



Travellers' acceptance of consumer-generated media: An integrated model of technology acceptance and source credibility theories



Julian K. Ayeh*

College of Humanities and Social Sciences, UAE University, United Arab Emirates

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ABSTRACT

Despite the rising influence of social media, the use of consumer-generated media (CGM) for the task of travel planning still meets with scepticism among certain online travel consumers. Hence the need to further explore the psychological factors underlying this aspect of online behaviour. The study proposes a model of consumer-generated media acceptance for the purpose of travel planning which integrates the Technology Acceptance Model with the Source Credibility Theory. Using an online survey of 661 valid responses and structural equation modelling, the findings highlight the critical factors relevant to the cognitive processes which determine online travellers' affective and conative responses to the use of consumer-generated media for travel planning. The results suggest that integrating technology acceptance factors with that of information adoption can enhance the understanding of consumer-generated media usage in the vacation planning context. The study outcome holds implications for theory and practice.

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1. Introduction

The rapidly increasing popularity of social media for the exchange of information cannot be ignored. More and more people are employing social media tools to gather information, share experiences and discuss concerns (Burgess, Sellitto, Cox, & Buultjens, 2009; Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008; Yoo & Gretzel, 2011). A momentous portion of these concerns relates to travel planning, as the travel planning process is frequently regarded as one of uncertainty (Cox, Burgess, Sellitto, & Buultjens, 2009; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). This essentially arises from the very nature of travel products: characteristics of tourism as a service product – intangibility, perishability, heterogeneity, and simultaneous production and consumption – often result in higher perceived risks with barely any objectively measurable qualities prior to purchase (Hsu, Kang, & Lam, 2006). For this reason, prospective travellers are inclined to rely on word-of-mouth communications from friends and relatives (who have previously experienced the travel product) in making their travel-related choices (Burgess et al., 2009; Litvin et al., 2008).

In the 21st century, however, the emergence of Web 2.0 and the growing interest in social media have led to the transfer of this “word-of-mouth” phenomenon to online domains. Travellers are

increasingly resorting to various social media platforms for consumer-generated media (CGM) to inform their travel-related decisions (Yoo & Gretzel, 2011). Consequently, CGM websites have emerged as one of the most prominent platforms for improving travel information accessibility and for enhancing travel decision making (Litvin et al., 2008). Yet regardless of the growing interest in CGM and social media in general, the use of CGM for travel planning still meets with scepticism from some travellers (Burgess et al., 2009; Cox et al., 2009; Dellarocas, 2003). Thus, it is important to understand the conditions under which CGM will be embraced and utilised by online travel consumers. While social media has recently received considerable attention in both academia and industry, research on CGM has predominantly focused on its implications for product awareness, purchase decisions, sales and complaint management (e.g. Arsal, Backman, & Baldwin, 2008; Au, Buhalis, & Law, 2009; Cox et al., 2009; Gupta & Harris, 2010; Huang, Chou, & Lin, 2010; Ye, Law, Gu, & Chen, 2011; Yoo & Gretzel, 2008) with less attention on the determinants of CGM usage for specific tasks like travel planning. The present study therefore seeks to shed light on the psychological and decision making mechanisms underlying the use of CGM for travel planning.

Traditionally, information systems acceptance has been examined with various theories (e.g. innovation diffusion theory, determinants of ICT assimilation model, motivation theory, theory of planned behaviour, etc.). Information Systems literature demonstrates that Davis' (1986) Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is

* Tel.: +971 50 2393671.

E-mail address: julian@uaeu.ac.ae

the most prevalent and compares favourably with alternative models (see Lin (2007) and Venkatesh and Speier (1999) for review). However, given the discrete nature of CGM as well as the high involving task of travel planning, the TAM might not offer sufficient understanding of users' attitudes and intentions. Thus, in the context of CGM adoption for travel planning, which factors can best explain acceptance? The study attempts to address this research question by proposing and empirically testing an integrated model which draws on previous literature that identifies the antecedents of technology acceptance as well as information adoption to predict attitudes and intentions towards using CGM for travel planning.

Given that the particular context of CGM raises credibility concerns such as the subjective nature of online consumer opinions (Dellarocas, 2003), the complicated task of judging the views of complete strangers (Burgess et al., 2009; Litvin et al., 2008), vulnerability to strategic manipulation and abuse (Dellarocas, 2003; Litvin et al., 2008) and uncertainty about the trustworthiness of the website operators (Gretzel, 2006), this study proposes that, integrating the Source Credibility Model (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953) with the classical TAM offers a more salient understanding of online travellers' acceptance of CGM for travel planning. By utilising technology acceptance literature to integrate and add to relevant concepts from the Source Credibility Theory, this study is expected to offer a deeper understanding of online travellers' acceptance of CGM.

