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Why provide an online review? An extended theory of planned behavior and the role of Big-Five personality traits

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ABSTRACT

Online review, an important form of reputation systems, has been studied intensively because of its powerful impact on online retailers, intermediaries, and customers. However, to date, very little attention has been paid to factors that influence an individual's intention to provide an online review. An extended theory of planned behavior and Big-Five personality framework are used in this study. We empirically examine our model by using a cross-sectional survey study, collecting data from a sample of 171 online shoppers. Results show that attitude, perceived pressure, neuroticism, and conscientiousness are significant predictors of an individual's intention to provide an online review. Findings may help online retailers and/or intermediaries increase the number of online reviews provided, which will lead to more accurate rating information about transactions, products, or services and may serve as a stepping-stone to continuous improvements. Implications, limitations, and future research directions are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Global competition and globalization are driving many firms toward greater adoption of e-commerce (Gibbs, Kraemer, & Dedrick, 2003). Although customers have concerns over e-commerce, such as security and trust issues, recent e-commerce improvements may have reduced these concerns. Better security protocols, for example, have been developed and are broadly used by online retailers to enhance potential customers' willingness to shop online. Moreover, communications between online retailers and customers have become more effective. By using the Internet and intranet communication facilities and infrastructures, for example, information interchange between an online retailer and customer is more efficient, precise, and extensive (Valera, Vergara, Moreno, Villagraa, & Berrocal, 2001). Among various developments in e-commerce, online reputation systems have received increasing attention as existing customers are now gaining more influence on potential customers (Wang, 2005).

Online reputation systems play crucial roles in determining business success since they help customers make decisions about whom to trust and provide an incentive for honest behavior (Resnick, Zeckhauser, Friedman, & Kuwabara, 2000). In Resnick et al.'s study, an online reputation system is defined as a platform that collects, distributes, and aggregates feedback and comments about participants' past behavior. One form of online reputation systems is online customer rating or online customer review platform. From business's perspective, online customer review provides firms with knowledge of customers' needs and satisfactions or dissatisfactions. Heim and Field (2007), for example, found that customer ratings of the payment process are strongly associated with e-service process attributes that involve a credit card fraud protection program. On the other hand, from a customer's perspective, online customer review provides prospective customers important information on whether to purchase a product and/or service. Thus, by leveraging online customer review, firms are able to enhance their existing online marketing merchandising, and brand building efforts (Barton, 2006).

Because customer rating and review are a highly desirable and effective form of word-of-mouth communications, well-known online retailers such as Amazon.com and eBay have integrated online customer rating and review into their marketing processes. A case study conducted by Barton (2006) found that PETCO, a pet supplies company, uses aggregated online customer ratings to drive conversion and shopping conveniences. Thus, managing an effective online customer review program would be an important marketing priority.

Previous studies have examined the impacts of online reviews on sales, price, reputation, customer expectation, trust, promotion, attracting new business, product differentiation, etc. (e.g., Clemons, Gao, & Hitt, 2006; Dellarocas, Zhang, & Awad, 2007). However, to date, very little attention has been paid to factors that influence

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an individual's intention to provide an online review. Thus, the first objective of this study is to provide a conceptual framework that partially explains factors that determine an individual's intention to provide an online review. Specifically, we adopt and extend Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior (TPB) as our theoretical base. In our research model, an individual's attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, and perceived pressure determine his or her intention to provide an online review.

In this study, *attitude* is defined as the degree to which an individual has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of providing an online review. *Subjective norm* is defined as the degree to which an individual perceives providing online reviews as a norm among people who are important to him or her. *Perceived behavioral control* is defined as the degree of ease or difficulty perceived by an individual with respect to providing an online review. Finally, *perceived pressure* is the degree of push (e.g., follow-up invitations or calls) perceived by an individual from sellers and/or intermediaries (e.g., eBay or Amazon.com) with respect to providing an online review after a purchase.

Additionally, while individual behaviors can be explained by personality traits (e.g., Barrick & Mount, 1991; Hough, Eaton, Dunnette, Kamp, & McCloy, 1990; Ones, Viswesvaran, & Schmidt, 1993; Tett, Jackson, & Rothstein, 1991), the second objective of this study is to investigate the impact of personality on an individual's intention to provide an online review. Although various personality-trait measures are available in the literature, there is an emerging consensus among personality researchers that personality measures can be described by the Big-Five framework of personality (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Digman, 1990; Goldberg, 1993). Thus, the Big-Five personality traits are included in the proposed research model. In addition, previous research has shown that an individual's past behavior has a positive impact on his or her intention to perform the behavior again (Cronan & Al-Rafee, 2008; Sutton, 1998). To control this effect, we include an individual's past behavior of providing an online review as a control variable. The proposed research model and the hypothesized relationships are summarized in Fig. 1.

