

The Effects of Altruistic and Egoistic Motivations on Online Reviews Writing Frequency

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Abstract

Purpose. The increasing importance of online reviews in hospitality and tourism has been widely assessed. A specific stream of research has addressed the motivations to write online reviews, highlighting the effects of both altruistic and egoistic motivations. In fact, some guests write reviews mainly for altruistic reasons such as the desire to help others, not only other customers but also the firms (hotels and restaurants in particular). Other guests post reviews mainly for egoistic motives such as to relive the experience but also to wreak revenge on hotels/restaurants. However, up to now the effects of these different motivations on online reviews writing behaviour have not been fully explored. The purpose of this paper is to contribute to fill this gap by examining the effects of altruistic and egoistic motivations on the frequency of writing online reviews.

Methodology. Data were collected through a questionnaire-based survey among a sample of Italian hotels' and restaurants' guests. A convenience sampling technique was used. Data were then analysed through a linear regression.

Findings. The results reveal that not all altruistic and egoistic motivations have significant effects. In detail, helping other customers (altruistic motivation), enjoyment and wreak revenge on hotels/restaurants (egoistic motivations) influence the frequency of writing online reviews.

Practical implications. The research presents practical implications for hotel and restaurant managers. In particular, to increase the number of online reviews for their hotels or restaurants, managers should focus on guests' willingness to help others but not on the willingness to help the hotel or the restaurant.

Originality/value. The analysis of the literature showed the absence of evidence about the effects of altruistic and egoistic motivations on the frequency of writing online reviews. This is an attempt to fill this gap.

Keywords

Online reviews, egoistic motivations, altruistic motivations, hospitality

1. Introduction

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWom) has rapidly become a crucial issue for many firms because of its effect on consumer attitudes and behaviours (King, Racherla, & Bush, 2014). In particular, these impacts are particularly intense in the service industry. In fact, due to the intangible and experiential nature of the offering, customers are motivated to search for more information and user generated contents (Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011). Online reviews play a noticeable role in fostering the eWom (Gottschalk & Mafael, 2017). Through online reviews consumers have the opportunity to post and share their experiences and emotions, thus acting as important sources of information for others (Liu & Park, 2015). Contents that in the past were exchanged inside a purely private sphere become accessible to uncountable number of people (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014).

This is particularly true in the hospitality and tourism industry where online reviews are considered as one of the most important innovation in the last decade (Gössling, Hall, & Andersson, 2016; Hu & Kim, 2018; Navío-Marco, Ruiz-Gómez, & Sevilla-Sevilla, 2018; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Online reviews platforms, such as TripAdvisor and Yelp, have become the main source of information in the tourism industry both for consumers and firms (Gössling et al., 2016; Liu & Park, 2015). Consumers search information from this sources because they are judged as independent, reliable and credible and therefore able to reduce their perceived uncertainty (Schuckert, Liu, & Law, 2015). For firms the reviews are a means to understand customer perceptions and improve the quality of their services (Hu & Kim, 2018; Phillips, Barnes, Zigan, & Schegg, 2017). As a consequence, online reviews are able to influence not only customer choices but also firm strategies and revenues (Gössling & Lane, 2015; Hu & Kim, 2018).

Given the remarkable impacts of online reviews, firms are highly interested in understanding online reviews writing behaviour to adopt effective strategies to stimulate their guest to write reviews (Magno, Cassia, & Bruni, 2018). Hence it is first of fundamental to understand why guests decide to write reviews A specific stream of research has addressed this question (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). Available studies highlight the effects of both altruistic and egoistic motivations (Yang, 2017). The first group of drivers is related to the concern for others while the second is connected to self-centred and self-interest grounds (Fu, Wu, & Cho, 2017; Vilnai-Yavetz & Levina, 2018). In fact, some guests prevalingly write reviews mainly for altruistic reasons such as the desire to help others, not only other customers but also the firms (hotels and restaurants in particular). Other guests are more motivated by egoistic motivations such as to relive the experience but also to wreak revenge on hotels/restaurants (Fu et al., 2017; Yang, 2017).

However, up to now the effects of these different motivations on online reviews writing behaviour, and in particular on reviews writing frequency have not been examined (Schuckert et al., 2015). On this points Hu and Kim (2018) noted the existence of a wide gap between the lurkers who use and read the online reviews but don't post and people who actively participate and create online contents. This statement is reinforced by additional evidence. For example, Britain's most prolific TripAdvisor reviewer, "UK Review Contributor of the Year" and "Restaurant Expert of the Year" has written 1,934 reviews posting 15,426 photos and writes up to 30 reviews on the back of each trip (<https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/tripadvisor-review-britain-most-prolific-reviewer-over-1934-reviews-stephen-kelly-liverpool-aintree-a7533381.html>). In the world, there are even more prolific reviewers. TripAdvisor's 2016 top reviewer in the world (renamed "chatty man") has written 2,000 reviews in one single year, more than 5 reviews per day

(<https://www.thesun.co.uk/travel/3548403/meet-tripadvisors-top-commenter-who-has-written-more-than-5000-reviews-and-even-has-his-own-fans/>).

