



What drives consumer knowledge sharing in online travel communities?: Personal attributes or e-service factors?



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ABSTRACT

Consumer voluntary sharing of e-service knowledge in an online community is of great value to both business and consumers. This study develops and tests a research model integrating two personal attributes (consumer innovativeness and subjective knowledge) and two e-service factors (perceived ease of use and usefulness) in predicting consumer voluntary knowledge sharing in an online community. Data were collected using a web-based survey of 364 airline travelers recruited through an online travel community in China. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) technique was used to analyze the data. The results reveal that personal factors are stronger drivers of knowledge sharing than e-service factors. This study advances consumer knowledge sharing in online communities, and has implications for enhancing a firm's e-service strategies.

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1. Introduction

With growing popularity of the internet, consumers are increasingly using e-service applications such as online flight information, ticket booking and check-in to organize their travel. Online travel communities have become a free source of knowledge sharing (Dholakia, Blazevic, Wiertz, & Algesheimer, 2009), providing unprecedented opportunities for both the consumers and travel business organizations. Novice consumers can learn to use e-services or solve problems associated with the use of e-services by consulting with an online community. Firms can significantly reduce service costs because consumer knowledge sharing can take over some or major parts of an e-service technical support function (Dholakia et al., 2009). Firms can utilize online communities to interact with their customers, to be better informed of the customers' requirements, experience, satisfaction or complaints, and develop effective customer service strategies (Hagel, 1999; Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008).

Understanding factors driving users to share knowledge online

is important if firms are to effectively exploit this free resource. The topic has received growing research attention in recent years (e.g. Heo & Toomey, 2016; Jadin, Gnambs, & Batinic, 2013; Lai & Chen, 2014; Wei, Lin, Chen, An, & Yeh, 2015). Prior studies have focused on constructs associated with social capital theory (Chung, Cooke, Fry, & Hung, 2015; Wasko & Faraj, 2005), social cognitive theory (Fang & Chiu, 2010), resource exchange theory (Chan & Li, 2010), uses and gratification theory (Chen, Yang, & Tang, 2013), and organizational citizenship behaviors (Chiu, Hsu, & Wang, 2006) and self-efficacy (Jin, Zhou, Lee, & Cheung, 2013; Papadopoulos, Stamati, & Nopparuch, 2013). In the travel service sector, Li and Liu (2014) have recently revealed that travelers' perceived usefulness of e-service has a positive effect on word-of-mouth knowledge sharing. Other driving factors of online knowledge sharing include positive self-enhancement social benefits (Yoo & Gretzel, 2008), empowerment and self-directed factors (Bronner & de Hoog, 2010). Despite the progress of online knowledge sharing research, there are at least two important gaps that need to be addressed. First, there is a lack of considerations of personal characteristics in driving knowledge sharing in an online community. For example, personality factors such as innovativeness and self-concept factors such as subjective knowledge have received limited attention (Wiertz & de Ruyter, 2007). Consumers with

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innovative personality traits are early adopters of self-service technologies (Rogers, 1995) such as online flight information search, ticket booking and check-in. Therefore, consumers with innovative personality traits could be the main knowledge contributors in online discussions (Lee, Qu, & Kim, 2007). Second, although prior research has indicated that consumer experience factors such as service quality, satisfaction, service failure and recovery as consumers' main motivations for writing reviews online (Casaló, Flavián, & Guinalíu, 2010), little is known whether consumer e-service experience factors could drive knowledge sharing in an online community.

This study aims to address the above research gaps by focusing on the impact of airline travelers' personal factors (innovativeness and subjective knowledge) and e-service experience factors (perceived usefulness and ease of use of airline e-services) of voluntary knowledge sharing in an online travel community. Based on recent theoretical developments in consumer psychology literature (e.g. Packard & Wooten, 2013) and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM, Davis, 1989), a research model is developed and tested using a sample of airline travelers recruited through an online travel community in China.

This study makes three important contributions to understanding drivers of consumer knowledge sharing in online communities. First, by integrating personal attributes with e-service experience factors in a research model, it improves understanding of the psychological foundations of consumer online knowledge sharing. Second, the study reveals that personal attributes are a stronger driving force than e-service use experience factors. Third, the findings of this study have practical implications for firms' online service strategies by helping firms to better comprehend the nature of consumer online knowledge sharing behavior.

