



Why do online tourists need sellers' ratings? Exploration of the factors affecting regretful tourist e-satisfaction



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Regretful personality influences cognitive dissonance.
- Postpurchase cognitive dissonance mediates the TTR/e-satisfaction relation.
- Post-purchase seller ratings can raise tourist e-satisfaction.

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ABSTRACT

Due to increasing online sales of Asian tourism, discussion of the factors influencing Asian online tourist e-satisfaction is an issue of critical importance. The major purpose of the study was to enhance regretful (e.g. high tendency-to-regret) tourist e-satisfaction by providing post-purchase information (sellers' ratings) to reduce post-purchase cognitive dissonance in the high uncertainty avoidance context (e.g. Taiwan). Results obtained from 2×2 experimental designs indicated that, the influence of regretful personality on e-satisfaction was fully mediated via post-purchase cognitive dissonance. The effect of valid sellers' ratings on raising regretful tourist e-satisfaction was also confirmed. The current study focused on Taiwanese online tourists, it provided a precise explanation of the relationships among variables and may expand understanding of Asian online regretful tourist post-purchase behaviors in a high uncertainty avoidance context. The current study could provide practitioners with post-purchase e-marketing implications and applications in such a context.

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1. Introduction

Rapidly increasing global eCommerce makes many industries devote their efforts to draw online consumer attention. One of the most notable industries in eCommerce markets is tourism. According to Wall Street Journal report by [Abkowitz \(2014\)](#), the market-research firm, Euromonitor International, proposed that China online travel retail sales are expected to grow at a compounded annual growth rate of 17%. While fast-increasing Asian online tourism deserves practitioners' attention, consumer perceived risk would be higher when they considered their online behaviors in Asia with the context of high uncertainty avoidance ([Choi & Geistfeld, 2004](#); [Keil et al., 2000](#)). According to cross-cultural research ([Hofstede, 1983](#)); it demonstrated that some individuals in Asian countries have high uncertainty avoidance, such

as in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand. Individuals will have high anxiety regarding uncertainty, and avoid risk, when they belong to a high uncertainty avoidance country ([Hofstede, 1983](#)). It is important to understand the online post-purchase behaviors of Asian tourists and the factors that influence online tourist post-purchase attitude.

Additionally, according to [Scott \(2004\)](#), more and more tourists have become "last minute" travelers. Such fast-made traveling decisions might arouse customer post-purchase cognitive dissonance due to incomplete information comparison. Based on prior discussion, it appears that some Asian online consumers (in high uncertainty avoidance context) are more likely to perceive uncertainty, experience possible post-purchase cognitive dissonance, and thus reduce their e-satisfaction after purchasing through the Internet.

Past research has shown that cognitive dissonance might influence consumer satisfaction ([Festinger, 1957](#); [Montgomery & Barnes, 1993](#); [Nail, Misak, & Davis, 2004](#); [Oshikawa, 1969](#)).

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According to Sweeney, Hausknecht, and Soutar (2000), post-purchase dissonance occurred when consumers generated inconsistent cognitions toward the product between pre-purchase and post-purchase phase. Past research also postulated that cognitive dissonance occurred after consumers make a purchase decision (Marshall, Na, State, & Deuskar, 2008). Additionally, prior research has suggested that individuals would be motivated by their cognitive dissonance to reduce their uncomfortable feelings (Elliott & Devine, 1994; Festinger, 1957; Harmon-Jones, Harmon-Jones, Fearn, Sigelman, & Johnson, 2008; Menasco & Hawkins, 1978; Nail et al., 2004; Oliver, 1980). Hence, providing effective methods (e.g. online ratings of sellers) to reduce dissonance of online tourists warrants further exploration.

Additionally, it has been posited that individual differences would affect individuals' perceived dissonance and post-purchase behaviors (Steele, Spencer, & Lynch, 1993; Stone, Wiegand, Cooper, & Aronson, 1997). Particularly, past research has shown that individual regret negatively influenced their post-decision attitudes (Harmon-Jones & Harmon-Jones, 2002; Inman & Zeelenberg, 2002; Inman, Dyer, & Jia, 1997; Schwartz, 2004; Shani & Zeelenberg, 2007; Tsiros & Mittal, 2000). According to Schwartz (2004), individuals have different tendency to feel regret. High tendency-to-regret (TTR) has been defined as an intrinsic trait in which individuals feel regret more easily and as a result are more likely to blame themselves after each decision. (Schwartz, 2004; Zeelenberg, Dijk, Manstead, & Pligt, 2000). The current study focused on whether regretful Asian online tourists (i.e. individuals with higher tendency-to-regret personal trait) were more likely to feel dissonance after online purchases.