Understanding whether significant relationships exist between altruistic and egoistic motivations and review writing frequency would provide valuable insights for both theory and practice. In order to fill this gap and through the support of an empirical analysis, this paper intends to examine the effects of altruistic and egoistic motivations on the frequency of writing online reviews. The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. We first introduced the background for this research, review current knowledge about altruistic and egoistic motivations and set the hypotheses. We then present the methods and the results of the empirical analysis. Finally, we discuss the implications of the findings.

2. Literature review and hypotheses

eWom is defined as “all informal communications directed at consumers through Internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristics of particular goods or services, or their sellers” (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008, p. 461). The role and importance of eWom has become crucial especially in the tourism and hospitality industry due to the experiential nature of its products. As a particular form of eWom, online reviews are considered credible and unbiased sources of information (Pan, MacLaurin, & Crotts, 2007) and consumers frequently base their choices on the comments and experiences posted by other people. Online reviews regard different aspects of tourism experiences such as accommodation, hospitality, destinations and so on (Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011). Both altruistic and egoistic motivations have been suggested as drivers of people’s willingness to write online review.

Altruism refers to the desire of giving advantages to others beyond themselves (Batson, 1994; Yang, 2017). When driven by altruism, reviewers post online information with the goal of increasing the benefits for the community and helping others and without expecting any recompense. Hence altruistic motivations are also defined as community-related motivations (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). Several authors found that enjoyment in helping others, not only other consumers but also service providers, was a key driver for writing reviews (Tong, Wang, Tan, & Teo, 2013; Vilnai-Yavetz & Levina, 2018). As regards helping other consumers, reviewers perceive that they belong to a virtual community which is characterized by common interests. Therefore, participation is guided by the ideas of social support (Tong et al., 2013) and by the proudness of supporting other people to reach their objectives (Fu et al., 2017; Hsu, Ju, Yen, & Chang, 2007; Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). In particular, in the case of tourism and hospitality industry, travel reviewers intend to contribute tourists’ well-being by reducing their risks perception (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008). As regards helping providers, reviewers are willing to provide input to support the firms to enhance the quality of their service (Schuckert et al., 2015). Regardless the valence of the reviews (positive or negative) consumers desire to influence the providers in a spirit of commonality.

While the role of the altruistic motivations in influencing the intention to actively participate in the online communities has been demonstrated (Yang, 2017), it is not clear whether altruistic motivations are related to the online reviews writing frequency. However, we suggest that the higher the number of reviews the higher the help provided to the community. Based on this reasoning we test the following null hypotheses:

H₀₁: online reviews writing frequency is not related to the willingness to help other consumers

H₀2: online reviews writing frequency is not related to the willingness to help the service provider

Egoism refers to the desire of obtaining individual advantages or own well-being (Batson, 1994; Yang, 2017). Hence egoistic motivations refer to self-centred drivers. Individuals prevalently guided by egoistic motivations engage in eWom for both tangible/financial and intangible/non-financial compensations. In the first case, the rewards are related to economic aspects such as economic gains, discounts, prizes. In the second case, the rewards are connected to the need of self-enhancement. In particular, people engage in eWom to display their knowledge, enhance their image and reputation, attract the attention (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). In some other cases, online reviews are posted to search public revenge, in particular in the case of service failures (Bradley, Sparks, & Weber, 2015; Obeidat, Xiao, Iyer, & Nicholson, 2017). In general customer revenge takes place when a customer feels to have received a damage or an injustice from a firm (Grégoire, Laufer, & Tripp, 2010). In fact, as highlighted by Sparks and Browning (2010) a negative review is often the revenge to a complaint.

Egoistic motivations refer also to enjoyment and other hedonic motivations. In fact, sharing experiences is considered as one of the joy of travel (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008). As Kim and Tussyadiah (2013) underlined online social circles, are ways to rethink back and relive a previous trip. In this sense, engaging in eWom in part of experience co-creation (Yoo & Gretzel, 2011).

Based on this reasoning we test the following null hypotheses:

H₀3: online reviews writing frequency is not related to enjoyment

H₀4: online reviews writing frequency is not related to wreaking revenge on hotels/restaurants

3. Methods

A cross-sectional research design was adopted to test the suggested hypotheses. In detail, a questionnaire-based survey was carried out among a sample of Italian travellers. To recruit participants, we contacted bloggers belonging to the Italian Association of Travel Bloggers and three of them agreed to post a link to our questionnaire on their blogs. Through this procedure we received 169 usable answers. The questionnaire included multiple item measures of the four motivations to write online reviews for hotels and restaurants: willingness to help other consumers and willingness to help the service provider (altruistic motivations) enjoyment and wreaking revenge on hotels/restaurants (egoistic motivations). The items used for this study (see table 1) were mostly derived from the work by Gretzel and Yoo (2008) and were measures through 7-point Likert scales. Convergent and discriminant validity was assessed through a confirmatory factor analysis.

Online reviews writing frequency (i.e. the dependent variable) was measured through the following five-point scale: “After staying at a hotel/restaurant I... 1. never/almost never; 2. rarely; 3. sometimes; 4. often; 5. always...write an online review”. Data were then analysed through a linear regression, which included also two control variables: annual frequency of stays at hotels and monthly frequency of lunches or dinner at restaurants.

