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Yu-Nan TAI, Hong-Cheng LIU

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Effects of Online Social Interaction and Social Capital on Brand Relationship Quality in Medical Tourism Industry

Yu-Nan TAI¹, Hong-Cheng LIU²

Abstract

The emergence of Internet media allows brands breaking through the one-way communication model of mass media in the past and reinforces the circular dialogue mechanism through the interaction of Internet media to precede one-to-one communication through text dialogue, where the affective connection generates in the interaction process. Many enterprise brands start to utilize social media as the new interactive communication platform for consumers selecting the required message communication needs. The two-way communication with brands is enhanced through social interaction to build and maintain the relationship, sustain existing consumers' loyalty to create the maximal profits of each consumer, and more efficiently contact new consumers in the constantly expanding relationship network to achieve relationship marketing. Aiming at the members of Internet fan pages of medical tourism industry, as the research objects, random sampling is applied to distribute 500 copies of questionnaire in this study. Total 392 valid copies are retrieved, with the retrieval rate 78%. The research results show significant correlations between online social interaction and social capital, social capital and brand relationship quality, and online social interaction and brand relationship quality. According to the results to propose suggestions, it is expected to provide practical strategies and development reference for future medical tourism industry brands managing and sustaining the exclusive pages on social network site in the constantly emerging marketing channels.

Keywords: medical tourism industry, online social interaction, social capital, brand relationship quality, component reliability, social media, social network.

¹ Department of Tourism, I-Shou University, TAIWAN, ROC. E-mail: dennistai1217@gmail.com

² Department of Public Policy and Management, I-Shou University, TAIWAN, ROC. E-mail: hcliu@isu.edu.tw

Introduction

Information flow methods and channels are changeable that consumers have more possibilities to acquire information. Information asymmetric communication model in the past therefore is largely changed to increase the diversity of consumer needs. Personalized and customized products or service become the mainstream trend in the market. The emergence of Internet media allows brands breaking through one-way communication model of mass media in the past and the interaction of Internet media reinforces the circular dialogue mechanism. The affective connection generated in the interaction process, with one-to-one communication through text dialogue, presents stronger benefit to build and sustain the relationship between consumers and brands. The construction of official websites is currently the major channel for many brands providing consumers with relative message through the combination of web technology with resources of text, sound, and even multimedia images. Web page construction is the first step of an enterprise communicating through online media to build dialogue channels internally, externally, and for more communication objects. In addition to official websites, a lot of enterprise brands start to use social media as the new interactive communication platform for consumers selecting the required message and communication needs and enhancing the two-way communication with brands through social interaction. It could build and maintain the relationship and sustain the loyalty of existing consumers to create the maximal profits for each consumer and efficiently contact new consumers in the constantly expanding relationship network to achieve relationship marketing.

In terms of tourism & travel marketing, various countries, aiming at the characteristics, are developing relevant subjects. Due to expensive medical resources and inadequate quantity supplied in European and American advanced countries, developing countries provide high-quality health care service with lower prices than in advanced countries to attract the people for medical behavior. Medical tourism service therefore becomes the trend and booms the medical tourism industry in Europe and Asia-Pacific, South Africa, and India. Through social network sites, brands expect to attract more people and expand the consumer network, to confirm, maintain, and establish the network relationship with individual customer through interactive, personalized, and value added long-term contact, as well as to reinforce the possibility of relationship marketing with the integrated power of reciprocal relationship. It does not simply maintain the long-term interaction between consumers and brands, but achieves the function of emotional cohesion among consumers, provides consumers with different experiences, as well as allows consumers finding out the ignored profits and meeting people with different background but same interests in the brand to reinforce the brand loyalty. Moreover, simple and easy message transfer and response show fast information delivery and the dissemination of interpersonal network accelerates and broadens the delivery scope. The development potential for brand community is apparent

and cannot be ignored. The effects of online social interaction and social capital on brand relationship quality in medical tourism industry are therefore studied, expecting to provide practical strategies and development reference for future medical tourism industry brands managing and sustaining exclusive pages on social network sites in emerging marketing channels.

