A Conceptual Model of Electronic Word of Mouth Communication through Social Network Sites: The Moderating Effect of Personality Traits

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ABSTRACT

Social network sites (SNSs) have become an essential part in today's world due to its ubiquities, interactivity and its applicability in different contexts. Information exchange is one of the most important practices on SNSs. Individuals tend to generate electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) in their social network to tell others about their consumption experiences with specific product or service. Only in recent time, e-WOM communication has serious academic and managerial attention. However, most of prior researches have examined e-WOM effectiveness, intensity and receiver adoption determinants, few studies have investigated the factors that enhance individual's intention to share their related-product information. With regard to the different nature of SNSs this paper aims to detect what drive individuals to share their consumption experience or product related-information in such online environment. The paper proposes that social relational factors; trust, reciprocity, and sense of community are positively associated with user's intention to share their related-product information in form of e-WOM through SNSs. The study also proposes that individuals' personality traits moderate the relationship between social relational factors and intention to share e-WOM through SNSs.

Keywords: Electronic Word of Mouth Engagement, Social Relational Factors, Personality Traits
JEL Classifications: O310, O330, M310

1. INTRODUCTION

The advanced features and popularity of social network sites (SNSs) have opened up a new opportunity for business. Recently marketers started to pay more attention to SNSs such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter as a communication tool of marketing. Information exchange among consumers has been expanded to electronic media, such as, blogs, online discussions forums, and SNSs (Li and Du, 2011; Cheung and Lee, 2012). These applications have enabled its users to share their information and experience with products or services with other participant in SNS. This new form of communication, known as electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), has become one of the most effective marketing tools. Prior researches confirmed that online review plays substantial role in consumers' purchase decision (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006; Godes and Mayzlin, 2004; Trusov et al., 2009). Business statistics also support the important effect of e-WOM

communication. For example, e-marketer revealed that one in five USA consumers read online review before they decide to buy, 20.8 of those users are relying on Facebook while the others turned to YouTube and blog posts with 18.2%,14% respectively (e-marketer, 2016).

However, e-WOM communication has limited attention especially in the context of SNSs. In addition, most of previous studies have investigated the effectiveness of e-WOM on actual purchase (Cheung and Thadani, 2010), receivers determinants of e-WOM adoption (Fang, 2014; Cheung et al., 2008), and the intensity of e-WOM (Lu et al., 2013; Ghose and Ipeirotis, 2006). Due to the few existing studies concerning e-WOM communications through SNSs, scholars still do not fully understand what factors encourage individuals' to share their related-product information in such environment. To fill this gap, the current research proposes a conceptual model with emphasis on the social relational

perspective and individuals' personality traits that might explain users' engagement in e-WOM communication through SNSs. The next section discusses the theoretical background and research framework surrounding this field of research. This is followed by a presentation of hypotheses and future research directions.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Prior research provides a rich basis of theory that explains individual engagement in WOM communication in online environment. This section will define e-WOM communication and describe the theoretical framework of the research model.

2.1. E-WOM and Prior Research
The new era of internet drastically changed the traditional word-of-mouth communication. This change has generated a new form of communication which is called electronic word-of-mouth (Cheung and Lee, 2012), where consumers' are able to post and discuss their opinion in various online settings. According to Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) e-WOM is "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to multitude of people and institution via the internet." With advent of the newest technology, the scenario of information exchange has changed that allow consumers' to share their product-related information with others in various online environments.

The most prominent researches on e-WOM communication are the extension of the traditional WOM theoretical background (Dichter, 1966; Sundaram et al., 1998). As the object of this study is to acquire further understanding of individuals' engagement in e-WOM communication, an intensive review of e-WOM communication motives in online environments is needed. Prior research provided a useful framework that explains social interaction motives in virtual communities based on social and economic utility (Balasubramanian and Mahajan, 2001). This framework was also extended by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) who identified eleven motives that enhance individuals intention to engage in e-WOM communication through online platforms.

Dellarocas and Narayan (2006) examined the motives of e-WOM communication from the perspective of public good, stressed that the large amount of online post would enhance individual intention to share their consumption experience with others as this behavior would help the entire society. Another study by Tong et al. (2007) based its model upon social exchange theory and motivation crowding theory to explore the significant factors on users intention to share their information through online feedback system. Recently, Cheung and Lee (2012) proposed that individual engagement in online conversations through consumers opinion platform may be explained from the perspective of public good.

Even though many studies had investigated the e-WOM communication motives, most of these researches were conducted in the context of consumer opinion platforms, which are unlike the nature and purpose of SNSs. The different attributes of SNSs have urged researchers to investigate e-WOM communication from another point of view in which individuals are motivated to engage

such behavior. For instance, Chu and Kim (2011) proposed a theoretical model based on the social capital perspective, indicated that users engagement in e-WOM communication through SNSs substantially affected by the tie strength, trust, normative and informational influence. Likewise Choi and Scott (2013) suggested that the relational dimension of users social capital positively associated with their engagement in knowledge sharing behavior through their own social networks.

