

# THE ROLE OF SOCIAL INFLUENCE MODEL IN SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

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## ABSTRACT

*Over the past few years, hotel businesses have acknowledged the huge role of social media in facilitating and assisting business growth due to its ease-of-use and speed of reach in nature, which essentially allow businesses to perform a role in social media marketing, where businesses can personally engage in advertising and promotion-related activities towards online customers. Nevertheless, hotel businesses are unable to effectively exploit social media marketing as they have a restricted knowledge on how to get potential customers to actively engage and become proactive as well as influence customers towards booking intention. The purpose of this conceptual paper is to propose a study that brings out an exploratory research which intends to analyze and determine the factors that lead to active participation and engagement among consumers within social media, paying attention towards three different processes of social influence: compliance, identification, and internalization that can foster individuals' attitude and behavioral changes. The improvement of social media marketing will enhance positive electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and consequently lead to intention to purchase, in addition to development of a robust, attractive image and product within online communities. Information within this study is regarded as valuable resource that could be used by online hotel marketers as well as related social media manager, as they can acknowledge and understand the actions and practices needed in social media to direct them towards business growth and positive online marketing practice.*

**Keywords:** Social Media Marketing, Social Influence Model, Attitude Towards Web sites, eWOM, Intention to Purchase.

## INTRODUCTION

Social media is a Web-based application that permits the formation of user-generated content. It provides a platform of virtually free information exchange, and it is designed based on the technological and conceptual of Web 2.0 (Schamari and Schaefers, 2015). The application consists of a variety of social networking selection from Web sites to chat rooms and forums, blogs and discussion boards, to name the least. Social media has burst into popularity partly because of its ease-of-use and speed of reach in nature, which essentially restructured the way people communicate and interact with one another (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). Social media can also present the current news and information, thus rendering it as a chosen application to browse for the most feasible and realistic products (Naaman et al., 2011). Over the past few

years, businesses have acknowledged the huge role of social media in facilitating and assisting their business growth (Stelzner, 2014).

In hospitality business, social media performs a role in online marketing when a business start to engage in advertising and promotion-related activities towards particular online customers, and provide businesses with opportunities to access customers (Kelly et al., 2010; Kamal et al., 2018). Hotels businesses are now capable of acknowledging their ‘online performance’. For instance, tracking the number of fans and likes within Facebook application, tracking the number of devotees within Twitter, and tracking the number of views within Youtube. In addition, hotel businesses can also track the number of online discussion and can instantly respond to comments, feedback and surveys. Latest and up-to-date information on product, service, and promotional activities can also be presented (Seth, 2012). Because of these advantages, social media generally influence approximately 90% of all online purchases, and recall rates for social media advertisements are approximately 55% higher than conventional advertisement (Marketingcloud, 2013). The utilization of social media has growth tremendously and current hotel businesses proactively use social media as a platform to communicate to a huge number of forthcoming and repeat customers (Seth, 2012; Ujang et al., 2016).

Despite providing numerous advantages towards consumers and marketers, social media has posed some problem. Customers may develop bad perception and post negative comments as an act of retaliation and frustration caused by perception of poor service or customer handling (Sparks and Browning, 2011). Dejected customers have post hostile pictures, messages, or upload audio and video recording that criticize businesses and services offered (Nadajara and Yazdanifard, 2016). Customers’ negative comments, posts or responses have jeopardized tremendously the marketing campaign and promotion effort done by hotel businesses (Nadajara and Yazdanifard, 2016). In addition, majority of hotel businesses have a restricted knowledge on how to manage social media marketing. They lack of knowledge on the driving factors that lead potential customers to social media pages. Hotel businesses also lack of knowledge on how to get potential customers to engage and become proactive in social media pages. Hotel businesses also are rather ignorance in terms of utilizing social media to influence booking intention (Leung and Baloglu, 2015).

