How social media brand pages contribute to functional conflict: The central role of commitment

Si Shi, Yu Cao, Yang Chen, Wing S. Chow

ABSTRACT

Although brand pages on social media platforms are burgeoning, companies frequently have difficulty in sustaining customer relationships on their brand pages. Consequently, this study focuses on how a social media brand page develops customer commitment and encourages them to perceive that future conflicts with the company can be resolved for their mutual benefit. On the basis of a review of the literature on customer value theory and commitment, this study develops an integrative model that explores the antecedents of functional conflict and the boundary condition under which brand page commitment enhances functional conflict. The model is tested using data collected from 293 followers of brand pages on a social networking site. The results demonstrate the salient roles of customer values and commitment in determining customer perceptions of future conflicts. By shifting scholarly attention from economic outcomes characterized by purchase intention to relationship outcomes characterized by functional conflict, the findings contribute to the research of the business implications of social networking sites.

Keywords: Brand page, Social media, Functional conflict, Commitment, Customer value

ARTICLE INFO

1. Introduction

The emergence of social networking sites (SNS) has provided a new type of communication channel for companies worldwide to use in engaging with their customers (Zhang, Guo, Hu, & Liu, 2017). An increasing number of organizations and companies create their own social media pages to increase awareness, attract potential audience, and enhance interactions with other parties (Aladwani & Dwivedi, 2018; Ngai, Tao, & Moon, 2015). Their social media brand pages are not only a platform for information delivery, but they are also an effective platform on which companies and customers can co-create value and resolve disagreements and conflicts (Wang, Tajvidi, Haji, & Love, 2017). Some companies can achieve a mutually satisfactory conflict resolution with customers, through communication and interactions on the companies’ brand pages. This favorable situation is often referred to as functional conflict, which refers to the customer’s perceptions that problems and disagreements with the company can be resolved for their mutual benefit and can serve as a good foundation for future relationships (Harris, Ogbonna, & Goode, 2008). However, failures in building actionable social media strategies can be among the most severe and dominant problems for most organizations when managing social media business profiles (Hwang & Chung, 2018).

Previous studies on functional conflict between the company and customer have mainly been conducted in the context of traditional marketing. Along with the growth of SNS and its popularity in building customer relationships, the development of functional conflict in this context has received limited academic attention (Kapoor et al., 2018). Given that functional conflict is a highly desirable outcome of relationship marketing (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), it is crucial to understand how companies can successfully manage social media brand pages to enhance their customers’ perception of functional conflict. It has been noted that many social media brand pages can only develop short-term customer relationships, which can be easily eroded when confronting conflicts in the future. Functional conflict reflects the customers’ positive attitudes toward future conflict resolution, and it is considered to be a key indicator of long-term relationship because customers would care more about long-term benefits than conflictual loss (Goo & Huang, 2008; Hashim & Tan, 2015; Hunt, 1995). While the extant literature of social media brand pages heavily emphasizes relationship maintenance outcomes, such as continuance intention and brand loyalty (Alalwan, Rana, Dwivedi, & Algharabat, 2017; Larroche, Habibi, & Richard, 2012), little theoretical or empirical research has been conducted to understand what drives functional conflict. Therefore, there is a need for theoretical research to investigate how a social media brand page could be effectively designed and operated to improve the customer’s perception that any future conflicts would be functional.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2018.11.007

Received 31 May 2018; Received in revised form 9 November 2018; Accepted 9 November 2018

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This paper intends to understand the key drivers of functional conflict on the brand page, on the basis of commitment literature and customer value theory, for the following reasons. First, trust and commitment are both categorized as key relationship mediators between relationship antecedents and relationship outcomes (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In the context of business partnerships, trust contributes more to functional conflict because it prevents opportunistic behaviors between business partners (Goo, Kishore, Rao, & Nam, 2009). However, in the context of a social media brand page, we expect commitment to contribute to functional conflict because, when confronting conflicts, the switching cost is low and commitment encourages customers to abstain from attractive short-term alternatives in favor of long-term benefits. (Kim, Choi, Qualls, & Han, 2008). Second, while shared value is a key determinant of mutual commitment in the traditional business context (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), in the social media context customer value is proposed to determine the customer’s commitment because previous studies have pointed out that understanding what customers really value is the first and most vital step in building a successful customer relationship in the social media context (Zhou, Zhang, Su, & Zhou, 2012). Therefore, we intend to understand how the key customer values impact the customer’s commitment and lead to functional conflict perceptions of the brand page.

Previous studies have pointed out that the brand community–customer relationship and the brand-customer relationship operate at different levels (Mcalexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002). Consequently, there is a need to understand the intermediate mechanisms through which consumer relationships that have developed via online social media impact those consumers’ relationships with the company (Zhou et al., 2012). Therefore, from the perspective of brand-community similarity, this study attempts to examine the boundary conditions under which brand page commitment contributes to the customer’s perceived functional conflict with a company.

We expect this study to contribute to theory and practice in the following ways. First, by gaining a deeper understanding of functional conflict as a relationship outcome from the brand page, we extend the current literature on the social media brand page beyond its previously heavy focus on purchase intention and continuance intention as outcomes of customer relationships. Second, we contribute to research on commitment in the social media context by recognizing its value in building reciprocal relationships and in serving as a key mechanism of future conflict resolution. Third, by using the customer value theory, we contribute to the theoretical understanding of how customer value dimensions contribute to functional conflict through commitment development in the social media brand page context. Finally, we provide practical guidance for companies in their efforts to effectively build their brand pages as platforms that promote customer commitment and reduce the negative impact of future conflicts.

