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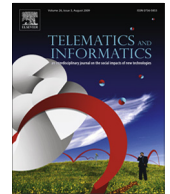
The use of social media in travel information search

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

When faced with new technology for tourism purposes, travelers often use information searches in the Internet and, in addition, gain valuable travel information from various sources. This paper examines the travel information searches using social media as a new search behavior from a value perspective. By adopting the value-based adoption model (VAM) based on the prospect theory and mental accounting theory from the perspectives of value maximization of benefits versus sacrifices for a new technology, our findings revealed that the traveler's perception of the value of social media is a primary determinant of the traveler's social media usage. We test our research model using empirical data collected ($n = 695$) in a survey and run a structural equation modeling. These results are mediated by perceived value. Thus, the users of new social media, especially for travel information searches, are influenced by both benefits (information reliability, enjoyment) and sacrifices (complexity, perceived effort). However, only enjoyment makes an impact directly on social media usage. Thus, this paper discusses both the theoretical and practical implications of VAM in the context of social media on the subject of tourism.

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1. Introduction

Social media sites are currently accessed by 4.2 billion people via their mobile device. Facebook user's check their account more than 5 times a day and 74% of marketers believe that social media including Facebook, Google+, Twitter, etc., are vitally important for their corporate and product strategy (Infographic: Social Media Stats 2013: Digitalbuzzblog.com). These effects make a huge impact on travel industry as well. Social media are fundamentally changing the way travelers and tourists search for, find, and read information regarding tourist suppliers and tourist destinations, and travelers can share their travel experiences through Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube (Sigala et al., 2012). People throughout the world have Internet access, consult blogs, and read or post information using some form of social media. Today, 'connecting' and 'exchanging' have replaced the keywords 'selling' or 'searching' in various industries. For this reason, information technology (IT) enhanced social media (Choi, 2013; Chung et al., 2012; Koo et al., 2011) in the hospitality and tourism industry has also become an essential tool for accessing various sources of tourist information (Law et al., 2009; Sigala et al., 2012).

One area in which social media can exert a strong impact is travel occurring as a result of an information-intensive industry (Sheldon, 1997; Werthner and Klein, 1999). Social media have become essential for restructuring the tourism industry, and this need for social media could have significant effects on tourism in general (Xiang et al., 2008). Because travel products are not easily verified and controlled in advance, it may be more cost effective to build online communities of people who share interests and engage in activities in other business areas, such as social commerce or entertainment. Travel

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information searches in contemporary web technologies can provide rich destination features, activities and appropriate price information to identify the needs, wants, and demands of tourists and travelers. Recently, social media, which include text messages, pictures, or videos in real-time and word-of-mouth, enable travelers to pay more attention, become interested in, desire, and interact more effectively within a variety of travel-related experiences with each other and tend to believe and rely on each other's information.

Travel information that is conveyed using blogs, tweets, and word-of-mouth comments from socially connected people (Jang et al., 2013) leads to a greater consumption of information (watchers, 79.8%; sharers, 61.2%) rather than generation of information (commenters, 36. 2%; producers 24.2%) because of the cost of posting or fear of offering information (Sigala et al., 2012). The Travel Industry Association of America noted that about two-thirds (79 million; 64%) of travelers (102 million) use search engines for travel planning (TIA, 2005). Another recent study showed that a search engine is a useful online information source for American families in the context of vacation planning (eMarketer, 2008; Fesenmaier et al., 2010). Furthermore, Compete Inc. found that user generated content (UGC) generates about US $10 billion a year in online travel bookings; thus, more than 20% of travelers rely on UGC when booking their trips (Schmallegger and Carson, 2008). Travelers using social media to search for a travel destination can turn to destination websites to locate destination information. That is, social media can be used during all stages of the travelers' decision-making process, and travelers realize that they have a need for social media in the tourism industry (Sigala et al., 2012).

