

PARTICIPANT MOTIVATIONS IN A SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNITY PAGE

Shu-Hsun Ho, Providence University
Yu-Ling Lin, National Chin-Yi University of Technology
Robert Carlson Patrick, Providence University

ABSTRACT

Recently there has been explosive growth in both the global reach and easy access to online social media content. However, people's motivations for using social media vary considerably from individual to individual. Attempting to gain a greater understanding of what motivates people to use social media is of interest to content providers and administrators of social media platforms such as online community pages, who wish to appeal to their current members and attract a wider audience. Means-end theory explores the abstract relationship between a product's attributes, the consequences or benefits gained from that product, and personal values guiding individuals to use a particular product. This exploratory study uses soft-laddering interviews and a hard-laddering survey method to create means-end chains and a subsequent Hierarchical Value Map. We use this information to illustrate the shared values of a sample of group members of an online community page. The results of the study were used to understand individual's motivations for joining the page. The study concludes with practical suggestions for marketing the community page to appeal to the current member's shared values. We believe this approach will create a wider and more loyal group to the page.

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KEYWORDS: Means-end Analysis, Social Media, Hierarchical Value Map, Laddering Theory, Marketing Strategy

INTRODUCTION

According to Reid (2009), a primary factor driving both the increasing popularity of the internet and the day-to-day use of the internet is social media and social networking sites (SNS). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as, "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content." Social media includes web-based and mobile based technologies which are used to turn communication into interactive dialogue among organizations, communities, and individuals. For many individuals around the world today, social media is universally accessible and daily interaction on social media websites such as *Facebook* or *MySpace* is possible via several forms of online communication tools such as smart phones, laptops or tablet computers.

Social media is highly interactive and users share and process information with others (Aula 2010). Social media offers a platform for serving customers, listening to customers, monitoring customer feedback, encouraging dialogue, and establishing connections. Social media is unstructured and focused on generating conversation and building community and may also have an influence on purchase decisions (Nair 2011). Social media network sites allow individuals to create public or semi-public profiles within a system, to identify other individuals that they share a connection with and to view information about their connections within the system (Boyd & Ellison 2008).

It is important for online or social media marketers and creators of online community content in general to understand what motivates people to use one website over another or become fans of one community page but not the next. A deeper knowledge or contextual understanding of consumers and how they make decisions represents an important weapon to marketers and creators of community pages. Therefore, important questions remain regarding the motivations to use and participate in community pages. Using a real *Facebook* community page called, '*i-Ride Taiwan*', as the basis for this exploratory investigation, this study explores motivations for joining the page from the member's personal values obtained through the levels of abstraction of the community page (from the page's attributes, to consequences or benefits that people receive from joining the page and the values that those people have which drives their commitment to the page) via a means-end chain model (Gutman, 1982). We analyze the results on the consequent hierarchical value map (HVM) drawn up from the raw data.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. In the following section, we present a discussion of related literature and studies about Social Media Community Pages and the Means-end chain theory. Next, we structuralize our research methodology consisting of research framework, the subjects participating, the method of data collection, and the analysis methodology. The paper continues with a summary and discussion of the empirical results. Finally, the paper closes with some concluding remarks.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media Community Pages

Social media at large and social networking websites in particular have enormous scope for audience reach and content diversity. For this reason, there is potential for significant growth in both the number and variety of social media websites or social network sites on the worldwide web. Blakeman and Brown (2010) pointed out that collaboration and community are the fundamental driving characteristics of Web 2.0 development and are key features of increasingly popular and sophisticated social communication services or channels like social media websites such as *Google+*, *Facebook*, and *LinkedIn*, and interactive online communities including *Wikipedia*, *YouTube*, and *Flickr*. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) the Forrester Research Institute found that, "75% of Internet surfers used social media in the second quarter of 2008 by joining social networks or reading blogs across numerous demographics". Today, *Facebook* is the most visited website and nearly 11% of the world population has a *Facebook* account. Despite the growth in social media, managers are still unclear as to how it can be used to benefit their organizations. Part of the problem stems from confusing customers with online community members through the popularization of the term 'social customer relationship management' (Ang, 2011).

In the past, ideas behind community and community groups were focused on how people met, grouped together or made connections in the physical world. Jansen and Zhang (2009) pointed out that social media and social networking sites have developed and evolved in such a way that now they are used for a number of different reasons from communicating with friends and family, sharing information with others or allowing one a cyber-platform to create and manage their own online identity through a variety of different social networking websites. One key features of many social media websites such *Facebook* is the option to join, '*like*' or create a so-called, 'community page' for various online and real-life communities. The community pages found on social networking sites are specifically designed online pages to help unify community members and build the relationship between people who share things in common. People like to connect, communicate, create and collaborate with each other (Ang, 2011). Thus, a community page may be used for a variety of purposes. For example, as Flagler (2011) highlights, a community page may be created to promote a sports, cultural or artistic event or perhaps to celebrate important places, people or historical dates.