This study suggests proper implementation of Social Influence Model (SIM) among hotel businesses in order to enhance social media marketing activities and improve customers’ attitude towards their social media sites. Through the improvement of such activities, hotel businesses could gain positive eWOM, enhance customers’ intention to purchase online, overcome bad perception and concurrently improve knowledge on social media marketing practice. SIM could foster active participation and engagement among online consumers within social media (Tang et al., 2016). Engagement is defined as conventional activities that online consumers practice as they communicate with other group members within social media community (Shin et al., 2016; Rossmann et al., 2016). These engagement could develop a sense of attachment, connectedness and level of participation among online customers, that consequently constitute a robust, attractive image within online communities (Calder and Malthouse, 2008). Customer online engagement and participation will most likely develop positive electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and intention to purchase (De Vries et al., 2012).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Social Influence Model (SIM)*

Social media has become a chosen platform for sharing experiences and information (Chen et al., 2013). This is due to its ability to foster active participation and engagement among consumers within the communication process and reciprocity (Tang et al., 2016). One of the most prominent tasks confronted by online marketers when trying to constitute a robust, attractive image and product within online communities is to have online consumers engage and participate within their social media marketing activities (Hodis et al., 2015). Engagement is defined as conventional activities that online consumers practice as they communicate with other group members within social media community (Shin et al., 2016; Rossmann et al., 2016). Engagement signifies a sense of attachment, connectedness and level of participation within the social media channel (Calder and Malthouse, 2008; Marzuki et al., 2016). Consequently, customer online engagement and participation tend to create eWOM, due to deliberate sharing of product related views on social media (De Vries et al., 2012).

Customer engagement among themselves may promote positive attitude towards online products, which could foster buying intention (Malthouse et al., 2013; Ngelambong et al., 2018). These engagement activities can be associated with social influence model (SIM). The SIM was made known by Kelman in 1958. Kelman (1958) proclaimed that SIM consists of three different processes of social influence: compliance, identification, and internalization that can actually foster individuals' attitude and behavioral changes. Compliance happens when an individual accepts the tempted behavior because of external rewards or punishments. Identification happens when an individual accepts the tempted behavior in an effort to generate or sustain a suitable self-defining relationship with other group members. Internalization happens when an individual accepts the tempted behavior due it is similarity to his/her value system.

Within hospitality field, SIM tend to establish high customers' engagement towards the particular hotel social media sites, which consequently will form an online social media community (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Razi et al., 2016). This established online community would have a high tendency to influence its members' attitude. These influenced and tempted community members will develop positive attitude towards social media sites, concurrently develop their sense of belonging and strengthen their engagement. From hotel businesses perspective, committed customers are more valuable due to their attitude of sharing similar values with businesses, attempt to support businesses to gain profits, and desire to become highly affiliated in order to keep positive inter-relationships within the community (Gunlach et al., 1995; Zolkopli et al., 2016).

The current study proposes the adoption of SIM to improve potential hotel customers' attitude toward hotel media social Web sites (ATW), paying attention on the level of customers' engagement within the social media community. The three construct that constitute social influences model: compliance, identification, and internalization, are proposed to have significant effect on customers' attitude toward a hotel social media Web sites (ATW), and consequently influence customers' attitude toward buying decision.

**Proposition 1:** Social media influence (SIM) will positively influence attitude towards (social media) Web sites (ATW)

### *Attitude Toward Web Sites (ATW)*

The attitude toward Web site construct (ATW) first introduced by Mitchell and Olson (1981) and Shimp (1981), and it is considered a very significant assessment in marketing research. ATW refers to individuals' favorable/unfavorable opinions and emotions toward a particular advertisement through advert exposure. ATW is defined as online customers' tendency to react positively or negatively to a Web site advertisement (Chen and Wells, 1999). Later on, ATW concept has been developed to accommodate new concept to explain online engagement effects (Chen and Wells, 1999). In previous studies, ATW has been proven to have a mediating influence on purchase intentions (Mitchell and Olson, 1981; Shimp, 1981; Stevenson et al., 2000). Due to its higher perceived credibility (Steffes and Burgee, 2009), customers' positive attitude and high engagement within online community can actually influence behavior toward buying decisions (Abubakar et al., 2016; Emir et al., 2016). In the hospitality studies, Jeong and Choi (2004) analyzed the possible effects of various online hotel picture displays on attitude toward Web site and customers' behavioral intentions. Consumers' positive attitude, together with their high commitment and engagement, tend to influence their intention to purchase on the Web sites. Referring the outcomes of previous studies, the current study proposes positive ATW (social media) among online hotel customers will improve online purchase intention (PI).

