ANTECEDENTS OF ONLINE COMMUNITY COMMITMENT AND ITS EFFECT ON BEHAVIOURAL INTENTIONS IN CHINA

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ABSTRACT

Social media has captured a major part of people's daily communication in recent years. As an important component of social media platform, online communities has attracted remarkable popularity and has greatly influenced the normal people's lives. Both researchers and practitioners have predicted this phenomenon will bring new opportunities and challenges to the business. However, due to the new social media phenomenon, research in this field is yet to mature. In addition, because of online community's virtual features and low switching cost, members frequently join and leave the communities. Therefore, previous researches have highlighted factors that influence customers' online community engagement and commitment from different perspective. After reviewing the existing literature related to the antecedents of online community commitment, this study aims to study what are the core factors that may influence online community members' commitment and how it shapes their behavioural intentions. To facilitate this research objective, this study proposes a holistic model with five hypotheses to explore antecedents of online community commitment from three aspects: personal influences, social influences, and online community characteristics based on Relationship Marketing Theory, Social Influence Model, and Framework of Community Characteristics. In addition, this study tests the effects of online community commitment on members' behavioural intentions. Lastly, this study stresses on adopting advertising as a moderating factor to investigate the moderating role of advertising on the relationship of online community commitment and behavioural intentions. To initiate this research, an online survey approach was taken. A total of 999 validated questionnaires were collected from ten top maternal and baby care related online communities in China, which were selected based on the ranking from http://top.chinaz.com. Partial least squares based structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was used to analyse the collected data. Overall, the results indicated that the proposed holistic model of online community commitment fulfil the principles of a parsimonious model with good predictive ability. The results also show that the collected data fits the proposed model well and support all the proposed hypotheses except H5. Specifically, the results revealed that personal influences, social influences, and online community characteristics gave positive effects on online community commitment. In addition, online community commitment also positively influences the members' behavioural intentions. However, the impact of online community commitment on behavioural intentions moderated by the level of advertising was not supported. Overall, this study proposed and tested a holistic model of online community commitment which has a theoretical significance and also enhance understanding of consumer behaviour in online communities in China, especially in maternal and baby care related industry.

ABSTRAK

Media social telah memainkan peranan yang penting di dalam komunikasi seharian masyarakat sejak kebelakangan ini. Sebagai satu komponen penting dalam platform media sosial, komuniti atas talian telah mengundang populariti luarbiasa dan banyak mempengaruhi kehidupan masyarakat marhaen. Kedua-dua penyelidik dan pengamal telah menjangkakan fenomena ini akan memberikan peluang-peluang baru dan banyak cabaran kepada dunia perniagaan. Walaubagaimanapun, disebabkan oleh fenomena media sosial yang baru, penyelidikan di dalam bidang ini masih belum matang. Tambahan pula, kerana komuniti atas talian yang bercirikan maya dan biaya pindah yang rendah, ahli-ahli sering menyertai dan meninggalkan kumpulan masyarakat itu. Kajian lepas telah menekankan faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi penglibatan dan komitmen pelanggan-pelanggan komuniti atas talian daripada perspektif yang berbeza. Setelah penelitian literature berkenaan anteseden komitmen komuniti atas talian dijalankan, penyelidikan ini bertujuan mengkaji apakah factor utama yang mempengaruhi penentu utama komitmen konsumer atas talian dan bagaimana komitmen tersebut membentuk hasrat tingkah laku mereka. Bagi mencapai objektif kajian, kajian ini mencadangkan satu model holistic dengan lima hipotesis untuk mengeksplorasi anteseden komitmen ahli komuniti atas talian dari tiga perspektif: pengaruh peribadi, pengaruh sosial, dan ciri-ciri komuniti dalam talian berdasarkan *'Relationship Marketing Theory'*, *'Social Influence Model'* dan *'Framework of Community Characteristics'*. Selain itu, kajian ini menguji kesan komitmen komuniti atas talian terhadap hasrat tingkahlaku ahli-ahli dalam komuniti. Akhir sekali, kajian ini menekankan penggunaan pengiklanan sebagai factor moderasi untuk mengkaji peranan moderasi pengiklanan terhadap hubungan komitmen komuniti atas talian dan hasrat tingkahlaku. Untuk memulakan kajian ini, satu kaji selidik atas talian telah dijalankan. Sebanyak 999 soal selidik yang sah telah dikumpulkan daripada sepuluh perniagaan dalam talian terbaik bagi penjagaan ibu dan bayi di China yang telah dipilih berdasarkan kedudukan menerusi laman web http://top.chinaz.com. *Partial least squares based structural equation modelling* (PLS-SEM) telah digunakan untuk menganalisa data. Secara keseluruhannya, keputusan menunjukkan bahawa model holistic komitmen komuniti atas talian yang dicadangkan memenuhi prinsip model parsimoni dengan kebolehan meramal yang baik. Keputusan juga menunjukkan bahawa data yang diperoleh memenuhi syarat kesesuaian model dengan baik serta menyokong semua hipotesis yang dicadangkan, kecuali H5. Secara khususnya, keputusan membongkarkan bahawa pengaruh peribadi, pengaruh sosial, dan ciri-ciri komuniti atas talian memberi kesan yang positif keatas komitmen ahli komuniti atas talian. Selain itu, komitmen komuniti atas talian juga mempengaruhi secara positif niat tingkahlaku ahli-ahli. Walaubagaimanapun, kesan komitmen ahli komuniti atas talian keatas niat tingkahlaku disederhana oleh tahap pengiklanan adalah tidak disokong. Secara keseluruhan, kajian ini telah mencadangkan dan menguji model holistik komitmen komuniti atas talian yang signifikan dari segi teori, dan juga meningkatkan pemahaman tingkahlaku konsumer komuniti atas talian di China, terutamanya dalam industri berkaitan penjagaan ibu dan bayi.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

