ONLINE SERVICE SWITCHING BEHAVIOR:
THE CASE OF BLOG SERVICE PROVIDERS

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, there have been a growing number of online social platforms which allow users to publish and share their personal stories, opinions, knowledge, expertise, and product reviews. Online service switching has become a major challenge for marketers. In this study, we attempt to understand online service switching behavior through investigating blog service switching. We use the push-pull-mooring migration framework to guide our investigation. We empirically examine three salient factors for online service switching in general. Further, we analyze survey responses to elicit specific push, pull, and mooring factors pertaining to the switching of blog service providers. The findings suggest that satisfaction, attractive alternatives, and sunk costs can significantly affect bloggers' switching intention. Dissatisfaction with service stability, attractiveness in functionality, attractiveness in ease of use, and descriptive norms are found to be the most frequently cited reasons for bloggers' switching behavior. We believe that online service providers can benefit from the findings of this research regarding how to maintain current users and attract new users. The present study extends prior research on consumer service switching by examining switching behavior in the online service context. We find that the push-pull-mooring migration framework is an effective tool in identifying factors affecting blog service switching behavior.

Keywords: Service switching, Online service, Blog, Push-pull-mooring

1. Introduction

Consumer service switching remains an important research area in the relationship marketing literature [Chiu et al. 2005]. In the last two decades, we have witnessed a significant number of studies examining the impact of consumer switching behavior [e.g., Antón et al. 2007; Bansal et al. 2005; Lin 2010; Lopez et al. 2006; Ranganathan et al. 2006]. Prior research indicates that switching behavior generates negative impacts on market share and profitability of firms [Rust & Zahorik 1993]. Researchers also find that consumers with long-term relationships bring significant value to firms, such as positive word-of-mouth engagement [Dick & Basu 1994], high service usage [Bolton & Lemon 1999], and high propensity to respond to new promotions [Hawkins et al. 2004]. Some researchers postulate that consumers' service switching behavior poses a serious threat to long-term relationships [Ganesh et al. 2000]. Therefore, it is critical to understand why consumers decide to switch to other service providers.

In recent years, there have been a growing number of online social platforms where users can publish and share their personal stories, opinions, knowledge, expertise, and product reviews [Qi 2011; Ye et al. 2012]. These online service providers are also facing the same challenge of keeping their users and preventing them from switching to other platforms [Luarn & Lin 2003; Wang et al. 2005]. Scholars suggest that service discontinuance and switching have become a primary concern for online service providers [Keaveney & Parthasarathy 2001; Parthasarathy & Bhattacherjee 1998]. Similar to traditional service firms, online service switching can damage company market

share and revenue. Moreover, online service providers can suffer due to the low barriers users face to switching and the high cost of attracting and retaining consumers [Chen & Hitt 2002; Koufaris & Hampton-Sosa 2004]. With the prevalence and popularity of online social platforms, researchers have begun to examine switching behavior of online services [e.g., Kim et al. 2006; Ye et al. 2008; Zhang et al. 2009]. Online service providers are often in a highly competitive marketplace where there are a number of alternative services which are increasingly more user-friendly and have similar and ever-improving features [Ye & Potter 2011]. Consumers can easily join an online service (e.g., a particular blog service provider) or switch to another service provider with a single click. Research on switching behavior of online services is still under investigation [Kim et al. 2006]. More empirical studies with a strong theoretical foundation are needed to enhance our understanding of online service switching [Ye et al. 2008].

In this study, we aim at examining several factors related to online service switching and to empirically test the research model with existing bloggers. We believe that service switching is an important concern for blog service providers. Blogs are "frequently modified web pages in which dated entries are listed in reverse chronological sequence" [Herring et al. 2005, p. 142]. Blog service providers offer the online platform for bloggers to post personal dairies. Blog services have developed as one of the most popular online services [Hsu & Lin 2008]. Over 170 million blogs are identified on the Internet [Nielsen 2011]. Many blog service providers offer easy-to-use blogging platforms with numerous features to bloggers free of charge. A list of popular blog service providers, including Xanga, Google, Yahoo, and Microsoft, is depicted in Appendix A. Researchers argue that blogs have great potential for generating political and economic influence [Hsu & Lin 2008]. For instance, perceived interactivity of blogs may increase voters' attitudes toward political candidates who use blog services to post thoughts and opinions [Thorson & Rodgers 2006]. Lee and Youn [2009] examined how product reviews in blogs influence consumers' review perceptions and product judgment. As the saying of "where there are eyeballs, there are business models" [Smith 2005, p. 25], advertisements in blogs with many visitors may produce substantial revenue for blog service providers. Marketers estimated that blog advertising revenue in the U.S. may increase from $283 million in 2007 to $768 million in 2012 [Verna 2008]. An earlier survey report pointed out that 20% of bloggers had switched their blog service provider [CNNIC 2007]. Recently, Technorati highlighted that over 50% of bloggers were using their 2nd or even their 8th blogs [White 2009].

