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THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL ON BRAND EVANGELISM IN ONLINE BRAND FAN PAGE: THE ROLE OF PASSIONATE BRAND LOVE

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Abstract

In recent years research studies have tackle the issue of brand fan economy and their behaviours, however little is known about brand evangelism. Given that many consumers are crazy in love with brand fan page on Facebook, understanding how fans behave in brand fan page is crucial in determining brand evangelism. Our main goal is to understand how different dimensions of social capitals in online fan page exert influence on brand love and how the underlying mechanism in turn facilitates consumers to develop brand evangelism. By using partial least square (PLS), the results show that the three dimensions of social capital impose differing effects in influencing the establishment of brand love and its consequent effect on brand evangelistic behaviours in SNS. It is found that relational capital in brand fan page serves as the most influential antecedent to drive brand love. The findings of this study have significant implications to both marketers and researchers.

Keywords: Brand love, Brand evangelism, Social capital
1 INTRODUCTION

Scholars and practitioners today are particularly interested in consumer brand relationship developed in the context of Social Networking Sites (SNS). Among which the extraordinary popularity of online brand fan page and the behaviours of brand fans have captured substantial attention. Brand evangelism (Matzler, Pichler, and Hemetsberger 2007) is analogous to brand zealots (Eighmey, Sar, and Anghelcev 2006; Pimentel & Reynolds, 2004), partial employees (Yi et al. 2012; Yen et al. 2011), value co-producers (Kozinets et al. 2010), champions (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003), and advocates (Chung and Darke 2006). Evangelistic consumers provide positive brand referral, word-of-mouth promotion or feedback to brands. Not only do they help other consumers in solving problems, they may even engage in enthusiastic actions to induce other consumers to degrade their favourite brand’s competitors (Becerra & Badrinarayanan 2013).

Many studies recognize evangelistic consumers are beneficial to the brand, as these individual engage actively in promoting the brand. (Paine and Organ 2000; Yu and Chu, 2007; Chiu et al., 2009; Bateman el al., 2006). Research show that by examining the brains of Apple fans, when images of Apple product was flashed in front of the fans, it evoked stimulation in the same part of the brain as did the religious images does to people of faith (Lindstrom & Underhill, 2010). Furthermore, by reaching out to potential customers, brand evangelistic consumers may even build brand communities out of their own initiative. (Matzler et al. 2007). Therefore, a better understanding of how the underlying mechanism facilitate consumer evangelism in online brand communities in social networking sites has great significance to today’s highly competitive online marketers.

Past research postulate that social capitals fully covers the social network functions which captures the critical content of social support and collaboration (Lu and Yang 2011), and are essential in exercising civic behavior (Warren, Sulaiman, Jaafar 2015). Extant literature and extensive research on social capitals have been done, which include social capital and knowledge sharing (Chiu, Hsu, Wang, 2006; Chow and Chan, 2008; Chang and Chuang, 2011), online impulse buying (Huang 2015), mental health (Jong, Schout, Pennell, Abma 2015), reading behaviour (Li, Guo, Chen, Luo 2015) and wellbeing (Chang, Hsu, 2016). However, there is little research directly linking the relationship between social capital and brand related behavioural outcomes such as brand evangelism in social networking sites. Thus our understanding on this important topic remains an open question. It is widely acknowledged that social media is an influential platform that plays an important role in marketing strategies (Bonsu and Darmody, 2008) and brand building (Chiu et al., 2009), Thus to examine the antecedents of brand evangelism from a social capital perspective can be of enormous value to managers and scholars.

Prior research on brand literatures have discussed how satisfied consumers can build emotional attachment with brands (Thomason, MacInnis, & Park, 2005; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006), yet the effect of brand love within online brand communities such as social networking site online fan page is seldom discussed in depth. How does the social capital manifested in online brand fan page interactions facilitate the establishment of brand love? Specifically, how does the three dimension of social capitals (structural capital, relational capital, and cognitive capital) drive the establishment of brand love? Furthermore, how does brand love individual built in online brand communities elicits brand evangelism? Brand love which plays a crucial role in driving consumer’s active participation in online brand communities such online fan page is rarely discussed.