The fast development of technology and the widespread of internet have diversified the usages of internet. For example, building and maintaining social networking relationships and business relationships (Brogi, 2014), learning through different social platforms (Allen and Seaman, 2013; Moore et al., 2011), searching information for travel planning (Casaló et al., 2010), entertaining through various social media platforms, as well as marketing products and services (Verma, Sharma and Sheth, 2015; Brogi, 2014). The wide adoption of the internet has also changed people's lifestyle and traditional habits. For instance, customers purchase products and services online, as well as discuss and share information and experiences about products and services with others through internet (Kim et al., 2015). This behaviour of discussing and sharing information via different online channels, including discussion forums, product reviews, online communities, and emails, is called Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) (Dwyer, 2007). eWOM is crucial for today's business as it has greatly influenced consumer's decision-making and attitude formation (Brown et al., 2007), which further influences the success of online and off-line businesses (Chinese Maternal Market Report, 2014; Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006).

Along with eWOM and human's desire for connectivity, a new social form has emerged for people to interact and communicate with each other, which is called "online community" (Jang, et al., 2008). Based on the latest data reported by a social media agency, WeAreSocialSG (Global Digital Statistics, 2014), the number of

world internet users reached 2.5 billion in 2014, which covered 35% of internet penetration worldwide. Besides, there were 2 billion active social network users in the world and amongst them, more than ¼ of the social network users were from China.

In the context of China, the chat app QQ had 816 million users in 2014, while the Chinese social networking platform Qzone was employed by 632 million users, and the Chinese chat app WeChat (Weixin) had 272 million users. In fact, a report issued by the China Internet Information Centre (CNNIC, 2014) stressed that a big portion of internet users among the number of online community members came from China. Until January 2014, China had 618 million internet users, and among them, 86.2% had registered in different online social networks (CNNIC, 2015). This showed that Chinese internet users displayed a higher rate of adoption of the virtual world (Zhou, 2011). Furthermore, until January 2014, the registered online community users in China had reached 2.78M, while the utilization rate was 45.0%, which dropped by 3.8% from 2012. However, although the utilization rate of the online community showed a decrement; the mode of communication via internet has evolved into a basic element of various internet applications. Moreover, Booz & Company estimated that social commerce (online business through social media) would emerge as another recent trend in the business world and by the end of 2015, 50% of trading in the whole world would have been transformed to social commerce (booz.com, 2013). Similarly, Jung et al. (2013) states that the growing popularity of the online social media has offered a new platform for marketing managers to relate to their customers. These online social networks can generate new relationships between marketing opportunities, as well as add value to the business. Online community, being one of the main platforms of social media (Kotler and Keller, 2012) that collaborates with a huge number of internet users and online community members, has attracted great attention from both marketers and researchers.

