

SPECIAL TRACK: THE ROLE OF ELEARNING APPLICATIONS WITHIN THE  
TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY SECTOR

**3<sup>rd</sup> INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON TOURISM MANAGEMENT AND  
TOURISM RELATED ISSUES**

Online social networks, an innovation path for  
social learning in tourism

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# 1. Introduction

- **ITC have changed the way of teaching** and the way of learning too.
- **Elearning has become common practice** in academic life and a new and evolving research discipline in pedagogy.
- **Virtual communities** are used for social and **cooperative learning**
- **Social media** are a new scenario for **personal learning environments (PLE)**
- A **Personal Knowledge Environment (PKE)** with a **more independent and flexible way of learning** has emerged.

# 1. Introduction

- Using the **social media to exchange knowledge** learners get to know also on how to **lead their future professional development**.
- **Professionals cooperate and compete in a different** way inside the networked economy **because ICT have fostered a new paradigm**
- **Information and knowledge exchange are key for companies to innovate and gain competitive advantage.**
- Thus, **social learning has become a normal practice** in common interest groups such as **virtual communities**.
- Inside online **social networks** learners **interact with friends, peers and colleagues while exchanging personal knowledge**.
- Does this **happens also between tourism professionals** in contrast with what have **been traditional barriers to professional and inter-organizational cooperation**, strong competence and diffidence among tourism actors?

# 1. Introduction

**Aims:** This research wants to

1. To **identify the key factors** that make **online social networks** become **good environments for knowledge exchange**,
2. To **understand how tourism professionals are using virtual networks for exchanging knowledge** and
3. To **learn how users perceive that social networking sites can help for long-life learning.**

## 2. Framework *The Tourism professionals*

Even though in a **complex industry** such as Tourism with

- **many different activities** and
- an **atomized enterprise structure**,

Diversity and **consequent diffidence makes communication difficult**,

**Success of social networking** sites among students and professionals  
**has fostered**

- the **emergence of a huge amount of virtual communities** of  
**organized tourism professionals**
- With a **dynamic activity**.

## 2. Framework *Knowledge transfer and generation*

**Cognitive dimension** in groups dedicated **to information & knowledge exchange** is focused on **the meanings and the understanding** of individuals inside the group (Boisot, 1998; Boland Jr. & tenkasi, 1995).

Thus **Comm. of Knowledge** need (von Friedrichs & Gränsjö, 2003):

- **Standards & values** (ethic attitudes and norms)
- **Dynamic and flexible leadership** (avoiding herarchical structure)
- **Flexible borders** (internal and external)
- **High mutual dependence** (members recognize interdependence internally and externally)

## 2. Framework *Knowledge transfer and generation*

Transfer and generation of **KNOWLEDGE** occur mainly within a **cyclical process of knowledge conversion** inside the groups (Nonaka i Takeuchi, 1995).

- **Difussion process** (Rogers, 1995) – influencing adoption of innovation
- **Virtual communities:** environment of interpersonal relations (Lea et al., 2003)
- **Communities of Practice** (Lave & Wenger, 1990)
- **Informal Learning** (Eraut, 2004) and **Personal Learning Environment** (Wilson, 2005)

**Connective Networks of Knowledge** (Downes i Siemens), are based on

- **openness,**
- **autonomy,**
- **Diversity and**
- **Interactivity**

## 2. Framework *Knowledge transfer and generation*

The **Web 2.0**:

- a **network open to multiple and mobile access** (DiNucci, 1999)
- Oriented to **harness the collective knowledge** (O'Reilly i Battelle, 2009),
- Where **users have control** over **their information**

**Main social networking sites:** *Facebook* (founded in 2005), *Twitter* (started on 2006), *LinkedIn* (founded in 2003), *YouTube* (created in 2005) also *Flickr*, (started on 2004)

**Social networking sites** help:

- **Exchanging knowledge & managing relations** → Interactivity
- **Creating a public profile articulating list of contacts** → Autonomy
- **Crossing list of contacts** with othe users → Openness & Diversity