The major contribution of this study is that it provides a partial understanding of the factors that determine an individual's intention to provide an online review. Findings may help online retailers increase the number of online reviews provided, which will lead to more accurate rating information of transactions, products, or services. Such information not only tells online retailers and/or intermediaries how well they are rated but also serves as a stepping-stone to continuous improvements.

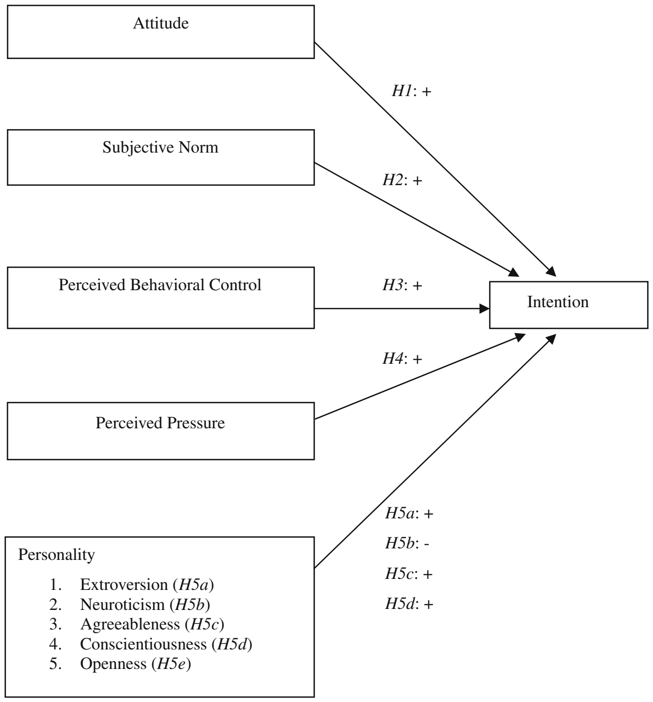

Fig. 1. The proposed research model and relations.

The remainder of this study is organized as follows: We first review existing research regarding online reviews and the relevant information system research that has applied the theory of planned behavior. This is followed by the theoretical arguments for the proposed research model. Next, we present the procedures of testing the proposed research model empirically. Then the results of an empirical test of the model are presented. Finally, we provide a discussion of the findings, followed by limitations, and areas for future research.

2. Literature review

This section reviews previous research related to online reviews and the relevant information system research that has applied the theory of planned behavior.

2.1. Online reviews

The amount of research on online reviews has been growing during the past years. Previous studies have analyzed the relation between online reviews and other variables. A literature review showed that three online review research streams are relevant to this study: the effect of online reviews on trust, the effect of online reviews on sales, and the effect of online reviews on assessment of product and service differentiation.

In the first research stream, researchers investigated the relationship between online reviews and trust. For instance, Ba and Pavlou (2002) examined the effect of feedback mechanisms on trust and found that feedback mechanisms partly help buyers develop trust in sellers' credibility and generate price premiums. Pavlou and Dimoka (2006) examined the content of feedback text-comments and their role in building a buyer's trust in a seller's benevolence and credibility. The study found that past seller behavior contained in the seller's feedback text-comments created price premiums when mediated by benevolence and credibility. Finally, Lim, Sia, Lee, and Benbasat (2006) investigated the effectiveness of trust building strategies on trust and the consequences of trust. Specifically, they investigated two trust building strategies, portal association and satisfied customer endorsements, and found that customer endorsement by similar peers increased a consumer's trusting beliefs in the store. They also found a positive relationship between trust and attitude and willingness to buy and a positive relationship between willingness to buy and actual buying behavior.

The second research stream studies the impact of online reviews on sales. For instance, Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) examined the effect of online reviews provided by customers on relative book sales at Amazon.com and Barnesandnoble.com. They found that reviews affected customer purchase behavior. In another study, Resnick, Zeckhauser, Swanson, and Lockwood (2006) examined the value of established reputation on eBay and found that buyers agreed to pay more to sellers with established reputations than to new sellers.

In the third research stream, the studies used online reviews to assess product or service differentiation. Clemons et al. (2006) used online reviews to assess the effectiveness of product differentiation strategies. Their study was based upon hyperdifferentiation theory and resonance theory and found that online reviews were useful to measure the impact of product positioning on sales growth. In another study, Finch (2007) analyzed a seller's feedback and used it to identify the relationships between a customer's emphasis

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