Drawing from social capital theory (Lin, Cook, Burt 2001), this study attempt to close this important knowledge gap by examining the mechanism by which social capital contributes to the establishment of brand love and its consequent effect on brand evangelistic behaviours in SNS. Specifically, this research investigates the following two sets of relationships: (1) How does the three dimensions of social capital influences the establishment of brand love; and (2) How does brand love exert influence on three dimensions of brand evangelism in SNS. Such inquiry makes two important contributions. First, this research empirically examines the mechanism of which social capital impacts brand
evangelism. We reveal the communication characteristics and impediments of SNS. Second, this research provides managerial implications that reveals how brand evangelism can be fostered in SNS.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Social Capital

Social capital is described as “resources embedded in a social structure that are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive action” (p. 29) (Lin 2001). The heart of social capital is quality social relations, which influences a group of people to congregate and seek resolutions to the problems they face in order to accomplish mutual benefit (Lochner, Kawachi, Kennedy 1999). Social capital is entrenched in the social networks structure and also in the position of people that are within these structures (Burt, 2005). Furthermore, social capital indicates the benefits individuals obtained from their social relationships and connections, which encompasses emotional support, obtaining access to non-redundant information and distinctive ideas exposure. Hence, it is understood that social capital is seen as a source for collective actions, which can lead to wide-ranging individual and group consequences. For individuals, social capital comprises access to the mutual, trustworthy social connections that facilitate individuals to getting ahead. On the other hand, for communities, social capital reveals the capability of community members to participate, collaborate, unite, and work together (Burt, 2000).

2.2 Brand Love and Brand Evangelism

Brand love indicates “a primarily affective, extremely positive attitude toward a specific brand that leads to emotional attachment and influences relevant behavioural factors” (Bauer et al., 2007, p. 2190). Brand love is derived from intimate communication (Jarvenpaa & Lang 2005). A multi-faceted brand love encompass different elements, such as enthusiastic and zealous feeling toward the brand (Keh, Pang, & Peng, 2007; Thomason, MacInnis, & Park, 2005). Brand evangelism indicates “a more active and committed way of spreading positive opinions and trying fervently to convince or persuade others to get engaged with the same brand” (Matzler et al. (2007, p27). The evangelistic behavior goes beyond advocating and civic behavior. Because not only do consumers provide positive word-of-mouth, feedback, provide help to other consumers and tolerate wrongdoings of brand, they also seek to convert others and “preach the brand” for oppositional brand referral (Matzler et al., 2007; Albert et al., 2008; Batra et al., 2012; Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013; Doss,2014). Generally speaking, brand evangelism encompasses three different dimensions (a) positive brand referrals: providing positive WOM (b) positive feedbacks: helping brand improvement and tolerate wrongdoings of brands, and (c) Antagonize: proactively preaching with other consumers who are not fans of the brand.

Matzler et al. (2007, p. 27) found a significant positive relationship between brand passion and evangelism, where evangelism extends beyond WOM to include active spreading of positive opinion and trying to persuade others to become engaged with the same brand. When consumers have passion toward a brand, they are more likely to accept a price increase (Aaker, 1991; Bauer et al., 2007; Thomson et al., 2005), prompting positive referral (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 2003; Bauer et al., 2007; Matzler et al., 2007), and provide feedback to companies (Groth 2005; Gruen et al. 2000; Yi et al. 2012). Since SNS differ from other devices as it provides ubiquitous interaction across time and space, thus this online platform allows online fans to foster close interactions, which in turn foster increased passion toward the brand (Mintz et al. 2012; Pihlström 2007; Pura 2005). Thus, we hypothesize that consumers who exhibit higher brand love are more likely to engage in brand evangelism.