2. Literature review

2.1. The social media brand page

The SNS is a popular form of social media platform, which provides a new dimension of web services to support effective communication and information exchange with others (Dwivedi, Kapoor, & Chen, 2015; Kim & Kim, 2018). The concept of “social networking” is built on person-to-person connections and it includes exchanges or interactions across a group of individuals (Shiau, Dwivedi, & Yang, 2017; Shiau, Dwivedi, & Lai, 2018). A brand page (also known as a fan page or a brand community) is a popular example of a company’s profile on SNS. Brand pages provide a new form of web service that consumers with similar interests can use to build relationships and share essential resources, either emotional or material (Lu & Hsiao, 2010). In addition, the brand page is a unique medium that companies can use to engage in conversations with a larger segment of their audience. By harnessing the power of connected users, the social media provides a great opportunity for companies to improve their business performances (Shareef, Mukerji, Aplyalat, Wright, & Dwivedi, 2018; Shareef, Mukerji, Dwivedi, Rana, & Islam, 2018). Furthermore, Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, and Chowdury, (2009) stated that collaboration and communication are key features of brand pages, which substantially influence word-of-mouth branding and which subsequently also influence brand image and awareness. Laroche et al. (2012) also confirmed that brand pages could improve brand loyalty through fostering the customer’s relationships with other customers, brands, products, and companies. However, other studies have indicated that many companies still use the brand page as an advertising tool to promote their product information rather than using it to directly engage with customers (Shareef, Mukerji, Dwivedi et al., 2018), which results in poor brand page performance. Therefore, a customer-centric model should be considered as the main component of a business strategy for a social media brand page. Consequently, companies should focus more on customers and their relationships with them rather than on promoting products or services (Huang & Chen, 2018).

2.2. Functional conflict

It is now common to find that many customers will submit their complaints, unsatisfactory service experiences, or problems with products on a company’s brand page in an attempt to get the company’s feedback on their problems. Therefore, conflict between the company and the customer is inevitable when given the complexity of the dynamic business environment and the disparate interests of both parties. If disputes between companies and customers are not resolved amicably, then the relationship is often terminated. However, when a company and a customer achieve a mutually satisfactory conflict resolution, the conflict can be constructive because it prevents stagnation, stimulates satisfaction, and provides a “medium through which problems can be aired and solutions arrived at” (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 26). For example, if a customer complains on a hotel’s brand page about breakfast, then the hotel manager could respond by offering apologies and coupons, and then seeking suggestions to improve the quality of meal service. This conflict resolution would be a satisfying one, and it would strengthen customers’ confidence that future conflicts with the hotel can also be resolved for their mutual benefit. Morgan and Hunt (1994), p. 26) proposed the concept of functional conflict to capture business partners’ perception that “future conflictual episodes will be functional”. Goo and Huang (2008) further elaborated that functional conflict refers to a partner’s perception that future issues of conflict will be functional and that he or she will regard conflict as being a part of doing business. Following the doctrine in previous studies, in this study we adopt functional conflict to measure the customer’s expectations that future conflicts with a company will be resolved for their mutual benefit and will contribute to the strength of their relationships.

Conflict can also be viewed as a dysfunctional situation by both parties (Menon, Bharadwaj, & Howell, 1996). Hunt (1995) demonstrated that whether conflict is viewed as functional or dysfunctional is determined by the sources of conflict, levels of conflict, conflict management, and the participants’ cognitive process. Other studies have suggested that the foundation of the participants’ relationship (e.g., their communication and reciprocal behaviors) can result in a significantly favorable customer perception that future conflicts will be functional (Anderson & Narus, 1990). Similarly, Goo et al. (2009) stated that certain foundational characteristics of a relationship (e.g., joint goals) may produce a mutual understanding that leads to functional conflict. Morgan and Hunt (1994) also proposed that trust and commitment between business partners are precursors of functional conflict. In the retailer-supplier relationship, Hwang and Chung (2018) confirmed that an ethical business foundation significantly impacts the chances of a satisfactory conflict resolution. In the literature on customer relationship management, several studies have proposed that a satisfactory conflict resolution is a major outcome of customer retention.
(Hur, Ahn, & Kim, 2011; Skarmeas, 2006). If customers are confident that probable future conflicts will be solved as functional, then they will be more likely to develop long-lasting relationships with the company involved (Skarmeas, 2006). Moreover, due to this confidence, they will be more willing to share their complaints and disagreements with the companies in an effort to achieve mutual benefits (Hur et al., 2011). Therefore, functional conflict can be seen as a highly desirable and effective outcome of customer relationship management. However, the current literature has paid little attention to achieving functional conflict through the use of social media brand pages, and has instead focused on attracting new customers, improving profits, and encouraging purchases.

2.3. Commitment

The literature on customer relationships and customer behavior has identified commitment as one of the most critical issues (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999). Good customer relationships cannot be built effectively without a solid foundation of commitment (Fullerton, 2005). In traditional exchange relationships, commitment is generally defined as “an enduring desire to maintain a valuable relationship” (Moorman, Zaltman, & Deshpande, 1992, p. 316). In addition, several studies have revealed that commitment is positively related to purchase intention (Wu, 2017), knowledge sharing intention (Hashim & Tan, 2015), and loyalty to an organization (Markovic, Iglesias, Singh, & Sierra, 2018).

In this study, the concept of brand page commitment is based on the concept of customer commitment, and it refers to a customer’s strong attachment to and emotional bonds with a brand page. Commitment to a brand page can be built upon superior values derived from the regular posts on the brand page, and also on customers’ engagement with the brand page (Hsu, Liu, & Lee, 2010). In the SNS and brand community literature, commitment is also considered to be central to understanding user attachment and behaviors (Tseng, Huang, & Pihlström, 2012) found that social and emotional values could improve the customer’s satisfaction with a Facebook brand page, whereas emotional value further increases customers’ loyalty. Therefore, in this study, we follow Sweeney and Soutar (2001) by conceptualizing customer value in the brand page as consisting of functional, social, and emotional values. To identify the key determinants of customer values in the context of an SNS brand page, we conducted a thorough review of the literature following the guidelines of the conventional systematic review methodology (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). On the basis of the literature review, we identified different coverage and factors for the contents of functional, social, and emotional values in the context of online communities and SNS (see Appendix B).

