

How Referral Rewards Systems Shape What Tourists Share on Social Media

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Abstract

Sharing on social media not only relies on our intrinsic motivations but also can be induced by the extrinsic motivations such as referral rewards. Although our previous study demonstrated that incentivizing tourists to create postings could influence peer consumers' behavioral intentions (i.e., purchase and word-of-mouth intentions) and social media engagement, we noticed that it was the content which was created under the incentive design drove all the impacts. Therefore, in this study, we extracted the content characteristics from the tourists' postings we collected. Results indicated that the referral rewards systems (RRSs) we introduced could shape what tourists share, and the content characteristics such as positive emotional, utilitarian, high-level and low-level construal have different effects on peer consumers' social media engagement and behavioral intentions. Our findings aid researchers and practitioners in understanding how to design successful RRSs and how to create viral content on social media.

Keywords: electronic word-of-mouth, referral rewards systems, content characteristics, social media engagement, behavioral intentions

1. Introduction

Sharing on social media has become an indispensable part of our lives. Researchers already identified that such interpersonal social transmission can remain in the public consciousness for a very long time, and simultaneously affect consumers' attitudes, decision-making process, and trigger an instantaneous promotion of brands and products [6, 41]. Such findings are more inspiring when they are associated with tourism industry, of which services have high-credence qualities, and their customers are more inclined to be affected by the positive and negative electronic word-of-mouth across a broad range of nations [35]

Creating travel content on social media was denoted to be dependent on tourists' diversified motivations, such as to exercise collective power over tourism companies and express positive and negative feelings; and for enjoyment, hedonic, altruism and self-enhancement purposes [56]. However, these motivations are relatively in a spontaneous form. Existing research [36, 56] found that only a small fraction of tourists posted on social media but the rest preferred to keep silent. Reasons led to this including many of the sharers considered they needed too much effort to understand their audience before posting online so that they found themselves incompetent, they had privacy concerns, and they were constrained by work or time. All these barriers make tourism practitioners' work more challenging when they attempt to diffuse product or service information on social media.

Spreading eWOM can also be evoked by the extrinsic motivation, such as referral rewards [26]. Previous studies [9, 23, 25, 43] already presented that, by exploiting referral rewards systems (RRSs), practitioners could incentivize existing customers to spread positive eWOM and increase their customer base. Under the assistance of social networking tools, RRSs become more effective as potential customers can be invited directly by existing customers to purchase

products [46]. In tourism industry, our previous study [57] found out that, by providing referral rewards to tourists (sharers), their audiences' (potential customers') behavioral intentions and social media engagement could be affected.

However, no matter what drives people to share, it is impossible that every piece of content on social media is influential to service consumers. Most of the content languishes in comparatively obscurity. The influential or the viral content are usually from relatively small and independent sources. Such content can be contagious across the Internet forthwith by briefly capturing an enormous number of people, and leads its audience to share, comment or give 'like' to it. Antecedent research [15] states that the viral content is associated with six primary emotions, namely, surprise, joy, sadness, anger, fear, and disgust. These emotions cause the diffusion of the content and also the consumers' subsequent forwarding behavior. Berger and Milkman [7] took a psychological approach to stress that, compared to content that triggered low arousal, those called forth high-arousal positive (awe) or negative (anger or anxiety) emotions were more likely to go viral. On the other hand, Pirouz [41] set out from the perspective of content themes and highlighted that themes such as novelty, incongruity and hyperbole could engage more audience as they were capable of inducing a stronger emotional reaction. Although these findings were insightful, they are incomplete as researchers neglect the role of the very initial motivations of customers to share on social media, especially when we found out that tourists could be incentivized with economic rewards by service suppliers [57].

This article is a follow-up of our previous study [51]. It focuses on examining (1) how incentive referral rewards systems shape what tourists share; (2) under such systems, how content characteristics affect potential customers' social media engagement, behavioral intentions (i.e., purchase and WOM intentions), and attitudes toward destinations. We do so in three steps. First, by using three treatments (create travel content to get the maximum retweets/comments/likes), we incentivized 65 tourists to create travel content. Second, we invited another 268 consumers to rate these postings based on their perceptions. According to the manipulation arrangements, we checked the impacts of referral rewards systems on audience's (potential customers') social media engagement, behavioral intentions, and attitude toward destinations. Third, relying on four human coders, we coded these postings on several dimensions (e.g. content characteristics, share focus, travel concerns) to examine how these travel content was shaped and also their impacts on audience.

This research makes several important contributions. First, research on eWOM and tourism industry has focused on its impact and importance (e.g. diffusion and sales of the travel products, enhancement of the destination image [27, 45, 49, 59]). However, there has been less attention to the cause of the eWOM or what drives tourists to share on social media with others and what kinds of content is more likely to influence audience's (potential consumers') social media engagement and behavioral intentions. By combining a large-scale examination of real travel postings and thoughtfully controlled experiment, we shed light on how referral rewards systems (RRSs) drive people to share, and demonstrate characteristics of viral travel content. Second, our findings provide insights regarding how to design effective and efficient RRSs and viral marketing campaigns, which can help tourism practitioners avoid customer backlash and craft contagious content.

2. Research Background

Referral reward systems (RRSs)

The word "referral", according to Grewal and Lilien [28], is "*a recommendation from A to B, such that B should, or should not, purchase from C*". It can be categorized into three types: customer-to-potential customer referrals, horizontal referrals, and supplier-initiated referrals. Among these types, customer-to-potential customer referral is typically studied as "word-of-mouth" (WOM) or "electronic word-of-mouth" (eWOM) in digital age, which implies the exchange of any information concerning any products or services can happen at anywhere and

anytime among consumers [25]. Utilizing referral rewards to incentivize existing customers to spread positive WOM is no longer a new norm. On social media, modern practitioners often reward their customers who would like to start favorable conversations about their service in order to encourage peer customers to purchase and increase their customer base. Some marketing mavens even take advantages of referral reward systems (RRSs) to persuade influential social media users to narrate impressive reviews to draw audiences' attentions.

