

HOW ONLINE CUSTOMERS' INTERACTIONS AND OFFLINE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENTS INFLUENCE E-SHOPPING INTENTIONS OF AIRLINE TICKETS

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RESUMEN

Online customers' interactions are key drivers of the consumer decision-making process. In the context of airline services, this study analyses how electronic Customer to Customer (C2C) exchanges influence shopping behaviour. Firstly, drawing from the Social Capital Theory and the Theory of Reasoned Action, we present in a comprehensive framework the effect exerted by (i) the C2C exchanges through the Internet, (ii) attitude toward e-shopping of services, and (iii) subjective norms (interpersonal and external influences), on e-shopping intentions. Secondly, we analyse the impact of attitude and subjective norms on different measures of e-shopping behaviour such as word-of-mouth communication (WOM and e-WOM). Utilizing structural equation modelling, we test our conceptual model using a sample of 441 Internet shoppers of airline tickets. Research findings will allow managers to understand the effect of online consumers' interactions and offline social environments on future repurchase intentions, WOM and e-WOM. Theoretical and managerial implications are discussed.

Palabras clave:

e-C2C exchanges, word-of-mouth, online tourist behaviour, airlines, attitude

1. Introduction

The Internet revolution has witnessed significant changes to the air travel industry and, specifically, within e-business processes such as facilitating electronic communication among customers and e-ticketing. Online-travel related companies have integrated community functionalities into their Web sites to enhance users' travel information searching experience (Wang and Fesenmaier, 2004). From a consumer perspective, Internet has modified several behaviours in online and offline buyers (i.e., air travel purchases) with regard to information and opinions seeking behaviour using third-party (independent) websites, forums, chats, blogs, virtual communities (Fong and Burton, 2006), which can be categorized as "Web-based opinion platforms". They provide consumers with many valuable network tools to draw together people with similar interests and present an opportunity for communication with like-minded people (Fong and Burton, 2006). In spite of the relevance of this new source of information, the majority of the behaviour theories have not analysed its effect (e.g. Theory of Reasoned Action, TRA). These theories only consider the normative influence of the social environment and obviate the information voluntarily obtained from other e-customers via the Internet. Nowadays, this fact is an important gap for the analysis of online shopping, and something which needs to be dealt with.

The technological advances that have taken place in the past years have shown the need to extend the influence of the social environment from information obtained voluntarily through the Internet. Recommendations are ranked one of the most important information sources when a consumer is making a purchase of tourism services (Litvin et al., 2008). Information derived from other customers is 700% more effective than newspaper or magazine advertising, 400% more effective than personal selling and 200% more effective than radio advertising in getting consumers to change their decisions (Severt et al., 2007). For this reason, we analyse the effect of the new information sources (i.e., interactions using Web-based online platforms to enhance knowledge) on e-shopping taking as a conceptual framework of reference the TRA in order to develop an improved model of tourism services e-shopping behaviour.

The objective of this study is to analyse the shopping behaviour for airline tickets through the Internet, focusing on the influence of the online and offline social environment of the e-purchaser. Specifically, our paper aims to contribute research in two ways. Firstly, drawing from the Social Capital Theory and the Theory of Reasoned Action, we present in a comprehensive framework the effect exerted by (i) the "Web-based opinion platforms", (ii) attitude toward the e-shopping of services, and (iii) normative influences of the social environment (interpersonal and external influences) on e-shopping intentions. Secondly, we analyse the impact of TRA variables on different measures of e-shopping behaviour.

The context for this study is the e-shopping for air tickets. Overall, travel and tourism services cannot be evaluated physically before consumption and the emotional risk of reference group evaluation is an important aspect of the decision-making process, so e-Customer to Customer (C2C) exchanges become an issue of critical importance for tourism marketers (Litvin et al., 2008). In the following section, we present the conceptual framework and research hypotheses. Next, we explain the methodology, and carry out the relevant empirical analyses. Finally, we present the conclusions and the implications for business.

2. Theoretical framework

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) has become a widely accepted model for exploring an individual's behaviour. TRA models have been applied in different disciplines and contexts (refer to review in Wu, 2003), such as shopping behaviour, women's labour orientation or vote intention. It is especially relevant to mention the topic of Information Technology (Liker and Sindi, 1997; Lu and Lin, 2003; Nijte and Parsa, 2005). Nevertheless, the application of this theory to the tourism context and, specifically, to tourists' shopping behaviour, is scarce.

