

The Influence of Motivation to Use Social Media and Source Credibility on Customer Equity in Nature Republic Brands Mediated by Parasocial Relationships

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ABSTRACT

The widespread use of social media in recent years has provided opportunities for business making by increasing customer equity through the use of media social content with the concept of parasocial relationships. This study aims to describe how motivation to use social media and source credibility affects customer equity through parasocial relationship mediation. The survey included 142 social media users in Indonesia who are also customers of the Nature Republic brand. Data analysis employed SEM analysis using the evaluation of the PLS model through the SmartPLS program. The results showed that source credibility had a significant positive effect on parasocial relationships while motivation to use social media did not affect it. In addition, they show that motivation to use social media had a direct effect on customer equity without parasocial relationship mediation. However, source credibility did not have a direct effect on customer equity. It would affect customer equity if they used parasocial relationship mediation. They also show positive and significant results regarding the direct influence of parasocial relationships on customer equity. Considering that there has been little research on the effect of parasocial relationships on customer equity in social media, the research results will be beneficial for companies to increase customer equity through social media by utilizing parasocial relationships that may arise between media users and media characters.

Keywords: Customer Equity, Motivation to Use Social Media, Parasocial Relationship, Source Credibility.

1. INTRODUCTION

The increasingly quick development of the internet in the current digital era makes social media platforms familiar to the public. The daily increasing use of social media causes the role of the media to expand rapidly. For this, companies respond to it to extensively connect and engage their customers through social media [1]. Competition in business is getting tougher along with the rapid development of digital information technology, including the use of social media as a marketing tool [2]. Business people will be carrying out digital transformation into their marketing development of changes in people's patterns and lifestyles that increasingly rely on social media through smartphones [3]. Integrating customers' activities through social media encourages companies to engage customers in collaborative conversations and increase customer equity

[3,4]. Customer equity is the monetary or non-monetary value that customers invest in a company's products or services while keeping a relationship with the brand [6]. Customer equity can also be said to be a long-term asset with consumers, based on good relationships that have been built and lasted for a long time [7]. The concept of customer equity has picked up consideration for the last few decades as marketing activities have moved to customer-centered relationships to build long-term relationships that will eventually increase profits through customer equity [8]. It plays an important role in deciding the viability of a company and it is recognized as a company's core strategic asset [9].

Marketing activities through social media can strengthen the emotion of intimacy that customers associate with a particular brand, for example by enabling customers to empathize with the celebrity endorsed by

that brand on social media [10]. Celebrities are recognized by marketers as a figure very influential on social media advertising [11]. Due to the effectiveness of social media as a marketing tool using celebrity media, it is therefore important to consider an appropriate way to harness the power of celebrity parasocial relationships [1]. The parasocial relationship is defined as a unilateral association of psychological relationships between media users and media characters [12]. It emerges when individuals (media users) are repeatedly exposed to media personas (media characters) and they build a sense of intimacy, friendship, and identification with media characters or celebrities [13]. It builds social media users, due to the increasing use of the media [14].

The previous studies investigate the parasocial relationship tended to affect customer equity, comprising three components: (1) value equity, (2) brand equity, (3) and relationship equity. The research result shows that it had a positive effect on customer equity, including three components: value equity, brand equity, and relationship equity [1,15].

The use of celebrity parasocial relationships for social media cannot be separated from the motivation of media users in using the media. To increase customer equity by using them for social media, companies can identify what motivations can encourage media users to use social media. They can encourage media users to access social media by facilitating parasocial relationships that arise between media users and celebrities they endorse or they make as a brand ambassador through product postings that show celebrity collaborations with their product brands. This study used the Nature Republic brand as the object of research. Nature Republic is a beauty product brand from South Korea that sells various beauty product lines such as skincare, make-up, body care, and hair care. In evoking customer motivation to use social media, it utilizes postings of products in collaboration with Nature Republic's brand ambassador, NCT 127. The previous studies show the positive influence of motivation to use social media on parasocial relationships [1,16].

In selecting celebrities as brand ambassadors, the source credibility factor needs considering. If the brand ambassador has good source credibility, this will bring a positive brand image. The source credibility construct consists of three components, consisting of expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness [17].