The fundamental idea of the implementation of RRSs originates from the exchange theories [9, 43], which argued that word-of-mouth could be treated as a type of social exchange [20], and customers' decision whether to engage in the social transmission usually depends on the costs and benefits of the exchange [29, 43]. Indeed, eWOM on social media often comes along with different costs such as time and efforts spent on crafting the content, risks of being criticized by the public, losing privacy, or when receivers are dissatisfied with a purchase that results from senders' recommendations, the relationship would suffer [43, 56]. With RRSs, how customers perceive referral costs and benefits may change during the process of social transmission. For instance, by transmitting eWOM, sharers gain additional economic benefits (e.g. money or in-kinds) which can compensate their perceived costs. However, the rewards make them feel "selling" recommendations rather than instinct motivation (e.g. altruism), and this would bring damages to their self-images [29]. On the other hand, from the practitioners' perspectives, although RRSs can be a cost-effective way to recruit new customers, there might be unnecessary expense if they are not designed and implemented properly [46].

Antecedent studies have made important contributions towards how to implement RRSs from different perspectives. For instance, regarding rewards to "who", Wirtz and Chew's study [30] presented that the RRSs were an effective catalyst to increase the satisfied customers' likelihood of recommending a firm to others. However, Ryu and Fecik [43] pointed out that, despite RRSs increased the existing customers' referral likelihood, rewards needed to be arranged with different targets: for weak ties and weak brands, rewards needed to be offered to WOM senders, whereas for strong ties and strong brands, rewards needed to be offered to WOM receivers. Concerning the rewards size and type ("what"), Garnefeld and her colleagues [20] highlighted that larger rewards strengthen attitudinal and behavioral loyalty, while smaller rewards are only influential on behavioral dimensions. Additionally, Jin and Hung's research [29] demonstrated that monetary rewards were less powerful than in-kind rewards, because offering money usually has potential flip side that increases customers' social costs (e.g. providing inappropriate advice) which would result in the unbalance with their economic costs. Unfortunately, there is relatively little concern on "under what conditions (how)" customers should be rewarded in the RRSs, especially in the context of social media. Our research will focus on this point. We propose that rewards should be offered to sharers whose postings achieve the maximum social media engagement.

Social media engagement, travel consumers' purchase intention, WOM intention, and attitudes toward destination

Social media engagement

Study [48] done by Smith and Gallicanno debated that understanding social media engagement can be from four different perspectives, including (1) Experiential perspective. Engagement is the evolution from interacting with the interface physically to developing into cognitively steeped into the content provided by it and then onto actively transmitting the outcomes of this involvement [38]. (2) Psychological perspective. Engagement is an affective state that is motivated by human's psychology and results in extra-role behaviors. In other words, engagement is social media users' perception of the content and then what they would do to the content, such as commenting and retweeting [54]. (3) Emotional perspectives. Engagement embodies "cognitive, attitudinal and behavioral attachment" [54]. (4) Social perspective. Engagement can be understood as behavior of building relationship with others based on mutual trust and interaction through social networking tools [26]. This research underscores social media engagement from the psychological perspectives, that is to say, whether the travel

consumers engage in social media depends on whether they would comment, retweet, or give “likes” to the content.

Purchase intention, WOM intention, and attitudes toward destinations

Made by actual or former customers, eWOM is referred to any positive or negative statement concerning a product or company, which is available to multitude of individuals via the internet anytime [31]. Plenty of studies [34] on eWOM have stressed that such interpersonal interaction can affect potential customers’ purchase intention and decisions. In the context of tourism, marketing investigations done by Anderson and Ye [2, 55] found out that user-generated-content (UGC) could influence peer consumers, and the increase of the scores of UGC improving hotel sales. This due to the fact that UGC usually delivers customers’ normative beliefs that implies whether they are content or discontent with a product. As concerning what others may think of them or deem others provide more credible information of a products’ real value, peers customers may conform to others’ products choice or attitudes [40]. On the other hand, word-of-mouth intention refers to the tourists’ intention to recommend a destination to others based on their knowledge acquired from travel-related eWOM, and it is found to be associated with the credibility of the source [49].

Further, the attitudes of tourists embody three elements such as cognitive (evaluate to form an attitude), affective (psychological response to express the performance), and behavioral (verbal indication to use the product) element [27]. Tourists’ intention behind an attitude is influential to their external behaviors, favorable attitudes towards the behavior usually increases the likelihood of the tourists to perform the behavior [34]. For instance, a potential tourist is more likely to go to the destination if he considers the destination is an ideal place to travel. On social media, tourists prefer to use taglines, slogans, logos in the content, which is impactful on the peer customers’ destination image formation and attitudes as a result [1]. Although previous research has demonstrated UGC hold different effects on potential tourists’ behavioral intentions and attitude toward destinations, but little attention has been paid to explore them from the perspectives of travel content characteristics.