In this study, we focus on bloggers' switching intention, which refers to their willingness or likelihood of switching from one blog service to another (e.g., intention to switch from Google's blog service: www.blogger.com to Xanga's blog service: www.xanga.com). The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In the next section, we introduce the theoretical background and develop relevant hypotheses about key factors identified in the literature. Then, we empirically test the hypotheses through a survey study with existing bloggers and we further explore and identify specific factors related to blog service switching behavior with the content analysis method. Finally, we discuss the findings and conclude the paper with implications for both researchers and practitioners.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development

To guide the present research on bloggers' service switching behavior, we refer to studies on consumer service switching in both offline and online contexts. We examine three salient factors from the marketing literature and further postulate their relationships with online service switching.

2.1. Consumer Service Switching

Relationship marketing refers to "all marketing activities directed toward establishing, developing, and maintaining successful relational exchanges" [Morgan & Hunt 1994, p. 23]. Consumer service switching, the migration of consumers from one service to another [Ranganathan et al. 2006], is one of the major research areas in relationship marketing. Prior research on consumers' switching behavior can be classified into three main streams [Lopez et al. 2006]: 1) the outlined process model of switching decisions [e.g., Roos 1999]; 2) the heterogeneous characteristics between continuers and switchers [e.g., Keaveney & Parthasarathy 2001]; and 3) the factors that drive consumers to switch [e.g., Antón et al. 2007; Shin & Kim 2008]. The third stream has attracted the most extensive attention among researchers. This stream of research has high potential to provide more relevant and manageable implications to practitioners. Research shows that important factors may include price and service failure [Gerrard & Cunningham 2004], and consumers' psychological perceptions, such as trust, commitment, satisfaction, and alternative attractiveness [Antón et al. 2007; Bansal et al. 2005]. Apart from these factors, researchers also suggested that consumers may be reluctant to leave their current service providers due to high switching costs [Burnham et al. 2003; Jones et al. 2002].

Consumer service switching has been examined in many research contexts, such as automobile-repair, hairstyling services [Bansal et al. 2005], bank services [Gerrard & Cunningham 2004], insurance services [Antón et al. 2007; Lin 2010], energy supplying services [Wieringa & Verhoef 2007], mortgage services [Bansal & Taylor 1999], and mobile services [Hu & Hwang 2006; Ranganathan et al. 2006]. Given the increased prevalence of online

services, research interest in consumer switching has begun to extend to the online environment [Balabanis et al. 2006]. For instance, Keaveney and Parthasarathy [2001] proposed the concept of the "churn", service discontinuance and switching, of online services (e.g., AOL). Li et al. [2009] examined the differences between website "stayers" and "switchers". Cheng et al. [2009] explored factors that drive users' switching behavior between social networking sites. Kim et al. [2006] investigated the influence of consumer satisfaction, availability of attractive alternatives, and switching costs on users' email service switching behavior. Bhattacherjee et al. [2012] examined how personal innovativeness moderates the impact of relative advantages and satisfaction with prior IT on user intention to switch the web browser they use.

2.2. The Push-Pull-Mooring Framework

The push-pull-mooring framework is a dominant paradigm in the migration literature [Bansal et al. 2005]. Migration means that people move from one place to another for a certain period of time [Boyle et al. 1998]. The push-pull-mooring paradigm suggests that the migrants' decision to move from one geographic area to another is affected by push, pull, and mooring factors. Push factors are defined as the negative factors that drive people away from their original place [Moon 1995; Stimson & Minnery 1998]. Pull factors are the positive factors that attract people to a new destination [Moon 1995]. Due to the complex nature of migration decisions, push and pull factors alone are not sufficient for explaining the phenomenon [Boyle et al. 1998]. Intervening obstacles or variables are also suggested [Jackson 1986; Lee 1966]. In this regard, the notion of moorings is introduced and incorporated into the framework [Longino 1992; Moon 1995]. Mooring factors can be personal, social, and situational variables [Bansal et al. 2005]. These variables are associated with the migration decision, which can either hamper or facilitate the decision [Moon 1995].