Literature review

Hwang & Zhang (2018) discovered that long-term and stable interaction in consumers' brand community would actually enhance and accumulate social capital and affect members' commitment to the community. The so-called interaction referred to the degree of information exchange among people. Shareef *et al.* (2019) stated that users contacted each other, shared and searched information, and spread information through social network service websites. An individual community participant with more social capital in a community would more possibly participate in the internal operation of the community and would better contribute or share high-quality knowledge. A lot of research also proved remarkable effects of some dimensions in online social capital on knowledge sharing in network communities. Coelho, Rita, & Santos (2018) found out the reference effect through parasocial interaction; when consumers felt the close relationship with a role, the role would more likely to become the reference man of consumers so that the role appeared large effects on consumers. The cues-filtered-out characteristics of computer-mediated communication allowed a brand shaping the brand personality with personification to effectively construct the role and personality of the brand. The interactive social function of SNSs could more effectively construct the quasi-social relationship and brand relationship with fans. Alalwan (2018) mentioned that fans with higher parasocial interaction would concern more about the brand on different media, more actively disseminate word of mouth, and think more of the content provided by the brand. To enhance fans' psychological parasocial interaction relied on shaping the personality and role of the brand, through personification, on the webpage. Meanwhile, exploring brand relationship on the webpage through parasocial interaction approach presented reasonableness and could precisely understand the role in the affectional solidarity and the developed function in the brand relationship as well as provide correspondent strategic thinking to the operation. Jin (2018) found out the effect of interpersonal interaction on loyalty in business community as well as significantly positive relations between community loyalty and customer loyalty. It revealed that proper management of community could benefit an enterprise enhancing customer loyalty and increasing the possibility of profit making. In the measurement of the effect of interpersonal interaction on loyalty in business community, interaction quality directly affected trust and community satisfaction and indirectly affected community awareness, and interaction frequency showed remarkable relationship with community awareness.

Apparently, “interaction quality” and “interaction frequency” in interpersonal interaction would affect the articulation in the community group. The following hypothesis is therefore proposed in this study.

H1: Online social interaction presents significant correlations with social capital.

Aiming at online word of mouth information sharing and transfer behavior on Facebook, Gan & Li (2018) found out notable effects of social capital and interpersonal relationship on online word of mouth information sharing and transfer behavior that the social capital on the platform accumulated through social interaction actually affected users’ cognition and behavior. Meanwhile, social capital also affected several dimensions, such as whether a community would form the aggregation of social and economic groups or as the experiment on the production department and procurement department in manufacturing to discuss the relationship between supply chain members’ social capital, relationship quality and supply chain performance, where Yu *et al.* (2020), from the perspective of organization, discovered remarkably positive relations between social capital and relationship quality. Shin *et al.* (2019) indicated that social capital also functioned in the interaction quality among community members. Many studies also discovered positive effects of brand relationship quality on community interpersonal relationship quality and the overall relationship quality between members and community as well as notable effects of community interpersonal relationship quality on the overall relationship quality between members and community. Martins *et al.* (2019) pointed out positive effects of the relationship between brand community members with brand, products, and other members on community identification. Brand community members could continuously and broadly affect the idea and action of brand community, constantly disseminate knowledge, learn other consumers’ evaluation of products, increase opportunities for customers participating in activities, and cooperate with highly loyal customers. In regard to the integration of relationship and relationship quality in brand community, the relationship between brand community members and brand, products, and company revealed positive effects on relationship quality. Furthermore, brand community integrated relationship, community identification, and relationship quality to appear positive effects on brand loyalty. Kim, Kang, & Lee (2018) mentioned that in the brand community with social relationship as the core, relationship based social capital could result in satisfactory information value and social value. A brand established virtual brand community expecting continuous interaction among consumers. When consumers participated in the fan page for interaction, they joined in the relationship network with the brand as the common interest. The provision of interpersonal relationship exchange channel and place allowed better interaction among community members to strengthen the commonly favored brand, reinforce the cohesion and social relationship, and satisfy the social needs of community members to accumulate social capital

and achieve trust, satisfaction, and commitment on the needs and expectation. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed in this study.

