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COMMUNITY ACCEPTANCE OF KNOWLEDGE SHARING SYSTEM IN THE TRAVEL AND TOURISM WEBSITES: AN APPLICATION OF AN EXTENSION OF TAM

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Abstract

The presence of customer community in tourism websites is an added value service that enable customers to read about other tourists' experience. This knowledge sharing of other people's experience is perceived as more neutral and trustworthy and help to reduce tourist's perceived risk. However, the deployment of tourist knowledge sharing through the Internet has yet to be measured. This paper presents the result of a study conducted to determine whether the perception of trust, risk and sharing have an effect on the sharing of information at the tourism website. The study was conducted, using the tourism website, www.virtualtour.com which has 400,000 members. A research team member became a member of the community group and befriended community members by taking part in the experience sharing sessions with them to gain their confidence. A survey was then conducted by sending questionnaires via personal e-mails to 1131 members and a total 262 completed questionnaires were returned and used in the analysis. The result yield preliminary evidence that perception of trust and perceived sharing resulted in positive behavioural intention of sharing. In addition, this research also produced preliminary evidence that perceived risk resulted in a negative behavioural intention of sharing. This research also contributed to the much needed measurement of users acceptance of knowledge management systems in e-commerce applications. The findings of this research is consistent with other TAM research findings especially on the constructs of perceived usefulness, ease of use and intentional behaviour.

Keywords: knowledge sharing, online community, tourism, TAM,

1 INTRODUCTION

The travel and tourism industry has emerged as an economic force in many nations. Information technology can support tourism organization reach a wider customer base (Gretzel and Fesenmaier 2001). With the entrance of e-commerce, tourism has become one of the most important users of the World Wide Web and has opened potentials that remain untapped. Traditionally, the travel and tourism industry is characterized by a conglomerate of all individuals and organizations that are involved in the production, distribution and consumption of travel and tourism products. Travel agents are intermediaries in the industry that acts as distributor, broker or retailer of tourism products. In the promotion and marketing of tourism products, travel agencies extended information service to potential customers to promote tourist destinations. Besides giving information on the destination, travel agencies also give recommendation for destination choices. Intermediaries have taken a step further by offering new value-added services in their travel and tourism websites. One such value-added service is the customer community on the travel and tourism websites (C2C). The presence of the customer community allows customers to read about other tourists' experience, seek advice from other customers on destination of their interest. This is a situation of knowledge sharing of destinations and experiences of other travelers. Information from other travelers or the word of mouth is often perceived as more neutral and more trustworthy than information given by the tourism business in advertising campaign or in the web portal. Customer community should contribute to the reduction of tourists' perceived risks.

The literature has shown that the success of information technology implementation began with the individual, individual acceptance and usage. In most situation, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) has been used as a framework to investigate the implementation of information technology ranging from e-commerce applications to knowledge management systems (Van der Heijden, et al 2000; Featherman 2001; Moon and Kim 2001; Pavlou 2003; Money and Turner 2004). However, the current literature does not outline the state of knowledge sharing in the traveling and tourism sector. Specifically, the missing element is about barriers and individual acceptance of knowledge sharing in the C2C travel and tourism websites. The objective of this paper is to determine whether the perception of trust, risk and sharing have an effect on the sharing of information at the C2C travel and tourism website.

2 KNOWLEDGE SHARING IN TRAVEL AND TOURISM

2.1 Online Community Knowledge Sharing

Tourism products can be classified as standardized products and non-standardized products (Nysveen and Leshagen 2001). In a purchasing situation, standard products such as a domestic flight are perceived as low risk and non-standardized products such as international flights to several destinations with accommodation are perceived as high risk. Perceived risks can be defined as *consumers' uncertainty about loss or gain in a transaction* (Murray 1991). The notion of perceived risk has been reported in the literature as the consumers' subjective belief of suffering a loss in the pursuit of a desired outcome (Pavlou 2003). For standardized tourism products, customers normally buy from traditional marketplace consisting of travel airlines and hotels. However, for more complex non-standardized tourism products, value-added services provided by intermediaries such as travel agencies may offer consumers, information and decision support to make their purchasing decision. The valued added service ranges from contact information, links, maps, price comparison facilities, customer community and decision support application. Hence, in the travel and tourism industry, information dissemination is crucial in promoting destinations and places. The Internet has become

