A STUDY ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FOOD COMMUNITY REVIEW READERSHIP AND PURCHASING BEHAVIOR

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Abstract— Recently, Internet popularity changed people's life, and the advancement of technology let the speed of delivering messages improve. Many Internet community platform was born, that provide a new channel of communication for the people. In Taiwan, more than 60% of internet users are inclined to browse for consumer information and food critics. When planning on purchasing goods or visiting a restaurant, consumers are accustomed to first search for information and consumer reviews before making a decision. Therefore, consumers searching information about virtual members' discussions and recommendations for the product, in order to know the dining experience of others, as a reference to its own purchasing decisions. However, prior research seldom explored that consumers read the article of food community, combining with social presence(SP) and persuasion knowledge model(PKM) impact on the subsequent behavior of consumers. When consumers read the comment of food community, they will perceive community word-of-mouth(WOM) and community SP, and began to doubt the authenticity of the articles when they perceive community commercialization. These are important issues that to study consumers' response in PKM, influence of those costumers to trust and identity of food community as parametric variable and purchase behavior of consumers. This study has adapted the model of social identity theory. Discuss consumer's trust and identity on food community affect the relationship in purchasing behavior after consumers read virtual member's comment. When consumers' trust and identity of food community are affected by WOM, SP and PKM; when consumers have trust and identity of food community, at the same time, and generate a positive impact on consumer purchasing behavior. Therefore, in this study, we analyzed the mediation impact about WOM, SP, and PKM.

Keywords— Word of Mouth, Social Presence, Persuasion Knowledge Model, Customer-Community Identification.

I. INTRODUCTION

Along with the emergence of the Internet, people began changing their ways of life and adopted the habit of going online. The Internet is an important tool used by consumers to search for information on products and services [1]; and by using it, their decisions will be influenced [2]. Before making a purchase, in addition to using the Internet to find relevant information, consumers also take into consideration online posts and reviews [3]. In 2014, a Market Intelligence & Consulting Institute (MIC) survey showed that up to 81% of consumers are accustomed to using the internet to search for "word of mouth" reviews before making a purchase. In this respect, consumers have a higher level of trust in the information shared by Internet users and bloggers [4]. Since the Internet is such a rapid media for transmitting information, the use of internet platforms to share product information or consumer reviews is gradually becoming an important topic for researchers investigating Internet behavior [5]. Additionally, survey results indicate that more than 60% of consumers are in the habit of searching online communities for information related to food and cuisine. This indicates that consumers' needs and levels of transmission with respect to this type of information is relatively high. In recent years, many online communities focused on "food" have also emerged, such as iPeen and OpenRice. Food communities operate with a focus on food and cuisine, providing a platform for sharing information on personal experiences with food lovers. The non-business or media affiliated communities operate using a third-party sharing model as a main axis, and not only serve as channels for members to communicate and exchange information with one another, but are also important tools for community members to create relationships.

Food communities have seen rapid development; however, in order to succeed they must draw on frequent human interaction [6]. Reference [7] recognized from the perspective of system success, points out that communities must rely on the continuous usage by visitors. Therefore, community operators must build a complete site that will attract visitations from internet users so that they can continue to operate Reference [8] recognized. In food communities, the willingness of community members to share food information is largely motivated by the factor of "trust"; thus, trust is a key factor in human interaction Reference [9] recognized. Trust will also give members a greater sense of "identity" towards the community, which is another key factor [10]. Since online communities operate in a virtual environment, community operators can use the medium to instill a high degree of social presence and allow users to feel as though the community is an environment that is inviting and socially supportive. If the community can create an environment that feels real, it will allow the community members to have feelings of trust [11].