Influential travel postings: content characteristics and share focus

We proposed that evaluating influential content should be, in general, from the following characteristics:

Emotional. Research [5] suggests that people like to transmit positive WOM as it is more likely to yield desired impressions and make themselves look better. Theory of self-enhancement also implies that both self-described experts and non-experts prefer positive and satisfying outcomes [53]. However, there is lay belief that negative WOM are more likely to be transmitted as well. Research conducted by Berger and Milkman [7] argued this based on the analysis of data obtained from *New York Times* articles. Findings indicated that positive content was more influential than negative content, but it is on account of psychological arousal [e.g. high-arousal positive (awe) and negative (anger or anxiety); low-arousal (sadness)]. From this point of view, content causes high arousal is more influential than low arousal. In this research, as tourists showed high degree (mean value over 87%) of satisfaction and happiness towards the travel, we exclude the high- and low- arousal negative content for analysis.

Utilitarian. Studies [6, 7] found useful stories, news, or information are most likely to be shared. Such phenomena is associated with the altruistic reasons that people want to help others and also self-enhancement purposes that imply they desire to appear knowledgeable [53]. Travel postings usually include information such as destinations, services, and price that is extremely useful for potential tourists’ travel plans.

Construal level: desirability and feasibility. Eyal and his colleagues [50] distinguish construal levels between low-level and high-level construals. The former is contextualized representations that contain subordinate and incidental features of the events, whereas the later is decontextualized representations that draw the gist from the available information. In the context of consumers’ purchase decisions, the high level construal reflects consumers’ desirability concerns that contains their end-state of the actions (e.g. why go to the destinations),

whereas the low-level construals reflects that consumers' feasibility concerns that contains means utilized to reach the end-state (e.g. how to go to the destinations). Previous study [4] found wheter a potential tourist would travel, no matter hedonic or utilitarian purposes, usually depends on their construal levels.

On the other hand, decades of egocentrism research [3, 13, 42] have shown that people are inclined to focus on the self but consider little for others. This, to some extent, due to the facts that it is not easy to talk from others' perspective and self-concerning information are more accessible. Study [17] done by Emler pointed out that self-disclosure is the most common topic in our daily life. On social media, according to Naaman's investigation [36], about 80% users focus on the self. Indeed, people would consider others' beliefs and knowledge only under the circumstance when they are evoked to [52]. In this research, as tourists are incentivized to created travel postings to get the audiences' maximum social media engagement, we hypothesize that content creators would focus on others rather than themselves. Accordingly, audiences would be attracted to engage in social media as postings are more for their considerations.

3. Methods and Results

Step 1: Using economic rewards to incentivize tourists to create travel content on social media

Sixty-five participants (60% MBA students) took part in this step. Each of them were randomly assigned to one of the three writing conditions (get the maximum retweets vs. get the maximum comments vs. get the maximum likes') design. Our objective in this step is to use referral rewards to incentivize customers to create postings concerning their travel experience.

In all conditions, at first, participants were enquired about both the most impressive destination they traveled to in the last 12 months and the duration of staying. To facilitate participants and our data analysis, we asked participants different items, which are modified from the Weaver's study [51] of travel evaluation, on 100-point scale: "How happy were you with the travel?"; "How much did you consider the travel is good value for money?"; "How much were you satisfied with the travel; and "How much would you like to recommend the destination to your friends?" (anchors: "not at all"; "very much"); "How would you rank this destination in all your travel activities?" (anchors: "lowest"; "highest").

Then, we created an imaginary scenario, which cast all participants into staff of some tourism marketing campaign. Then we asked them to write a short description of travel experience that they had concerning the most impressive destination they mentioned above. The content later will be published on one of the Chinese social media (e.g. WeChat, Weibo, or travel blogs/communities). Each of the participants has an ultimate purpose, which is to obtain the maximum retweets, comments, or likes (this depends on which condition he was randomly set down). To ensure our design take effects, we committed that those who succeed in fulfilling the goal would be rewarded a bottle of wine (2011 Chateau Fleur Cardinale, values approx. 30 €). In addition, for the sake of some social media regulations, we suggest all the participants better use less than 200 Chinese characters.

Results of step 1

Participants' staying period varies from minimum half day to maximum forty days. By overall observing the postings that participants created, we found out that all of them deployed throughout the entire world in search of experience of, such as holiday, recreation, religion, health, meeting, and etc. This copes with the core spirit of tourists' definitions [10, 32] and roll out the possibilities that they might not be real tourists.

In addition, those ancillary measures facilitated us to understand the tourists' experiences better. Generally speaking, these tourists showed high degree of happiness (87.09%) and satisfaction (87.26%) toward their travel. Most of them considered their travel were good value for money

(85.82%) and they would like to recommend the destinations to their friends, and their average ranking of destinations is 38 (out of 100).

Step 2: obtaining ratings of real travel postings

Travel postings in *Step 1* now become essential and supportive in the *Step 2*. By gathering ratings of these travel postings from Chinese consumers, we predict that these postings, which were created through incentive design, have positive impacts on the audiences' social media engagement, purchase intention, WOM intension, and attitudes toward destinations.

Three hundreds of Chinese consumers (268 of them rated finally) were invited through social media and emails to complete a survey entitled "Rate travel experience" through "Qualtrics" (www.qualtrics.com; an industry-provider of Online Survey Software and Insight Platform). They were told: "You will confront six different travel postings from some random tourists on Chinese social media. We kindly invite you to go through and rate these postings based on your perceptions". Then the very 65 postings from *Step 1* were randomly assigned to them. This arrangement was made to ensure each posting has equal probability to be exposed to each rater. Then, under each posting, raters were asked to rate it on a variety of different dimensions concerning their social media engagement, behavioral intentions (purchase and WOM intention) on 100-point scale: "How likely you will retweet this posting?"; "How likely you will comment on this posting?"; "How likely you will give this posting a like?" (anchors: "very unlikely"; "very likely"); "Will you seriously take this destination as your future alternative?"; "Will you recommend this destination to your friends if they have no idea where to travel?" (anchors: "definitely will not"; "definitely will"). To analyze their attitudes toward the destination, raters were also enquired on a 7-point scale: "The place is an ideal travel destination" (anchors: 1 = "totally disagree"; 7 = "totally agree").

