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Customer social participation in the social networking services and its impact upon the customer equity of global fashion brands

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ABSTRACT

Those of us who live in the age of information technology are offered the opportunity to engage in multiple-way communication with others, the brand, and the media. Thus, customer participation is the most important in an online environment. Although such constructs correspond in part to the online, they fall short of meeting the unique characteristics of customer participation in social media. This study provides a clarification of the definitions presented by researchers and explores the construct of customer participation within SNS, and seeks to reveal how the relationship among external factors may influence customer participation and how it, in turn, effects customer equity. The main finding is that SNS participation motivation and customer social participation were positively associated. In particular, customer-media participation demonstrated the strongest influence on customer equity. This study contributes to filling this gap by offering analysis of the role of customer participation in SNS on customer equity.

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1. Introduction

SNS has transcended individual-based interaction to be adopted by industries in a wide range of sectors as a forum that encourages customer communication, participation, and purchase. Reflecting on the current trends, the Internet is increasingly perceived by firms as a space to directly interact with customers and to foster interaction, as information sharing and participation of customers are a far more effective marketing strategy than one-way online advertisement (Kim & Ko, 2012). Recently, numerous fashion brands have sought to build and maintain relationships with their customers through the Internet or mobile SNS.

In an SNS environment, customer participation requires a different kind of understanding than the offline site of interaction, on which the subjects of participation are limited to customer and brand versus customer and customer (Chae, Ko, & Han, 2015; Domagk, Schwartz, & Plass, 2010). The unprecedented and diversified development in the media has enabled customers to meet brand employees and other customers mediated by communication technologies such as, mobile devices (Ngo & O'Cass, 2013). By applying the interaction theory to a social media setting, customer participation in social media is categorized into customer-media/system, customer-brand, and customer-customer participation according to the subject of participation. The process of customer participation in an online environment ranges from accessing SNS through one's mobile device, searching for and

collecting information about products and services provided by the brand, product evaluation on a bulletin or customer service center, and proactive WOM activity of a coveted product to one's network.

The essence of a firm's marketing activity is to understand and satisfy the needs of its customers, which is vital to building a lasting relationship between a firm and its customers. In order to understand the participatory behavior of the consumers, how they engage in decision making and what their motivations are for undertaking particular behavior need to be observed (Kontu & Vecchi, 2014).

The mediated environment of SNS that renders relationship building and exchange between a brand and its customers non-face-to-face may ground feelings of distrust in forming relationships, which impedes in building a long-term reciprocal relationship or maximizing performance. Therefore, this study finds the need for an in-depth examination of how active participation of customers in SNS service builds trust and whether this affects customer equity as a way to maintain relationship with a brand.

Therefore, based on literatures of participation in offline context, the purposes of this study are: (1) to examine the construct of customer participation in an SNS environment, (2) to identify the causal relationships between the antecedents of customer participation to SNS, SNS service shopping context, SNS service user orientation, participation motivation, and customer participation, (3) to investigate the effect of SNS customer participation on trust and customer equity. It is anticipated that doing so will offer valuable insights from a marketing perspective of the types of customer participation on SNS that is associated with long-term relationship building with a brand. The findings of this study provides brands with possibilities for differentiated participatory strategies according to the orientation of customers to evoke effective

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and proactive participation among customers as well as offer specific and managerial implications for SNS service of fashion brands.

2. Literature review

2.1. External factors in social media context

2.1.1. SNS shopping context

As the social media shopping environment is rapidly formulated, brand's marketing activities on SNS is becoming increasingly diversified. Currently, fashion brands that had initially limited their SNS service to marketing activities have expanded to sell products, creating a system that offers information about the product provided by the brand. The information through social media can even be set to alert the customers through their mobile devices with a 'push alert' function. The constant interactivity increases emotional stability and trust among the users and brands by controlling the conversation among the participants in their communication process (Roozmond, 2001). Accessibility interactivity is an essential element to secure a successful relationship between the seller and the customer in e-commerce, and the increase in the opportunity to receive service through interactivity significantly affects trust (Kim, 2015).

SNS service provided by brands also offers economic benefits for customers by providing information about ongoing or future promotions. Furthermore, SNS service that executes real-time aggressive marketing of new or promotional products has also shown to stimulate unintended ripple-buying behavior (Yoon & Han, 2011). SNS shopping context makes the consumers who in their twenties to thirties that live in an age of new media constantly have at their disposal mobile devices that allow easy access to purchase products, stimulating unplanned, impulsive buying of products or coupons for future use.