2. Conceptual background and hypotheses

2.1. Personal attributes and online knowledge sharing

Personalities differ greatly in their inclination to participate in online discussions (Wasko & Faraj, 2005). Some consumers tend to be active discussants, while others are passive 'lurkers' (Wiertz & de Ruyter, 2007). Human behavior is usually determined by several fundamental personality traits, which tend to be relatively stable across different situations and over time (e.g. McAdams & Olson, 2010; Pervin, 2003). Consumer psychological studies have revealed the impact of personality traits in online knowledge sharing behavior. For example, Wiertz and de Ruyter (2007) propose a concept of "online interaction propensity" that is rooted in personality to explain the difference between active knowledge contributors and lurkers. Matzler, Renzl, Müller, Herting, and Mooradian (2008) reveal agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness personality traits play as determinants of the employee's knowledge sharing behavior in an engineering firm. Wang and Yang (2007) propose a Five-Factor Model of personality inventory to study knowledge sharing in a high-technological laboratory. This personal inventory reveals that extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness are positively related to knowledge sharing intention. Lai and Chen (2014) examine the differences between posters and lurkers in knowledge-sharing. They find that posters are influenced by intrinsic motivational factors (i.e., enjoyment and knowledge self-efficacy), while lurkers are affected by extrinsic motivational factors (i.e., reciprocity). Jadin et al. (2013) investigate three different personality traits (trendsetting, opinion leadership, and pro-social value orientations) in predicting the authorship of Wikipedia articles. The mixed result indicates only trendsetting can be confirmed to have a positive effect. Although Jadin et al. (2013) allude to personal innovativeness that may play an important role

in sharing knowledge online, they have not empirically tested the model. Therefore, this study extends this line of research to include a personality trait of personal innovativeness, and another personal construct – subjective knowledge in predicting consumer knowledge sharing in online travel communities.

Consumer innovativeness is an innate predisposition 'to buy new and different products and brands rather than remain with previous choices and consumer patterns' (Steenkamp, Hofstede, & Wedel, 1999). In other words, consumer innovativeness embraces change and tries new products. Roehrich (2004) defines consumer innovativeness as a "consumption of newness" and proposes four major forces to explain such a predisposition. The four major forces are stimulation need, novelty seeking, independence toward others' communicated experience, and need for uniqueness. Innovative consumers are early adopters of a new technology and they introduce a new idea into a consumption community (Rogers, 1995). Empirical evidence tends to support Rogers' argument. For example, Grewal, Mehta, and Kardes (2000) reported that innovativeness has a positive influence of opinion leadership in the consumption domains of cars and computers. In the online context, Pagani, Hofacker, and Goldsmith (2011) found that user innovativeness is positively related to the use of online social networking sites for information exchange, suggesting that innovative users are more likely to contribute content to the social networking sites. Thus.

H1. Innovativeness is positively related to knowledge sharing in an online travel community.

Consumer subjective knowledge refers to self-beliefs regarding one's knowledge in the domain of consumption (Carlson, Vincent, Hardesty, & Bearden, 2009; Packard & Wooten, 2013; Park, Mothersbaugh, & Feick, 1994). It is a psychological self-concept (Leary et al., 1994; Packard & Wooten, 2013) that contributes to global evaluations of the self (Tafarodi & Milne, 2002). Subjective knowledge thus can be seen as an integral part of an individual's personal character and identity (Wasko & Faraj, 2005). The construct is different from objective knowledge (Brucks, 1985; Flynn & Goldsmith, 1999), which refers to the actual amount of accurate information stored in a person's memory. Subjective knowledge has a stronger influence on consumption behavior than objective knowledge (Selnes & Gronhaug, 1986). This study focuses on consumer subjective knowledge.

People who perceive themselves as being particularly knowledgeable of a new consumption practice tend to be keen to share their opinions online and to maintain the positive self-concept of being knowledgeable (Packard & Wooten, 2013). Therefore, expert consumers usually are opinion leaders (Grewal et al., 2000). Research by Wasko and Faraj (2005) suggest that experience or expertise is positively associated with knowledge sharing activity in online communities (Wasko & Faraj, 2000). In addition, people who have higher subjective knowledge tend to have more confidence in their capability to provide valuable knowledge, which is often referred to as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982). Knowledge self-efficacy is positively associated with intention to share knowledge as well as the amount and usefulness of knowledge shared (Jin et al., 2013). Thus.

H2. Subjective knowledge is positively related to knowledge sharing in an online travel community.

Innovative consumers have greater willingness to experiment with new ideas and to try new products or services earlier. As a consequence, they are more knowledgeable (Engel, Kegerreis, & Blackwell, 1969). Moreover, they tend to be more active in dissemination of a new product or service information than most

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