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Completed Research Paper

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Abstract

Understanding the generation of online reviews is a fundamental issue for firms to gain benefits from online reviews. Our study tries to investigate the antecedents of online review characteristics by figuring out the following two research questions: (1) Will travel influence consumers' post-consumption behavior (i.e., consumers' review behavior)? And if so, (2) will consumers' social capital moderate the influence of travel on consumers' review behavior? The results show that consumers on travel tend to give higher review ratings and are more possible to post pictures while writing online reviews; consumers' social capital level exacerbates the positive influence of travel on review ratings and mitigates the positive impact of travel on review richness.

Keywords: Travel, online review behavior, review characteristics

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Introduction

The rise of new media channels during the last decade has offered fertile ground for electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) communication. Online reviews, which are defined as peer-generated evaluations about products or services posted on retailer or third-party websites (Mudambi and Schuff 2010), are an important form of eWOM. Online reviews have been found to impact product sales (Dellarocas et al. 2007; Duan et al. 2008; Liu 2006), facilitate the efficiency of consumers' decision making (Hu et al. 2008), affect firms' market competition (Kwark et al. 2014) and impact firm value (Luo and Zhang 2013; Luo et al. 2013). Therefore, many businesses utilize online reviews as a new marketing strategy (Chen and Xie 2008).

Given the great value of online reviews, understanding the generation of online reviews is a fundamental question for firms to gain benefits from online reviews (Gao et al. 2018). However, existing studies related to online reviews mainly focus on investigating the consequences of online reviews from a macro-perspective (e.g., Liu (2006), Kwark et al. (2014), Luo and Zhang (2013)) or focus on understanding the characteristics influencing online review helpfulness from a micro-perspective (e.g., Mudambi and Schuff (2010), Liu and Park (2015)). Only a few studies pay attention to the generation of online reviews. In this regard, building on a small body of work (e.g., Huang et al. (2017), Gao et al. (2018)), our study tries to investigate the antecedents of online review characteristics. Specifically, we try to figure out the following two research questions: (1) Will travel impact consumers' post-consumption behavior (i.e., consumers' review behavior)? (2) Will consumers' social capital moderate the relationship between travel and consumers' review behavior?

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. We first clarify the concept of consumers' online review behavior, and then put forward our research hypotheses in Section 2. In Section 3, we present our research methodology. In Section 4 we report the empirical results and discuss our findings. In the final section, we conclude this paper by discussing the contributions, limitations, and future directions of our study.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development

Online Review Behavior

Due to great value extracted from online reviews, understanding the generation mechanism of online reviews has attracted increasing attention from both practitioners and researchers. Most of existing studies on online review generation focus on online rating behavior and use review rating to scale review characteristics (Gao et al. 2018; Ho et al. 2017; Li 2016; Zhang et al. 2016). Besides investigating the review rating behavior, understanding how consumers provide a text comment is also important, which is often ignored by existing research. To better describe consumers' review behavior, review content should also be taken into account. In order to provide a more intuitive description of the feature of a text comment, we utilize the concept of review richness to depict review characteristics. At last, we include both review rating and review richness to measure consumers' online review behavior.

Hypotheses Development

As an old Chinese saying goes, be thrifty at home and spend liberally while travelling. The implication is that travel can distinctly change consumer behavior. Consumers' behavior can be divided into three stages: pre-consumption, consumption, and post-consumption stages (Frambach et al. 2007). During the post-consumption phase, Internet technologies can be used to share, document and relive travel experiences through storytelling (Gretzel et al. 2006). Hence, we will study how travel impact post-consumption behavior by investigating the characteristics of online reviews generated by consumers.

Review rating given by a consumer can be used to indicate his or her overall satisfaction with the product or service (Gu and Ye 2014), so review rating can be regarded as a proxy measure of consumers' satisfaction. Sirgy et al. (2011) find that travel experience has a positive influence on

individuals' overall life satisfaction, implying that consumers on travel may be more satisfied than those at home. Therefore, we put forward the following hypothesis:

H1: Consumers on travel tend to provide online reviews with higher review ratings.

With the fast development of information technologies, the role of consumers as receivers of online information has changed. Consumers are not only accessing the content on the Internet, but also creating and sharing their experiences through digital cameras, virtual community websites, web blogs, etc. (Gretzel et al. 2006). Tourism is a uniquely visual experience (MacKay and Fesenmaier 1997) about "consuming places" (Haldrup and Larsen 2003). Travelers use pictures to capture relationships with other people, places and cultures (Edensor 2000), making photograph taking an emblematic tourist practice (Haldrup and Larsen 2003). Consumers on travel have stronger motivation to take pictures and to share what they experience during the trip, so we put forward the following hypothesis:

H2: Consumers on travel are more possible to provide enriched online reviews with pictures.

