IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CONSUMER ATTITUDE TOWARDS A BRAND WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

Hospitality industry is growing at a very rapid rate. Hence the importance of creating positive attitude becomes even more important and Social Media tools if use effectively can benefit the overall industry as a whole and a specific brand in particular. Social Media is becoming one of the main tools used to spread information among customers. Blogs, social networking sites, content communities, virtual worlds or collaborative projects all represent groups of people that create and share content inside and outside of professional routines.

The potential influence of social media on hospitality industry has attracted considerable interest in academia and industry alike. However, most of the research that has been conducted has been from customers' and not from the service provider perspective. Hence, to bridge this gap, this paper is an attempt to find out impact of social media on consumer attitude towards a brand in hospitality industry.

Keywords: Social Media, Consumer Attitude, Hospitality Industry.

Introduction

Attitudes help consumers easily reach daily judgments and decisions so that he/she can live their days more efficiently. If consumers have strong attitudes toward certain brands in the category, they can make a quick decision and save time and cognitive resources for other

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important things. In this sense, holding (strong) attitudes, either positive or negative are very much important for a particular brand.

Social media, which are web-based, mobile based or cloud based technologies have created wonders as far as accessibility is concerned. For marketers this phenomenon is of high interest as social media is becoming an important source of customer information sharing, awareness, support and empowerment. These are particularly important for hospitality and tourism area field since Social media provides opportunities to manage and present business content and it helps in identifying core values that induces customers trust towards a particular brand.Through this paper, an attempt has been to find out the factors which influences the consumer attitude towards choosing a particular hotel. Customers are first divided on the bases of their level of cognition, then factors which can influence attitude formation using social Media for different type of customers are identified so that marketers can leverage this information and try to create strong and positive attitudes towards their brand with the help of Social Media.

Literature Review

Kwon and Nayakankuppam (2015) in their study of The Role of Implicit Self-Theories in Forming and Accessing Attitudes suggests that entity theorists expect more consistency in objects, a smaller sampling of information is considered sufficient for the formation of an attitude. They rehearse their attitudes from the earliest encountered information to make it chronically accessible, and it is the strength of this object–evaluation node in memory that results in attitude strength. In contrast, incremental theorists attend to more information and appear to require longer to reach some level of comfort in forming their attitudes. They also do not appear to rehearse their attitudes spontaneously. Attitude strength is thus an outcome of effortful cognitive elaboration that results in rehearsal and dense interconnections caused by the repeated activation of the attitude schema in response to processing multiple items of information

Each company's aim is to create positive brand attitude or if not positive, then at least an attitude that will lead to profitable results, leading positions on the market and opportunities for future growth. So a brand needs to take into consideration both the entity theorists as well as incremental theorists and make their marketing strategies different for both the segments as per their needs to make a strong brand attitude. This can be done by continuously providing the relevant information to the consumers so that they can form a strong brand attitude which can lead to repeat purchase.

Social Media is becoming one of the main tools used to spread information among customers. Blogs, social networking sites, content communities, virtual worlds or collaborative projects all represent groups of people that create and share content inside and outside of professional routines. For marketers this phenomenon is of high interest as social media is becoming an important source of customer information sharing, awareness, support and empowerment

Trust in a particular brand is encouraged by social media, significantly affects their attitude formation and their intention to buy. In addition, perceived usefulness is the other construct of the research that significantly affects the attitudes and intention to buy. When consumers experience high levels of system quality and information quality through social media, they are more likely to have strong brand attitude. (Hajli, 2013)

These findings are particularly important for hospitality and tourism area field since Social media provides opportunities to manage and present business content and it helps in identifying core values that induces customers trust towards a particular brand.

Social network offers media technologies that can facilitate online functionality and monitoring perspectives wherein the data gathered can be used to develop their services for customer satisfaction.

Gaur and Rishi (2012) argues in the study of thematic analysis of customer reviews from world's top tourist destinations provides insights that factors like creating a strong differentiated brand identity, service management, service satisfaction with respect to pricing, hotel's attributes like ambience, technology supported services and internet facilities, managing check-in and check-out sales channels , managing customer feedbacks are all need to be looked upon so as to ensure that customer avoid alternative hotel brand.

All these factors if communicated through the use of proper social media channels can have a great impact on Consumer satisfaction which lead to a strong brand attitude and it is a two way process wherein hospitality industry can use social media to engage customers and clients in dialogue and recognize their needs.