# 3. The research

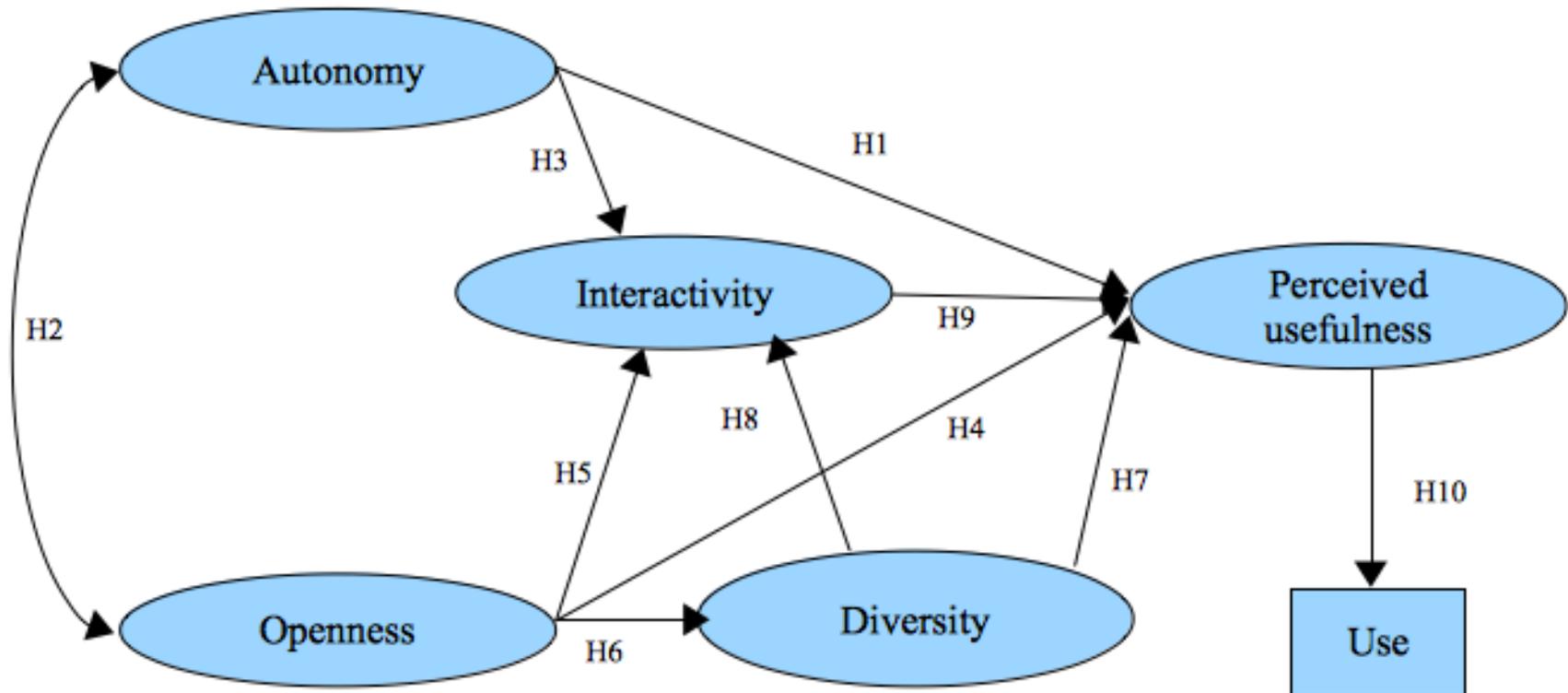
We have studied the level **of trust, commitment** and **loyalty** in these communities that **are fundamental in knowledge exchange**.

At the same time we checked for the **impact of key factors that make knowledge exchange in virtual environments more dynamic**.

Taken from the theory of connective knowledge

We have studied how **autonomy** of users, **diversity** of members and ideas, **openness** of the networks and **interactivity** between members **influence the perceived usefulness** of social networking sites for **knowledge exchange** (TAM adaptation).