The push-pull-mooring framework provides a clear structure for researchers to understand the migration behavior with respect to three dimensions. The analogy between human migration and consumer service switching has been recognized by some researchers. For instance, Bansal et al. [2005] identified twelve factors for service switching and classified them with the push-pull-mooring framework. In a similar vein, Ye and Potter [2011] applied the framework and further investigated the role of habit in users' switching behavior of web browsers. Hou et al. [2011] relied on the framework to understand the switching behavior of online gamers. This line of studies suggests the utility of the push-pull-mooring framework as a helpful tool, which can be further tested empirically in the broader online service switching contexts.

2.3. Research Hypotheses Development

Following the push-pull-mooring framework, we identify three salient factors, namely satisfaction, attractive alternatives, and sunk costs, from the prior literature. The three factors can be classified into the push, pull, and mooring dimensions. They are hypothesized to be key determinants for online service switching in general. We will examine their effects on bloggers' intention to switch. Figure 1 depicts our research model.
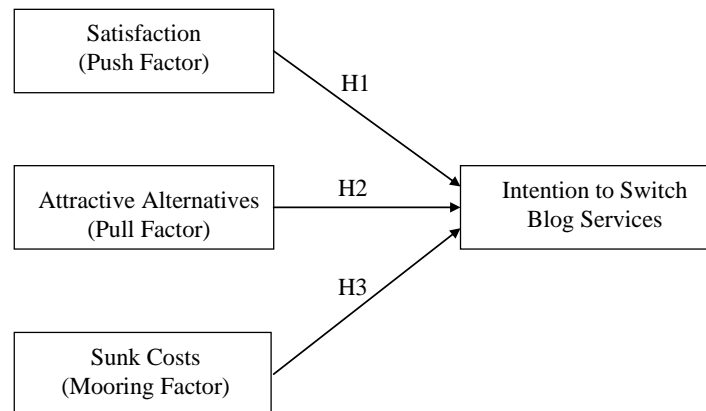

Figure 1: Research Model

Satisfaction is an important concept in the relationship marketing literature and has attracted a great deal of research interest in the past few decades. Oliver defined satisfaction as "the summary psychological state resulting when the emotion surrounding disconfirmed expectations is coupled with the customer's prior feelings about the consumption experience" [Oliver 1981, p. 29]. Its extent varies from a highly dissatisfied state to a highly satisfied state. According to previous studies, a high level of satisfaction will help to build online consumer relationships [Floh & Treiblmaier 2006; Wang & Head 2007], whereas a high level of dissatisfaction will result in relationship

dissolution [Ping 1993]. In both offline and online settings, researchers have found that satisfaction negatively influences consumers' switching behavior [Bansal et al. 2005; Ye et al. 2008]. Consumers who possess a dissatisfied consumption experience will have the propensity to switch away from their incumbent services.

Migration researchers have postulated that satisfaction/dissatisfaction has a push effect toward individuals' migration decision [De Jong & Faweell 1981]. In this study, we consider satisfaction/dissatisfaction to be a push variable in the current blog service context. We posit that when a blogger is dissatisfied with his or her current blog service, there is a higher chance that he or she will be pushed away from the origin, and thus will have a higher intention to switch to another blog service. The following hypothesis is provided:

H1: Satisfaction has a negative impact on behavioral intention to switch blog services.

Rusbult et al. [1998, p. 359] defined the quality of alternatives as "the perceived desirability of the best available alternative to a relationship". Previous research postulates that few perceived viable options would bring about high chance of repurchasing [Jones et al. 2000], while high attractiveness of alternatives may result in greater propensity of switching [Kim et al. 2006]. In service industries, the attractiveness of competitors has been found to drive consumers to switch their services [Keaveney 1995].

Scholars in the migration literature suggest that attractive attributes of a destination can draw migrants to the destination [Moon 1995]. In the current study, we refer to the attractiveness of alternative blog services as a pull variable. We postulate that if a blogger discovers attractive alternative blog services, he or she will be more likely to be pulled away to new blog services and has a higher propensity to abandoning their current service provider. The following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Attractive alternatives have a positive impact on behavioral intention to switch blog services.

Prior research suggests that switching costs significantly affect consumer retention, and a high level of switching costs is less likely to result in service switching behavior [Anderson 1994; Fornell 1992]. Switching costs can refer to not only economic costs, but also emotional and psychological costs [Chang & Chen 2008; Yang & Perterson 2004]. It denotes the barriers that a person faces when he or she switches from the current service to another [Dess et al. 2007]. Researchers posit that switching costs may have multiple dimensions [Burnham et al. 2003; Jones et al. 2002]. For instance, Jones, Mothersbaugh and Beatty [2002] suggested three types of switching costs: learning costs, continuity costs, and sunk costs.

