An Empirical Study of The Gratifications of Customer Resonance On Purchase Intention

Research-in-Progress

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Abstract

In recent years, social networks have become incredibly popular. Online communities such as Facebook, YouTube, and Flicker offer freely available user-created content that has enabled individuals to express their ideas and communicate their opinions to many people. People can create, modify, discuss, and share on networks. These social networks have gradually become interpersonal communication platforms—away from traditional face-to-face and word-of-mouth interaction toward new forms of online communication referred to as electronic word-of-mouth such as user-generated content. Messages resonate when information is shared among individuals. We want to have a better understanding of the use and gratification that users obtain from social networks when topics resonate with them. The purpose of this study is to investigate what drives people to share or reply to content on social networks while customers’ resonance arises and understand the impact of customer resonance on purchase intention in the social networks.

Keywords

Social networks, Customer behaviors, Use and gratification, Self-presentation, Purchase intention

Introduction

Social media is referred to as consumer-dominated media that enables customers to converse online (Mangold and Faulds 2009). There are many social media activities such as creating, modifying, discussing, and sharing Internet content (Kietzmann et al. 2011). Many types of platforms including blogging, microblogging, and social networks exist on social media (Hoffman and Fodor 2010). In recent years, social networks have become incredibly popular. Social networks are generally defined as interactive communication environments that engage customers to express their opinions, exchange their experiences, disseminate messages, and share and reply to posts. We will discuss issues such as today news or characteristics of new products on close group of Facebook, Mobile 01 or other social network sites. These social networks have created a transition in interpersonal communication—away from traditional face-to-face and word-of-mouth interaction toward new forms of online communication referred to as electronic word-of-mouth such as user-generated content (Goh et al. 2013; Mangold and Faulds 2009). Previous studies have found that customers tend to trust user-generated content, such as recommendations of products reviews from customers on social media more than messages posted by businesses in traditional media (Goh et al. 2013). There is a shift of information control from business to customers (Mangold and Faulds 2009). Customers feel empowered to control the spread of information. One customer agrees with the information and then shares it with others online. In some cases, hundreds of customers agree with the information and then separately share it with others online. Therefore, social media can rapidly facilitate information sharing on the social network (Stiegltitz and Dang-Xuan 2013). Messages resonate when information is shared among individuals. This resonance phenomenon means that people will provide feedback such as sharing or replying when they are interested and pay more attention to specific topics. Moreover, social media can influence various kinds of consumer behavior such as raise awareness, transfer information, express opinions, and purchasing behavior (Mangold and Faulds 2009). Goh et al. (2013) indicate that word-of-mouth is one of the key drivers in customer purchases.

Social media is a social platform that is available to anyone with Internet access. From the perspective of business, marketing on social media focuses on content that attracts attention from others.
and encourages them to share information. From the research of Goh et al. (2013), more then 1.5 million businesses set up fan pages on social networks to reach and engage customers to spread information about their products and services. This form of word-of-mouth marketing refers to marketing that results naturally from social media rather than from paid media from corporations. However, from the viewpoint of customers, resonance is more likely to occur on social networks, with more interaction and communication between individuals. User-generated content, which is the observed output of consumers’ engagement, is typically called word-of-mouth buzz generated by customers and is mainly composed of social networks (Goh et al. 2013; Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). Previous researchers have found that user-generated content has a strong impact on market-generated content (Goh et al. 2013). People will observe the number of reviews, replies, and the number of people sharing in user-generated content before they make purchases (Goh et al. 2013). Goh et al. (2013) indicate that people are more likely to believe user-generated content when they make repeat purchase decisions. Thus, comments or posts of specific messages of products from customers on social media may affect other customers purchase intentions and decisions. However, Riegner (2007) found that online word-of-mouth does not always result in the intention to buy. Sixty-one percent of users were influenced by offline sources such as browsing in a retail store rather than influenced by online word-of-mouth. This research suggested several reasons why consumers are not affected by online word-of-mouth (Riegner 2007). First, consumers want to see and touch items that they want to buy (Riegner 2007). Second, some user-generated content has too much emotional attachment to the product resulting in people not believing the reviews (Riegner 2007). Third, some personal and confidential details limit user-generated content on purchasing decisions (Riegner 2007). For example, some customer reviews about drug use would not directly affect other customer intentions to buy and use. The conclusion indicates that word-of-mouth does not affect individuals’ purchase intention. According to the above discussion, we want to learn whether customer resonance with another form of customer word-of-mouth behavior has an impact on intention to buy.