2.1.2. SNS user orientation

SNS users display common attributes with online shoppers. Moreover, characteristics of online users are a critical factor that influences channel choice in making purchases. Specifically, the traits include user personality, past experience of using online shopping malls, and shopping orientations (O'Cass & Fenech, 2003). Self-efficacy is the most notable attribute of consumers who actively engage in social media.

Prior research on social commerce reveal that customers who use services through social media and purchase products feel a sense of joy as their self-efficacy increases through the sharing their information with others. The tendency to share one's information with others is also attributed to altruism in wanting others to receive the same benefits (Park, 2010).

Some consumers perceive new media use as a way to elevate their self-prestige. In this case, SNS use and participation help to strengthen one's position within a referent group, and the elevated self-image results in a greater intention for use (Venkatesh & Bala, 2008). This is said to be driven by the psychological desire to purchase products at a lower cost and without committing an error through direct interaction with other customers or indirectly through e-WOM (Han, Somg, & Lim, 2011; Park, 2010).

2.1.3. SNS participation motivation

The mass popularization of SNS is a primary representation of Web 2.0. It diverges from earlier media in that voluntary participation of individuals is used to provide information and enhance service and product quality. Voluntary, active participation of users' needs to be supported by motivating factors that stimulate and maintain such behavior. The essence of the theory is that the user, driven by a specific set of motivations, intentionally selects a particular media that can satisfy the desires (Stafford, Stafford, & Schkade, 2004).

Early research on uses and gratification theory identified the motivating factors of media use as cognitive motivation, which seeks to

find and acquire information, entertainment motivation for escape, personal identity motivation that is related to strengthening one's social position, and finally, social integrative needs, which seeks to strengthen social interaction with family and friends through the media (Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter, & Espinoza, 2008). Lee, Kang, Oh, and Lee (2011) analyzed motives driving Twitter, Facebook, and blog use as six areas of social motivation, emotional motivation, self-respect motivation, entertainment motivation, cognitive motivation, and others.

2.2. Customer social participation

Developments in digital technology have brought about a new media society. According to Van Dijk (2006), new media is characterized by interactivity between the sender and the receiver, convergence, and its use of digital codes. Furthermore, the advent of mobile devices has enabled customers to access the brand's SNS as well as instantaneous acquisition and spread of brand-related information.

As such, the importance of customer participation has been widely acknowledged, but a unified definition has yet been developed. A large body of extant literature uses two concepts to segment customer participation: customer participation, which is an in-role behavior (required action of customers at the time of service encounter) and customer citizenship behavior, which is an extra-role behavior (voluntary and discretionary behaviors that are not required for the successful production and service) (Groth, 2005; Rodie & Kleine, 2000; Yi & Gong, 2012).

It is difficult to apply the concept of customer participation to SNS environment as it occurs offline. The definition of customer participation in an online environment, therefore, needs to be more encompassing and considerate of its interactive nature. The notion of interactivity broadly refers to all kinds of actions a person engages in with an object, person, or entities of existence (Lombard & Snyder-Duch, 2001). Research related to interactivity and interaction has become increasingly vibrant with the emergence of the Internet and new media.

The constructs of interaction theory change according to the subject of interaction. A study by Chen and Yen (2004) categorized interaction as perceived by the user into three types: media/system-user, firm/brand-user, and user-user (See Table 1).

Based on extensive research, this study refers to customer participation on social media as 'customer social participation' and defines it as an effort to achieve co-creation of values through required but voluntary interactive participation of the customers in service production and delivery process in social media. This study segments the types into customer-brand, customer-customer, and customer-media according to the subject of interaction.

Table 1
Types of interaction on social media service.

Types of interaction	Categorization of interactivity	References
System and user interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> System and user to exchange communication Accessing websites and shopping mall & Interaction through new media technology, such as smartphone and tablet 	Chen and Yen (2004), Domagk et al. (2010)
Firm/brand-user interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relationship between firm/brand and users through interaction Supply evaluation and opinion on brand product at social media service 	Cho and Cheon (2005)
User-user interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interaction among user mediated by communication channel The degree of control of discourse and role exchange among participants during communication process 	Ennew and Binks (1999)

2.3. Trust

Online trust is an important antecedent to consumer behavior intention (Hong & Cho, 2011). Wu and Chang (2005) pointed out that because exchange in an online shopping mall takes place in a non-face-to-face environment, trust is a crucial element. In order to build trust online, the firm and its customer needs to build a relationship over an extended period of time and possess shared values developed through intimate communication (Doney & Cannon, 1997; Gefen, 2000).

