community identification; stickiness intention

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1 Background and Significance

Advances in communication technologies geared toward helping people connect and collaborate with like-minded others have led to the rapid developments of online brand communities (OBComms) (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). In these OBComms, consumers share information about the products and create content to promote or support the products toward which they feel loyal (Schau, Muñiz, & Arnould, 2009). For example, Jones Soda, a carbonated beverage firm, solicits customer co-creation of package design from its community of loyal fans. Fans are invited to rate suggested new flavors and submit photos and quotations for the packaging (Schau et al., 2009). Thus, OBComms not only allow firms to establish linkages to devoted consumers but also offer them opportunities to garner a number of benefits from those consumers (Andersen, 2005).

Building a vibrant OBComm, therefore, is becoming an increasingly vital task for companies of any type (Fournier & Lee, 2009). However, according to a report by Deloitte (Moran, 2008), most business efforts to forge successful OBComms fail to live up to expectations. In the report (Moran, 2008), for example, only 26% of the businesses surveyed have more than 1,000 active members in their OBComm. Extant research also indicates that effectively engaging community members is a major impediment to community success because the majority of consumers visiting OBComms leave quickly, rarely return, and contribute little (Ren et al., 2012).

However, there are as yet few theoretical frameworks that conceptualize how to improve member involvement and retention. This study contributes to bridging this gap by applying organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs), which are widely accepted in the organizational literature as having a significant impact on various organizational performance outcomes (Bell & Menguc, 2002; Organ, 1988), to the context of OBComms. More specifically, this study will explore the contribution of OCBs to member "stickiness intentions" (defined in the next section), as well as the role of the "member-community relationship" as a critical determinant of OCB (or member involvement) formation. Thus, from a theoretical standpoint, this study will illustrate how a well-established construct (i.e., OCBs) from organizational research can be applied to gain a more systematic understanding of OBComms. For practitioners, this study will provide insight into how to design and manage their OBComms.

2 Research Model and Hypotheses

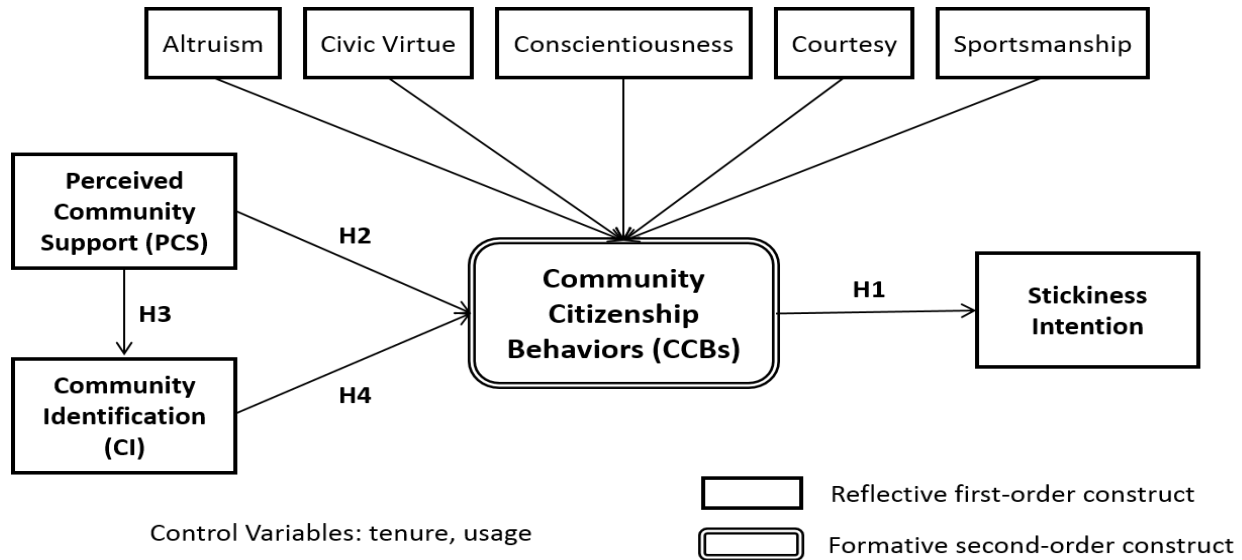


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

The conceptual model proposed is presented above. OCBs are translated into community citizenship behaviors (CCBs) (described in the CCBs section) and measured employing the reflective second-order approach (Lepine, Erez, & Johnson, 2002). At the center of the model are CCBs that represent member involvement in OBComms. CCBs are conceptualized to be influenced by perceived community support (PCS) and through community identification (CI). Examining these links will contribute to informing OBComm designers and researchers of the significance of the “member-community relationship” management, more specifically, the significance of supporting community members in building a strong identification with their community (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). Lastly, CCBs are theorized to impact member “stickiness intentions.” Investigating this link will also generate implications for practice and research with regard to member retention (Wu, Chen, & Chung, 2010). Some auxiliary theories from sociology and marketing research help hypothesize these links.