As a new communication paradigm, social media plays an important role in promoting information dissemination on social networks (Stiglitz and Dang-Xuan 2013). The purpose of this study is to investigate what drives people to share or reply to content on social networks while customers’ resonance arises and understand the impact of customer resonance on purchase intention. Below are the research questions we will investigate:

RQ1. What factors may have an influence on customer resonance on a social network?

RQ2. What effects does customer resonance have on purchase intentions?

We want to have a better understanding of the use and gratification that users obtain from social networks when topics resonate with them. In order to do so, we created a research model based on a use and gratification perspective. We wanted to understand different types of gratification underlying social media usage. We predict that content gratification, social-relation gratification, and self-presentation gratification will have an influence on customer resonance. Content gratification is based on the perspective of Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), who state that user-generated content is the main component for people using social media. Social networks are made up of varieties of individuals’ relations. Hence, social-relation gratification is based on the viewpoints of Chu and Kim (2011), who state that people who use social networks want to build and maintain social relations in their personal networks. People who want to communicate with others create personal pages as a form of self-presentation. Based on the perspective of Schau and Gilly (2003), many activities on social networks could be viewed as a type of self-presentation. Once customer resonance is generated, we want to learn whether the resonance arising between customers has an impact on purchase intention. We will conceptualize and develop independent variables to explore different types of gratification, customer resonance, and purchase intentions.

**Resonance**

Online communities such as Facebook, Youtube, and Flicker offer freely available user-created content that has enabled individuals to express their ideas and communicate their opinions to many people (Riegner 2007). When people are interested in a topic, they are more likely to discuss and share messages, thus creating resonance. The phenomenon of resonance is caused by responses that are triggered when someone who makes a posting and others react quickly (Gruhl et al. 2004). We will discuss the phenomenon of resonance from the perspectives of social media, business, and individuals.
From the perspective of social media, Solis (2010) defines resonance as successfully sharing social objects such as posts, pictures, and videos. Resonance means the speed and degree at which social objects change hands (Solis 2010). Regarding the Twitter platform, Liand Shiu (2012) stated that resonance is the interaction between users and sponsored tweets such as retweets, replies from the perspectives of advertising, and so on. From the perspective of business, Solis (2010) states that there are three critical-path stages of social media: relevance, resonance, and significance to achieve social-media business goals. Businesses first need to make their message relevant concerning their products or services, which can then attain resonance with customers (Solis 2010). The transition from relevance to resonance is sharing, which is motivated by individuals incentivized by thoughtfulness, values, and empathy on social media (Solis 2010). At least, based on the viewpoints of individuals, resonance is a cognitive engagement when an audience participates in media (Russell 2009). In addition, resonance is a pre-conditional behavior of word-of-mouth. Word-of-mouth refers to a customer-to-customer interaction that describes interactions among customers in online environments (Libai et al. 2010). Once a customer is aware and engaged, he or she will have a willingness to communicate with others (Hoffman and Fodor 2010). Regardless of whether the person is satisfied or dissatisfied, they share their attitudes, opinions by posting, replying or even sharing. The differentiation of resonance and word-of-mouth is explained in Figure 1. Resonance is simply a behavior between user and post on the social networks. Hence, resonance is focus on individual level. On the other hand, word-of-mouth is a form of interaction among all users on the social networks and indicate on large-scale groups on the social networks.

Based on the above perspectives, we defined resonance as the pre-conditional behavior of word-of-mouth from any interactions such as clicking Like button, replying or sharing between individuals on a social networks platform. Resonance is the phenomenon of a message going through on social media. So resonance could be seen as an indicator to evaluate social media success. When strong resonance occurs, messages resonate more and reach a larger audience on social media platform.

Previous researchers have used the repost rate as an indicator to evaluate the behavior of sharing about resonance on online platforms (Li and Shiu 2012). Hoffman and Fodor (2010) indicated that metrics such as the number of reposts/shares and number of responses could be seen as a performance evaluation of resonance on social networks.

