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ABSTRACT

Blog has become an increasingly popular form of new information technology (IT) in recent years. Many world famous web sites (e.g., Microsoft, Yahoo!, and Google) are providing blog services on the Internet. Bloggers, therefore, can easily establish and maintain their blogs through such services. However, research on blogs' adoption and diffusion is rare. In this study, we attempt to study bloggers' post-adoption behaviors. We examine bloggers' intention to switch their blog services building upon the marketing and IS literature. Particularly, the role of gender is explored and an online survey is conducted to test the research model. Findings confirm that bloggers' intention to switch their blog services is strongly associated with three factors: satisfaction, sunk costs, and attractive alternatives. Meanwhile, gender is found to moderate the relationship between satisfaction and intention to switch the blog service. Implications for both researchers and practitioners are provided.

Keywords

Blog, gender, intention to switch, satisfaction, sunk costs, attractive alternatives, post-adoption

INTRODUCTION

Blogs are web pages that allow owners to publish their content online in a reverse chronological order. It has become an increasingly popular form of new information technology (IT) in recent years. As a widely recognized blog tracking site, Technorati claimed that it is tracking 112.8 million blogs on the Internet[1] and the number is growing fast. Many world famous web sites, such as Microsoft, Yahoo!, and Google, are providing blog services. Bloggers, therefore, can easily establish and maintain their blogs through such services.

Compared with its rapid development, research on blogs' adoption and diffusion is rare. It has been suggested that adoption and acceptance of technologies is an important domain in IS field (Venkatesh and Davis, 2000). Further, post-adoption research is gaining more and more interest in the past few years (Ahuja and Thatcher, 2005; Bhattacherjee, 2001). Meanwhile, blog researchers in IS area are just paying their attention on blogs' adoption. For instance, Ma, Li and Clark (2006) based upon Venkatesh, Morris, Davis and Davis's (2003) Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) model and studied bloggers' acceptance of blogs. This implies that a post-adoption research of blogs is needed to enrich our understandings of its adoption and diffusion. In this study, we refer bloggers' switching intention as their willingness of stopping using the current blog service and switching to use another one. In other words, bloggers continually use the blog technology.

Gender issue is another emphasis in this paper. Various blog studies have implied that the number of female bloggers is usually larger than that of male bloggers in their data collection results (Guadagno, Okdie and Eno, 2007; Miura and Yamashita, 2007; Ma et al., 2006). Herring and Paolillo (2006) explicitly indicated that diary blogs have more female stylistic entries while filter blogs have more male stylistic entries. Likewise, Argamon, Koppel, Fine and Shimoni (2003) postulated that the writing of female bloggers is more interpersonal and the male is more informative. In this regards, we incorporated gender into our research model and examine its role through data analysis.

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[1] Data are fetched from http://technorati.com/about on 3 March 2008

In the rest of this paper, we first discuss previous studies of switching behaviors in marketing and IS literature, and the issue of gender. Then we propose our research model and hypotheses, followed by the research design. Finally, we conclude our findings and provide implications for both researchers and practitioners.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

Switching behavior research in marketing literature

Research on switching behavior has been conducted over a decade in marketing literature. Ping's (1993) work was one of the early studies that addressed the switching behaviors between companies. They proposed that the relationship between retailers and suppliers have five stages: loyalty, voice, opportunism, exiting, and neglect, and suggested that satisfaction, attractive alternativeness, investment, and switching costs affect in each stage. Then customer switching behaviors became an important topic in this field. Keaveney (1995) provided eight categories of factors, including pricing, service failures, attraction by competitors, and etc., to understand customers' service switching decisions. Following this stream, various service switching studies were conducted in recent years: car-insurance services (Antón, Camarero and Carrero, 2007), auto-repair and hairstyling services (Bansal, Taylor and James, 2005), and fixed-line telephone services (Lopez, Redondo and Olivan, 2006).

Switching behaviors of information technologies

The number of studies on switching behaviors of information technologies increases in recent years. Keaveney and Parthasarathy (2001) firstly investigated the customers' switching behavior between Internet service providers, which arouses researchers' interest on switching studies of information technologies. Chen and Hitt (2002) measured the influences of customer characteristics and firm attributes on online brokers' switching and attrition. New IT services like mobile services' (Ranganathan, Seo and Babad, 2006; Kazakevitch, Torlina and Hendricks, 2005) and email services' (Kim, Shin and Lee, 2006) switching behaviors were also analyzed. Along with the aforementioned research on post-adoption studies in IS literature, Ye, Seo, Desouza, Papagari and Jha (2006) examined prior customer switching behaviors studies in marketing literature and focused on Internet users' switching behavior of web browsers. Factors, which are specific to both the current web browser (e.g., satisfaction) and the new one (e.g., relative advantage), were tested.