Restaurant operators have begun focusing on consumer habits of gathering information prior to

making purchases, and the way in which they pay attention to the user reviews [4]. This has caused restaurant operators to emphasize Internet marketing. Occasionally operators will actively invite influential internet celebrities or bloggers to come experience a meal at their establishments, hoping that through their experiences and reviews, more customers will come in and they will be able to expand their restaurants' reputations. Also, some businesses will use community platforms to exaggerate the experiences of customers and how delicious the food is, integrating professional recommendations in an attempt to increase the positive impact that the readers get; however, in reality, undercover commercials are a risk of product promotion [12]. Nevertheless, not all consumers accept the information provided on community platforms. According to the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM), when community members read food reviews, if they perceive that information has been planted, it will activate their Persuasion Knowledge and they will be suspicious about the information [13]. When readers doubt the motives of a review, using their Persuasion Knowledge they will assume that an attempt is being made to persuade them. Not only will this have a negative influence on consumers, but it will also reduce the authenticity of the medium being used for persuading [14]. This, in turn, will have a negative impact on consumers' evaluations of the community's brand [15]. And consumers' evaluations of the food community's brand will impact their attitudes towards that brand. Therefore, the strength or weakness of the relationship between the consumer and the community depends on the degree to which the consumer identifies with the community [16] [17]. This can also help maintain the relationship between the community and the consumer [18]. Reference [19] proposed the Customer-Company identification concept; accordingly, when customers identify with the information posted by a food community, the degree to which they identify with that community will increase. Hence, if consumers identify with the information posted by a food community, this signifies that the community's information has more credibility. In the virtual environment of the Internet, consumers sense of trust towards community members and operators will directly impact the decisions of the site users to take part in purchasing behavior [20]. When consumers have greater trust in restaurant reviews by food communities, their "purchase intention" will increase [21]. When consumers identify with a community, based on the Customer-Company identification concept, this identification with the community will cause the consumer to be more willing to spend money at a restaurant [22].

Therefore, after compiling relevant literature, this study explores the way in which word of mouth, social presence, and Persuasion Knowledge impact consumers purchase intention with respect to food community trust and identity, and proposes a comprehensive model on the relationship between food community review readerships and purchasing behavior

II. LITERATURE REVIEW & PROPOSITION DEVELOPMENT

2.1. Word of Mouth (WOM)

Reference [23] defined Word of Mouth (WOM) as an "oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, concerning a brand, product, or a service." Reference [24] also believes that WOM transmissions are "informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods or services and/or their sellers." These are produced as a result of the exchange of "ephemeral oral or spoken messages between a contiguous source and a recipient who communicate directly in real life" [25]. However, the internet is also channel of WOM transmissions [26], as it allows consumers to share experiences and opinions about using products or services with other consumers [27]. Here, virtual communities communicate via a non-face-to-face manner of communication [28]. From the perspective of marketing, WOM is a marketing communication tool [29]. Reference [30] separated WOM communications into Positive WOM and Negative WOM categories. Positive WOM is where consumers share positive evaluations of the product or services after making a purchase [31]; while Negative WOM is where the consumers share experiences of dissatisfaction towards the goods or services after making purchases [30].

2.2. Trust of Community

Reference [32] define "trust" as existing "when one party has confidence in an exchange partner's reliability and integrity". Trust is also understood as the "extent to which a person is confident in and willing to act on the basis of, the words, actions and decisions of another" [33]. At the current extent of internet development, the topic of trust has gained prominence [34]; while among virtual community members, trust plays a key role with respect to whether or not to share information with others [35] [36]. Furthermore, whether or not a consumer identifies with and accepts a community will depend on the judgment the community's trust ability [9]. When consumers lack trust towards a community, they will be less willing to provide or exchange information with that community [36]. Therefore trust is one of the keys of successful community operations [37]. Reference [38] pointed out that trust is transmitted to others via informal channels when people are interacting. WOM often is regarded as an

informal communication channel for transmitting information on consumer experiences [39].

An information source's trustworthiness depends on the WOM transmitter's ability to provide objective source information, and this will influence the willingness of the receiver to accept the information [40] When website information sources have "expertise" and "trustworthiness", and the receivers identify with the source's professionalism, the information source will have a persuasive WOM effect [41]. When the consumer perceives that an information source has a high level of reliability, it will have a significant positive effect on the level of trust they have towards the WOM review [42]. Therefore, when the Positive WOM received by the consumer is greater, they will have a greater level of trust towards the medium of transmission [43]. Based on the literature mentioned above, this study submits **Proposition 1**:

***P_1*: When consumers recognize that the writer of a food article has positive WOM, the consumer will develop trust towards the food community.**