2. Theory and hypotheses

Several studies have sought to understand online travellers' behaviour regarding CGM and social media in general. Early attempts focused on online community participation (e.g. Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004a, 2004b). Some studies have addressed the implications of CGM for travel decisions (e.g. Arsal et al., 2008; Cox et al., 2009; Yoo & Gretzel, 2008). Recent studies have widened further to address the various forms of user-generated content (e.g. Enoch & Grossman, 2010; Chen, Shang, & Li, 2014; Huang et al., 2010). While these studies clarify the understanding of online travellers' behaviour regarding social media platforms within the online travel domain, the determinants of travellers' acceptance of CGM for travel planning still deserve further attention. Building on previous research, the present study investigates how the integration of theories from two distinct disciplines can help to shed light on the factors underlying online travellers' acceptance of CGM for travel planning. The CGM platform can be construed as a travel information system (involving a technological application as well as a source of information). Hence factors which determine technology acceptance and those which influence information acceptance may both be of relevance to the understanding of this phenomenon. The current study therefore proposes a model which integrates Davis' (1986) TAM with Hovland et al.'s (1953) Source Credibility Model to explain online travellers' intentions to use CGM for travel planning.

2.1. Technology acceptance theory

In the existing literature, several theoretical perspectives have been applied in an attempt to understand individuals' acceptance and use of technology-related applications. Of these, the TAM stands out as the most parsimonious and, perhaps, the most influential approach to studying user acceptance. The model was originally proposed by Davis (1986) based on the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). The theory postulates that individual's acceptance of information systems are determined by two cognitive factors (i.e. perceptions of usefulness and ease of use). TAM has been widely applied to investigate user-acceptance of various types of

technology including smart phones (e.g. Joo & Sang, 2013), technology based services (e.g. Zhu & Chan, 2014), e-learning (e.g. Persico, Manca, & Pozzi, 2014) and the new media (e.g. Workman, 2014). In the locale of hospitality and tourism-related research, TAM applications include employees' acceptance of IT in upscale hotels (Lam, Cho, & Qu, 2007), hotel front office systems (Kim, Lee, & Law, 2008) and other information systems (Huh, Kim, & Law, 2009), restaurant computing systems (Ham, Kim, & Forsythe, 2008), travel agency computerized reservation systems (Lee, Kim, & Lee, 2006), and the adoption of biometric systems in hotels (Morosan, 2012). The findings of these studies demonstrate that perceived usefulness and ease of use are important determinants of user acceptance of technology-related applications. Davis (1989) defines perceived usefulness as "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance" (p. 320). In the present study, perceived usefulness can be construed as the extent to which an online travel consumer believes that using CGM enhances his or her travel planning. The existing literature suggests that perceived usefulness drives attitude and usage intention (e.g. Ayeih, Au, & Law, 2013a; Joo & Sang, 2013; Persico et al., 2014; Workman, 2014). Prospective travel consumers who perceive CGM to be useful are more likely to have favourable affective and conative responses towards its adoption for travel planning than those who do not. Hence the hypotheses,

Hypothesis 1. Perceived usefulness has a significant positive effect on attitude.

Hypothesis 2. Perceived usefulness has a significant positive effect on usage intention.

Perceived ease of use has been conceptualised by Davis (1989) as "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free of effort" (1989, p. 320). In the present study, ease of use refers to the extent to which the online travel consumer believes that using CGM for travel planning will be free from effort. Prior research suggests that ease of use influences attitude (Zhu & Chan, 2014). Also, it is generally believed that a system will be regarded as more useful if it is easy to use. For example, studies by Morosan (2012) and Kim et al. (2008) among others, offer strong empirical support for a positive relationship between perceived usefulness and ease of use. The present study therefore proposes that

Hypothesis 3. Perceived ease of use has a significant positive effect on attitude towards usage.

Hypothesis 4. Perceived ease of use has a significant positive effect on perceived usefulness.

2.2. Source credibility theory

The proposed model also considers the Source Credibility Theory (Hovland et al., 1953). While the source credibility perspective is expected to be relevant in the study of individuals' acceptance and use of information sources, it can be expected to be particularly useful in the context of CGM because of the many concerns regarding CGM which largely hinge on credibility (e.g. Dellarocas, 2003; Litvin et al., 2008).

Source credibility has received extensive attention in the Marketing and Communication Studies literatures as regards the study of various phenomena (for review, see Metzger, Flanagin, Eyal, Lemus, & McCann, 2003; Pornpitakpan, 2004). In the marketing literature, Source Credibility Theory has often been

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