Online community pages may support various charities, and build awareness for a worthy cause or to simply allow people with a shared common interests, goals or values to communicate or share information as a unified group within that community. As a direct result of the massive popularity of social media, the members of the growing global online community now have access to literally millions of community pages on social media and social networking websites for every conceivable individual, cause or interest from pages to support or promote sport teams, high schools, welfare organizations, religious groups, popular musicians or trending movie stars, favorite food or beverages, places to vacation and so on. Therefore, any individual with access to *Facebook* or other social networking sties may participate in an existing community page or create their own community page and share it with millions of people around the world. However, with this obvious freedom to create or choose community pages invariably brings with it both positive and negative consequences to the broader audience of that particular social media website. Being aware of these consequences and both the positive and negative implications of using online community pages is imperative for gaining a better understanding of the motivations for joining a community page.

Means-end Theory

According to Orsingher, Marzocchi & Valentini (2011), “means-ends theory is rooted in the work of Simon (1957), who argued that decision makers act in order to achieve desired outcomes or end-states”. Put another way, this theory states that consumers have abstract ideals that guide their purchasing decisions. Products and their perceived attributes that can help the consumer achieve an end-state are valued as instruments, or “means” to achieve the desired end-state. Consumers also identify with attributes of the products that help them achieve end-states on different levels of abstraction. Several years later, Gutman (1982) applied this theory to explain customers’ purchasing behavior and developed the means-end chain (MEC) model and the key guidelines for means-end analysis.

According to Gutman (1982) attributes may be divided into concrete and abstract levels because it is necessary to distinguish between aspects that are literally part of a product or service (such as a lot of salt on a pretzel) and those that are attributed to a product because of those attributes (strong flavor). According to Valette-Florence (1998) each product has specific attributes. For example, the physical (concrete) attributes of coffee may include that it is *warm*, and *bitter*. A more abstract attribute of coffee may be that it is a *sophisticated* beverage. Gutman (1982) explains that at the consequence level, a distinction has been made between two forms of consequences as well -functional and psycho-social consequences. Functional consequences accrue directly to the consumer from consuming the product (a skin product giving the consumer clean, healthy skin or "glowing skin"). The psycho-social consequences are produced by the functional consequences of using a product, such as when clean or healthy skin leads to admiration from friends or perhaps more attention from members of the opposite sex. And at the values level, Gyhiller (2010) highlights two forms of values namely, intrinsic (terminal) and instrumental values. Instrumental values (i.e., self-confidence, accomplishment) have been distinguished from terminal values (i.e., security, self-esteem).

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

There are many options for social networking websites including ‘*MySpace*’ and ‘*Google+*’ that could have been considered for this research, *Facebook* was examined as a social media platform primarily because of its global appeal and large number of active users. A community page called, ‘*i-Ride Taiwan*’ (<http://www.facebook.com/IRideTaiwan?ref=hl#>) was created in May 2012 by the researcher and four other members of the administration staff. The participants selected for this research were conveniently selected active members of the ‘*i-Ride Taiwan*’ community page. As suggested by Gutman (1982), as a rule of thumb, at least 25 laddering interviews are needed per group to conduct a conclusive analysis of the data. When

conducting means-end analysis research, many studies used between 20 and 40 in-depth, personal interviews consistent with Kearns and Hair (2008). Most interviews were an average of 60 to 90 min in length. For this research, 5 people were selected for the “soft” laddering interview and a further 40 participants (28 males and 12 females) were selected to take part in the survey, which were conducted between January and April 2013.

First, the researcher conducted an interview with the content-providers and administrative team of the ‘*i-Ride Taiwan*’ community page to create their own means-end chains about the community page. The purpose of this initial interview was two-fold. First, the researcher aimed to improve his interviewing and data-collecting skills in a relatively comfortable, non-threatening environment in anticipation of further interviews in the research process. Second, the researcher aimed to create a framework from which to conduct the ‘hard laddering’ survey. This initial interview would provide the content for further investigation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted by the researcher with individual administrators of the ‘*i-Ride Taiwan*’ community page.