H2: Social capital shows remarkable correlations with brand relationship quality.

Chen & Lin (2018) considered that Internet experience could be a topic for interpersonal exchange and provide the value of knowledge and experience sharing in the interpersonal communication. Meanwhile, network community aggregated consumers with same interests to satisfy the needs for socialization and provided consumers with value for socialization. Wan & Liu (2020) considered that consumers could receive value for socialization on the Internet to enhance the satisfaction and affect the building and maintenance of relationship. From the perspective of relationship marketing, the core goal was to build powerful connection with consumers. Wijker *et al.* (2019) regarded connection as the psychological, affective, economic, or material attachment cultivated through communication and interaction to closely bond members under relationship exchange. From the aspect of social capital, such connection could achieve information or resource exchange and circulation through trust and interaction among people. It would help community members and entire community achieve the expected goal. In addition to the relationship between consumers and other community consumers, Linder *et al.* (2018) proposed brand relationship as the interaction process between consumers and brand. They indicated that the relationship between brand and consumers, similar to the relationship between two people, referred to consumers' attitudes towards a brand and the attitudes of the brand towards consumers to infer the relationship character; and, the relationship between two people was constructed through complicated cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes. Xu & Du (2019) mentioned that good consumer-brand relationship depended on consumers' perceived brand attitude; meanwhile, such perception would have the brand attitude become meaningful. In the research on automobile brand community, Li *et al.* (2018) discovered that "consumer-consumer (community)" relationship would affect "consumer-brand" relationship; in other words, consumers with better relationship with the community would have more positive connection with the brand. As a result, the following hypothesis is proposed in this study.

H3: Online social interaction reveals notable correlations with brand relationship quality.

Methodology

Operational definition

Online social interaction. Online social interaction in this study is referred to the dimensions proposed by Wang & Chen (2020): (1) Parasocial interaction: focusing on the parasocial interaction between audience with entertainment as the purpose and role; (2) Social interpersonal interaction: referring to the relationship strength among virtual community members and the spending time and communication frequency.

Social capital. Referring to the dimensions proposed by Kim *et al.* (2019) in the research on organization, social capital in this study contains structural, relational, and cognitive dimensions: (1) *Structural dimension*: referring to structural social capital, standing for the embeddedness of proper relationship and the entire relationship network as well as the connection pattern in the group, e.g. entire network between organization and community; (2) *Relational dimension*: referring to the relationship developed after interacting for a period of time, which focuses on mental and subjective cognition relationship. A lot of capitals constructed or extended from social capital are established the long-term partnership through relational dimension; (3) *Cognitive dimension*: Social capital in cognitive dimension could externally present the consistent characteristics in the social network. Internally, it contains resources being able to enhance organizational members' agreement, including common language and code, common experience, and shared vision.

Brand relationship quality. Brand relationship quality in this study is referred to the definition proposed by Lee, Kim, & Choi (2019): (1) *Commitment*: The establishment of relationship is based on mutual commitment, which is not frequently changed. Besides, people do not make commitment on affairs without value; normally, commitment is made based on the reciprocity of both parties; (2) *Trust*: Trust, as ability, could predict the opposite party's behavior and believe that they would not speculatively deal with the relationship, even though they have the opportunity. In other words, the buyer could predict the security; (3) *Satisfaction*: Customer satisfaction could enhance customers' repurchase behavior and affect customers to purchase other products. In this case, satisfaction is regarded as an important result in the relationship between buyers and sellers.