Previous researchers believed that online communities have become a powerful socio-economic phenomenon (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). In fact, studies have found that recommendation and shared information among online community members form strong eWOM effects, which significantly influence retail

sales, as well as customers' behavioural intentions and actual behaviour (Park and Cho, 2012; Wu and Wang, 2011; Jang et al., 2008; Flavian and Guinaliu, 2005). The prior researches also discussed online communities from different perspectives. For example, Davison et al. (2007) and Koh and Kim (2004) addressed the importance of a sustainable online community; whereas Flavian and Guinaliu (2005) stressed on the importance of adopting virtual communities as a distribution strategy; and some other researchers looked into the deriving value of online community (Stephen and Toubia, 2010; Fuller et al., 2008).

Another emerging issue related to online communities is the commitment among the members to online communities (Hur et al., 2011; Kang, 2004). This is because numerous researchers successfully revealed the strong influence of community commitment on customer loyalty (Erdogmus and Cicek, 2012; Oliver, 1999; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Aaker, 1991; Kotler et al., 1989; Wiener, 1982; Staw, 1980). Meanwhile, other researchers (Jang et al., 2008; Flavian and Guinaliu, 2005) had investigated the characteristics of websites, which could increase the commitment among the members to online community. Additionally, Zhou (2011), Lee et al. (2011), McAlexander et al. (2002), and Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) stressed on the factors of social influence impact on online community commitment. Besides, Park and Cho (2012) identified three psychological attachment factors based on social influence factors as the main determinants of online community commitment. Moreover, Wang et al. (2012) integrated issue involvement, perceived social interactions, and perceived system interactivity as the key factors that influenced the commitment among the members to an online community.

Due to the remarkable popularity and the influence of these communities on the lives of normal people, both researchers and practitioners in disciplines of Information Systems and Marketing are interested in eWOM communication behaviour in the context of online communities (Noble et al., 2012; Shi, 2011; Woisetschlager et al., 2008; Brown et al., 2007). Moreover, Fuller et al. (2008) and Gruen et al. (2006) also supported that the two-way interaction behaviour of community members and companies in online communities plays a crucial role in today's industry world. From the customers' standpoint, customers engage in the

online communities, which provide them a chance to share information and experiences with other internet users or even the companies. From the marketers' standpoint, on the other hand, online community has been established as a platform to capture customers' opinions for their products or services, and also can function as an effective marketing tool that serves as a good market arm for improving business promotion and customer loyalty (Shi, 2011) in order to develop newer and deeper relationships with their customers (Armstrong and Hagel, 1996).

However, because of online communities' virtual features and low switching cost, the members frequently join or leave an online community. Therefore, understanding the reason individuals choose to stay in an online community, as well as invest their time and energy to engage in the communities, is very necessary for both e-marketers and researchers (Zeng et al., 2014). However, the factors that generate a sustainable relationship between an online community and its members are still not well investigated. Accordingly, this research identified its research questions and objectives on the basis of the above arguments. The details are discussed in the later sections.

1.2   Problem Statement

China is the second largest economy in the world, and maternal and baby care industry is becoming one of the most popular and fastest growing retail market in China (UBM China, 2014). Currently, online purchasing and communication on social media has become a habit for new Chinese parents. Online communities are making drastic changes in individuals' ways of communication; resulting in two-way interaction between community members and companies (Shi, 2011). Generation of eWOM and greater business development opportunities are grabbing consistent interest of researchers and practitioners in disciplines of Information Systems and Marketing (Noble et al., 2012). With 545 million members, Chinese online communities are showing a utilization rate of 45.0%; implying that online communities have evolved into a major mode of communication (booz.com, 2013). Additionally, predictions about steady growth of social commerce via online

communities in China also stresses the importance of studying online communities from perspective of relationship marketing. From practical standpoint, virtual features of online communities and lower switching costs result in frequent joining and leaving of these online communities. This void leaves managers and researchers alike with insufficient information to identify the factors that truly drive members' commitment towards online communities. Considering limited literature on this issue, understanding the reasons why individuals choose to stay in an online community, as well as invest their time and energy to engage in the communities, can be beneficial and timely (Zeng et al., 2014).