In this study, we only include the sunk costs into the investigation of online service switching behavior. Given the prevalence of online services (e.g., blog services), we expect that it is simple for online users to identify new services. Thus, learning costs may not be a serious concern. Since many online services are provided for free or with low subscription fees, users are less likely to suffer significant monetary costs regarding their switching behavior. Therefore, the impact from continuity costs is not considered in this study. According to Jones et al. [2002], we refer to sunk costs as the perception of irrecoverable time and effort that have been invested in using ones' current online service. Prior research indicates that cost constraints or switching costs have mooring effects on migration and switching behavior [Bansal et al. 2005; Lee 1966]. Hence, we denote sunk costs as the mooring variable in the current study. That means, the more time and effort a blogger has spent on writing content, uploading pictures, tagging entries, filtering information, or linking resources on the Internet [Herring et al. 2005], the higher he or she will perceive the sunk costs to be and will be less likely to switch to new blog services. The following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Sunk costs have a negative impact on behavioral intention to switch blog services.

3. Research Method

The research model was empirically tested in blog communities of Hong Kong. Blogging in Hong Kong has become a prevalent phenomenon, which is gaining increased attention from local magazines, newspapers, TV, and the web [MySinaBlog 2007]. Some recent empirical studies on blog services have also explored findings based on samples of Hong Kong bloggers [e.g., Ma et al. 2006; Qian & Scott 2007; Viégas 2005]. In this section, we will discuss measures in the questionnaire, our data collection method, and survey responses in detail.

3.1. Questionnaire

All the instrument items of satisfaction, attractive alternatives, sunk costs, and intention to switch were adapted from previous studies, with minor modifications made to fit the blog service context [Bhattacherjee 2001; Jones et al. 2002; Kim et al. 2006]. The measures of these constructs are listed in Appendix B. Multi-item measures were used for each construct to ensure reliability and construct validity. In addition, the questionnaire included demographic questions for statistical purposes and an optional open-ended question "what circumstances would drive you towards using another blog service?" for the content analysis.

3.2.   Data Collection

We employed an online survey to collect data of Hong Kong bloggers. Invitation messages with the URL of our online questionnaire were distributed to many popular blogging communities of Hong Kong, including local online discussion forums, popular blog service providers, and blogs with many visitors. To encourage involvement, participants were provided with lucky draw prizes of local supermarket coupons.

3.3.   Survey Responses

A total of 299 usable responses were collected for this research. Table 1 illustrates the demographic profile of respondents. It indicated that the sample had relatively more female bloggers than males. The majority of respondents were young adults who had attained a university education. Xanga.com was the most popular blog service provider noted in the sample. 117 out of the 299 respondents answered the open-ended question, including 65 female bloggers and 52 male bloggers.

Table 1: Demographic Profile

Characteristics		Number	Percentage
Gender	Female	169	56.5%
	Male	130	43.5%
Age	Below 18	9	3.0%
	19-24	204	68.2%
	25-30	63	21.1%
	Above 30	23	7.7%
Education level	Secondary and high School	17	5.7%
	Diploma or relative course	20	6.7%
	University or above	262	87.6%
Years of blogging	Less than 1 year	41	13.7%
	1-2 years	129	43.1%
	3-4 years	103	34.4%
	5 or more	26	8.7%
Possession of blogs	1 blog	153	51.2%
	2 blogs	98	32.8%
	3 blogs	30	10.0%
	4 or more	18	6.0%
Primarily used blog service	Xanga	165	55.2%
	Windows Live Spaces	48	16.1%
	Yahoo! Blog	21	7.0%
	MySinaBlog	22	7.4%
	Others	43	14.4%
Days of blogging per week	0-1 day	63	21.1%
	2-3 days	77	25.8%
	4-5 days	69	23.1%
	6-7 days	90	30.1%

4. Data Analysis

The data analysis process of this research included two steps. First, we employed the structural equation modeling technique to empirically test the relative impact of three independent variables (i.e., the push, pull, and mooring variables) on intention to switch. Second, we performed the content analysis approach on responses to the open-ended question to elicit more detailed determinants of blog service switching.

4.1.   Structural Equation Modeling

The present study adopted the structural equation modeling approach because it enables us to examine latent constructs measured with multiple items and to take into account measurement errors when estimating relationships among them. We specifically examined the research hypotheses using LISREL 8.80. LISREL is a covariance-based structural equation modeling technique that has been widely adopted in the literature [e.g., Antón et al. 2007; Bansal

& Taylor 1999; Shin & Kim 2008]. Following the two-step analytical procedures [Hair et al. 1998], we firstly examined the measurement model and then assessed the structural model.