2.3 Consumer-Community Identification **(CC identification)**

Moreover, voice is motivated by individuals' desires to influence the status they receive from others [42].Based on Social Identity Theory [44] [45], individuals in a social environment will use "self-categorization" to place themselves and others into different groups, and will seek out organizations or groups which they personally identify with [46]. When individuals' levels of identification towards a certain group are elevated, they will engage in behavior favorable towards that group. Furthermore, they will make decisions about the level of their individual performance based on the behavior of members of that group [47]. [19] proposed the concept of Consumer-Company Identification (C-C Identification), arguing that when consumers identify with a company, they will establish a relationship of strong loyalty with that company, and when a company helps consumers satisfy their self-defined needs, the consumers will be attracted to the company and will experience a sense of belonging. Ultimately, they will voluntarily engage in behavior beneficial to the company. Past researchers of C-C Identification have largely explored the relationship of identification between real-world consumers and companies [48] [49]. However, this study will apply the concept to virtual-world food communities, with the community users as the C-C Identification model's "customers" and the community as the "company". This study will take advantage of these concepts to explore the identification relationship that consumers have with communities. Therefore, with respect to the study results, Reference [50] pointed out that when a consumer perceives that the WOM reputation of a food article author is greater, the level of identification with the brand will also be greater. Based on the literature described above, this study submits **Proposition 2:**

***P_2*: When consumers perceive that an article by a food writer has positive WOM, they will have higher levels of C-C Identification towards the food community.**

2.4 Social Presence (SP)

Reference [51] put forward the concept of Social Presence (SP) which is the level that a person feels another person's real existence as a result of media transmissions; such as in situations where using social media feels like communicating with someone face-to-face, and creates the experience of participation [52]. Individuals will make judgments based on clues they receive throughout the course of communication which will produce different levels of SP [53]. According to a method proposed by [54], food communities can use moving content and personable images to not only elevate users' community SP, but also to serve as an important factor connected to the trust relationship they have towards the community. Past researchers have argued that by increasing the perception of SP, the trust the consumer has towards a website will increase; as will their willingness to make a purchase [55]. Therefore, high levels of SP will allow people to feel as though the medium is more warm and personal [11]. It is also a medium of informative communication [56] and allows people to interact with one another [57]. However, in environments where the level of social presence is low, information will be more obscure which will result in distrust [54]. SP reduces the social distance between consumers and vendors [57], and when social distance is reduced, trust will increase [58]. That is, when website operations produce high-level SP environments, community members perceive that social distances have been reduced, and they feel that the website is more worthy of trust [59]. Reference [60] argue that if communities have benign SP attributes, this will help users to develop greater feelings of identification with the communities. According to the above mentioned literature this study submits **Proposition 3** and **Proposition 4**:

***P_3*: When consumers have perceptions of a strong SP on a food community website, they will develop greater levels of trust towards that food community.**

***P_4*: When consumers have perceptions of a strong SP on a food community website, they will develop greater levels of C-C Identification towards that food community.**

2.5 Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM)

Reference [61] put forth the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM), which states that if consumers perceive that the information they are being subjected to is intended to persuade them of something, it will invoke their knowledge of persuasion and they will become skeptical of the information that they are receiving. When a consumer becomes skeptical it willaffectthe information's persuasiveness[13]. When the consumers' persuasion knowledge (PK) is evoked, they will doubt the truthfulness of the information and will infer that the other party is being manipulative, therefore negatively effecting the persuasion results [14][62]. Reference [63] have demonstrated that PK can indeed be used to judge the authenticity of information. When consumers feel that the intent to persuade is strong, their PK will be more elevated resulting in more negative attitudes towards the information. Reference [64] argues that consumers who have lower PK due to lower cognitive abilities are less sensitive towards the intention to persuade, and vice versa. According to research results from Reference [65], consumers who have higher levels of PK have less trust towards articles. However, persuasion knowledge will not only impact consumers' attitudes towards products, but will also impact their attitudes toward the mediums of transmission. Thus, even if the product is of excellent quality, consumers with high levels of consumer persuasion knowledge will still not trust the content of the food reviews [66]. When consumers are aware that the information is meant to persuade them, they will pay less attention to the information and become detached from the idea of investing it; rather, they will re-evaluate the persuasion processes and information [67].

