

ONLINE WOM USAGE MODEL FOR TOURISM

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, service providers in tourism cannot utilize the online word of mouth (WOM) information to improve their service for tourists because they do not understand how tourists use the WOM information. In this paper, we investigated how tourists utilize the online WOM as a consumer to consumer (C2C) interaction for choosing travel destinations, using a methodology based on Cognitive Chrono-Ethnography (CCE) (Kitajima, Nakajima and Toyota, 2010). In particular, we focused on senders' and receivers' styles of using an online WOM. Based on these observations, we built an online WOM usage model for tourism. The model helps service providers evaluate effects of online WOMs on tourists' choices.

KEYWORDS

Online WOM, Tourism, C2C interaction, service provider, Cognitive Chrono-Ethnography (CCE)

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, web site information in tourism service, one of the largest service industries, plays a significant role in tourists' choices of destinations. An online WOM is an especially valuable source for visitors selecting the hotel they will stay at and the local spots they will visit. An online WOM is also valuable for service providers because it includes feedback of tourists' experiences, expectations, etc. so providers can improve their services for tourists. However, tourism service providers cannot utilize the information, primarily because it is not easy for them to extract the information they need from the online WOM due to the lack of understanding how a WOM is written and read by tourists. In this study, we investigated how tourists use information on an online WOM to choose travel destinations. In particular, we focused on senders' and receivers' styles of using online WOMs. Finally, we built a model that businesses can use to evaluate how an online WOM affects tourists' choices. This model describes relationships among senders, receivers, and service providers in terms of how each agent uses the online WOM.

2. METHOD

We adopted Cognitive Chrono-Ethnography (CCE; for the methodology and theoretical background of CCE, see Kitajima, et al., 2010) as the methodology to conduct the study.

Step 1. Selecting monitors

Purpose: We conducted a web survey to select receiver monitors and sender monitors, 18 in total, who would participate in the in-depth interview sessions.

Method: The Web survey consisted of two questionnaires: their attitudes on using online WOM and contents they were interested in as receiver and sender. The questionnaire for receivers included four attitude items: 1) frequency of using daily online WOM, 2) acceptance of information on an online WOM, 3) influence of information on an online WOM, and 4) contribution. Attitude items for senders included 1) frequency, 2) desire for communication, 3) intention to influence receivers' activity, and 4) intention to contribute to receivers. The respondents were required to answer both types of questions using a scale of high, middle, low and none. The questionnaire included seven content of interest items: spa, meals, hotel,

town, shopping, sightseeing, and others. The respondents were asked to indicate items in which they were interested.

Results: First, we extracted 636 monitor candidates from about 10 thousand respondents who had visited Kinokasa onsen (one of the most famous Japanese traditional spas, located in Hyogo Prefecture) by using an online WOM. Second, we applied Hayashi's quantification method type three to categorize the responses. We then categorized the monitor candidates into three attitude groups, high, middle, and low, for receiver and sender. Similarly, we categorized the candidates into four content groups for receiver, all-over type, semi-all-over type, spa type, and hotel type, for receiver, and three content groups for sender, all-over type, semi-all-over type, and hotel type. The difference between all-over and semi-all-over types is the quantity of answers for each question. In this way, we defined 12 groups for receivers and 9 groups for senders. Since we were not interested in low-attitude senders, we chose 18 study monitors from 12 receiver groups and 6 sender groups.

Step 2. In-depth interview

We conducted in-depth interviews twice for each monitor to determine the styles of using online WOM for senders and receivers. The two interviews were separated by two or three weeks. The monitors were required to record their daily use of online WOMs in writing. This was called the diary memo and was used in the second interview. In the interview, we asked monitors' current and past use of online WOMs.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents typical answers given by most monitors to the main questions provided in the in-depth interview.