Consumers who have emotional and useful benefits tend to participate in online discussions (Riegner 2007). Thus, people will reply to messages to gain more information or they may share messages to spread information. Individuals that share information with their friends enhance the resonance on network platforms because individuals select, judge and deliver information to their friends whose friend think they will like (Li and Shiu 2012). In addition, Libai et al. (2010) state that one of the most important results of customer engagement is that people are influenced directly or indirectly by engaged customers.
So we want to study what factors motivate individuals to share and how those factors then affect other customers in online environments.

**Use and gratification theory**

Use and gratification (U&G) theory was proposed by Katz (1959) and developed based on the social and psychological needs that generated expectations of the media (Chung and Austria 2010). The theory explains that people have different gratification needs that result in different patterns of media usages (Katz 1959). In a new technology environment, there are many choices of mass communication venues such as the Internet to activate audiences to select and satisfy their needs (Ruggiero 2000). Therefore, U&G suggests that different choices of media usage are used according to peoples' needs in order to satisfy their demands. In sum, different peoples' motivations result in different media usage.

Use and gratification theory speculates that people are goal directed with regard to their needs and motivations. Social and psychological literature has indicated five categories of use and gratification needs that result in people using mass media (Katz et al. 1973; Sangwan 2005). These needs include functions of cognitive, affective, social integrative, personal integrative, and tension release (Katz et al. 1973; Sangwan 2005). Cognitive needs are related to acquiring information for knowledge or a better understanding. Affective needs are related to aesthetic, pleasurable, and emotional experiences. Social-integrative needs are related to contact with family, friends, and others. Personal-integrative needs are related to the desire for an individual to be more credible and confident of their status. Tension-release needs are related to escape.

Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) classify two dimensions that include utilitarian and hedonic value in the area of consumer consumption. Information is one of the most important dimensions in use and gratification theory for users of social networks (Bonds-Raackeand Raacke 2010). Jahnand Kunz (2012) mention that the functional and hedonic values in content play important roles for users’ browsing information on social-network fan pages. Thus, cognitive needs and affective needs could be categorized into two values of content gratification here. Chuand Kim (2011) state that social relationship-related factors are crucially related to all activities on social network platforms. The components of social relationships on a social network are tie strength, homophily, trust, and interpersonal influence (Chuand Kim 2011). Therefore, social-integrative needs are related to social-relationship gratification. Tufekci (2008) states that people participate in activities on social networks because customer behavior could be recognized as a form of self-presentation as theorized by Goffman (2002). Hence, personal-integrative needs could be seen as self-presentation gratification. Exploring customer resonance, we think that the motivation of escape in tension-released needs is not feasible. So we discard this construct and do not discuss it here. Therefore, to view customer resonance on social media, we divide it into three dimensions of gratification: content gratification, social-relationship gratification, and self-presentation gratification.

**Content gratification**

The most important reason that people take part in social networking is to gather information or provide information to others (Foster et al. 2010). Without the limits of online space and time, information could be offered anytime or anywhere on the social network. According to Hirschman and Holbrook (1982), consumer consumption is divided into utilitarian and hedonic by their perceived values. Hence, in the field of content area, we divide the utilitarian and hedonic function into two values delivered on the social network.

Utilitarian is one dimension through which to evaluate consumer attitudes (Batra and Ahtola 1991). Bloch and Richins (1983) define utilitarian value as a customer-involving process such as collecting information out of necessity rather than recreation. Utilitarian value is mostly relevant to “an errand,” “work,” or “useful” (Babin et al. 1994). It is a cognitively consumptive object that means “how useful or beneficial the object is.” Based on an information perspective, Jin et al. (2009) also define information usefulness as the degree to which information is perceived by individuals to be helpful and informative. Thus, the utilitarian value of content means how useful or beneficial the information is on social networks (Batra and Ahtola 1991). For example, individuals are more likely to talk about topics when they feel they are well informed (Mangold and Faulds 2009). Hence, we consider that when more detailed information exists, people might be more willing to discuss and share the message.
Customer resonance on social networks