Method & model

Test for goodness-of-fit with LISREL could be measured from overall model fit (i.e. external quality of model) and internal quality of model. In the overall mode fit test, the commonly used fit indices contain: (1) " χ^2 ratio" (Chi-Square ratio), standing for the different between actual theoretical model and expected value, which is better smaller than 3; (2) goodness of fit index (GFI) and adjusted

goodness of fit index (AGFI), which show better goodness-of-fit when close to 1; (3) root mean square residual (RMR) to reflect the square root of “fit residual variance/covariance mean”, which is better smaller than 0.05, and (4) incremental fit index (IFI), showing good model fit when higher than 0.9.

Common indicators for internal quality of model in LISREL include: (1) SMC (square multiple correlation) of individual manifest variable, as R² of manifest variable and latent variable, which is better higher than 0.5; (2) component reliability (ρ) of latent variable, as the Cronbach's α of the observed indicator in the latent variable, which is better higher than 0.6, and (3) average variance extracted of latent variable, which is calculated by dividing the R² sum of manifest variables in a latent variable by the number of manifest variables to show the percentage of latent variable being measured with manifest variables, which is better higher than 0.5.

Research sample and object

Aiming at Internet fan page members of medical tourism industry, random sampling is utilized in this study for distributing 500 copies of questionnaire. Total 392 valid copies are retrieved, with the retrieval rate 78%. The questionnaire data are analyzed with statistics software.

Reliability and validity test

Validity refers to a measurement scale being able to actually measure what the researcher would like to measure. Common validity contains “content validity” tending to qualitative test, “criterion validity, using identified external criterion and the correlation coefficient of the test for evaluation, and “construct validity” for evaluating a measurement theoretically consistent with other observable variables. The questionnaire content in this study is referred to past theories and is designed, after referring to the real situation of research objects, to authentically express the essence of affair and complete representativeness in order to ensure the questionnaire match content validity. Besides, the final commonality estimate of the factor analysis result is applied to test the construct validity among items. The validity appears in 0.8~0.9, revealing good validity test result of this questionnaire.

Results

Model fit test

“Maximum likelihood method” is utilized in this study for the estimation, and the analysis result reaches the convergence. Overall speaking, the overall model fit indices in this study pass the test, Table 1, fully reflecting good external quality of the model.

Table 1. Model analysis result

	evaluation index	judgment standard	result
overall fit	<i>p</i> -value	p -value > 0.05	0.000
	χ^2 /d.f.	< 3	1.863
	GFI	> 0.9	0.982
	AGFI	> 0.9	0.914
	CFI	> 0.9	0.957
	RMR	< 0.05 lower than 0.025 excellent	0.017
	RMSEA	0.05~0.08 good < 0.05 excellent	0.036
	NFI	> 0.9	0.940
	IFI	> 0.9	0.929

Path relationship test

In terms of the test of internal quality of model, SMC of manifest variables is higher than 0.5 (Tables 2 & 3), revealing good indicators of latent variables. Furthermore, the component reliability of latent variables (online social interaction, social capital, and brand relationship quality) is higher than 0.6, and the average variance extracted of dimensions is higher than 0.5 (Table 4), apparently conforming to the requirement for internal quality test.

Table 2. SMC of variable to dimension

online social interaction	
parasocial interaction	social interpersonal interaction
0.74	0.78

Table 3. SMC of variable to dimension

social capital			brand relationship quality		
structural dimension	relational dimension	cognitive dimension	commitment	trust	satisfaction
0.71	0.73	0.79	0.76	0.78	0.81

Table 4. Component reliability and average variance extracted of variable

item	online social interaction	social capital	brand relationship quality
component reliability	0.863	0.874	0.896
average variance extracted	0.84	0.85	0.88

The model analysis results, *Table 5*, show positive and significant correlations between online social interaction and social capital (0.847), social capital and brand relationship quality (0.866), as well as online social interaction and brand relationship quality (0.851) that H1, H2, and H3 are supported. The research hypothesis test results are shown in *Table 6*.

