

ANTECEDENTS OF THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY TOURISTS: MOTIVATION, OPPORTUNITY, AND ABILITY

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It is of vital importance that tourism organization managers and destination policy makers understand the antecedents of the tourists' use and adoption of social media before, during and after their trips due to the impact of these collaborative behaviors on tourists' decisions about the choice of all the elements of the trip (destination, accommodation, activities, restaurants, ...).

This work addresses the use of social media to organize and take vacation trips from an overall perspective and is not restricted to the use of a specific tool or to one community. That use is related not only to the different phases of the trip (before, during and after) but also to the different levels of use (consulting and/or contributing content).

Thus, this study has three objectives: to adapt the theoretical MOA model to the use of social media on vacation trips that contemplates, in a generalized fashion, the set of these tools; to test and refine the proposed theoretical model by means of Structural Equations, using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) technique; and to evaluate the strength and direction of the influence of those factors on their use.

The hypotheses of the work are the following:

Hypothesis 1. There is a positive relationship between the motivation and the intentions of using social media in organizing and taking vacation trips.

Hypothesis 2a. There is a positive relationship between the perceived functional benefits and the intentions of social media in organizing and taking vacation trips

Hypothesis 2b. There is a positive relationship between the perceived social benefits and the intentions of social media in organizing and taking vacation trips

Hypothesis 2a. There is a positive relationship between the perceived hedonic benefits and the intentions of social media in organizing and taking vacation trips

Hypothesis 1. There is a positive relationship between the opportunity and the intentions of using social media in organizing and taking vacation trips.

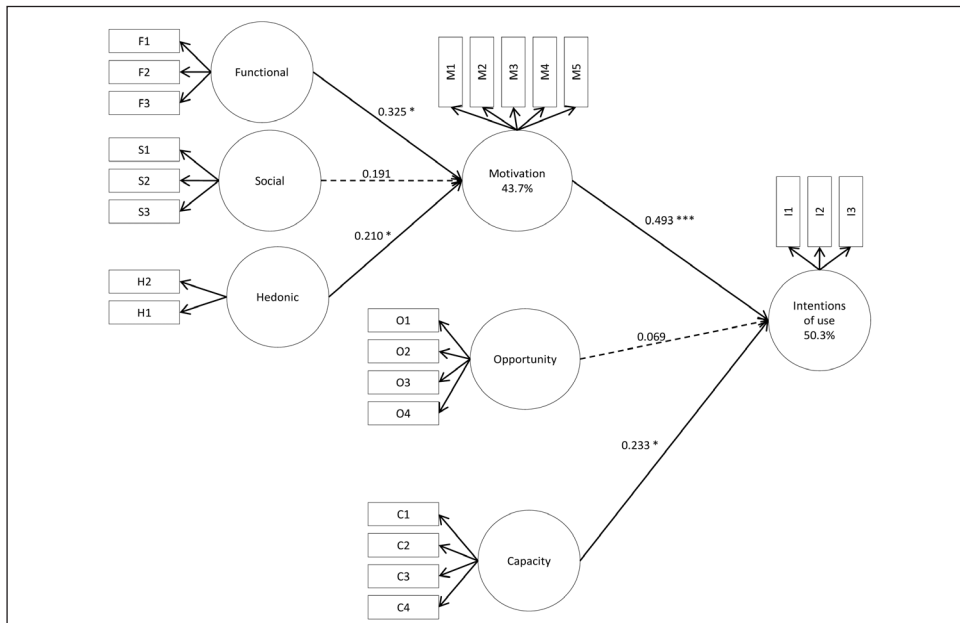
Hypothesis 4. There is a positive relationship between the ability and the intentions of using social media in organizing and taking vacation trips.