Social capital has been conceptualized as the resources embedded within social networks among individuals (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998) and their connections with their communities (Chang and Chuang 2011). Following the previous literature in social media (Kang et al. 2017; Wang et al. 2015), our study adopts the number of followers in the focal online community to measure an individual's social capital. As the data source of this study, Dianping, allows users to follow other users' postings and to be followed by others, we can build a social network based on the following and followed relationships. These networks differ from other interactive media because they increasingly contribute to establishing and maintaining social capital in the form of relationships among users (Chang and Chuang 2011). A user can potentially influence his or her followers by postings. Huffaker (2010) finds that opinion leaders who have a large number of followers can impact a large mass of users by affecting their opinions and decision-makings. Social capital also influences the sharing of user-generated content (Munar and Jacobsen 2014). The influence of travel on review behavior for consumers with different social capital (e.g., opinion leaders and common users) may be different, so we propose that:

H3: Social capital moderates the relationship between reviewer's travel status and review rating.

H4: Social capital moderates the relationship between reviewer's travel status and review richness.

Research Methodology

Data

Dianping (www.dianping.com) provides us with an ideal research context. Dianping, one of the most poplular consumer review website in China, was founded in April 2003 in Shanghai. Any registered users can post online reviews on products or services. In this research, we developed a crawler to collect data of restaurant reviews for a matched set of restaurants from Dianping. We randomly selected ten large cities (Xiamen, Tianjin, Guangzhou, Haikou, Suzhou, Xi'an, Guiyang, Zhengzhou, Changchun, Changsha) out of mainland China cities included in Dianping. For each city, we collected data for the most popular ten restaurants (we use total review number of a restaurant to scale its popularity, i.e., the more reviews a restaurant has, the more popular it is). The data collection procedure was conducted in September 2017. Every consumer review for a restaurant was collected since the restaurant joined Dianping. The data contains time stamps and review content (review ratings and texts), in addition to reviewers' profile and information of restaurants. We obtained 731,004 reviews in total. Our data set includes reviews posted during July 2004 to August, 2017. After deleting observations with missing data, 87,669 reviews were included in this study.

Main Variables

Dependent Variables

Most of existing studies on online review generation focus on online rating behavior and use review rating to scale review characteristics (Gao et al. 2018; Ho et al. 2017; Li 2016; Zhang et al. 2016).

Keeping in line with existing research, we adopt review rating as one review feature to scale consumers' online review behavior. *Review rating* is an integer and ranges from 1 to 5 based on the five-star rating scale of Dianping. More stars indicate more positivity and five stars represent the best rating. Review rating given by a consumer can be used to indicate his or her satisfaction with the product (Gu and Ye 2014).

Besides review rating, providing a review text comment is also an important part of review behavior, whose mechanism is often ignored by extant research. In order to provide a more intuitive description of the feature of review text comment, we also utilize review richness to measure review characteristics. Reviewers are allowed to write reviews using different information format such as texts or pictures. Different types of information media have varying information richness (Daft and Lengel 1986). Research suggests that messages delivered using pictures are richer than texts, as they require less processing effort (Larkin and Simon 1987). Review richness is an important feature of online reviews, which can impact review helpfulness and product sales. Therefore, we use *review richness*, which is measured by whether a review contains a picture, as another review characteristic to investigate consumers' review behavior.

Independent Variables

Travel is a binary variable used to describe whether the reviewer was on travel when experiencing the restaurant. It is determined by the location of the reviewed restaurant and the reviewer's location of residence. Travel status is coded as a binary variable, with 1 for on travel and 0 for at home. A consumer is believed on travel if the reviewed restaurant location and the reviewer's residence are different, and at home otherwise.

Moderating Variable

Consumers' social capital is treated as a moderating variable in our study. It can be measured as the number of fans (followers) a reviewer owns on Dianping. The number of followers indicates a target user's popularity in the community (Chae 2015). Huffaker (2010) finds that opinion leaders who have a large number of followers can influence a large mass of users, affecting others' opinions and decision-makings. Therefore, we use the number of followers to measure a user's social capital.

Control Variables

To robustly test the research hypotheses, we also included a comprehensive set of restaurant- and reviewer-related control variables. They are: *restaurant popularity*, measured as the volume of online reviews for a given restaurant; *restaurant average rating*, measured by the average value of all review ratings for a given restaurant; *restaurant location*, measured as the city where the restaurant locates, is used to control the effect of restaurant location; *restaurant price*, measured by the average cost per person for his/her patronage; *restaurant environment rating*, measured by the environment rating rated by consumers; *reviewer gender*, measured by a dummy variable of man or woman with a value of 0 for woman and 1 for man; *reviewer tenure*, measured by the number of days between the time when reviewer was registered to be a Dianping user and the time when he/she posted the review; *reviewer experience*, measured by the number of reviews the reviewer has posted on Dianping.