On the basis of our literature review, we identified product learning as a key determinant of functional value, interaction as a key determinant of social value, and entertainment as a determinant of emotional value. For functional value, the current literature has mainly focused on monetary incentives, information gathering, and product learning. Although monetary incentives and information quality allow customers to assess the credibility of a brand page, they often do not contribute to customer commitment because they tend to be short-lasting stimuli and are easily imitated by other brand pages (Tseng et al., 2017). This study identifies product learning as the key determinant of functional value because it represents the customer’s initial motivation for following a brand page and it promotes long-lasting relationships by offering professional, useful advice on products (Goh, Heng, & Lin, 2013).

The extant literature of social value has mainly focused on interaction, collaboration, and social-presence features of the SNS. Whereas collaboration fosters relational bonds among community members, social presence enhances individuals’ social well-being, and interaction captures the social process through which customers develop a relationship with the brand page (Carlson, Wylie, Rahman, & Voola, 2018). Therefore, we identify interaction as the measure of social value on the brand page because we wish to understand the social exchange between the customer and the brand page.

Finally, previous studies of emotional value have heavily focused on entertainment, arousal, and escapism in the SNS context. Arousal tends to include short-term incentives that are provided to stimulate the user’s participation in the online community (Liang, Ho, Li, & Turban, 2011), while escapism represents the passive effects of the individual’s use of SNS (Smock, Ellison, Lampe, & Wohl, 2011). This study, entertainment is identified as being essential because it refers to the intrinsic fun and enjoyment that customers experience when engaging with a brand page. It could also perhaps motivate customers toward a higher level of relational commitment (Sung, Kim, Kwon, & Moon, 2010).

2.4. Customer value theory

Studies on customer decision-making have evolved from an initial focus that was solely based on cognitive factors to one that includes intrinsic factors, such as hedonic and esthetic perceptions (Kim, Chan, & Gupta, 2007). Following this stream of directive research, customer value theory (CVT) was developed to explain why consumers make the choices that they do on the basis of different value perceptions, such as functional, social, and conditional values (Sheh, Newman, & Gross, 1991). In the SNS literature, research has indicated that understanding what customers really value is critical for companies that are seeking to build and maintain customer relationships through SNS (Baird & Parasnis, 2011), Woodcock, Green, and Starkey, (2011) also pointed out that although many companies today recognize the importance of using SNS to connect with customers, most of them fail to understand what their customers really value. According to Sweeney and Soutar (2001), customer value is mainly composed of the following three dimensions: functional, social, and emotional values. Functional value derives from a perceived performance of products and services, and is traditionally recognized as the principal driver of a customer’s value perception. Social value refers to the perceived benefits of enhancing the customer’s social well-being and social relationships. Finally, emotional value derives from the inner feelings or affective states that a product or service generates.

These three dimensions of customer values have been widely applied in the SNS literature to investigate customer attitudes and behaviors in different decision-making environments (e.g., Kim, Gupta, & Koh, 2011; Zhang et al., 2017). For example, Gummerus, Liljander, Weman, and Pihlström, (2012) found that social and emotional values could improve the customer’s satisfaction with a Facebook brand page, whereas emotional value further increases customers’ loyalty. Therefore, in this study, we follow Sweeney and Soutar (2001) by conceptualizing customer value in the brand page as consisting of functional, social, and emotional values. To identify the key determinants of customer values in the context of an SNS brand page, we conducted a thorough review of the literature following the guidelines of the conventional systematic review methodology (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). On the basis of the literature review, we identified different coverage and factors for the contents of functional, social, and emotional values in the context of online communities and SNS (see Appendix B).
3. Research model and hypotheses development

Fig. 1 shows our proposed research, including its three model components: relationship antecedents (brand page value), relationship mediators (brand page commitment), and relationship outcomes (functional value). The constructs of product learning, interaction, and entertainment were the measures of functional, social, and emotional values in the brand page context, respectively. The operational definition of each construct is provided in Appendix C.

3.1. Effects of brand page values on brand page commitment conflict

3.1.1. Product learning

In the SNS literature, functional value is considered to be a key determinant of customers’ attitudes and behaviors (Kim et al., 2011). In this study, the functional value of the brand page was measured by product learning, which reflects the brand page’s effectiveness in providing customers with product-related knowledge. According to Yen, Hsu, and Huang, (2011), many customers actively participate in online brand communities in an attempt to learn more about specific products. The availability of official and professional information and services on brand pages encourages the customers’ trust in the brand page’s competence (Kim, Kim, & Wachter, 2013). Furthermore, customers who have acquired knowledge and have achieved learning goals in an online community are more likely to develop a cognitive identification with the community for their continued use in knowledge enhancement (Huang & Chen, 2018). Therefore, we propose that product learning contributes to brand page cognitive commitment because it is related to the customer’s cognitive evaluation of the brand page’s ability to provide them with professional knowledge about products. Consequently, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1. Product learning is positively related to one’s cognitive commitment to the social media brand page.