H1: Brand love positively influences (a) brand evangelism (b) positive brand referral, (c) feedback.
2.3 Structural Capital and Brand Love

Structural capital refers to network of social interaction ties that endowed with a desire for social recognition (Engel et al. 1993; Sundaram et al. 1998). Prior research suggests that structural capital satisfies member knowledge exchange and resource exchange (Burt, 2000). The exchange nature of structural capital not only can help to establish interpersonal networks (Boyd and Ellison 2007) but also can evoke interaction and communication with members within SNS (Ellison, Steinfield, Lampe, 2010). This social interaction pave way to a strengthened relationships between online fans members and also provides a potent way to transmit and foster brand love. Therefore, by allowing fan members to increase the amount of time spent and communication frequency, social capital may positively influences active engagement (Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen, 2010) which in turn facilitates the establishment of brand love. Thus we hypothesize structural capital positively influences the establishment of brand love.

H2: Structural capital positively influences the establishment of brand love.

2.4 Relational Capital and Brand Love

Relational capitals refers to the interpersonal relationship such as trust and friendship that is developed through interaction. Trust enable consumers to engage in social exchange which encourage an increase of long term interactions (Lu and Yang 2011). Previous studies have shown that trust serves as a crucial antecedent for continued intention (Lee, Chung 2015) and relationship commitment (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999). Also, trust has been highlighted for its role in facilitating brand love (Albert, Merunka and Vallette-Florence 2010) and brand passion (Albert et al., 2012). Consequently, this study suggest that the relationship capital in a fan page facilitates the establishment of brand love in online fan page. Therefore, we hypothesize relational capitals positively influences the establishment of brand love:

H3: Relational capitals positively influences the establishment of brand love.

2.5 Cognitive Capital and Brand Love

Cognitive capital indicates the shared value, vision, or language among members in a community. For instance, members can share their brand using experience, create their own jargons or vocabulary within a SNS. Individuals join online brand fan page, because of their common interest in the brand. When the common brand values, visions, jargons and language are created in the online brand fan page, it is likely that these cognitive capital will increase engagement to the brand (Yang, Lin, Carlson, 2016). Sitkin and Roth (1999) indicate that sharing values enables consumers to generate a “value congruence” process which has a positive effect in building mutual reciprocity toward the brand (Lu and Yang 2011). As a result, members who share cognitive capital is more likely to generate brand engagement which in turn facilitates the establishment of brand love. Therefore, we hypothesize that cognitive capital positively influences the establishment of brand love.

H4. Cognitive capital positively influences the establishment of brand love.

3 METHOD

3.1 Data Collection and Sampling

The formal questionnaire survey was collected from Internet and restricted to those who have participated the online brand fan page. Respondents were recruited from the largest online survey website, Amazon Mechanical Turk. The participants received one dollar as the incentive for finishing
the questionnaire. Among the 202 respondents, 66 are males and the rest of 136 are females. The majority (55.4%) of the respondents ranged from 21 to 30. 84.7% of respondents reported to visit brand fan page more than five times a week. Among all the respondents, 89.1% respondents report that Facebook is the platform they interact most often, following by Twitter (10.9%).

3.2 Measurement

Following Tsai and Ghoshal (2008), we used shared vision to represent cognitive capital, trust to represent relational capital and social interaction ties to represent structural capital. Shared vision was adopted from Chiu, Hsu and Wang (2006) with three items anchored seven-point Likert scale (1, “strongly disagree”, 7, “strongly agree”), the items are as follows: “Members in the brand fan page share the vision of helping others solve their professional problems”, “Members in the brand fan page share the same goal of learning from each other”, and “Members in the brand fan page share the same value that helping others is pleasant.”

Trust which is used to represent relational capital was adopted from Chiu, Hsu and Wang (2006), with five items anchored seven-point Likert scale: “Members in the brand fan page will not take advantage of others even when the opportunity arises”, “Members in the brand fan page will always keep the promises they make to one another”, “Members in the brand fan page would not knowingly do anything to disrupt the conversation”, “Members in the brand fan page behave in a consistent manner”, “Members in the brand fan page are truthful in dealing with one another”.

