



E-Tourism: Malaysian travellers intention in online accommodation booking

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Abstract

A great number of tourists has embraced online travel booking. This paper examines the influence of four factors, namely credibility, trustworthiness, perceived usefulness, and perceived ease of use on booking intention and explores whether the attitude mediates the relationship between trustworthiness and booking intention. A total of 191 completed and usable questionnaires from holidaymakers in Malaysia were collected. The results showed that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use have a significant positive relationship with the booking intention. The result also highlighted that attitude partially mediates the relationship between trustworthiness and booking intention. The paper concludes with a discussion on managerial implications and suggestions to address this issue.

Keywords: holiday accommodations, holidaymakers, online booking, online information search

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1.0 Introduction

The internet is known as a chic way for travel firms to communicate (Law & Wong, 2003; Llach, Mariomon & Alonso-Almeida, 2013). As a result, a new form of online reviews has emerged due to the easy access to the internet and the capability to produce easily assessable information (Hart & Blackshaw, 2006). Customers these days are more likely to seek information by researching the internet before making decisions as they are more familiar with online accommodation booking, thus forming a new way of communication where they construct a robust online reputation through social proof. Consequently, online reviews have become essential mainly in the information retrieval field and buying decisions in the hospitality and tourism industry (Liu & Park, 2015). Online reviews are now renowned for being a prospective influence on consumer purchase intentions as peer-to-peer commendations and social connections gradually motivate booking decisions. This paper aims to study how online reviews influence consumers' booking intention towards holiday accommodations. Some study findings indicate that hotels are not exploiting the internet and meritoriously market their hotels online (Baloglu & Peckan, 2006). There are four antecedents to be investigated; trustworthiness, credibility, perceived usefulness, and perceived ease of use. The effect of attitude, which acts as the mediating variable, will also be examined. This research will provide travel companies with an opportunity to progress on parts that have been criticised by customers and highlight what is important to them.

2.0 Literature Review

Holidaymakers can search and book the plans of travel conveniently via the internet as it has now emerged as an essential tool for information searching and purchasing of products, mainly in tourism. There is a core belief that travellers are inclined to rely on information provided by past customers on hotel products and services (Senecal & Nantel, 2004); signifying the power and influence of

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online product reviews (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008). Therefore, online reviews can potentially be a robust marketing platform for hotel marketers as well as a tool to convince travellers to book holiday accommodations. Cantalops and Salvi (2014) revealed that online reviews had a strong influence on the hospitality sectors. Additionally, online reviews carry a powerful impact on holiday accommodations comparing to electronic-word-of-mouth (EWOM) (Ogut & Tas, 2012). It is due to the fact that online reviews can be shared through forums of discussion, boycott websites, platforms for opinion or any sites that allowed direct communications with consumers (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh & Gremler, 2004).

Travellers prefer to visit an online platform rather than a hotels' website due to the ease of viewing reviews posted by other travellers. Based on the research done by Khammash and Griffiths (2011), online reviews are referred to as the involvement of both active and passive consumers, whereby only active consumers shared their opinions through reviews on websites. Hence, with monitoring and controlling online reviews, many businesses started to offer virtual spaces on their websites for consumers to share their experiences and opinions (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). Consumers have a plethora of choices in terms of online travel booking websites around the world such as Booking.com, Agado.com, TripAdvisor.com, Expedia.com.my and Trivago.com offering package holidays, hotel stays and also private vacation rentals like homestay which is available for reservation through the internet. The trend of online hotel accommodation bookings has been emerging at an immense speed around the world and Malaysia is not an exception. Like in other South-East Asian countries, Malaysia has also been enjoying a growth in this sector as Malaysians are becoming more willing to spend more on travel even during economically harder times (Travelwireasia, 2016). Based on the survey conducted by Google Malaysia (2013) in partnership with TNS Research, nine out of 10 Malaysian travellers search for hotels online and five in 10 travellers book accommodations online.

