



Sharing travel stories and behavioral outcomes: A case of travel



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Tourists represent better post-purchase happiness, self-enhancement, well-being, and return intention when they share experiential purchase.
- Tie strength influences the relationship between tourists' sharing activity and their behavioral outcomes.
- Communication mode influences the relationship between tourists' sharing activity and their behavioral outcomes.

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ABSTRACT

The benefits of tourism have been drawing a great deal of attention from tourists, community, and society alike. This study investigates how tourists' story sharing activities influence their post-purchase behavioral process, depending on different communication conditions. Two 2x2 between-subject experiments were conducted with recent travelers in the U.S. Results reveal tourists' post-purchase behavioral processes depend on what, how, and with whom they engage in post-trip story sharing activity. Findings contribute to the literature on purchase-driven happiness, self-enhancement, well-being, and communications by providing evidence on how different communication conditions alter the effects of tourists' story sharing on their post-purchase behavioral outcomes. Findings also suggest that destination marketers should apply strategies to encourage tourists' story sharing activity.

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1. Introduction

Imagine you just returned from a trip to New York. How likely would you tell others about your trip? Would such story sharing make you feel happy? Would you prefer sharing the story in person to sharing it on social networking sites (SNSs)? Will you share your trip with close friends and/or strangers on SNSs? This research aims to understand implications of these post-trip storytelling activities, which are generally referred to as 'sharing activities,' from the perspective of customer behavior. Research shows that sharing stories about previous purchases can enhance customers' well-being (Kumar & Gilovich, 2015). Tourism benefits include a link between tourism activities and tourists' well-being (Chen, Petrick, & Shahvali, 2016). People travel to relieve stress (Chen et al., 2016) or to fulfill their leisure goals (Sirgy, 2010). Despite some research on the association between tourism activities and tourists' well-being (e.g., Uysal, Sirgy, Woo, & Kim, 2016) and increasing

popularity of tourists' post-trip information sharing activities (e.g., Jacobsen & Munar, 2014), few studies have investigated the influence of post-trip sharing activities on tourists' post-purchase behavioral process.

Understanding the implications of story sharing is important particularly because more tourists share their trip easily with others through SNSs in addition to traditional face-to-face communications. However, not all sharing activities lead to positive outcomes like increased well-being. Well-being theory supports customers' happiness might change based on the circumstance (Diener, Lucas, & Scollon, 2006). Even though sharing activity, a form of social interactions, serves as an underlying mechanism related to tourists' well-being, boundary communication conditions for sharing activity remain unclear. The effect of sharing activity on customers' well-being might depend on the customer's goals, the nature of the communication engaged, or the perceived closeness to the communication partners (Burke & Kraut, 2016).

This research investigates the roles played by the different communication conditions of sharing activity that cause different post-purchase behavioral outcomes. Three communication conditions of interest include what (prior purchase), how

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(communication mode), and with whom (communication partner) one communicates, while the key outcomes under investigation are post-purchase happiness, self-enhancement, well-being, and return intention. This study enriches our understanding on how to enhance tourists' post-purchase behavioral process outcomes when tourists engage in post-trip sharing activities and contributes to the well-being and communication literature. This research is one of a few early attempts to demonstrate how post-trip sharing activities relate to tourists' psychological and behavioral responses. Results from this study suggest how destination marketers can frame a destination or tourism activities to enhance tourists' post-purchase behavioral outcomes in an effort to promote destination attractiveness.

2. Literature review

2.1. Sharing activity

Sharing activity refers to customers' communication with others regarding their consumption activities. Sharing activity explains how and why customers communicate their stories, potentially enabling a pleasant event more pleasant (Kumar & Gilovich, 2015). It serves as a form of social interaction and promotes customers' happiness (Caprariello & Reis, 2013). Sharing activity occurs not only through traditional communications (Caprariello & Reis, 2013), but also via online/social media communications (Lee, 2016). For instance, Caprariello and Reis support the importance of social interactions on well-being, because social interaction is associated with customers' positive affect. In addition, Lee (2016) argues different SNSs activities are related to the customer's well-being as they fulfill the customer's needs for autonomy and other psychological needs.