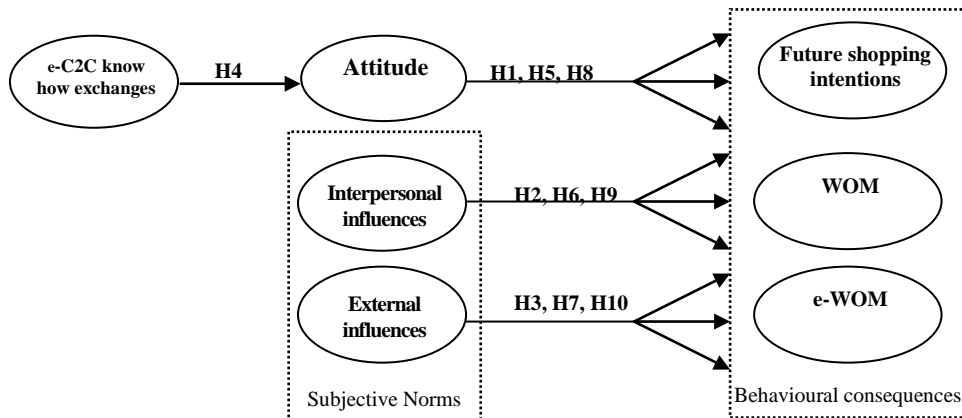
According to its basic formulation, TRA advocates that a person's behaviour is predicted by intentions, and that the intentions are jointly determined by the person's attitude and the subjective norm concerning his or her behaviour. Previous TRA studies analysed in offline settings the effect of the subjective norm, but they obviate the effect exerted by the exchanges of information made voluntarily through the Internet. Interestingly, consumers rely on online opinions for their purchase

decisions (Guernsey, 2000), due to the fact that other's opinions about a product can help a consumer save decision-making time and make better purchase decisions (Henning-Thurau and Walsh, 2004).

On the basis of the social capital theory (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998), Web-based opinion platforms can be thought as a voluntary electronic form of knowledge sharing and with no economic rewards, such as blogs, virtual communities (Pan et al., 2007) and reflect this in eWOM that differentiate them from marketer-induced communications (Hung and Li, 2007). Social capital refers to the "resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit" (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998, p. 243) that provide the basis for trust, cooperation, and collective action in social aggregates.

The proposed model integrates the perceived effect of consumers' interactions using Web-based online platforms to enhance knowledge about online purchases. This has been referred to as e-C2C exchanges, and it acts as a key driver of attitude. Furthermore, the influence of the social subjective norms usually analysed in TRA research are tested: interpersonal and external influences (see Figure 1). The rationale of the hypothesized relationships is discussed in the next sessions.

FIGURA 1
Conceptual model



2.1. Antecedents of e-shopping intentions in airlines

In the context of airline services, this study analyses how attitude, offline social environments and online customers' interactions influence e-shopping intentions. Offline social environments refer to the influence of subjective norms on e-buying behaviour. Online customers' interactions refer to the influence of participating in Web-based platforms or, in other words, e-C2C know-how exchanges.

Attitude towards online shopping. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) defined attitude as an individual's overall positive or negative evaluation on performing a behaviour and a result of expectancy-value judgments concerning that behaviour. On the basis of TRA models, different authors have demonstrated a direct effect of attitudes on the intention to purchase on the Internet (Fenech and O'Cass, 2001; Keen et al., 2004; Bigné et al., 2010). In the context of air tickets purchases, we consider that:

H1: Customers' attitudes toward e-shopping for airline tickets have a significant effect on their future shopping intentions in airlines.

