An Investigation of Factors Effecting Consumers’ Intention to Share Knowledge through Development as a Social Norm in Travel-Related Online Societal Networks

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ARTICLE DETAILS

ABSTRACT

For recommendations, customers are increasingly having faith in suggestions over the internet. Online societal/social networks (OSNs) are frequently used in Tourism and tourists use them to gain knowledge and gather information about different tourist’s resorts. The main objective of the current research is to develop understanding about the effect of different independent variables such as apparent Ease of use, Belief in reliability, Functional belief and Switching Cost to determine Social Norms which ultimately effect Intention to Share knowledge. This model helps to understand the underlying motives that influence consumers to share information about tourist’s resorts with others. Data was collected from the people who were using social networking sites for more than a year for tourism recommendations. Structural equation modeling was used for the data analysis and it was found the most of the proposed hypothesis were accepted validating presence of a significantly valid relationship between the variables. The study carries considerable theoretical and practical implications for researchers as well as tourism managers.

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1. Introduction

Online social/societal networks (OSNs) nowadays play a vivacious part in collecting the data for different purposes as the customers’ trust on this new information source is increasing (Ellison, Vitak,
Gray, & Lampe, 2014). Online social/societal networks (OSNs) have emerged as an innovative method to seek and share large pool of information directly from the peoples’ own experience. Therefore, this source is considered as more reliable and credible by consumers as compared with marketing messages on the mass media. The information on OSNs is easily accessible with wide reach around the globe.

Online societal network (OSNs) are providing a podium from where consumers not only gather information influencing their decisions but also share it with their friends and colleagues readily (Bilghians and Peng, 2014; Singhla, 2012). A survey in USA showed that one of the most important information tentative tourists were looking for in OSNs was searching for recommendations regarding tourist resorts (Vickery, 2007). Some of the people using OSNs were looking for suggestions from their associates while others were glancing tourist experiences regarding different sightseeing options. It was also found that almost 75% of the people who were looking for suggestions practically opted in conformance with the suggested option.

It was also found that more than half of the people using ‘Facebook’ trust on the commercial information provided in it (Mackenzie, 2011). Thus, OSNs play a great role in the process of decision making of travelers as they use these networks to seek information regarding their friends, colleagues and relatives (Inversini & Maasiero, 2015; Law, Lo’, Leung, & Fong, 2014). Using social networks, travelers are particularly looking for the option that is more cost effective as well as comfortable so that overall experience could become more pleasurable and good use of the money spent (Brone & de Hogg, 2011; Sigalow, 2013).

Some of the users of social networks read reviews and get knowledge about tourism options but they claim that they are not much interested in participating through this medium (Heinonen, 2011). So, there is a need to investigate the underlying reasons of such behavior. One of the issue is that some consumers are reluctant to share their experience online (Urban, Sultan, & Qualls, 2012). One of the major concern for the tourism-based organizations is to investigate whether people are willing to share their experience with others or not? (Alurii, Sleevitch, & Larzelere, 2015; Bakkshy, Rosenna, Marlow, & Adamic, 2012). This readiness of customers is very important for tourism industry as positive spread of word of mouth significantly affects in increase in their business. Therefore, the main purpose of this research is to investigate the phenomenon of reasons of information sharing and the possible hurdles in this regard.

2. Literature Review
2.1 Apparent Ease of use of Online Social Networks:

Apparent ease of use is taken as an independent variable in this study. Apparent ease of use and the level of expertise strongly influences motivation to share knowledge (Venkatesh, 2000). Online customers who think that social network is easy to use and easy to convey information will more willingly convey information (Carrierr, & Cheever, 2013). It is quite clear that as the perception of ease of use increases, tendency to share the knowledge also increases (Jodo, Lim, & Kim, 2011). Perceived Ease Of Use boost customers to distribute their knowledge (Al-Busaiadi & Olfman, 2014). Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H1: Apparent ease of use of social networks positively influences development of a social norm to share knowledge

2.2 Functional Belief

Functional belief is considered as an independent variable in the current research. Belief in
functional standards of a particular societal network motivates a person to share information on it (Kandampully et al., 2015; Xiong, King, & Hu, 2014). If there is lack of practical remuneration then customers do not use social network for tourism. Utilitarian belief increases sharing tendency and is strongly correlated to the level of production and performance (Premkumar, Ramamurthyy, & Liu, 2008). According to O’Cassand Fence (2003), when users recognize functional advantages of a social website, they are more likely to share their experiences on it. Functional attitude is a strong determinant of intention to share knowledge on a particular social medium (Bridges &florsheem, 2008; Sun &Zhang, 2006).