We obtained 1668 groups of ratings in all on the 65 travel postings. We ran one-way ANOVAs to compare ratings' variation on each dimension assessed among every three writing conditions we controlled in this incentive design.

Results of step 2

Consumers' behavioral intentions and attitudes towards destinations. Results denoted that the incentive design significantly affects consumers' purchase ($F(1665, 2) = 3.117, p < 0.05$) and WOM intention ($F(1665, 2) = 4.176, p < 0.05$). However, it does not take effect on their attitudes toward destinations. To be specific, the consumers did not deem these destinations as ideal travel places. Groups under the control of "get the maximum like" condition achieved higher mean value of purchase ($M = 50.70$) and WOM ($M = 49.75$) intention than the rest two groups

Consumers' social media engagement. Although results indicate the incentive design takes effect on consumers' likelihood of giving "likes" to the postings ($F(1665, 2) = 3.730, p < 0.05$), it fails in influencing consumers' likelihood of commenting and retweeting the postings ($P > 0.05$). In addition, group of "get the maximum likes" yields higher mean value of likelihood of giving "likes" ($M = 45.56$) than of rest of the groups.

Step 3: coding the travel postings

Although we proved the incentive design took effects on audience's (potential customers') behavioral intentions and social media engagement. However, we notice that it is the content, which is created by tourists under the RRSs design, that triggers all the impacts. As the writing conditions were different, by coding these postings from *Step 1*, in *Step 3* we predict that, (1) under the incentive design, content characteristics, share focus, and travel concerns will vary across all three writing conditions. (2) In RRSs, the content characteristics will impact consumers' behavioral intentions, and social media engagement in different ways.

Four coders were recruited to classify travel content. Each of the coders viewed every posting at least twice and rated it on many dimensions according to a classification scheme prepared in advance. In order to preserve individual variation, each of the coders did not interact or consult

with another to arrive at a consensus. We created dummy variables to control for all the characteristics.

To be specific, first, we coded emotions to examine if positive is linked to consumers' social media engagement, and behavioral intentions. The positive emotion (i.e., joy, contentment, pride, love) promote individuals to engage with their environments and partake in activities, and also it promote social transmission [6, 18]. Second, our analyses control for several potentially confounding variables including (1) utilitarian, which provides practical and helpful information concerning the travel (e.g., how to get the destination, use what transportation, which is the best season to travel to the destination) [6], (2) desirability and feasibility concerns of destination, which indicates why tourists wanted to travel and how they traveled and these concerns will resonate audiences according to their preferences [50]; (4) travel concerns, which describe the service quality (e.g. ambiance of the resort, quality of food and accommodation); price cues (e.g. how much the services cost) [47]; environmental factor concerns (e.g. land scarcity, water and air quality) [10]; and value for money concerns (e.g. the place is worth for money or under the budget) [12].

We captured the pronoun usage to check the tourists' sharing focus. The usage of singular pronouns (e.g., I, my, mine) stands for they are more focusing one themselves, whereas the usage of second-pronouns (e.g., you, your) implies that they are more focusing on others [14, 50].

Results of step 3

Can referral rewards systems (RRSs) shape what tourists share? We ran cross tabulation analysis to examine whether the content characteristics, share focus, and travel concerns were different under the three treatments. Our results showed that the percentage of the characteristics such as "positive emotional" ($\chi^2[1, N= 65] = 6,44, p < ,05$), "utilitarian" ($\chi^2[1, N= 65] = 7,85, p < ,05$), and "concerns of environmental factors" ($\chi^2[1, N= 65] = 17.54, p < ,001$); "desirability" ($\chi^2[1, N= 65] = 9,30, p < ,05$) significantly different among the three treatments, whereas the other were not ($p > ,05$). What is worth mentioning, the mean values indicate, compared with the other two groups, group "get the maximum comment" yields more positive emotional, utilitarian, and environmental concerning content, whereas the group "get the maximum retweet" create more desirability-concerning content. This implies that RRSs have positive impacts on what tourists share on social media.

In the RRSs, what content is influential to audience? In order to examine this, an independent-samples t-test was conducted.

(1) Postings created under the condition of "get maximum retweets". Results (see *Table 1*) show that (1) positive emotional content ($t[486]_{\text{likelihood of retweets}} = 2,52, p < ,05$; $t[486]_{\text{likelihood of comment}} = 3,41, p < ,01$; $t[486]_{\text{likelihood of like}} = 2,61, p < ,05$), content with desirability concerns ($t[486]_{\text{likelihood of comment}} = 2,04, p < ,05$), and environment factor concerns ($t[486]_{\text{likelihood of retweets}} = 2,06, p < ,01$; $t[486]_{\text{likelihood of comment}} = 2,10, p < ,05$; $t[486]_{\text{likelihood of like}} = 2,03, p < ,05$) have significant effects on consumers' social media engagement; (2) when there appears positive emotional content ($t[486]_{\text{purchase intention}} = 4,81, p < ,001$; $t[486]_{\text{WOM intention}} = 4,54, p < ,001$) and service quality concerns ($t[486]_{\text{purchase intention}} = 2,67, p < ,01$; $t[486]_{\text{WOM intention}} = 2,56, p < ,05$), consumers are likely to go to the destination and recommend this destination to their friends; (3) consumers' attitudes towards destinations were impacted when there appeared positive emotional content ($t[486]_{\text{attitude}} = 4,84, p < ,001$), content with desirability concerns ($t[486]_{\text{attitude}} = 2,58, p < ,05$), and the share focus is for others ($t[486]_{\text{attitude}} = 2,01, p < ,05$).

