A THEORETICAL MODEL FOR STUDYING THE INFLUENCE OF OPINION LEADERS TOWARDS THE PURCHASE INTENTIONS OF CONSUMERS IN THE ONLINE COMMUNITY OF CONSUMPTION

YU WANG

Department of Economic and Management,Tohoku University, Japan.
E-mail:whc631211@vip.163.com

Abstract - Nowadays, more and more consumers begin to get used to searching and sharing the electronic word-of-mouth information online and interact with others, leading to the popularity of online communities of consumption. Facing with numerous information which are difficult to judge, these consumers begin to rely on the opinion leaders' recommendation. Theopinion leaders exert not only informational influences on the public through spreading eWOM information, but also interpersonal influences through the interaction with the public. Prior researches have confirmed the influence of opinion leaders towards the eWOM dissemination inside the online communities. However, the mechanism of how opinion leaders affect the purchase intentions of the consumers in the online communities of consumption is still unknown. In order to fill in this research gap, this study points out a theoretical model, based on the original model of consumer behavior and provides theoretical implications for further study.

Key Words - Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), Online communities of consumption, Opinion leaders, TechnologyAcceptanceModel (IAM), Information Adoption Model (IAM)

I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the Internet enables numerous information to be spread online with diversified channels and breaks the geographical distribution. With the new transmission pattern of information, individuals are able to use various network platforms to interact online and to share information, to build relationships with others and even to make transaction (Kozinets, 1999). Hence, the eWOM communication becomes popular. Here, the eWOM refers to any positive or negative statement made by potential or actualconsumers about a product or company, which is made available to the public via the Internet (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

Because of the popularity of eWOM communication, these consumers begin to rely more on searching and sharing online information. However, facing with numerous eWOM information of the products or services, it is difficult for them to evaluate and judge all of them. Hence, they begin to rely on the opinion leaders. The opinion leaders are the active receivers of WOM, are exposed the most to mass media, and tend to interpret the information with or without their own subject ideas to others(Arndt, 1968). They can affect the attitudes or behaviors of others through WOM communication informally (Stern & Gould, 1988) and are considered to be more influential and can create and spread more WOM than general individuals (Rogers, 1995).

Meanwhile, individuals with similar interests gradually gather online, leading to various online communities.Particularly, the online communities of consumption gather a great number of potential consumers who like discussing and sharing information on products and services. Prior research show that Kozinets et al. (2010) has pointed out models for explaining the eWOM dissemination in the online communities and has confirmed the influence of opinion leaders towards the eWOM dissemination. However, the mechanism of how these opinion leaders affect the consumers is still unknown. Hence, this article is going to point out a theoretical model for explaining this mechanism.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE MODELS FOR CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

Because this article aims to study the influence of opinion leaders towards, the theories and models related to the consumer behavior should be taken into consideration. Previous researches show that there are two typical and practical models of consumer behavior are widely used for studying the purchase intentions and that these two models include Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis et al., 1989) and Information Adoption Model (IAM) (Sussman & Siegal, 2003).

1)Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

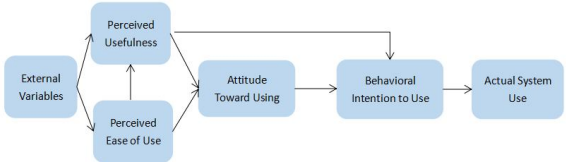


Figure 1. Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), introduced by Davis et al. (1989), is widely used to explain users' acceptance of information systems and technologyby measuring their intentions, and also to

explain their intentions by their attitudes, subjective norms, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and external variables(See Figure 1).

2) Information Adoption Model (IAM)

The Information Adoption Model (IAM), proposed by Sussman and Siegal (2003), is a widely used to examine how individuals adopt information into their intentions and behaviors within the computer-mediated communication platforms by measuring their perceived information usefulness, and to explain their perceived information usefulness by the argument quality and the source credibility (See Figure 2).

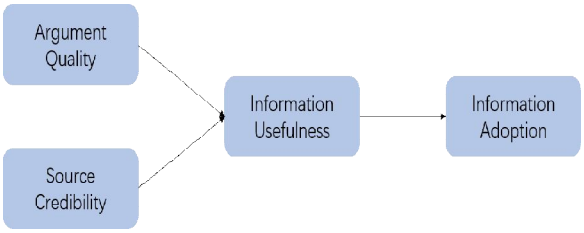


Figure 2. Information Adoption Model (IAM)

III. DESIGN OF THE MODEL

In order to fill in the research gap that the mechanism of how opinion leaders affect the purchase intention of consumers in the online communities of consumption, four small questions are pointed out and answered, as follows.