2.4. Customer equity

Customer equity constitutes both monetary and non-monetary value invested by a customer to a firm during the period of exchange relationship. Research on this concept was enriched by Rust, Zeithaml, and Lemon (2000) who defined customer equity as ‘discounted sum of customer lifetime values’. In addition, this concept refers to cash flows that are sustained over a period of time, therefore, based on an expectation that the relationship with the customer will be sustained for the duration of time.

3. Research model and hypotheses

3.1. Research model

In order to examine the relationship among SNS service shopping context, SNS service user orientation, participation motivation, customer social participation, trust, and customer equity, this study proposes a research model as depicted in Fig. 1, and based on the model, the following hypotheses are presented.

3.2. Research hypotheses

The development and expansion of digital media transformed the ways in which people exchanged information through new media

devices that enabled multi-modal communication environment that involves not one-to-one form of communication but one-to-many or many-to-many interaction. The shift in the pattern of communication is primarily reflected in SNS shopping context, in which customers exchange information about a brand.

Fashion brands reflect such social context in providing service through SNS and seek to increase accessibility of customers through new media as a way to communicate with customers. The ease of access provided by SNS fosters customers to maintain interest in products or brand service, invoking motivation to participate (Armstrong & Hagel, 2000). Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is posited.

H1. SNS service shopping context has a positive influence on SNS participation motivation.

The primary difference between SNS service shopping context and traditional e-commerce is that in SNS, the consumer naturally plays the role of both the consumer and seller through consistent communication between the seller and consumer (Han et al., 2011). The most distinguishing aspect of e-commerce 2.0 and SNS commerce is that if collective intelligence accounted for the criterion of rationality, shopping on SNS is dominated by social intelligence. The ease of access through such social interactivity is seen to be sufficient to evoke participation of customers. In addition, as it is possible to access a brand’s SNS with a mobile device, participation can be achieved with little effort.

H2. SNS service shopping context has a positive influence on customer social participation.

H2-1. SNS service shopping context has a positive influence on customer-customer participation.

H2-2. SNS service shopping context has a positive influence on customer- participation.

H2-3. SNS service shopping context has a positive influence on customer-media participation.

$$CLV_{ij} = \sum_{t=0}^{T_{ij}} \frac{1}{(1 + d_j)^{t/f_i}} V_{ijt} \times \pi_{ijt} \times B_{ijt}$$

- T_{ij} : number of purchases customer i makes during the specified time period
- d_j : firm j 's discount rate
- f_i : average number of purchases customer i makes in a unit time (e.g. per year)
- V_{ijt} : customer i 's expected purchase volume of brand j in purchase t
- π_{ijt} : expected contribution margin per unit of brand j from customer i in purchase t
- B_{ijt} : probability that customer i buys brand j in purchase t

Measurement of Customer Lifetime Value

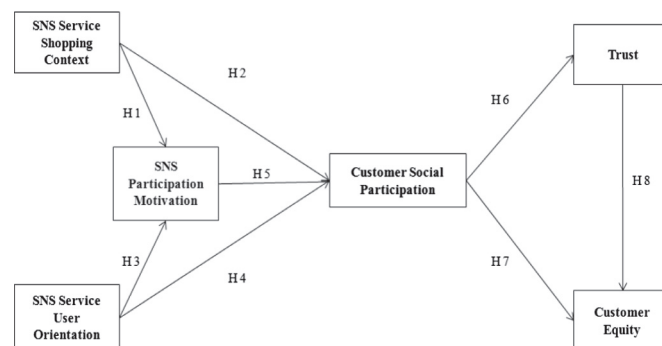


Fig 1. Research model.

SNS service user orientation is an important component to explicate the relationship between motivation for use and participatory activity, as it attributes the behavioral difference to not only social scientific variables of users but to their personality from a psychological perspective (Lee et al., 2011). As such, the orientation of individual users affects new media production and expansion, and the reason for engaging with communication devices differ by their orientation, leading to the following hypothesis.

H3. SNS service user orientation has a positive influence on SNS participation motivation.

Kim and Joo (2002) posited shopping mall orientation and individual orientation of users as variables that determine positive evaluation of online shopping mall and analyzed the effect of interaction of the two variables. It categorized individual orientation into four types – diversity-seeker, consumer-innovator, self-realizer, and information-seeker – and showed that the attitude and behavior toward online shopping mall changed according to the orientation of the individual. Based on the previous research, it is expected that user orientation will affect SNS customer participation and the following hypotheses are posited.

H4. SNS service user orientation has a positive influence on customer social participation.

H4-1. SNS service user orientation has a positive influence on customer-customer participation.

