

Dark Sides of Engaging in Fan Community of Human Brand*

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People enthusiastic about human brands eagerly engage in fan communities to share their common interests with others. Although sharing one's enthusiasm towards the same celebrities can give them positive senses of we-ness (in-group identity, togetherness, camaraderie) and belongingness, negative sides also exist such as schadenfreude and trash talk. Even though the studies addressing the negative sides of fan community are gaining significance, no prior studies formally examined the negative consequences of engaging in a fan community and their effect on one's well-being. Therefore, this current study aims to investigate how engaging in fan community negatively affects members' psychological well-being through schadenfreude and trash talk. Structural equation modeling analysis revealed that engaging highly in a fan community leads members to feel malicious pleasure at rivals' misfortunes and share negative opinions of rival human brands and fan communities. These negative consequences of fan community engagement ultimately lead to a lower level of psychological well-being, especially in the area of personal growth whereas fan community engagement has a direct positive effect on personal growth. By showing the negative influences of engaging in fan communities on members' well-being through schadenfreude and trash talk, the results of this study are expected to add depth to the existing literature.

Key words: human brand, celebrity, fan community, psychological well-being, personal growth, schadenfreude, trash talk

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I. Introduction

Famous individuals such as movie stars, singers, athletes, entrepreneurs, politicians, etc. always draw great attention from the public. People imitate what those celebrities do and follow where they go. As the role of those famous individuals in society is getting more important these days by becoming role models or inspiring people, their influence on the lives of people are also becoming great. With an increase in the popularity of the celebrities, even celebrity worship became a significant phenomenon, and in many cases, it dominates people's life (McCutcheon et al. 2002). Therefore, famous individuals are now considered a significant type of brands in marketing studies known as human brands (Kim et al. 2010; Ahn and Lee 2010). Thomson (2006) coined the term 'human brand' and defined it as 'any well-known persona who is the subject of marketing communication efforts' (p104).

Moreover, as the online environment has been rapidly developing, those people enthusiastic about the human brands eagerly engage in fan communities through both online and offline to share common interests with others. As a result, the number of fan communities of human brands and their members are growing around the world.

How does engaging in a fan community influence the members' life? On the bright side,

members of a fan community as a group may cooperate to do good deeds, which help them to live more fulfilling lives. The fan community of now deceased pop icon Michael Jackson, for example, voluntarily helped the victims of Hurricane Katrina. Therefore, engaging in such fan community activity positively influence the members' well-being.

However, members of such fan communities may be also negatively influenced in terms of their well-being. Members who are highly involved in their fan community feel joy when other rival human brands and fan communities are in the midst of controversy, and fuel negative ideas about rivals with their gossip. For example, fan communities of 1st generation idol dance groups in Korea, H.O.T. and Sechs Kies, got involved in physical fight in 1997. More recently, in the 2008 Dream Concert, fan communities of Super Junior, Tong Vfang Xien Qi, and SS501 conspired to suppress any signs of positive emotional response, which is typical during a performance, with the intent to humiliate the performance of Girls' Generation. This negative phenomenon that occurs in the fan community has been also reported in the US media recently. According to a news report, a fan of San Diego Chargers said in an interview, "When bad things happen to a rival, like a championship loss, public scandal or even a serious injury of an opposing player, fans find joy in their competitor's pain, whether it is perceived deserved or not." (CSUSM News

Center 2012)

As the negative effects of fan community emerge as social issues and it is likely to harm members' quality of life, the need for studies to address such issues is growing. To the best of our knowledge, however, no previous studies have formally examined these issues. Therefore, this study addresses the negative effects of engaging in the fan communities of human brands on members' quality of life. More specifically, we first examined how fan community engagement leads to negative consequences such as *schadenfreude*, which is malicious pleasure at misfortunes of out-group, and trash talk, which is negative intra-group communications about the out-group. Then, we examined how the *schadenfreude* and trash talk affect members' psychological well-being, especially personal growth, negatively. In order to do this, we brought established existing research on communities, one's well-being, *schadenfreude*, and trash talk.

The results of the current study have significant theoretical implications in that this study is the first to focus on the fan community of human brand and its dark sides. Although the influences of human brands on consumers in the marketplace are becoming increasingly important (Thomson 2006; Spears, Royne, and Steenburg 2013), the fan communities of human brands remained largely unexplored. This study also provides important managerial implications to marketers who plan to use human

brand endorsers by showing how engaging in fan community of their human brand endorsers influence fans' quality of life.