3.1.2. Interaction

Previous studies have pointed out that social value is a significant factor in determining commitment to an online brand community. For example, it has been suggested that strong social relations in the community can further enhance social identity among a group of people who share a similar interest in a brand (Gummerus et al., 2012). In our study, we measured the social value of the brand page by interaction, which reflects the customer’s social interactions on the brand page, both with the company and with other members. By providing a platform on which customers can interact, the brand page enables customers to establish social ties with the brand and with other members (Kamboj, Sarmah, Gupta, & Dwivedi, 2018). It can also enhance their sense of belonging and commitment to the brand page community (Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Pearo, 2004). Cvijikj and Michaelelles (2013a) found that interactions on the brand page promote a higher level of social involvement and commitment. In this study, we argue that interactions will enhance the customer’s cognitive and affective commitment to the brand page. On the one hand, interactions on the brand page allow the customer to exchange ideas and share information with others, thus enhancing their cognitive gains and motivating them toward a higher level of engagement (Carlson et al., 2018). On the other hand, interactions with the brand and with other members foster relationship building and the formation of emotional bonds on the brand page, thereby contributing to customers’ emotional attachment (Tseng et al., 2017). Consequently, we propose the following hypotheses:

H2a. Interaction is positively related to one’s cognitive commitment to the social media brand page.

H2b. Interaction is positively related to one’s affective commitment to the social media brand page.

3.1.3. Entertainment

Generally, emotional value derives from the enhancement of the customer’s inner feelings and their affective states (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). Kim et al. (2013) indicated that users who experience pleasure, fun, and excitement on brand pages would be intrinsically motivated toward a higher level of engagement and continuance intention. In our study, we measured the emotional value of the brand page by entertainment, which refers to the intrinsic fun and enjoyment that customers experience on the brand page (Gummerus et al., 2012).
Entertainment is closely related to hedonic feeling, which can be fostered by interesting information and entertaining activities on the brand page (Shareef, Mukerji, Alyalat et al., 2018; Shareef, Mukerji, Dwivedi et al., 2018; Tseng et al., 2017). In this study, we expected that entertainment would impact customers’ affective commitment to the brand page because it could help strengthen their inner feelings and help them develop a stronger emotional bond with the brand page. Thus, the entertainment feeling serves as a protocol that generates an enhanced emotional attachment (Chen, 2013). Consequently, we propose the following hypothesis:

**H3.** Entertainment is positively related to one’s affective commitment to the social media brand page.

### 3.2. Effects of brand page commitment on functional conflict

Functional conflict refers to the customer’s perception that future conflicts with the company would be functional and would be resolved to their mutual benefit. Consequently, functional conflict can be considered to be a key indicator of a long-term relationship because customers with a functional conflict perception would care more about long-term benefits than conflictual loss (Goo & Huang, 2008; Hashim & Tan, 2015; Hunt, 1995). In the social media brand page context, although companies can respond more quickly to customers’ dissatisfaction and complaints, customers can easily switch to another alternative brand page via a click (Kim et al., 2008). Therefore, without a strong sense of commitment, the customer may not expect a long-term relationship with the company and, therefore may doubt the functionality of future conflicts. Skarmeas (2006) also indicated that loyal and committed customers are believed to have a deeper perception that future conflicts will be functional and will improve the strength of their relationships with the company. Furthermore, commitment indicates the customer’s willingness to exert an effort in maintaining the relationship and identify with the values of the company (Bettencourt, 1997). From this perspective, we expect commitment to contribute to functional conflict because functional conflict is built upon the customer’s willingness and effort to maintain the relationship through functional conflict resolutions. Furthermore, a strong belief in the value of the company will enhance the customer’s confidence in future conflict resolution (Kim et al., 2008). For example, Hur et al. (2011) found that committed customers in an online brand community are more likely to present their complaints and disagreements to the company because they believe that resolving disagreements will improve the strength of their relationship. Thus, in the context of SNS brand pages, we expect that the cognitive commitment will enhance functional value perception because these customers intend to maintain their relationship for continuous benefit. In addition, the affective commitment reflects deep emotional bonds, which further enhances the customer’s perception that future conflicts will be resolved toward their mutual benefit. Consequently, we propose the following hypotheses:

- **H4a.** Brand page cognitive commitment is positively related to one’s functional conflict perception toward the brand.
- **H4b.** Brand page affective commitment is positively related to one’s functional conflict perception toward the brand.

### 3.3. The moderating effects of perceived community-brand similarity

In this study, we used perceived community-brand similarity to measure the congruence between brand page characteristics and brand characteristics. Fu, Yan, and Feng, (2018) have explored the similarity effect in SNS and confirmed that it is an important cue for users’ decision making. Previous studies have also established the importance of a perceived similarity between the brand community personality and the brand personality in generating brand relationships from brand communities (Hung, 2014). When customers have a sense of consistency between the brand page and the brand, then they are more likely to extend their relationship with the brand community to the brand itself (Zhou et al., 2012).

When customers develop a cognitive commitment to the brand page, then they value their relationship with the brand page for long-term benefits (Tseng et al., 2017). However, if the congruence between the brand page characteristics and the brand characteristics is weak, then customers may feel confused and lack confidence about whether the brand will provide the same value to them as the brand page does (Zhou et al., 2012). In this case, the customer may perceive that the brand page and the brand operate independently and at different levels. Therefore, when confronting disagreements with the brand, customers who are committed to the brand page may still doubt the brand’s ability to achieve a mutually satisfying conflict resolution. Take, for example, a customer who is cognitively committed to a mobile phone brand page whose image is service oriented. However, if the perceived brand image is instead sales oriented, then the customer may become skeptical about whether he or she can achieve a functional conflict resolution with the brand when confronting service problems. Therefore, we argue that the impact of brand page cognitive commitment on functional conflict may be weak if the perceived similarity between the brand page and the brand is low. Consequently, we propose the following hypothesis:

**H5a.** The perceived brand-community similarity positively moderates the relationship between brand page cognitive commitment and functional conflict with the brand.