Subjective norms towards online shopping. Subjective norms (SN) reflect one's perception of other's relevant opinions on whether or not he or she should perform a particular behaviour. Bhattacharjee (2000) consider SN as a collective component including two forms of influence: interpersonal and external. Interpersonal influences are defined as the "influence of friends, family members, colleagues, superiors, and experienced individuals known to the potential adopter". External influences refer to "mass media reports, expert opinion, and other non-personal information considered by individuals in performing a behaviour" (Bhattacharjee, 2000; Roca et al., 2006). Hsu and Chiu (2004) modelled interpersonal and external influences to predict electronic service continuance. Based on TRA, we propose a relationship between subjective norms and future shopping intentions regarding airlines, as follows:

H2: Interpersonal influences toward e-shopping for airline tickets have a significant effect on their future shopping intentions.

H3: External influences toward e-shopping for airline tickets have a significant effect on their future shopping intentions.

e-C2C know-how exchanges. Information exchange of consumers' purchases can provide an additional source of perceived benefits to the participating customer and unlock the value that customers may overlook without know-how exchange (Gruen et al., 2006). A customer engaged in e-C2C exchanges may develop affective bonds with other customers (Gruen et al., 2006), which may in turn directly influence their attitudes. Likewise, e-C2C transmission of information modifies the receiver's emotions (Söderlund and Rosengren, 2007). In that sense, Lee et al. (2008) consider that the proportion of negative online consumer reviews could be an important factor for consumers' attitudes because they easily observe how many people have already bought the product and how many of them are satisfied with it. Based on this, we suggest that the e-C2C exchanges about e-shopping for airline tickets improve the attitude towards it.

H4: e-C2C know-how exchanges about e-shopping for airline tickets have a significant direct effect on attitude.

2.2. Antecedents of Word-of-mouth about online purchases in airlines

Together with the effects of online shopping intentions, our conceptual model analyses the influence of attitude and subjective norms on word-of-mouth. Analysing exclusively future intentions does not allow going into depth in other variables such as WOM or e-WOM, which typically reflect the final choice and complete the study of e-behaviour. As already demonstrated by Cheng et al. (2006) for the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980), TRA is appropriate for measuring WOM communication. Furthermore, limited studies have examined the effect of interpersonal, external influences and attitude simultaneously upon WOM (see Blodgett et al., 1993).

With regard to attitude, if an individual possesses a certain attitude towards behaviour, he or she may be more likely to engage in such behaviour. Different studies have analysed the effect of the attitude on different measurements of behaviour, such as satisfaction, loyalty or word-of-mouth (Lu and Lin, 2002; Bandyopadhyay and Martell, 2007; Bigné et al., 2010). Along this line, the same as Cheng et al. (2006) demonstrated the effect of attitude on the negative WOM in the hospitality sector, we will test this relationship for the positive WOM communication.

H5: Customers' attitudes toward e-shopping for airline tickets have a significant effect on their willingness to make positive WOM communication.

Research has demonstrated that customers' behaviours are highly influenced by referents (Keng et al., 1995). Cheng et al. (2006) posit that if the behaviour is socially accepted, consumers may have the intention to engage in negative WOM. Likewise, customers may have a high motivation to comply with what their significant others advise them. Thus, we posit a similar effect on positive WOM communication in the following hypotheses:

H6: Interpersonal influences toward e-shopping for airline tickets have a significant effect on their willingness to make WOM communication.

H7: External influences toward e-shopping for airline tickets have a significant effect on their willingness to make positive WOM communication.

Most research on WOM has focused on interpersonal (or face-to-face) influence (Anderson, 1988; Bearden and Etzel, 1982) and has largely neglected the Internet as a new channel for expressing an opinion, i.e. electronic word of mouth or e-WOM (Gruen et al., 2006; Fong and Burton, 2006). E-WOM can be defined as any positive or negative statement made by potential, current or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet (Henning-Thurau et al., 2004). It differs from traditional WOM in some aspects. Firstly, the new interpersonal influence is a many to many communication process in which the source is unknown and the non-commercial focus may not be certain. Secondly, the contact is electronic, not face to face, and finally, the volume of information is higher than that obtained through

traditional process (Chatterjee, 2001; Smith et al., 2005). Some of the most influential sources of e-WOM are the forums, blogs, specialized websites, virtual communities, newsgroups, e-mails and SMS initiated by the company, etc. These tools serve to draw together people with similar interests and present an opportunity for e-WOM from like-minded people to take place (Fong and Burton, 2006).