2.1 Hypothesis Development

Trust is a positive belief about the reliability and dependability of a person or an object (Everard & Galletta, 2006). It is a vital feature of buyer-seller relationships. The more a customer trusts a website, the lesser the perceived online transaction risk, and the higher is the intention of buying on that website (Mansour, Kooli, & Utama, 2014). Through online accommodation bookings, customers might be susceptible to accommodations and services delivered by the tenants. Customers anticipate that the hotel will provide services as pledged on the website, and the anticipation is reliant on the trust the customer has on the hotel. Credibility is the judgment of individuals about the reliability and trustworthiness of information based on their knowledge and experience (Rieh, 2010). Thus, in general, the word credibility defines a person's judgment of the information's truth and validity. From the above-mentioned, a consumer will be the judge of the information's credibility. Perceived usefulness defines the belief that using a system will be helpful and that the operation can help enhance an individual's job performance (Davis, 1989). Davis (1989) also stated that perceived usefulness has a positive influence on behavioural intention. This relationship is supported by numerous recent studies (Bhatiasevi & Yoopetch, 2015). According to Liu and Park (2015), useful information from reviews can assist consumers in evaluating the attributes offered by a service to build confidence. Under this study, perceived ease of use is crucial in determining a consumer's acceptance of the technology. According to Stern, Royne, Stafford, and Bienstock (2008), the ease of use or simplicity in the usage of a specific website will influence the consumer's intention to use it despite the increasing perceived risk attached. In this case, any unfavourable online reviews may elicit a wrong impression negatively affect consumer's booking intentions.

2.1.1 Relationship between Trustworthiness and Booking Intention

Trustworthiness is derived from the combinations of a set of beliefs that are centered on the integrity, trustworthiness, and benevolence of a party (Mayer & Davis, 1999). Mansour et al. (2014) implemented an integrative approach to explain the antecedents and consequences of online trust on purchase intention, and the findings showed that an online trust positively influence purchase intention. Ling, Daud, Piew, Keoy and Hassan (2011) supported the positive relationship between trust and online purchase intentions. Thus, the level of which consumers are willing to book the hotel room is affected by their trust towards the hotel, which can be significantly impacted by the feedbacks of their peers or past consumers. Thus, this research proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Trustworthiness will have a positive effect on booking intention.

2.1.2 Relationship between Credibility and Booking Intention

Johnson and Kaye (2009) proved that perceived credibility is the judgment of an individual and not the inherent characteristics of the source. Therefore, credibility is dependent on the beliefs of the cause, the medium, the message, and the receiver. With a significant increase in the number of people collecting their information through online means, the credibility of this information remains uncertain and often still dependent on the source of the data itself (Johnson & Kaye, 2009; Westerman, Spence & Van Der Heide, 2013). Research findings in communication studies suggest that people are less likely to give attention to any media that they judge as not credible (Metzger, Flanagan, Eyal, Lemus & McCann, 2003). Credibility is totally significant in the travel arrangement context for a reason that of the unclear nature of tourism products plus, the economic and psychological risks related with travel decision making (Loda, Teichmann, & Zins, 2009). Hence the following hypothesis is formed: *H2: Credibility will have a positive effect on booking intention.*

2.1.3 Relationship between Perceived Usefulness and Booking Intention

Perceived usefulness in the online travel communities originates from the belief that by using the system, they have the capabilities to enhance their performance by exchanging information with other community members (Lin, 2007). Consumer's decision making will be

influenced by valuable comments and opinions when confronting a tremendous amount of data. Therefore, this research proposes the following hypothesis: *H3: Perceived Usefulness will have a positive effect on booking intention.*

2.1.4 Relationship between Perceived Ease of Use and Booking Intention

Thavornchak and Taratanaphol (2009) explored that perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and perceived risks were factors that influenced the intention of purchasing domestic airline tickets online for non- adopters. Roca, Chiu and Martinez (2006), stated that perceived ease of use is most important for consumers who are new to the process and still learning how to use such applications. In another study, Cho and Sagynov (2015) and Tong (2010) found highly significant effects of perceived ease of use on perceived usefulness among online customers. Henceforth, by cultivating the perceived ease of use of technology, perceived usefulness could be heightened and later convert into an increased behaviour intention and acceptance of the technology. Özbek, Günalan, Koç, Şahin, and Kaş (2015) used the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to explore how tourists embrace online booking sites, and they found that perceived ease of use of online booking site had a positive relationship with perceived usefulness. Thus, this research proposes the following hypothesis: *H4: Perceived ease of use will have a positive effect on booking intention.*