Different studies showed that functional attitude causes people to express their experiences truly with veracity (Liao, Paalvia, & Lin, 2006). Functional attributes contemplate over as an important element of the Online Societal Networks including handiness, value, and multiplicity (Pookulangaaara, Hawley, & Xiao,2011). Psychologists point out functional belief as a useful value influence the viewpoint in terms of truthfulness in societal relationships (Flaavizaan et al., 2006). Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H2: Functional belief positively influences development of a social norm to share knowledge

2.3 Belief in Reliability

Belief in reliability is also one of the independent variable in the study. If a person viewing a social website strongly trust a person who is sharing his/her experience, then the tendency to follow recommendations increases (MccaKnight, Choudhury, &Kacmar, 2002). While trading off between different tourism options, the firms who are perceived reliable gets competitive advantage over others (Ayeeh et al., 2013). Mostly perceived reliability acts as a faith to build trust on particular firms (Kucukustia et al., 2015).

Distribution of information through online medium depends primarily on conviction about reality (Hsuu, Ju, Yen, &Chanag, 2007). It was also found that those people who are pretty much convinced about service output efficiency and believe in sincerity with others are more enthusiastic and keen to share this information with others on social websites (Zmuud, Kims, & Lee, 2006). It was also reported that customers are more willing to spread information about those firms who invest in customer follow-up and attending complaints on urgent basis (Bock et al., 2006). Integrity attitude play crucial part in the knowledge sharing. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H3: Belief in reliability positively influences development of a social norm to share knowledge

2.4 Switching Cost

Switching cost is treated as another independent variable in this study. Burnnham et al. (2003) mentioned that as consumers shift from one social network to another, the association with previous network reduces. Higher the switching cost, more would be the tendency to remain loyal with the social network. The switching cost may be reflected in terms of financial or psychological mutilation. If the switching cost of shifting from a network is higher, the tendency of using the existing network as a social norm increases. Therefore, both of them are directly proportional with each other.

Switching defeats the association developed with the existing social network and continuation of using a network acts as a slanted norm implying psychological benefits to the user (Changg& Chen, 2009). According to the theory of considered behavior, switching behaviors depend on outlook. Meanwhile, it also creates a psychological pressure on a person if a person wishes to switch
(Bansall&Taylor, 2002). Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H4: Switching cost positively influences development of a social norm to share knowledge

2.5 Social Norms

Social norms are taken as mediator in our research. Mostly customers asks for assistance from their friends (e.g. friends and superiors) to perform a rigorous decision (Ajzen, 1992). Subjective rule is that customers are always looking for the important aspects to consider which other could employ to make a decision (Teoo, 2009). Social norm theory asserted that behavioral intentions tend to be persistent with the perceived “biased” norms of society (Kucukustta, Law, Besbeis, & Legoherel, 2015). Customers mostly tries to meet expectations of family and friends for the intended behaviors. The slanted norm is the measure to which customer thinks about the others’ perception and is concerned about how he/she has to identify himself/herself with others.

If Online tourism firms are following societal norms prevalent in the society, customers are more likely to follow them by updating and altering their expectations and values (Zhou, 2013). From a person viewpoint, the apparent biased norms within the indirect and direct environments play a fundamental role in this regard. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H5: Social norm positively influences intention to share knowledge/information

2.6 Information or knowledge sharing

Knowledge sharing is the ultimate dependent variable in the current research. Information sharing occurs when the customers convey, attain, as well as correspond to knowledge (Cheg, Cheng, Tsebng, Cihen, & Chan-g, 2014). Maa and Chaan (2014, p. 52) explain significance of knowledge sharing by stating that knowledge sharing acts as a foundation in such a way which makes the message useful by the recipient. Knowledge sharing could be auxiliary in terms of gathering information by both sender and recipient and creates curiosity to know about each other’s experiences (Ghosh & Scott, 2007, p.4).