Table 5. Linear structure model analysis result

evaluation item	parameter/evaluation standard	result	t
internal fit	online social interaction→social capital	0.847	27.31**
	social capital→brand relationship quality	0.866	35.12**
	online social interaction→brand relationship quality	0.851	31.46**

Table 6. Hypothesis test

research hypothesis	correlation	empirical result	P	result
H1	+	0.847	0.00	supported
H2	+	0.866	0.00	supported
H3	+	0.851	0.00	supported

Conclusion

The research results show that webpages provide rich community and gaming functions to attract billions of users and provide business based fan pages. Fan pages allow medical tourism industry brands and even individuals establishing exclusive business application page for marketing to get rid of placement marketing in

blogs influencing the integrity. The presentation and functions of medical tourism industry fan pages are similar to personal file pages, but replacing individual friend-making with fan community gathering, allowing medical tourism industry brands reasonably managing the community through the community marketing staff and establishing the promotion channel for community marketing. Internet changes online interpersonal interaction model in the past and allows people reshaping the formation and maintenance channels for new online interpersonal relationship. Moreover, the emergence of social media results in dense and instant interaction between brands and consumers to form characteristic brand community. The research findings show that, in the management of official fan pages in medical tourism industry, the social interpersonal interaction among consumers and the parasocial interaction between consumers and brands would affect brand relationship quality through various routes. Although a brand is not a real person, it could induce fans' feeling of face-to-face conversation with people and imagination of the human nature of the brand, when the brand precedes two-way interaction with fans through the Internet. In this case, direct interaction between consumers and medical tourism industry brands could directly and effectively affect consumers' perception of brand relationship quality. Meanwhile, fan pages provided by medical tourism industry could provide consumers with a group environment, and consumers could create and accumulate social capital through the interaction with medical tourism industry brand to further reinforce the perceived brand relationship quality.

Discussion

It is considered in this study that users, when joining in medical tourism industry fan pages for activities, would precede social interpersonal community activities with other fans. Medical tourism industry community members would precede social interpersonal interaction by sharing information about product consumption experience or solving problems as well as appear parasocial interpersonal interaction with medical tourism industry brands to make spoken text descriptions on the platform. It might result in deeper and stronger parasocial interaction involvement between consumers and brands. The research results reveal that parasocial interaction between consumers and medical tourism industry brands on the Internet and social interpersonal interaction among consumers would positively affect social capital relationship. The higher interaction would accumulate higher social capital to have community members further establish the judgment standards for mutual concern, confidence, and sincerity as well as accelerate the socialization process of medical tourism industry brand community members. Regardless of the shared content and the result of shared information,

good community/social network relationship could be established and sustained through sharing, e.g. establishment of trust and friendliness among members. Sense of belongingness and positive perception could also be acquired from the interaction to appear agreement with and participation in the community. A user often participating in community for interaction is the performance of feedback as well as the establishment of trust and affection with other members.

Recommendations

By organizing the research results and findings, the following practical suggestions are proposed in this study.

Think of consumer needs: The targets are first drawn about the maintenance of interpersonal relationship with target customers and the method to participate in community. The community could merely be driven by understanding consumers' needs and behaviors, thinking what to offer consumers on fan pages, and finding out the intersection.

Draft business strategy: The management of social media contains listening to consumers' voice, assisting marketing strategies, and driving sales. A brand could acquire consumers' positive/negative opinions and feedback through social media. Furthermore, social media could distinguish consumers' response to and discussion about products for making marketing strategies. Besides, brands could provide product information and promotion through social media to enhance the sales performance.

Find out orientation and shorten distance from fans: To manage social media is to make friends with consumers. Aiming at consumer needs to provide interactive contents with inside-out and outside-in cycle. When directly converse and interact with customers through community, friendly but professional attitude is necessary for communicating with fans. Since the update of information on network platform is fast, dynamic news would rapidly replace new information. A brand should think of the characteristics, create fan page matching the brand characteristics, shape fresh and consistent brand personality, and match the need of target consumers to have the consumers consider certain degree of relationship with the brand. Consistent posts and attitude, as a real person interacting with consumers, could attract consumers with similar personality to the brand for direct interaction.

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