Sharing activity benefits people in different ways. Talking to others allows customers to relive their experiences by reflecting on previous experiences. Langston (1994) proposed the concept of *capitalization* to explain the phenomenon that when customers share a positive event with others, they have more positive feelings through sharing than experiencing the event itself. Talking to others also allows customers to shape their identity because they construct who they are by telling their stories (Carter & Gilovich, 2012). Customers talk about their previous consumption activities to strategically develop their self-image (Schau & Gilly, 2003) and self-concept (Chung & Darke, 2006). The value and meaning of previous consumption (e.g., trip) can be reinforced through sharing previous consumptions, rather than merely making the purchase (Taylor, Strutton, & Thompson, 2012). For instance, when tourists talk about the time they traveled to New York City, they could feel as if they became another person, say, a "New Yorker," thereby constructing part of their identity.

Tourists do share their trip experience with others. A tourism experience refers to "an individual's subjective evaluation and undergoing of events related to his/her tourist activities that begins before, during, and after the trip" (Tung & Ritchie, 2011, p. 1369). Tourism experiences are personal and are formulated based on how tourists perceive destination places and products (Jacobsen & Munar, 2014). Tourists develop their perceptions based on not only their actual/simulated visit to the destination (Gallarza, Saura, & Garcia, 2002), but also touristic objects such as souvenirs (Haldrup & Larsen, 2010). Accordingly, tourists share their trip activities about new knowledge acquisition such as attraction information as well as about emotional experiences through stories and pictures (Baym, 2010). Different types of social media platforms enable tourists to share knowledge (Buhalis & Law, 2008) and construct their virtual identities (Munar, 2010). Jacobsen and Munar (2014) report that tourists share their trip experience on

social media in light of their personal and community-based motivations.

2.2. Self-enhancement

When customers communicate with others, they want to present themselves in a way they desire others to perceive them. Self-enhancement relates to customers' need to seek experiences that improve the self-concept (Baumeister, 1998). Customers have a desire to present the positivity of their self-concepts to others (Banister & Hogg, 2004). The Hyperpersonal Model explains customers intentionally select information that represents positive effects on their self-esteem (Walther, 1996). Self-enhancement plays an important role in various sharing activities as it is one of the central motivations for word-of-mouth (WOM) (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). Taylor et al. (2012) report that customers share online advertising with others with a goal of enhancing themselves.

Promoting positive self-concept is important in the tourism context. Sirgy (1982) proposes the idea of self-congruity, which explains tourists' comparison between their destination visitor image and their own self-image. Beerli, Meneses, and Gil (2007) also conclude that when tourists perceive a higher self-congruity between the self-concept and the destination, they are more likely to choose the destination.

2.3. Tourists' well-being

Customer well-being refers to a positive, subjective feeling about life experiences (Andrews & Withey, 1976). Customer well-being focuses on the well-being of the customer in relation to his/her consumptions (Sirgy, Lee, & Rahtz, 2007). Kotler, Roberto, and Lee (2002) support the idea of social marketing, explaining marketers should seek to "deliver superior value to customers in a way that maintains and improves the consumer's and the society's well-being" (p. 20). Sirgy et al. (2007) propose two sub-dimensions of customer well-being—objective and subjective. Examples of the objective approach include cost of living, while those of the subjective approach may reflect customers' satisfaction with their possessions. Research on customer well-being has shifted from the objective approach (e.g., Ahuvia, Scott, & Bilgin, 2010) to subjective, individual happiness, with the rise of positive psychology and subjective well-being (e.g., Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Sirgy, 2010).

Both academic researchers and industry practitioners have shown substantial interest in customers' well-being (Goldberg, 2016; Kumar & Gilovich, 2015). Different factors are known to promote customers' well-being and they include, for example, purchase type (Guevarra & Howell, 2015), social support (Burke & Kraut, 2016), SNSs' activities (Lee, 2016), and talking (Kumar & Gilovich, 2015). In the tourism context, scholars have investigated tourists' well-being related to social tourism (McCabe & Johnson, 2013), tourist type (Bimonte & Faralla, 2012), and the role of vacation (Chen, Lehto, & Cai, 2013). Tourism activities have a positive influence on tourists' well-being (Uysal et al., 2016). Taking a vacation, as a form of tourism activity, contributes to tourists' overall life satisfaction through various trip experiences (Neal, Sirgy, & Uysal, 2004). For instance, Chen et al. (2016) investigate the role of tourism experiences as a stress reliever as well as a life satisfaction enhancer. Although the relationship between tourism activities and tourists' well-being has drawn much research attention, the literature is short on investigations into the role of sharing trip activities in creating feelings of well-being.

When investigating customer well-being, Schmitt, Brakus, and Zarantonello (2015) suggest examining two types of happiness

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