**Proposition 2:** Attitude towards (social media) Web sites (ATW) will positively influence purchase intention (PI)

### ***Electronic Word-of Mouth (eWOM)***

As consumers utilize social media, they develop the tendency to share product views as well as consumption experience (Chen et al., 2013). The act of engaging and sharing product views create electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) that can come in a form of subjective and objective statements (Okazaki et al., 2015). Word-of-mouth (WOM) was first introduced by Arndt (1967), who defined WOM as oral, person-to-person communication between a communicator and receiver that is perceived as a non-commercial message. With the development and widespread of the Web, the notion of WOM was expanded and applied to Web-based communications and engagement to develop a new thought, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Hennig-Thurau and Walsh, 2003). eWOM is outlined as "all informal communications directed at consumers through Internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristics of particular goods and services or their sellers" (Litvin et al., 2008, p. 461).

Previous studies claimed that eWOM in social media has important association with purchase intentions (PI) (King et al., 2014; Park and Kim, 2008). EWOM is considered as more reliable and significant source of information that generates the prospect craved by customers. In addition, eWOM could also affect on customers' post-purchase and PI (Luo and Zhong, 2015). Currently, eWOM distinction has increased, as customers tend to spend more time in social media. The situation would help customers to assess details about products and services prior to making decision to purchase (Yan et al., 2014). Online reviews in social media is developing to be a vital means of marketing communication as more customers are relying on these reviews to arrive at purchase decision making. Based on the previous facts, this study proposes the eWOM positive influence on PI within the social media context.

**Proposition 3:** Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) will positively influence purchase intention (PI)

EWOM is perceived as a significant marketing tool as consumers tend to seek information and discuss their views online. To do these consumers tend to pursue information previously posted

by community members (Pitta and Fowler, 2005). This kind of engagement encompasses participation of eWOM-related activities, including initiating and sharing product reviews, discussion and suggestions, which is derived from customers' attitude towards the particular Web site (Rodzi et al., 2016; Van Doorn et al., 2010). These activities are originated by consumers' co-formation of value to self and others, which are originated from their experience and attitude toward a Web site (Liou et al., 2016). Consequently, the scale of the customers' attitude towards social media Web sites will determine the level of eWOM engagement (Rossmann et al., 2016). In the hospitality related studies, the drivers of eWOM have also been significantly studied, and attitude has been recognized as one of the vital element that initiates eWOM (Leach et al., 2008). Referring the outcomes of previous studies, the current study proposes positive ATW (social media) among online hotel customers will initiate electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM).

**Proposition 4:** Attitude towards (social media) Web sites (ATW) will positively influence electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM)

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figures and tables must be centered. Graphics may be full color. Figures and tables must be numbered using Arabic numerals. Figure and table captions must be in 10 pt Times New Roman and centered. Captions with figure numbers must be placed after their associated figures, as shown in Figure 1. Captions with table numbers must be placed before their associated tables, as shown in Table 1.

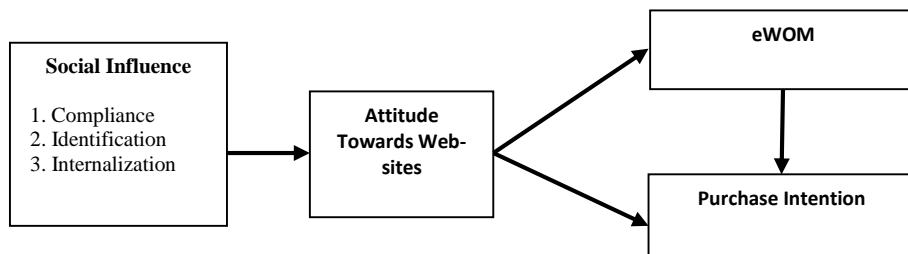


Figure 1: Proposed conceptual framework.