one of the important media for communication, content and business transaction. The Web is a perfect meeting place for all kinds of information. With the pace of growth in e-commerce, many stakeholders in the travel and tourism industry has capitalized on the marketing and selling of their services online. Contribution of online tourism has been studied by Palmer (2000) and Heung (2003) and the common conclusion was the ability of the Internet to disseminate information to help boost the travel and tourism industry.

As highlighted earlier, the value-added service in the travel and tourism industry can be achieved through the sharing of information of destination or mode of travel choices among travelers and potential travelers through customer community. Information related technologies can support knowledge sharing through collaboration technologies and community of interest (Money and Turner 2004). The tourism and travel industry can capitalize on the ability of experience sharing, by the establishment of C2C online community through their portals. Sharing travel experience can be made explicit either through story telling or through the distribution of artifacts such as photographs and videos or a combination of both. Experience is a form of tacit knowledge. Therefore, experience sharing is one form of knowledge sharing. The literature has provided evidence that technology assisted communications are the key component of knowledge sharing process (Murray 2003). The common knowledge sharing platform offered by portals include e-mails, instant messaging, newsgroup, bulletin board system and its likes, chatroom, personal website and electronic postcard. Currently, numerous C2C tourism websites are available. This include websites such as www.virtualtourist.com, www.mytravelexperience.com, www.mytravelguide.com and others.

2.2 Trust in Knowledge Sharing

In the knowledge sharing process, people are willing to share their knowledge either on an interpersonal context or on a group orientation basis. In an online community, sharing in a group involve a large number of people who are anonymous. This situation may pose problems that may become barriers to knowledge sharing. Barson, et al (2000) categorized three types of barriers to knowledge sharing which are personal, organizational and technological. The personal barrier can be of the following: internal resistance, self-interest, trust, risk, fear of contamination and others. Organizational barriers will include costs, proprietary knowledge, targeting and distance. On the other hand, the technological barrier will be the availability of the technology, efficiency and effectiveness of the system and compatibility of the system. Trust has also been identified as the barrier for several knowledge sharing application (Levina 2001). The importance of trust is elevated in e-commerce due to the high degree of uncertainty and risk present in the online transaction thus making the role of trust a fundamental importance of for adequately capturing consumer behaviour in e-commerce (Pavlou 2003).

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) has become a well-established robust model for predicting user acceptance (Figure 1). Originally developed by Davis (1989), TAM was derived from the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) model by Fishbein and Ajzen to explain a broader range of behaviours based on situation specific combinations of beliefs and attitudes. The literature has shown that TAM has been extended and revised as a tool for investigating and predicting user information technology acceptance. The original TAM have been empirically validated in a variety of settings which includes website success (Liu and Arnett 2000) and behavioural intention to use the web (Moon and Kin 2001). TAM has also extended by validation with other theories in other setting that includes behavioural intention to use the web (Agrawal and Karahanna 2000), willingness to buy (Jarvenpaa, et al 2000), unplanned purchases and intention to return (Koufaris 2002) and acceptance of knowledge management information systems (Money and Turner 2004). In addition, TAM has been updated

with a number of antecedents of usefulness and ease-of-use, including subjective norms, experience, and output quality (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000). Pavlou (2003) has adopted TAM by integrating TAM with the constructs of trust and risk, both of which are essential when uncertainty is present in the technology-driven environment of e-commerce.