H4-2. SNS service user orientation has a positive influence on customer-brand participation.

H4-3. SNS service user orientation has a positive influence on customer-media participation.

SNS environment invokes motivations to participate, leading to proactive customer participation. Motivational theory has been rigorously applied as a theoretical basis to observe the behavior of people who adopt new technologies (Davis, Bagozzi, & Warshaw, 1992).

Although large majorities of previous research are focused on offline service marketing, Darley, Blankson, and Luethge (2010) pointed out that the customer decision making process in an online environment is not much different from offline, although the process may be slightly reduced due to the contextual characteristics. This study categorized participation motivation on fashion brands' SNS service into interpersonal, convenience, incentive, brand likeability, entertainment, and information motivation.

Therefore, motivation to participate is an antecedent variable to participation behavior of customers, and it can be expected that participation motivation may have a significant effect on customer social participation.

H5. SNS participation motivation has a positive influence on customer social participation.

H5-1. SNS participation motivation has a positive influence on customer-customer participation.

H5-2. SNS participation motivation has a positive influence on customer-brand participation.

H5-3. SNS participation motivation has a positive influence on customer-media participation.

Morgan and Hunt (1994) posited that continuous communication and value sharing is necessary to build trust between customers and a firm. Their assertion was also supported by Park (2002) through an empirical study that found an increase in trust among customers who actively engaged in interactive participation with the online provider. As

such, relationship based on trust is built on active communication and participatory activities of customers and the firm.

H6. Customer social participation has a positive influence on trust.

H6-1. Customer-customer participation has a positive influence on trust.

H6-2. Customer-brand participation has a positive influence on trust.

H6-3. Customer-media participation has a positive influence on trust.

Customers are becoming increasingly involved in the marketing activities of firms via SNS. The firms request continuous and extended participation of its customers as a way to provide customized service based on the information and opinions gathered (Wind & Rangaswamy, 2001). Rishika, Kumar, Janakiraman, and Bezawada (2013) argue that a firm's SNS activities, by maintaining a long-term relationship with customers, will influence their customer equity. In a similar line, Rust, Lemon, and Zeithaml (2004) claim that customer equity is determined by marketing activities based on relationship building with customers, for which proactive marketing led by the customer is vital.

H7. Customer social participation has a positive influence on customer equity.

H7-1. Customer-customer participation has a positive influence on customer equity.

H7-2. Customer-brand participation has a positive influence on customer equity.

H7-3. Customer-media participation has a positive influence on customer equity.

Building trust has been found to lead to loyalty, attitude, and commitment, and particularly in an online environment, this is due to the ability of trust to create reciprocal relationships as brand and relationship equity (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Therefore, this study established the following hypothesis.

H8. Trust has a positive influence on customer equity.

4. Method

4.1. Measures

Before the main survey, a preliminary test was conducted to select the two global fashion brands. 37 graduate students and five fashion experts who are majoring in clothing and textiles were asked to list the first three global fashion brands based on the most popular SNS service. Uniqlo and Louis Vuitton were the highest ranking. Therefore, the two brands' social media services were chosen for the present study. The present study drew on a survey questionnaire to test the research hypotheses (see Table 2).

4.2. Sample & data collection

Prior to the main study, a preliminary test was conducted with 30 employees in the fashion industry who had experience in using a brand's social media service in order to confirm that the questionnaire items and terms would be clear to the respondents. And two more pre-tests (516 respondents) were conducted to confirm the questionnaire items.

The empirical test was conducted with a consumer panel from a research institution, MacriMill Embrain, in their twenties and thirties with experience of participating in social media service of the global SPA brand, Uniqlo and global luxury brand, Louis Vuitton. Out of the 650 completed samples, those with insincere responses and inappropriate

Table 2
Survey questionnaire measures.

Variables	Constructs	No. of questionnaires	References
SNS service shopping context	Interactive accessibility Flexibility Economic benefit	9	Roosamond (2001), Lee (2012), Yo (2012)
SNS service user orientation	Informational self-efficiency Self-image Altruism Social network	20	Wasko and Faraj (2005), Yang and Lee (2005), Chow and Chan (2008)
SNS participation motivation	Interactive benefits Interpersonal Brand likeability Entertainment Information Incentive	31	Sung, Kim, Kwon, and Moon (2010), Kim et al., (2010), Subrahmanyam et al., (2008)
Customer social participation	Customer and media Customer and brand Customer and customer	36	Suh and Ahn (2009), Chan, Yim, and Lam (2010) Sun, Kim, and Kim (2014)
Trust		7	Forsythe and Shi (2003)
Customer lifetime value (CLV)		8	Rust et al. (2004)

respondents for the subject of study were omitted, and a total of 582 samples were used for analysis.