Kelman's (1958) study of social influence model (SIM) was motivated by his interest in understanding the changes brought about in individuals' attitude by external inputs. Applying SIM standpoint to the model, compliance, identification, and internalization could significantly foster individuals' attitude and behavioral changes (Kelman, 1958). Through the implementation of SIM, hotel businesses will tend to continuously foster active participation and engagement with consumers within social media in order to constitute a robust, attractive image and product within online communities (Tang et al., 2016; Shin et al., 2016). Customers' positive attitude and high engagement within online community can actually influence positive eWOM and behavior toward buying decisions (Abubakar et al., 2016). This study makes new contribution to the study of social media marketing as it highlights the role of social influence in fostering online consumers to engage and participate within social media marketing activities (Hodis et al., 2015), which consequently will establish positive attitude towards social media Web sites, and consequently will lead to positive eWOM and purchase intention among community members (Okazaki et al., 2015; King et al., 2014).

Up to the present time, most researches on hotel social media marketing have been based on qualitative and descriptive method (Hsu, 2012; Phelan et al., 2013). There is lack of studies

that concentrated on describing the essential instrument of hotel social media marketing. Thus the general aim of this conceptual paper is to propose the fundamental consumer behavior model of social media marketing. In spite of increasing research interest in social media marketing, knowledge in the area is still lacks of empirical support, and understanding of the notion of customers' engagement is still limited (Bolton, 2011; Hollebeek et al., 2014). This situation is due consumer online engagement research is abstracted to a multi-dimensional construct (Hollebeek et al., 2014). This study posits that implementation of social influence model within social media marketing study should play an important role in responding to the unsettled issue.

## METHODOLOGY

A quantitative research design will be performed by utilizing online and self-administered questionnaires. The sampling frame for this study will be customers who have experience engaging within hotel social media Web sites. The data collection will not be conducted at any hotel, as the primary target of the sample are customers who approach hotel businesses via social media. Data collection period will be done primarily during school holiday season (June – July) as the number of online reservation increase during this period. The data will be gathered using Google survey for respondents approached online and hand delivered questionnaires for respondents approached by the researcher. The study plans to collect a range of between 250 and 350 respondents. Respondents will be contacted by email and telephone to verify their participation in the study. Later, the respondents will be approached with a questionnaire, sent online or administered in person.

## CONCLUSION

While recent studies suggest that hotel businesses may not implement effective social media marketing due to lack of knowledge (Nadajara and Yazdanifard, 2016; Sparks and Browning, 2011), the reason of the ineffective implementation is not obvious (Leung and Baloglu, 2015). This is because social media marketing still lacks of empirical support, and understanding of the notion of customers' engagement is still limited (Bolton, 2011; Hollebeek et al., 2014). Ineffective social media marketing may frequently initiate negative comment as well as bad perceptions that would lead to negative eWOM, and eventually jeopardize the marketing campaign and possible intention to purchase (Nadajara and Yazdanifard, 2016). This would severely affect hotel businesses growth and performance. Looking at the current situation, it can be determined that the contribution of the study towards hotel businesses social media marketing is manifold. Implementation of social influence model within social media marketing is seen necessary by hotel businesses focusing not only on develop sense of attachment, connectedness and level of participation within the social media channel, but also gaining positive eWOM and improved online purchase.

This study attempts to assist hotel businesses to initiate proper handling of social media marketing that would permits hotel businesses to improve product image within online communities, as well as to have online consumers engage and participate within their social media marketing activities (Hodis et al., 2015). Hotel businesses can now effectively acknowledge customers' perception as well as insight about their products and services. Eventually, social media marketing enhancement is needed by hotel businesses to increase marketing performance, increase sales, and become more competitive. In addition, the right social media marketing practice will consequently increase brand recognition, improve brand loyalty, and at the same time reduce marketing costs, and gaining better performance at search engine ranking.

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