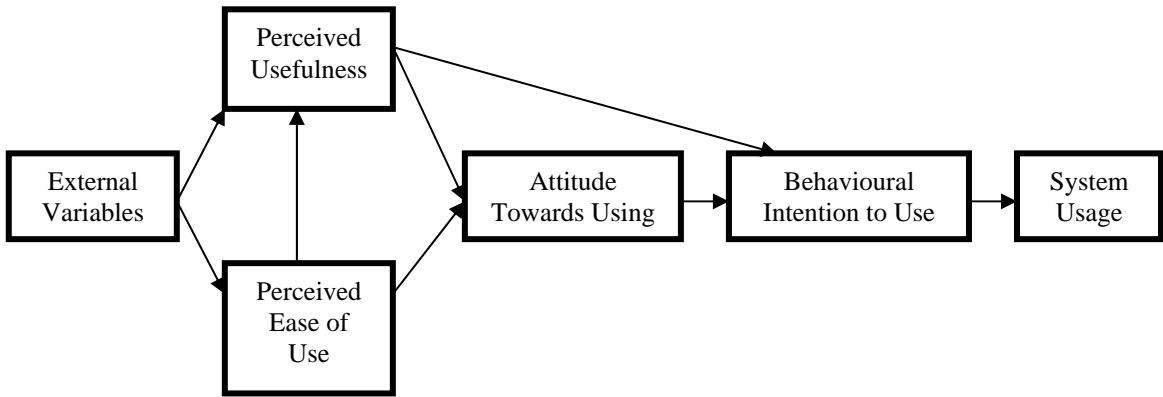


Figure 1. Technology Acceptance Model (Davis).

4 CONCEPTUAL MODEL AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

The research model is shown in Figure 2.

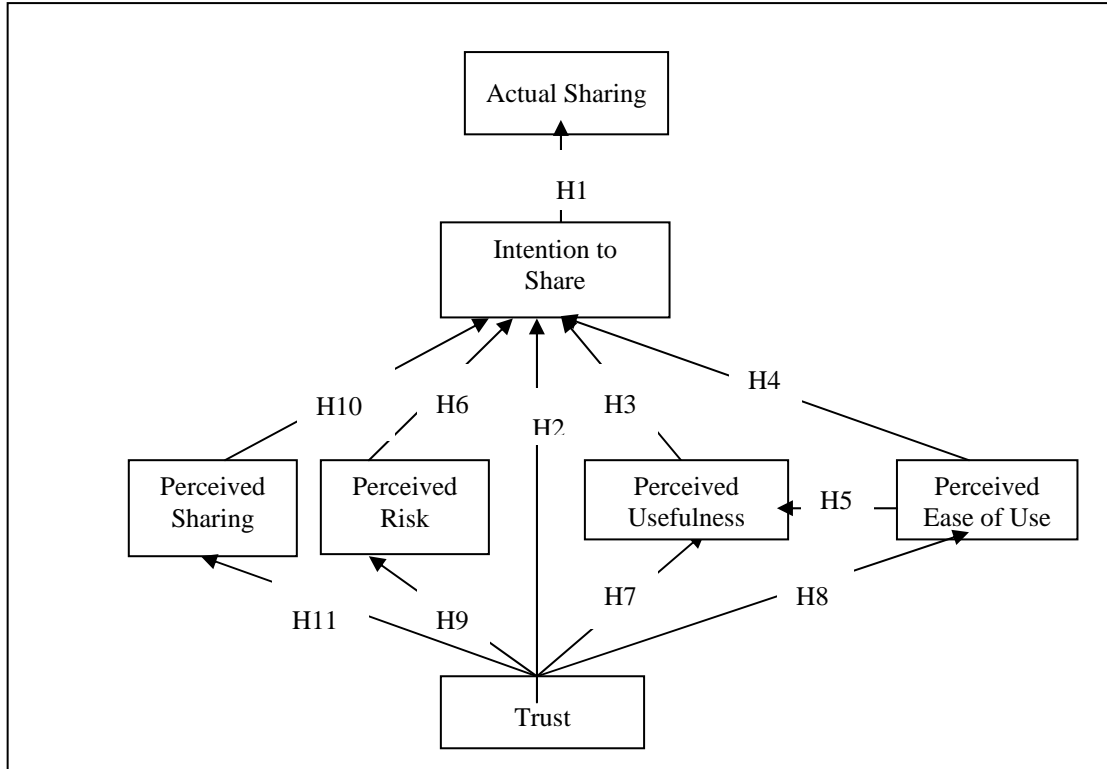


Figure 2. Research Model (adapted from Pavlou (2003))