Measurement Model: Convergent validity and discriminant validity were assessed to examine the measurement model. Convergent validity shows the extent to which the items of a scale that are theoretically related to each other should be related in reality. Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) are two indicators for measuring convergent validity. It is considered acceptable when CR values are higher than 0.7 and AVE values are higher than 0.5 [Fornell & Larcker 1981]. After deleting one item of attractive alternatives for its low factor loading, this research obtained CR values ranging from 0.75 to 0.92, and AVE values ranging from 0.61 to 0.77 (Table 2). In addition, confirmatory factor analysis with LISREL revealed the following fit indices: χ^2=95.38, df=71, RMSEA=0.034, NFI=0.97, CFI=0.99, GFI=0.96, and AGFI=0.94. According to previous studies [Gefen et al. 2003; Hair et al. 1998], the recommended thresholds for fit indices are χ^2/df<3, RMSEA<0.06, NFI>0.90, CFI>0.90, GFI>0.90, and AGFI>0.80. It suggests that the result of the confirmatory factor analysis were acceptable for this research.

Table 2: Item Loadings and Descriptive Statistics of Constructs

	Item	Loading	Mean	StDev
Intention to switch (INT) CR= 0.91, AVE = 0.77	INT1	0.89	3.02	1.59
	INT2	0.86	3.13	1.61
	INT3	0.88	2.71	1.59
Satisfaction (SAT) CR= 0.92, AVE = 0.73	SAT1	0.86	5.50	0.99
	SAT2	0.90	5.52	0.98
	SAT3	0.84	5.26	1.10
	SAT4	0.82	5.35	1.04
Attractive alternatives (AA) CR = 0.75, AVE = 0.61	AA1	0.67	5.54	1.43
	AA2	0.87	5.00	1.29
Sunk costs (SC) CR = 0.91, AVE = 0.67	SC1	0.77	2.80	1.42
	SC2	0.83	2.77	1.44
	SC3	0.83	2.82	1.24
	SC4	0.86	2.91	1.38
	SC5	0.78	3.14	1.38

Note: CR=Composite reliability, AVE=Average variance extracted

Discriminant validity describes the degree to which the measure is not a reflection of some other variables. It is indicated by low correlations between the measure of interest and the measures of other constructs that are not theoretically related. If the square root of the AVE for each construct is greater than the correlation between constructs, then discriminant validity is confirmed [Fornell & Larcker 1981]. As shown in Table 3, the result demonstrated that discriminant validity was sufficient in this research.

Table 3: Correlations of Constructs

	Intention to Switch	Satisfaction	Attractive Alternativeness	Sunk Costs
Intention to Switch	*0.88*			
Satisfaction	-0.26	*0.85*		
Attractive Alternativeness	0.06	0.18	*0.78*	
Sunk Costs	-0.17	-0.40	0.00	*0.82*

Note: The italicized diagonal elements are square roots of AVEs

Structural Model: We first examined the common method bias for this study. We performed the Harman's single-factor test to check whether a general factor accounts for most of the variance for all items [Podsakoff et al. 2003]. We found that the first factor only explained 31.2% of the variance. It implied that common method bias might not be a serious concern for this research. Then, we analyzed the structural model using the maximum

likelihood method. As shown in Table 4, we found that satisfaction and sunk costs negatively affected bloggers' intention to switch, whereas attractive alternatives had a positive impact. Hypotheses *H1*, *H2*, and *H3* were supported in this research. The fit indices of the model were χ^2=95.38, df=71, RMSEA=0.034, NFI=0.97, CFI=0.99, GFI=0.96, and AGFI=0.94. The findings demonstrated that the model had a good fit to the data. Since mooring factors may also posit moderating effects [e.g., Bansal et al. 2005], we performed a post-hoc analysis to examine whether sunk costs can moderate the influences from satisfaction and attractive alternatives. We followed the procedure suggested by Baron and Kenny [1986] and Cortina et al. [2001]. The result showed that no significant moderating effects were found.

Table 4: Results of Hypotheses Testing

	Path Coefficient	t-value	Hypothesis Testing
H1: Satisfaction→Intention to Switch	-0.41	5.93***	Supported
H2: Attractive Alternativeness→Intention to Switch	0.13	1.98*	Supported
H3: Sunk Costs→Intention to Switch	-0.34	4.91***	Supported

Note: * denotes $p<0.05$; *** denotes $p<0.001$

4.2. Content Analysis

Building upon the push-pull-mooring framework in the migration literature and prior research on consumer service switching, we hypothesize and empirically test the impacts of satisfaction, attractive alternatives, and sunk costs in an online service context. These factors are expected to demonstrate important effects for many online services. For blog services, there may be specific or other important factors affecting bloggers' switching behavior. It is necessary to investigate whether the push-pull-mooring framework is capable of providing more detailed insights in this context. Based on this concern, the purpose of the content analysis is to explore more specific determining reasons for blog service switching. In the online survey, 117 respondents provided comments to the open-ended question. These responses were coded based on the push, pull, and mooring dimensions. Note that one response might include comments in more than one dimension. For instance, a response showing dissatisfaction with current blog services and the observation of other better services would be coded into both push and pull dimensions.