Objectives of the Research

Following are the objectives of this Research.

1. To segment the consumers as per their attitude formation process.
2. To study the impact of Social Media towards making or altering brand attitude for both entity theorists (low need of cognition) as well as incremental theorists(high need of cognition)

Research Design

Two models were used for the further Research. First model classified the respondents into two groups i.e. entity theorists with low need for persuasion and incremental theorists with high need of persuasion.

Second model is used to find out the most important Social Media factors that helps in making or altering brand attitude for both entity theorists and incremental theorists.

And finally helpful insights are drawn through which marketers can leverage the use of proper social media channels for their differentiated brand positioning.

Schematic view of the two Models used in the research is as follows

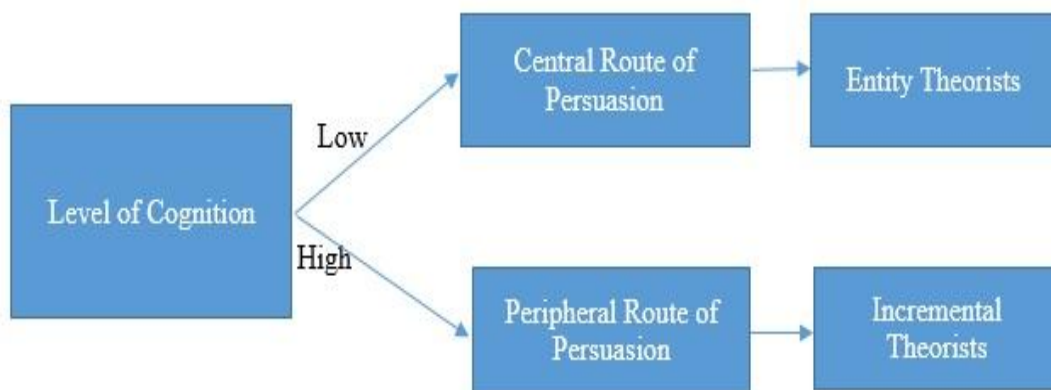**Model to divide the respondents into two groups**

Figure 1: Model Used for dividing respondents into two groups.

As shown in the model, level of cognition for entity theorists is low and they follow a central route of persuasion. In order for this form of persuasion to work, the person receiving the message must be motivated to listen to the message and be able to think about and comprehend the message and doesn't look for external cues.

Second set of respondents i.e. Incremental Theorists have high need for cognition and follows a peripheral route of persuasion. The peripheral route to persuasion is when a person is persuaded by something other than the argument or content of the message. He/she decides whether to agree with the message based on other cues besides the strength of the arguments or ideas in the message. Hence, they have a high need for cognition and looks for extensive information prior to take any decision.

Entity theorists normally utilize low elaboration than incremental theorists. (Kwon and Nayakankuppam (2015)). Hence, attitudes of entity theorists and incremental theorists can

vary significantly. So, dividing respondents in these two groups as per their attitude formation process gives a clear perspective of the needs of customers

Model U\used to find out factors which can influence attitude formation using social media

After dividing the respondents into Entity and Incremental Theorists, second model is applied which gave information about the most important factors which entity theorists and incremental theorists looks for while using Social Media channel for seeking information that influences in making or altering brand attitude. The basis of this model is based in Diffusion of Innovation Model.