Referring to the research results, parasocial relationships can provide benefits for companies. In the context of social media, the parasocial relationships using celebrity media show a positive influence on customer equity which comprises three components, namely value equity, brand equity, and relationship equity [1,15]. In utilizing them through social media using celebrity media to increase customer equity, companies need to pay attention to the customer's motivation to use social media and source credibility from celebrities endorsed. This

study aims to analyze the effect of motivation to use social media and source credibility on customer equity comprising three components, namely value equity, brand equity, and relationship equity in the Nature Republic brand, mediated by parasocial relationships focusing on them appearing in social media platforms.

There has been less research on the effect of parasocial relationships on customer equity in social media. The present research results will be useful for marketing practitioners to take advantage of the opportunities that arise from parasocial relationships to celebrity media to increase customer equity.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The relationship between consumers and celebrities through social media can be clarified through the concept of a parasocial relationship [18]. It is defined as a unilateral association of psychological relationships between media users and media characters [12]. It builds a sense of intimacy between media users and media characters that reflect real social relationships [19]. The use of social media and parasocial relationships between consumers and celebrities has a positive relationship tendency. The psychological experience of media users when meeting celebrities online through social media will further motivate an individual to use social media and it will determine to what extent he or she tends to empathize with celebrities [16].

An individual has various motives for using social media such as for entertainment, information exploration, and relationship building. These strengthen the parasocial relationship built with the media character [1]. The research results show that the motivation to use social media had a positive effect on parasocial relationships [1,16]. Thus, the following hypothesis can be formulated as follows.

H1: Motivation to use social media has a positive effect on parasocial relationships

source credibility is a term that implies positive characteristics that influence the acceptance of a message recipient [17]. When media users perceive the media characters or celebrities they like as having a strong source of credibility, they will tend to build a positive parasocial relationship with the media characters or celebrities [20].

Endorsement activities on celebrities who are considered to have good credibility will lead to profitable relationships such as creating parasocial relationship commitments that will benefit the endorsed brand [1]. The source credibility construct consists of three components, namely expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness [17]. The previous research result shows that source credibility has a positive influence on

parasocial relationships [1]. Thus, the following hypothesis can be formulated as follows:

H2: Source credibility has a positive effect on parasocial relationships

Customer equity is the monetary or non-monetary value that customers invest in a company's products or services while keeping maintaining a relationship with the brand [6]. It has three components, namely value equity, brand equity, and relationship equity [1,15]. Value equity can be defined as the customer's objective appraisal of the usefulness of a brand based on customer perceptions [21]. By comparing the rewards customers get with the effort they have expended in obtaining the product or service, they can identify value [22]. Brand equity is defined as a customer's subjective and intangible evaluation of a brand beyond the objectively perceived value with three main levels of brand equity: brand awareness, attitude towards the brand, and corporate ethics [21]. A strong, unique, and desirable brand according to customer ratings will indicate that the brand has high brand equity [23]. Nevertheless, the propensity of customers to stay to the brand beyond the customer's objective and subjective appraisal of the brand can be referred to as relationship equity [21].

The consumer's relationship with the brand is important to the consumer's brand evaluation [24]. Parasocial relationships play an important role in brand evaluation from consumers, including customer equity components: value equity, brand equity, and relationship equity [1]. In line with this explanation, the previous research results found that parasocial relationships positively affect customer equity which comprises three components, namely value equity, brand equity, and relationship equity [1,15]. Thus, the following hypothesis can be formulated as follows:

H3: Parasocial relationship has a positive effect on customer equity

The increasingly widespread use of social media in today's digital era encourages marketers to understand how to improve customer relationships through social media platforms. They can design content on social media that can drive customer equity. In the previous research, it was stated that marketing practitioners can fulfill customer motivation in terms of using social media to improve parasocial relationships which will also increase customer equity [1]. Thus, the following hypothesis can be formulated as follows:

H4: Motivation to use social media has a positive effect on customer equity

Source credibility is one thing that needs to be considered in choosing a brand ambassador for a brand. Customers who tend to build a parasocial relationship with media characters or celebrities who have high source credibility will feel more connected to the

celebrity-endorsed brand. This can increase the customer equity of the brand in question which consists of brand equity, value equity, and relationship equity [1]. Thus, the following hypothesis can be formulated as follows:

H5: Source credibility has a positive effect on customer equity

The psychological experience of media users when meeting celebrities online through social media will further motivate an individual to use social media. This will determine to what extent how they tend to empathize with celebrities through parasocial relationships [16]. The parasocial relationship between media users and media characters or celebrities plays an important role in brand evaluation from consumers, including customer equity components: value equity, brand equity, and relationship equity [1]. The previous research shows that motivation to use social media has a positive effect on a parasocial relationship. It positively affects customer equity [1]. Thus, the following hypothesis can be formulated below:

H6: Parasocial relationships mediate the effect of motivation to use social media on customer equity

When media users perceive the media characters or celebrities they like as having a strong source of credibility, media users will tend to build positive parasocial relationships with the media characters or celebrities [20]. Endorsement activities of celebrities considered to have strong credibility will lead to profitable relationships such as building parasocial relationship commitments that will be beneficial for the endorsed brand [1]. Social media users and customers who tend to build parasocial relationships with media characters or celebrities who have high source credibility will feel more connected to the celebrity-endorsed brand. It can increase the customer equity of the brand in question which comprises three components of brand equity, value equity, and relationship equity [1]. The previous research shows that source credibility had a positive effect on parasocial relationships and they positively affected customer equity [1]. Thus, the following hypothesis can be formulated below:

H7: Parasocial relationships mediate the effect of source credibility on customer equity

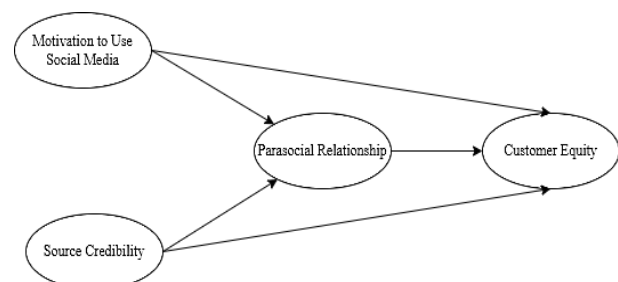


Figure 1. Research model

3. RESEARCH METHOD

3.1. Sample and Data Collection

Data was collected through the distribution of online questionnaires. The sampling technique used purposive sampling, part of a non-probability sampling technique. By employing the technique, questionnaires were distributed to respondents who met the criteria, namely social media users in Indonesia, purchased Nature Republic products over the past year, knew about the collaboration between the Nature Republic and NCT 127, and saw the collaboration posts on social media. The study involved 142 respondents who met the criteria and processed the data. The analysis of the characteristics of the respondents is shown in **Table 1** below:

Table 1. Analysis of respondent characteristics

| Measure | Items | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Gender | Female | 138 | 97.2 |
| | Male | 4 | 2.8 |
| Age | < 20 | 38 | 26.8 |
| | 20 – 25 | 89 | 62.7 |
| | 26 – 30 | 14 | 9.8 |
| | 31 – 35 | 1 | 0.7 |
| Job | Student | 106 | 74.7 |
| | Private sector employee | 27 | 19 |
| | Entrepreneur | 6 | 4.2 |
| | Others | 3 | 2.1 |
| Domicile | Jabodetabek & Jawa Barat | 74 | 52.1 |
| | Jawa Tengah | 16 | 11.3 |
| | Jawa Timur | 25 | 17.6 |
| | Bali | 2 | 1.4 |
| | NTT-NTB | 1 | 0.7 |
| | Sumatra | 14 | 9.9 |
| | Kalimantan | 3 | 2.1 |
| | Sulawesi | 7 | 4.9 |
| | Maluku | 0 | 0 |
| Are you a fan of NCT 127? | Yes | 118 | 83 |
| | No | 24 | 17 |

Source: Primary data (2021)

3.2. Measurement

A total of 4 variables (motivation to use social media, source credibility, parasocial relationships, and customer equity) were used and each variable item was measured using a 5-point Likert scale. The question items for each variable were modified from various previous research instruments [1,15,7]. There are three indicators to measure motivation to use social media, namely information exploration, entertainment, and relationship building. To measure source credibility, however, three indicators were used, namely attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness. Parasocial relationships were measured using indicators of proximity, similarity, and

attraction. Nevertheless, customer equity is measured using indicators of value equity, brand equity, and relationship equity. The data from the respondents were then processed using SEM analysis through the evaluation of the PLS model with the SmartPLS program.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Results

4.1.1. Outer model evaluation

Table 2 shows the value of the outer loading of each indicator. If processing data with outer loading as shown in **Table 2**, during the validity test there were invalid variables, namely motivation to use social media and customer equity. Therefore, the researchers removed indicators from the smallest outer loading on the two variables to the valid variables. Three indicators of the motivation to use social media (X1.3, X1.4, and X1.5) and 2 indicators of customer equity (Y3 and Y4) were removed. Furthermore, data processing used indicators after the process of removing those five indicators.