It supports the specific objective of this research to determine whether the perception of trust, risk and sharing have an effect on the sharing of information at the tourism website. This research model is adapted from Pavlou (2003). Included in the model are principal constructs for perceived usefulness (USEF), perceived ease of use (EOU), perceived trust (TRUST) and perceived risk (RISK). Sharing constructs added include perceived sharing (SHARE), intention to share (INSHARE) and actual sharing behaviour (ACTSHARE). The constructs of intention to share and actual sharing behavior are posited as the primary construct to determine consumer acceptance of knowledge sharing adoption. Following the application of theory of reasoned action (TRA) to a technology driven environment, the TAM constructs (perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use) are posited as key drivers in e-commerce acceptance. However, in this study, both TAM constructs perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are posited together with additional key drivers in consumer behavior acceptance. Trust, risk, and sharing are integrated and will comprise the major attitudinal component of the model. As will be justified later, these constructs are believed to be strong enough to have direct effects on the adoption of knowledge sharing in the travel and tourism online website (C2C). Here, trust and risk are considered because of the uncertainty of the website environment.

The research hypothesis are:

H1: Consumer intention to share is positively related to actual knowledge sharing process.

H2: Consumer intention to share is positively related to trust in the travel and tourism website.

H3: Consumer intention to share is positively related to the perceived usefulness of the travel and tourism website.

H4: Consumer intention to share is positively related to perceived ease of use of the travel and tourism website.

H5: The perceived usefulness of the travel and tourism website is positively related to its perceived ease of use.

H6: Consumer intention to share is negatively related to perceived risk.

H7: Consumer trust is positively related to the perceived usefulness of the travel and tourism website.

H8: Consumer trust is positively related to the perceived ease of use of the travel and tourism website.

H9: Consumer perceived risk is negatively related to trust in travel and tourism website

H10: Consumer intention to share is positively related to perceived sharing.

H11: Consumer trust is positively related to the perceived sharing.

5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 The VirtualTourist C2C Tourism Website

The study was conducted on the C2C tourism website, VirtualTourist (www.virtualtour.com) (Figure 3). This site was selected based on an initial investigation on eleven tourism websites to gauge their technology, reliability and popularity. This website has received several awards in recognition of its effort. Some of the awards are: TIME “Recommended Travel Forum” 2003, “Best of the Internet” Travel Site 2003, US NEWS “Best of the Web” Travel Site 2000 and E-Travelworld “Gold Medallist” 2000. At the time of investigation, this site has 400,000 members, over one million postings at the Forum feature and over two million users who have visited the site. The communication platform that enable experience sharing among members are chatrooms, comment posting, e-mail, notice, postcards

posting, meeting events, wish list and rating system. The rating system employed allows for the ranking of members based on the rating of the accuracy and helpful information they shared. Members are ranked from a scale of 1 to 5 based on their participation. Members with the highest rating are those who participate actively in the site.



Figure 3: VirtualTourist (www.virtualtour.com)

5.2 Data Collection

During the period of the study, a member of the research team became a member of the community group of VirtualTourist and befriended community members by taking part in the experience sharing sessions with them to gain their confidence for a period of five months. A survey was then conducted by sending questionnaires to community members who have a rating of 5. The survey comprised of eighteen items based on previous validated constructs using the 7-point Likert scales. A total of 1131 members were personally approached via e-mails to invite them to participate in the survey. No time limit was given for the response. After one month a total of 262 (23.2%) completed questionnaires were returned and used in the analysis. The email response rate of this research is consistent with the general response rate of email and web-based survey which is 20% (Andrews, et al 2003).