Henning-Thurau et al. (2004) consider that e-WOM participants exhibit a set of motivations similar to those of participants of traditional WOM. Such findings suggest that WOM mechanisms act in the same manner on the Internet and that e-WOM effects may be very similar to WOM effects (Gruen et al., 2006). Therefore, the effect established between the attitude and interpersonal and external influences upon WOM (Blodgett et al., 1993; Cheng et al., 2006) can be extrapolated to e-WOM. Accordingly,

H8: Customers' attitudes toward e-shopping for airline tickets have a significant effect on their willingness to make positive e-WOM communication.

H9: Interpersonal influences toward e-shopping for airline tickets have a significant effect on their willingness to make positive e-WOM communication.

H10: External influences toward e-shopping for airline tickets have a significant effect on their willingness to make positive e-WOM communication.

3. Research methodology

The research instrument employed to obtain the information was a survey with close-ended questions. Pre-tests were carried out, in order to correct possible defects and to foresee doubts and problems that could arise during the process of collecting information. As a result of the pre-tests, some redundant questions were eliminated and some of the scales were adapted in order to facilitate their understanding and to avoid erroneous interpretations.

Final questionnaires were delivered to and collected from Spanish passengers who have purchased airline tickets through the Internet. They responded to the interview through a web page that was designed specifically for this research project. The online survey was conducted throughout a market research company. The universe were Spanish Internet shoppers 15 years of age or older who had purchased airline tickets. A total of 2,947 individuals were contacted during the survey; 1,149 agreed to participate. Of the questionnaires received, 441 were analysed.

Profile of respondents is shown in Table 1. The total sample is composed of 57.6% men and 42.4% women. A large percentage of the sample belongs to the age segment between 25 and 49, 25-34 (34.9 %) and 35-49, 32.7%. In terms of educational level, university educated individuals predominate (71.2%). The quota sampling is on the basis of gender and age range determined by Telecommunication Observatory Study (2007), which is the most important directory of Internet shoppers in Spain, so that a good representativity of the average Internet shopper was observed.

TABLE 1
Sample Demographics (N=441)

Variable		Column percentage	Variable		Column %
Gender	Male	57.6	Frequency of Internet access	Every day	89.1
	Female	42.4		5 or 6 days per week	8.6
	Total	100		Between 2 and 4 days per week	2.3
Education	Under Primary	0.2		Once a week or less	0
	Primary	0.7	Products purchased		100
	Secondary	27.9		Airline tickets	100
	University	71.2		Hotel reservations	79.1
	Total	100		Tickets for events	60.3
Age	15-24	15.6		Technology	33.8
	25-34	34.9		Books	31.3
	35-49	32.7		Others	25.4
	50-64	15.2		Music	21.3
	65 and older	1.6		Clothing	19.7
	Total	100		Food	10.2

Research constructs were operationalised using several items adapted from previous research, as shown in Table 2. All the variables were measured using 7-point Likert scales (1, totally disagree; 7, totally agree).