In order to reduce skewness, natural log-transformations are adopted for *restaurant popularity*, *restaurant price*, *social capital*, *reviewer tenure*, and *reviewer experience*.

Empirical Model

Given the nature of the dependent variables, the ordinary least squares estimates may be biased. For review rating, which is an ordered and censored data type, it is advisable to employ an ordinal logit regression model (Gao et al. 2018; Huang et al. 2016). In terms of review richness, we adopt logit regression model because of its binary characteristics.

Results

Descriptive Analysis

Table 1 and Table 2 report the descriptive statistics and correlation matrix of key variables in our study respectively. We report the original value of *social capital*, *reviewer experience*, *restaurant popularity*, *restaurant price*, and *reviewer tenure* in the descriptive statistics table to provide a more intuitive description of our data set. We use the logarithm value of these mentioned variables in the correlation matrix as well as in the regression analysis due to the large skewness.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Variable	Observation#	Mean	S.D.	Min	Max
Review rating	87,669	4.119	0.947	1	5
Review richness	87,669	0.409	0.492	0	1
Travel	87,669	0.399	0.490	0	1
Gender	87,669	0.246	0.431	0	1
Social capital	87,669	53.571	139.009	1	9041
Reviewer experience	87,669	126.671	213.530	1	5609
Restaurant popularity	87,669	12141.12	5282.329	765	22825
Restaurant price	87,669	85.435	29.658	22	151
Restaurant environment rating	87,669	8.320	0.747	6.5	9.2
Restaurant average rating	87,669	4.300	0.273	3.433	4.858
Reviewer tenure	87,669	1173.215	849.558	1	5084

Table 2. Correlation Matrix and VIFs of Main Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1	1.00											
2	0.12	1.00										
3	-0.03	0.11	1.00									
4	-0.02	0.10	0.07	1.00								
5	-0.03	0.19	0.07	0.64	1.00							
6	-0.15	0.14	0.10	0.36	0.53	1.00						
7	-0.02	-0.09	0.04	-0.01	-0.00	-0.14	1.00					
8	-0.01	-0.03	-0.24	-0.00	0.01	0.01	-0.06	1.00				
9	0.08	0.03	0.09	-0.01	-0.01	-0.03	-0.00	-0.00	1.00			
10	0.02	0.17	0.10	0.13	0.19	0.27	-0.05	0.05	0.05	1.00		
11	0.21	0.12	-0.32	-0.08	-0.03	-0.12	-0.03	0.10	0.29	0.06	1.00	
12	0.25	0.08	-0.26	-0.08	-0.04	-0.15	-0.01	-0.03	0.29	0.05	0.81	1.00
VIF			1.25	1.54	1.42	2.20	1.04	1.11	1.15	1.11	3.17	3.09

Notes: 1: *Review rating*; 2: *Review richness*; 3: *Travel*; 4: *Travel*Social capital*; 5: *Social capital*; 6: *Reviewer experience*; 7: *Gender*; 8: *Restaurant popularity* (log value); 9: *Restaurant price* (log value); 10: *Reviewer tenure* (log value); 11: *Restaurant environment rating*; 12: *Restaurant average rating*.

Table 2 provides the correlation matrix and Variance Inflation Factor (i.e., VIF) values of main variables in our study. As we can see from the correlation matrix table, all the correlations between two variables are small with the exception of the correlation between the *restaurant environment rating* and *restaurant average rating* (0.81). To formally test multicollinearity, we calculated the VIF values for all independent variables. It shows the maximum VIF value is 3.17, indicating that multicollinearity is not a threat to our study.

Main Analysis

Prior to main analyses, the moderating variable (i.e., the logarithm value of the consumer's social capital) were centered by subtracting its mean value to obtain the interaction term with the independent variable (i.e., travel) (Cohen et al. 2003). Doing so can avoid nonessential multicollinearity with a variable and its interaction term (Cohen et al. 2003). Stata 14.0 is used to estimate research models, and we report the final estimation results in Table 3.

After controlling the effects of control variables, we find that the direct effects of travel on consumers' review behavior are significant. To be more specific, consumers on travel tend to provide online reviews with higher review rating values (b=0.174***) and are more possible to post pictures (b=0.485***), supporting H1 and H2. The interaction term of social capital and travel is significant on both review rating and richness, implying the marginal effects of travel on review rating and review richness depend on the consumers' social capital. Specifically, consumers' social capital exacerbates the positive influence of travel on review rating and mitigates the positive impact of travel on review richness, supporting H3 and H4.