5.2 Results and Discussion

To validate the data, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin and Bartlett's Test were conducted to test on all items. The result was 0.868 which is above 0.6. The pre-test and post-test results of the measurement reliabilities showed a Cronbach's Alpha of above 0.7 for each construct. The mean and standard deviation of each construct were obtained and are shown in Table 1.

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
USEF	6.0372	0.91355
EOU	5.8919	1.07359
TRUST	5.1341	0.90878
RISK	1.8168	0.78712
SHARE	6.0754	0.94853
INSHARE	6.0389	0.89332
ACTSHARE	6.1374	0.92399

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Principal Constructs

The results showed that positive response was towards agreement except for perceived risk, which the respondents considered least.

The principle component analysis was used as the extraction method for factor analysis with Varimax rotation. The rotation component matrix was performed and is shown in Table 2.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
TRUST1- SUBJECTIVE NORM					
I can trust the information provided by website administrator to be truth.	0.496				
I can trust the information submitted by the member to be truth based on the rating history (VT Rank & Rookie Rank).	0.828				
I can trust the information submitted by the member to be truth based on the comment received on each travel page.	0.782				
I generally trust other member in www.virtualtourist.com unless they give me a reason not to	0.663				
I am confident to use the tips or information from member who were rated as 5 for their information.	0.800				
PERCEIVED SHARING					
I am willing to share my photos from my traveling trips for others to review.		0.808			
I don't mind to write my travel journey experiences.		0.813			
I am willingly to tell others about the benefit of using www.virtualtourist.com ?		0.623			
I would not hesitate to provide information about my experience to www.virtualtourist.com .		0.766			
PERCEIVED EASE OF USE					
Using the site, I find it easy to get the website to do what I want it to do			0.863		
Learning to operate www.virtualtourist.com is easy to use especially in sharing what I have to others.			0.821		
Using the site, I find it very easy to participate in sharing experiences.			0.814		
PERCEIVED USEFULNESS					
www.virtualtourist.com is useful in providing idea of budget and places to go for vacation.				0.674	
www.virtualtourist.com is useful when many members share their photos, videos, experiences, and tips to others via the web.				0.689	
www.virtualtourist.com will allow me to make friends from all over the world.				0.806	
www.virtualtourist.com is useful when members are able to have gathering and meetings annually to get to know each other by sharing their knowledge and experiences.				0.742	
TRUST2: OUTPUT QUALITY					
I feel safe and confident to involve in auction bid in www.virtualtourist.com .					0.793
I trust with the "privacy statement" listed on the website.					0.645

Table 2: Factor Analysis With Rotation Component Matrix

The factor analysis, revealed five factors: TRUST1: subjective norm, perceived sharing, perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, TRUST2: output quality. Here all the factors have a single structure except for trust that is split into subjective norm and output quality. When wording of each item under trust was examined, the expected construct have two perspective: trust on what other people say (subjective norm) and trust towards content (output quality), that is trust on the website itself. This may indicate that website that provide reliable output quality will normally be favoured by Internet users.

The correlation analysis results conducted after the factor analysis is shown in Table 3. Most of the variables seem to exhibit a significant positive relationship among others except for *Perceived Risk*. In general the relationships are moderate. As expected relationship between other constructs with *Perceived Risks* showed a weak negative correlation. This may be due to respondents' perception that since no purchase is involved there is no or little risk involved and hence there is a willingness to share their knowledge. The correlation is insignificant except for the correlation between *Perceived Risk* and *Trust2: Output quality*.