To verify these hypotheses, a data gathering process was carried out, in which the population of the study comprised individuals who regularly take vacation trips and have access to the Internet. With the means of delimiting the sample from an operational point of view, the data for this research were obtained from a sample of the population of the Canary Islands who met the two requisites of habitual Internet use and having traveled for vacations in the previous 12 months. The data was gathered via the web by means of a self-administered questionnaire (in Spanish) that the respondent him/herself completed.

Data was collected during May 2009 and the final sample comprised 404 responses. The method chosen to analyze the data was the structural equations method, using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) technique (Fornell& Cha, 1994), specifically, we used SmartPLS 3.0 build M3 (Ringle et al., 2005).

The model used for this research has seven first order constructs, as can be seen in Figure 1. In this same Figure we present the result of the structural model evaluation, together with the explained variance of the constructs (R2) and the standardized coefficients (β).

Figure 1
MOA MODEL CONSTRUCTS AND ESTIMATED CAUSAL RELATIONSHIPS
IN THE STRUCTURAL MODEL



*** p <.001 level; ** p <.01 level; * p <.05 level.
 Note: Dotted lines indicate non-significant paths.

We now comment on the hypotheses proposed in this work. Regarding those relating to the antecedents of motivations, Hypothesis 2a, which established that there was a positive relationship between the functional benefits of the use and the motivations of using social media when organizing and taking vacation trips, has been verified ($\beta=.325$, $p<.05$). On the contrary, Hypothesis 2b was not verified, so we cannot state that there is a positive relation between social perceived benefits and the motivations of using social media when organizing and taking vacation trips ($\beta=.191$, n.s.). Last, Hypothesis 2c, which established that there was a positive relation between perceived hedonic benefits and the motivations of using social media when organizing and taking vacation trips, was verified ($\beta=.207$, $p<.05$).

Regarding the hypothesis that deal with the direct influences on the intentions to use social media when organizing and taking vacation trips, Hypothesis 1, which established that there was a positive relation between the motivation and the intentions of use, was verified ($\beta=.486$, $p<.001$); same happens with hypothesis 4, that stated a positive relation between ability and intentions of use ($\beta=.233$, $p<.05$). However, Hypothesis 3 which established a positive relation between opportunity and intentions of use was not verified ($\beta=.084$, ns).

The model applied, Motivation, Opportunity and Ability (MOA), is able to explain 50.3% of the variance. The results of the analysis show the importance that motivation and ability have in explaining the intentions of use of social media. However, opportunity does not have a significant impact on the predisposition to use social media.

The biggest impact comes from the side of the motivation, this is, the disposition, willingness, interest and desire to participate and collaborate in generating knowledge on the destiny. This motivation is influenced, in turn, by the functional and hedonic benefits perceived by users, but not by social benefits. Thus, the recommendation for those interested in encouraging and promoting the use of social media in the organization and taking of a vacation trip is that it is necessary to focus on the area of the benefits that the users obtain: better knowledge of destinations, cost savings, belonging to groups with similar interests, and fun using the tools.

Our study has not found a significant relationship between the opportunity of using social media and the intentions of using it. Probably the generalization of the use of these tools and their improved facility of use, have caused that the use of social media in organizing and taking vacation trips is not limited anymore by these factors.

Our study also reveals that the skills and competences of users stimulate the use of social media. Therefore, managers of tourism firms and destination policy makers should concentrate in identifying the clients' needs for information in the social media so that they can respond actively and favor the perception of functional benefits.

Thus, it is necessary to «listen» constantly to the tourists' contributions in the social media in order to participate and respond immediately to suggestions, needs and queries, thus increasing the perception of functional utility. This will favor the tourists' use of these tools in relation to the product or service offered by the firm or destination. Moreover, if the Internet community managers identify and expand the online conversations that takes place about their product, the perception of functional utility increases.

The results of this study also suggest that the community managers should recognize and be thankful for the tourists' participation in terms of contributions (photos, videos, comments, etc.) about their products. That recognition entails the perception of hedonic benefits and, therefore, the participation and the evaluation of their products will increase.