TABLE 2
Measurement of the variables and summary statistics

VARIABLES	ITEMS	Mean	SD
EXTERNAL INFLUENCES (EXI) (Roca et al., 2006; Bhattacharjee, 2000; Limayem et al., 2000)	I tend to read information that considers the purchase of airline tickets on the Internet to be a good idea	4.70	1.51
	The opinion of experts in respect to the purchase of airline tickets on the Internet generates a positive feeling in me	4.75	1.42
	The communications media have motivated me towards the purchase of airline tickets on the Internet	4.38	1.57
INTERPERSONAL INFLUENCES (INI) (Roca et al., 2006; Bhattacharjee, 2000; Limayem et al., 2000)	My family thinks I should purchase airline tickets on the Internet	4.73	1.52
	My work/study mates think I should purchase airline tickets on the Internet	5.01	1.48
	My friends think I should purchase airline tickets on the Internet	5.07	1.43
e-C2C KNOW HOW EXCHANGES (C2C) (Gruen et al., 2005)	Overall, Web-based platforms are an important source of information for me	3.95	1.79
	I find the interaction among Web-based platforms users enhances my knowledge	4.20	1.75
	I can depend on the Web-based platforms to provide answers to my questions	4.07	1.74
	In general, the ideas suggested on the Web-based platforms are reliable	4.02	1.71
WORD OF MOUTH (WOM) (Zeithlam et al., 1996)	In relation to the flights that I have purchased on the Internet....		
	...I like to say positive things to other persons	4.90	1.51
	...I would recommend online airline ticket purchase to anyone who asked my opinion	5.45	1.44
	...it is likely that I would urge my friends and acquaintances to purchase airline tickets online	5.47	1.40
ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH (E-WOM) (Zeithlam et al., 1996)	In relation to the flights that I have purchased on the Internet....		
	...it is likely that I would say positive things through forums, chats, virtual communities, blogs, specialized web sites or any other source of online information	4.15	1.90
	...I would recommend the purchase of airline tickets on forums, chats, virtual communities, blogs, specialized web sites or any other source of online information	4.11	1.89
	...it is likely that I would urge, through forums, chats, virtual communities, blogs, specialized web sites or any other source of online information, the purchase of airline tickets on the Internet	4.04	1.95
ATTITUDE (ATT) (Ahn et al., 2004; Yu et al., 2005)	The use of the Internet for the purchase of airline tickets		
	...is a good idea	6.14	1.164
	...is an intelligent idea	5.99	1.302
	...is a positive idea	6.00	1.202
FUTURE SHOPPING INTENTIONS (FUI) (Limayem et al., 2000; Thong et al., 2006)	In the future, I plan to continue using the Internet for the purchase of airline tickets	6.35	1.140
	I hope to continue using the Internet for the purchase of airline tickets	6.30	1.176
	It is likely that I will purchase an airline ticket using the Internet in the near future	5.97	1.476

4. Data analysis and results

4.1. Reliability and validity assessment

To assess measurement reliability and validity, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) containing all the multi-item constructs in our framework was estimated with EQS 6.1 (Bentler, 1995) using the maximum likelihood method. The results of the final CFA are reported in Table 3 and suggest that our measurement model provides a good fit to the data on the basis of a number of fit statistics ($S-B\chi^2=261.95$, $df=188$, $p=0.000$; $RMSEA=0.048$; $NFI=0.961$; $NNFI=0.975$; $CFI=0.980$). As evidence of convergent validity, the CFA results indicate that all items are significantly ($p<.01$) and related to their hypothesized factors, the size of all the standardized loadings are higher than .60 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988), and the explanatory coefficients are higher than .30 (Jöreskog and Sörbom, 1993).

TABLE 3
Internal consistency and convergent validity of the theoretical construct measures

Variable	Indicator	Factor loading	Robust t-value	R2	Composite reliability	AVE	Cronbach's alpha
INTERPERSONAL INFLUENCES (INI)	INI1	0.669	14.034	0.448	.887	.727	.875
	INIV2	0.927	24.827	0.859			
	INI3	0.936	22.959	0.875			
EXTERNAL INFLUENCES (EXI)	EXI1	0.847	20.487	0.718	.840	.640	.831
	EXI2	0.870	20.451	0.757			
	EXI3	0.667	13.294	0.444			
ATTITUDE (ATT)	ATT1	0.939	13.254	0.882	.946	.854	.945
	ATT2	0.922	15.675	0.851			
	ATT3	0.911	14.362	0.831			
e-C2C EXCHANGES (C2C)	C2C1	0.897	30.819	0.805	.943	.846	.957
	C2C2	0.925	30.698	0.856			
	C2C3	0.938	32.944	0.880			
	C2C4	0.926	30.520	0.858			
WOM	WOM1	0.672	13.535	0.452	.870	.694	.856
	WOM2	0.910	19.702	0.828			
	WOM3	0.896	17.072	0.802			
E-WOM	EWOM1	0.923	32.498	0.853	.961	.890	.960
	EWOM2	0.956	36.456	0.913			
	EWOM3	0.952	37.210	0.905			
FUTURE SHOPPING INTENTIONS (FI)	FI1	0.940	12.134	0.884	.908	.768	.887
	FI2	0.950	13.862	0.903			
	FI3	0.721	13.183	0.521			

**p<.01; *p<.05

Table 3 also shows the high internal consistency of the constructs. Composite reliability of each factor was higher than 0.60 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988), Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was also greater than .50 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981) and Cronbach's alpha exceed the reference value of 0.7 (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994).

