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Understanding consumer intention to participate in online travel community and effects on consumer intention to purchase travel online and WOM: An integration of innovation diffusion theory and TAM with trust

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ABSTRACT

The growing presence of online travel communities is leading to great developments in the travel industry. Grounded in the innovation diffusion theory (IDT) and the technology acceptance model (TAM), this paper seek to develop and empirically test a comprehensive framework to examine the antecedents of customers' intention to participate in online travel community. Using SEM to analyse the data collected from a sample of 495 members, the results indicate that innovation diffusion theory and TAM with trust provide an appropriate model for explaining consumers' intention to participate; this intention in turn has a positive influence on intention to purchase and positive WOM. Furthermore, religiosity plays an important role in understanding consumers' behavioural intention. The results offer important implications for online service provider and are likely to stimulate further research in the area of online travel community.

1. Introduction

Information Communication Technologies, especially the Internet, is leading to great developments in the tourism industry (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Internet has come as a new way of communication and selling for travel companies (Law & Wong, 2003; Llach, Mariomon, & Alonso-Almeida, 2013). Radical changes in social interactions have been initiated due to the emergence of Information Communication Technologies, which in return provide important implications for the online communities' formation (Wasko & Faraj, 2005; Wiertz & Ruyter, 2007).

The benefits of online travel communities extend to both for travel searchers and tourism marketing firms. For travellers, online travel community enables traveller to discover what other persons think about potential facilities such as hotels and restaurants,

traveller can access information easily which enable travellers to extract more value from the travel companies (Qu & Lee, 2011). For tourism marketing firms, online travel communities facilitate deep and constant relationships with consumers (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002), reduce the costs of consumer service (Prahalad, 2000; Wiertz & Ruyter, 2007). Furthermore, online travel communities reflect the progressively popular "consumer empowerment" movement (Tsai & Pai, 2014).

Yet despite the substantial implications and importance of online communities for tourism firms (Qu & Lee, 2011; Wang, Yu, & Fesenmaier, 2002), little attention has been given to the antecedents and consequences of the intentions of customers to participate in these online communities (Casaló, Flavián, & Guinaliu, 2010; Qu & Lee, 2011; Tsai & Pai, 2014). Prior studies have mostly concentrated on the drivers of consumer involvement and contributions to the online travel communities, because energetic participation is an important element in order to guarantee the survival of the online community. In fact, if none participated in the community, it would cease to exist (Wasko & Faraj, 2005). Nevertheless, a scant of consensus continues to exist regarding the major determinants of consumer intention to participate. For example, Casaló et al. (2010)

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pointed out that consumer participation in online travel communities is affected by perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness, but it also seems to be affected by hedonic and norms benefits (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004). Consumer participation and building prosperous online travel communities are frequently cited central challenges for any online travel community provider. Therefore, examining and understanding determinants of consumer intention participation has become a key question in online travel community studies. Consequently, this study proposes an integrated model that identifies key factors that affect the intention of consumer to participate in online travel community. Moreover, this study examines the effect of consumer intention to participate on consumer intention to purchase travel online and positive word of mouth. Understanding these behavioural intentions may benefit this online travel community.

The current study aims to contribute the following to the literature of tourism and relationship marketing: 1) identify the most crucial determinants that effect consumer intention to participate in online travel communities; 2) by integrating two well-recognised technology adaption theories: the innovation diffusion theory and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), we help to understand the intention of consumers to participate in online travel community; 3) we examine the influence of consumers' intentions to participate on both the intention to purchase travel online and positive word of mouth (WOM). 4) We also examine the moderating role of religiosity on the association between consumer intention to participate, attitude, trust, and intention to purchase travel online. The findings will help tourism companies' managers and other tourism institutions to evolve strategies that enhance the intention of consumer to participate as well as evolving strategies that improve consumer intentions to purchase travel online and consumer intentions to recommend the online travel community.

Our study is organized as follow; the next section represents literature pertaining to the study variables and theories as well as the hypotheses development. Then we demonstrate our data collection and measures operationalisation. Finally, we explain the study results, discussion, and managerial implications as well as demonstrating the limitations and future research.