Table 1. Answers of receivers and senders in the in-depth interview

RECEIVER	SENDER
What is the purpose of using an online WOM? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ To choose sight-seeing spots and hotels. ➢ To plan for real and future travel. 	What is your motivation for writing online WOM messages? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ To indicate satisfaction or complaints →mainly being satisfied. ➢ To provide information that they want to tell tourists.
What information do receivers want to obtain? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Raw opinions, new information, brief and concise information. ➢ Negative information for mental preparation and eliminating candidates. ➢ Contents (rooms, faculties, meals, staff service, tour spots, etc.). 	What messages do senders write on the Website? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Impressions (evaluation) or information (facts). ➢ Positive message or Negative message. ➢ Contents (rooms, faculties, meals, staff service, tour spots, etc.).
From whom? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Persons with similar characteristics (age, sex, style of travel). ➢ Matured parson for travel and sending online message. 	For whom? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Staff members of hotel where tourist stayed. ➢ Other tourists.
What types of online WOM messages are credible? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Quantity and qualities of online WOM messages ➢ Quantity of similar opinions ➢ Evaluation score of a hotel 	What points does the sender consider in the messages? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Ways of writing phrases (conciseness and the usage of language) ➢ Length of a message ➢ Difference from the other messages

3.1 Styles of Senders

1) Most tourists were motivated to send a message on an online WOM when they were satisfied with their travel. For example, they sent messages when hotels they stayed in were very clean and comfortable, meals were very good, and service staff members were very kind and polite. Therefore, almost all senders wrote

This model is explained as follows.

1) Structure: An online WOM is centered in the model, which consists of sites and contents. There are three types of sites where online WOM were written in. Three agents representing the sender, receiver, and business are placed around the centered elements of the online WOM. The motivation for using online WOMs and information required by each agent are described in boxes.

2) Sender: A tourist who would like to send an online WOM message to hotel staff members or other tourists when they were satisfied with services in the hotel in which they stayed. Almost all the messages are positive such as expressing appreciation and positive impressions about rooms, meals and service.

3) Sender: The tourists who write messages on web sites managed by tour companies and the hotel where they stayed, their own web log, and social networking services (SNS) such as Mixi. Most tourists write messages on web sites managed by tour companies because the sites provide exposure to many people and are trustworthy because they restrict submitters to those who actually reserved a room using the web sites. The tourists intend to express their appreciation to hotel staff members and to recommend the hotel and favorite spots to other tourists. Other tourists often write messages in their own weblog and SNS to convey a personal message.

4) Receiver: Receivers explore an online WOM for information on their travel. Some receivers use WOMs to decide the spots they will visit and the hotel where they will stay. Others use WOMs to plan their itinerary when they cannot obtain information from published media and TV. Receivers who use online WOMs to make decisions explore negative information not only to exclude unfavorable candidates but also to confirm online WOM sites having credible information. Moreover, they ignore negative information unrelated to them even though there is much such information.

5) Staff members: Staff members in tourism use online WOMs to confirm whether the tourists were satisfied with the service they provided and how the tourist evaluated them. Some hotel staff members respond to their message as soon as the tourist sends it. The immediate response tends to be evaluated better for future visitors.

4. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we investigated how tourists utilize online WOMs as a C2C interaction for choosing travel destinations and built an online WOM usage model for tourism. The model would be useful for service providers in appropriately evaluating effects of online WOM on tourists' choice. For example, the model demonstrated that receivers tend to explore negative information, but almost all senders prefer to write positive messages. At this point, it is interesting that Online WOM is composed of asymmetric communication between receiver and sender. In our future work, we should investigate how service providers use online WOMs to complete the model because we only focused on C2C interactions. Recently, interest in C2C interactions has increased in online WOM studies (e.g., Maclaran and Catterall, 2002; Nah, Siau, Tian and Lin, 2002; Xue and Phelps, 2004). Many companies suffer similar problems. It has been suggested that companies need to utilize the feedback from online C2C interaction (Maclaran and Catterall, 2002). Therefore, we should consider applying the methodology we adopted in this study to construct a model for tourism centered on online WOM for other service industries so they can improve their quality of services.

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