



Factors influencing the continuance intention to the usage of Web 2.0: An empirical study

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ABSTRACT

New business models and applications have been continuously developed and popularized on the Internet. In recent years, a number of applications including blogs, Facebook, iGoogle, Plurk, Twitter, and YouTube known as Web 2.0 have become very popular. These aforementioned applications all have a strong social flavor. However, what social factors exert an influence onto their use is still unclear and remains as a research issue to be further investigated. This research studies four social factors and they are subjective norm, image, critical mass, and electronic word-of-mouth. A causal model of the satisfaction and continuance intention of Web 2.0 users as a function of these four social factors is proposed. Results indicate that user satisfaction with Web 2.0 applications significantly affects electronic word-of-mouth, which in turn significantly influences their continuance intention. In addition, subjective norm, image and critical mass all have a significant impact onto satisfaction, which in turn has an indirect significant influence on electronic word-of-mouth. Finally, all social factors have a significant direct impact on continuance intention. Finally, implications for service providers and researchers are discussed.

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1. Introduction

The burst of the Internet bubble have witnessed the demise of countless Internet companies. It is generally agreed that we are now in the Web 2.0 era that users are connected by person-to-person applications directly (O'Reilly, 2005). The concept of Web 2.0 was originated from the 2004 International Symposium hosted by O'Reilly and MediaLive (O'Reilly, 2005). However, there was no clear definition of Web 2.0 and only an initial discussion of its principles was available. Furthermore, Web 2.0 did not have a strict boundary; but it consists of the following attributes such as "interaction, participation and sharing" as core values. In contrast to Web 1.0, Web 2.0 is characterized by services rather than software, and its platforms include any devices that can be connected to the Web rather than just personal computers. The emergence of Web 2.0 can be identified first in the growth of blogs, and subsequently a host of social networking sites including Facebook, iGoogle, Plurk, Twitter, and YouTube. By catering to people's desire for social interactions and recreation, social networking applications have enticed people to constantly contribute their time and

money towards building a virtual world (Shin, 2010). However, the market of Web 2.0 is very competitive and hot applications existed today are easily replaced by new ones developing tomorrow. Consequently, Web 2.0 sites need to have high customer loyalty in order to survive in this aforementioned highly competitive market. Building a long-term relationship with users to maintain their intention of continuously using the services will be a key to becoming a leader in the Web 2.0 world (Shin, 2008).

The communication by electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is an important and integrated part of online consumer interactions within the environment of online social network (Brown, Broderick, & Lee, 2007). In addition, customer satisfaction has been justified as a mediator for information system adoption in a large number of prior studies (e.g. Bhattacharjee, Perols, & Sanford, 2008; Chen, Chen, & Chen, 2009; Liao, Chen, & Yen, 2007; Longinidis & Gotzamani, 2009; Somers, Nelson, & Karimi, 2003; Tong, 2009; Wu & Chen, 2005; Wu & Wang, 2007; Zviran, Pliskin, & Levin, 2005). Furthermore, recognizing the social influence how it impacts the continuance intention towards the usage of Web 2.0 applications is crucial even though it is a determinant of behavioral intention employed in other empirical studies (e.g. Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Chen et al., 2009; Cheung, Chiu, and Lee (2011); Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Taylor & Todd, 1995; Venkatesh, Morris, Davis, & Davis, 2003; Yen, 2005). In summary, this study integrates social influence factors with satisfaction as well as with eWOM to understand/explore the chain of mediating relationships.

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Up to date, prior studies have identified the associated relationships in terms of the various utilizations of web 2.0 applications (e.g. Cheung et al., 2011; Hsieh, Kuo, Yang, & Lin, 2010; Jin, Lee, & Cheung, 2009; Yang & Lai, 2010), but few studies have explicitly assessed the correlations among such factor as satisfaction, electronic word-of-mouth, continuance intention, and also the exploration of their relative antecedents in the context of Web 2.0. The main purpose of this study is to examine the effects of social influence factors on the satisfaction of Web 2.0 applications and investigate their intention to continually use those relevant services via electronic word-of-mouth. To distinguish from previous research and/or studies reporting only the influence of social influence onto the intention to use Web 2.0 applications (Cheung et al., 2011), the contribution of this research clarified the path analysis on consumer satisfaction, electronic word-of-mouth and long-term usage intention of Web 2.0 services based on three dimensions of social influence including subjective norm, image, and critical mass. Consequently, this research may provide more insights to this subject area as exploratory study to form/develop/utilize a three dimensional framework. In this research, usage is measured by continuance intention, which is affected by satisfaction and a number of other social factors including subjective norm, image, critical mass, and electronic word-of-mouth.