The current research asks: are higher tendency-to-regret (TTR) tourists more likely to experience post-purchase cognitive dissonance than lower TTR tourists after online purchases? How does post-purchase cognitive dissonance (PCD) influence the relationship between tourists' tendency-to-regret and e-satisfaction? Can the post-purchase information provision (sellers' ratings) effectively raise tourist e-satisfaction after they have experienced PCD? These issues are critically relevant to online profit, tourist e-satisfaction and their repurchase intentions.

Thus, based on prior research, the current study postulated that in the context of high uncertainty avoidance, tourists' individual personal trait (e.g. regretful personality: tendency-to-regret) and their post-purchase psychological state (e.g. post-purchase cognitive dissonance) might influence their e-satisfaction. The current study also considered the possible influence of post-purchase information (e.g. sellers' ratings which are feedback from online buyers) as an important factor to increase online tourist e-satisfaction.

The current research thus developed a conceptual model that incorporated the antecedent, consequent of PCD and a moderator to influence the relationship between PCD and e-satisfaction. The present study may expand our understanding of PCD in three aspects. First, it examined the influence of post-purchase cognitive dissonance on the relationship between individual differences (tendency-to-regret) and e-satisfaction after online purchases. Second, it examined how the moderator, post-purchase information (sellers' ratings which are feedback from online buyers), influences tourist e-satisfaction after they experience PCD. Third, it expanded our understanding of the post-purchase behaviors of Asia online tourists in high uncertainty avoidance context. Since the study focused on Taiwanese online tourists (i.e. Taiwan is one of the high uncertainty avoidance countries in Asia), it could provide a precise explanation of the relationships among variables and may expand understanding of Asian online tourist post-purchase behaviors in such a context. Thus, the current research could provide practitioners with post-purchase e-marketing methods to enhance online tourist e-satisfaction in high uncertainty avoidance context.

2. Background literature

2.1. Post-purchase cognitive dissonance

According to Festinger (1957), individuals experienced cognitive dissonance when two elements of their cognition, behavior or feeling were inconsistent. Sweeney et al. (2000) further proposed that post-purchase cognitive dissonance (PCD) occurred when consumer generated inconsistent cognitions toward the product between pre-purchase and post-purchase phase (Elliott & Devine, 1994). Additionally, prior research has also demonstrated that post-purchase cognitive dissonance could result from post-purchase apprehension of possible undesirable or unexpected consequences (Cooper & Fazio, 1984; Oliver, 1997). For example, when consumers considered that "I was not comfortable with the purchase decision I have just made", they were experiencing differences between pre-purchase behavior and post-purchase attitudes toward the purchase (i.e. they were experiencing PCD) (Sweeney et al., 2000). This notion was consistent with prior research, which suggested that post-purchase dissonance was a form of state anxiety existing temporarily (Menasco & Hawkins, 1978). Thus, it was reasonable to conclude that, tourists might generate inconsistent cognitions soon after purchases and experienced unpleasant emotion when tourists doubted their online purchase decisions.

2.2. Post-purchase cognitive dissonance and high uncertainty avoidance context

Recent research has suggested that, consumer perceived risk would be higher when they considered their online behaviors in the context of high uncertainty avoidance (Choi & Geistfeld, 2004; Keil et al., 2000). In other words, online consumer post-purchase attitudes (e.g. trust about the product quality) might be influenced in the high uncertainty avoidance context. For instance, consumer might doubt about the website security, product quality, and then experience more dissonance after online purchases. Prior research on cross culture has shown that people in the context of high uncertainty avoidance will try to create security and establish rules to minimize uncertainty (Hofstede, 1983, 2001, p. 161; Jin, Park, & Kim, 2008; Straughan & Albers-Miller, 2001). Past research also suggested that people in a high uncertainty avoidance context would seek to avoid post-purchase anxiety and reduce ambiguity (e.g. post-purchase inconsistency) (Hofstede, 1983, 2001, p. 161; Jin et al., 2008).

Since PCD is a form of state anxiety (Menasco & Hawkins, 1978), which results from unexpected dissonance between pre-purchase and post-purchase phases (Sweeney et al., 2000). This discomfort feeling was more likely to be occurred in a high uncertainty avoidance context, since people under this circumstance were more likely to perceive uncertainty. It was reasonable to infer that online tourists would feel more assured when their post-purchase cognitive dissonance was reduced in such a context. Therefore, the issue of how to reduce their PCD merits further consideration in the context of high uncertainty avoidance.

Based on past research (Hofstede, 1983), some Asian countries were with high uncertainty avoidance (e.g. Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand), thus, it was reasonable to infer that some online Asian tourists were more likely to perceive risks (Choi & Geistfeld, 2004; Keil et al., 2000; Lim, Leung, Sia, & Lee, 2004), perceive cognitive dissonance, and would try to protect themselves from the unpredictability of online purchases (Hasan & Ditsa, 1999; Ho, Yoo, Yu, & Tam, 2007; Lee, Choi, Kim, & Hong, 2007). The proposed model focused on one Asian country with high uncertainty avoidance (namely Taiwan) to test an e-marketing strategy to

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