The issue of gender

Gender schema theory (Bem, 1981) suggests that different gender perceptions or behaviors are resulted from the development and socialization process in a culture, where women and men adopt norms or expectations from what they believe to be female and male respectively. Thus, gender is related to culture factors. In IS research, Gefen and Straub (1997) incorporated gender into the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). They argued gender as one of the socio-culture factors in the IT context and concluded that perceptions toward email technology diffusion differ by gender. Similarly, Venkatesh et al. (2003) included gender and other factors (age, experience, and voluntariness of use) into the UTAUT model as key moderators. Recently, in a post-adoption research, Ahuja and Thatcher (2005) found that gender interacts with the association between perceptions of work environment factors and trying to innovative.

Demographic variables like gender also attracted attention from IT switching researchers. Chen and Hitt (2002) examined customers' demographic characteristics and concluded that only weak effects were found on predicting their switching behaviors. Ranganathan et al. (2006) proposed that female customers will less likely to switch than male customers and results supported this hypothesis

RESEARCH MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

Instead of investigating all possible factors, this study adopted three salient factors from marketing research: satisfaction, sunk costs, and attractive alternatives, which fit Ye et al.'s (2006) two categories of independent variable on switching behavior. The first two factors are specific to the current blog service while the third one is related to the new service. Furthermore, by examining moderating effect of gender, we bring more specific perspectives on bloggers' switching research. The research model is illustrated as follow, where dotted lines refer to moderating effects (Figure 1).
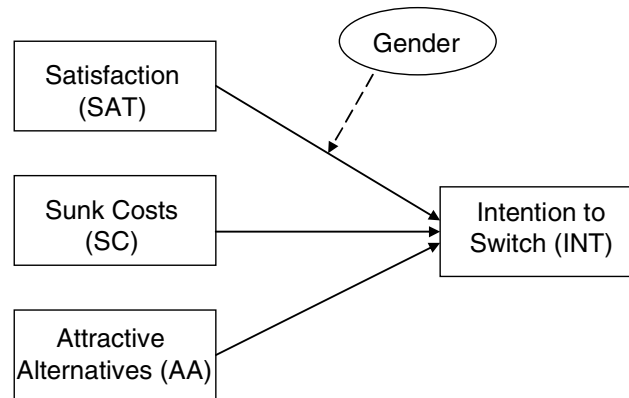
Figure 1. Research Model

Satisfaction

Oliver (1981, p. 29) defined satisfaction as "the summary psychological state resulting when the emotion surrounding disconfirmed expectations is coupled the customer's prior feelings about the consumption experience." It was widely held that satisfaction/dissatisfaction influences customers' switching behaviors in marketing literature (Keaveney, 1995; Ganesh, Arnold and Reynolds, 2000). Low level of satisfaction will result in the increase of customers' switching intention (Antón et al., 2007; Bansal et al., 2005).

In post-adoption studies, satisfaction was found to be positively associated with IS continuance intention (Bhattacherjee, 2001). Keaveney and Parthasarathy (2001) proposed that customer continuers are more satisfied than switchers. In Ye et al.'s (2006) study, they identified satisfaction as the factors pertaining to the incumbent web browser usage, and suggested that it will negatively affect users' switching behavior. Therefore, we propose that when bloggers hold low level of satisfaction, there is a higher chance that they will switch to another blog service:

H1: Bloggers' satisfaction with current blog services is negatively associated with the intention to switch their blog services.

Sunk costs

Sunk costs are derived from switching costs (Jones, Mothersbaugh and Beatty, 2002). Based on Jones et al.'s research, we define sunk costs as the perception of irrecoverable time and effort that are invested in using current blog services. Studies have been found that the more investments customers make, the less likely they will switch to use another services (Lopez et al., 2006; Ranganathan et al., 2006). In IS literature, Keil, Tan, Wei, Saarinen, Tuunainen and Wassenaar (2000) introduced the importance of sunk cost effect on IT project's continuance research. Ye et al. (2006) argued breadth of use through the concept of sunk costs and proposed its negative effect on switching behavior. Taking these into account, we believe that if bloggers have already spent much time and effort on their blogs (e.g. they may have written many posts and uploaded many pictures on their blogs), they will be less likely to switch to new blogs:

H2: Bloggers' perception of sunk costs for switching is negatively associated with the intention to switch their blog services.