The other dimension through which to evaluate consumer attitudes is hedonic value (Batra and Ahtola 1991). Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) defined hedonic consumption as involving emotional arousal and feelings such as joy, jealousy, fear, rage, and rapture. It is a cognitively consumption object meaning “how pleasant and agreeable those associated feelings are.” Therefore, the hedonic value of content means how pleasant and agreeable the feelings associated with the benefits of information on social networks (Batra and Ahtola 1991). In the online environment, content often reflect an author’s emotional state such as someone’s evaluation or judgment about a topics or product (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan 2013). In addition, content that is fun, surprising, highly visible, with emotional attributes is more likely to promote conversation and sharing of information (Mangold and Faulds 2009). Mangold and Faulds (2009) state that people like to discuss something that they feel is outrageous or something that makes them feel special. So emotional messages are a successful factor in getting customers to pass messages along (Dobele et al. 2007). For example, Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2013) find that emotional Twitter messages tend to be retweeted quickly and more often than neutral messages. In other words, customers are more likely to tell others things they are emotionally connected to. In sum, researchers have suggested that emotional content is a main driver of information diffusion that results in user information-sharing behavior (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan 2013).

Social-relation gratification

Chuand Kim (2011) developed a conceptual model of social relation that has an influence on customer engagement that includes five factors: tie strength, homophily, trust, and normative and informational-interpersonal influence are all important factors resulting in word-of-mouth behavior. Social relation is identified to one-to-many relation in order to explore whether user is resonated when he/she interact with others on social networks.

Social tie

Tie strength refers to ‘the potency of the bond between members of a network’ (Mittal et al. 2008). Researchers divided strength of a relationship can be divided strong and weak relation and users are connected not only by one type of relationship (Granovetter 1973; Kietzmann et al. 2011). Strong ties such as close friends or family means that we develop deep relationships with these people and a strong tie of social relation means that we are within an individual’s personal network in order to provide substantive and emotional support (Pigg and Crank 2004). One the other hand, weak ties such as strangers seeking information on specific topic are those that we would not develop a deep relationship with and weak ties of social relation are often among weaker and less personal social relationships (Pigg and Crank 2004).

In terms of social media, relations that are associations between individuals that connect them and converse is an important function (Kietzmann et al. 2011). We can classify tie strength to strong ties and weak ties by previous research definitions of social ties on social networks (Granovetter, 1973). While customer browsing on social networks, choices of different kinds of products may be influenced by both stable and intimate “strong-tie” interactions and randomly or remotely connected “weak ties” (Chuand Kim 2011). For example, friendships on YouTube could be seen as based on users’ interests and tastes (Susarla et al. 2012). Users can follow their friends or classmates to learn about their online actions. This is called a strong tie. On the other hand, users can communicate with people whose identity they may not know to acquire information. In other words, we consider that strong ties definitely have an impact between individuals or groups replying to posts from their friends, but the asynchronous characteristic of weak ties on social network sites will make individuals more willing to express their opinions or share posts with their friends.

Based on strong ties and weak ties of perceived tie-strength value would motivate individuals to exchange information with one another and to expand content out, thereby creating resonance. Weak ties act as a bridge function that allows information to disseminate and propagate among people and strong ties are more likely to be activated for recommendation behavior (Chuand Kim 2011).

Homophily

The definition of homophily is the degree to which individuals who interact with others have certain similar characteristics (Rogers and Bhowmik 1970). Prior research suggests that people and groups are
likely to have same socio-demographic characteristics such as age, gender and race (Gilly et al. 1998). They also have and share the same attitudes and beliefs (Festinger 1962). So the connections that exist between them are often based on having similar characteristics such as attitudes or interests (Gremler et al. 2001).

In an online environment, Sheldon (2008) indicates that individuals like to find others with similar interests and with whom they feel would be a member of their community. Sometimes people spread an online message because they want to meet others who share their interests (Riegner 2007). For example, on YouTube’s social network platform people who reply and share user-generated contents such as videos based on user interests could be characterized as a phenomenon of homophily between users (Susarla et al. 2012).

From the perspective of sociology, people who feel a high level of similarity tend to form relationships (Gremler et al. 2001). In addition, individuals are more likely to communicate and interact with those who share similar attributes (Mouw 2006). In other words, interpersonal communication often happens under conditions in which two individuals have similar preferences (Chuand Kim 2011).