	USEF	EOU	TRUST1	TRUST2	SHARE	RISK	INSHARE	ACTSHARE
USEF		.471*	.316*	.487*	.495*	-.079	.545*	.534*
EOU			.351*	.452*	.470*	-.074	.486*	.508*
TRUST1				.612*	.344*	-.095	.520*	.406*
TRUST2:					.484*	-.104*	.611*	.527*
SHARE						-.050	.760*	.919*
RISK							-.119	-.043
INSHARE								.794*
ACTSHARE								

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed)

Table 3: Correlation Matrix of Principal Constructs Using Spearman's Rho Rank Correlation

The data analysis result will now be discussed in the context of the research hypothesis and research model (Table 4). Hypothesis 1 postulated that consumer intention to share is positively related to actual knowledge sharing process. The evidence in support of the confirmation of this hypothesis can be found in the positive correlation (0.760) and statistical significant p value (< 0.05). The relationship between consumers' intention to share and actual sharing is strong and can be interpreted as when there is an intention to share, sharing actually takes place. Hypothesis 2 hypothesized that consumer intention to share is positively related to trust in the travel and tourism website. The correlation analysis on the split trust factors of subjective norm and output quality further provide evidence of positive correlation of 0.520 and 0.611 respectively and statistical significant p value (< 0.05). This implies that the consumers will have the intention to share when they trust the content of the travel and tourism website and information given by other people on the website. Hypothesis 3 hypothesized that consumer intention to share is positively related to the perceived usefulness of the travel and tourism website. The correlation analysis confirmed this hypothesis by evidence of positive correlation (0.545) and statistical significant p value (< 0.05). Hypothesis 4 hypothesized that consumer intention to share is positively related to perceived ease of use of the travel and tourism website. Here, too, the analysis confirmed the hypothesis by evidence of positive correlation (0.486) and statistical significant p value (< 0.05). Hypothesis 5 hypothesized that the perceived usefulness of the travel and tourism website is positively related to its perceived ease of use. The analysis also confirmed the hypothesis by evidence of positive correlation (0.471) and statistical significant p value (< 0.05). Hypothesis 6 hypothesized that consumer intention to share is negatively related to perceived

risk. The analysis also confirmed the hypothesis by negative correlation (-0.119) and statistical significant p value (<0.05). This is a weak correlation but however it can be interpreted as when consumer perceived there is risk on sharing then there will be no intention of sharing. Correlation between perceived risk and trust on what other people says (trust factor subjective norm) is insignificant. This can be interpreted as the consumer do not perceive risk even if they do not trust information given by other people on the website. This may be due to there is no transaction involved unlike in purchasing situations.

