


Chapter 6

The Effects of Trust on Parasocial Interaction of Malaysian Facebook (FB) Travel Community

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ABSTRACT

This chapter investigates the effects of trust dimension (competence, benevolence, and honesty) on parasocial interaction (PSI) of a Malaysian travel community through the usage of social media platforms. This study utilized a non-probability purposive sampling approach targeting Malaysians who use FB to interact and share their travel activities using self-administered online survey approach. Based on 142 respondents, the data were analyzed using multiple regression. The findings suggest that all three dimensions under trust are significant in predicting PSI among Malaysian FB travel community. The limitation of the study is that the majority of the samples were females and limited to only one FB community group.

INTRODUCTION

The technological development from Web 1.0 to Web 4.0 has changed the way people generally interact, search, collect, share, and consume information (Casaló, Flavián, & Guinalíu, 2011). Technological advancements also lead to further development and emergence of online communities, which enables better community interactions based on shared interests, including smart online travelers (Choi, Kim, Cha, Suh, & Kim, 2019; Fauzi & Abdul-Latif, 2019).

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Smart online travelers are “travelers who use the Internet to research their trips and to engage with communities of travelers” (Choi et al., 2019, p. 888). They rely on online communities as their platforms to source for travel-related information, communication, and knowledge-sharing needs (Choi et al., 2019; Yoo, Goo, Huang, Nam, & Woo, 2017). Among the online activities involved are travel information sharing, expression of travel opinions and guidance, as well as sharing of pictures and videos (Choi et al., 2019). Reviews of travel destinations and travel products are also often done using these platforms (Fauzi & Abdul-Latif, 2019).

Online travelers can promote many different travel-related topics through active participation and mutual collaboration within their online community (Casaló et al., 2011). With active participation from community members, the level of social interaction within the communities may improve (Silvia, Enrique, & Buzova, 2017). Potential or actual travelers can obtain support as a form of interpersonal interaction (Ballantine & Martin, 2005) in addressing travel-related challenges through online travel communities (Tsiotsou, 2016).

Affective responses, for instance, intimacy, friendship, and empathy can emerge from the frequent and consistent interaction between members with shared interests. This phenomenon is conceptualized as “parasocial interaction” (Klimmt, Hartmann, & Schramm, 2006 cited from Choi et al., 2019), which initially describes a one-direction interaction between a media consumer and a media persona (Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985). The interactions between online group members were proposed to be similar (Ballantine & Martin, 2005).

PSI can be beneficial as it can be used for predicting the behaviors and attitudes of users towards media usage (Kim, Ahn, & Kim, 2017). Previous studies have identified PSI’s influence on users’ interaction with online communities (Silvia et al., 2017), nurturing positive attitudes toward communities (Voorveld, Neijens, & Smit, 2009) and predicting consumption-related behaviors (Ballantine & Martin, 2005).

Though there are many potential and advantages of PSI, this concept has received lesser attention among researchers primarily in the travel management literature (Choi et al., 2019). Despite the importance of PSI to online communities, there are a limited number of studies that addressed PSI within the context of online travel communities. Following Choi et al. (2019), this study examines PSI from the context of online travel community.

By following Choi et al. (2019), this study adopted the trust theory (Casaló et al., 2011) in explaining PSI in online travel community context. Previous studies have agreed that trust is vital in forming interpersonal relationships online (Wu & Chang, 2005) with identified dimensions of competence, benevolence, and honesty (Choi et al., 2019). It can be suggested that PSI relationship can be formed through induced affective responses as a result of users’ needs being fulfilled by communities’ activities (Chiu & Huang, 2014).

More research that delve into facet of consumer behavior in the digital economy is deemed necessary (Ling Chang, Ling Tam, & Suki, 2016; Nathan, Fook Chiun, & Suki, 2016; Suki, 2013a; 2013b; Suki, 2016; Suki & Abang Sulaiman, 2016). Besides, there is a limited number of studies on online travelers and their online travel communities. Due to this, online travelers may not be able to understand and fully realize the potentials of online platforms and communities. This study examines the development of interpersonal interactions in a particular online travel community and attempts to provide empirical evidence that the dimensions of trust, which are competence, honesty, and benevolence of an online travel community is positively associated with PSI.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the tourism literature by recognizing trust as a predictor of PSI in the area of tourism. Moreover, the results can be useful for managers of online travel

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