Social interaction ties which is used to represent structural capital scale is modified from Chiu, Hsu and Wang (2006), with four item anchored seven-point Likert scale: “I maintain close social relationships with some members in the brand fan page”, “I spend a lot of time interacting with some members in the brand fan page”, “I know some members in the brand fan page on a personal level”, “I have frequent communication with some members in the brand fan page”.

Brand love is modified from Carroll and Ahuvia (2006), with eight items anchored seven-point Likert scale: including “This is a wonderful brand fan page”, “This brand fan page makes me feel good”, “This brand fan page is totally awesome”, “This brand fan page makes me very happy”, “I love this brand fan page”, “This brand fan page makes me feel excited”, “I am passionate about this brand fan page”, “I’m very attached to this brand fan page”.

Brand evangelism is modified from Kohler, Fueller, Stieger, and Matzler, (2011) including three items: “I would make a perfect brand salesperson”, “I try to convince as many as possible of this brand”, “If someone tries to decry this brand, I will tell him off unmistakably”.

Positive brand referral items is modified from Yi and Gong (2012), including three items, “I spread positive word of mouth about the brand”, “I recommend the brand to my friends”, “I encouraged friends and relatives to join brand fan page.” Feedback is modified from Yi and Gong (2012), including three items, “If I have a useful idea on how to improve brand, I let the brand know”, “When I receive good information from the brand, I comment about it”, “When I experience a problem, I let the brand know about it”.

3.3 Common Method bias

Common method bias was conducted following the procedure suggested by Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003), thus Harman’s single-factor test is adopted to test for common method bias. An exploratory factor analysis extracted seven factors with eigenvalues greater than one, with the first factor accounting for 13.863% of the variance in the items. The result showed that neither a single factor emerged, nor was there a general factor accounting for the majority of the covariance in these variables, suggesting that common method bias is not a concern for this study.
A Partial Least Square (PLS) model was conducted for data analyses (Rigdon, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2010). Using the two-step approach (Anderson & Gerbing 1988), Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was applied to the data. The result indicate the measurements are reliable. In terms of convergent validity, all CFA factor loadings are significantly greater than 0.7 (the p-values for the t-tests < 0.01), and the AVE values are also greater than 0.5 (Fornell & Larker, 1981), suggesting good convergent validity as shown in table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Standardized factor loadings</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Cronbach’s α</th>
<th>Composite Reliability</th>
<th>AVE</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structural capital (SC)</td>
<td>SC 01</td>
<td>0.88</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>SC 04</td>
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<td>Relational capital (RC)</td>
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<td>RC 05</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>18.88</td>
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<td>Cognitive capital (CC)</td>
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<td>0.74</td>
<td>15.04</td>
<td>0.72</td>
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<td>0.64</td>
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<td>CC 02</td>
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<td></td>
<td>CC 03</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>23.40</td>
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<td>Brand love (BL)</td>
<td>BL 01</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>21.86</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.94</td>
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<td></td>
<td>BL 02</td>
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<td>21.50</td>
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<td></td>
<td>BL 03</td>
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<td></td>
<td>BL 04</td>
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<td></td>
<td>BL 05</td>
<td>0.87</td>
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<td></td>
<td>BL 06</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>16.11</td>
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<td></td>
<td>BL 07</td>
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<td>BL 08</td>
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<td>Brand evangelism (BE)</td>
<td>BE 01</td>
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<td>0.69</td>
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<td></td>
<td>BE 03</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>8.63</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive brand referral (PBR)</td>
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<td>53.43</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.81</td>
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<td></td>
<td>PBR 02</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>72.22</td>
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<td>PBR 03</td>
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<td>30.03</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback (FD)</td>
<td>FD 01</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>32.93</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.71</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FD 02</td>
<td>0.86</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FD 03</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>21.73</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 1. Validity and Reliability indices of the model.
For discriminant validity, the square roots of AVEs are all greater than the construct inter-correlations, indicating high discriminant validity, thus the measurements are good in reliability and validity (table 2). A total of 29 items with factor loadings exceeding 0.70 (p < 0.001) are used for further analyses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive brand referral</th>
<th>Brand evangelism</th>
<th>Feedback</th>
<th>Brand Love</th>
<th>Structural capital</th>
<th>Cognitive capital</th>
<th>Relational capital</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive brand referral</td>
<td>0.902</td>
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<td>Brand evangelism</td>
<td>0.488</td>
<td>0.830</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>0.543</td>
<td>0.582</td>
<td>0.843</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brand Love</td>
<td>0.726</td>
<td>0.559</td>
<td>0.676</td>
<td>0.813</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.802</td>
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<tr>
<td>Structural capital</td>
<td>0.696</td>
<td>0.477</td>
<td>0.446</td>
<td>0.608</td>
<td>0.802</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive capital</td>
<td>0.516</td>
<td>0.496</td>
<td>0.484</td>
<td>0.637</td>
<td>0.366</td>
<td>0.808</td>
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<td>Relational capital</td>
<td>0.697</td>
<td>0.729</td>
<td>0.677</td>
<td>0.795</td>
<td>0.634</td>
<td>0.604</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. The construct inter-correlation matrix with AVE values listed on the diagonal. (Note): Values in the diagonal cells are the square roots of AVE.

