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Travelers' switching behavior in the airline industry from the perspective of the push-pull-mooring framework

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HIGHLIGHTS

- New components of PPM dimensions were discovered.
- The adequacy of the second-order PPM model was identified.
- The PPM dimensions all had a significant impact on switching intention.
- The moderating role of mooring dimension was notable.

GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT

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ABSTRACT

We tested the applicability of the push-pull-mooring (PPM) migration theory to travelers' airline selection in order to clarify their switching behavior. Based on the extensive review of the literature and open-ended survey, we identified the constituents of four push, three pull, and four mooring factors. A field survey was conducted at an international airport in South Korea, and a total of 529 complete responses were used for data analysis. Our results showed that the PPM model comprising the second-order factor structure provided an acceptable representation of the observed variables in a comparison with the first-order construct model. Results of the structural analysis also indicated that all PPM categories directly affected switching intention. In addition, mooring dimension had a significant moderating effect on the relationship between pull category and switching intention. However, no moderating effect of mooring factor on the relationship between push factor and switching intention was found.

1. Introduction

The airline industry was operated as a conventional monopoly until the US enacted the International Air Transportation Action in 1980 to promote free competition and growth in the international aviation market. Later, airlines in the US led air market liberalization by signing the Treaty on Open Skies in 1992 (Park, Ahn, & Lin, 2011). In 2010, Korea signed Open Skies agreements with 20 countries for passenger transport and 33 countries for air cargo. In 2013, 50,986,891 passengers travelled by air, after a consistent annual growth of 8.1% since 2000. Korea's passenger transport market was the world's sixteenth largest in 2013, while its air cargo market was the fourth largest that year (Ministry of Land,

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Infrastructure and Transport, 2014; Park et al., 2011; The Korea Transport Institute, 2014).

The expansion of the aviation market and the changes in air transport demand impacted stakeholders such as airports, airlines, passengers, and countries. The impact is the especially significant for airline companies because it directly affects revenues (Lee & Kim, 2013). Competition to attract passengers has grown fiercer with these developments, and it is essential for airlines to identify which factors determines' choice and the switching of airlines.

Switching behavior is the action of changing the goods or services that have been previously used, and it is subordinated to behavioral intention. Repurchasing goods or services indicates favorable and positive outcomes to providers, whereas switching indicates unfavorable and negative results (Han, Kim, & Hyun, 2011; Keaveney, 1995). As customer switching behavior can lead to financial losses for service providers, many scholars attempted to reveal its causes using factors such as service quality, satisfaction, attractiveness of alternatives, lack of alternatives, price, switching costs, and personal characteristics, etc. (e.g., Bansal et al., 2005, Chih, Wang, Hsu, & Cheng, 2012; Ha & Jang, 2013; Han et al., 2011; Jung & Yoon, 2012; Keaveney, 1995; Park & Jang, 2014; Sun, 2014; Wieringa & Verhoef, 2007). However, these previous studies have mainly explored the role of the variables in the switching behavior. Relatively little research has been attempted to identify comprehensive determinants of switching behavior (for exception, Keaveney, 1995; Njite, Kim, & Kim, 2008; Roos, 1999). No research has ever examined or identified antecedent variable for switching behavior and their impact on in building customers' intentions to switch, particularly in the airline industry.

On the other hand, the notion of switching from one provider to another is not limited to marketing. It is part of theoretical considerations in the literature on human geography, especially 'migration' research examining movement between locations. Migration involves the flow of people from one geographic place to another, while service provider switching involves the flow of customers from one service provider to another (Bansal, Taylor, & James, 2005). In the previous research regarding migration, movement of customers was described by using the 'push-pull' framework. This framework describes the negative factors pushing people away from the original location as a 'push effect' and the positive factors pulling people toward a new destination as a 'pull effect.' Because this push-pull model did not explain how individuals determine their movement based on their own personal and social context, migration researchers later added a 'mooring' factor to the push-pull model and extended it to the 'push-pull-mooring' framework (hereafter referred to as 'PPM') in order to collectively understand migration. The 'mooring' factor represents an additional factor such as the switching costs or personal characteristics making the migration decision easier or more difficult. The PPM model is a new paradigm used for migration research (Bogue, 1969; Hsieh, Hsieh, Chiu, & Feng, 2012). However, to the best of our knowledge, no empirical research in hospitality and tourism, including the airline industry, has dealt with this model.