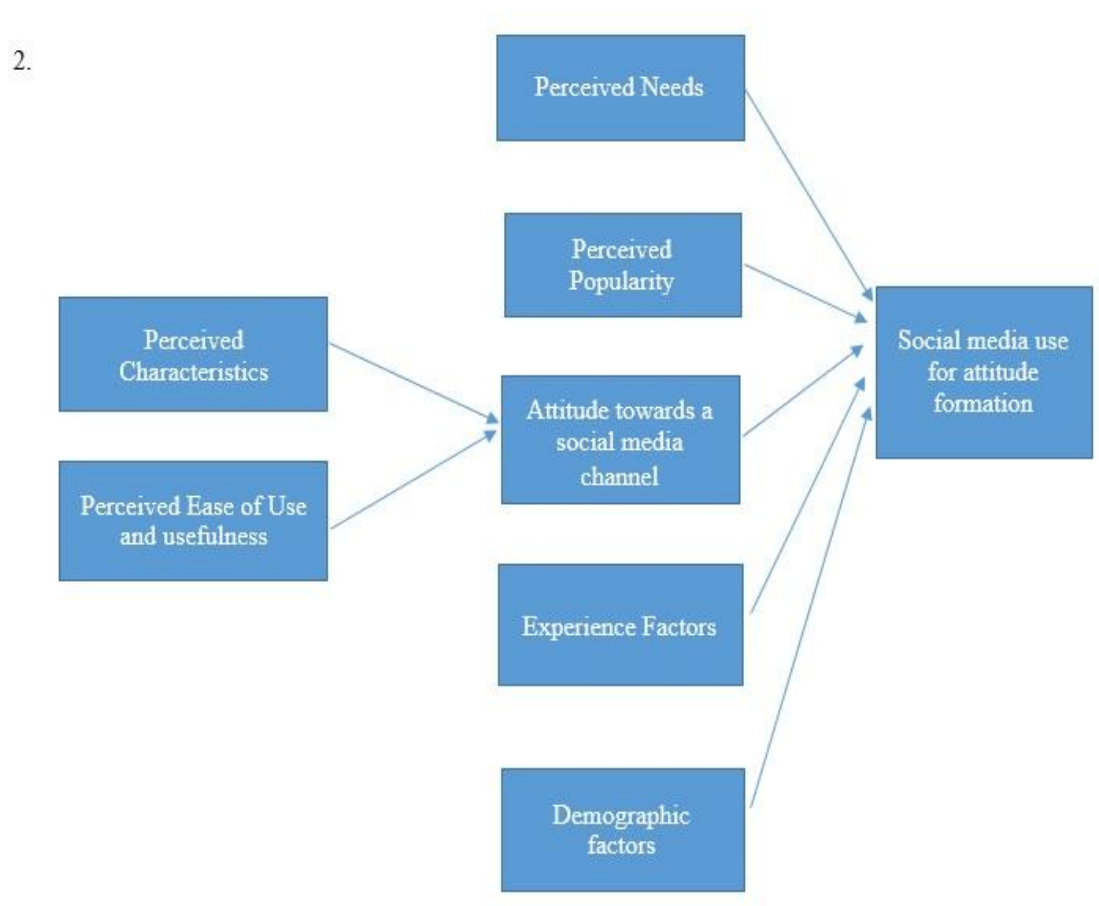Model to find out the important factors is shown below

Figure 2: Model Used to find out factors which can influence attitude formation using Social Media

Research Methodology

General research approach is based on exploratory research as well as descriptive research. To start, secondary data, literature reviews, statistics and case studies has been used. A Questionnaire Survey was used for primary data collection. Non-probability sampling technique was applied in administering the questionnaire. The sample size was 312.

Variables used for understanding the Consumer attitude making process were based on their level of cognition i.e. whether they took extra efforts to look into various services and facilities provided by the hotel before choosing it. Variables like Courtesy and Friendliness of Staff, Ambience, Price, Location, Free High Speed Internet (Wi-Fi), Free Breakfast, Discounted Packages etc. were taken into consideration to segment the customers as per their attitude making process. Variables to find out the Social Media factors used for making or altering brand attitude were considered on the basis of Diffusion of Innovation model.

Data Analysis and Findings

To analyze the collected data SPSS tool is used to provide statistically significant results. Statistical tests like Clustering and Factor analysis have been used to satisfy the above said objectives.

Cluster Analysis

Cluster analysis has been performed on 13 pre-decided variables asked in the questionnaire statements rated using 5 point Likert scale, to divide the respondents into two groups as per their attitude formation process. Agglomerative Hierarchical Clustering technique using Complete Linkage as a distance measure is used to identify the effective number of clusters.

Agglomerative techniques begin with n clusters and sequentially merge similar clusters until a single cluster is left. Hence, a diagrammatic view of effective number of cluster is obtained. Complete linkage ensures the maximum accuracy while cluster identifying cluster membership because distance between two clusters is the distance between the two farthest points, one from each cluster.