Accordingly, numerous researchers have emphasized on exploring the determinants of online community commitment from various perspectives in the recent years. Researchers such as Casalo et al. (2008) and Chen et al. (2013) have highlighted the importance of trust on online community commitment by adopting Commitment-Trust Theory. Some other researchers emphasised on the impact of social factors on community commitment. For instance, Bagozzi and Dholakia (2002) found that social identity and group norms were dominant factors which determined users' participation behaviour in online communities. Dholakia et al. (2004) identified other key social factors including purposive value, self-discovery, maintaining interpersonal interconnectivity, and social enhancement. Furthermore, Laroche et al. (2012) identified shared consciousness, shared rituals and traditions, as well as obligation to society as the main antecedents of community commitment. Likewise, Park and Cho (2012) identified we-ness, moral responsibility, and shared culture as the key social factors that may impact online community commitment. Another stream of research focused on the effect of website/community characteristics on members' online community commitment. For example, Seo (2005) listed various community characteristics including interaction, user friendliness, credibility of information, brand reputation, and reward for activities. Meanwhile, Lee and Kim (2005) pointed out that the characteristics of an online community include quality of information, quality of service, reward, member interaction, and leadership. Jang et al. (2008) and Flavian and Guinaliu (2005) identified four characteristics of virtual community including interactivity, convenience of use, reliability of information, and reward for activity. Besides, literature also suggests some other key factors that may influence members' online

community commitment, such as entertainment value and prior experience (Park and Cho, 2012). In addition to its antecedents, scholars also discussed consequences of online community commitment such as member's behavioural intentions i.e., loyalty, eWOM and purchase intentions. For instance, several studies examined the relationship between brand community commitment and brand loyalty (Shi, 2011; Jang et al., 2008), while some other researchers focused on investigating online community participation or commitment on revisit and eWOM intentions (Han and Kim, 2009; Han and Ryu, 2006). However, most of the existing studies have focused on antecedents and/or behavioural intentions of online community commitment from one aspect. Hence, little agreement exists on the various causal relationships reported in empirical research (Verma et al., 2015).To conclude, despite of all these efforts prior researchers have put on this field, there is a continuing debate over the activities on the online communities (Laroche et al., 2013) and the causal relationship of online community commitment is still understudied (Barreda et al., 2015).

In addition to the need for developing a holistic view of online community commitment, literature also highlights the need for studying the role of advertising in social media (Mir, 2012). Moreover, marketers in the maternal and baby care industry have also realized the potential power of social media and have put great efforts on advertising products and services through numerous social media platforms. Yet, to which level customers accept these advertisements and how much the advertising influences customers' behavioural intentions is still not clear, generating an important avenue for research (Mir, 2012; Zeng et al., 2009).

To summarize, there had been a gap in understanding the holistic view of online community commitment in relation to its antecedents and consequences in the context of maternal and baby care industry. Furthermore, there is also a limited understanding towards the moderating role of advertising in the context of maternal and baby care related online communities.

1.3   Research Questions and Objectives

As discussed in Sections 1.1 and 1.2, this study aims to contribute to the literatures on Information System and consumer behaviour; specifically in determining the antecedents of member's online community commitment and how it affect the behavioural intentions of online community members. Furthermore, this study empirically examines the moderating effect of advertising on member's online community commitment and their behavioural intentions. Accordingly, this study addresses to answer the following research questions and objectives.

1.3.1   Research Questions

i.   What are the antecedents of member's online community commitment in the maternal and baby care related online communities in China?

    a.   What are the effects of 'personal influences' on member's online community commitment within maternal and baby care related online communities in China?

    b.   What are the effects of 'social influences' on member's online community commitment within maternal and baby care related online communities in China?

    c.   What are the effects of 'online community characteristics' on member's online community commitment within maternal and baby care related online communities in China?

ii. What are the effects of member's online community commitment on their behavioural intentions?

iii. Does advertising moderate the effects of online community commitment on behavioural intentions?

1.3.2   Research Objectives

In order to answer the above three research questions of this study, the main objectives of this study are listed in the following:

i.   To identify the antecedents of member's online community commitment in the maternal and baby care related online communities in China;

ii.   To investigate the effects of 'personal influences' on member's online community commitment;

iii. To investigate the effects of 'social influences' on member's online community commitment;

iv.   To investigate the effects of 'online community characteristics' on member's online community commitment;

v.   To examine the effects of member's online community commitment on their behavioural intentions;

vi.   To examine the moderating effect of advertising on online community commitment and behavioural intentions.

1.4   Research Scope

As discussed by Global Digital Statistics (2014), around 2.5 billion people use internet in the world. Until January 2014, China had 618 million internet users, and among them, 86.2% had registered in different online social networks (CNNIC, 2015). This showed that Chinese internet users displayed a higher rate of adoption of the virtual world (Zhou, 2011).According to China Internet Information Centre's Annual Report in 2014, 93 per cent of the "Millennial Generation" (those born after 1982, who have come of age in a time of dependence upon technology) communicated via online channels, and nearly half of the internet users used online communities to communicate with others. These "digital natives" are skilled to access to information and seek for help through cyberspaces. Besides, AC Nielsen Company (2014) in UBM conference estimated that the population born between

1985 and 1995 would become the mainstream consumer group in China, and would contribute to 35% of the consumer market in 2020.