II. Literature Review and Hypotheses

2.1 Dark sides of engaging in fan community - *schadenfreude* and trash talk

Fan community is defined as a group of individuals with a particularly strong attachment to a human brand (Théberge 2005). Since members of a fan community have strong attachment to a same human brand and thereby share common interest and enthusiasm with other members, they tend to engage in the fan community to interact with others. The fan community engagement refers to the members' intrinsic motivation to interact and cooperate with other fan community members (Algesheimer, Dholakia, Herrman 2005). That is, highly engaged members willingly participate in group activities of the fan community and help other members. They strive to act in ways that enhance the value of the fan community for other members and themselves.

According to Algesheimer, Dholakia, Herrman (2005), community engagement is a consequence of overlaps between self-identity and social

identity. Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) also believed that people participate in group activity because the values of the group are congruent with their personal values. This is consistent with social identity theory. The theory posits that people identify themselves as a member of social groups, social identity, and the people who adopt the social identity try to positively distinguish themselves from out-groups (Tajfel 1982; Spears et al. 1997; Tesser 2001; Hickman and Ward 2007). Thus, social identity as a member of the fan community is significant to highly engaged members, and thereby they are motivated to positively differentiate themselves from other fan communities.

Engaging highly in a fan community can produce a negative consequence such as *schadenfreude*. (Leach et al. 2003; Hickman and Ward 2007). *Schadenfreude* is a form of social hostility and is defined as malicious pleasure that an individual or group experiences when observing the misfortune of relevant out-groups (Leach et al 2003; Feather and Sherman 2007; Cikara and Fiske 2011). The engaging in the fan community can lead members to feel *schadenfreude* since observing misfortunes or failures of out-groups can provide the members a feeling of positive distinction from out-groups. Previous studies support this view. Hickman and Ward (2007) showed that highly engaged members of a community tend to have an inter-group stereotype in terms of in-group members' warmth and competence. Cikara and Fiske (2011) fur-

ther showed that having the inter-group stereotypes lead people to feel malicious pleasure with regards to competitive targets' misfortunes.

Based on discussions above, it can be concluded that fan community engagement can result in *schadenfreude* about rival human brands and fan communities. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis.

H 1: Higher level of fan community engagement leads to a higher level of schadenfreude

Engaging highly in a fan community can produce another negative consequence such as trash talk (Hickman and Ward 2007). Trash talk, which is a borrowed term from the sports world, refers to the negative intra-group communication about an out-group (Hickman and Ward 2007). Fan community engagement is likely to lead to trash talk because in-group members can positively distinguish themselves by sharing negative information about relevant out-groups.

Previous studies support this view. Schnake and Ruscher (1998) claimed that the motivation to positively create a differentiated group can encourage the in-group members to share negative beliefs about out-groups. This is because that in-group provides a sense of belongingness while differentiating from out-groups provides a sense of uniqueness (Jenkins 1996; Narvaen, Kartastenpaa, and Kuusela 2013).

The negative beliefs about out-group tend to be developed and repeated among in-group members, and this sharing allows them to feel a sense of positive distinction from an out-group.

Based on discussions above, fan community engagement can result in negative intra communication about an out-group, trash talk. Therefore, we hypothesize the following.

H2: Higher level of fan community engagement leads to higher level of trash talk

2.2 Negative effects of schadenfreude and trash talk on psychological well-being

The two negative consequences, schadenfreude and trash talk, are expected to negatively affect members' psychological well-being. This study adopts schadenfreude and trash talk among other negative outcomes of community because although previous studies showed that schadenfreude and trash talk are negative sides of community, their effects on members life and well-being have not been examined. Therefore, this study looked into how schadenfreude and trash talk affect members' psychological well-being.

