Affordances of Mobile Communal Referral Service

TREO Talk Paper

Haoran Zheng
Florida International University
hzheng@fiu.edu

Abstract

Communal referral service (CRS) has grown to become very popular. CRS is an online community dedicated to sharing, rating, and reviewing deals and coupons across a variety of products and services. CRS usually entails the following properties: 1) real-time deals posted by users and editors; 2) user interfaces enabled by social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, and WeChat); 3) collaborations among community members and editors enabled by community-based features. Despite the rapid growth of CRS, there is a lack of research about why and how consumers interact with CRS. Careful evaluations of the CRS are critical to ensuring that firms can effectively exploit its potential. This study uses the lens of affordance to examine consumers’ attitudes toward the use of CRS and behavioral intention derived from CRS use. We first conceptualize the concept of affordances of CRS and then examine the relationship between CRS affordances and consumer behavioral intentions. We expand the concept of affordance statics interactions among material agent, human agent and the organization to tap into the hybrid form of social media and shopping websites.

A two-phase approach research design will be used for the study. Given the limited literature on CRS, in the first phase, we utilize qualitative methods to gain an exploratory understanding of the key constructs and relationships by conducting semi-structured interviews and collecting user-generated text review data on CRS. As a result of the first phase, a research model will be developed. In the second phase, we utilize quantitative methods to operationalize the various constructs and to test the research model by developing measurement instruments and collecting survey data. We expect to test the mediating effect of CRS affordance between consumers’ demographic differences and purchase intention. We expect to further build a predictive model on the willingness to buy using CRS affordance and relevant variables.

The qualitative exploratory study phase will (1) demonstrate different sentiments towards CRS, (2) identify dimensions of affordance associated with CRS such as functional affordance, subjective affordance, and interactive affordance, and (3) reveal the advantages and shortcomings of CRS from the consumers’ perspective. The quantitative model testing study phase will (1) develop and validate the measurement instruments for assessing different dimensions of affordance and the other key constructs in the research model, and (2) provide empirical evidence of the significant role that affordance plays in the interplays among consumers, CRS providers, and product/service providers, and (3) illustrate the mediating effects of CRS affordance on consumers’ purchase intention.

This research makes both theoretical and practical contributions. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the literature by providing insights into the concept of affordance regarding CRS enabled by hybrid social media and shopping websites, by modeling and testing affordance and shedding lights on its role in influencing consumer behavioral intentions. From a practical perspective understanding of affordance can be applied in interface design, in a better understanding of users’ intention, interpretation, and evaluation of CRS. By demonstrating the effectiveness of understanding CRS perceptions and use through the lens of affordance, this study also provides product and service providers with insights on how to improve their decision-making processes and marketing strategies.