In addition, customers who develop affective commitment to the brand page feel a deep emotional attachment with the brand page community. Customers who are emotionally attached to the brand page may share some values and personal interests with the brand page (Royo-Vela & Casasamissima, 2011). For example, customers who are affectively committed to a brand page may believe that the brand page cares about their interests and values the emotional bonds between them. Thus, if the customers’ perceived similarity between the brand page and the brand is high, then they will hold the same belief that in a future conflict, the brand will resolve the conflict to their mutual benefit and that this conflict will strengthen their relationship. Consequently, we propose the following hypothesis:

**H5b.** The perceived brand-community similarity positively moderates the relationship between brand page affective commitment and functional conflict with the brand.

### 3.4. Control variables

We included the following three control variables in this study: gender, age, and brand page tenure. Gender was included due to its reported significant influence on Internet usage and social networking activities (Muscanello & Guadagno, 2012). Age was included because different age groups may exhibit different attitudes toward the adoption of social media (Stokburger-Sauer, 2010). Brand page tenure was included because the length of time that one has followed a brand page will be linked to the number of interactions generated over time, and these interactions form a foundation for commitment and functional conflict.

### 4. Research method

#### 4.1. Measurement

We adopted the measuring instruments that were used in previous studies to measure the constructs identified in this study. For the scales of product learning, interaction, entertainment, affective commitment, and perceived brand-community similarity, the original context was changed to the brand page to fit our research setting. For the scale of
cognitive commitment and functional conflict, the wording was slightly modified to better capture the characteristics of a brand page. For example, the item of “I am sure that there are other sites where I could find the same content and services that I get at this site” was modified to “I am sure that there are no other brand pages where I could find the same content and experience that I get on this one”. Items were carefully revised by several information systems professors and students who are familiar with brand page usage to ensure that they were relevant to the particular context of this research. With these reviewers’ insightful comments, we were able to modify and finalize the items (as shown in Appendix A). We used multi-item perceptual scales using a five-point Likert scale to measure all of the constructs.

4.2. Research sampling and data collection

The potential respondents of this study were users who have “followed” at least one brand page on Sina Microblog (www.weibo.com). Sina Microblog is currently one of the most popular SNS in China, with more than 250 million registered users, more than 50,000 enterprise accounts, and more than 90 million tweets published every day (Gu & Wang, 2012). Brand page followers are conversant in brand page features and their daily operations, and were thus potential participants in our study.

The measurement items were translated into the local language to facilitate the local respondents’ understanding. By using the back-translation method, we followed the approach of Bhalla and Lin (1987) to ensure the validity of our questionnaire. After the first translation round, we invited several IS experts and doctoral students who are also brand page followers to review our questionnaire. We collected their feedback about the content validity and the clarity of the instructions, and then refined our questionnaire according to their suggestions.

We used the stratified sampling method to identify potential participants. Brand pages on Sina Microblog are classified into 25 groups according to the industry type, including information and technology, tourism and hospitality, food and beverage, health care, and so on. These 25 groups were treated as strata in our study. We then used a simple random approach to obtain four brand pages from each industry and to identify 20 followers from each brand page. This selection process guaranteed a wide diversity of brand pages and thus ensured that our study had a wide generalizability (Lee & Baskerville, 2003). In total, we identified 2000 potential participants. We used an online invitation method to collect our data by sending participants invitation letters that contained a link to our online survey. Small gifts were offered to encourage their participation. In addition, a screening question was used in the online survey to confirm that each respondent was aware that he or she was actually a follower of the brand page.

4.3. Sample profile

We have received a total of 462 responses from the online survey, generating a response rate of 23.1%. After excluding invalid responses with incomplete information, we collected 293 valid responses for data analysis. Among the respondents, 58.4% were female and 41.6% were male. A majority of the respondents (77.8%) were between 18 and 28 years old, and 76.5% of the respondents had a Bachelor’s degree or above. Most of the respondents (63.4%) routinely visited Sina Microblog on more than four days per week and 44.7% visited it every day. Moreover, 23.9% of respondents posted on the brand page every week and 87.0% of respondents noticed posts from the brand page every day they visited Sina Microblog.

5. Data analysis and results

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used for the data analysis in our study. The SEM technique is a powerful second-generation multivariate analysis method for examining causal models and simultaneously evaluating the corresponding measurement model (MacCallum & Austin, 2000). In this study, we adopted the component-based SEM technique of partial least squares (PLS). The PLS approach was suitable here because it makes minimal demands on normal distribution and works with nominal, ordinal, and interval scaled variables (Chin, 1998). We used the software package Smart PLS 2.0 in this study. We analyzed the measurement model first and then we analyzed the structural model.

5.1. Assessment of the measurement model

To assess the properties of the measurement model, we conducted confirmatory factor analysis to examine the convergent and discriminant validities of the scales. The convergent validity measures the extent to which all of the items measuring a construct actually load onto a single construct (Campbell & Fiske, 1959). We used three criteria in our assessment: (1) all factor loadings should be greater than 0.7 (Chin, 1998); (2) composite reliability (CR) should be above 0.7 (Chin, 1998); and (3) average variance extracted (AVE) should be greater than 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The results (see Table 1) show that our measurement model demonstrated high convergent validity. The discriminant validity refers to the verification of each proposed factor intended to measure a distinctive event (or activity) (Campbell & Fiske, 1959). We assessed this by examining whether the square root of the AVE for each construct exceeded its correlation with other constructs in the model (Chin, 1998). As presented in Table 2, all of the square roots

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>PES</th>
<th>FUC</th>
<th>AFC</th>
<th>COC</th>
<th>ENT</th>
<th>PRL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Product learning (PRL)</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction (INT)</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment (ENT)</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive commitment (COC)</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Affective commitment (AFC)</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional conflict (FUC)</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived brand community similarity (PES)</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The diagonal elements are the square roots of AVEs for each construct and the off-diagonal elements are the correlations between constructs.
of AVEs are larger than the corresponding correlations, thus demonstrating sufficient discriminant validity. Therefore, the measurement model was considered to have adequate validity and reliability, and was used for structural model analysis.