In response to the limited studies in the context of individuals' motives e-WOM through SNSs, this study suggests that social relational factors and personality traits can explain users' engagement in such form of communications. The following section discusses the relational factors (trust, reciprocity, and sense of community).

2.2. Social Capital
Social capital has been defined as the accumulated resources through relationship between people (Coleman, 1988). According to Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) there are three dimensions of social capital; structural, relational, and cognitive dimension. This paper focuses the attention to the relational dimension of social capital.

2.2.1. Trust
Trust in social networks' members is a worth consideration in terms of individual engagement in e-WOM communication through SNSs. Trust is defined as "a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence" (Moorman et al., 1993). Trust is an essential factor that enhances knowledge sharing in both face-to-face and online environments. Many studies have confirmed that trust positively associated with individual's engagement in knowledge sharing behavior (Pigg and Crank, 2004; Huysman and Wulf, 2006). Furthermore, trust found to be a crucial determent to engage in social interaction in online environment (Ridings et al., 2002; Gefen et al., 2003).

Likewise, trust could be also influential factor on engagement in e-WOM communication in the context of SNSs. As Chu and Kim (2011) suggested that trust among SNSs users stem from the mutual agreement to be a friend which is allow each other to go through their own profiles. This ability to communicate would increase the level of trust and in turn enhance users' intention to engage in e-WOM communication. In the same way, Choi and Scott (2013) found that trust is positively associated with individuals' intention to share their product-related information through SNSs. The main key characteristic of SNSs is to support the communication level and social interaction, therefore, trust among online communities members' can also determine their engagement in e-WOM communication.

2.2.2. Reciprocity
People might be engaged in reciprocal behavior such as giving information because they expect future returns (Ekeh, 1974). Norm of reciprocity refers to the mutual sense of indebtedness between individuals. When people receive benefits from others feels like they should return these benefits back (Shumaker and Brownell, 1984). Reciprocity can also facilitate information exchange among

individuals if they see that the future benefit could be achieved by share their knowledge with others (Hendriks, 1999; Wiess, 1999). Prior research indicated that even those who interacted through electronic network are strongly affected by the norm of reciprocity in terms of their intention to share knowledge with others (Wasko and Faraj, 2000). In this paper, reciprocity refers to information exchanges in form of e-WOM that are mutual and supposed by the participant as fair.

Many research confirmed that reciprocity positively associated with individual engagement in knowledge sharing behavior through online environment (Bock et al., 2005; Atreyi et al., 2005; Liao et al., 2013). These studies posited that individual's engagement in knowledge sharing behavior driven primarily by their norm of reciprocity. On the contrary, some studies have found that reciprocity is not a significant determent of individual engagement in knowledge exchange behavior through online environment (Wasko and Faraj, 2005; Chiu et al., 2006; Jeon et al., 2011). They found that some other motivational factors such as reward or sense of community might exert stronger effect on individuals' attitude toward knowledge sharing behavior. However, individuals' intention to engage in e-WOM communication can be enhancing by the reciprocal behavior through online context. For instance, Cheung and Lee (2012) suggested that reciprocity positively related with individual engagement in social exchange behavior specifically e-WOM communication through consumer-opinion plat forms. Thus, this paper proposes the following hypothesis:

H₂: Reciprocity is positively associated with individual engagement in e-WOM communication through SNSs.

SNSs have attracted a huge number of users, allowing them to interact with each other. These interactions are controlled by many factors such as social relational factors. Past researches confirmed that trust is one of the most important factors in shaping users behavior through online environment (Shneiderman, 2015; Son et al., 2016). The established trust may reduce users' uncertainty in their involvement in online interactions with other participants thus facilitating the process of engagement in e-WOM communication. Thereby this paper proposes the following hypothesis:

H₁: Trust among SNSs users' is positively associated with engagement in e-WOM communications.

2.2.3. Sense of community

Sense of community refers to the obligation or commitment to engage in future actions which can be raised through iteration action (Coleman, 1990). When individuals identify themselves as part of group and line up their objectives with those in group, they will be motivated to do something beneficial for others (Hars and Ou, 2001). Sense of community is the sense of responsibility that one has toward others within a specific community who have something in common (Wasko and Faraj, 2005). In this study, sense of community refers to the positive feeling among virtual community members, which is in line with sense of belonging proposed by Ellemers et al. (1999). Sense of community raises loyalty and commitment behaviors

in a group, such behaviors will enhance the group members to maintain rigorous relationships (Massimo and Richard, 2000; Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2002).