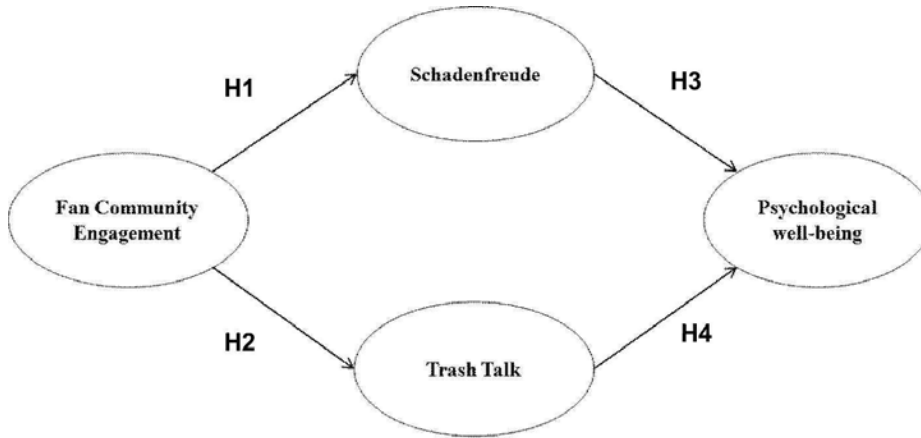
Psychological well-being refers to mental health or positive psychological functioning including such perspectives as self-actualization, fully functioning person, formulation of individuation, and maturity (Ryff 1989). The psychological well-being consists of six dimensions of well-

ness which include autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance (Ryff 1989; Ryff and Keyes 1995). For the purpose of focus and brevity, our study focuses on a single area, personal growth, rather than cover all aspects of psychological well-being. This is because developing self is a very important factor in enhancing one's well-being (Maddux 2009; Mcfarland and Alvaro 2000). In addition, we aim to investigate how engaging in social groups like fan communities and sharing the same enthusiasm with others affect a person's feeling of continued development, growth, and improvement in self.

According to Ryff (1989), the need to realize one's potentialities is critical for personal growth. However, schadenfreude and trash talk are both closely related to disparaging others rather than finding one's own potentialities. Schadenfreude is about having malicious pleasure at observing others' failure and trash talk is about sharing others' negative information, which gives a feeling of positive distinction without having to exert to improve one's own capabilities. Therefore, both schadenfreude and trash talk are likely to lead people to neglect realizing their personal potentialities, which ultimately negatively influence people's senses of continued development, growth, and improvement.

Based on discussions above, schadenfreude and trash talk can result in decreased feelings of personal growth. Therefore, we propose the

<Figure 1> Research Model



following hypotheses.

H3: Higher level of schadenfreude leads to a lower level of psychological well-being

H4: Higher level of trash talk leads to a lower level of psychological well-being.

In summary, as shown in Figure 1, we suggest that engaging in a fan community can cause two different negative consequences, schadenfreude and trash talk, which ultimately result in decreased level of psychological well-being, personal growth in particular.

III. Method

3.1 Survey participants

A survey was conducted to members of var-

ious fan communities of celebrities in South Korea. The types of celebrities included movie stars, athletes, politicians, singers, and TV stars. The final sample consisted of 418 participants. The average length of a participant's membership in these respective fan communities was 27 months. As an incentive to participants, we randomly chose six participants and sent each of them a Starbucks coffee coupon.

The summary of the survey participants' demographics is as follows: 39% of the participants were male and 61% were female. Participants are ranged in age from 12 to 69 years ($M_{age}=33$, $SD_{age}=13$). More specifically, 13.6% were between the ages of 10 to 20, 29.5% were in their 20s, 24.6% were in their 30s, 20.1% were in their 40s, 8.4% were in their 50s, and 3.8% were in their 60s. By occupation, 27.6% were students and 72.4% were full-time employees. Therefore, we concluded that our sample well represented people's general behaviors of en-

gement in fan community.

3.2 Measures

The participants were asked to write down the name of the celebrity whose online fan community they participated in and the length of their membership (in months) at the beginning of the survey. Then, on a seven-point scale with answers ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree,' the participants rated the level of fan community engagement, schadenfreude, trash talk, psychological well-being. The measurement items in detail are presented in Table 1.

Fan community engagement ($M=4.39$, $SD=1.22$) was measured using Algesheimer, Dholakia, Herrman (2005)'s community engagement scale to assess the extent to which participants are motivated to cooperate with other members of fan community (e.g., "I am motivated to participate in the fan community's activities because I am able to support other members"). Schadenfreude ($M=3.27$, $SD=1.33$) was measured using Sundie et al. (2009)'s scale to assess the extent to which participants show joyful responses to the scandals of rival celebrities (e.g., "I feel glad when a rival celebrity is involved in scandal"). Trash talk ($M=3.03$, $SD=1.46$) was measured using Hickman and Ward