2.1.5 Attitude Mediates the Relationship between Trustworthiness and Booking Intention

Trust has been proven through the use of empirical research to increase the consumer’s intention to purchase a product by a company (Jarvenpaa, Tractinsky and Saarinen 1999). Trust has also been proven to help a company retain its customer base as the likelihood of returning customers increases with the increase in trust consumers have over the company (Doney and Cannon, 1997). Researches have proven that trust has a direct impact on consumer’s attitude and thus, it is believed that trust also affects a consumer’s intention indirectly through consumer’s attitude. Furthermore, previous researches have shown that trust is a significant antecedent of contributing to online shopping (Lim et al., 2016). Moreover, Shukla (2014) finds that customers’ purchase intentions are positively influenced by the online trust. Another research by Hsu et al. (2013) found a positive correlation between trusts and consumers’ intention to shop online. Thus, it can be said that the likelihood of consumers making a purchase is dependent on the level of trust the consumers have over the vendor of the product online. In this case, the more the consumers trust the hotel, the more likely he or she is to book a room from the hotel online. Hence the following hypothesis is formed: *H5: Attitude mediates the relationship between trustworthiness and booking intention.*

2.0 Methodology

The research use self-administered questionnaire survey and convenient sampling to collect empirical data. After data cleaning and editing, the final count of questionnaires with no missing values for all variables under analysis was 191 out of 230, representing a response rate of 83 per cent. Table 1 present the demographic data of the respondents, according to their gender, age, online platforms used and frequency on visiting online platforms. There were 44.5 per cent male and 55.5 per cent female respondents. About 78 per cent of the respondents were from the age of 25 and below followed by 21.5 per cent from the 26-49 age groups, giving a total of 99.5 per cent of total respondents.

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents

Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	85	44.5
	Female	106	55.5
Age	Below 20	1	0.5
	20-25	148	77.5
	26-31	25	13.1
	32-37	11	5.8
	38-43	2	1
	44-49	3	1.6
	50 and above	1	0.5
Online platforms used	Agoda	141	35.9
	Booking.com	94	23.9
	Expedia	35	8.9
	Hotel	31	7.9
	Trivago	82	20.9
	Others	10	2.5
Frequency on visiting online platforms	More than once a week	2	1.1
	Weekly	6	3.1
	Monthly	19	9.9
	Once every 3 months	56	29.3

	Once every 6 months	50	26.2
	Once every year	58	30.4

(Source: developed for this research)

Established and validated scales are selected for data collection to obtain reliable information from the respondents. In this paper, the survey instrument of intention to book (6 items) adopted from Bhatiasevi and Yoopetch (2015), credibility (3 items) adopted from Sidali, Schultze and Spiller (2009), trustworthiness (4 items) adopted from Xu (2014). While perceived ease of use (5 items), perceived usefulness (1 item) and attitude (3 items) adopted from Elwada, Lu and Ali (2016). A survey instrument was composed based on the measurement items plus items designed to collect respondent demographics. A 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) used to measure all questions, where respondents indicated their degree of agreement or disagreement with a series of statements. The Cronbach alpha reliability for all antecedents and dependent variables ranged from 0.850 to 0.923. The results indicated a high degree of internal consistency which concurs with Hair, Money, Samouel and Page’s (2007) 0.70 cut-off point.

4.0 Findings

Multiple regression analyses determined the relationship between the five antecedents and intention to book holiday accommodations online. The result shown in Table 2 indicated that perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness affect intention to book positively ($p \leq 0.05$). Therefore, H3 and H4 were supported. As for H1 and H2, the results indicated that there was no significant relationship between credibility and trustworthiness with booking intention ($p > 0.05$). The value of R2 indicated that 49.6% of the independent variables contributed towards booking intention.

Table 2: Regression analysis between the four antecedents and online accommodation booking intention

Independent variables	Dependent variable (Intention to book)			
	Beta	t	Sig.	Outcome
Credibility	0.055	0.758	0.449	Not supported
Trustworthiness	0.032	0.386	0.700	Not supported
Perceive ease of use	0.380	4.660	0.000	Supported
Perceived usefulness	0.373	4.596	0.000	Supported
R ²	0.496			
F	45.699			

To test hypothesis 5, two different tests, namely Baron and Kenny’s (1986) 4 causal steps test, and Sobel’s Z test were adopted to examine the mediating effect of attitude on the relationship between trustworthiness and booking intention. This study hypothesizes that trustworthiness (i) has a positive total impact on booking intention, and (ii) also exerts an indirect effect on booking intention through the mediating effect of attitude. As indicated in Table 2, the effect of trustworthiness on booking intention is reduced (from Beta = 0.515 to Beta = 0.168) after adding attitude as the mediator, but remains significant. In this regard, attitude is a partial mediator on the relationship between trustworthiness and booking intention.

