Motivation of Using Social Network Sites and E-Word of Mouth Intention: A Case of Sport Team Facebook Page

Taeho Kim, University of Florida
Hee Yeoun Kim, University of Florida
Jung-Hwan Jeon, North Carolina State University
Kayoung Kim, University of Florida
Yong Jae Ko (Advisor), University of Florida

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Social network sites (SNSs; e.g., Facebook) have emerged as a significant research genre (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Golder, Wilkinson, & Huberman, 2007). One of the most important reasons for people using SNSs is to stay in touch with friends and to make new acquaintances (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008). In addition, SNSs users can easily get up-to-date and in-depth information that is not readily available (Clavio & Kian, 2011). The Uses and Gratifications Theory helps explain the motivation of those people wanting to use the Internet-aided communication (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974; Clavio, 2008; Lin, 1999). Clavio and Kian (2010) found three motivational domains of Fandom among twitter users: Organic Fandom (entertainment), Functional Fandom (information seeking), and Interaction Fandom (social aspect). Although they are very important concepts, sport consumers’ usage of new media has not received scholarly attention.

Social networking behavior in SNSs is a specific type of Word of Mouth (WOM). When customers make purchasing decisions, they prefer to rely on a non-transactional personal source (Bansal, & Voyer, 2000; Murray, 1991). The WOM has become an important communication method, due in part to technology development (e.g., national wide Wi-Fi, smart phone, and SNSs). The technology advancement allows a wider range of WOM, from a close friend to numerous people in the world via the Internet. As a result, electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) emerged to be one of the most effective marketing communication tools (Hennin-Thurau, et al., 2004). However, limited scholarly attention was given to the issues of SNSs and E-WOM behavior in the field of sport management. Prior research indicated that there is a positive relationship between fan motivation and team identification (Trail, Fink, & Anderson, 2003; Trail, Robinson, Dick, & Gillentine, 2003) and the relationship between identification and WOM intention (Brow et al., 2005). However, few research has examined the relationship between these three constructs in the context of SNSs and E-WOM.

Accordingly, this study examined Facebook users’ motivation to visit their favorite team page and its role in E-WOM intention. The authors also considered the level of fan’s preexisting team identification to fully understand this relationship. Three research questions were developed: (1) What is important motivation to use Facebook? (2) What is the role of Facebook uses’ motivation in explaining their E-WOM intention? 3) Does team identification play a mediating role in the relationship between Facebook uses’ motivation and E-WOM intention?

A total of 236 surveys were collected from students in two large Southeastern Universities in the United States. They all actively use Facebook and have their favorite sport team. 203 usable surveys were included in data analyses. Fifty one percent of the respondents were male and 49% were female. A majority of the participants was Caucasian (50%), followed by Hispanic (15.9%), and African-American (13.4%), which is consistent to the national ethnic distribution.

Measures for motivation of SNSs use were adapted from Clavio and Kian’s (2010) scale. Team identification was measured by four items of existing scale (Heere, 2005). The measure of E-WOM intention was revised and adapted from Swanson et al.’s (2003) and Harrison-Walker’s (2001) studies. The response format for all items was 7-point Likert-type scale anchored by 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. To avoid response bias from order effect, the items were randomly placed in the questionnaire. Furthermore, to focus on the sport context, we excluded individuals that did not have favorite sport team. Items measuring demographic characteristics of participants were also included in the final questionnaire.
The authors conducted a two (2) step analyses. First, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the measurement properties of the selected measures using the SPSS 18.0 and AMOS 18 software (Arbuckle, 2006). The final measurement model includes 20 items: Motivation (10 items), Team Identification (4 items), and E-WOM intention (6 items). As indicated by \(X^2/df = 302.32/125 = 2.42\), RMSEA = .07, CFI = .95, and SRMR = .05, the measurement model achieved good fit to the data. All factor loadings were greater than .72, ranged from .72 to .87. AVE values ranged from .51 (Interaction motivation) to .70 (E-WOM intention). Reliability coefficients ranged from .75 (Interaction motivation) to .90 (E-WOM intention). Correlations among research variables were acceptable, ranged from .49 to .80, except on case (Organic Fandom and Interaction Fandom = .89) which indicates discriminant validity of the measures (Kline, 2005). Taken all together, the results provide a strong evidence for the convergent and reasonable level of discriminant validity of the measurement scales (Hair et al., 2005). Second, the authors empirically evaluated the hypothesized model and tested the mediating effect of team identification using the AMOS 18.0 software (Arbuckle, 2006). The simultaneous equation model achieved good fit to the data (S-B \(X^2/df = 302.32/125 = 2.42\), RMSEA = .07, CFI = .95, SRMR = .05). All three dimensions of Facebook users' motivations has high factor loadings on motivation (Organic Fandom: \(\beta = .83\), S.E. = .09; Functional Fandom: \(\beta = .97\), S.E. = .09; Interaction Fandom: \(\beta = .87\), S.E. = .08). The direct path from Motivation to E-WOM intention was significant (standardized \(\beta = .20\), S.E. = .09). The direct path from Motivation to Team Identification was also significant (standardized \(\beta = .52\), S.E. = .07). The direct path from Team Identification to E-WOM intention was significant as well (standardized \(\beta = .41\), S.E. = .07). However, there is no indirect effect (mediating effect) between Motivation and E-WOM intention through Team Identification.

The proposed research model may contribute to the body of knowledge of SNSs users' motivation and E-WOM behavior among sport consumers. In terms of consumer motivation of using Facebook, functional dimension (informational seeking) was found to be the most important factor of motivation, which is inconsistent with a prior research (Clavio & Kian, 2010). By using twitter user as a research sample, Clavio and Kian found that socializing aspect was more salient motivation factor than information seeking. This result has both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, the results of this research extend the theoretical lens of use and gratifications theory (Katz, et al., 1974). This theory posits that consumer selected media channels to satisfy their needs and achieve gratifications. From a practitioner standpoint, Facebook is suggested to be more effective marketing tool than twitter for sport consumers as Facebook users are highly motivated by functional fandom. This implies that sport manager should provide fans with valuable information to increase team identification level and E-WOM intention. Further research is necessary to accurately assess the impact of social media usage in promoting a sport team. Further implications for research and practice will be presented.