Prior research argues that information can induce cognitive and emotional reactions in consumers, which allow them to handle the information on a deeper level and form good attitudes towards it [68]. However, not all research agree that information only has positive results, as some have pointed out that while they are attracting consumers' attention, they will also elevate contrarian thinking towards the info[69] [70], and their levels of doubt may rise [71]. As is the case, the persuasive results of advertisements are reduced, which leads to consumers having lower levels of trust towards food community articles and lower levels of identification towards food review article communities. Therefore, based on the above mentioned literature, this study submits **Proposition 5** and **Proposition 6**:

***P_5*: When consumers PK is invoked, Trust levels towards food community will decrease.**

***P_6*: When consumers PK is invoked, C-C Identification levels towards food community will decrease.**

2.6 Purchase intention (PI)

Purchase intention is the probability that a customer will buy a certain product or service [72]. Reference [73] contend that "the best single predictor of an individual's behavior will be a measure of his intention to perform that behavior". It represents what purchase intention is an indicator of whether consumers would purchase a certain product or service over others. Reference [74] emphasized purchase intention as a judgment of customer about purchasing a product, taking into account the current situation and possible circumstances. Prior researches examined that purchase intention is a vital predictor of actual purchase behavior [75] [76].

Trust positively influences consumers purchase intention [77], [78]. Reference [79], [4] and [80] studies also supported the positive relationship between trust and online purchase intentions.

Reference[19]contend that customers will build the strong relationship with the company when they have consumer-community Identification. When customers identified with company, they will behave positively. Customers will continuously conduct activities in the original company, such as re-use or purchase products and services. Based on the literature described above, this study submits **Proposition 7** and **Proposition 8**:

***P_7*: When consumers have higher levels of trust towards the food community, their purchase intention will be higher.**

***P_8*: When consumers have higher levels of C-C Identification towards the food community, their purchase intention will be higher.**

2.7 The conceptual model of this study

The conceptual model of this study is illustrated in Fig. 1.

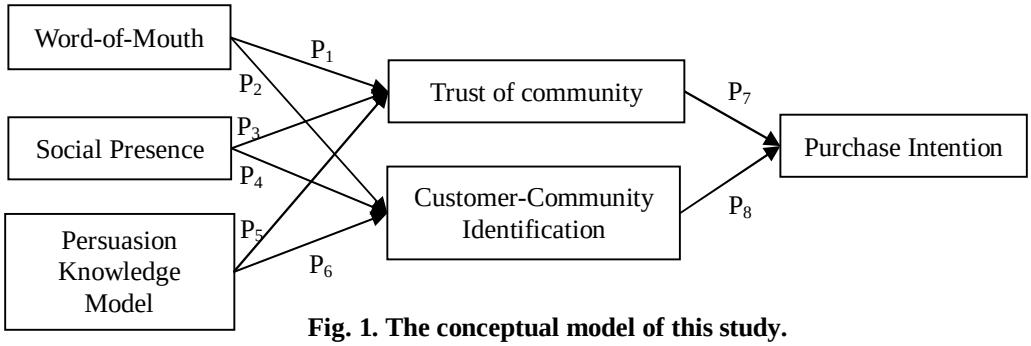


Fig. 1. The conceptual model of this study.

CONCLUSIONS

This research used PKM theory as a foundation with customers' trust and C-C identification towards food community as an intermediary factor to explore the relationship they share with the customers' purchase intention towards food community use. Consequently, food community should consider the customers' (food community readers) needs and provide information useful to the customer. Furthermore, food community should focus on verity of someone's comments. When the customer's PKM is activated, his or her trust towards the cuisine food community will decrease. Therefore, the food writer should maintain an objective and neutral position when writing food community articles, without exaggerating to avoid making customers suspicious and increasing their distrust andreducing their sense of identification, thus impacting the food community user's purchase intention. In the future, this study will further develop a framework of WOM, PS, PKM impact PI with trust and C-C identification, and hope to mature the relationship of those constructs and be more completely.

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