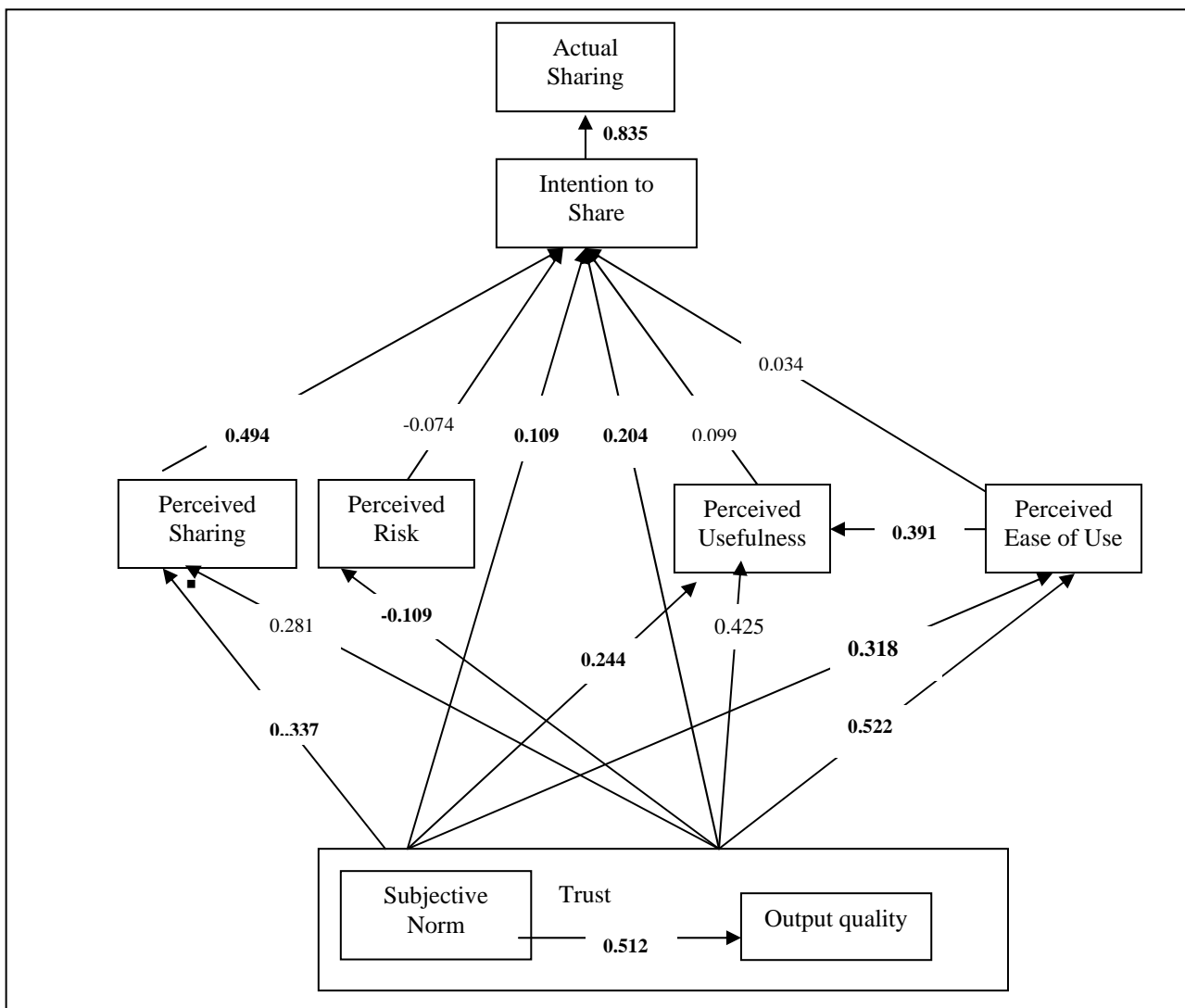
Hypothesis 7 hypothesized that consumer trust is positively related to the perceived usefulness of the travel and tourism website. The analysis on both split trust factors confirmed the hypothesis by evidence of positive correlation for both subjective norm of trust factor (0.316) and trust factor output quality (0.487) with statistical significant p value (<0.05). Hypothesis 8 hypothesized that consumer trust is positively related to the perceived ease of use of the travel and tourism website. The analysis on both split trust factors confirm the hypothesis by evidence of positive correlation for both subjective norm of trust (0.351) and trust factor output quality (0.452) with statistical significant p value (<0.05). Hypothesis 9 hypothesized that consumer perceived risk is negatively related to trust in travel and tourism website. The correlation analysis on the split trust factors of subjective norm and output quality with perceived risks revealed only evidence of negative correlation between perceived risk and trust factor of output quality (-0.104). This can be interpreted as when consumer trust the content of the travel and tourism website they perceived no risk. Hypothesis 10 hypothesized that consumer intention to share is positively related to perceived sharing. The analysis on both split trust factors confirm the hypothesis by evidence of positive correlation for both subjective norm of trust (0.520) and trust factor output quality (0.611) with statistical significant p value (<0.05). Hypothesis 11 hypothesized that consumer trust is positively related to the perceived sharing. The analysis on both split trust factors confirm the hypothesis by evidence of positive correlation for both subjective norm of trust (0.344) and trust factor output quality (0.484) with statistical significant p value (<0.05).