1) For this study, which traditional models of consumer behavior will be more suitable?

Previous researches have indicated that many researchers have used TAM and IAM for studying the purchase intentions of consumers. However, for this study, IAM is more applicable, and there are two main reasons: On one hand, although TAM is a widely-accepted theory, it is criticized for its limited applicability of eWOM communication study. TAM mainly focuses on how intentions towards using a system are formed, but neglects the social processes (Riffai et al., 2012). However, the eWOM communication refers to the process of information flowing from the information sender to the receivers (Bansal & Voyer, 2000) and in this process, the interaction from information senders to receivers is necessary. Hence, the explanatory power of TAM for studying the eWOM communication is inadequate.

On the other hand, as IAM explains the information adoption behavior of Internet users who communicate through computer-mediated platforms, many researchers have applied it for studying the information communication (Cheung et al., 2008; Tseng & Wang, 2016), especially the eWOM communication (C.-W. Chen et al., 2011; Cheung et al., 2009).

Consequently, IAM is more suitable.

2) Whether the original IAM can be used for this study?

Although IAM is used to analyze individuals' adoption to the information (Cheung et al., 2008), it is criticized for only focusing on the characteristics of information (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Also, the changes in the environment may result in the inadequate explanatory power of IAM. Hence, based on the real situations, prior researches show that many researchers have added variables to the original IAM (Erkan & Evans, 2016; Tseng & Wang, 2016; D. H. Zhu et al., 2016), and many researches have built up new model based on the original IAM (C.-W. Chen et al., 2011; Cheung et al., 2009; Gunawan & Huarng, 2015). This study focuses on opinion leaders, thus the original IAM, which only focuses on the information, is insufficient. Meanwhile, this study focuses on the online communities of consumption, which is a new environment. More factors need to be taken into consideration. Therefore, this research will design an extended model, based on IAM.

3) Thirdly, how did other researchers adjust IAM for eWOM study?

Previous researches show that the empirical study of Cheung et al. (2008) confirms the applicability of the original IAM on the eWOM study.Later, the empirical study of Cheung et al. (2009)confirmed that the argument strength, source credibility, confirmation with prior belief,recommendation consistency and recommendation rating all affected the eWOM review adoption via perceived eWOM review credibility.

Furthermore, because the influence of perceived information credibility towards perceived usefulness is confirmed by McKnight and Kacmar (2007), C.-W. Chen et al. (2011) have added three factors, including confirmation with prior belief, recommendation consistency, and credibility into IAM to investigate which factors affect information adoption, and further to explain how eWOM in the online communities affects the consumption decision (See Figure. 3). However, the explanatory power of both perceived usefulness of information and the message credibility towards the information adoption in this model is only 54%. Although the variance was improved, there are still more factors need to be taken into consideration.

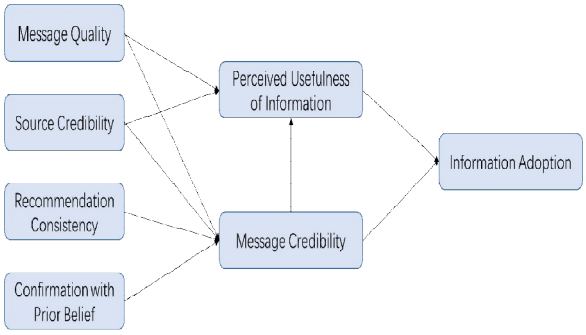


Figure 3. The research model of C.-W. Chen et al. (2011).

4) Finally, based on IAM, how to design the model for this study?

This study will be based on IAM and will add some factors of opinion leaders and of consumers. From the opinion leaders side, three factors are added and these factors include the source credibility, message quality and the tie strength. The message credibility should be considered because of their informational influence and the tie strength between opinion leaders and others, namely their relationships, should be considered because of their interpersonal influences. The source credibility should also be added to the model. Namely, these two original factors in the IAM are now considered as the factors related to the opinion leaders. For investigating the consumers, the three factors are added, including the trust towards the site, recommendation consistency, confirmation with prior belief are added. Furthermore, the research of C.-W. Chen et al. (2011) indicates that more intermediators should be taken into consideration. Hence, besides the perceived usefulness of information the message credibility and perceived risk are also added into the new model for investigating their intermediary functions. Consequently, inside this new model, the characteristics of opinion leaders and consumers are integrated into IAM (see Figure 4). Every black line between two variables represent one hypotheses. Notably, the influences of trust towards the site to the perceived risk, of perceived risk to both perceived usefulness of information and information adoption are considered to be negative.