The coding was further developed into more specific categories. We tried out an initial pool of categories for the coding under three dimensions. These categories were created by examining the comments and referring to previous studies [e.g., Hsu & Lin 2008; Kim et al. 2006]. Following the process of grounded theory [Glaser & Strauss 1967], we then refined the categories (e.g., adding, deleting, and merging categories) through many coding iterations until saturation was reached. The final coding scheme with category descriptions and examples is listed in Appendix C.

A total of 162 comments were grouped into three broad dimensions. As shown in Table 5, 32.7% of them were under the push dimension, whereas 49.7% under the pull dimension and 17.6% under the mooring dimension. The push factors depicted respondents' overall satisfaction and dissatisfaction with many aspects of their current blog services. Table 5 demonstrates that dissatisfaction with service stability (17.0%) was the most important concern within this dimension. The pull factors showed respondents' overall attractiveness and attractiveness in specific aspects of alternative blog services. Attractiveness in functionality (13.9%) and attractiveness in ease of use (12.7%) were the two most cited reasons under this dimension. Finally, the mooring factors for blog service switching were manifold. In addition to sunk costs, the findings suggested that descriptive norms (13.9%) were highly important in this dimension.

Table 5: Coding Results

	Number	Percentage
Push factors		*32.7%*
Overall dissatisfaction	4	2.4%
Dissatisfaction with service stability	28	17.0%
Dissatisfaction with money charge	8	4.8%
Dissatisfaction with privacy issue	5	3.0%
Dissatisfaction with functionality	3	1.8%
Dissatisfaction with readership	3	1.8%
Dissatisfaction with blogging culture	1	0.6%
Dissatisfaction with storage capacity	1	0.6%
Dissatisfaction with ease of use	1	0.6%
Pull factors		*49.7%*
Overall attractiveness	12	7.3%
Attractiveness in functionality	23	13.9%
Attractiveness in ease of use	21	12.7%
Attractiveness in readership	10	6.1%
Attractiveness in interface design	9	5.5%
Attractiveness in service stability	4	2.4%
Attractiveness in storage capacity	3	1.8%
Mooring factors		*17.6%*
Sunk costs	2	1.2%
Descriptive norms	23	13.9%
Subjective norms	2	1.2%
Learning	1	0.6%
Bored	1	0.6%
Total	*165*	*100%*

5. Discussion and Conclusions

Motivated by the need to enrich the understanding of service switching, this research sheds light on bloggers' service switching behavior. We identify three salient factors (i.e., satisfaction/dissatisfaction, attractive alternativeness, and sunk costs) from the literature of consumer service switching. The factors are found to demonstrate push, pull, and mooring effects on bloggers' switching intention. Guided by the push-pull-mooring migration framework, we are also able to elicit more specific determinants of bloggers' switching behavior. We believe that this research is one of the earliest attempts to apply the framework and investigate reasons behind bloggers' service switching behavior.

5.1. Limitations and Future Research

Before addressing implications of this research, we must point out several limitations which may offer opportunities for future research. First, the findings of the present research are based only upon 299 usable questionnaires collected in Hong Kong. Since blogging is an internationally popular phenomenon, future studies may use our model to seek out more universal results by examining blog service switching in different regions of the world and with a larger sample size. To enrich the understanding of online service switching, researchers are also encouraged to extend the research context from blog service to other online services. This direction of research becomes increasingly important as recent reports show that many users have started to use social networking and microblogging sites instead of blogging services [e.g., Kopytoff 2011]. Second, we use bloggers' switching intention as a proxy to examine their switching behavior. This approach is consistent with many previous studies on consumer service switching [e.g., Antón et al. 2007; Bansal et al. 2005; Kim et al. 2006]. Nevertheless, future research may explicitly measure whether switching behavior occurs (yes or no) and interpret the probability of switching in logistic models [e.g., Lopez et al. 2006; Ye et al. 2008]. Finally, the content analysis of this research provides some specific reasons for bloggers' switching behavior. Further studies may develop relevant constructs from the findings (e.g., descriptive norms). Valid and reliable measurement instruments of these constructs can then be empirically tested. Rigorous statistical analysis can be adopted to further validate new hypotheses regarding bloggers' service switching behavior.

