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Understanding the Justice Fairness Effects on eWOM Communication in Social Media Environment

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ABSTRACT

This article integrates the trust and justice fairness to construct a model for investigating the motivations behind customers eWOM in social media environment, specifically WeChat. Using data from the online surveys of netizens in China, the proposed model was verified and validated by using the structure equation modeling (SEM) technique. The outcomes reveal that customer trust appear to be mostly driven by interactional fairness, which in turn effects satisfaction. Procedural fairness and interactional fairness impacts considerably positive on satisfaction. Trust and satisfaction have a direct positive effect on the eWOM. However, trust has indirect influence on eWOM through the satisfaction. Discussions provide the useful implications for managers and future directions.

KEYWORDS

China, Distributive Fairness, eWOM, Interactional Fairness, Justice Fairness, Procedural Fairness, Satisfaction, Social Media, Trust, WeChat

1. INTRODUCTION

With the rapid growth of social media, it has become one of the most renowned platforms to spread online information between vendors and customers around the world (Chu & Kim, 2018). Social media provides the efficient and effective way to interact with family members, circle of friends, and the group of people with same interests. The online social channel has given the opportunity to customers where they can share opinions and information related to products or services that is called electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Hayes, Shan, & King, 2018). However, social media contacts are explicitly considered reliable and credible sources compared to perceived information from marketers, as well as considered vital for customers decision making (Chu & Kim, 2011).

The massive increase in Chinese social media usage has given rise to WeChat as a most leading social application. It attracts more than 900 million users all around the globe (Sohaib, Hui, & Akram,

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2018). WeChat is the Chinese equivalent of WhatsApp, that permit its users to share information through instant messaging (IM) in the form of text, voice, photo, and video (Xu, Kang, Song, & Clarke, 2015). WeChat has become an essential part of Chinese customers daily life. It enables users to share their everyday life experiences through unique interaction features like, friends' moments. This provides rapid way to transmit personal experiences, about products or services, and engage customers in eWOM (Lien & Cao, 2014). Specifically, justice from online sellers during buying process stimulate customers involvement in eWOM (Fu, Ju, & Hsu, 2015).

According to the social psychological literature, customer's perceptions about justice are based on the three dimensions: perceived fairness of outcomes usually referred as Distributive Fairness (DF), Procedural Fairness (PF) leads to decision making outcomes, and the treatment with customers during buying process also known as Interactional Fairness (IF). The fairness provides a meaningful source to understand the individual's perceptions about trust or distrust (Saunders & Thornhill, 2003). Previous studies in the marketing context have revealed that perceptions about fairness have significant and positive direct impact on trust e.g. (Aryee, Budhwar, & Chen, 2002; Pillai, Williams, & Justin Tan, 2001; Ramaswami & Singh, 2003). Trust reduces the uncertainty and risk related to online buying and cultivate strong bonding between the buyer and the seller. Moreover, trust strongly impacts on customer's satisfaction (Shih, Lai, & Cheng, 2013). According to the equity theory, a justified balance between input (what is invest) and output (what is received) shapes the customers satisfaction, and they engage in certain behavioral activities such as positive eWOM. Although, trust and satisfaction has been clearly documented in the marketing studies, very few studies examine the effects of fairness on customers satisfaction and trust. The prevailing effects of customers trust and satisfaction on eWOM still remains unclear in the social media environment such as WeChat.

Above discussions provide the theoretical support to measure the aims of this study. In order to understand the customers psychological motivations towards positive eWOM, explicating the distinctive roles of fairness are required. First, we determine the fairness dimensions which are DF, PF, and IF effects on customer trust in the online seller. Second, we measure the significance of the fairness three dimensions and trust on customer satisfaction. Third, we examine impacts of customer satisfaction and trust on eWOM in the WeChat settings.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Before 1975, the fairness study was mainly related to the distributive fairness. This research most part was related to initial efforts done by Homans (1961). Homans (1961) provides an elementary formula for distributiveness, explained that an individual's benefits in exchange with others should be equal to his or her efforts. The theories of dissonance, social comparison, and social exchange provides that DF highlights the role of equity, where an individual evaluates the fairness output/input ratio of oneself with comparison to others (Adams, 1965). PF introduced by Thibaut and Walker (1975) study on dispute-resolution procedures. Thibaut and Walker (1975) proposed that the decision-making procedures fairness influenced on dispute-resolution decisions and individual's reactions to allocation of third-party. Bies and Moag (1986) distinct the interpersonal facet from PF, called as an IF. The three elements of fairness are well differentiated, not only in behavioural studies of customer (Martínez-Tur, Peiró, Ramos, & Moliner, 2006; Teo & Lim, 2001), but also in other research settings such as, service recovery (Smith, Bolton, & Wagner, 1999), Web-based learning (Chiu, Chiu, & Chang, 2007), complaint management (Blodgett, Hill, & Tax, 1997; Maxham III & Netemeyer, 2002), and organizational justice (Aryee et al., 2002; Ramaswami & Singh, 2003).

Trust is explained as a belief that trustor is expecting from trustee will behave by showing integrity, benevolence, and ability (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Benevolence is described as, the faith that the trustee will not do any opportunistic act in contrary to the trustor, particularly given the opportunity to perform. Integrity is clarified as, the faith that the trustee will be credible by

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