Table 1. Influence of the content characteristics, share focus, and travel concerns of postings from group of “maximum retweets”. (Notes: this table reports *t*-tests results of mean differences between “there is such content” and “there is no such content” in the postings. Statistical Significance of *t*-tests: ****p* < ,001; ***p* < ,01 **p* < ,05)

		Likelihood of Retweet	Likelihood of Comment	Likelihood of Like	Purchase Intention	WOM Intention	Attitudes
	Mention	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Positive Emotional	Yes	44,13 (35,65)	49,11 (37,58)	52,04 (39,35)	59,63 (32,23)	59,12 (32,97)	5,37 (1,53)
	No	35,30 (30,30)	37,09 (29,99)	42,26 (32,13)	43,79 (29,00)	44,09 (28,99)	4,59 (1,41)
	<i>t</i> (SE)	2,52* (3,50)	3,41** (3,52)	2,61* (3,74)	4,81*** (3,30)	4,54*** (3,31)	4,84*** (,160)
Utilitarian	Yes	37,35 (32,46)	39,96 (32,38)	45,02 (34,47)	47,47 (31,29)	47,81 (31,29)	4,76 (1,49)
	No	36,27 (27,65)	38,00 (30,70)	40,87 (31,39)	45,50 (25,42)	44,54 (25,99)	4,73 (1,38)
	<i>t</i> (SE)	-,281 (3,84)	-,503 (3,89)	-1,01 (4,11)	-,535 (3,68)	-,888 (3,67)	-,178 (,179)
Feasibility	Yes	41,02 (33,84)	40,55 (34,59)	47,37 (34,23)	49,21 (33,43)	52,34 (34,07)	4,99 (1,49)
	No	36,43 (31,56)	39,43 (31,56)	43,67 (33,93)	46,69 (29,72)	46,18 (29,56)	4,71 (1,47)
	<i>t</i> (SE)	1,24 (3,76)	,293 (3,81)	,916 (4,04)	,697 (3,61)	1,70 (3,61)	1,60 (,175)
Desirability	Yes	38,73 (33,23)	43,27 (34,74)	45,96 (36,11)	48,65 (32,12)	49,33 (32,65)	4,97 (1,47)
	No	36,13 (30,62)	37,22 (30,02)	43,24 (32,51)	46,14 (29,16)	45,90 (28,90)	4,62 (1,46)
	<i>t</i> (SE)	-,887 (2,93)	2,04* (2,96)	-,865 (3,14)	-,896 (2,81)	-1,22 (2,82)	2,58* (,136)
“I”	Yes	39,09 (30,38)	39,09 (30,38)	46,45 (33,18)	47,16 (29,46)	48,02 (29,31)	4,73 (1,58)
	No	35,60 (32,67)	35,60 (32,67)	42,59 (34,58)	47,12 (31,15)	46,64 (31,41)	4,78 (1,38)
	<i>t</i> (SE)	1,21 (2,88)	,677 (2,92)	1,25 (3,09)	,012 (2,77)	,497 (2,77)	-,373 (,134)
“You”	Yes	37,56 (29,99)	40,69 (33,69)	46,36 (35,45)	48,43 (31,23)	48,81 (31,27)	4,86 (1,50)
	No	36,95 (32,61)	37,70 (28,90)	40,62 (30,88)	44,79 (28,61)	44,44 (29,00)	4,58 (1,42)
	<i>t</i> (SE)	,204 (3,00)	-,984 (3,20)	-1,79 (3,21)	-1,23 (2,87)	-1,52 (2,88)	2,01* (,139)
Concerns of Service Quality	Yes	37,36 (30,65)	40,01 (35,00)	44,78 (35,74)	50,84 (31,37)	50,82 (31,27)	4,89 (1,53)
	No	36,96 (32,76)	39,26 (29,48)	43,88 (32,23)	43,53 (28,97)	43,79 (29,30)	4,63 (1,41)
	<i>t</i> (SE)	-,140 (2,87)	,259 (2,91)	,294 (3,08)	2,67** (2,73)	2,56* (2,74)	1,93 (,133)
Concerns of Price Cues	Yes	37,20 (31,91)	41,71 (34,70)	45,83 (37,01)	47,27 (30,66)	47,55 (30,66)	5,00 (1,35)
	No	36,46 (27,35)	39,52 (31,98)	44,25 (33,85)	44,63 (24,51)	41,71 (26,30)	4,75 (1,48)

	<i>t</i> (<i>SE</i>)	-,112 (6,63)	,326 (6,72)	,223 (7,12)	-,415 (6,36)	-,916 (6,38)	,824 (,309)
Concerns of Environmental Factors	<i>Yes</i>	38,15 (32,24)	40,64 (32,70)	45,36 (34,51)	47,43 (30,53)	47,98 (30,88)	4,82 (1,49)
	<i>No</i>	28,35 (24,66)	30,53 (24,92)	35,02 (27,28)	44,55 (29,01)	40,86 (25,77)	4,16 (1,18)
	<i>t</i> (<i>SE</i>)	2,06** (2,88)	2,10* (2,92)	2,03* (3,09)	-,628 (2,77)	-1,55 (2,77)	-3,00** (,134)
Concerns of Value for Money	<i>Yes</i>	37,54 (32,13)	40,14 (32,50)	44,59 (34,31)	47,34 (30,57)	47,70 (30,74)	4,77 (1,50)
	<i>No</i>	34,13 (27,84)	35,38 (28,30)	42,13 (31,34)	45,47 (28,90)	43,70 (28,08)	4,62 (1,24)
	<i>t</i> (<i>SE</i>)	-,738 (4,61)	-1,02 (4,68)	-,497 (4,95)	-,423 (4,42)	-,902 (4,43)	-,709 (,214)