<Table 1> Measurement items

Items	Measures	References
Fan community engagement	I benefit from following the fan community's rules.	Algesheimer, Dholakia, and Herrman (2005)
	I am motivated to participate in the fan community's activities because I am able to support other members.	
	I am motivated to participate in the fan community's activities because I am able to reach personal goals.	
Schadenfreude	I feel glad when a rival celebrity is involved in scandal.	Sundie et al. (2009)
	I feel joyful when a rival celebrity is involved in scandal.	
Trash talk	Other members of the fan community and I talk about how negatively we feel about other rival fan communities.	Hickman and Ward (2007)
	Other members of the fan community and I talk about how negative we feel about other rival celebrities.	
	I say negative things about the rival of my celebrity to other people.	
Psychological well-being	For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth.	Ryff and Keyes (1995)
	I am interested in activities that will expand my horizons.	
	I don't give up trying to make big improvements or changes in my life.	

(2007)'s scale to access the extent to which participants talk negatively about other fan communities and the rivals of the celebrity they like (e.g., "Other members in my fan community and I talk about how negatively we feel about the other fan community"). Psychological well-being ($M=5.29$, $SD=1.05$) was measured using Ryff and Keyes (1995)'s personal growth scale to assess the extent to which participants had a feeling of continued development, growth, improvement in self (e.g., "For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth").

3.3 Data analysis

We conducted Cronbach's Alpha, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to test the reliability and validity of the present study. After achieving reliability and validity, we proceeded to conduct a correlation analysis and a structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis to test our hypothesized relationships. One key advantage of conducting a SEM analysis for this study is that we can investigate how fan community engagement negatively affects psychological well-being through schadenfreude and trash talk simultaneously and the relative strength of each negative effect.

IV. Results

4.1 Reliability and validity

We first conducted Cronbach's Alpha test, EFA, and CFA in order to test the reliability and validity and the results are summarized in Table 2. All Cronbach's Alpha values of each construct indicate that the measures of constructs have strong confidence and internal consistency. In addition, the results of EFA and CFA also indicate validity in the measures. The model fits of CFA (CMIN/DF = 3.742, CFI = .967, NFI = .956, IFI = .967, TLI = .951, RFI = .936 and RMR = .073) generally satisfy the required level. To more formally test reliability, we calculated the composite reliability using the results of CFA. As seen in Table 2, all values of composite reliability exceed the required threshold value of 0.6, showing that the measures are reliable and representative. Therefore, we can confirm that all constructs fulfilled the requirement of reliability and validity, which suggests that we can proceed to test our hypothesized relationships with confidence.

After confirming the measures of constructs have reliability and validity, we conducted a correlation analysis between the variables to examine the relationships among major variables. The result of the correlation analysis is presented in Table 3. As the result shows, the correlation between schadenfreude and trash

<Table 2> Result of reliability and validity tests

<i>Constructs</i>		<i>Cronbach's a</i>	<i>EFA results</i>		<i>CFA results</i>	
			<i>Factor loading</i>	<i>Estimate (t-value)</i>	<i>Composite reliability</i>	
Fan community engagement	1	.842	.828	.760	.734	
	2		.880	.816(15.32)		
	3		.877	.826(15.38)		
Schadenfreude	1	.877	.741	.926	.785	
	2		.844	.844(20.84)		
Trash talk	1	.945	.890	.930	.882	
	2		.924	.952(36.63)		
	3		.878	.891(30.28)		
Psychological well-being	1	.846	.844	.801	.797	
	2		.897	.886(17.37)		
	3		.811	.741(15.514)		

talk is high ($r = .719, p < .01$). Hence, we built alternative CFA model that combines schadenfreude and trash talk as one variable to test whether our proposed model with schadenfreude and trash talk as two separate variables fits better with the data. The model fits of alternative CFA model with schadenfreude and trash talk as one variable is CMIN/DF = 7.750, CFI

= .912, NFI = .901, IFI = .913, TLI = .882, RFI = .867 and RMR = .104. This means that our proposed model with schadenfreude and trash talk as two separate variables showed better fit with the data in terms of overall model fits. Therefore, we proceeded to the main analysis with confidence in our original model.

As shown in Table 3, the results of the cor-

<Table 3> Result of correlation analysis

	Fan community engagement	Schadenfreude	Trash talk	Psychological well-being
Fan community engagement	1			
Schadenfreude	.146*	1		
Trash talk	.097**	.719*	1	
Psychological well-being	.224*	-.313*	-.349*	1

* $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$

relation analysis generally support our hypotheses. All of the relationships between constructs in the hypothesized model were significant. As expected, fan community engagement was positively associated with schadenfreude ($r = .146, p < .01$) and trash talk ($r = .097, p < .05$), and psychological well-being was negatively related to schadenfreude ($r = -.313, p < .01$) and trash talk ($r = -.349, p < .01$).