The current study focuses on the maternal and baby care related online communities in China. Due to the unique characteristics of online communities and its users, the maternal and baby care related online communities managed to attract a large number of technology-dependent members in China, which brought a huge market segment for organizations (BabyChina, 2013). According to UBM-China (2014), China has become the second largest consumption country of maternal and baby care products in the world. In 2013, the maternal and baby care market researched 86.03 billion, which accounted for 6.8 per cent of the total retail sales in China; and it is estimated that in 2017, the market share would reach 247.2 billion, while the compound annual growth rate would reach 30 per cent. The industry is expected to boom even further along with the new rules of family planning policy (universal two-child policy).

This study aims to understand the antecedents of commitment among online community members and the effects on members' behavioural intentions. Therefore, the research scope of this study are all the members of online communities related to the maternal and baby care industry in China; and the unit of analysis in this study had been individuals, namely members of the maternal and baby care industry related online communities in China.

1.5   Significance of Study

The main research objective is to build up and empirically evaluate a holistic model of antecedents of member's online community commitment and its effect on behavioural intentions in China, as well as examine the moderating role of advertising on online community commitment and member's behavioural intentions. The findings of this study are expected to provide important theoretical and practical contributions in several ways.

i. First, the present study is expected to contribute to the expanding knowledge on online information communication and its influence upon online consumer behavioural responses. Moreover, the prior literature has examined several key factors that have motivated people to commit to online communities, such as social influences (Park and Cho, 2012; Laroche et al., 2012; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001) and online community characteristics (Jang et al., 2008; Lee and Kim, 2005). However, some other factors are still under explored, such as prior experience, and entertainment value (Park and Cho, 2012; Cheung and Lee, 2009; Budiman, 2008). Therefore, this study includes these new elements as the antecedents of online community commitment. Therefore, the current work are expected to contribute to the research of antecedents of online community commitment, and the findings obtains from this study can provide conceptual assistance for future studies.

ii. Second, in relation to marketing, commitment is the least investigated mediator (Verma et al., 2015). Researchers have explored either the antecedents and online community commitment, or consequences and online community commitment in isolation. The present study empirically provides a holistic research model, which integrates personal influences, social influences, and community characteristics as the antecedents of online community commitment in China. Additionally, this study incorporates three consequences of online community commitment, including purchase intention, loyalty, and eWOM (Verma et al., 2015). Hence, successful validation of the research model might provide significant theoretical contribution for the body of knowledge and useful guidance for future research.

iii. Third, based on the prior literature (Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995), the current study adopts advertising as a moderating factor in order to examine its moderating influence on the relationship between online community commitment and behavioural intentions. The results of the current work are expected to encourage further investigation of advertising in social media platforms.

This study is also expected to provide some useful insights into e-marketing in online communities in the context of China:

i. First, the literature from this study provides information concerning marketing practitioners, especially the market size of the maternal and baby care industry and the current competitive situation. It further depicts the latest trends and the new opportunities developed in this industry, as well as the key to succeed in the industry.

ii. Second, the first part of the research model provides e-marketing and advertising managers with guidelines of the core factors that might attract their potential customers to stay in and commit to the online communities. These could be applied in generating relationships between management strategies, applying online advertising and promoting positive eWOM communication in online communities, as well as encouraging budget planning.

iii. Third, by understanding why consumers commit to online communities and how their commitment affects their behavioural intentions, marketing managers should be able to anticipate customer response to online information, as well as to develop strategies on how to involve or respond to such online communication and interaction. These might further help in implanting their businesses firmly in social interaction in order to maintain and improve their businesses towards success.

1.6   Operational Definitions

Trust is the willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence (Dwyer and LaGace, 1986; Moorman et al., 1992; Morgan and Hunt, 1994). For this study, in the context of an online community, trust can be viewed as member's willingness to agree with or believe in other members' opinions or actions (Hsu et al., 2011; Ridings et al., 2002).