Participants in the study were asked to recall the key motivation(s) for creating this community page and participants were then asked to list factors (attributes) that they relied on as they created this community page. The researchers then utilized the laddering technique as described by Reynolds and Gutman (1988) and later applied to community page user and community page selection by Klenzoky, Templin, and Troutman (2001) to create means-end chains, in which each attribute was explored via the question, “Why is that important to you?” This would elicit a response suggesting how this attribute would benefit the participant (consequence). After they name a factor or attribute that was important in a particular product, the researcher simply seeks to determine why that factor was important. This generally leads to a connection to a consequence. Asking why the consequence was important leads into further abstraction, to a statement of a value.

While the ‘soft’ laddering interviews aimed to find the initial A-C-V links, the surveys were used to add substance to the findings in the interviews. Content analysis and coding of the data was performed according with the relevant literature (Kassarjian, 1977; Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). While the ‘soft’ laddering interviews aimed to find the initial A-C-V links, the surveys were used to add substance to the findings in the interviews. The purpose of the ‘hard’ laddering surveys was to find which pre-determined values were shared among the potential new members of the online community group. The researcher is of the opinion that this combination of “hard” and “soft” laddering approaches was the best means to address the shortcomings and gain value from both approaches. First, using the data collected from the interview in the first part of the research, a ‘check-the-box’ survey was created in the same format used by Russell et al (2004). The survey was conducted with participants from a sample of ‘*i-Ride Taiwan*’ community members. Participants were explained the purpose of the research and 40 useable surveys were collected. The survey lasted approximately fifteen minutes.

RESULTS

During the interview process, the administration of the community page discussed attributes of the page that they had either intentionally or unintentionally created. From a list of eight main attributes, the administration of the community page discussed why these were important to them to elicit the consequences (10) of these attributes and finally the values (6) that are important to the creators of the page. The personal interviews elicited several sets of ladders and each item was labeled as an A, C or V. After inspecting the results for completeness, a set of summary codes was developed to reflect all the elements (A-C-Vs) elicited. Table 1 below provides the summary content codes from the personal interview.

the 'fun' attribute and the consequence of this attribute which seems to make people want to 'explore more' and, more significantly, to 'get new ideas'. There were strong connections between these consequences and the values of 'achievement' and 'enjoyment'.

This would suggest that perhaps the fun, happy, healthy attributes of this page inspires some people to do their own exploring with the hope of achieving their own goals or simply for the enjoyment of being outdoors and having fun. It is perhaps unsurprising that this is a strong chain as more and more people today are motivated to live healthily and to make the most of their lives and the community page offers a real example that others can live up or strive towards. The fact that the page is 'fun' and has lots of motivating content inspires others to be part of the community that encourages such a lifestyle. Next interesting link in the HVM was the strong connection between the 'inspiring' attribute of the community page and how it seemed to have a very strong 'motivating' consequence for the participants in the study. The data seems to suggest that for many, this is primarily driven by needs to 'live well' or 'be healthy' which are driven by 'self-esteem' and 'achievement' values. Thus, it appears that by having content which inspires others (such as cycling up high mountains or meeting new friends) really motivates people to do the same and that rather than simply admiring the achievements of other people on the community page, people are motivated to perhaps attempt their own challenges.

Another chain worth highlighting stems from the 'exciting' attribute of '*i-Ride Taiwan*'. The data obtained from the participants in the study shows that the main consequence of looking at the exciting content on the page is that it also gives others 'new ideas' and 'motivation' which, once again, has strong links to the values of 'self-esteem', 'enjoyment' and 'achievement'. This appears to tie in closely with the 'fun' attributes of the page and indicates that these are all significant attributes, consequences and values which contribute to the participant's interest in the page and motivation for being active members of the page too. Finally, there also appears to be a strong attraction to the 'simple' attributes of the page. This lead to many of the participants feeling 'comfortable' when visiting the page, which lead to weaker connections to the consequences of 'easy use' and 'stress-free' browsing to the value of 'convenience. This seems to suggest that for many of the participants in the study, it was important or appealing to them to visit a community page that is simple (lots of photos, limited text and orderly structure) as it makes for a relaxing, easy and enjoyable experience on the page. The participants valued 'convenience' so having a page that is uncluttered and well-managed appears to be one of the more appealing aspects of the '*i-Ride Taiwan*' community page.

