How to Keep Brand Fan Page Followers? The Lens of Person Environment Fit Theory

Emergent Research Forum Papers

Introduction

Social media based brand fan pages (hereinafter referred to as "BFPs") are increasingly being established by companies to broadcast product information, increase brand awareness, retain existing customers, and attract new customers (Goh et al., 2013). It has been reported that 80% firms listed in the Standard and Poor's 500 index possess BFPs in social media (Braojos-Gomez et al., 2015). In addition, more than half of social media users are "following[1]" at least one BFP (Chow and Shi, 2015).

A brand fan page (also known as fan page or brand page) in social media is a profile created and managed by company (Rishika et al., 2013; Habibi et al., 2014). Companies can be benefit from operating BFPs in many ways. For instance, BFPs provide marketers an "unparalleled opportunity to disseminate commercial messages to literally hundreds of thousands of potential brand buyers in a matter of days, without the cost associated with traditional mass media" (Nelson-Field et al. 2013, p.205). In addition, marketers can use BFPs to answer followers' questions instantly, thereby more effectively breaking the distanced corporate image by communicating with existing or potential brand buyers (Zhang et al., 2014).

The expected values of BFPs can be realized only if there are sufficient followers who stay and continually participate. It has been reported that sustained BFPs followers are the main transmitters of brand-related information and that the information shared by them may be perceived as more credible and trustworthy than other forms of word of mouth (Kim et al., 2014). Moreover, continued followers are more inclined to keep long-term relationships with the brand and to provide valuable insights for companies to improve their products and services (Hu et al., 2014). Although companies and BFPs operators realize the importance of fans, most fail to understand the critical importance of fan retention. Currently, 30% of Facebook users between the ages of 16 and 64 have unfollowed or unliked BFPs, with that figure rising to 38% in the sub-group of users aged 16 to 24 (Adweek, 2014). We argue that the viability of BFPs depends not only on how many followers they have but also on how many followers stay and continue participate. However, the extant information systems (IS) literature on following behavior and related phenomena such as BFPs participation has focused primarily on the initial decision to follow or to participate or on the outcome of following behavior; there remains a lack of research examining why fans continue or discontinue following after initial acceptance of BFPs.

The objective of this paper is, therefore, to shed light on the above issues by addressing the following research question: "What drives fans to continue following BFGs?" To address this question, we grounded our research in the theory of person environment fit (hereinafter referred to as "TPEF") to develop a research model enabling us to understand how fit perceptions play an important role in fans' continued following behavior.

TPEF is a theory that explains how well characteristics of an employee and the environment of an organization fit one another (Caplan, 1987). In its essence, TPEF posits that compatibility between employees and organizations is more likely to happen when (a) the organization and its employees share similar fundamental characteristics, (b) employees' needs or desires are realized and provided for by the organization, and/or (c) both (Kristof, 1996; Greguras and Diefendorff, 2009).

Organization is a social unit of people that is structured to meet a need or to pursue collective goals (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). A BFP forms a specific type of organization in which both followers of BFPs and organizations (a) play different roles (such as contributors and lurkers in BFPs versus managers and workers in organizations), (b) and are motivated by a variety of intrinsic or extrinsic benefits (i.e.,

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[1] Following is one of the core functions of social media services such as Twitter and Facebook. By simply pressing the "follow" button, individuals can automatically receive messages on their own home page from accounts they are following.

rewards, social benefits, and knowledge). Therefore, the TPEF can usefully be employed as an insightful perspective for examining BFPs followers' behavior.

Theoretical Background and Research Model

Brand Fan Pages

The handful of studies that have examined the impact of BFPs can be categorized into two streams. One stream of literature has focused on **the impact of BFPs on customer and brand relationships.** For example, by surveying 315 Korean consumers who currently follow brands on Twitter, Kim et al., (2014) showed that brand followers are more inclined to retweet brand-related word of mouth (WOM) than other consumers. Rishika et al., (2013) investigated the impact of customer participation in a BFP on the intensity of customer-firm relationship represented by customer shopping visits and purchase frequency. The other stream of literature on **BFPs explored users' initial decision to follow BFPs.** Poyry et al., (2013) found that consumers' usage of company-hosted Facebook pages are mainly motivated by hedonic and utilitarian motivations. Also, Jahn and Kunz (2012) indicated that seeking for content-, relationship-, and self-oriented gratification drive individuals to join BFPs. However, despite the undeniable commercial potential of BFP, few studies have empirically examined consumers' continued intention to follow BFPs and, thus, cannot explain why people withdraw after initial adoption. In the current study, we define 'continued intention to follow' as follower's intention to keep receiving and processing messages from BFPs.