This study attempts to verify whether the PPM is applicable to understand customers' switching behavior in terms of airline selection. To achieve this objective, first, factors affecting customers' switching behavior were identified by reviewing relevant research as well as through qualitative approach. Second, these factors were categorized into push, pull, and mooring effects and second-order construct model was developed to test whether the identified factors can be adequately accounted for by PPM factors. Finally, the relationship between the PPM variables and customers' switching intention were investigated.

2. Literature review

2.1. Switching behavior

Switching behavior denotes exchanging or replacing a current service provider with another provider (Bansal & Taylor, 1999; Keaveney, 1995; Njite et al., 2008) and is the opposite of customer loyalty (Wieringa & Verhoef, 2007). Since customer switching behavior can either allow a company to obtain new customers (referred to as "in-switching") or cause it to lose customers to another company (referred to as "out-switching"), it is highly related to business continuity (Reichheld & Teal, 2001). Switching behavior is also an essential concept in business marketing because companies are able to utilize it as a way to re-revaluating their strengths and weaknesses, and it can be used as a tool to attract new customers (Njite et al., 2008).

The numerous research attempts to understand customer switching behavior can be divided into four main directions. The first aimed to understand the switching behavior itself and relationships between the variables affecting switching behavior (Chih et al., 2012; Colgate & Hedge, 2001; Ha & Jang, 2013; Han & Hyun, 2013; Han et al., 2011; Jung & Yoon, 2012; Park & Jang, 2014; Sun, 2014). The second involves reviewing the mean differences between individual groups in terms of switching behavior (Grace & O'Cass, 2001; Swanson & Hsu, 2009; Wieringa & Verhoef, 2007). The third is focused on the process of switching behavior decision making and disclosing the factors that cause customers to switch service providers (Keaveney, 1995; Njite et al., 2008; Roos, 1999). And the fourth identifies switching behavior by applying existing theories such as theories of planned behavior and the push-pull-mooring model (Bansal & Taylor, 1999; Bansal et al., 2005; Hou, Chern, Chen, & Chen, 2011; Hsieh et al., 2012; Zhang, Cheung, Lee, & Chen, 2008). However, much of the previous research has attempted to reveal the relationships between particular antecedent variables and switching behavior, as well as the roles of such variables, for example, direct role, moderating role, or mediating role. Few studies have explicitly explored customers' reasons for switching, and research based on existing theories is limited.

2.2. Migration theory and PPM model

The movement of people (migration) has long been an important research topic in the field of demography. Migration is defined as the action of people leaving their original location (i.e., the place where they are living) to go to a new location (i.e., a new environment), that is, movements between two places during a certain period of time (Bolye & Halfacree, 1998). Ravenstein (1885)'s research, regarded as the cornerstone of migration theory, revealed seven characteristics of movements through the national census survey of British subjects in 1881. He combined those seven characteristics into the "Law of Migration". In 1938, Herberle classified and explained migration through push and pull factors. This push-pull model is considered one of the most traditional and important theories to date (Lewis, 1982). In the push-pull model, factors that promote leaving the original location are called push factors, whereas factors that attract a person to the destination are called pull factors (Lewis, 1982). A push factor is a negative factor causing a person to leave the original place, whereas a pull factor is a positive factor attracting a person attracted to the new destination (Bansal et al., 2005).

However, there is criticism that this model fails to fully explain individual migration and that the push-pull model is a macroscopic analysis (Bansal et al., 2005; Hou et al., 2011). Lee (1996) stated that comparing the factors of starting point and of destination is not a simple ± calculation that results in a decision to move. In addition,