Cluster Analysis Result

Cases					
Valid		Missing		Total	
N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
312	100.0	0	.0	312	100.0

a. Squared Euclidean Distance used
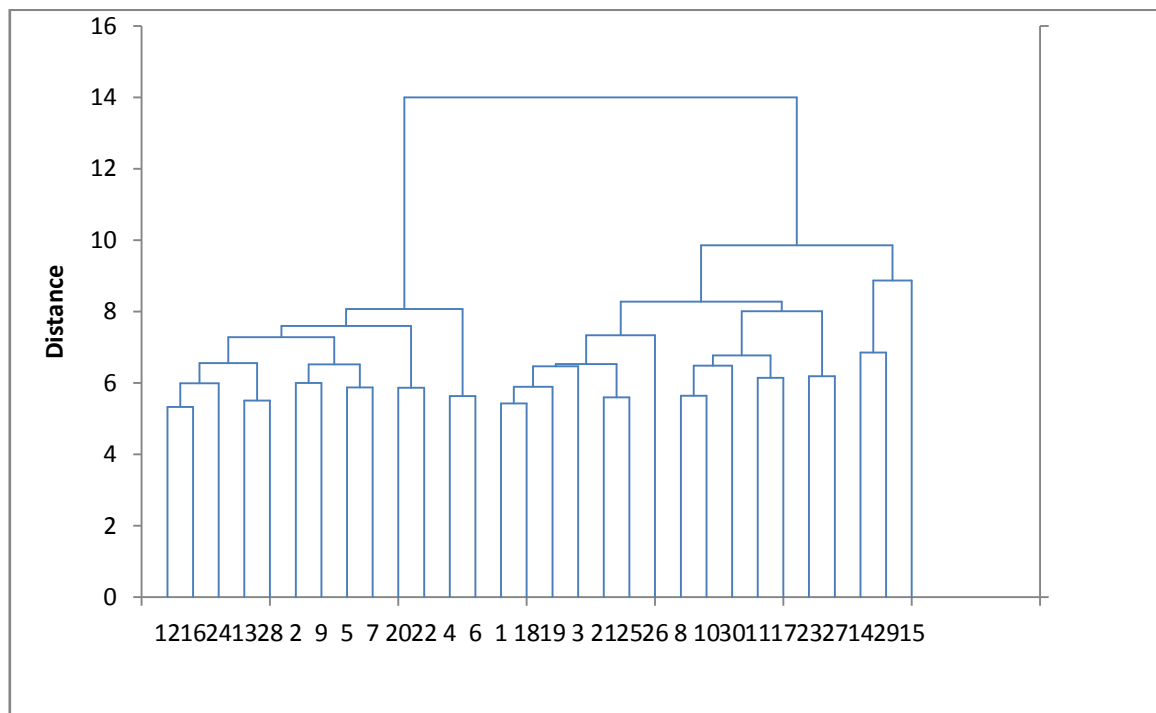b. Complete Linkage

Figure 3: Case Processing Summary

Figure 4: Dendrogram

Cluster	1	115.000
	2	197.000
Valid		312.000
Missing		.000

Figure 5: Number of Cases in each Cluster

Interpretation and Findings

By looking at the dendrogram, it is evident that the effective numbers of clusters are two. Using figure 3, it is known that in cluster 1, there are 115 elements and cluster 2 consists of 197 elements. Characteristics of both the clusters were found out using excel software. Characteristics are as follows

Characteristics and Naming of cluster 1

By looking at elements of cluster 1, it was observed that the elements scored less important to important on all the thirteen parameters used for clustering.

Hence it can be concluded that the respondents belonging to cluster 1 have a low need of cognition and they follow a central route of persuasion.

Hence, cluster 1 can be termed as **Entity theorists** because of the above said characteristics

Demographics-Entity Theorists

Following are the observed demographics of entity theorists
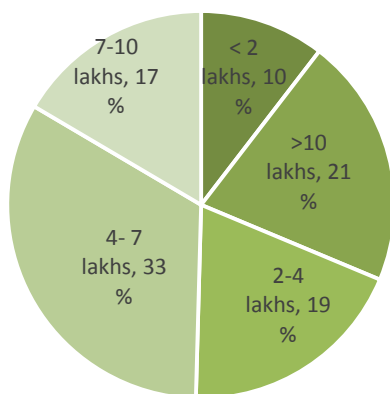
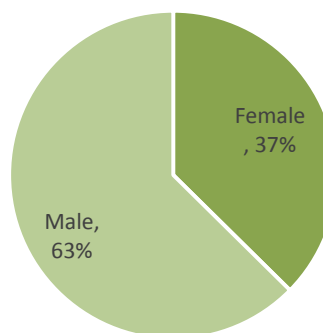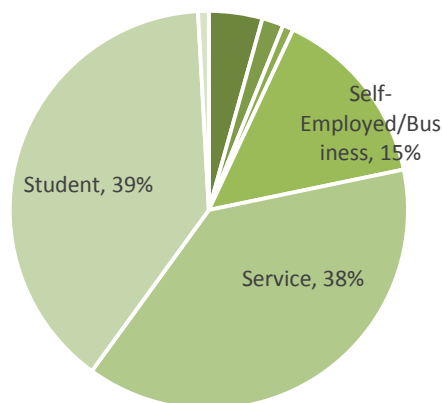Figure 6: Annual Income   Figure 7: Gender

Figure 8: Profession

Characteristics and Naming of cluster 2

Elements of cluster 2 of most important to critical on all the parameters. So**,** respondents belonging to cluster 2 have high need of cognition Hence, cluster 2 can be termed as **Incremental theorists**.