The rest of this study is organized as follows. After the introduction section, the next section performs a review of prior studies and discusses the associated factors about an individual's continuous use of web 2.0 applications. The research model, hypotheses, and operationalization are covered in Section 3 and the data analysis procedures and the obtained results using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique are discussed in Section 4. The managerial implications are covered in Section 5 and finally, the last section extends our findings from both theoretical and practical perspectives in addition to providing future research directions and limitations to complete this study.

2. Literature review

2.1. Electronic word-of-mouth

Although many researchers have suggested that word-of-mouth is one of the key factors leading to customer loyalty (e.g. Bansal & Voyer, 2000; Chung & Darke, 2006; Casaló, Flavián, & Guinaliu, 2008; Park & Lee, 2009), there is a lack of studies to discuss their relationships in the Web 2.0 context. According to the studies of Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, and Gremler (2004), the definition of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) may be that online customers or potential customers often seek out information on products or companies and share their knowledge, experiences and opinions, both in a positive and negative manner. E-mail, E-Mail List Service, User Groups, Industry Portal Discussion Areas, BBS, News Group, Online Forums and Virtual Community can all be the media or vehicle for disseminating the eWOM (Hanson, 2000). As interaction becomes more widespread on the Web, more and more customers will make their purchasing decision based on eWOM. As a result, many companies have started to pay attention to and reexamine their corporate policies from a customer perspective to improve their strategic competition (Rezabakhsh, Bornemann, Hansen, & Schrader, 2006).

2.2. Satisfaction and continuance intention

Expectation-Confirmation Theory (ECT) was proposed by Oliver (1980) as a framework to assess the effect of satisfaction with a product or service on purchase behavior. The main theme of this theory is that repurchase decision is dependent on satisfaction,

which is in turn a function of the customer's expectations before purchasing or using the product. Satisfaction also depends on confirmation, which is derived from the perceived performance of the product and expectation. Perceived performance is formed by the customers after their consuming the product. This aforementioned perception is compared with initial expectation and the result is confirmation.

Oliver (1981) considered customer satisfaction as some kind of emotional reaction to a business transaction. This reaction can be affected by the expectation as well as the consumption experience (Bhattacharjee, 2001; Lin & Hsieh, 2007; Oliver, 1980; Oliver, 1981). In short, the customer will compare the perceptions before and after the purchase of a product or service to form a degree of satisfaction.

Cardozo (1965) found that higher customer satisfaction led to increased repurchase of the same product and even the purchase of other related products. In other words, continuance intention is in fact, a manifestation of customer satisfaction or loyalty. In general, it is less costly to keep existing customers than acquire new customers. ECT explores customer satisfaction resulted from the consumption of products or services and how satisfaction can affect repurchase behavior (Oliver, 1980). In the discipline of information systems, the Post-Acceptance Model similarly posits that is continuance intention is dependent on satisfaction (Bhattacharjee, 2001; Chou, Min, Chang, & Lin, 2010). As a result, the continuance intention of Web 2.0 users can also be related to their satisfaction.

2.3. Subjective norm

In terms of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) suggested that an individual's behavior intention is affected by his or her attitude toward the behavior and subjective norm, which are simply the perceived social pressure to perform that particular behavior. If one individual has a positive attitude toward the behavior and feels obliged to engage in that behavior, then his or her behavior intention will be greater. An individual is often motivated to comply with the views of his or her supervisors, and/or peers in order to meet their expectations or earn their approval (e.g. Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Bhattacharjee, 2000; Venkatesh et al., 2003; Wu and Chen, 2005; Chen et al., 2009; Liao et al., 2007). Since Web 2.0 applications are socially oriented, subjective norm is potentially related to their continued use.

2.4. Image

Boulding (1956) considered an individual's image his or her subjective knowledge of the world. This knowledge in turn affects how the individual behaves. Martineau (1958) first applied the concept of image to the retailing industry. This author actually proposed that a retail store's image is formed via the shopper's perceived functional qualities of the store and the atmosphere of psychological attributes projected by the store. Speaking in the group level, if a group member perceives that the use of certain novel items will boost his or her status or image, he or she will tend to use the items more frequently. This perception effect on user behavior may be another form of image (Moore & Benbasat, 1991; Venkatesh et al., 2003). Nelson (1962) proposed that images are formed when an individual extrapolates what is known into unknown and that the formation is subject to the influence of two types of factors provided below:

- (1) *External factors* include social influence, peer pressure, participation of peers or group members, and the degree of concentration of the organization.
- (2) *Internal factors* include personal interests, motivation, attitude, judgments, psychological and physiological states, and status within the organization and team chemistry.

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