Table 3. Results of Main Analysis

Variable	DV=*Review rating*		DV=*Review richness*	
	Model1	Model2	Model1	Model2
Travel	**0.174(0.017)*****	0.173(0.017)***	**0.485(0.019)*****	0.490(0.019)***
*Travel*Social capital*		**0.038(0.008)*****		**-0.098(0.010)*****
Social capital	0.091(0.005)***	0.076(0.006)***	0.216(0.006)***	0.257(0.007)***
Reviewer experience	-0.309(0.006)***	-0.310(0.006)***	0.040(0.006)***	0.041(0.006)***
Gender	-0.153(0.015)***	-0.152(0.015)***	-0.455(0.018)***	-0.4571(0.018)***
Restaurant popularity	0.109(0.024)***	0.108(0.024)***	0.350(0.027)***	0.353(0.027)***
Restaurant price	-0.015(0.020)	-0.016(0.020)	-0.276(0.024)***	-0.272(0.024)***
Reviewer tenure	0.072(0.005)***	0.072(0.006)***	0.231(0.007)***	0.233(0.007)***
Restaurant environment rating	0.149(0.016)***	0.150(0.016)***	0.562(0.019)***	0.556(0.019)***
Restaurant average rating	1.404(0.046)***	1.408(0.046)***	0.282(0.053)***	0.268(0.053)***
Restaurant location	YES	YES	YES	YES
cut 1	3.648(0.263)***	3.625(0.263)***		
cut 2	4.629(0.262)***	4.607(0.262)***		
cut 3	6.236(0.263)***	6.213(0.263)***		
cut 4	8.024(0.263)***	8.0002(0.263)***		
Observation#	87,699	87,699	87,699	87,699
LR Chi^2	10089.19***	10110.27***	9884.82***	9988.46***
Pseudo R^2	4.69%	4.70%	8.33%	8.42%

Notes: Cut *i* is the cut-points corresponding to the ordered categories of review rating. Standard errors are reported in parentheses. *: $p<0.1$, **: $p<0.05$, ***: $p<0.01$.

Robustness Check

We also examined the robustness of our results using an alternative estimation method. We apply Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression as the alternative regression method. Table 4 presents the results of our model estimated by the alternative method. The results are consistent with the results of the main analysis. Therefore, the various models demonstrate robustness to different model specifications.

Table 4. Results of Robustness Check

Variable	DV=*Review rating*		DV=*Review richness*	
	Model1	Model2	Model1	Model2
Travel	**0.052(0.008)*****	0.053(0.008)***	**0.107(0.004)*****	0.107(0.004)***
*Travel*Social capital*		**0.026(0.004)*****		**-0.018(0.002)*****
Social capital	0.033(0.002)***	0.023(0.003)***	0.047(0.001)***	0.054(0.001)***
Reviewer experience	-0.100(0.003)***	-0.101(0.003)***	0.010(0.001)***	0.010(0.001)***
Gender	-0.083(0.007)***	-0.083(0.007)***	-0.095(0.004)***	-0.096(0.004)***
Restaurant popularity	0.062(0.012)***	0.062(0.012)***	0.081(0.006)***	0.081(0.006)***
Restaurant price	-0.019(0.010)**	-0.020(0.010)**	-0.062(0.005)***	-0.061(0.005)***
Reviewer tenure	0.024(0.003)***	0.023(0.003)***	0.042(0.001)***	0.043(0.001)***
Restaurant environment rating	0.057(0.008)***	0.058(0.008)***	0.122(0.004)***	0.121(0.004)***
Restaurant average rating	0.724(0.022)***	0.726(0.022)***	0.065(0.011)***	0.063(0.011)***
Restaurant location	YES	YES	YES	YES
Observation#	87,699	87,699	87,699	87,699
F value	452.43***	431.00***	576.10***	558.75***
R^2	8.50%	8.54%	10.58%	10.65%

Notes: Standard errors are reported in parentheses. *: $p<0.1$, **: $p<0.05$, ***: $p<0.01$.

Discussions

The main purpose of this research is to find out whether consumers' review contexts (on travel or at home) impact their online review behavior. The most popular restaurant review website in China, Dianping, provides us with a very good research context to investigate this question. Customers' online review behavior is reflected by review characteristics, which are measured by review rating and review richness in this study. We apply multiple regressions and robust checks to find that travel does have an influence on these review characteristics.

Our study enriches extant empirical research on online reviews and provides helpful suggestions to online review website managers and the retailers. Online review platform managers can recommend the ratings and reviews from tourists and residents to tourists and residents separately considering that the online ratings given by tourists and residents are different from one another. Retailers should synthesize the online ratings provided by local reviewers and tourists on travel to gain accurate and objective feedback from consumers and take measures to stimulate reviews from tourists, especially those with high social capital who have a large number of fans in popular online review platforms.

However, our study inevitably has several inherent limitations due to the sampling methods and measurements used. First, a convenience sampling method was used. Future research should increase the sample size to improve generalizability. Second, we just test our hypotheses in the context of catering business. We can empirically test our research model in other domains such as hotel industry to achieve a better external validity in the next step.

Acknowledgements

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