Evidence for discriminant validity of the measures was provided in two ways (Table 4). First, none of the 95 per cent confidence intervals of the individual elements of the latent factor correlation matrix contained a value of 1.0 (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). Second, the shared variance between pairs of constructs was always less than the corresponding AVE (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). On the basis of these criteria, we concluded that the measures in the study exhibited sufficient evidence of reliability, convergent and discriminant validity.

TABLE 4
Discriminant validity of the theoretical construct measures

INI	EXI	ATT	C2C	WOM	EWOM	FI
.73	.29	.15	.05	.17	.03	.13
[.44;.63]	.64	.12	.17	.09	.13	.06
[.28;.50]	[.23;.46]	.85	.05	.37	.04	.54
[.12;.33]	[.31;.51]	[.13;.31]	.85	.15	.69	.03
[.31;.52]	[.17;.42]	[.49;.72]	[.29;.48]	.70	.19	.42
[.07;.28]	[.26;.47]	[.10;.30]	[.79;.87]	[.35;.52]	.89	.02
[.26;.45]	[.14;.35]	[.63;.83]	[.07;.25]	[.56;.73]	[.05;.23]	.77

Diagonal represents the average variance extracted. While above the diagonal the shared variance (squared correlations) are represented. Below the diagonal the 95% confidence interval for the estimated factors correlations is provided

4.2. Results and discussion

We tested the proposed conceptual model (Figure 1) using structural equation modeling. The empirical estimates for the main-effects model are shown in Table 5. The results indicate that the data fit our conceptual model acceptably ($S-B\chi^2=647.38$, $df=196$ $p=.00$; RMSEA=.091; NFI=.904; NNFI=.909; CFI=.923).

Attitude has a significant effect on the three concepts which determine online behaviour: Future Intentions ($\beta_1=.727$; $p<.01$), WOM ($\beta_5=.561$; $p<.01$) and e-WOM ($\beta_8=.116$; $p<.01$). H1, H5 and H8 are verified. Attitude therefore explains not only future purchase intentions, but also the intention to make their opinion and experiences known to other interested individuals. The fact of having a positive attitude generates greater intention to recommend the product, not only in the physical market (offline market) but also in Internet.

Interpersonal influences has a significant effect on Future Intentions of e-shopping low-cost airline tickets ($\beta_2=.132$; $p<.01$) and WOM ($\beta_6=.188$; $p<.01$). H3 and H6 are supported. Nevertheless, contrary to H9, Interpersonal Influences does not affect e-WOM ($\beta_9= -.118$ $p>.05$). This result is probably due to the fact that information obtained directly from family and friends is dealt with in a more personal way, and is therefore only transmitted to persons with the same type of bond or tie and in a traditional way, without making it public on the Internet (e-WOM).

TABLE 5
Structural model results

Hypothesis	Path	Standardized Path Coefficients	Robust t-value
H1	Attitude→Future shopping intentions	0.727	9.408
H2	Interpersonal influences→Future shopping Int.	.132	2.377
H3	External Influences→Future shopping intentions	- .062	-1.594
H4	C2C exchanges→Attitude	0.239	4.808
H5	Attitude→WOM	.561	7.429
H6	Interpersonal influences→WOM	.188	2.890
H7	External influences→WOM	.056	0.932
H8	Attitude→E-WOM	.116	2.177
H9	Interpersonal influences→E-WOM	- .118	-1.899
H10	External influences→E-WOM	.469	7.123

** $p<.01$; * $p<.05$

Consistent with our expectations reflected on H10, External Influences is positively related to e-WOM ($\beta_{10}=.469$; $p<.01$), but not with Future Intentions ($\beta_3= -.062$; $p>.05$) and WOM ($\beta_7=.056$; $p>.05$). H10 is verified, but H3 and H7 are rejected. Therefore, in respect to information received through the mass media (external influences), this is more susceptible to being spread by means of e-WOM.

Finally, it has been demonstrated that e-C2C exchanges have a positive influence on Attitude ($\beta_4=.239$; $p<.01$), verifying H4. This effect exercised by the e-C2C exchanges significantly improve the attitude of the individual towards online purchase, and therefore have a direct influence on final behaviour. Therefore, those e-customers who are accustomed to obtaining their airline tickets via the Internet will also use this medium in order to gather information on the purchase they intend to make, in this way improving their attitude.