Because the data for the independent and dependent variables were all self-reported and collected from a single source, we examined the common method bias (CMB) using Harman’s single-factor test, while simultaneously loading all items in factor analysis using Varimax rotation (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). The results included more than one factor with an eigenvalue above 1, and no factor accounted for the majority of the variance. Therefore, a CMB is unlikely to be a serious concern in our study. Moreover, we examined the potential problem of multicollinearity by conducting the variance inflation factor (VIF) test. In these results, the VIF values for all constructs ranged from 1.16 to 1.94, which are far below the threshold of 10 (Diamantopoulos & Winklhofer, 2001), thereby suggesting that multicollinearity was not a threat in our research.

5.2. Assessment of the structural model

Having verified our measurement model, we then tested the proposed hypotheses using Smart PLS 2.0. Fig. 2 depicts the results of the hypothesis testing of the structural model, including the standardized path coefficients and the variance of the dependent variables explained (R² value).

The results reveal that both product learning (β = 0.25, p < 0.001) and interaction (β = 0.34, p < 0.001) had significant impacts on cognitive brand page commitment, suggesting that H1 and H2a are supported. The impacts of interaction (β = 0.11, p < 0.01) and entertainment (β = 0.31, p < 0.001) on affective brand page commitment were also significant, validating H2b and H3. For the relationship between brand page commitment and functional conflict, both cognitive commitment (β = 0.25, p < 0.001) and affective commitment (β = 0.13, p < 0.05) were positively related to functional conflict, thereby supporting H4a and H4b. In addition, as hypothesized, perceived brand-community similarity exerted a significant, positive moderating effect on the relationship between cognitive commitment and functional conflict (β = 0.35, p < 0.001). Meanwhile, contrary to our prediction, the moderating effect of perceived brand-community similarity on the relationship between affective commitment and functional conflict was not significant (β = -0.08, p > 0.1). Therefore, H5b is not supported.

6. Discussion

This work attempts to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how various customer value perceptions contribute to the customer’s brand page commitment, which in turn impacts how the customers perceive future conflicts with the company.

Our results confirm that the relationships between customer values and two types of brand page commitment are significant. First, the findings suggest that the facilitation of product learning on a brand page will enhance the customers’ cognitive commitment to that brand page, so that they can continue to gain the benefits. Second, interaction on the brand page has a significant impact on the customers’ cognitive commitment and also on their affective commitment toward the brand page. This result shows that when customers are positively engaged in social interactions on a brand page, they are more likely to develop a stronger identification with the brand page. This identification then enhances the customers’ emotional bonds with and cognitive value perceptions of the brand page. It is worth noting that the impact of interaction on cognitive commitment (β = 0.34, p < 0.001) is stronger than on affective commitment (β = 0.11, p < 0.01). This demonstrates that interactions on the brand page contribute more to the customers’ cognitive evaluations of the brand page. Previous studies have also showed that interactions on social media communities facilitate information flow and knowledge exchange, contributing significantly to the perceived benefits derived from the community (Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013b; Rapp, Beitelspacher, Grewal, & Hughes, 2013). Third, our results reveal that entertainment value derived from the brand page positively impacts the customers’ affective brand page commitment. Previous studies have produced similar findings regarding the relationship between emotional feelings and customer commitment. For example, Wu and Holsapple (2014) and Gupta and Kim (2007) found that the customers’ emotional feelings that arise from a hedonic-oriented online community are positively related to their attachments and commitment. Our study further demonstrates that entertainment delivered on the brand page enhances the customers’ emotional bonds.
with that brand page. Therefore, we can conclude that the brand page should provide a positive emotional experience to users so that it can strengthen their affective commitment, even though the page was originally designed to promote product information and assist customers in product usage.

Our study also confirms the significant role that brand page commitment, in the form of both cognitive commitment and affective commitment, plays in predicting the customers’ perceptions of functional conflict. Whereas previous studies in the social networking context have focused heavily on examining the impacts of communication skills on functional conflict, our study has extended the previous research by considering the roles of cognitive and affective commitment in determining the customers’ perceptions that future conflicts will be functional. Our findings demonstrate that, with proper e-marketing strategies based on customer values, brand page commitment can be further promoted to generate favorable brand relationships by achieving functional conflict expectations between the customer and the brand.

Furthermore, our results confirm that a perceived brand-community similarity positively moderates the relationship between cognitive brand page commitment and functional conflict. This moderating effect suggests that if customers who develop a cognitive commitment to brand pages perceive that the image of the brand page and the related brand are consistent, then they will be more likely to perceive that future conflicts with the brand will be functional. Meanwhile, in our results, a perceived brand-community similarity did not have a significant moderating effect on the relationship between affective commitment and functional conflict. This finding suggests that customers who have developed an emotional attachment to the brand page may not depend on a brand-community similarity when they evaluate the company’s ability to resolve future conflicts. This apparent lack of dependence may be due to the fact that customers usually engage in a cognitive evaluation process to evaluate the perceived brand-community similarity (Zhou et al., 2012). However, compared with cognitive commitment, affective commitment is more of an emotional factor and is mainly based on the customers’ intuitive judgment (Bateman et al., 2011). Therefore, customers who are affectively committed to the brand page may be too emotionally involved to be easily influenced by the cognitive evaluation of perceived brand-community similarity.

7. Implications for theory and practice

7.1. Implications for theory

By proposing and empirically validating an integrated research model, this study offers important contributions to theory development and future research on the social media brand page.