Attractive alternatives

Perceived attractive alternatives is the positive perception toward competing products or services (Bansal et al., 2005). Keaveney (1995) identified that attraction by competitors is one of eight reasons that will drive customers to switch services. Interestingly, to some extent, the notion of attractive alternatives is similar with relative advantage, which is used for predicting IS diffusion and adoption (Moore and Benbasat, 1991). They share the meaning of seeking for something "better". In Ye et al.'s (2006) study, they suggested that relative advantage, as a factor specific to the substitute product, will positively affect users' switching behaviors. Hence, we hypothesize that if bloggers discover better or attractive alternative blogs, then they will be likely to try the new blogs and form the intention to switch the blog service:

H3: Bloggers' perception of attractive alternative blog services is positively associated with the intention to switch their blog services.

Gender

Earlier discussions indicate that gender issue varies in many aspects of blogs. Research in switching literature and post-adoption also suggest its importance. Therefore, this study aims at exploring the role of gender on bloggers' switching behavior. Particularly, we focused on its role on relationship between satisfaction and intention to switch.

Oliver (1993) posited that satisfaction is a cumulative evaluation, which captures both cognitive and affective meanings. In advance, Bhattacherjee (2001) postulated that satisfaction is an affective condition based on cognitive evaluation of the discrepancy between performance and prior expectation. As research has found that, compared with men, women tend to care more about interpersonal and emotional aspects in IS area (Gefen and Straub, 1997), thus we believe that when bloggers intent to switch blog services, women are more sensitive to satisfaction rather than men:

H4: The association between satisfaction and intention to switch is stronger in women than in men

RESEARCH DESIGN

Data collection

An online survey was conducted to test our hypotheses. As Trammell and Keshelashvili (2005, p. 973) claimed that, "a complete directory of blogs does not exist, and it is impossible to select a random sample", many blog studies conducted surveys through convenient samples and usually adopted snowball-sampling techniques (Ma et al., 2006; Qian and Scott, 2007; Viégas, 2005). In this study, we adopted similar techniques and distributed invitation messages, which contained the URL of our online questionnaire, to many popular online forums and online blog communities in Hong Kong. In order to increase responses, incentives of local supermarket coupons were offered as lucky draw prizes. Finally, a total of 299 usable data were collected. Demographics of female (N=169) and male (N=130) groups are listed in Table 1.

		Female	Male
		No. (Frequency)	No. (Frequency)
Years of blogging	Less than 1 year	17 (10.1%)	24 (18.5%)
	1-2 years	70 (41.4%)	59 (45.4%)
	3-4 years	67 (39.6%)	36 (27.7%)
	5 or more	15 (8.9%)	11 (8.5%)
Possession of blogs	1 blog	86 (50.9%)	67 (51.5%)
	2 blogs	52 (30.8%)	46 (35.4%)
	3 blogs	24 (14.2%)	6 (4.6%)
	4 or more	7 (4.2%)	11 (8.5%)
Primarily used blog service	Xanga	91 (53.8%)	74 (56.9%)
	MSN Spaces	29 (17.2%)	19 (14.6%)
	Yahoo	12 (7.1%)	9 (6.9%)
	Sina	10 (5.9%)	12 (9.2%)
	Others	27 (16.0%)	16 (12.3%)
Days of blogging per week	0-1 day	33 (19.5%)	30 (23.1%)
	2-3 days	49 (29.0%)	28 (21.5%)
	4-5 days	39 (23.1%)	30 (23.1%)
	6-7 days	48 (28.4%)	42 (32.3%)
Age	Below 18	2 (1.2%)	7 (5.4%)
	19-24	119 (70.4%)	85 (65.4%)
	25-30	41 (24.3%)	22 (16.9%)
	Above 30	7 (4.1%)	16 (12.3%)

Education Level	Secondary and High School	6 (3.6%)	11 (8.5%)
	Diploma or Relative Course	11 (6.5%)	9 (6.9%)
	University or Above	152 (89.9%)	110 (84.6%)

<div align="center">**Table 1. Demographics of the sample**</div>

Measures

We adapted validated items of constructs from prior studies (Kim et al., 2006; Jones et al., 2002; Bhattacherjee, 2001). Slight wording modifications were applied to fit the blog research context. In particular, two types of scales were used for measurements of items. Satisfaction used seven-point differential semantic scales, while attractive alternatives, sunk costs, and intention to switch adopted seven-point Likert scales (Appendix A).