5.2. Theoretical Implications

The present study can contribute to the existing literature in several ways. First, as one of the very few studies on online service switching behavior [e.g., Kim et al. 2006; Ye & Potter 2011], this research advances this domain by investigating why bloggers consider switching their blog service providers. In tackling the research problem, we

are able to demonstrate that the push-pull-mooring migration framework acts as an effective tool in identifying factors affecting blog service switching behavior.

Second, the empirical findings from the online survey indicate that the independent variables demonstrate significant impacts on bloggers' intention to switch blog services. Consistent with prior research in offline [e.g., Bansal et al. 2005] and online [e.g., Kim et al. 2006; Zhang et al. 2009] settings, satisfaction and attractive alternatives are two of the most important determinants of service switching behavior. In this research, we also find that sunk costs significantly affect bloggers' switching intention. Given that sunk costs are conceptually related to the extent of service usage, this finding is congruent with previous studies. For instance, Keaveney and Parthasarathy [2001] showed that service usage is important in discriminating between online service continuers and switchers. Chen and Hitt [2002] contended that web site usage is a good predictor of consumer attrition and switching in the online environment. On the other hand, different from research of offline service switching, where mooring factors may posit moderating effects, we found that sunk costs did not moderate the effects from satisfaction and attractive alternatives in this study. It implies that high perceived sunk costs may not be able to prevent bloggers from switching away, when they have high levels of dissatisfaction and high perceived attractive alternatives.

Third, we adopt the content analysis approach to identify more specific factors with respect to the push, pull, and mooring dimensions of bloggers' switching behavior. Our analysis shows that dissatisfaction with service stability is the most frequently cited push factor, whereas attractiveness in functionality and attractiveness in ease of use are the two most important pull factors for bloggers. The efforts of exploring concrete elements of the two dimensions in the push-pull-mooring migration framework are consistent with previous studies on switching behavior. For instance, Kim et al. [2006] explicated consumer satisfaction with email service through design, stability, spam blocking, and storage capacity aspects. Ye et al. [2008] indicated that users may evaluate certain attractiveness of alternative web browsers, such as relative advantage, ease of use, and security.

Finally, the results from the content analysis approach further show that descriptive norms are the most frequently mentioned mooring factor for bloggers' switching behavior. Descriptive norms and subjective norms are two distinct forms of social influence. Subjective norms highlight the perceived social pressures from influential peers with regard to performing a behavior [Ajzen 1991]. In contrast, descriptive norms capture the observations of other influential peers performing the behavior [Rivis & Sheeran 2003]. Our findings suggest that bloggers do care about which blog services other people or friends are using.

5.3.   Managerial Implications

We believe that this research also holds considerable implications for practitioners. In a highly competitive online environment, it is imperative for online service providers to retain long-term relationships with users and caution their switching behavior. As service switching refers to relationship dissolution with existing services and relationship establishment with new services, online service providers should invest many resources in maintaining current users and attracting new users. According to the hypotheses testing, we find that satisfaction and sunk costs have negative impacts on switching intention. It suggests that online service providers could improve the level of user satisfaction and promote users' service usage (in turn increasing sunk costs) for the purpose of user retention. In addition, attractive alternativeness is found to produce a positive effect on switching intention. It urges online service providers to offer competitive features for attracting more and more users.

In a similar vein, blog service providers can benefit from the findings of this research regarding how to maintain current bloggers and how to attract new bloggers. Providers can use the findings to identify several key holding elements for blog services to better hold their bloggers and prevent them from switching away. First, we suggest that blog service providers pay great attention to bloggers' satisfaction level in terms of service stability. A blog service with frequent connection problems can easily irritate bloggers and drive them away. Second, it is also important to increase the sunk costs of bloggers. Blog service providers may promote bloggers' participation enthusiasm by featuring and profiling active bloggers on the website. Another possible approach is to provide migration tools and help bloggers "transfer" sunk costs (e.g., blog archives) between blog services. For example, Blogger.com and WordPress.com provide "import tools" to facilitate the transfer of blog archives between different blog services. Third, blog service providers should note that functionality and ease of use are two key elements that have high potential for attracting new bloggers. It is critical to provide attractive functions with user-friendly interfaces in order to stand out from the large and growing crowd of blog service providers. Finally, the result about descriptive norms indicates that bloggers tend to follow the choices of blog services that their friends and other people are using. Popular blog service providers are easier to maintain and better able to attract bloggers. Descriptive norms are probably also an important factor in users' switching decision in other online services that provide social features, such as microblogging and social networking.