Recently, OSNs is now an important tool to share knowledge. More and more people are becoming inclined to share their experiences in online groups. In this regards, particularly travelers seems to be very motivated to share their practice with others (Sarkaar, Aau, & Law, 2014). One of the reason reported by tourists to share knowledge online is to shun other people of selecting unsuitable tourism options (Munar& Jacobsen, 2014).

3. Methodology

This study utilizes quantitative approach since it has used already developed and validated scales to address the issue of sightseeing/tourism linked with online societal network. Correlational approach is also used to examine the relationship between variables proposed in the conceptual model. Online questionnaire were used and the data was collected online from diverse group of people having experience of interaction on online societal networking options.

In total, 205 questionnaires were filled online by the respondents. Already validated questionnaire from preceding studies was used. The study employed 7-point Likert scale for every question where the range varied from 1 as Strongly Disagree to 7 as Strongly Agree.

For preliminary analysis, data was cleaned using the standard procedure to take care of errors and omissions. PLS-SEM was preferred in this study due to its robustness in terms of model testing and
pictorial representation. It is also commonly used technique in tourism perspective studies. Therefore Smart PLS-3 was employed. This software is quite resilient in terms of data transmission, outlier's exposure, data regularity, multicollinearity, soundness, trustworthiness and self-control. In addition it is good tool to investigative variable relationships.

4. Finding and Results of Analysis:

4.1 Demographic Results

In total, 500 online questionnaires were distributed but the response rate was almost 50%, out of which 205 questionnaires were found to be usable for data analysis. Out of 205 respondents, 67.6% were Males and 32.4% were Females. In terms of Age, 68% of people were found to be in a younger age bracket of 18 to 25 years and 20% respondents were in the age bracket of 26 to 35 years. So predominantly (87%) respondents were young. Further demographic distribution of sample is described in the table below:

Table 1. Demographics of respondents

| Description          | Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|----------------------|-----------|---------|--------------------|
| Gender               |           |         |                    |
| Male                 | 138       | 67.6    | 67.6               |
| Female               | 66        | 32.4    | 100                |
| Marital Status       |           |         |                    |
| Bachelor             | 120       | 58.8    |                    |
| Engaged              | 32        | 15.7    |                    |
| Married              | 38        | 18.6    | 100                |
| Separated/Divorced   | 10        | 4.9     |                    |
| Widowed              | 4         | 1.96    |                    |
| Age                  |           |         |                    |
| 18-25 years          | 138       | 67.6    | 67.6               |
| 26-35 years          | 41        | 20.1    | 87.7               |
| 36-45 years          | 14        | 6.9     | 94.6               |
| 46-55 years          | 8         | 4.2     | 98.8               |
| 56-65 years          | 3         | 1.2     | 100                |
| Education            |           |         |                    |
| High School          | 9         | 4.4     | 4.4                |
| Certificate/Diploma  | 23        | 11.3    | 15.7               |
| Undergraduate Degree | 76        | 37.3    | 53                 |
| Post Graduate        | 86        | 42.2    | 95.2               |
| PhD                  | 10        | 4.8     | 100                |
| Profession           |           |         |                    |
| Scholar              | 116       | 56.9    | 56.9               |
| Private job          | 33        | 16.2    | 73.1               |
| Government job       | 19        | 9.3     | 82.4               |
| Self Employed        | 3         | 1.4     | 83.8               |
| Other than above     | 33        | 16.2    | 100                |
| Monthly Family Income|           |         |                    |
| Less than 15000 Rs.  | 46        | 22.5    | 22.5               |
| 15001 to 30000 Rs.   | 56        | 27.4    | 49.9               |
| Description       | Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------------------|-----------|---------|--------------------|
| Gender            |           |         |                    |
| Male              | 138       | 67.6    | 67.6               |
| Female            | 66        | 32.4    | 100                |
| 300001 to 50000 Rs.| 39        | 19.1    | 69                 |
| 50001 to 100000 Rs.| 42        | 20.5    | 89.5               |
| Above 100000 Rs.  | 21        | 10.5    | 100                |
| Total             | 204       | 100     | 100                |