Data analysis and results

We used Partial Least Squares (PLS) to analyze the research model. PLS is a robust and frequently adopted technique in IS literature (Venkatesh and Morris, 2000; Gefen and Straub, 1997; Ahuja and Thatcher, 2005). It is a component-based structural equation modeling approach, which requires relatively small sample size and has no restriction on normal distribution (Chin, Marcolin and Newsted, 2003). These make PLS highly suitable for the data analysis of our study. Therefore, we used PLS-graph version 3.0 for Windows and followed the two-step analytical procedures (Hair, Anderson, Tatham and Black, 1998). The measurement model was first examined and then the structural models were assessed.

Measurement model

In each subgroup, we calculated the convergent validity and discriminant validity to assess the measurement model. To achieve sufficient convergent validity, items with Composite Reliability (CR) values higher than 0.7 and with Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values higher than 0.5 are required (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). After deleting one item of attractive alternatives for its low factor loading, we obtained CR values ranging from 0.810 to 0.944, and AVE values ranging from 0.692 to 0.850 for both groups (Table 2), which means that the results are adequate. Meanwhile, to ensure the discriminant validity, the square root of the AVE for each construct should be greater than the correlation between constructs (Fornell et al., 1981). As shown in Table 3, discriminant validity of the data is also sufficient.

Construct	Items	Female	Male
SAT	SAT1	0.896	0.904
	SAT2	0.923	0.907
	SAT3	0.892	0.911
	SAT4	0.879	0.765
	CR	*0.943*	*0.928*
	AVE	*0.806*	*0.764*
SC	SC1	0.836	0.849
	SC2	0.838	0.853
	SC3	0.854	0.810
	SC4	0.877	0.873
	SC5	0.831	0.878
	CR	*0.927*	*0.930*
	AVE	*0.718*	*0.728*
AA	AA1	0.622	0.715
	AA2	0.998	0.974

	Correlation between constructs			
Female	SAT	SC	AA	INT
SAT	**0.898**			
SC	0.304	**0.847**		
AA	-0.077	-0.047	**0.832**	
INT	-0.302	-0.148	0.318	**0.917**
Male	SAT	SC	AA	INT
SAT	**0.874**			
SC	0.4	**0.853**		
AA	-0.004	-0.09	**0.854**	
INT	-0.143	-0.198	0.392	**0.922**

<div align="center">**Table 3. Convergent validity and discriminant validity (Note: the bold diagonal data refer to the square roots of AVE)**</div>

	CR	0.810	0.841
	AVE	0.692	0.730
INT	INT1	0.920	0.934
	INT2	0.911	0.902
	INT3	0.919	0.930
	CR	*0.940*	*0.944*
	AVE	*0.840*	*0.850*

Table 2. Item loadings

Structural Model

In this study, we adopted subgroup analysis method (c.f. Ahuja and Thatcher, 2005; Keil et al., 2000; Venkatesh and Morris, 2000) to examine the moderating effect of gender. We tested two structural models for the full, female, and male groups.

The first model, as the baseline model, was to assess the effects of control variables on bloggers' switching intention. Since days of blogging per week is conceptually related to sunk costs. We took years of blogging, possession of blogs, primarily used blog service, age, and education level as the control variables. Results indicated that all variables, except for years of blogging and age, have significant effects on intention to switch. Significant variables were then included into the following model. In the second model, we tested the direct effects of satisfaction, sunk costs, and attractive alternatives on intention to switch. Table 4 provides the path loadings and corresponding t values of two structural models.

	Full	Female	Male
First model#			
Possession of blogs	0.129 (2.1466*)	0.010 (0.1214)	0.220 (2.6868**)
Primarily used blog service	-0.169 (2.3887*)	-0.129 (1.5420)	-0.224 (2.4391*)
Education Level	-0.150 (2.4621*)	-0.122 (1.1053)	-0.160 (2.1974*)
R^2	6.4%	2.7%	10.5%
Second model			
SAT	-0.300 (5.8709**)	-0.399 (4.6007**)	-0.249 (2.2503*)
SC	-0.242 (4.0139**)	-0.240 (3.2407**)	-0.227 (2.0607*)
AA	0.302 (7.0950**)	0.275 (3.3951**)	0.331 (3.9607**)
R^2	25.4%	24.1%	28.4%

Table 4. Summary of two structural models (Note: * for $p<0.05$; ** for $p<0.01$; # Insignificant control variables are omitted)

As the results shown above, all the direct effects were significantly supported. It means that hypotheses *H1, H2, and H3 are supported.* Based on the second model, we performed the subgroup analysis. As Ahuja and Thatcher (2005) suggested, we obtained the standard error of path and the corresponding path coefficient from the results of PLS, and then calculated the discrepancy of each path between female and male groups on the relationship between satisfaction and intention to switch. Table 5 illustrates the results of this analysis and implies that hypotheses *H4 is supported*.