Table 2. Outer loading

| Variable | Indicators | Outer loading |
|--------------------------------|------------|---------------|
| Motivation to Use Social Media | X1.1 | 0.666 |
| | X1.2 | 0.644 |
| | X1.3 | 0.515 |
| | X1.4 | 0.583 |
| | X1.5 | 0.560 |
| | X1.6 | 0.661 |
| Source Credibility | X2.1 | 0.755 |
| | X2.2 | 0.771 |
| | X2.3 | 0.836 |
| | X2.4 | 0.828 |
| | X2.5 | 0.735 |
| | X2.6 | 0.847 |
| Parasocial Relationship | Z1 | 0.740 |
| | Z2 | 0.777 |
| | Z3 | 0.833 |
| | Z4 | 0.827 |
| | Z5 | 0.847 |
| | Z6 | 0.760 |
| Customer Equity | Y1 | 0.672 |
| | Y2 | 0.754 |
| | Y3 | 0.466 |
| | Y4 | 0.462 |
| | Y5 | 0.671 |
| | Y6 | 0.749 |
| | Y7 | 0.857 |
| | Y8 | 0.712 |
| | Y9 | 0.837 |

Source: SmartPLS data processing (2021)

The validity and reliability tests are shown in **Table 3**. **Table 3** shows that all variables have an AVE value > 0.5. It indicates that each variable has good discriminant validity and has passed the validity test. In addition,

Table 3 shows that each variable has a composite reliability value > 0.7 . Thus, it indicates that each variable passes the reliability test. The results of the multicollinearity test are shown in **Table 4** where the VIF value is < 5 so that it does not deviate from the multicollinearity test.

Table 3. Validity and Reliability Test

| Variable | AVE | Composite Reliability |
|--------------------------------|-------|-----------------------|
| Motivation to Use Social Media | 0.542 | 0.779 |
| Source credibility | 0.634 | 0.912 |
| Parasocial Relationship | 0.637 | 0.913 |
| Customer Equity | 0.579 | 0.905 |

Source: SmartPLS data processing (2021)

Table 4. Collinearity statistics (VIF)

| | CE | Mot | PSR | SC |
|-----|-------|-----|-------|----|
| CE | | | | |
| Mot | 1.123 | | 1.113 | |
| PSR | 1.909 | | | |
| SC | 1.953 | | 1.113 | |

Where: CE=Customer Equity, Mot=Motivation to Use Social Media, PSR=Parasocial Relationship, SC=Source Credibility

Source: SmartPLS data processing (2021)

4.1.2. Inner model evaluation

4.1.2.1. Coefficient determination (R^2)

Based on **Table 5** below, the high influence of the motivation to use social media, source credibility, and parasocial relationship variables on customer equity is 37.4%. However, the high influence of the variable of motivation to use social media and source credibility on parasocial relationships is 47.6%.

Table 5. Coefficient determination (R^2)

| | R Square |
|-------------------------|----------|
| Customer Equity | 0.347 |
| Parasocial Relationship | 0.476 |

Source: SmartPLS data processing (2021)

4.1.2.2. Goodness of fit

In this study, the goodness of fit was tested by calculating Q^2 . The results of the Q^2 calculation can be seen in the calculation below:

$$\begin{aligned}
 Q^2 &= 1 - (1 - R_1^2) \times (1 - R_2^2) \\
 &= 1 - (1 - 0.374) \times (1 - 0.476) \\
 &= 1 - (0.626) \times (0.524) \\
 &= 1 - 0.33 \\
 &= 0.67
 \end{aligned}$$

Based on the above calculation, the Q^2 value is 0.67 or 67%. This shows the high diversity of research data

that can be submitted by the research model is 67%, but the remaining 33% is clarified by other factors outside the variables studied in this study. These results indicate that this research model already has good goodness of fit.

4.1.2.3. Hypothesis testing

Table 6 below shows the direct influence test between variables. This study shows that H2, H3, and H4 are accepted with each P Values < 0.05 . Source credibility has a significant positive effect on parasocial relationships; parasocial relationships have a significant positive effect on customer equity; motivation to use social media has a significant positive effect on customer equity. While H1 and H5 were rejected with P Values > 0.05 . This means that motivation to use social media does not directly affect parasocial relationships. In addition, source credibility does not have a direct effect on customer equity.