**Trust**

Trust is defined as a willingness to rely on an exchange with partners in whom one has confidence (Moorman et al. 1993). Morganand Hunt (1994) also defined trust as the perception of confidence in the exchange partner’s reliability and integrity and state that trust can be seen as an important factor to maintaining successful relationships.

In an online virtual community, trust is an essential factor for individuals who take part in exchange messaging to other members (Jarvenpaa et al. 1998). In social media, reputation helps to identify the status of others and is considered a matter of trust, referring to people and content (Kietzmann et al. 2011). The reputation of a video may be based on the “counts of views,” “ratings” or “number of comments and replies” on the YouTube platform content (Kietzmann et al. 2011). Thus trust is one of important factor that affects customer-engagement behavior in a customer-based relationship (Van Doorn et al. 2010).

From the users in online environments, Ridings et al. (2002) suggest that trust plays an important role in disseminating messages or exchanging information. Most individuals on social networks are relatively invisible rather face-to-face; thus, it is hard to communicate or share information. As a result, a higher level of trust will lead to a higher level of word-of-mouth behavior because trust can create an open atmosphere in which communication and sharing are more likely to occur (De Matosand Rossi 2008).

**Interpersonal influence**

Interpersonal influence is an important social factor that affects customer decision-making (Chuand Kim 2011; D’Rozarioand Choudhury 2000; Parkand Lessig 1977). Interpersonal influence could be classified into two dimensions: normative influences and informational influences (Bearden et al. 1989).

**Normative influences**

The definition of normative influences is the idea of corresponding to expectations from others, which affects attitudes, norms and values (Burnkrantand Cousineau 1975). People who have a high level of normative influence are more likely to correspond to others’ expectations and seek others’ approval (Chuand Kim 2011). In the online environment, Dholakia et al. (2004) have mentioned that individuals hope to receive acceptance and approval from other members. Many individuals take part in activities to escape their loneliness, find other members who have similar interests, or obtain approval from others (Dholakia et al. 2004). For instance, people taking part in YouTube could be seen as representing a form of normative influence because users customize their personal pages in order to obtain peer recognition from interacting with other users (Susarla et al. 2012).

From the perspective of users, Riegner (2007) mentions that people want to spread their message because their friends are talking about it. According to the studies discussed above, we consider that
people who refer to a high degree of normative influence tend to communicate, reply, or share information because they want to be accepted or find others who have the same interests.

**Informational influences**

The definition of informational influence is the tendency to accept information from others and the degree to which an individual is directed to search topics, products, or brand (Bearden et al. 1989; Deutschand Gerard 1955). People who have a high level of informational influence tend to gain more social benefits such as friendship, supports, or knowledge in an online environment (Dholakia et al. 2004). In addition, Chu and Kim (2011) state that people who with a high level of informational influence are likely to obtain information and acquire useful contacts from others while they seek or decide whether to buy. Hence, people who refer to a high degree of informational influence tend to communicate, reply, or share information because they want to obtain more useful information from others in social networks.

**Self-presentation gratification**

Self-presentation is built as identity and social performance in Goffman’s theory and defined such that people want more self-assurance and personal identity in a social environment (Jahn and Kunz 2012). People who display signs and symbols would communicate their desired impression to others (Schau and Gilly 2003).

In recent years, social networks have become popular platforms for people to express themselves on. Tufekci (2008) has found that there are many activities on a social network that can be seen as a form of self-presentation according to the theory by Goffman (2002). People are willing to talk about certain topics online when those issues may present the way they want others to see them or sustain their desired self-image to others in a social network (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010; Mangold and Faulds 2009). With the ease of creating a personal page, individuals engaging in the YouTube platform could be seen as self-expressive to others (Susarla et al. 2012). For example, users who upload videos and make comments could be seen as engaging in a self-image on YouTube (Susarla et al. 2012). We suppose that if people have a strong intention to intensify their self-image, they communicate through talking more often, replying to posts from others, or even sharing posts or messages.

**Purchase intention**

Purchase intention is a result of pre-purchase satisfaction (Chen et al. 2010). In an online environment, consumers could be influenced by information on purchasing decisions (Mangold and Faulds 2009).

Sharing action in resonance is one word-of-mouth content-creation activity that influences purchasing decisions (Riegner 2007). An example of this is the social-shopping service Groupon, which sells discounts to customers online. These types of corporate make use of mapping a user’s connectivity to share discount information on a social network (Kietzmann et al. 2011). The sharing of customer behavior leads to purchase intention and then to purchase.