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Appendix A. Some popular blog service providers on the Internet

Hosting Company	Name of Blog Service	URL of Blog Service
Xanga	Xanga	http://www.xanga.com
Google	Blogger	http://www.blogger.com
Yahoo	Yahoo! Blog	http://blog.yahoo.com
Microsoft	Windows Live Spaces	http://spaces.live.com
Automattic	WordPress	http://wordpress.com
SAY Media	TypePad	http://www.typepad.com
Squarespace	Squarespace	http://www.squarespace.com
LiveJournal	LiveJournal	http://www.livejournal.com
SINA	MySinaBlog	http://mysinablog.com

Appendix B. Measures of constructs

Construct	Items
Satisfaction [Bhattacherjee 2001]	How do you feel about your overall experience with the blog service?
	Very dissatisfied/Very satisfied.
	Very displeased/Very pleased.
	Very frustrated/Very contented.
	Absolutely terrible/Absolutely delighted.
Attractive Alternatives [Kim et al. 2006]	I know that there are alternative blog services I can switch to.
	There are other blog services that provide high service quality.
	* There are blog services I find more attractive than the one I am using.
Sunk Costs [Jones et al. 2002]	A lot of energy, time, and effort have gone into using my blog service.
	Overall, I have invested a lot into using my blog service.
	All things considered, I have put a lot into previous use of my blog service.
	I have spent a lot of time and effort on my blog.
	I have invested much into using my blog service.
Intention to Switch the Blog Service [Kim et al. 2006]	I am considering switching from my current blog service.
	The likelihood of me switching to another blog service is high.
	I am determined to switch to another blog service.

Note: 1) Items of satisfaction use 7-point semantic differential scales (from -3 to 3), whereas items of attractive alternatives and sunk costs use 7-point Likert scales, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree); 2) * denotes that this item of attractive alternatives was deleted for its low factor loading.

Appendix C. Coding scheme for the open-ended question

	Descriptions	Sample comments
Push factors		
Overall dissatisfaction	A blogger demonstrates an overall dissatisfaction towards the current blog service	It totally disappoints me. Very poor services are provided by the site.
Dissatisfaction with service stability	The current blog service is unstable	It cannot be always connected to. It is unstable or down frequently, and becomes very slow.
Dissatisfaction with money charges	The current blog service has begun to charge or increase fees	My blog decide to charge me for fees. The blog service provider I'm currently using has started charging a fee higher than HKD200 per year.
Dissatisfaction with privacy issue	The current blog service is insecure or triggers privacy concerns	Privacy is an issue as too many people whom I'd rather not read my blog know of my blog. There is security issue, such as the privacy problem.
Dissatisfaction with functionality	The current blog service does not satisfy blogger's functionality needs	The functions of my current blog are inadequate to satisfy my needs. My current blog service puts more limits/restrictions on use.
Dissatisfaction with readership	The current blog service has some unfavorable visitors	My current blog service has too many visitors. There are too many people that know of my blog whom I'd rather not have reading it.
Dissatisfaction with blogging culture	The current blog service provides an unpleasant blogging environment or culture	The blog service provider I'm currently using changes its blogging culture.
Dissatisfaction with storage capacity	The current blog service has low storage capacity	The storage capacity is full.
Dissatisfaction with ease of use	The current blog service is difficult to use	I find the blog has become harder to manage.
Pull factors		
Overall attractiveness	There are other attractive blog services providing better service	There are other better blog services. There is a new blog which has better service.
Attractiveness in functionality	Some other blog services provide better or more functions	Another blog has more useful functions. Another blog has more additional or special features.
Attractiveness in ease of use	Some other blog services are easy to use	The new blog is easy to use. The new blog is user-friendly.
Attractiveness in readership	Some other blog services have a favorable or wide audience	By using another blog service, I can widen my readership. Another blog service has a bigger audience.
Attractiveness in interface design	Some other blog services have better interface design	I find another blog has a more beautiful interface template to build on. The blog has prettier layout.
Attractiveness in service stability	Some other blog services are more stable	There are other blogs which are faster. Another blog takes little time to load my photos.
Attractiveness in storage capacity	Some other blog services have larger storage capacity	If the new blog has more space for keeping files. The blog has larger space (storage).
Mooring factors		
Sunk costs	A lot of time and effort has been put in using the current blog service	It's a hassle moving old blog items to a new one. I'd switch if it is easy to switch/transmit all contents from the current ones to the new one.
Descriptive norms	Many friends or other people have switched to using another blog service	If many friends switch to use other blog service, then I think I will switch to that blog. More people are going to the other blog.
Subjective norms	A blogger's friends suggest him/her to switch to another blog service	I care about my friend's advice. My friends have advised me to use another one.
Learning	A blogger can learn new things in another blog service	I can learn something new in another blog.
Bored	A blogger feels bored of using the current blog service	I am bored of this blog.