Our results allow us to conclude that the comprehensive framework, integrating TRA variables, e-C2C exchanges, WOM and e-WOM, is a good predictor of online behaviour with regard to online shopping for low-cost airline tickets.

5. Conclusions and managerial implications

The Internet as a channel of information and purchase has taken on special interest in the airline industry. More and more, e-customers are exchanging information with other e-customers through chats, forums, blogs and other online formats, which have all become a valuable source of information on which to base purchase decisions.

The objective of this research has been to analyse the shopping behaviour in low-cost airline tickets through the Internet, concentrating on the influence exercised by the online and offline social environment of the e-purchaser. With this aim, we have developed an extended model based on the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) from Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) and social capital theory (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). The main contributions of our paper are related to bridging some gaps existent in the original TRA formulation resulting from the current technological context.

Firstly, we have demonstrated that the influence of the e-customers' social environment should not only be centred on influences of a normative nature (interpersonal and external influences), but also in Web-based online platforms such as forums, chats, blogs, virtual communities, i.e. e-C2C exchanges. Secondly, the evolution of the social environment has made it necessary to extend the study of e-shopping e-behaviour through the incorporation of WOM and e-WOM, which serve to complete the study of future intentions. The results obtained show that attitude influences positively in all types of behaviour, in purchase intention as well as in the intention to carry out positive WOM and e-WOM. In respect to interpersonal influences, these have an effect on future e-shopping and WOM intentions, but they do not, however, have any effect on e-WOM. We could therefore affirm that the information transmitted through e-WOM comes from experience or from the mass media, whereas the WOM is affected by means of experience and interpersonal influences. The results obtained make it possible to conclude that the interchanges of information through the Internet (e-C2C exchanges) generate more opinions in this medium (e-WOM), as it promotes the voicing of opinion in this medium (e-WOM), at the same time influencing in the e-shopping intentions. This analysis of the effect exercised by online information from a double perspective (as antecedent and as consequence) is one of the principal contributions of our work. In the light of this, the present study has built a bridge between information received from other customers and the intention to transmit their own experiences (WOM and e-WOM).

5.1. Managerial implications and limitations

We suggest the use of communication tools to improve the attitude and the level of e-shopping. From a marketing point of view, the importance of e-C2C exchanges of information is continuously increasing due to the fact that consumers are turning to computer-mediated communication in order to obtain information on which to base their decisions (Kozinets, 2002). These communities are usually associated to several benefits for the organization, because they improve the attitude, and, extensively, they could increase the member's emotional connection through the product and develop affective bonds with the brand and the firm.

To increase the rate of e-C2C exchanges, low-cost airline companies should initiate campaigns to cultivate the feelings of the community and of the group in respect to their company. These campaigns must highlight the positive aspects of the website and the advantages of the services offered by these airline companies.

Furthermore, customers should be made aware of the available Web-based platforms for opinions. The process of making opinions should be easy and within control of customers. In this respect, airlines must link and/or host Web-based platforms for e-C2C exchanges such as blogs, forums and chats in their website, in order to achieve that their e-customers are able to give their opinions easily. Such Web-based platforms would therefore provide advice on the purchase of products, influence in the decisions of other potential and real e-customers, and finally increase sales.

In terms of the limitations of this study, some complementary aspects are worth analysing. The first limitation of the study lies in the fact that we have not taken into account the type of link or bond that exists with the consumers among whom information is interchanged (e-C2C exchanges). Along this line, some studies have considered the uniting link between them, showing that the effect of the opinion gathered differs depending on the knowledge that the e-customer has about the source. In future studies we shall introduce the bond strength among e-customers so as to be able to differentiate the effect exercised on attitude.

Secondly, our study has focussed on a sampling of purchasers in Spain. Nevertheless, some studies have demonstrated that the importance of the social environment depends on the culture of the e-customers (Money, 2004). Along this line, in future studies we should like to check the existence of significant differences in the WOM and e-WOM effected in relation to the country the e-customer comes from. Finally, this study focuses on the online purchases of air travel tickets. Further studies could empirically test this framework with regard to other tourism products.

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