Prior research stressed that individuals' could share a valuable information because of their sense of community toward a group (Constant et al., 1996). In addition, Wasko and Faraj (2000) suggested that individuals might be engaged in helping behavior through electronic network to pay back the benefit for the whole network. Individuals who are not interested to be a part in group usually show less intention of corporation behaviors such as giving advice or information (Ardichvili et al., 2003). Similarly, Chiu et al. (2006) stated that individuals would not contribute any knowledge or information unless they recognize other persons as their group-mates. Cheung and Lee (2012) further argue that sense of belonging to electronic network positively associated with individuals engagement in e-WOM communication as a form of information exchange. Individuals' with high sense of community will show more tendencies to share related-product information in form of e-WOM through SNSs. Accordingly, the current study proposes the following hypothesis:

H₃: Sense of community positively associated with individuals' engagement in e-WOM communication through SNS.

2.2.4. Personality traits

In the last decade, personal characteristic has received significant attention by researchers. This has led to the recognition of a generic high-level structure specified by five major domains (the "Five-Factor Model" or "Big Five") comprising of neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, consciousness openness to experience. Personal characteristic is defined as "the sum total of ways in which an individual reacts and interacts with others" (Robbins, 2005). Personality trait is a vital predictor in deferent context including job performance (Barrick and Mount, 1991), individuals attitude (Judge et al., 2002), trust (Mooradian et al., 2006) and satisfaction (Judge et al., 2000). Due to the social and cognitive nature of personality traits and its significant role in explaining individuals' behavior in different settings (Witt et al., 2002; Johnson and Krueger, 2004), it can be also a vital predictor of individuals engagement in knowledge sharing behavior (Matzler et al., 2008).

However, in the increasingly spread of SNSs, users' personality traits could also be a crucial determinant of users' intention to engage e-WOM communication. Previous researches indicate a robust relationship between personality traits factors and social applications usage (Hughes et al., 2012; Correa et al., 2010; Amichai-Hamburger and Vinitzky, 2010). For instance, Ross et al. (2009) suggested that extraversion, neuroticism, and openness to experience are key factors for social media usage. Meanwhile, Ehrenberg et al. (2008) state that people with high level openness, neuroticism, and extraversion are more inclined to instant message usage as compared to those with low level. In line with SNSs usage, personality traits could also affect their knowledge sharing intention. A part from individuals' behavior in online communities can be determined by their personality traits

Figure 1: A conceptual framework of electronic word of mouth engagement through social network sites
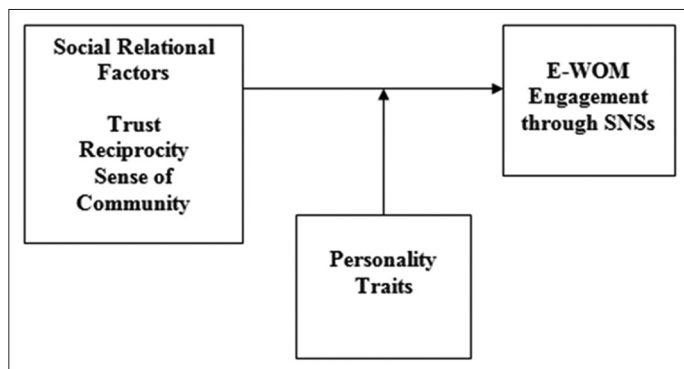
(Jadin et al., 2013). Hence, the present study aims to explore the moderating role of personality traits between social relational factors and users' engagement in e-WOM communication through SNSs, proposing that:

H_4: Personality traits moderate the relationship between social relational factors and users engagement in e-WOM communication through SNSs.

3. PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The model in this paper is developed in the context of SNSs by mapping the relationships between social relational factors, personality traits and users engagement in e-WOM communication. The model represents an investigation mechanism in which these factors might potentially affect individuals' intention to share their related products-information through online environment, specifically users' engagement in e-WOM communication SNSs. Figure 1 shows the proposed model.

4. CONCLUSION

Prior researchers have emphasized the importance of the relational dimension of social capital to the engagement in knowledge sharing behavior such as e-WOM communication (Chu and Kim, 2011; Choi and Scott, 2013). The focus of this study is on the factors that motivate individuals' intention to engage in e-WOM communication through SNSs. Previous studies have shown strong associations between social relational factors and users' engagement in e-WOM communication. In addition, other researchers have recognized that personality traits are crucial determinants for individuals' actions in different contexts (Barrick and Mount, 1991; Teng et al., 2007). However, the relationship between personality traits and users engagement in e-WOM communication through SNSs has received almost little attention. Studies on the potential effect of personality traits as influencers to information sharing in online environment would enhance our understanding of the phenomenon. Thus, this paper provides a parsimonious model that contribute in explaining the main role played by personal characteristics in users' engagement in e-WOM through SNSs.

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