4.3. Data analysis

The data was used to conduct descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analysis and reliability analysis with SPSS 18.0, and Amos 18.0 was used to conduct confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling (SEM) for testing the hypotheses.

5. Results and discussion

5.1. Demographic analysis

The demographic characteristics of the present study are summarized. Among the total of 582 consumers who have participated in Uniqlo and Louis Vuitton's SNS service (333 for Uniqlo and 249 for Louis Vuitton), 237 were male (40.7%) and 345 were female (59.4%). 422 were in the age group of 18 to 30 (72.5%) and 160 were in their 30s (27.5%). Almost all respondents were generation Y who often are willing to share their idea through SNS than in person. Overall, the sample displayed a high level of education, with the majority of the respondents being either university students (n = 318, 54.6%) or university graduates (n = 154, 26.5%).

In order to arrive at an accurate measurement of customer equity, the survey asked respondents to write the likelihood of purchasing Uniqlo and Louis Vuitton among competing brands. Uniqlo resulted in the highest likelihood of purchases among ZARA and H&M at 54.73%, and CLV for each customer was found to be 49,252 KRW. For Louis

Vuitton, customers were likely to purchase Louis Vuitton over Prada and Gucci 51.55% of the times, and CLV totaled 454,885 KRW.

5.2. Constructs of customer social participation

In a social media setting, participation occurs more actively and voluntarily, but there is a lack of research in this area. Therefore, this study sought to explore how customer participation takes place in an SNS setting. Exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis extracted seven constructs of customer social participation (see Table 3).

5.3. Discriminant validity test of research model

Prior to conducting a validity test for the proposed research model, correlation matrix test was conducted in order to examine the association between the constructs. Correlation matrix test was followed by confirmatory factor analysis using AMOS 18.0 to assess the variables included in the research model. The model fit statistics of the research model ($\chi^2 = 227.041$, $df = 110$, $p = .000$, $GFI = .963$, $NFI = .969$, $IFI = .984$, $TLI = .972$, $CFI = .984$, $RMSEA = .043$) supported an adequate model fit.

The discriminant validity was evaluated by comparing the AVE value of latent variables and squared correlation of two variables, which mostly achieved discriminant validity (see Table 4). The reliability and validity test of the scale found that the convergent reliability values of SNS participation motivation, customer-customer participation, and customer-brand participation fell short of the threshold. However, the standardized loadings were found to be significant at $p < .01$, which supported convergent validity of the variables. Furthermore, the internal

Table 3
Definition of constructs for customer social participation.

Types	Constructs	Definition
Customer-customer participation	e-WOM	Communicating positive and negative opinions on the service, which can influence the brand's positive image as well as expectation of higher service and quality and evaluation.
Customer-brand participation	Benefits sharing	Sharing benefits such as information, events and coupons with other customers.
	Accurate request	In order for the customer to use the service "well," putting in the effort to communicate in a cautious manner with the people involved in the brand as a crucial part of the opinion and service delivery process
Customer-media participation	Tolerance	Emotional and behavioral willingness to put up with inconveniences and errors in using brand service.
	Responsibility	Behaving as to not interrupt provision and distribution of service in social media by cooperating and adhering to the terms and regulations
	Device using activity	Actively searching the 'what' and 'how' of service in social media and putting in effort such as information seeking to use the service well.
	Pro-active settlement	Participatory activities such as creating a wish list or setting notifications that allow real-time update of a brand information

Table 4
Correlation matrix.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Social media shopping characteristics (1)	0.706						
Social media participation motivation (2)	0.494	0.394					
Social media users' orientation (3)	0.407	0.475	0.691				
Customer-customer participation (4)	0.510	0.632	0.610	0.524			
Customer-brand participation (5)	0.323	0.536	0.420	1.090	0.397		
Customer-media participation (6)	0.442	0.697	0.465	0.494	0.588	0.667	
Trust (7)	0.430	0.382	0.331	0.383	0.349	0.303	0.744

Note: Diagonal: AVE, Under the diagonal: Φ^2 (Correlation coefficient²), AVE > Φ^2 .

consistency and construct reliability of the variables were found to be adequate, and it was determined that they can be included in the analysis.

5.4. Test of research model

This study tested the path model to assess the effect of SNS service shopping context, SNS service user orientation and participation motivation on customer social participation, trust, and customer equity.