It should also be noted that although there were not strong attribute-consequence-value links to all the attributes of the page that the administration of '*i-Ride Taiwan*' hoped to appeal to the public, there were other links and it is assumed that had the research sample been larger then perhaps more of those chains would have become more evident. Nevertheless, some important results were discovered which opened some interesting data worthy of further discussion.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

As discussed in the analysis of the results, there are very important findings from the final hierarchical value map that are worth expanding on further. Many participants appear to value 'self-esteem' greatly. This is interesting because the community page was driven by one individual and there was the risk of the page coming across as very self-glorifying in nature. However it seems that many of the respondents were attracted to the page because it may help them to build up their own self-esteem by exploring the country or doing more exercise. Therefore, continuing with the same method but also encouraging people to share more of their own travels or reminding people that they can also cycle more and explore more of Taiwan may help to appeal to their self-esteem and thereby potentially increase the attractiveness of the page to those people. Another value that seemed important to many of the participants in this research is

'happiness' which was closely related to 'joining in' or building a sense of 'belonging'. This is significant because if being part of a team or a community page like '*i-Ride Taiwan*' makes people happy and that is driven by a need to be part of a group because 'camaraderie' or togetherness is valued then there are many specific steps that the community page can take to target these values.

Furthermore, with a strong link between 'getting new ideas' and the 'achievement' value, it is apparent that the page seems to motivate people to achieve their own goals or to revel in achievements of another. The 'social' attribute did not seem very significant for many participants who is unsurprising as the page would probably benefit from having more contributors and therefore making it a more social space. The 'originality' of the page was also not seen as a very important motivating factor for a lot of the participants and this may be attributed to the fact that there are so many similar community pages available to the public today and trying to make a community page that is entirely original is a complicated task.

Specifically, there are several practical steps that the administration of the '*i-Ride Taiwan*' page could consider. For example, there was a strong leaning towards the 'happiness' value from the sample and therefore the content providers may look to incorporate more photographs of smiling people, bicycle or cycling-related jokes, humorous quotes, funny clips or images of success or athletic achievement which may appeal to the commonly shared value of happiness. Another commonly shared value was the value of 'achievement'. Once again, some practical suggestions for appealing to such a value may include links to triathlons or other challenging endurance races, photographs of people with their bicycles at the top of high mountains or the end of a difficult ride, motivational quotes, or inspiring videos. These may also appeal to people's values of 'discovery and 'self-esteem' which scored highly, too.

Another strong link was towards 'joining in', 'belonging' and 'camaraderie'. Therefore, including more group photographs, videos showing cycling teams riding together, comments about group rides on weekends and links to blogs about what is like to cycle with a large group of your friends could all be specific steps to add to the appeal of '*i-Ride Taiwan*'. However, many participants in the study seemed to appreciate that the page was not too cluttered or overly bogged down with content so the administration should aim to guard against this. Some final suggestions to market the community page better and attract a wider audience may include advertising the community page to bicycle magazines, sharing the idea on other social media websites such as cycling blogs, incorporating a wider word-of-mouth strategy to let more people know about the existence of the community page and perhaps to even offer incentives to add one's own content to the page as it does appear to be an appealing yet relatively unknown page which has potential for significant growth and reach.

This research was particularly interested in the shared values amongst active and potential members of the online community page and how to create suitable content and market the product to best meet those values. Therefore, the managers or administrative personnel of the '*i-Ride Taiwan*' community page may consider the results of this study to develop a more focused strategy to retain the current users, attract new users and develop the community page to make it more appealing to the users. Based on the results of this study, there are several ideas that the content-providers of '*i-Ride Taiwan*' may consider employing in terms of an overall strategy and specific steps to add to the possibility of growing and improving the community page, particularly in terms of segmenting consumers with respect to their values orientations for a product class or brands. The overall strategy to take the '*i-Ride Taiwan*' community page forward is related directly to the values that were uncovered in the research which the content providers of the community page should consider while the specific steps relates to the precise actions that those same content providers of the community page may look to employ in the future to appeal to those values.

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BIOGRAPHY

Shu-Hsun Ho is a professor in the Department of Business Administration at Providence University, Taiwan. She received her Ph.D. degree in Business Administration at National Chaio-Tung University in 2003. Her research focuses on issues related to Consumer Behavior, Internet Banking and Electronic Commerce. Her research has been published in *Total Quality Management & Business Excellence* (SSCI), *International Marketing Review* (SSCI), *Internet Research* (SSCI), and *The Journal of American Academy of Business* (ABI/Inform, EBSCO, CABELLS Directory). She is also an Ad Hoc Editor for *Psychology & Marketing*.

Yu-Ling Lin is an associate professor in the Department of Business Administration at National Chin-Yi University of Technology, Taiwan. Her current research interests are in the areas of consumer behavior, education of e-learning, business strategy and innovation. Her research has been published in *Computers in Human Behavior* (SSCI), *Computers & Education* (SSCI), *Technological Forecasting & Social Change* (SSCI) and *International Journal Technology Management* (SSCI). Contact E-mail: yllin@ncut.edu.tw/yllin2@ms27.hinet.net

Robert Carlson Patrick is a graduate student, Department of Business Administration, Providence University.