Table 6. Direct effect test

| | Original Sample | T Statistics | P Values |
|-----------------------|-----------------|--------------|----------|
| Mot \rightarrow CE | 0.273 | 3.012 | 0.003 |
| Mot \rightarrow PSR | 0.073 | 1.158 | 0.247 |
| PSR \rightarrow CE | 0.339 | 3.201 | 0.001 |
| SC \rightarrow CE | 0.164 | 1.703 | 0.089 |
| SC \rightarrow PSR | 0.663 | 13.621 | 0.000 |

Where: CE=Customer Equity, Mot=Motivation to Use Social Media, PSR=Parasocial Relationship, SC=Source Credibility

Source: SmartPLS data processing (2021)

Table 7 below shows the indirect effect test between variables which shows that H7 is accepted with P Values < 0.05 . It states that parasocial relationships mediate the influence of source credibility on customer equity. However, H6 is rejected because it has P Values > 0.05 . It means that parasocial relationships did not mediate the effect of motivation to use social media on customer equity.

Table 7. Indirect effect test

| | Original Sample | T Statistics | P Values |
|--|-----------------|--------------|----------|
| Mot \rightarrow PSR \rightarrow CE | 0.025 | 1.013 | 0.312 |
| SC \rightarrow PSR \rightarrow CE | 0.225 | 2.899 | 0.004 |

Where: CE=Customer Equity, Mot=Motivation to Use Social Media, PSR=Parasocial Relationship, SC=Source Credibility

Source: SmartPLS data processing (2021)

4.2. Discussion

This study provides a theory to understand the main process underlying the building of customer equity through the context of social media by utilizing the

concept of parasocial relationship theory. The research results are relevant to the previous research [1,25], where source credibility has a direct positive effect on parasocial relationships. In line with the previous studies [1,8], it also shows that parasocial relationships directly have a positive effect on customer equity consisting of three components, namely value equity, brand equity, and relationship equity. In addition, it produces new findings through the indirect effect testing, stating parasocial relationships positively mediate the effect of source credibility on customer equity. The credibility of a celebrity used by a brand as a brand ambassador will affect customer perceptions in building a parasocial relationship with a celebrity used as a related brand ambassador. The higher the source credibility of the celebrity, the higher the possibility of the customer building a parasocial relationship with the celebrity. Good customer relationship management through the use of parasocial relationships will provide opportunities to increase customer equity from customers towards the brand which is also expected to increase company profits.

In terms of customer motivation in using social media, however, the research results are contrary to the previous research [1,9], where the motivation to use social media has no direct effect on parasocial relationships. It also examines the indirect effect of motivation to use social media on customer equity through the mediation of parasocial relationships and they do not mediate the effect of motivation to use social media on customer equity. It is assumed that the low influence of motivation to use social media on parasocial relationships can be caused by the celebrity media used in the process, namely NCT 127 which may not affect the perception of some respondents in parasocial relationships building through social media. This is reinforced that 17% of respondents are not fans of NCT 127 so not all respondents care about the parasocial relationships that arise in the use of social media when they see the collaboration posts of the Nature Republic and NCT 127. A new unique finding shows that motivation to use social media has a direct effect on customer equity without the mediation of parasocial relationships. This can be an opportunity for companies to maximize the motivation of using social media by customers to increase customer equity.

5. CONCLUSION

This study shows that the parasocial relationship built between media users and celebrities who are used by companies as brand ambassadors provides opportunities for business making. By facilitating parasocial relationships that may arise between media users and celebrities, companies can establish and improve relationships with customers expected to increase customer equity that will provide profits to them. It shows that motivation to use social media has a direct

effect on customer equity. If the company can facilitate and maximize customer motivation in using social media, it will improve customer relationships which can increase customer equity from customers towards the brand.

The research is limited to the number of respondents. Future research can examine more samples so that the results are more accurate and varied. In addition, the research can use another brand as an object and other celebrities as a media in the concept of parasocial relationships.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

All the authors give a contribution to completing the paper research.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to acknowledge and give my great thanks of gratitude to our supervisor, Soepatini, for suggestions so that we can complete our research paper.

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