4.2 **Measurement Model (Outer Model)**

Convergent influence is considered all the way during Average variance extracted (AVE). As per directive of replica assessment, compound dependability must be upper than 0.70, pointer dependability (which is the open for loadings) should to be higher than 0.70, convergent validity (which is standard or average of variance extracted) should to be higher than 0.5 (Ringle & Sarstedt, 2011).

The Fornells–Larcker condition was also followed which tests the soundness through addressing the tetragon root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Subsequent analysis illustrated that Fornell–Larcker condition is met by the data as the square root of AVE is higher than the correlation of all projections.

4.3 **Structural Model (Central model):**

If the conditions of Measurement model are met then Structural model is developed (Ringle & Sarstedt, 2011). The Structural model is pictorial representation of the relationship between Independent and Dependent variables. For this purpose, six path coefficients representing hypothesis were examined using PLS-SEM. Impact of hypothesized relationships were examined by bootstrapping method. The data was bootstrapped to determine the replica.

This procedure designated the path coefficients of the self-regulating variables and conditional variables. Ultimately, the results showed that correlation between Independent and Dependent variables. The significance levels were found to be \( p < 0.01 \). Structural model is shown below:

Figure 1 Structural Model
Cronbach’s Alpha

Composite Reliability
According to the results, the detail of hypothesis testing is as follows:

1. For H1, the beta value representing the path coefficient, T-value, and level of significance is reported. (β = 0.24; t = 4.788; p < 0.01). Consequently, H1 is supported implying that apparent ease of use of social networks positively influences development of a social norm to share knowledge.

2. Similarly, H2 is also supported as results are β = 0.17; t = 2.732; p < 0.01. This showed that functional belief positively influences development of a social norm to share knowledge.

3. Regarding H3, results are β = 0.29; t = 5.044; p < 0.01 showing that belief in reliability positively influences development of a social norm to share knowledge.

4. However, H4 is not supported β = 0.022; t = 0.422; p > 0.01. It means that switching cost does not influence development of a social norm to share knowledge.

5. **Discussion and Conclusion**

This research shows the major determinants of information sharing via online societal networks which affect preference towards a particular tourist resort. The study showed that people frequently share information with each other. Particularly sharing of information is very common with those friends, family members, and colleagues who want to visit different places and trying to learn from others’ experience. Internet is one of the most readily accessible modes for most of the people now and online social networking is considered to be the most reliable and credible method for collecting information. Generally, consumers also perceive that the information on mass media is crafted for marketing purposes only and it is not as trustworthy as compared to personal experiences of individuals regarding tourism.

This research aims to evaluate the effect of major determinants already identified in the
literature to share knowledge online. It was found that four major factors are identified in literature and all of them jointly creates a “social norm” to share information online. These major four determinants are treated as independent variables as Apparent Ease of use, Belief in reliability, Functional belief and Switching Cost. It was found that other than switching cost, all three independent variables were found to be major predictors to creation of social norm to share knowledge and experience online. Result regarding Switching cost is not significant because in Pakistan, online website phenomenon is comparatively new and people are neither loyal with particular websites nor acquainted with alternative websites to share information.

Finally, from this research article it could be concluded that for sharing of knowledge/experience online, customers are likely to do it if they are feeling ease of use of a website/portal, they believe that the information on website will be treated as reliable and their sharing will have a substantial functional benefit creating trust on the information posted.

Above mentioned three aspects could be used for managerial perspective to ensure to develop easy to use website/portal, implying concrete functional benefits and methods to develop belief in reliability of organization and information posted.

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