CONCEPTUAL ARTICLE

The Impact of Intrinsic Motivations on Electronic Word of Mouth Communication through Social Network Sites: Openness to Experience as a Moderater

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ABSTRACT

In the last decade, social media have attracted much attention in different industry contexts such as digital advertising. Marketing managers keep inducing consumers’ to generate a positive electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) about their products or services on social network sites (SNSs). Effective assortments of those factors that enhance individual’s engagement in online conversion on SNSs about specific products or services, is key success to growth. This conceptual paper aims to find out the impact of psychological factors on individuals engagement in e-WOM communication with the moderating effect of personality traits. Relevant studies have been perused and in view of that the model was proposed. Based on the literature, psychological factors such as reputation and altruism play vital role in terms of users’ engagement in e-WOM communication. This article also proposed that personal traits of SNSs users such as openness to experience moderates the relationship between these psychological factors and users’ engagement in such behaviour.

INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that social network sites have revolutionised the life of many people, allow them to create their own profiles and maintain limitless relationships with others. Social network sites (SNSs) are web-based communication applications that support our social interactions with others in different ways (Ellison et al., 2011). These platforms provide individuals with capability to share any preferences, or product-related information with many contacts as well as opportunity for organisation to take advantage of electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) communications (Trusov et al., 2009). SNSs have become a new component of marketing communications tools that allow firms to make strong relationship with consumers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). The emergence of these web-based platforms has facilitated the development of e-WOM communication (Chu & Kim, 2011). e-WOM has been defined as ‘any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet’ (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004:39).

According to Nielsen online survey, 84% of total respondents across 58 countries indicated that word of mouth recommendations from friends and family, are the most influential and trustworthy form of advertising (Nielsen, 2013). This result clearly explains consumers’ reliance on recommendation from others in their purchase decisions. However, with the higher social presence and enormous participants of SNSs (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), firms should incorporate these platforms as an integral part of their marketing strategy. On the other hand, researchers need to investigate what makes consumers more encouraged to engage in online activities such as e-WOM communications through SNSs.

Prior researches have investigated the determinants of consumers’ engagement in e-WOM from different point of view focusing on online consumers’ opinion – platforms and firms websites. However, due to the diverse nature of SNSs users might be encouraged by different stimulating factors. To date, the determinants of users’ engagement in e-WOM communication through SNSs have received limited attention. Hence, and in response to the importance of SNSs as effective communication tool with consumers it is necessary to find out the most influential factors on users involvement in information exchange behaviour. This study proposed a model, which is, explain users’ engagement based on psychological factors, specifically their reputation, altruism, and the moderating effect of users’ personality traits (openness to experience). In the second section, this article addresses the theoretical background and the research model.

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THEORITCAL BACKGROUND

In the last decade and due to the overwhelming increase of individuals’ engagement in social media, organisation started to launch their promotions campaign through these platforms such as SNSs. This change has urged researchers to seek behind the motivations that enhance users’ engagement in e-WOM communication. Individuals who have stronger intention to engage in a behaviour are more likely to perform it (Ajzen, 1991). In general, this study focuses on the motivational part, a scientific review of the existing studies on this part can help to identify the most prominent factors regarding individuals’ engagements as well as it can help to spot the potential gap in literature. This section presents prior research on e-WOM.

Prior Research on e-WOM

Prior researches have utilised many approaches to investigate what enhance individuals’ engagement in WOM communication through online sitting. For instance, Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) identified 11 factors that stimulate individuals engagement in such behaviour (concern for other, help the company, social benefits, exerting power, advice-seeking, self-enhancement, economic rewards, convenience, problem-solving, expressing positive emotions and venting negative feelings). Tong et al. (2007) investigated individual motives to contribute in online venues from other perspective; cognitive and executional cost, enjoyment in helping others, self-enhancement and reward. While some of the researchers build their models based on social exchange theory some of them have employed social capital components (structural, relational and cognitive) as a determinant of users engagement in information exchange behaviour (Chang & Chuang, 2011; Chiu et al., 2006; Choi & Scott, 2013; Chu & Kim, 2011). For instance, Chu and Kim (2011) found that the relational factors are the most influential determinant on the user’s engagement in e-WOM communication through SNSs. Similarly, Choi and Scott (2013) indicated that social relational factors such as trust and sense of community positively associated with the user’s intention to share knowledge with others. On the other hand, some researchers have identified individuals’ motivation based on the perspective of public good. Accordingly, Cheung and Lee (2012) identified four main categories that might explain consumer’s engagement in online consumer-opinion platforms: egoism, collectivism, altruism and principle.