Table 1. Constructs and items

Construct	Item	Factor loading
Willingness to help other consumers	I am happy to share with other satisfactory experiences with providers	0.75
	My experience can help other people to take better decisions	0.86
	I want to save others from having the same negative experience as me	0.86
Willingness to help the service provider	I can help the hotel/restaurant to understand its strength and weak points	0.85
	If I am satisfied with a hotel/restaurant I want to help it be successful	0.89
Enjoyment	I enjoy it	0.62
	It allows me to relive my experiences	0.89
	It allows me to reflect on the hotel/restaurant experience after returning home	0.83
	I get in touch with other travellers and people like me	0.59
Wreaking revenge on hotels/restaurants	I want to take vengeance upon a travel service provider who ruined my experience	0.84
	I believe travel service providers are more accommodating when I publicize matters	0.80

4. Results

Respondents were mainly female, aged up to 45 and with a medium to high level of education. The complete profiles of the respondents are indicated in table 2.

Table 2. Profiles of the respondents

Dimension	Items	Frequencies (n=169)
Gender	F	98
	M	71
Age	<25	40
	26-35	56
	36-45	44
	46-55	18
	56-65	11
	>65	
Education	Less than high school	4
	High school degree	37
	University degree (bachelor and/or master degree)	97
	Postgraduate degree	31
Occupation	Student	39
	Employed	75
	Self-employed	43
	Unemployed	8
	Others	4

The regression model showed good model fit with $F(6,162)=7.03$, $p<0.01$. Multicollinearity was not an issue, since all variance inflation factors (VIF) were largely below the cut-off level of 5. The results of the analysis are shown in table 3.

Table 3. Results of the regression analysis

	Std. Beta	t-statistic	VIF.
(Constant)	/	9.939**	/
Willingness to help other consumers	.328	4.684**	1.002
Willingness to help the service provider	.082	1.162 ^{ns}	1.017
Enjoyment	.225	3.156**	1.034
Wreaking revenge on hotels/restaurants	.127	1.804*	1.006
Frequency of stays at hotels	.041	.556 ^{ns}	1.098
Frequency of having dinner/lunch at restaurants	.129	1.719*	1.142

**p<0.01; *p<0.10; dependent variable: online reviews writing frequency.

As regards altruistic motivations, the findings reveal that the willingness to help other customers is strongly related to online reviews writing frequency ($\beta=0.328$, $p<0.01$), while the willingness to help the service provider is not ($\beta=0.082$, $p>0.10$). Hence, H_{01} is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted while H_{02} cannot be rejected. In addition, as regards egoistic motivation both enjoyment ($\beta=0.225$, $p<0.01$) and wreaking revenge on hotels/restaurants ($\beta=0.127$, $p<0.10$) are significantly related to online reviews writing frequency. Therefore, both H_{03} and H_{04} are rejected. Finally, one of the two control variables, frequency of having dinner/lunch at restaurants, was found to be significant ($\beta=0.129$, $p<0.10$).

5. Discussion and conclusions

The results of this study contribute to advance knowledge on online reviews writing behaviour, by highlighting the relationships between altruistic and egoistic motivations and online reviews writing frequency. In detail, while all egoistic motivations emerged as significant predictors, mixed findings were obtained for altruistic motivations. In fact, the willingness to help other guests was found to be the strongest antecedent of online reviews writing frequency but the willingness of helping the service providers was not significant.

These findings can be interpreted in light of available evidence about the positive effect of review volume on purchase intention (Ladhari & Michaud, 2015; Tsao, Hsieh, Shih, & Lin, 2015) and sales (Phillips, Zigan, Silva, & Schegg, 2015; Xie, Zhang, & Zhang, 2014) in the hospitality industry. Based on these previous results, increasing the volume of reviews should be a priority for hospitality firms. By understanding the effects of guests' motivations to frequently write online reviews, our study has identified actionable mechanisms to increase the review volume. In particular, to increase the number of online reviews for their hotels or restaurants, managers could focus on guests' willingness to help others but not on the willingness to help the hotel or the restaurant. Therefore, managers may solicit guest to write reviews by emphasizing the benefits for future guests (Magno et al., 2018). This strategy may serve as an alternative to other available review management strategies (Gössling et al., 2018).

At the same time, as wreaking revenge on hotels/restaurants is another significant antecedent of online reviews writing frequency, hospitality business should make extra efforts to promptly recover service failures and regain customer trust before customer engage in writing online reviews.

Finally, several limitations of this study should be noted before generalizing its results. First, participants were recruited among travel bloggers readers. Therefore, it can be hypothesised that they were more experienced than other people in both reading and writing online reviews. Replicating this study on larger samples and adopting different sampling techniques may strengthened our findings. In addition, we did not examine possible relationships between guests' characteristics and their motivations for writing reviews. By addressing this issue, future studies may gain more in-depth evidence to inform managers' review solicitation strategies. Future research could also investigate drivers of online reviews writing frequency other than altruistic and egoistic motivations (for example situational factors).

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