HYPOTHESIS	COMMENTS
1. Consumer intention to share is positively related to actual knowledge sharing process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Confirmed. ▪ R² of 0.760, strong relationship
2. Consumer intention to share is positively related to trust in the travel and tourism website.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Confirmed ▪ R² of 0.520 for subjective norm and 0.611 for output quality
3. Consumer intention to share is positively related to the perceived usefulness of the travel and tourism website.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Confirmed ▪ R² of 0.545 lower than previous research
4. Consumer intention to share is positively related to perceived ease of use of the travel and tourism website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Confirmed ▪ R² of 0.486 lower than previous research
5. The perceived usefulness of the travel and tourism website is positively related to its perceived ease of use.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Confirmed ▪ R² of 0.471 lower than previous research
6. Consumer intention to share is negatively related to perceived risk.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Confirmed ▪ R² of -0.119 not that strong
7. Consumer trust is positively related to the perceived usefulness of the travel and tourism website.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Confirmed ▪ R² of 0.316 for subjective norm and 0.487 for output quality
8. Consumer trust is positively related to the perceived ease of use of the travel and tourism website.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Confirmed ▪ R² of 0.351 for subjective norm and 0.452 for output quality

9. Consumer perceived risk is negatively related to trust in travel and tourism website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confirmed only for correlation between perceived risk and trust factor of output quality with R^2 of -0.104 R^2 below than what is found in previous research
10. Consumer intention to share is positively related to perceived sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confirmed R^2 of 0.760, strong relationship
11. Consumer trust is positively related to the perceived sharing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confirmed R^2 of 0.344 for subjective norm and 0.484 for output quality

Table 4 Summary of Research Hypothesis Findings

To further confirmed the results, a regression analysis was conducted and the β -value was computed and is shown in the following path diagram (Figure 4).



Significant β -value in bold

Figure 4. Path Diagram With Observed Regression Coefficients

In the correlation analysis above, the hypothesis H3 and H4 showed a lower R^2 than the previous research. The regression analysis refuted both hypotheses. In the case of H6 the correlation analysis reported a weak correlation and the results of the regression analysis also refuted this hypothesis.

5.3 General Discussion

The primary contribution of this research is the revelation of that perceived trust, risk and sharing has an effect of sharing of knowledge at the C2C travel and tourism website. In addition, this research also contributed to the integration of the variables associated with behavioural uncertainty (trust and perceived risk) with TAM constructs (perceived usefulness, ease of use and behavioural intention) in a model that is able to predict consumers' acceptance of knowledge sharing (Figure 4). In previous TAM research, perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness can influence actual use. However in this research, one important finding is that the perceived usefulness and the ease of use of the knowledge sharing website do not contribute to the intention to share. This implies that website users are not influenced by the usefulness and ease of use of the C2C travel and tourism website. Another contribution of this research includes discovery of the importance of the construct of quality content of websites and subjective norm (what other people said) towards the attitude of actual sharing behaviour.

In addition, unlike previous research which argued that the reduction of perceived risk as an important factor for acceptance (Pavlou 2003), the risk factor towards the attitude of actual sharing behaviour is not that significant as shown in this research. The reason to offer at this point is that knowledge sharing in the travel and tourism website does not involve financial transaction and therefore even if a perceived risk exists the community members are still willing to share. Further research should be conducted to confirm the situation.

The limitation of this research is the sample size. Only a small population of the community were selected to participate in the online survey. Although the selected participants are active C2C members, the research missed to capture the perceptions of the general C2C members. Future research should explore further on the risk constructs to reach a conclusive finding of the relationship of perceived risk and intentional behaviour of sharing among online community members.

6 CONCLUSION

As stated earlier, the objective of this research is to determine whether the perception of trust, risk and sharing have an effect on the sharing of information at the C2C travel and tourism website. The result of this research yields preliminary evidence that perception of trust and perceived sharing resulted in positive behavioural intention of sharing. However perceived risk factor, perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness are not significant for the intention of sharing. This research also contributed to the much needed measurement of users' acceptance of knowledge management systems in e-commerce applications. This preliminary evidence that trust factor is a significant factor toward sharing needs to be further explored.

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