# Key factors for perceived usefulness



## 4. Methodology

- **Survey** with identified variables
- **Launching the survey: invitation** to all the members of 28 virtual communities in the Internet (LinkedIn, Facebook, Ning,..) with 85.612 members.
- **363 voluntary responses** over *Google Docs* between December 2009 and July 2010, after three calls.
- The information gathered was integrated in a database with **81 variables** that helped to do a **descriptive analysis**
- **And an analysis on the of the model of adoption and use** of social networking sites, using **Structural Equations Model (SEM)**

# 4. Methodology

<b>Comunitats virtuals objecte d'estudi</b>			
Web de xarxes socials	Comunitat virtual	N. de membres	Total
<b>LINKEDIN</b>			<b>65.000</b>
	Tourism 2.0	2.014	
	Believers in Sustainable Tourism	104	
	Business Tourism Education	92	
	Hospitality Superstars	9.044	
	Hotel Industry Professionals WorldWide	26.752	
	Online Travel Market	906	
	Tourism Society	570	
	Tourism Professionals	1.115	
	Tourism Revolution People	317	
	Tourism Synergy System Serchers	28	
	Travel & Tourism E-commerce	266	
	Travel & Tourism Industry Prof. . World Wide	14.940	
	Travel 2.0 Incentive Travel industry Professionals	8.852	
<b>FACEBOOK</b>			<b>3.133</b>
	Ecotourism & Sustainable Tourism Conference	475	
	IdTour	355	
	Travel 2.0	962	
	Ecotourism Society	355	
	European Journal of Tourism Research	142	
	Sustainable Destinations	273	
	Tourism	182	
	Ecotourism Forum & Sustainable Tourism	389	
<b>NING</b>			<b>14.136</b>
	Travel 2.0	1.582	
	China Contact Tourism Network	755	
	Travel 2.0 The Travel & Hospitality Soc. Netw.	83	
	Travel Blog exchange	2.192	
	Tourism 2.0	1.586	
	Turismo 2.0	7.938	
	Comunidad HOSTELTUR	3.343	<b>3.343</b>
			<b>85.612</b>

$$n = \frac{\lambda^2_a P(1-P)}{E^2_M} = 385$$

## 5. Findings

The analysis of the data shows that

1. A **63,3%** of the members of the virtual communities of tourism professionals think that **SN sites are useful** to them and a **56,7%** think they are **good environments for learning** and for knowledge exchange,
2. A **79,3%** have a **high level of participation**, but **only a 56,8** interact with other members and only **42,5%** do **get involved in generating new ideas**.
3. They are more **motivated in improving relations (62,5%)** than **in generating new knowledge**.
4. Even though professionals are using them to **keep relationships with friends and professionals** as well, only the **53,7% feel trust**, and a **47,1% feel committed** with their networks, while only a **44,9% feel loyalty** with the other members.

## 6. Findings

In consequence, we may conclude that

1. virtual communities inside social networking sites are very much appreciated and used to socialize
2. but the level of commitment in exchanging professional knowledge seems less significant

## 5. Findings

Regarding the factors that impact knowledge exchange inside social networking sites,

1. The perceived levels of **autonomy** and **interactivity** influence the **perceived usefulness** of the SN sites, which in turn influences the **level of usage**.
2. On the other hand, the perceived levels of **openness** and **autonomy** are **strongly correlated**.
3. While there is a **direct relation between** perceived **openness** of the SN sites and the perceived **diversity** of the members and he ideas inside the SN sites.
4. Finally, **autonomy** and diversity seem to influence the **interactivity** in the networks.

## 6. Conclusions

SN sites are **still used for socializing** and **less for knowledge exchange**.

**Tourism professionals overcome** in SN **sites traditional existing distrust**

The **positive perception** of users of social networking websites **regarding autonomy, diversity and openness encourage interaction among members and increase the use of social networking websites**

## 6. Conclusions

Online VC inside SN sites are organized as **open unbounded networks** where **flexibility of relations, autonomy of members, openness of structures and diversity of relations, of members and ideas facilitate** information and knowledge exchange.

**Professional associations** can **take advantage of SN** sites to improve **professional development**, though to the levels of trust and commitments, they should

1. **integrate some resources** that foster learning and knowledge exchange, such **as moderators** and
2. **organize working groups** as it happens in “**virtual communities of practice**”.

# 5. Conclusions

## Research limitations

- 💧 **Methodology** collecting data
- 💧 **Survey done in 2010** (Use in SN sites has increased and also experience of users)

## Future research

- 💧 Deepen in the **study of the limitations of social networking sites** for **learning and knowledge generation** trying to identify if **technology constraints** are more important than **attitudinal** or the **relational ones**.

Thank you!  
Gràcies

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