	Females		Males		Statistical comparison of each path
Construct	Standardized path	t-value	Standardized path	t-value	t-value

	coefficient		coefficient		
SAT	-0.399	4.6007**	-0.249	2.2503*	14.0332**

Table 5. Subgroup analysis

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Motivated by the need of understand post-adoption issues of blogs, this study attempts to study bloggers' switching intention between blog services, by drawing three salient factors from marketing literature and exploring the role of gender in the research model. Our results confirm that satisfaction and sunk costs will negatively affect bloggers' switching intention, while attractive alternatives exert positive effect. Further, moderating effect is found in gender on relationship between satisfaction and intention to switch. Female bloggers, rather than males, are more sensitive to satisfaction.

Implications

The insights of this study lie in several aspects for researchers. Firstly, since post-adoption studies have been recently attracting researchers' interest, many of these studies focus on users' continuance adoption, and only a few targets on IT switching behaviors. In this study, we attempt to address this gap and extend our understandings of switching research by drawing factors from marketing literature, where many studies have been conducted on customers' switching behaviors. Secondly, this study also contributes to the blog literature. Blogs have been developed so fast and reached widely adoption on the Internet. However, relevant studies on blogs in IS research are rare. More studies are needed to investigate bloggers' behaviors and examine their underlying factors. Therefore, we hope that by studying bloggers' switching behaviors, more insights on blogs could be developed. Finally, this study examines the moderating effect gender. Previous research has implied the importance of gender in blogs. In this study, we further examine the gender effect in the research model empirically, and result confirms our hypothesis. Researchers are then recommended to pay attention on gender issue when conducting blog studies.

Practitioners can also adopt our findings, especially for the designers of web sites that provide blog services. Because that satisfaction and sunk costs negatively affect bloggers' switching intention, blog service designers should not only collect bloggers' feedbacks and complaints instantly, but also provide interesting activities for them to communicate with each other, thus increasing their time spent on blogs. Concerning the positive effect of attractive alternatives, blog service designers can apply two strategies. The first one is to prevent the decreasing of their current blog memberships. They can keep track on the development of blog services from other web sites and try to make their own blog services as comparable as others at the minimum. The second one is to attracting new bloggers. One suggestion is to provide more useful features and functions according to the feedbacks and complaints from current blog memberships, because it will increase these bloggers satisfaction as well. Finally, blog service designers should be aware of the differences between females and males, because that female bloggers care more about the satisfaction with their current blogs than the males. Accordingly, different strategies that emphasize the females or the males could be carried out.

Limitations and Future research

The main limitation of this study is about our sample, which is conveniently collected in Hong Kong with 299 usable respondents. Both the sampling region and the sample size could affect the generalizability of this study. As researchers have found that gender is closely related to culture, the moderating effect of gender may not be inferable to other regions. Nevertheless, the importance of gender effect should arouse researchers' interest, and more examinations of gender in bloggers' switching behaviors are suggested based on in-depth literature analysis. Another limitation is that the R square of the final model is 24.1% for female bloggers and 28.4% for males, which are relatively low in IS literature. This suggests that other factors may help to explain additional variances. In this sense, future research could be conducted by considering all the above discussions.

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Appendix A

Satisfaction (Bhattacherjee, 2001)

How do you feel about your overall experience with the blog service?

1. Very dissatisfied/Very satisfied.

2. Very displeased/Very pleased.

3. Very frustrated/Very contented.

4. Absolutely terrible/Absolutely delighted.

Attractive Alternatives (Kim et al., 2006)

1. There are other blog services that provide high service quality.

2. There are blog services I find more attractive than the one I am using.

3. * I know that there are alternative blog services I can switch to.

Sunk Costs (Jones et al., 2002)

1. A lot of energy, time, and effort has gone into using my blog service

2. Overall, I have invested a lot into using my blog service.

3. All things considered, I have put a lot into previous use of my blog service.

4. I have spent a lot of time and effort on my blog.

5. I have invested much into using my blog service.

Intention to Switch the Blog Service (Kim et al., 2006)

1. I am considering switching from my current blog service.

2. The likelihood of me switching to another blog service is high.

3. I am determined to switch to another blog service.

* Item was deleted for low factor loading on its corresponding construct.