

Chapter 3

Analysing the Effect of Value in Online Communities on Satisfaction in Online Socialisation and Knowledge-Sharing Intentions of Eco-Tourist

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ABSTRACT

This study, which is based on social exchange theory (SET), focuses on the capacities of social media to provide such means by examining the effect of value in online communities (VOC) in social media platforms on satisfying ecotourists' online socialisation and knowledge sharing. Based on the data obtained from 543 ecotourists and analysed by structural equation modelling (SEM), the results of this study confirmed that VOC, which embeds the SET factors of cooperation, reputation, trust and altruism, significantly influenced ecotourists' satisfaction in socialisation and knowledge-sharing intentions through social media. Furthermore, VOC served as a higher-/second-order factor reflected by the indicators of cooperation, reputation, trust and altruism. Finally, ecotourists' satisfaction in socialisation exerted a significant mediating effect between VOC and knowledge sharing.

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INTRODUCTION

Social media emerges from Web 2.0 as its technological foundation and that involves a two-way dialogue between users. This often leads to the creation of potentially highly useful user-generated content which enable individuals to engage in social interactions and knowledge sharing. Social media provides the platforms for online communities to spawn where individuals with mutual interests through intense social interactions build sustainable relationships among them. These sustained relationships through online social interactions via social media are existent in the form of a value strongly evident in online communities which can be referred to as value in online communities (VOC) (Seraj, 2012). This value which is intellectual, cultural and epistemic in nature embeds cooperative actions, reputational benefits, altruistic motives, trustworthiness and sense of community identification (Kozinets, 1999; Sanchez-Fernandez & Iniesta-Bonilo, 2007). VOC with these embedded characteristics can bring satisfying social interactions to online community members and knowledge exchanges among them (Kozinets, 1999; Seraj, 2012). Socialisation and knowledge sharing opportunities are also found to be vital motivating aspects for ecotourists to derive gratifying experiences of ecotourism while on an ecotrip. Given this imperative-ness of eco-tourists to socialize and share knowledge, it is cognitively vital for them to continue doing so beyond the ecotours. This is imperative from the perspective of promotion of sustainability, sharing of ecotourism-related knowledge and recommendations which are vital for eco- tourists to engage with through word-of-mouth socialisation (Weaver, 2002; Wearing & Neil, 2009). Social media which can enable socialisation through e-WOM can enhance engagement on such vital aspects by eco-tourists beyond the ecotours. Social media which offer a diversified communication platform can play a significant role in facilitating ecotourists in socialisation and knowledge sharing through online word-of-mouth exchanges before and after the ecotrips they engage in. While it has been recognised that social media can provide a many to many communication platform for ecotourists to socialize and share knowledge, its actual use in practice has been found deficient (Lu & Stepchenkova, 2012; Wearing & Neil, 2009). Therefore what remains unclear is the actual intensity of knowledge sharing that can place online and whether online socialisation, as it in the case of face-to-face socialisation, can lead to higher possibilities for knowledge sharing. It is therefore imperative to examine knowledge sharing that emanates from the learning desires of eco- tourists about the ecology and the environment in the online context as it is being observed in the offline context. Besides, the ability of social media in facilitating socialisation and knowledge sharing by means of word-of-mouth communication online among ecotourists has also not been investigated in the previous literature (Touray & Jung, 2010; Lu & Stepchenkova, 2012).

In the context of social interactions in social media, given the epistemic, intellectual, socio-cultural aspects VOC carries (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002; Seraj, 2012), empirical studies probing on its impact on satisfaction in socialisation and knowledge sharing via social media are inadequate. Seraj (2012) observed the cultural, intellectual and social value in online communities built through cooperative actions, reputational benefits, altruistic motives, trustworthiness and sense of community identification in turn, leading to satisfaction and loyalty as the effects. Moreover, in the context of ecotourist interactions through social media, studies examining the role of VOC in facilitating satisfying online social interactions and knowledge sharing are deficient. Eco-tourists social interactions and knowledge exchange processes also involve intellectual, epistemic and socio-cultural elements. Such are in relation to their need to spread awareness and recommendations on issues of ecological aspects, environmental consciousness and sustainability as well as their desire to socialise with likeminded individuals (Eubanks Jr, Stoll, & Ditton, 2004; Galley & Clifton, 2004; Harlow & Pomfret, 2007). This makes it imperative

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