2.1 Community citizenship behaviors (CCBs)

Fully compatible with all recent versions of Microsoft Word for windows. Also works with versions of LibreOffice and OpenOffice. CCBs are defined as beneficial member behaviors that promote the effective functioning of an OBComm, by adapting from the Organ’s definition of OCBs (Organ, 1988): discretionary individual behaviors that are not explicitly recognized by the formal reward system but are essential to the effective functioning of an organization (p. 4). Based on Organ’s taxonomy of OCB (Bell & Menguc, 2002; Organ, 1988), a five-dimensional CCB framework is identified as: 1) altruism – helping other members, 2) civic virtue – actively involving in the concerns of the community (e.g., attending community events), 3) conscientiousness – going beyond minimum requirements (e.g., taking a leadership role in the community), 4) courtesy – preventing conflicts with others (e.g., being considerate of other members, and 5) sportsmanship – overlooking the negative details and focusing on the positive ones (e.g., being tolerant of lurkers).

2.2 Stickiness intention

Stickiness intention refers to the willingness of members to remain with their OBComm (Bell & Menguc, 2002). Members demonstrate their stickiness by frequent visits, positive recommendations, and increased participation (Wu et al., 2010). Self-perception theory (Bem, 1967), which posits that people infer their attitudes from their own overt behavior (Brown & Peterson, 1994, p. 2), can provide an explanation for why CCBs positively influence members’ stickiness intention. The more members engage in CCBs, the more they are likely to be induced to form a stronger favorable attitude (here, stickiness intention) toward their OBComm [**Hypothesis 1**].

2.3 Perceived community support (PCS)

PCS is defined as the members' general perception of the extent to which the community values their contributions and cares for their well-being. The support that members perceive can be demonstrated by, for example, their feeling that help is available from the community or that their opinions are valued in the community. Social exchange theory (Emerson, 1976) and its associated norms of reciprocity can offer an explanation as to the link between PCS and CCBs. The more members perceive support from the community, the greater they are likely to display CCBs to reciprocate such support [**Hypothesis 2**].

PCS can also contribute to fostering a *sense of community*, which refers to the perception of feeling that one is part of a community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986), because members are likely to exhibit favorable affective and cognitive responses to high levels of community support (Bell & Menguc, 2002). As members perceive a stronger sense of community, they are also more likely to identify themselves with the values and beliefs of the community, and thus with the community itself [**Hypothesis 3**].

2.4 Community identification (CI)

CI is defined as the degree to which members perceive, feel, and value their affiliation with their community. Identification has been found to be one of the strongest determinants of various deep and committed relationships (e.g., consumer-brand, community-member, or romantic relationships) (Lam, Hu, Ahearne, & Schillewaert, 2010). Park et al.'s (Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci, 2010) extension of self-expansion theory (Aron et al., 2004) to relationship marketing argues that consumers who strongly identify with a brand invest their own resources (e.g., time, energy) in that brand to sustain or strengthen the relationship with the brand. From this rationale, the expectation is that as member identification with their community increases, members will be more likely to engage in CCBs for the community [**Hypothesis 4**].

3 Method and Current Status

3.1 Instrument development

The hypotheses will be examined at the individual level using online survey data. The initial version of the survey questionnaire has been developed by adapting existing scales and making wording changes to tailor the scales to the context of OBComms. Table 1 shows examples of survey items.

Construct	Example Item
Altruism	I enjoy helping other members in the community
Civic Virtue	I actively involve in the concerns of the community
Conscientiousness	I try to take a leadership role in the community
Courtesy	I try to prevent conflicts with other members in the community
Sportsmanship	I am tolerant of lurkers
Stickiness Intention	I will continuously visit the community
Perceived Community Support (PCS)	The community provides various technical means to support members
Community Identification	I have a sense of belonging to the community

Table 1. Examples of Survey Items

3.2 Data collection

The survey will be administered to members of three different OBComms (i.e., Apple and Nike – consumer products, Mozilla – an Open Source application) in order to increase the generalizability of the study and reduce concerns about common method variance (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). The features (e.g., forum boards) provided by these three OBComms are very similar, which also contributes to reducing the contextual variability between the communities. The survey will be distributed via an internal email function in the communities to members who posted a message(s) during the past six months.

3.3 Data analysis

Partial least squares (PLS), a component-based structural equation modeling (SEM) technique, will be employed to test the proposed conceptual model (Chin, 1998). PLS is preferred over a covariance-based SEM, since this study is exploratory in nature rather than confirmatory (Chin, 1998). The statistical package that will be used is SmartPLS 2.0 (Ringle, Wende, & Will, 2005).

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