Despite the phenomenal growth, there is a lack of empirical data describing the role of social media in the context of online travel information searches (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). One of the major questions is why are people willing to use travel information search processing on social media websites (Fesenmaier et al., 2010). Travelers' choice and decision making could be studied from the value maximization perspective (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979) and mental accounting theory (Thaler, 1980). That is, travelers also tend to maximize value on their choices for travel information search comparing with customers' decision making based on the compounding factors (Gupta and Kim, 2010). Zeithaml (1988) proposed the concepts of perceived value which took place in a comparison context such as perceived quality vs. perceived sacrifice for a conventional product context. Chen and Dubinsky (2003) extended the perceived customer value in an electronic commerce setting. Perceived value is known to be a key predictor of customer purchase decision making (Gupta and Kim, 2010). In terms of the delivery of information service study, we need to explore why travelers use social media and seek out travel information searches and the factors that influence information search in social media. There are many studies that adopt value as a key predictor of IT user's decision to adopt a mobile services (Pihlström and Brush, 2008; Pura, 2005), Internet shopping behavior in a consumer use context (Venkatesh et al., 2012), customer purchase decision making on Internet shopping context (Chen and Dubinsky, 2003; Gupta and Kim, 2010; Kim et al., 2007). However, most of them are set in the Internet customer shopping context and do not consider the role of value affected by the trade-off effects such as benefits and risks (Gupta and Kim, 2010) or risk and uncertainty (Chen and Dubinsky, 2003) in the tourism and hospitality research (Al-Sabbahy et al., 2004). In general, Information Systems (IS) have little adopted to examine both the benefit and sacrifice aspects of innovation compared to scholars in other disciplines (Bolton and Drew, 1991; Chang and Wildt, 1994; Chen and Dubinsky, 2003), rather IS scholars have focused on the comparison between extrinsic motivation (i.e., perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use) and intrinsic motivation (i.e., perceived enjoyment) (Davis et al., 1992; Lee et al., 2005; Teo et al., 1999).

The most well-known model explaining the adoption and usage of technology by individuals in an organization is the Technology Adoption Model (TAM) introduced by Davis (1989). Kim et al. (2007) argued that TAM is limited, however, in explaining the adoption of new ITs or behaviors, such as mobile commerce. Instead, they proposed the value-based adoption model (VAM), which is more suitable for explaining the dual role of technology users and service consumers. Most consumers adopt and use it for personal purposes, and the cost of voluntary adoption and usage is borne by the individuals. In the context of tourism information search, however, a great portion of issues to consider would be either benefits or sacrifices in pursuing innovative approaches to achieve valuable tourism information. For example, using social media for travel information searches not only have benefits (i.e., acquisition utility), such as enjoying online networking, but also have costs (i.e., transaction utility), such as inconvenience or not producing reliable travel information (Thaler, 1980; Thaler, 1985; Thaler, 2008). In the end, people may be more perceive either benefit or sacrifice, which may have any value regarding new technologies (Sheth, 1981). If people do not properly understand new technological innovations because of the complexity of using these technologies, they may begin to feel a "psychology of reactance", which influences attempt to bring about felt pressure toward change (Clee and Wicklund, 1980).

Our study focuses on travel information to examine the phenomenon of travel information searches in social media websites, focusing on the mental accounting theory (Thaler, 1980; Thaler, 1985; Thaler, 2008), which explains travelers' decision making. Mental accounting theory is helpful in examining travel information search theoretically, especially in the context of social media use, rather than from a technology user's perspective (Kim et al., 2007, 2012). Travel information searches are defined as "the bulk of technology use by traveler 2.0 is related to searches for information on the different products and services to be used during a trip" (Sigala et al., 2012, p. 172). In previous literature, the VAM based on the mental accounting theory thoroughly explains the costs and benefits associated with choices made by users. According to this theory, the value function can be applied by the concept of gains and losses relative to a reference point for the traveler. Therefore, the VAM enables us to consider the benefits or costs related to the use of information searching via social media used by travelers. By investigating influential factors involved in travelers' use in the context of social media, we propose that travelers' use of travel information searches can be explained in a search behavior. Through this study, we can contribute some practical