Although the results of the correlation analysis generally support our hypothesized relationships, the results from the simple correlation analysis should not be fully trusted because of its possible spurious effect. Thus, we conducted a more rigorous hypotheses test using a structural equation modeling analysis as in the following section.

4.2 Hypotheses test

Structural equation modeling using AMOS was conducted to examine the hypotheses that fan community engagement is related to schadenfreude and trash talk, which are negatively related to psychological well-being. In addition, even though it is not formally hypothesized due to the focus of this study, we examined the direct effect of fan community engagement on psychological well-being. The posited model generally showed a good fit with the data: CMIN/DF = 3.742, NFI = .956, RFI = .936, IFI = .967, TLI = .952, CFI = .967, and RMSEA = .081.

Hypothesis 1 proposed that higher level of

fan community engagement leads to a higher level of schadenfreude. The path between fan community engagement and schadenfreude shows a significant positive relationship ($\beta = .158, p < .01$) in support of H1. Hypothesis 2 proposed that higher level of fan community engagement leads to a higher level of trash talk. The path between fan community engagement and trash talk shows a significant positive relationship ($\beta = .114, p < .05$). This result supports H2. Hypothesis 3 proposed that higher level of schadenfreude leads to a lower level of psychological well-being. The result shows that schadenfreude has a significant negative effect on psychological well-being ($\beta = -.246, p < .01$) in support of H3. Hypothesis 4 proposed that higher level of trash talk leads to lower level of psychological well-being. The result shows that trash talk has a significant negative effect on psychological well-being ($\beta = -.215, p < .05$). This result supports H4. In addition, fan community engagement turned out to have a positive effect on psychological well-being ($\beta = .293, p < .01$). This is because community engagement is a positive outcome of participating in community (Algesheimer, Dholakia, and Herrman 2005). New positive social relationships, which are developed by engaging in the fan community, are likely to result in a person's feeling of continued growth in self. The direct and indirect effects of fan community engagement on psychological well-being are summarized in Table 4.

Overall, our analysis indicates that engaging

<Table 4> Direct and indirect effects of fan community engagement on psychological well-being

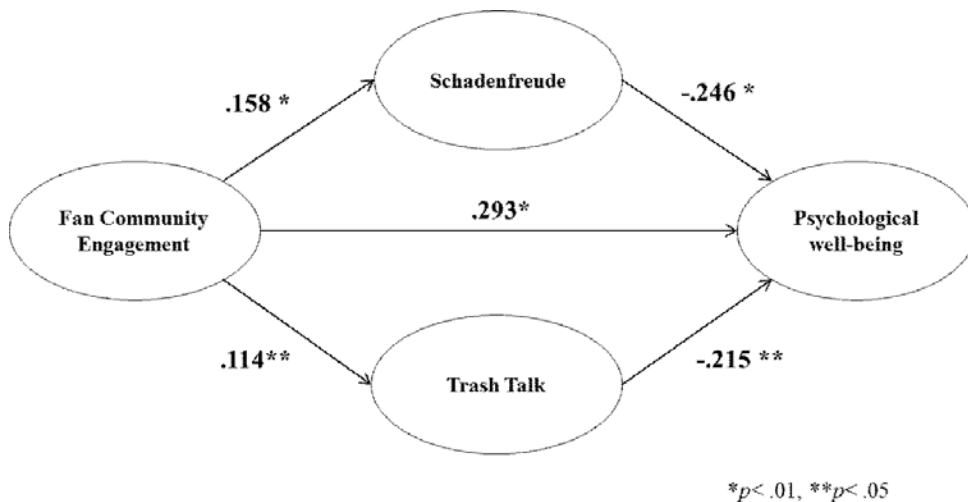
	Path (Hypothesis)	Path coefficient	<i>p</i> value
Direct effect	Fan community engagement → Psychological well-being	.293	<i>p</i> < .01
Indirect effect	Fan community engagement → Schadenfreude (H1)	.158	<i>p</i> < .01
	Fan community engagement → Trash talk (H2)	.114	<i>p</i> < .05
	Schadenfreude → Psychological well-being (H3)	- .246	<i>p</i> < .01
	Trash talk → Psychological well-being (H4)	- .215	<i>p</i> < .05

in fan community directly leads to enhanced psychological well-being. However, the results clearly indicate that engaging in fan community negatively influence members' psychological well-being indirectly through schadenfreude and trash talk. This means that fan community engagement can lead in-group members to feel malicious pleasure at misfortunes of relevant out-groups and to share negative beliefs about the out-groups, which ultimately decreased their psychological well-being, especially a sense of personal growth. The major results of testing

the posited structural relationships are presented in Figure 2.