Most of these studies were conducted in web-based opinions platform such as OpenRice.com, where consumers mostly just login looking for advice. On the contrary, of SNSs where participants skim their profiles permanently, articulate themselves in various communities and share mutual preference. For instance, Chu and Kim (2011) suggested that SNSs users might be engaged in e-WOM behaviour because they wish to maintain social relationships with their personal networks. In sum, the unique nature of SNSs provide users with many features and distinct social environment (French & Read, 2013), thereby factors that enhance individuals’ engagement in e-WOM communication could be also different.

Even though relevant researches that examined key drivers of e-WOM communication in SNSs have only focused on the social capital effect (Chu & Kim, 2011; Choi & Scott, 2013; Wáng et al., 2016). However, users’ of these applications might be encouraged for different reasons such as intrinsic motivations (reputation and altruism). Moreover, literature review has shown very little attention regarding personality traits and knowledge sharing behaviour through SNSs (Jadin et al., 2013; Osatuyi, 2015; Zhong et al., 2011). This study pays more attention for the moderating effect of personal characteristics as a determinant of users’ engagement in e-WOM communication.

Intrinsic Motivations

One of the most appropriate theory that can be used to understand an individuals’ behaviour is social exchange theory (Cook & Whitmeyer, 1992). According to this theory, people in any action aims to maximise their benefits and reduce the cost (Molm, 1997). In this article, users’ engagement in e-WOM communication can be regarded as social exchange behaviour as they can share any product-related information with future expectations such as social status (reputation) and enjoyment of helping others (altruism).

Reputation

Individuals aim to achieve intangible returns such as social status or reputation through different behaviours. One of those behaviours is to share information with others (Cheung & Lee, 2012; Constant et al., 1994; Tong et al., 2007). People share their knowledge or information to obtain recognitions and social status by showing themselves as experts (Wasko & Faraj, 2005). In the online environment, reputation has much stronger effect because of the larger amount of participant and the long lasting of any contribution (Kankanhalli et al., 2005). Therefore, SNSs substantially enhance individual’s ability to be in touch with huge number of users as they can make different actions. Similarly, it has been found that consumers might be engaged in e-WOM communication as means to improve their reputation among other consumers (Engel et al., 1993; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

Previous research indicated the positive association of reputations and individuals’ engagement in any type of information exchange (Chang & Chuang, 2011; Kankanhalli et al., 2005). In addition, researchers suggested social status as a prominent motive for e-WOM communication (Cheung & Lee, 2012; Sundaram et al., 1998; Wojnicki & Godes, 2004). However, with the distinct features of SNSs compared to other online platforms, users are more interested in their reputation and might be engaged in any actions that improve their social
status. Hence, this article is based on the above-mentioned proposed by the following hypothesis:

H1: reputation is positively associated with users’ engagement in e-WOM communication through SNSs.

Altruism

The enjoyment in helping others refers to the intrinsic satisfaction caused by any effort to improve other people’s benefits without expectancy for future returns (Smith, 1981). This behaviour is more likely to happen when individuals perceive their actions beneficial for others (Engel et al., 1993). In terms of e-WOM communication, consumer shares his experience with a specific product as an attempt to help others or to avoid them from bad experience (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). The importance of e-WOM stem from its credibility since the consumers have not vested interest and its availability for many consumers unlike other form of advertising. People presume that providing information about products help consumers in their purchase decision (Wang et al., 2005).

Many studies have confirmed altruism as a vigorous determinant of consumers’ engagement in e-WOM communication through consumer opinion platforms (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Tong et al., 2007). With the different nature of SNSs high interactive environment, users also might be engaged in e-WOM communication to fill their physiological need such as enjoyment of helping other. Accordingly, this article proposed the following hypothesis:

H1: Altruism is positively associated with users’ engagement in e-WOM communication through SNSs.