First, this work is a response to the call for further research on the company’s use of social media. Brand pages represent a new form of information and communication technology that can help companies to better connect with their customers and resolve conflicts more effectively. The critical research gap that we intended to address in this study of SNS brand pages was that the antecedents of the highly desirable customer relationship outcome—that is, functional conflict—was not clearly understood. We built on the CVT and commitment literature, and we have demonstrated how the customer’s values contribute to functional conflict through brand page commitment. While the customer relationship outcomes, such as satisfaction and loyalty, have been intensively discussed in previous brand page studies, positioning functional conflict as an important aspect of customers’ willingness to maintain a long-term relationship can further our understanding of how SNS brand pages can help to generate brand-related outcomes.

Second, the majority of the previous studies of how brand pages can help with conflict resolution have been descriptive (e.g., Dineva, Breitsohl, & Garrod, 2017). In contrast, this study has used a process view to theoretically investigate how relationship antecedents (i.e., customer values) impact the relationship mediator (i.e., commitment) and lead to the relationship outcome (i.e., functional conflict). While previous studies consider the relationship mediator of trust as a critical predictor of functional conflict in the business partnership context (Goo et al., 2009; Morgan & Hunt, 1994), our work shows that commitment, which is another important relationship mediator, explains significant variance in functional conflict in the context of SNS brand page. Omitting commitment may produce potential biases in research toward functional conflict, especially in the social media context where a long-term relationship is hard to maintain. Appreciating the role of commitment in predicting functional conflict can further our understanding of how brand pages encourage customers to abstain from attractive short-term alternatives and become willing to exert effort to arrive at a functional conflict resolution.

Third, this research also contributes to CVT by contextualizing its dimensions and confirming the importance of customer value perceptions in determining brand page commitment and functional conflict. Exploring the black boxes of customer values has been an issue of concern in several previous studies (e.g., Kim et al., 2011; Lu & Hsiao, 2010). Consequently, this study responds to the call to incorporate specific variables that are more closely tied to the research context. Therefore, we expect that our work will make a more contextualized theoretical and concomitant practical contribution (see Johns, 2006).

Finally, by investigating the moderating role of perceived brand-community similarity, this study explores the boundary conditions under which a customer relationship that develops on a social media brand page can generate the customer’s relationship with the company. Whereas previous studies have examined similar relationships in the context of online SNS, few studies have pointed to the boundary conditions that would impact this relationship. By examining the moderating role of perceived brand-community similarity, this study sheds new insights on this research field and serves as a foundation for future research.

7.2. Implications for practice

This study provides a number of practical implications for system designers and managers who seek new ways to promote a better customer relationship on SNS brand pages by generating positive functional conflict perceptions. It is noteworthy that commitment plays a critical role in predicting functional conflict in the brand page context. According to the IS literature, the positive effects of benefits derived from a brand page tend to decline over time because users may be attracted by alternatives due to a sense of novelty and curiosity (Huang & Chen, 2018). In this study, we conjecture that a brand page may initially attract customers by offering various customer values but that this may not be enough to maintain customers’ favorable attitudes toward future conflict resolution unless the customers feel committed to the brand page. Therefore, we highlight that a brand page should develop customer commitment in a way that enhances the customers’ perceived long-term benefits and emotional attachment with the brand page.

In addition, our study helps brand page managers to understand how brand page commitment can be enhanced by customer values. The activities on a brand page need to be designed with a view to support customers in the long term and to guarantee that the customer values that are important to users will be provided. Our findings suggest that interaction, compared with product learning, is a stronger antecedent of cognitive commitment. While brand page managers previously focused heavily on offering product-related information, our results suggest that customer interactions on the brand page may generate more useful information for customers to cognitively evaluate the value of the brand page. Indeed, product learning can be regarded as an inherent part of a brand page’s capability (i.e., following the page to receive product information). Brand page managers should also take an active role in
interacting with followers and in organizing activities that will encourage interactions among brand page followers. In terms of affective commitment, entertainment generates more impact than interaction. Affective commitment reflects the customers’ emotional bonding with the brand page and derives from their inner feelings. Therefore, entertaining experiences on the brand page should be facilitated to increase the customers’ positive inner feelings and emotional attachment. In addition, customers’ emotional bonds could be strengthened through activities such as customer care, building a shared understanding, and disseminating the corporate culture.

The finding that perceived brand-community similarity positively moderates the relationship between cognitive commitment and functional conflict indicates that to generate favorable brand relationship, the brand page should be kept consistent with the brand. This result further supports the view that in the era of omnichannel marketing, it is important to provide a seamless experience across channels (Saghiri, Wilding, Mena, & Bourlakis, 2017). Consequently, companies should pay attention to the coherence of the images and styles used on their brand page and in the brand because this will help to make the customers believe that the value they receive from the brand page could also be provided by the brand in the long run.

### 7.3. Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations. First, our data were collected from brand pages on only one regionally specific SNS in China. Given the global context of the business implications of brand pages, generalizing the results of this study will require replication within other cultures. Cross-national studies are particularly useful because they are able to investigate cultural differences in this context. Second, this study only considers the moderating role of perceived brand-community similarity on the relationship transfer between a brand page and its company. Future research should explore how the customer's characteristics (e.g., brand knowledge) may impact this transfer process. Third, the data were collected at one point in time, which means that causal relationships beyond the theoretical hypotheses cannot be established empirically. Therefore, future studies should use other research designs (e.g., longitudinal studies) to examine causal relationships.

### 8. Conclusion

Customer relationship management has long been considered to be the core of the business use of social media. This study is one of only a few emerging works to undertake an empirical investigation of how social media brand pages can help with future conflict resolution between customers and companies. A key contribution of this study is that it broadens our understanding of the nature of customer values and customer commitment on the brand page. In particular, we have confirmed that customer values—which we measured by product learning, interaction, and entertainment—can contribute to both cognitive and affective commitment on the brand page. In turn, this commitment can further foster the customers’ perceptions that future conflicts will be functional. We also investigated whether a perceived brand-community similarity functioned as a moderator between brand page commitment and functional conflict. Consequently, this study should serve as a catalyst for research into the business implications of social media and it should provide a stepping-stone for a deeper understanding of customer attitudes and behaviors on social media.