Prior experiences are private events that occur in response to some stimulation and occur as a result of encountering, undergoing, or living through situations (Hsu and Tsou, 2011). In this study, prior experiences refer to members' perceptions and/or attitudes towards the information and knowledge they gained from the other

community members, and the trustworthy levels of the communities they feel (Ling et al., 2010).

Entertainment value: includes physiological, cognitive and affective components; and researchers usually positively terms it as playfulness, enjoyment and even delight (Bosshart and Macconi 1998; Sheng and Teo, 2012). Entertainment value in online community refers to the extent to which member's participation and sharing knowledge in online community are perceived to be personally enjoyable, fun, and relaxing (Chiu et al., 2010).

Shared consciousness of kind: is the shared intrinsic connection felt among community members (Gusfield, 1978). Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) explained that there is one type of strong connection between online community members, which made them feel "they sort of know each other" even if they have never met, which is called shared consciousness of kind.

Shared rituals and traditions: is also known as shared culture. Members share common values, history, and culture, which enhance the members' emotional ties with a community. Shared rituals and traditions can be passed on through members and they enhance psychological attachment by forming a unique culture and conduct of behaviours (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). In this study, shared rituals and traditions refers to members in Chinese maternal and baby care related online communities share common values and unique culture, which enhance the members' emotional ties with an online community.

Moral responsibility: refers to the sense that each members sustains the moral duty or obligation for the survival of the belonged community and the well-being of individual members (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). In this study, moral responsibility refers to the sense that each member sustains the moral duty or obligation for the survival of the maternal and baby care related online community and the well-being of individual members.

Quality of information: accurate, opportune, and useful information provided through the community (Jang et al., 2008). In this study, it means the accurate,

useful and professional information and knowledge provided by the maternal and baby care related online communities and their members.

Quality of system: speedy, functional convenience and well-organized structure of information in the community, with help of menu hierarchy and layout (Jang et al., 2008). In this study, it means the speed, functional convenience provided by the maternal and baby care related online communities.

Interactivity: degree of information exchange among community members and between community members and the host of the community (Jang et al., 2008). In this study, interactivity refers to the information exchange among the online community members and the willingness of helping each other amongst the members.

Reward for activities: degree of monetary or psychological reward for proactive members in the community (Jang et al., 2008). In this study, it refers to the monetary or psychological reward for the members by the maternal and baby care related online communities.

Online community commitment: degree of strong and positive feelings among members towards the online community (Wang et al., 2011) such as the sense of belonging to the online communities and hoping the long-term success and development of the online community.

Online advertising: advertising is a paid non-personal form of presentation in order to promote a product or an idea sponsored by an identified sponsorthrough various Medias in order to spread the message to the targeted audiences (Mir, 2012). In this study, online advertising refers to the advertising presented through various social media platforms on the Internet.

Positive eWOM intention: is the subjective likelihood of posting any positive statement about a brand or a product suggested by the online community or the other online community members (Hur et al., 2011).

Purchase intention: a plan to purchase a particular good or service through the online community in the future (Hur et al., 2011).

Loyalty: according to Kotler and Keller (2012), loyalty is a feeling of attachment to a certain set of brands and companies. In regarding to this study, loyalty is a feeling of attachment to the products or services recommended by a certain online community (Shang et al., 2006).

1.7 Structure of Thesis

This study is designed in five chapters: Chapter 1 (Introduction), Chapter 2 (Literature Review), Chapter 3 (Research Methodology), Chapter 4 (Findings and Analyses), and Chapter 5 (Discussion and Implications).

Chapter one explicates research background, problem statement, research questions and objectives, research scope, methodology and expected contributions, as well as structure of the study. Chapter two first introduces the theoretical background of this study. Then, the literature on primary constructs used in this dissertation, the current maternal and baby care industry in China, as well as its adoption of online communities are discussed. In the end, this chapter builds a research model on the basis of theories and related literature, and explicates hypotheses development. In chapter three, research paradigm, research methodology, and research design are discussed first. Then, it explains the data collection technique, such as population, online survey, sampling, etc. Next, instrument development, including questionnaire design, translation process, pre-test, and pilot study are discussed in detail. The last section introduces the reliability analysis and the method employed for data analysis. Chapter four starts with applying Smart PLS 2.0 M2 to test both measurement and structural model. Then, observations are made from the results of the structural model analysis. In the end, based on the results of PLS analysis, this study gives detailed answers for all the research questions and discusses all the research hypotheses. The last chapter highlights the key findings, contributions and limitations, and the theoretical and practical contributions of this research.

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