Personality Traits

In the last decades, personality traits have played important role in different research context (Funder, 2006). According to Pervin (1993), personality is “a set of relatively enduring behavioural responses and internal predispositions that characterise how a person reacts to the environment”. Research found Personality strongly associated with many workplace predictors such as performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991), satisfactions (Judge & Bono, 2001), and trust (Moorradian et al., 2006). Recently, research found personality as a vital determinant of knowledge-sharing behaviour in both face-to-face (Matzler et al., 2008; 2011) and online environment (Chen et al., 2013; Jadin et al., 2013). One of the most important structures that describes individuals personality is the big five model (extraversion, consciousness, neuroticism, agreeableness and openness to experience). Researchers have recognised this model as the most efficient personality structure to clarify individuals’ differences (McAdams & Pals, 2006; Poropat, 2009). With the social nature of openness to experience trait (Witt et al., 2002), which is in line with SNSs purpose it would be reasonable to investigate these traits as predictor for certain behaviour such as engagement in e-WOM communication through SNSs.

Openness to Experience

Openness refers to the traits of imaginative, cultured, curious, originality, broad-minded, intelligent and artistically sensitive (Costa & MacCare, 1992). People with high level of openness show more curiosity to the worlds and more likely to involve with new ideas, usually they have experience in both positive and negative emotions more than those with low level (Costa & MacCare, 1992; McCrae & Costa, 1997). Moreover, researchers demonstrated that individuals who are highly open more positive in their attitude, flexible and inclined to learn new things (Costa & MacCare, 1992; Digman, 1990).

Accordingly, researchers assumed that the different levels between individuals in openness could reflect their engagement in a certain behaviour. For instance, Cabrera et al. (2006) found that people’s curiosity and originality which reflect their levels of openness is a strong predictor of knowledge-sharing behaviour, since they display more tendency for giving advice and seek for others insights. While openness could result in high level of experience prior studies (Constant et al., 1996; Wasko & Faraj, 2005) suggested that individuals who recognised themselves as expert are more encouraged to contribute their knowledge with others.

These evidences clearly demonstrated the vital role of the level of persons openness in terms of knowledge-sharing behaviour due to the essential effect of personal dispositions regarding knowledge-sharing behaviour (Matzler et al., 2008). This study aims to extent this assumption of the relationship between openness and knowledge-sharing behaviour in online context, especially e-WOM communication through SNSs. In addition, previous studies have considered personality traits as a determinant of internet use (Ozgüven & Mucan, 2013; Wang et al., 2015; Zhong et al., 2011). This study propose that personal characteristic such as openness to experience would also predict interaction behaviours such as users’ engagement in e-WOM communication through SNSs. Therefore, the following hypotheses is proposed:

H3: Openness to experience moderate relationship between intrinsic motivations and users engagement in e-WOM communication through SNSs.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The research framework is depicted in Fig. 1. Users’ engagement in e-WOM communications through SNs is the dependent variable. The two intrinsic motivations (reputation and altruism) were proposed to have a positive effect on users’ engagement. In addition, openness to experience assumed a moderator in the relationships between intrinsic motivations and users engagement.
CONCLUSION

In conclusion, SNSs have made a vital communication medium. These mediums allow users’ to access unlimited profiles of other participants and share their experience with products or services in different ways such as “like”, comment, and share. However, individuals’ might be engaged in e-WOM communication for many reasons like psychological needs and social capital factors. In addition, based on intensive review of literatures, it is also found that personal characteristics could play important role in such behaviours. This research proposed that users’ engagement in e-WOM communication through SNSs related to their intrinsic motivations, specifically reputation and altruism. Moreover, this research proposed that an individual's level of openness with products or services in different ways such as experience with products or services in different ways such as “like”, comment, and share. However, individuals’ might be engaged in e-WOM communication for many reasons like psychological needs and social capital factors. In addition, based on intensive review of literatures, it is also found that personal characteristics could play important role in such behaviours. This research proposed that users’ engagement in e-WOM communication through SNSs related to their intrinsic motivations, specifically reputation and altruism. Moreover, this research proposed that an individual's level of openness is to experience moderate the relationship between their intrinsic motivations and actual engagement in e-WOM communication through SNSs.

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