4 RESULTS

Overall, the hypotheses are supported. As reported in Figure 1, the relationship between structural capital and brand love is positively significant ($\gamma=0.18$, $t=2.88$). Relational capital is positively associated with the brand love ($\gamma=0.53$, t= 7.72). Cognitive capital is positively associated with the brand love ($\gamma=0.25$, t= 4.75). Also, results shows that the positive relationship between brand love and positive brand referral is significant ($\beta=0.73$, t= 13.10). The result also indicated that the higher brand love, the greater the likelihood of feedback ($\beta=0.68$, t=13.83). Finally, the result indicated that brand love, is positively related to brand evangelism ($\beta=0.56$, t=9.28). Hence, all hypotheses are supported.

Figure 1. Results of PLS
5 CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

Social networking site (SNS) has been recognized to be closely associated with social capital, yet little research directly link the relationship between social capital and brand related behavioral outcomes such as brand evangelism in social networking sites. Thus our understanding on this important topic remains an open question. Drawing from social capital theory (Lin, Cook, Burt 2001), this study attempt to close this important knowledge gap by examining the mechanism by which social capital contributes to the establishment of brand love and its consequent effect on brand evangelistic behaviors in SNS. This study contributes by highlighting the role of brand love and social capital in facilitating brand evangelism in online brand community literatures. The result reveals relational capital, cognitive capital and structural capital are positively associated with the brand love which in turn facilitates brand evangelism, positive brand referral and feedback behaviours.

The findings also show that relational capital exert greater influence than cognitive capital and structural capital on facilitating brand love. By shedding light on the mechanism of brand evangelistic consumer behaviors in online brand fan page, this study provides valuable managerial insights to marketers. Marketer can develop distinctive efforts that enhances relational capital, structural capital and cognitive capitals accordingly. For example online brand fan page mangers can promote brand vision and brand unique language within the online brand communities to cultivate brand common values.

One major limitation of the current research is the cross-sectional nature of the research. In investigating the consumer-brand relationships, the relationships between the consumers and the brand may evolve over time. Does the relationship change once the brand love satisfied through brand evangelism? If so, how does it change? In what directions? It is not easy to answer these questions with the cross-sectional research design. Longitudinal research tracking evangelist behaviour over time is commanded in this case. Thus future research should consider employing the longitudinal research design to further inspect the dynamic nature of the relationship between brand love and brand evangelism. Other than the nature of research design, another limitation has to do with the types of brands. For future research, it is worthwhile to investigate how different types of online brand communities such as hedonic or utilitarian brand fan page differentiates in driving consumers to engage in brand evangelistic behaviors.
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