The Theory of Person-Environment Fit

Person-environment fit theory (TPEF) is widely used in organizational behavior, organizational psychology, and human resource management literature (Edwards et al., 2006). As mentioned earlier, the theory is employed to study job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job performance, and turnover (Edwards et al. 1998; Kristof, 1996; Kristof-Brown et al., 2014). The concept of person-environment fit describes the congruence, correspondence, or match between a person and an environment (Edwards et al., 1998; Kristof, 1996; Yu et al., 2016). The underlying logic of TPEF assumes that human behavior is a product of interactions between individual and environment (Edwards et al., 1998; Kristof, 1996).

Based on previous studies on TPEF and BFPs, we propose three types of Person-Environment (P-E) fit that may influence individuals' continued intention to follow – person-organization fit, needs supply fit, and person-group fit. Person-organization (P-O) fit explains the association between the characteristics of individuals and organizations (Kristof, 1996). In this paper, P-O fit is defined as the congruence between the values, norms, and goals of a person and those of a BFP's parent brand. An extensive body of studies indicates that employees are more inclined to commit to and stay in an organization when their values and preferences are align with organization's culture (Greguras and Diefendorff, 2009; Kristof-Brown et al., 2014). Along this line, it is reasonable to think that the more strongly followers feel their values align with the values of the brand operating a BFP, the greater their intention to continue to follow that BFP. Bearing this reasoning in mind, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Person-organization fit positively influences followers' continued intention to follow.

Needs supply fit is the compatibility that occurs when and employees' needs are well matched with the rewards they receive in return for their contributions and service (Kristof-Brown et al., 2014). Cable and DeRue (2002) assert that needs supply fit may be considered the most influential type of fit, since people to enter the labor market in order to gain access to extrinsic and intrinsic rewards and meet their diverse needs. Tims et al., (2016) suggested that when employees feel that their various job-related needs are well fulfilled, they are more likely to perceive their work as meaningful. Similarly, in an online context, Zhou et al., (2014) indicated that users are more likely to keep participating in Social Virtual World service when their utilitarian needs, hedonic needs, social needs are fulfilled by service providers. In the context of BFPs, needs supply fit is the result of an individual's perception that the benefits received from following BFPs are equal (or greater) to the expected benefits. Thus, we argue that when followers perceive a high degree of match between their needs and the services provided by BFPs, they are more likely to continue following. We therefore propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Needs supply fit positively influences followers' continued intention to follow.

Person-group fit (P-G) or person-team fit emphasizes the match between individuals and their team members (Kristof,1996; Seong and Kristof-Brown, 2012; Kristof-Brown, 2014). In this study, we propose two types of P-G fits that may influence individuals' continued intention to follow: personality-based group fit and perceived group similarity. Personality-based group fit refers to the extent to which an individual's personality is similar to the personalities of his or her colleagues (Kristof, 1996; Seong and Kristof-Brown, 2012: Christiansen et al., 2014). Previous studies have indicated that when employees perceive that their personality is congruent with the personalities of his or her team members, they will more inclined to feel psychologically safe (Seong and Kristof-Brown, 2012). Therefore, it seems reasonable to think that when followers perceive a high degree of match between other BFPs followers' personalities and their own, they are more likely to continue following the BFP. Consequently, we hypothesize the following:

H3. Personality-based group fit positively influences followers' continued intention to follow.

Perceived group similarity reflects the extent to which an individual regards his or her character tics, other than personality, to be similar to the existing organization members. This commonalities can include a wide range of attributes such as interests, values, goals or experiences, (Piasentin and Chapman, 2007). According to findings on similar-to-me phenomenon, individuals are more likely to be attracted to join and remain in organizations when they are similar to organizational members (Seong and Kristof-Brown, 2012). Zhao et al., (2012) found that sense of belonging will be cultivated when virtual community members perceive other members to be similar to them. In the context of BFPs, perceived group similarity comes from comparing oneself to other followers. We argue that when followers perceive that other followers are similar to them, they will have greater motivation to continue following. This leads us to hypothesize the following:

H4. Perceived group similarity positively influences followers' continued intention to follow.

Measurement

The five constructs of interest to this study are person organization fit, need supply fit, personality based group fit, perceived group similarity, intention to continue follow brand fan page. All the measurement items used in the study will be adapted from validated measurement instruments in the prior literature, with minor modifications to fit the context of the current study. All constructs will be measured using multi-item scales; each construct will be measured by a few items for construct validity and reliability.

Data Analysis

This study will use the two-step approach suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) to conduct data analysis. The measurement model will be first examined by confirmatory factor analysis and then the structural model will be assessed by structural equation modeling (SEM) technique. In this study, partial least squares (PLS) will be employed to conduct data analysis, because it places minimum restrictions on sample size, measurement scales, and residual distributions (Marcoulides & Saunders, 2006). In this study, SmartPLS 2.0 M3 will be employed to carry out the data analysis.

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