The results of the model fit test indicated $\chi^2 = 198.465$, $df = 92$ ($p < .000$), and the Q value ($\chi^2/df = 2.157$) satisfied the threshold of less than 3, rendering the path model acceptable. The model fit statistics GFI = .964, NFI = .968, IFI = .982, TLI = .967, CFI = .982, RMR = .079, RMSEA = .045 supported the criterion suggested by Bagozzi and Yi (1988), demonstrating a high level of model fit. The results of the hypotheses are summarized in Table 5.

The path-coefficient of H1 shows that SNS service shopping context had a positive influence on SNS participation motivation ($\gamma = .536$, $t = 7.662^{***}$), and therefore, the hypothesis was supported. Development of new media such as SNS allows easier approach of brands to their customers, and the shopping context that stimulates impulsive buying provides participation motivation on the part of the customers. The finding supports a study by Lee et al. (2011), which posits that the environmental context in the era of social media motivates users to actively participate.

H2-1 and H2-2, which tested the effect of SNS service shopping context on customer-customer participation and customer-brand participation resulted in path-coefficients of ($\gamma = .471$, $t = 6.201^{***}$) and ($\gamma = .347$, $t = 4.654^{**}$), supporting both hypotheses. The finding resonates with that of Yoon and Han (2011), which indicated that customers consciously/unconsciously tend to access brand's social media due to real-time provision of information that is customized to individual taste and interests through mobile devices. The path-coefficient of H2-3 indicated ($\gamma = .064$, $t = .769$), and therefore, the hypothesis that SNS service shopping context positively influences customer-media participation was rejected. The lack of significance in the relationship is possibly due to the fact that customers do not need to put in considerable amount of effort to receive service as SNS service constantly provides customized information to its customers.

The path-coefficient of H3 shows that SNS service user orientation positively influences SNS participation motivation ($\gamma = .327$, $t = 5.148^{***}$), and therefore, the hypothesis was supported. The result is in line with a study by Yoo, Kim, and Choi (2005), which found that loyalty toward online community is influenced by user orientation, and the drive to use a new product or system in the age of new media differs according to the characteristics of individuals.

H4-1, H4-2, and H4-3, which tested the relationship between SNS service user orientation and customer social participation, were all supported (H4-1: $\gamma = .246$, $t = 4.411^{***}$; H4-2: $\gamma = .232$, $t = 4.654^{***}$; H4-3: $\gamma = .181$, $t = 2.788^{**}$). SNS service users tend to demonstrate high levels of informational self-efficacy, expect prestige

Table 5
Results of hypotheses tests.

No.	Hypotheses	Estimate	S.E	t-Value	Results
H1	SNS service shopping context → SNS participation motivation	.536	.054	7.662***	Supported
H2	SNS service shopping context → customer social participation				
H2-1	SNS service shopping context → customer-customer participation	.471	.057	6.201***	Supported
H2-2	SNS service shopping context → customer-brand participation	.347	.059	4.654***	Supported
H2-3	SNS service shopping context → customer-media participation	.064	.090	.769	Not supported
H3	SNS service user orientation → SNS participation motivation	.327	.047	5.148***	Supported
H4	SNS service user orientation → customer social participation				
H4-1	SNS service user orientation → customer-customer participation	.246	.041	4.411***	Supported
H4-2	SNS service user orientation → customer-brand participation	.232	.059	4.654***	Supported
H4-3	SNS service user orientation → customer-media participation	.181	.067	2.788**	Supported
H5	SNS participation motivation → customer social participation				
H5-1	SNS participation motivation → customer-customer participation	.430	.092	4.619***	Supported
H5-2	SNS participation motivation → customer-brand participation	.355	.096	3.851***	Supported
H5-3	SNS participation motivation → customer-media participation	.666	.067	2.788**	Supported
H6	Customer social participation → trust				
H6-1	Customer-customer participation → trust	.669	.187	5.2000***	Supported
H6-2	Customer-brand participation → trust	.183	.121	2.093*	Supported
H6-3	Customer-media participation → trust	-.148	.089	-1.693	Not supported
H7	Customer social participation → customer equity				
H7-1	Customer-customer participation → customer equity	.080	.160	.507	Not supported
H7-2	Customer-brand participation → customer equity	-.237	.147	-1.556	Not supported
H7-3	Customer-media participation → customer equity	.246	.065	2.686**	Supported
H8	Trust → customer equity	.297	.055	3.793***	Supported

Estimate: Standardized coefficient, t-value: C.R (Critical Ratio).
*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

from information sharing, and find pleasure from sharing information with others and continuously seek to interact with others. Users with such tendencies, in general, put effort to participate in brand's SNS service.