### Acknowledgement

The work described in this study was supported by the National Natural Science Foundation of China (Nos. 71502140 and 71502142).

### Appendix A

#### Constructs and measurement items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>Measurement items</th>
<th>Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Product learning</strong></td>
<td>PL1: Following this brand page enhances my knowledge of the product and its usage.</td>
<td>Nambisan and Baron (2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PL2: Following this brand page helps me to obtain solutions to specific product-related problems.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PL3: Following this brand page enhances my knowledge about advances in the product, related products, and technology.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interaction</strong></td>
<td>INT1: Other members are very responsive to my posts on this brand page.</td>
<td>Zhao and Lu (2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>INT2: I can always count on getting a lot of responses to my posts on this brand page.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>INT3: I can always count on getting responses to my posts on this brand page fairly quickly.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Entertainment</strong></td>
<td>EN1: I think this brand page is very entertaining.</td>
<td>Verhagen, Feldberg, van den Hooft, Meents, and Merikivi (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EN2: The content of this brand page is eye-catching and cheers me up.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EN3: Following this brand page entertains me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Affective commitment</strong></td>
<td>AC1: I feel like a part of the group on this brand page.</td>
<td>Bateman et al. (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AC2: I have a real emotional attachment to this brand page.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AC3: I feel a strong sense of belonging to this brand page.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cognitive commitment</strong></td>
<td>CC1: I am sure that there are no other brand pages where I could find the same content and experience that I get on this one.</td>
<td>Bateman et al. (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CC2: There are very few other places where I could find the kind of useful content that I get from this brand page.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CC3: The content of this brand page is too valuable for me to stop following it.</td>
<td>Goo and Huang (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Functional conflict</strong></td>
<td>FC1: Dissatisfaction between me and the company of this brand page will always be successfully resolved.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FC2: Dissatisfaction between me and the company of this brand page will be resolved to our mutual satisfaction.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FC3: The discussions I have with the company of this brand page on areas of disagreement will increase the effectiveness and strength of our relationship.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perceived brand-community similarity</strong></td>
<td>PES1: There is similarity between the values of this brand page and the values of this brand.</td>
<td>Zhou et al. (2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PES2: There is similarity between style of this brand page and the style of this brand.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PES3: There is similarity between the feeling of this brand page and the feeling of this brand.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Literature review on customer value dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literature</th>
<th>Functional value</th>
<th>Social value</th>
<th>Emotional value</th>
<th>Nature of research</th>
<th>Research context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zhang, Gu, and Jaborami (2018)</td>
<td>Seeking convenience; problem-solving; responsiveness; monetary gain</td>
<td>Interacting with others; making friends</td>
<td>Pleasure; surprise</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Online sharing economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alalwan (2018)</td>
<td>Performance expectancy; informativeness; Perceived relevance</td>
<td>Interactivity</td>
<td>Hedonic motivation</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Social media advertisement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlson et al. (2018)</td>
<td>Helpful; usefulness</td>
<td>Interaction; sense of belonging</td>
<td>Fun; excitement; entertainment</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>SNS brand community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goh et al. (2013)</td>
<td>Content information richness; product-related experience</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Feeling interested</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>SNS brand community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jahn and Kunz (2012)</td>
<td>Useful information; promotion of work</td>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td>Pleasure</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>SNS fan page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baek, Holton, Harp, and Yaschur (2011)</td>
<td>Immediate access; disclosure</td>
<td>Coordination; social presence</td>
<td>Leisure; affection; escapism; entertainment</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>SNS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim et al. (2011)</td>
<td>Price utility; functional quality</td>
<td>Social self-image expression; social support</td>
<td>Playfulness</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>SNS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liang et al. (2011)</td>
<td>System quality; service quality</td>
<td>Social support</td>
<td>Appraisal and encouragement</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Social commerce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smock et al. (2011)</td>
<td>Expressive information sharing; professional advancement</td>
<td>Companionship; social interaction</td>
<td>Relaxing entertainment; escape from reality; habitual pastimes; cool and new trends</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>SNS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sung et al. (2010)</td>
<td>Help to seek information; incentive and convenience</td>
<td>Interpersonal connection</td>
<td>Entertainment seeking</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>SNS brand community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yen et al. (2011)</td>
<td>Problem-solving support; rewards</td>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td>Feeling arousal, stimulated</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Online community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tseng et al. (2017)</td>
<td>Knowledge-seeking</td>
<td>Social integration</td>
<td>Entertainment-seeking</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Online brand community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hew, Leong, Tan, Lee, and Ooi (2018)</td>
<td>System and service quality; mobility</td>
<td>Social presence</td>
<td>Enjoyment</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Mobile social networking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wang and Fesenmaier (2004)</td>
<td>Information gathering; facilitating learning</td>
<td>Communication; collaboration; exchanging ideas</td>
<td>Enjoyment; entertainment</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Online travel community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix C

Operational definition of each construct

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>Operational definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Product learning</td>
<td>The brand page's functional value in providing customers with product-related knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>The brand page's social value in assisting customers with social interactions with the company and other members on the brand page.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective commitment</td>
<td>The brand page's emotional value in providing customers with intrinsic fun and enjoyment when engaging with the brand page.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive commitment</td>
<td>The customer's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the brand page.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional conflict</td>
<td>The customer's awareness of the benefits derived from the brand page and the costs associated with stopping following the brand page.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References


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