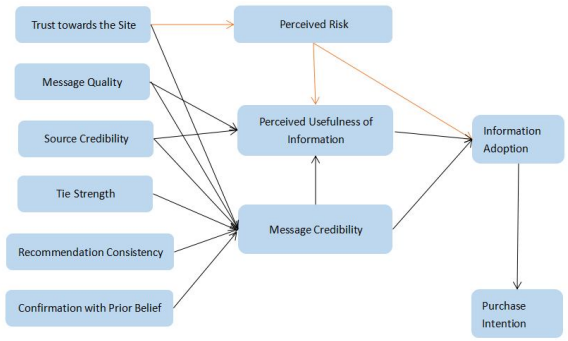


Figure 4. The theoretical model for this study

IV. FUTURE STUDY

The model of this study will testify by the empirical study. To be more specific, the questionnaire for the hypotheses in this model will be design and send out. The obtained data will be calculated by SPSS 23 and AMOS 21.0. By doing so, the hypotheses and the model can be testified and the research gap can be filled in.

REFERENCES

[1] Arndt, J. (1968). A test of the two-step flow in diffusion of a new product. Journalism Quarterly, 45(3), 457-465.

[2] Bansal, H. S., & Voyer, P. A. (2000). Word-of-mouth processes within a services purchase decision context. Journal of service research, 3(2), 166-177.

[3] Chau, P. Y., & Hui, K. L. (1998). Identifying early adopters of new IT products: A case of Windows 95. Information & Management, 33(5), 225-230.

[4] Chen, C.-W., Chen, W.-K., & Hsu, Y.-Y. (2011). The study of eWOM adoption model. Xing Xiao Ping Lun, 8(2), 175.

[5] Cheung, C. M., Lee, M. K., & Rabjohn, N. (2008). The impact of electronic word-of-mouth: The adoption of online opinions in online customer communities. Internet research, 18(3), 229-247.

[6] Cheung, M. Y., Luo, C., Sia, C. L., & Chen, H. (2009). Credibility of electronic word-of-mouth: Informational and normative determinants of on-line consumer recommendations. International Journal of Electronic Commerce, 13(4), 9-38.

[7] Davis, F. D., Bagozzi, R. P., & Warshaw, P. R. (1989). User acceptance of computer technology: a comparison of two theoretical models. Management science, 35(8), 982-1003.

[8] Erkan, I., & Evans, C. (2016). The influence of eWOM in social media on consumers' purchase intentions: An extended approach to information adoption. Computers in Human Behavior, 61, 47-55.

[9] Gunawan, D. D., & Huarng, K.-H. (2015). Viral effects of social network and media on consumers' purchase intention. Journal of Business research, 68(11), 2237-2241.

[10] Hennig-Thurau, T., Gwinner, K. P., Walsh, G., & Gremler, D. D. (2004). Electronic word-of-mouth via consumer-opinion platforms: what motivates consumers to articulate themselves on the internet? Journal of interactive marketing, 18(1), 38-52.

[11] McKnight, D. H., & Kacmar, C. J. (2007). Factors and effects of information credibility. Paper presented at the Proceedings of the ninth international conference on Electronic commerce.

[12] Kozinets, R. V. (1999). E-tribalized marketing?: The strategic implications of online communities of consumption. European Management Journal, 17(3), 252-264.

[13] Kozinets, R. V., De Valck, K., Wojnicki, A. C., & Wilner, S. J. (2010). Networked narratives: Understanding word-of-mouth marketing in online communities. Journal of marketing, 74(2), 71-89.

[14] Riffai, M., Grant, K., & Edgar, D. (2012). Big TAM in Oman: Exploring the promise of on-line banking, its adoption by customers and the challenges of banking in Oman. International journal of information management, 32(3), 239-250.

[15] Rogers, E. M. (1995). Diffusion of innovation theory: New York: Free Press.

[16] Stern, B. B., & Gould, S. J. (1988). The consumer as financial opinion leader. Journal of Retail Banking, 10(2), 43-52.

[17] Sussman, S. W., & Siegal, W. S. (2003). Informational influence in organizations: An integrated approach to knowledge adoption. Information systems research, 14(1), 47-65.

[18] Tseng, S.-Y., & Wang, C.-N. (2016). Perceived risk influence on dual-route information adoption processes on travel websites. Journal of Business research, 69(6), 2289-2296.

[19] Zhu, D. H., Chang, Y. P., & Luo, J. J. (2016). Understanding the influence of C2C communication on purchase decision in online communities from a perspective of information adoption model. Telematics and Informatics, 33(1), 8-16, (In Chinese).

★★★