H5-1, H5-2, and H5-3, which tested the relationship between SNS participation motivation and customer social participation, were all supported (H5-1: $\gamma = .430$, $t = 4.619^{***}$; H5-2: $\gamma = .355$, $t = 3.851^{***}$; H5-3: $\gamma = .666$, $t = 2.788^{***}$). A comparison of the differences in the effects of the path-coefficient according to the type of customer participation and participation motivation indicates customer-media participation, customer-customer participation, and customer-brand participation, respectively ($\gamma = .666 > \gamma = .430 > \gamma = .355$), showing that customers tend to place the greatest amount of effort and interest in using service when participation motivation is provided on SNS service. To facilitate active customer-customer and customer-brand participation, the result indicates that customized information should be set through customer-media participation beforehand or the user should click through the brand's SNS service.

For H6, which analyzed the effect of customer social participation on trust, only customer-customer participation ($\gamma = .669$, $t = 5.200^{***}$) and customer-brand participation were positively associated ($\gamma = .183$, $t = 20.93^*$). The path-coefficient of H6-3 was not significant, and therefore, rejected ($\gamma = -.148$, $t = -1.693$). The finding indicate that in a fashion brand's SNS service, overall trust toward the brand or information provider is established by way of customer-customer and customer-brand participation rather than customer-media participation. The finding supports previous studies which argue that interactive exchange of opinions between customers and firm or among customers are the most important to build trust (Gefen, Karahanna, & Straub, 2003; Park, 2002).

The path-coefficients of H7-1 shows $\gamma = .080$, $t = -.507$, for H7-2, $\gamma = -.237$, $t = -1.556$, and finally, for H7-3, $\gamma = .246$, $t = 2.686^{**}$. Although the results of customer-customer and customer-brand social participation are not significant as they are not positively associated with customer equity, customer-media participation was found to positively influence customer equity. As participation on a firm's SNS is a way to maintain an extended relationship, it supports Rishika et al.'s (2013) that posits that it will influence customer lifetime value (CLV). Customer-media participation can be interpreted as the will of customers to receive a brand's SNS service, and as Rust et al. (2004) emphasized, creation of customer equity is determined by the relational marketing activities of a firm and its customer.

The path-coefficient of trust and customer equity indicated a positive influence ($\gamma = .297$, $t = 3.793^{***}$). SNS service trust toward information or information provider is established upon interaction between the firm and its customer, and it significantly affects the firm's success and customer satisfaction (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). There is a lack of empirical research that examines the direct effect of trust on customer equity, but the result of this study supports the hypothesis that maintaining a cooperative relationship between a firm and its customers as a way to build trust has a positive effect on customer equity.

6. Conclusion and implications

Customer participation is of primary importance in the current service marketing industry. Until now, related literature on customer participation has mostly centered on offline service situations. However, the invention of social media has simplified the process of participation for customers, and invoking voluntary customer participation has become the challenge facing service industries, and, at the same time, the path to success. Therefore, in order to establish constructs for customer participation in social media, revision and supplementation of the offline-based constructs was found to be necessary.

This study explored the notion of customer participation by categorizing it into three types: customer-customer, customer-brand, and customer-media. In addition, it examined external factors that

influenced customer social participation and how active social customers participate in social network sites (SNS) effects trust and customer equity.

The results of the hypotheses are as follows.

First, external factors such as SNS service shopping context and SNS service user orientation has a positive influence on participation motivation on SNS. The ease of coming into contact with customers through mobile devices and marketing activities that stimulate impulsive buying motivates customers to participate. Lee (2012) suggests that the instructiveness of the media (responsiveness, simultaneity), which is an environmental factor, influences customer's emotions and awareness, and therefore, should be emphasized in the digital new media age. In addition, the growth of social capital and self-efficacy through SNS increases intention to participate for customers, and, in turn, helps to increase the quality of information (Lee, 2012). Accordingly, by emphasizing accessibility, a component of SNS service shopping context and the active interaction due to accessibility is expected to serve as positive drivers of SNS participation.

Second, SNS service shopping context found positive association with customer-customer participation and customer-brand participation, but customer-media participation was insignificant. As SNS is characterized by its linkage to different websites and platforms, customers are exposed to constant opportunities for participation. Due to active participation of customers, customer-brand participation has witnessed intimacy that was present only among firms in the past. Unlike the two types of participation, customer-media participation was found to be insignificant, which is interpreted as the indiscriminate real-time provision of information that seeks to spur impulsive buying has actually led to antagonism of the customers.