(2) Postings created under the condition of “get maximum comments”. Results (see Table 2) indicate that (1) consumers’ social media engagement is associated with the positive emotional content ($t[558]_{\text{likelihood of retweets}} = 2,08, p < ,05$); utilitarian content ($t[558]_{\text{likelihood of retweets}} = 3,22, p < ,001$; $t[558]_{\text{likelihood of comment}} = 4,34, p < ,001$; $t[558]_{\text{likelihood of like}} = 3,83, p < ,001$), content with desirability concerns ($t[558]_{\text{likelihood of retweets}} = 2,83, p < ,01$; $t[558]_{\text{likelihood of comment}} = 1,96, p < ,05$; $t[558]_{\text{likelihood of like}} = 3,02, p < ,01$), service quality ($t[486]_{\text{likelihood of comment}} = 2,74, p < ,05$) and price concerns ($t[558]_{\text{likelihood of retweets}} = 2,82, p < ,01$; $t[558]_{\text{likelihood of comment}} = 3,81, p < ,001$; $t[558]_{\text{likelihood of like}} = 2,50, p < ,05$); (2) consumers would be impressed to go to the destinations and recommend to their friends when there appeared content with desirability concerns ($t[558]_{\text{purchase intention}} = 2,64, p < ,01$; $t[486]_{\text{WOM intention}} = 2,04, p < ,05$) and price concerns ($t[558]_{\text{purchase intention}} = 2,51, p < ,05$; $t[558]_{\text{WOM intention}} = 3,81, p < ,001$); (3) the attitudes of destination is affected by the content with environment concerns ($t[558]_{\text{attitude}} = 2,77, p < ,01$).

Table 2. Influence of the content characteristics, share focus, and travel concerns of postings from group of “maximum comment”. (Notes: this table reports *t*-tests results of mean differences between “there is such content” and “there is no such content” in the postings. Statistical Significance of *t*-tests: *** $p < ,001$; ** $p < ,01$ * $p < ,05$)

		Likelihood of Retweet	Likelihood of Comment	Likelihood of Like	Purchase Intention	WOM Intention	Attitudes
	<i>Mention</i>	<i>Mean</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>Mean</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>Mean</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>Mean</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>Mean</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>Mean</i> (<i>SD</i>)
Positive Emotion	<i>Yes</i>	39,36 (34,02)	37,43 (32,74)	41,95 (33,58)	48,38 (30,97)	44,83 (31,54)	4,76 (1,42)
	<i>No</i>	32,78 (32,71)	35,47 (30,76)	38,41 (33,42)	45,01 (29,92)	44,20 (31,12)	4,55 (1,41)
	<i>t</i> (<i>SE</i>)	2,32* (2,83)	,728 (2,70)	1,25 (2,84)	-1,30 (2,56)	-,236 (2,66)	1,80 (,120)
Utilitarian	<i>Yes</i>	40,59 (34,33)	41,94 (32,26)	44,79 (34,60)	46,76 (30,17)	43,24 (31,32)	4,65 (1,37)
	<i>No</i>	31,52 (32,03)	30,41 (30,25)	35,28 (31,58)	46,39 (30,71)	45,60 (31,27)	4,67 (1,46)
	<i>t</i> (<i>SE</i>)	3,22*** (2,82)	4,34*** (2,65)	3,83*** (2,81)	,145 (2,58)	-,893 (2,65)	-,193 (,120)
Feasibility	<i>Yes</i>	39,91 (40,16)	41,98 (37,89)	42,51 (37,81)	53,32 (32,60)	51,85 (35,45)	4,77 (1,34)
	<i>No</i>	36,00 (32,91)	36,03 (31,21)	40,12 (33,14)	45,94 (30,18)	43,82 (30,83)	4,65 (1,42)
	<i>t</i> (<i>SE</i>)	,766 (5,12)	1,23 (4,85)	,467 (5,11)	1,59 (4,63)	1,69 (4,76)	,523 (,216)