Demographics-Incremental Theorists

Following are the observed demographics of Incremental theorists
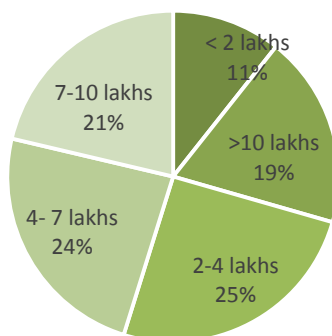
Figure 9: Annual Income

Figure 10: Gender   Figure 11: Profession
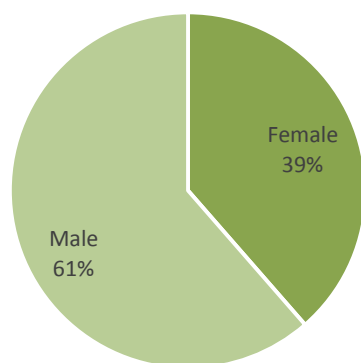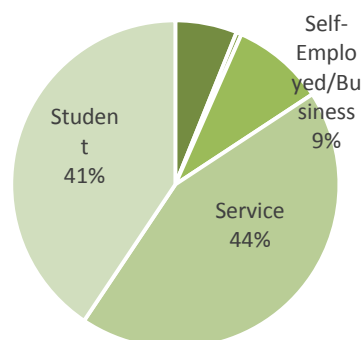
Hence, by applying cluster analysis, the first objective of the study i.e. to segment the consumers as per their Attitude formation process is been fulfilled.

Factor Analysis

Factor analysis has been performed on 12 pre-decided variables based on Diffusion of innovation model asked in the questionnaire statements rated using 5 point Likert scale with 1

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being unimportant and 5 being critical. Factor Analysis was applied separately on Cluster 1 i.e. Entity theorists as well as well as on Cluster 2 i.e. incremental theorists so as to solve the second objective of the study i.e. To study the impact of Social Media towards making or altering brand attitude for both entity theorists as well as incremental theorists.

Factor Analysis on Entity Theorists

Factor analysis was performed on responses of 115 respondents belonging to Entity Theorists Cluster to under the factors that influence the brand attitude. The result is as follows

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.777
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	290.667
	Df	66
	Sig.	.000

Figure 12: KMO and Bartlett's Test

KMO and Bartlett's Test provides a minimum standard to conduct factor analysis.

Interpretive adjectives for the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy are: in the 0.90 as marvelous, in the 0.80's as meritorious, in the 0.70's as middling, in the 0.60's as mediocre, in the 0.50's as miserable, and below 0.50 as unacceptable. Since our value is .777 or between meritorious and middling, we do not have a problem that requires us to examine the Anti-Image Correlation Matrix.

Bartlett's test of Sphericity tests the hypothesis that the correlation matrix is an identify matrix; i.e. all diagonal elements are 1 and all off-diagonal elements are 0, implying that all of the variables are uncorrelated. If the Sig value for this test is less than our alpha level, we reject the null hypothesis that the population matrix is an identity matrix. The Sig. value for this analysis leads us to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there are correlations in the data set that are appropriate for factor analysis. Hence the analysis meets this requirement

Naming of Factors

After a factor solution has been obtained, in which all variables have a significant loading on a factor, name has been assigned as per some meaning to the pattern of factor loadings. Variables with higher loadings are considered more important and have greater influence on the name or label selected to represent a factor. The names /labels are derived by the factor analysis intuitively based on its appropriateness for representing the underlying dimension of

a particular factor. All three factors have been given appropriate names on the basis of the variables represented in each case.