Third, SNS participation motivation and customer social participation were all positively associated. In particular, customer-media participation demonstrated the strongest influence, followed by customer-customer and customer-brand participation. It indicates that when customers are motivated to participate, they set the alarm function for wanted information or use different mobile devices to easily access the site, therefore, actively taking part in SNS. As have been emphasized by Lee (2012) and Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, and Gremler (2002) real-time information exchange with customers through mobile devices directly influence their behavior and participation activities.

Fourth, all paths from SNS user orientation to customer social participation was significant. SNS users in general possessed high levels of self-efficacy and tend to feel elevated as well as find altruistic pleasure in providing information that would help others. Such users participate through numerous ways such as customer-brand and customer-media participation but are the most active in customer-customer participation. Ajzen (2006) claims that having control of information in an information age strengthens self-efficacy or a sense of prestige, and such tendencies influence participation behavior.

Fifth, it was found that customer-customer and customer-brand participation builds the trust of customers toward the SNS service and the information or the information provider. However, customer-media participation did not indicate the same results. Customer-customer and customer-brand participation, which emphasize customers' social status can pose strong influence on long-term profit of the brand. This supports the finding of a study by Kim (2015), which indicated that customer participation in social commerce affects trust. Furthermore, marketing strategies, such as offering events and coupons to stimulate e-WOM activities of customers as well as creating a space for open communication is vital to build trust.

Sixth, customer-media participation was positively associated with customer equity. Unlike customer-customer and customer-brand participation which requires constant physical effort of the customer, customer-media participation demands considerably less time and effort, other than the initial stages during which customization process is undergone, to receive tailored information with just one click. Real-

time access to new and diverse brand-related information is possible and as the customer has a positive reaction toward the compatibility and responsiveness of the system, it is expected that continuous relationship with the brand is maintained. Therefore, establishing a convenient and a practical system that targets the Y-generation in their 20s and 30s is emphasized in order to maintain a long-term relationship.

Seventh, trust has a positive influence on customer equity. Building trust is based on interactivity among people and therefore, trust among customers is also created through interaction (Kim, Ko, Lee, Mattila, & Kim, 2014; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). This study found that customer-customer participation and customer-brand participation influences customer equity through trust and for customer-media participation, it leads to customer equity without being mediated by trust. Therefore, all three types of participation are equally important to customer equity.

The present study presented new constructs on the types of customer participation in fashion brands' SNS service. It identified the association between the variables of environmental factor (SNS service shopping context), personal factor (SNS service user orientation), participation motivation, customer participation, trust, and customer equity.

The theoretical implications of the study are discussed below.

Despite the economic downturn, the growth of global fashion brands is sky-rocketing. However, most studies on SPA or luxury brands focus on psychological variables of consumers, and there is a dearth of studies on effective marketing strategy to increase customer equity for long-term profit generation. Therefore, this study analyzed the effect of customer social participation on the customer equity of global fashion brands, it would be meaningful to refer to as a reference for developing marketing strategies of fashion brands.

Although customer participation and customer equity are two very influential theoretical concepts, there has been a lack of substantial relevant research. As such, external and internal factors driving participation in SNS environment and how customers, in turn, influence customer equity is an area of study that further needs to be developed. This study sought to fill the gap by empirically demonstrating that participation mediated by an online platform also leads to creation of social capital and has a positive effect on customer equity. Based on the results, it is suggested that opening up a space for participation for customers will foster deeper understanding of customer behavior as well as contribute to more rigorous research in this area.

Finally, customer social participation was the central focus of this study. At a point in time where customers' value creation is attracting more and more attention, this study empirically revealed that customer-media relationship, which enables customer-customer and customer-brand participation on SNS, is also within the bounds of participation. Facilitating voluntary participation simplifies the process of acquiring market information as well as reduces the huge amounts of cost involved in market research and advertisement. Finally, this research points out that as each and every customer networks to create group intelligence, a new opportunity for marketing is created.

7. Limitations and future research

The limitations of the study and suggestions for future research are discussed below.

First, the sample of the study consisted of Koreans between the ages of 20 to 30. Therefore, a comparative study with broader sample across culture and age is necessary for the future research.

Second, this study observed customer participation on SNS environment. The measurement instrument, therefore, needs to be further applied with different antecedents and consequences in subsequent research.

Finally, due to a dearth of previous literature on customer participation in SNS environment, the theoretical basis of the relationship

between the variables lacked solidity. This study adapted a part of a theoretical framework to fit the context of the study to come up with the hypothesized relationship between the variables. Therefore, future research work toward developing and strengthening the theoretical framework of customer social participation is suggested.

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