We can compare the relative strength of the negative influence of fan community engagement on psychological well-being by calculating the total effect from each variable in the structural equation model. The total effect from engaging in fan community to the psychological well-being through schadenfreude is $-.039(.158^* (-.246))$, and the total effect through trash talk is $-.025(.114^* (-.215))$. As the arithmetic shows, the negative effect of fan community

<Figure 2> The result of structural equation modeling analysis



engagement through *schadenfreude* is slightly greater compared to the negative effect of trash talk. It should be noted, however, that trash talk has a more harmful effect on well-being than *schadenfreude* does.

V. Discussion

This study focused on the negative sides of engaging in fan community on members' psychological well-being. The results of this study showed that while engaging in fan community directly influences members' feeling of personal growth in a positive way, the engagement indirectly influences the feeling of personal growth through *schadenfreude* and trash talk in a negative way. More specifically, engaging highly in a fan community leads members to feel malicious pleasure at rivals' misfortunes and talk negative things about rivals. These negative consequences of fan community engagement ultimately lead to a lower level of psychological well-being, especially a feeling of personal growth. Contrary to common belief, engaging in a fan community, which is supposed to be invariably beneficial for members, also has a negative effect on members' well-being.

5.1 Contributions

There are significant theoretical and mana-

gerial contributions made by this study. The first theoretical contribution derives from this study's focus on human brand communities. Previous marketing studies regarding communities have focused on brand communities (Brown, Kozinets, and Sherry 2003; Franke and Shah 2003; Algesheimer, Dholakia, and Herrman 2005; Bagozzi and Dholakia 2006). Although the influences of human brands on consumers in the marketplace are becoming more important (Thomson 2006; Spears, Royme, and Steenburg 2013), the fan communities of human brands remained largely unexplored. Second, this study is the first attempt to empirically demonstrate that while fan community engagement directly affects members' well-being in positive way, it also indirectly affects well-being in negative way through *schadenfreude* and trash talk. Hickman and Ward (2007) showed that participating in brand community have dark sides such as *schadenfreude* and trash talk. This study not only confirmed the dark sides in the human brand community context but also went further by examining the negative effect of *schadenfreude* and trash talk on members' well-being.

In addition to the theoretical contributions, this study also provides important managerial implications for marketing practitioners. The results of this study indicate that community engagement positively influences members' well-being not only directly but also indirectly in negative ways through *schadenfreude* and trash talk. This result provides important implications

to marketers who plan to use human brand endorsers.

Previous marketing studies show that consumers' well-being results in brand supportive behavior such as positive word-of-mouth and company goodwill (Lee and Sirgy 2004; Szymanski and Henard 2001). Marketers who learn such implications would understand the significance of enhancing consumers' well-being. Therefore, marketers should manage fan communities of their endorsers in a way to lead members to actively engage in fan community activities while preventing members from developing hostility toward out-groups. For example, marketers can develop group-level volunteer programs so that members can feel distinguished without disparaging out-groups while doing good deeds for others. In doing so, marketers can strengthen the positive effect of fan community engagement while reducing the negative effect on well-being, which ultimately leads to supportive behavior for the endorsed brands or products.

5.2 Limitation and further research

Despite the significant contributions, our study has limitations which further studies should address. First, since this study used a survey method, further studies should employ qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews to add more richness to human brands and fan community literatures. Second, further studies

may want to also include the positive effects of fan community on members' quality of life. For example, collective efficacy, or beliefs in capabilities as a group, may be one possible positive consequence of engaging in a fan community. Since members of fan community share the same interests and enthusiasm and tend to exhibit group behaviors, engaging in fan community is likely to result in enhanced collective efficacy. Last, further studies may also want to search for moderators that weaken the negative effects of engaging in a fan community. For example, because fan communities are not always in competitive rivalries, the degree of perceived rivalry can be considered as one moderating variable. The age of members can be another possible moderator because the level of perceived personal growth may vary at different ages. In doing this, further research may be able to address how to manage fan communities in a way that will enhance participants' qualities of life.

research.

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