Form the perspective of customers, Mangold and Faulds (2009) mention that using search information to make purchase intentions in social media is a trustworthy platform through which to obtain information about products and services. Jin et al. (2009) state that individuals read comments or opinions posted by other users before they make a purchase intention. Therefore, user clicking Like button, replying or even sharing posts means they read information from the post when they engage in social networks. Thus, we consider that people who search and see user-generated content with higher volumes of resonance behavior such as clinking Like button, replying or sharing will lead to a higher-purchase intention.
Methodology

Research framework and theory development

This study describes a better understanding of what factors potentially raise resonance while participating in social-network activities and whether resonance among customers affects their intention to buy. The conceptual framework of this study is based on the use and gratification theory. We separately use content construct, the social-relation construct, and the self-presentation construct to develop the framework in which to explore customer resonance and purchase intention. The framework is examined in Figure 2.

![Diagram showing the research framework](image)

**Figure 2. Constructs definition and research framework.**

H1A: The utilitarian value of content is positively related to resonance on social networks.
H1B: The hedonic value of content is positively related to resonance on a social network.
H2A: The tie strength of a social relation is positively related to resonance on a social network.
H2B: Homophily within a social relation is positively related to resonance in a social network.
H2C: Trust within a social relation is positively related to resonance in a social network.
H2D: Normative influences of a social relation are positively related to resonance in a social network.
H2E: Informational influences of social relation are positively related to resonance in a social network.
H3: Self-presentation is positively related to resonance in a social network.
H4: Resonance in a social network is positively related to purchase intention.

Research variables

Customer-behavior resonance of sharing and replying on social networks is the phenomenon we want to discuss in our research. In our research model, we further explore three constructs that result in customer resonance: content, social relation and self-presentation. Content is divided into utilitarian and hedonic value. Social relation is composed of social ties, homophily, trust, normative influence, and
interpersonal influence. Self-presentation is individuals’ impressions that they want to convey to others. Lastly, we will discuss customer purchase intention, which is a form of customer pre-purchase satisfaction on a social network platform.

**Data collection**

We will focus on two social media platforms that provide user-generated content in which customer can discuss new products or recommendations for specific product categories. The platforms separately are Facebook and Mobile 01. Facebook is the main social network site in the world and Mobile 01 is separately a product-dominated social website in Asia which offers technology products such as notebooks, cameras, smart phones to users to discuss on it. The social network platforms we selected not only have user-generated content but also product- or service-directed websites that promote discussion and purchasing among users. We will then separately offer four kinds of questionnaires for each social network platform to customers. For each questionnaire, we will provide one type of user-generated content such as product reviews to other users who are engaged in social network platforms to browse and ask them to answer questions on the questionnaire. We assumed to collect a total of 400 questionnaires.

**Measurement**

We use multi-item scales to test the constructs in our model according to collected data from different social network platforms. Each construct is designed by adapting existing scales and modified to accommodate the research construct. The measurement of informational and hedonic value of content gratification is adapted from the scale from Jahnd and Kunz (2012). The hedonic scales were also based on those designed by Babin et al. (1994). For tie strength, homophily, trust, interpersonal influence we adapted from the social-relation conceptual model via the social network from Chuand Kim (2011). Self-presentation gratification scales were based on the social-value component of customer-value framework from Jahnd Kunz (2012). Customer-resonance scales were based on Chiu et al. (2006) and this study. The measurement of purchase intention is based on the scale from Lu et al. (2010). The constructs contain several observable indicators that represent some questions on the questionnaire. All survey items are evaluated by five-point interval scales, ranging from 1 (strong disagree) to 5 (strong agree). The objectives of this study are to empirically test the hypothesized relationship between factors and resonance and resonance and purchase intention. A two-step approach was employed to analyze the data (Andersonand Gerbing 1988). In the first phase, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) would be performed to access the goodness of fit, composite reliability, and construct validity of the measurement model. In the second phase of the analysis, we will test the proposed hypotheses by using a structural equation model with a maximum-likelihood method to test the relationship among constructs. Each construct is estimated by AMOS 7.0 and SPSS 17.0.

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