Desirability	Yes	45,27 (37,22)	42,43 (36,28)	49,83 (36,91)	54,13 (29,73)	50,51 (31,96)	4,86 (1,30)
	No	34,55 (32,52)	35,35 (30,77)	38,43 (32,52)	45,06 (30,37)	43,29 (31,04)	4,62 (1,43)
	<i>t</i> (SE)	2,83** (3,79)	1,96* (3,60)	3,02** (3,78)	2,64** (3,44)	2,04* (3,54)	1,48 (,161)
“I”	Yes	37,97 (34,89)	38,04 (32,32)	39,55 (33,95)	47,64 (29,99)	45,43 (31,22)	4,79 (1,42)
	No	35,39 (32,78)	35,65 (31,61)	40,76 (33,32)	45,94 (30,70)	43,96 (31,35)	4,59 (1,41)
	<i>t</i> (SE)	,875 (2,95)	,855 (2,78)	-,411 (2,95)	,635 (2,67)	,535 (2,75)	1,67 (,124)
“You”	Yes	36,33 (31,81)	38,23 (30,35)	42,91 (32,51)	49,07 (28,69)	47,98 (29,40)	4,61 (1,16)
	No	36,32 (34,26)	36,01 (32,28)	39,55 (33,82)	45,81 (30,92)	43,45 (31,79)	4,68 (1,49)
	<i>t</i> (SE)	,003 (3,37)	,694 (3,20)	,998 (3,36)	1,07 (3,05)	1,44 (3,14)	-,458 (,142)
Concerns of Service Quality	Yes	34,89 (33,12)	38,97 (31,57)	37,11 (32,59)	44,76 (29,69)	42,71 (30,84)	4,71 (1,32)
	No	37,20 (33,83)	32,51 (31,93)	42,28 (33,97)	47,66 (28,97)	45,57 (31,55)	4,63 (1,45)
	<i>t</i> (SE)	-,792 (2,92)	2,74* (2,76)	-1,78 (2,91)	-1,09 (2,65)	-1,05 (2,72)	,649 (,123)
Concerns of Price Cues	Yes	37,96 (33,46)	38,61 (31,65)	41,77 (33,43)	47,88 (30,64)	46,54 (31,34)	4,57 (1,29)
	No	26,65 (32,63)	24,21 (30,21)	31,74 (33,01)	38,75 (28,02)	32,38 (28,25)	4,68 (1,44)
	<i>t</i> (SE)	2,82** (4,01)	3,81*** (3,78)	2,50* (4,01)	2,51* (3,64)	3,81*** (3,71)	-,650 (,170)
Concerns of Environmental Factors	Yes	35,62 (32,04)	35,20 (31,30)	40,15 (32,95)	45,31 (30,35)	42,89 (31,73)	4,83 (1,34)
	No	37,03 (35,02)	37,83 (32,34)	40,50 (34,13)	47,80 (30,51)	46,07 (30,81)	4,50 (1,48)
	<i>t</i> (SE)	-,498 (2,84)	-,980 (2,69)	-,123 (2,84)	-,970 (2,57)	-1,20 (2,64)	2,77** (,119)
Concerns of Value for Money	Yes	38,63 (32,43)	34,26 (32,13)	37,87 (32,20)	45,27 (30,91)	42,15 (31,77)	4,78 (1,34)
	No	35,95 (33,75)	36,89 (31,80)	40,72 (33,74)	46,77 (30,38)	44,87 (31,22)	4,64 (1,43)
	<i>t</i> (SE)	653 (4,10)	-,678 (3,89)	-,696 (4,09)	-,404 (3,72)	-,711 (3,82)	,803 (,173)

(3) Postings created under the condition of “get maximum likes”. Results (see Table 3) imply that (1) positive emotional content ($t[618]_{\text{likelihood of like}} = 2,40, p < ,001$), content with desirability concerns ($t[618]_{\text{likelihood of retweets}} = 3,65, p < ,001$; $t[618]_{\text{likelihood of comment}} = 3,20, p < ,001$; $t[618]_{\text{likelihood of like}} = 2,64, p < ,001$), content share focus for others ($t[618]_{\text{likelihood of retweets}} = 2,85, p < ,01$; $t[618]_{\text{likelihood of comment}} = 2,07, p < ,05$), service quality ($t[618]_{\text{likelihood of retweets}} = 3,84, p < ,001$; $t[618]_{\text{likelihood of comment}} = 3,81, p < ,001$; $t[618]_{\text{likelihood of like}} = 2,64, p < ,01$) and environmental concerns ($t[618]_{\text{likelihood of like}} = 2,02, p < ,05$), and “value-for-money” concerns ($t[618]_{\text{likelihood of retweet}} = 2,04, p < ,05$; $t[618]_{\text{likelihood of comment}} = 2,12, p < ,05$) has significant impact on consumers. Note that feasibility concerns ($t[618]_{\text{likelihood of like}} = -2,20, p < ,05$) content also show effects on consumers, but the “no such characteristic” achieves high mean score than “there appears such characteristic”. This means, where there appears less such characteristic, the likelihood consumers’ social media engagement would increase. (2) when the content share focus is for others ($t[618]_{\text{attitudes}} = 2,15, p < ,05$), consumers’ attitude toward destination would be affected.

Table 3: influence of the content characteristics, share focus, and travel concerns of postings from group of “maximum retweets”. (Notes: this table reports *t*-tests results of mean differences between “there is such content” and “there is no such content” in the postings. Statistical Significance of *t*-tests: ****p* < ,001; ***p* < ,01 **p* < ,05)

