

Chapter 7

Interactivity: The Concept and Its Dimensions

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ABSTRACT

The revolution of Social Web and mobile technologies has a tremendous impact on the world today. Noticeably, this revolutionary phenomenon has brought opportunities for companies to reach and communicate with audiences in different ways. This social media-based revolution has largely accelerated the rate at which relationships develop and information is shared. Nowadays, audiences expect to be able to select what they read, and most believe they should be able to contribute content and opinions. Among these changes, there has been a growth in interactivity, which lays emphasis on conversing with audiences rather than merely communicating to them. The understanding of interactivity and associated communication concepts has lagged behind the development of communications technology. This chapter draws on the literature developed in Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), e-Commerce, and Education, as well as Media, Marketing, and Advertising with the help of tri-dimensional features of interactivity identified as active control, two-way communications, and real-time communications.

INTRODUCTION

Importance of the Chapter

Despite the increasing importance of weblogs in the Tourism Industry, academic studies pertaining to travel weblogs remain sparse. Among the relatively few studies, Douglas & Mills (2006) investigate nearly 350 weblog entries from the travel weblog site 'travelpod.com'. Their study

identifies the perceived brand images of travel bloggers across the Middle East and North Africa. Another case study conducted by Lin & Huang (2006), analyses Tourism-marketing responses. Pan *et al.*, (2007) qualitatively analyse the opinions posted on leading travel weblogs. Their research finding ascertains how bloggers communicate about their travel experiences.

Although the research interest in the subject has recently increased in popularity, many studies

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centre on depicting the weblogging phenomena. Interaction intention is an important issue in relation to corporate travel weblog studies. The concept of interactivity has increasingly received considerable scholarly attention across different academic disciplines. For instance, the vast majority of interactivity literatures resides in the field of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), Electronic Commerce (EC), Information Technology (IT) and Web-based education (e.g., distance learning).

While a plethora of literature on testifying the significance of the term ‘interactivity’, no consensus has been reached on probing the nature or content of its dimensions (Lee, 2005). Scholars propose different views which attribute to certain characteristics, from an experimental and conceptual manner (Levinson, 2010; Karimova, 2011).

Owing to the complexities and popularity of the concept, an explicit investigation of the dimensionality of interactivity construct has yet to be successfully addressed. Furthermore, no attempt has been made to extend the constructs of interactivity into a corporate weblogging environment. In this instance, this chapter is expected to provide an opportunity to broaden the contexts in which interactivity has been studied.

As stated earlier, interactivity can be one of the key functions on a corporate travel weblog site to build a positive virtual relationship between travel companies and weblog users (Pan *et al.*, 2007). Importantly, interactivity is viewed as a central characteristic of weblogs and can have a positive impact on the attitude toward the weblog site (Levinson, 2010). Nevertheless, extant researchers in corporate weblog marketing have yet to comprehensively study the significance of interactivity functions in weblogging environment.

Given these gaps in our knowledge, it is critical to realise the multidimensional nature of interactivity particularly their relative effectiveness within a corporate weblogging setting. In brief, it is important for researchers to understand how people use interactive functions on corporate

travel weblogs and how interactivity may influence attitudes toward a corporate travel weblog and towards prospective behavioural intentions.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES (ICT)

The rapid and continuous development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) has shaped the media landscape, through both human and technology mediated interaction (Rambe, 2012). With the proliferation of ICT, the Internet has become a significant part of people’s daily lives and serves as an important medium for people to interact in the virtual world (Hogan & Wellman, 2012).

According to Internet World Stats (2012), 2.4 billion people had Internet access in 2012, penetrating approximately 34.3 percent of the global population. The Internet has touched every aspect of our lives, changing how we keep in touch, share information, and conduct business among other activities. As a communication medium, the Internet opens up opportunities for making communications more interactive and participatory (Rahman, 2008). Compared with traditional mass media, the Internet allows greater user control, two-way communications, and real-time communications (McMillan & Hwang, 2002). For example, web users can select the information to access, as well as their browsing time. They can control the sequence to browse the web and access information at their own pace. Also, a real-time feedback application of the web facilitates reciprocal communications among different users.

Reaping the benefits of modern technology, particularly Internet mediated communications, a large number of Internet-based conversational applications, such as weblogs, podcasts and other social networks have sprung up all over the information-based society. On behalf of the latest technology trends, weblogs or blogs as they are

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