Who will attract you? Similarity effect among users on online purchase intention of movie tickets in the social shopping context

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ABSTRACT

With the popularity and growth of social networking sites, users often rely on the advice and recommendations from online friends when deciding to purchase movie tickets. The relationship between users' reviews and movie ticket purchase intention in the context of social media has been demonstrated in several studies, but few studies have explored users' perceptions of the similarity effect on online purchase intention or the psychological mechanisms of the similarity effect. From an interpersonal relationship perspective, we propose that similarity (including external and internal similarity) is an important cue for users who are deciding to purchase movie tickets online. Built on SOR (Stimuli-Organism-Response) Model and drawn upon trust transfer and information technology acceptance theories, we examined whether similarity could enhance users' online purchase intention of movie tickets. The results of a PLS analysis demonstrated that both external and internal similarity significantly affected users' perceived usefulness, enjoyment and trust transfer, which in turn exerted profound impacts on users' social shopping behaviors.

1. Introduction

The absence of human and social elements is one significant challenge that hinders the growth of e-commerce (Lu, Fan, & Zhou, 2016). The emergence of social shopping could help to ameliorate this situation. Social shopping is an emerging worldwide trend that has rapidly been developing in China. The beginning of social shopping was viewed as a subtype of e-Commerce that uses social media to support and enhance social interactions between customers (Marsden, 2010). After adding interpersonal interactions, social media gradually became the core platform for online shopping. Meanwhile, compared to the traditional "broadcast style" communication of e-commerce, social shopping depends on "penetration style" interpersonal communication for two-way communication and emphasizes users' contributions and user-generated content. This e-commerce method combines social networking and shopping to satisfy the needs for obtaining information before shopping and sharing personal experiences online after use (Stampino, 2007). Therefore, there has been growing interest in both academia and industry in the study of the effects of social networking sites and their influences on consumer behavior, including online purchase intention (Chan, Lei, Leong, Ng, & Wong, 2016).

For the movie industry, social shopping provides another distribution channel that allows customers to rapidly book movie tickets with convenience and substantial price savings. Therefore, it is ideal for consumers to purchase the tickets online. The purchasing rate was more than 35% in many European countries in 2011, and 34% of Internet users in the US have experienced purchasing movie tickets online (Fritz & Schwartzel, 2015). The Chinese movie market has grown at a faster rate. A total of 57.5 percent of movie tickets were sold online in 2015 (Papish, 2016), and the box office performance in China increased from 370 million to 6.78 billion, with a growth rate of 30% each year between 2006 and 2015, which contributes to the second-highest-grossing movie ranking in the world (Feng, 2017).

In contrast, social shopping provides a new platform for expressing moviegoers' opinions and intentions to purchase movie tickets. Movie reviews are vital for the movie industry (Harrison-Walker, 2001). In general, positive reviews are associated with higher movie sales (Rui, & Whinston, 2013; Robinson, Goh, & Zhang, 2012; West & Broniarczyk, 1998), which further influence users' purchase intention (Robinson et al., 2012).

As such, purchasing movie tickets online is a trend, and more people will use this approach to buy tickets on social commerce sites. Although online sales of movie tickets are increasing, some users hesitate to purchase tickets online. Users also have no specific loyalty to a given

website, as information redundancy and price competition encourage them to continually change portals. Business practitioners face the challenge of determining how to personalize a user's purchasing path and the specific types of social strategies that are the most effective for facilitating users' engagement in social shopping, such as purchasing movie tickets online. Given the low cost, it is useful for practitioners to know the primary factors that affect the use of social shopping websites for purchasing movie tickets.

Interpersonal relationships exist in the context of social shopping, and interpersonal interactional factors have received much attention (Hsiao, Lin, Wang, Lu, & Yu, 2010). For interpersonal interaction, similarity is an important cue upon which people build personal relationships, which has been highlighted in recent literature (Brack & Benkenstein, 2012; Brendl, Chattopadhyay, Pelham, & Carvallo, 2005; Burger, Messian, Patel, del Prado, & Anderson, 2004; Guéguen, Martin, & Meineri, 2011; Jiang, Hoegg, Dahl, & Chattopadhyay, 2010; Kachersky, Sen, Kim, & Carnevale, 2014; Martin, Jacob, & Gueguen, 2013) that has found that similarity (demographic, incidental or overall similarity) has a positive effect. Similarity refers to, "the degree to which people who interact are similar in beliefs, education, social status, and the like" (Rogers & Bhowmik, 1970). In sociology, there is a similarity effect when people prefer those who are similar to their own characteristics.