		Likelihood of Retweet	Likelihood of Comment	Likelihood of Like	Purchase Intention	WOM Intention	Attitudes
	Mention	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Positive Emotion	Yes	35,55 (33,32)	38,73 (34,33)	47,37 (33,44)	51,24 (33,04)	47,04 (33,73)	4,81 (1,46)
	No	38,73 (34,23)	40,86 (32,30)	38,73 (36,64)	50,54 (31,01)	50,46 (31,00)	4,85 (1,40)
	<i>t</i> (SE)	-,741 (3,09)	-,683 (3,12)	2,40* (3,25)	,234 (3,00)	-1,02 (3,01)	-,321 (,134)
Utilitarian	Yes	38,92 (34,74)	36,40 (34,60)	38,84 (36,14)	49,24 (34,04)	43,38 (33,77)	4,54 (1,34)
	No	37,12 (32,21)	40,81 (32,56)	46,32 (34,08)	50,86 (31,19)	50,46 (31,36)	4,87 (1,42)
	<i>t</i> (SE)	,417 (4,32)	-1,01 (4,36)	-1,64 (4,56)	-,338 (4,19)	-1,69 (4,20)	-1,18 (,187)
Feasibility	Yes	32,91 (31,73)	34,59 (32,87)	36,94 (35,50)	44,35 (32,23)	42,68 (31,92)	4,65 (1,32)
	No	37,85 (32,52)	41,07 (32,72)	46,62 (34,07)	51,48 (31,32)	50,62 (31,54)	4,86 (1,42)
	<i>t</i> (SE)	-1,18 (4,17)	-1,54 (4,21)	-2,20* (4,40)	-1,77 (4,04)	-1,96 (4,06)	-1,19 (,181)
Desirability	Yes	44,40 (34,27)	46,83 (33,84)	51,17 (34,49)	51,23 (30,48)	52,84 (30,17)	4,75 (1,43)
	No	34,33 (31,22)	37,66 (31,96)	43,21 (34,04)	50,48 (31,91)	48,45 (32,19)	4,88 (1,40)
	<i>t</i> (SE)	3,56*** (2,83)	3,20*** (2,86)	2,64** (3,01)	,272 (2,77)	,192 (2,78)	-1,03 (,124)
“I”	Yes	35,64 (30,86)	37,16 (32,49)	39,20 (33,80)	48,93 (32,61)	46,80 (32,50)	4,78 (1,41)
	No	38,17 (33,25)	42,03 (32,83)	48,86 (34,19)	51,62 (30,86)	51,27 (31,14)	4,87 (1,41)
	<i>t</i> (SE)	-,920 (2,75)	-1,76 (2,77)	-3,35*** (2,88)	-1,01 (2,66)	-1,67 (2,68)	-,708 (,120)
“You”	Yes	40,02 (32,78)	42,35 (33,08)	46,09 (34,73)	51,62 (31,17)	50,68 (31,65)	5,00 (1,27)
	No	32,27 (31,24)	36,67 (31,92)	44,56 (33,65)	49,98 (32,02)	48,00 (31,67)	4,75 (1,48)
	<i>t</i> (SE)	2,85** (2,72)	2,07* (2,75)	,530 (2,89)	,997 (2,65)	1,05 (2,67)	2,15* (,119)
Concerns of Service Quality	Yes	42,62 (33,24)	45,69 (33,09)	49,44 (35,01)	52,20 (29,52)	52,09 (29,52)	4,81 (1,38)
	No	32,69 (31,06)	35,74 (31,82)	42,19 (33,43)	49,04 (33,19)	47,71 (33,30)	4,87 (1,44)
	<i>t</i> (SE)	3,84*** (2,58)	3,81*** (2,61)	2,64** (2,75)	1,11 (2,53)	1,72 (2,55)	-,544 (,114)
Concerns of Price Cues	Yes	28,70 (33,97)	30,04 (34,45)	30,52 (35,13)	43,83 (36,52)	37,96 (35,35)	4,70 (1,52)
	No	37,64 (32,37)	46,14 (34,20)	46,14 (34,20)	50,96 (31,27)	50,20 (31,45)	4,84 (1,40)

	<i>t</i> (<i>SE</i>)	-1,30 (6,89)	-1,54 (6,96)	-2,15 (7,25)	-1,07 (6,87)	-1,82 (6,71)	-,495 (,300)
Concerns of Environmental Factors	<i>Yes</i>	37,83 (32,84)	41,69 (32,79)	47,50 (34,21)	51,28 (31,57)	50,93 (31,57)	4,84 (1,43)
	<i>No</i>	41,69 (32,79)	37,65 (32,63)	41,59 (34,34)	49,52 (31,32)	47,32 (31,76)	4,83 (1,38)
	<i>t</i> (<i>SE</i>)	,572 (2,78)	1,45 (2,80)	2,02* (2,93)	,653 (2,69)	1,34 (2,70)	,127 (,015)
Concerns Value for Money	<i>Yes</i>	44,78 (32,55)	48,22 (32,40)	52,17 (33,16)	55,58 (28,98)	53,33 (28,74)	4,68 (1,56)
	<i>No</i>	36,37 (32,34)	39,38 (32,71)	44,73 (34,42)	50,09 (31,74)	49,30 (32,00)	4,86 (1,39)
	<i>t</i> (<i>SE</i>)	2,04* (4,61)	2,12* (4,17)	1,70 (4,38)	1,37 (4,02)	,999 (4,04)	-,983 (,180)

4. Discussion and Marketing Implications

Indeed, it is not news that social media are capable of changing the way we communicate and spread knowledge. The content on social media, on the other hand, has been identified as influential on consumers' product adoptions and satisfactions [6]. Unfortunately, little effort has been made towards why people share and why certain content becomes more influential than the others.

Our research took a perspective from the tourism industry and explored the impacts of referral rewards systems on both sharers and potential consumers. The findings were very inspiring and should be taken into account for both academic and industrial purposes. First, we found using referral rewards as the extrinsic motivations can incentivize tourists to share on social media. The postings, which were created under the incentive design, were impactful on peer consumers' social media engagement and behavioral intentions. This breaks the silence that scholars considered social media were difficult to control [56]. Second, consumers appreciate positive emotional, useful, and high-construal content rather than the opposite. These characteristics play a critical role in impacting consumers' social media engagement and behavioral intentions. In other words, they are more likely to create a viral marketing which can efficiently promote a product or service. Third, potential consumers prefer "other-focused" rather than "self-focused" content. It might be the reason that when a posting use "you", the audience will consider that the content provides advice from their considerations. Fourth, for marketing practitioners who plan to employ RRSs, the findings present how to reward the sharers to obtain the most effective outcomes. Last but not least, for tourism industry, we provided travel concern that could drive potential consumers to purchase the product and recommend it to others.

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