2. Background

2.1. Consumer intention to participate in an online community

Online communities have emerged as an essential element of the knowledge economy and for organisations are often considered as a source of competitive advantage, as well as a channel for organisational learning (Balasubramanian & Mahajan, 2001, Guo & Sheffield, 2008; Procaci, Siqueira, Braz, & Andrade, 2015).

According to the social constructivist theory, people can develop and improve their skills and creativity through solving work-related problems in collaboration with capable peers (Jonassen, Howland, Moore, & Marra, 2003). In other words, one of the important and effective methods for professional development occurs when those professionals are involved in discussions with their peers about their ideas, experiences, and collaboratively solve work-related problems. Wenger (1998) emphasises that knowledge creation occurs in communities when members are involved and participate in problem solving and when they share their ideas and knowledge through articulating, illustrating, and negotiating on the better alternative solutions to solve the problems. In general, there are three distinct and different groups of benefits that might be obtained from a regular community of practice: individual, community and organisational (Millen, Fontaine, & Muller, 2002). At the individual level, they suggest that there are benefits that might be obtained from increased understanding of others' efforts and

increased levels of trust. The community's members will have access to experts and resources within the subject area relevant to their work. On the other side, communities benefit from increased idea generation, better quality of knowledge, and more effective problem solving. According to Millen et al. (2002), the individual and community benefits will generate tangible benefits at the organisational level in the form of positive business outcomes for the organisation. Such benefits may include improved communication, successful projects, product innovation, a reduction in time spent accomplishing tasks, and the greater operational efficiency.

Members' participation has been acknowledged as both the key resource and the biggest challenge for the survival of online communities (Ardichvili, 2008; Ardichvili, Page, & Wentling, 2003; Butler, 2001; Chiu, Hsu, & Wang, 2006; Hsu et al., 2007; Park & Yang, 2012; Wasko & Faraj, 2005).

Regardless of their purpose, type, or environment in which they reside, online communities' survival largely depends on their ability to attract and retain members who are willing to actively participate in their communities (Butler, 2001; Wang, Butler, & Ren, 2011). Assuming the critical relevance of participation for the survival of online communities, previous online community studies have largely been conducted with the aim of understanding what motivates people to participate in these social spaces. To inform their explanations, they have relied on the use of such theories as social cognitive theory (Bock & Kim, 2002; Chiu et al., 2006); social capital theory (Chiu et al., 2006; Huysman & Wulf, 2005); social exchange theory (Bock & Kim, 2002; Faraj & Johnson, 2011; Wang, 2007); sunk cost theory (Tiwana & Bush, 2005); the technology acceptance model (Venkatesh, 2000); theories of social networks and Social Network Analysis (Faraj & Johnson, 2011; Toral, Martínez-Torres, & Barrero, 2010); critical mass theory (Raban, Moldovan, & Jones, 2010); and resource-based theory (Butler, 2001). Through these theories, previous studies have provided different perspectives influenced by such areas as psychology, sociology, information technologies, organisational studies, human–computer interaction.

The participation of consumers in an online community is a key factor that determines the success of any online community in the long term (Koh & Kim, 2004), because consumer participation in an online community will contribute to building long term relationships between the members of the community (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005). Participation in online community will guarantee a high level of consumer involvement with the online community, which may "reinforce the feelings that bind each member to the other community members, improve instruction on communal values, encourage conjoint behaviours and information sharing, and enable stronger group cohesion" (Casaló et al., 2010, p. 898). Continuing participation in an online community joint activities helps the community members achieve common goals (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006) and is a key factor for community endurance (Koh & Kim, 2004).

However, due to the difficulties regarding measuring consumer real behaviour, we focus on consumer intentions to participate. Both the theory of reasoned action (TRA) and theory of planned behaviour (TPB) show that consumers' intention directly affects their actual behaviour. Previous studies pointed out that consumer intentions measure consumer behaviour in the context of technology acceptance e.g., (Casaló et al., 2010; Karahanna, Straub, & Chervany, 1999; Kim, Ferrin, & Rao, 2008; Kim, Lee, & Law, 2008; Sia, Lim, Leung, Lee, & Huang, 2009). McKnight, Choudhury, and Kacmar (2002) pointed out that consumer behaviour intentions refers to a consumer will likely behave in a specified way, and both behaviour intentions and real behaviours are very highly associated (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000). Therefore, we focus on the intention of consumer to participate as a good indicator of the level of the