Little research has examined the types of social shopping websites that drive users to purchase movie tickets online or the psychological mechanisms that are used to complete transactions on these sites. Deka (2017) indicated that it is important to understand factors that influence online purchasing behavior. Drawing from the literature above, this study infers that investigating the impacts of interpersonal interaction factors (e.g., similarities between users in the social shopping context) on users' social purchase intention should be a promising area for research. However, there has been little effort to examine factors that contribute to similarities between users on social shopping websites. To address this gap in research, the present study aims to explore the similarity factor in the social shopping context. Then, we use concepts from psychology to propose a new method of categorizing similarity and introduce a new theoretical explanation for how similarity affects users' decision-making processes.

The results from our study demonstrate that there is a positive effect of similarity (external and internal similarity) on users' online purchase intention for movie tickets and that internal similarity has a larger effect than external similarity. We also incorporate "perceived enjoyment", "perceived usefulness" and "trust transfer," from the fields of information technology and organizational behavior, in our research to employ an interdisciplinary perspective for examining users' purchase intention for movie tickets online.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. The next section reviews the theoretical background for this study. The subsequent sections develop a research model that is based on the above-described theories and present the research hypotheses. The research methodology and data analysis results are presented in the following sections. In the last section, we discuss the findings and their theoretical and practical implications, as well as limitations and future directions for research.

2. Theoretical background

The following theories are integrated to develop the research model. The Stimuli-Organism-Response Model (SOR) provides a framework that describes similarity as a stimulus, while perceived usefulness, perceived enjoyment and trust are different types of organism, and the online purchasing intention for movie tickets is a type of response. The theories of trust transfer and information technology acceptance contribute to the rationale for choosing trust, perceived usefulness and perceived enjoyment as our mediating variables in the research model.

2.1. The stimuli-organism-response model in social shopping

2.1.1. Stimuli

Previous research on social shopping has indicated that the experience of consumers in the context of social media differs from offline shopping, as consumers have social interactions with others (Hajli, 2014) and all users eventually interact with other users online (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Kozinets, 2010). Once a user interacts with others online, it is likely that they will become a recurring member of the community, and as time passes, they are more likely to become a source of information and social interaction (Kozinets, 2010). Thus, similarity between members in the social community is an important stimulus that influences users' intentions and behaviors on a social shopping website.

2.1.2. Organism

Most human behaviors are driven by mental states, which are often affected by how we relate to a specific stimulus. This type of organism includes cognitive and affective reactions. Previous environmental psychology research defined cognitive reactions as 'the mental process occurring in individuals' minds when they interact with the stimulus'(Eroglu, Machleit, & Davis, 2001), and affective reactions are related to individuals' emotional responses when they are stimulated by the environment (Sun & Zhang, 2006). In this context, we introduce perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived enjoyment (PE), which are constructs from the TAM Model, to further explain users' cognitive and affective reactions when interacting with similar members on a social shopping website. In addition, trust and trust transfer are a type of reaction that includes both cognitive and affective factors.

2.1.3. Response

Consistent with the S-O-R model, responses represent the final outcomes and decisions of users based on cognitive and affective reactions and include approach or avoidance behaviors (Sherman, Mathur, & Smith, 1997). In the context of social shopping, the response has two important aspects, namely, social shopping intentions and social sharing intentions (Chen & Shen, 2015). Because this study focuses on consumers' online purchases of movie tickets, we only discuss social shopping intentions. Thus, this paper explores the effects of similarity on social shopping from the perspectives of perception and trust transfer.

2.2. The similarity effect: external and internal similarity

In sociology, we describe the similarity effect as the way in which people strongly prefer those who have similar characteristics to their own. The concept of similarity has been widely studied in the areas of psychology and marketing. Based on the hypothesis that similarity leads to attraction (Byrne, 1971), many scholars have examined similarities for different personal attributes, including demographic information (Hitsch, Hortaçsu, & Arielyet, 2010), trusting in those who have the same fingerprint (Burger et al., 2004), wearing the same clothing (Buckley & Roach, 1981), and preferring those who have similar facial features (Bailenson, Pontikakis, Mauss, Gross, Jabon, & Hutcherson, 2008). In the context of brand names, consumers prefer brands that have their initials, e.g., Tonya prefers the brand "Twix" (Brendl et al., 2005). In addition, people also prefer those who have similar attitudes (Fisher, 1974; Simons, Berkowitz, & Moyer, 1970) or interests (Martin et al., 2013). In addition, Guéguen et al. (2011) demonstrated that similarity promoted people's implicit behaviors.

Research on interpersonal attraction in social psychology has shown that people like others who share similarities with themselves because human beings are social animals. When people interact with similar others, they will experience smoother communication and better understanding, and they will be able to predict the reactions of the other person. In addition, similarity can stimulate a feeling of connection to