Component Matrix^a

	Component		
	1	2	3
Interactivity	.739	-.226	.166
Suggestions from companions	.716	-.146	-.175
Popularity/ Reliability	.686	-.179	-.016
Prior Experience with the channel	.655	-.012	-.389
Ease of Use	.639	-.161	-.050
Complexity	.578	-.357	.335
Usefulness of Information Searched	.436	.388	-.323
Relative Advantage	.074	.739	.312
Compatibility	.232	.693	.220
Real Time Experience	.170	.655	-.264
Substitute of Traditional Media	.291	.460	-.180
Mobility	.441	.185	.613

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
a. 3 components extracted.

Figure 13: Component Matrix

Factor -1: **Ease of Use, Referent and Experiential factors**: This factor explains 27% of the variation. Variable like Ease of Use, popularity, Prior Experience to channel, interactivity etc. which are highly correlated to each other accounts for this factor.

Factor 2: Technical aspects and as a useful medium: This factor explained 18 % of the variations. Variables like Relative Advantage to traditional media, as a substitute of traditional media shows Social Media as a useful medium and variables like Real Time Experience, Compatibility etc. shows the Technical Aspects of using Social Media. So the name Technical aspects and as a useful medium has been assigned.

Factor-3: Mobility: The factor explains 10% of the variances. In this segment, variable Mobility is dominant which means how Social Media gives users the power to share their thoughts freely. Hence, factor has been assigned the same name as that of variable.

Factor Analysis on Incremental Theorists

Factor analysis was also performed on responses of 197 respondents belonging to Incremental Theorists Cluster on the same 13 variables used in above cluster so as to obtain a three point factor solution.

The result is as follows

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.829
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	481.962
	Df	66
	Sig.	.000

Figure 14: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Value of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy is .829and Bartlett's test of Sphericity tests has the Sig. value .000 which leads to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there are correlations in the data set that are appropriate for factor analysis. Hence the analysis meets this requirement.

Naming of Factors

Names as per some meaning to the pattern of factor loadings areas follows.

Component Matrix^a

	Component		
	1	2	3
Complexity	.679	-.253	-.242
Popularity/ Reliability	.648	-.295	.276
Interactivity	.615	-.366	-.133
Compatibility	.610	.361	.035
Ease of Use	.605	-.382	-.328
Prior Experience with the channel	.592	-.083	.523
Mobility	.591	-.099	-.421
Suggestions from companions	.513	-.191	.409
Real Time Experience	.486	.395	-.018
Usefulness of Information Searched	.459	.395	.213
Substitute of Traditional Media	.370	.600	-.077
Relative Advantage	.393	.533	-.220

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Component Matrix[a]

	Component		
	1	2	3
Complexity	.679	-.253	-.242
Popularity/ Reliability	.648	-.295	.276
Interactivity	.615	-.366	-.133
Compatibility	.610	.361	.035
Ease of Use	.605	-.382	-.328
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Usefulness of Information Searched	.459	.395	.213
Substitute of Traditional Media	.370	.600	-.077
Relative Advantage	.393	.533	-.220

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
a. 3 components extracted.

Figure 15: Component Matrix

Factor -1: **Technicalities, Ease of Use and Referent factors**: This factor explains 31% of the variation. Variable like Compatibility, Real time Experience accounts for technicalities, Interactivity, Complexity, Ease of Use accounts for Ease of Use properties and Popularity and Prior Experience to channel accounts for Referent Properties.

Factor -2: **Social Media as a useful medium:** This factor explained 13 % of the variations. Variables like Relative Advantage to traditional media, and as a substitute of traditional media shows Social Media as a useful medium and hence the name.

Factor -3: **Experiential Factor:** Variable accounting to this factor isPrior Experience with the channel, hence the name Experiential Factor is assigned.

Hence, by applying factor analysis on both the clusters, second objective of the research has been fulfilled i.e. we have successfully identified the factors to study the impact of Social Media towards making or altering brand attitude for both entity theorists as well as incremental theorists.

Conclusion

In nutshell, this study has successfully divided the consumers into groups of entity theorists and incremental theorists and has been able to find out the Social Media factors which influence the brand attitude for both Incremental Theorists and Entity Theorists.

There are namely three factors which are important for Entity Theorists are

1. Ease of Use, Referent and Experiential factors

2. Technical aspects and as a useful medium

3. Mobility

And three factors which are important for Incremental theorists are

1. Technicalities, Ease of Use and Referent factors

2. Social Media as a useful medium

3. Experiential Factor

So for a marketer, their Strategies should vary as per the attitude formation process of Consumers and should focus on the factors said above for two sets of respondents so as to have a positive brand attitude in for their brand in the minds of consumers and also to have a differentiated brand positioning.

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