The results of Sobel’s test (Table 3) revealed a change in unstandardized coefficient from 0.515 to 0.168. However, the new unstandardized coefficient (i.e. 0.168) is still significant (at $p < 0.001$) even after the inclusion of attitude as mediating variable. Similarly, the results of Sobel’s test also supported that attitude has a partial mediating effect on the relationship between trustworthiness and booking intention. Since the relationship between trustworthiness and booking intention remains significant, the mediator is said to mediate the relationship between the two variables partially. Hence, H5 is supported.

Table 3: summary of four steps approach for the testing mediator (Attitude)

	Path	Beta (Unstandardized)	Standard Error	Beta (Standardized)
Step 1	C	0.515	0.061	0.524
Step 2	A	0.587	0.051	0.639
Step 3	B	0.708	0.058	0.663
Step 4	C'	0.168	0.069	0.171

(Source: developed for this research)

Table 4: Sobel Calculator for testing mediation (Attitude)

Input:	Test statistic:	Std. Error:	p-value:
a 0.587	Sobel test: 8.37425926	0.04962779	0
b 0.708	Aroian test: 8.35942357	0.04971587	0
s _a 0.051	Goodman test: 8.38917421	0.04953956	0
s _b 0.058	Reset all	Calculate	

(Source: developed for this research)

3.0 Discussion

Perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use have a significant relationship with booking intention. Research by Ahn, Ryu and Han (2007) using 932 respondents stated that there is a positive and direct correlation between perceived usefulness and behavioral intention. The results are similar to this study; thus the research question is answered and the hypothesis of the significant positive relationship between perceived usefulness and booking intention accepted. Agag and El-Masry (2016) recommended that perceived usefulness is the most crucial element in foretelling the probability of an individual's plan to use online bookings. Roca et al. (2006) suggest that perceived ease of use holds the stoutest influence on consumer's booking intentions. Furthermore, Xu et al. (2012) discovered that perceived ease of use is one of the foremost factors in the adoption of mobile travel reservations by consumers. The result of this study is similar to that of the previous research by other researchers and answer the research question of will perceived ease of use positively affect booking intention towards holiday accommodations. Attitude partially mediated variable (attitude) with trustworthiness and booking intention. However, the other two remaining independent variables do not affect the online booking intention which is trustworthiness and credibility.

These findings can help the hotel online-booking website companies better understand and place strong emphasis to improve these variables that may directly or indirectly affect the customer booking intention. Online booking companies need to improve their websites or platforms so that they could offer products and services that are useful and easier to use shortly. Customers tend to seek helpful information from the online booking website when making an online booking for their preferred hotel. Therefore, companies must provide sufficient, accurate and correct information on their website so that customers will think that the information provided, product provided and services provided are useful. Eventually, it will generate greater confidence in the customers to use the online platform at the same time. Perceived usefulness will influence their booking decision based on the information provided by the company as well as their perceptions of websites. Therefore, offering more choices or alternatives to the hotels' option to choose and more applications on the sites could improve the usefulness of the online booking platform. Other than that, the mediating variable (attitude) is partially mediated with trustworthiness and booking intention for holiday accommodations booking intention. Albeit credibility and integrity does not affect online - booking intention, managers should not disregard these two variables. Provide sufficient and accurate information concerning the accommodations and services that the customers intended to book will help to increase the level of credibility and trustworthiness.

4.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has presented some valuable insight into studies on the online travel service. When results are interpreted, accreditation of the limitation of the study needs to be done. First, the empirical study was conducted just in one country, Malaysia. The results do not apply to most other countries. Secondly, the empirical study only chooses websites like Booking.com, Agado.com, TripAdvisor.com, Expedia.com.my, and Trivago.com that specialise in providing customers with the facility to book their accommodations online. More cases in different travel service organisations and industries will better support the assumptions in the study. In examining the dimensions of online travel service quality, future researchers may conduct further empirical studies on how to evaluate online travel service quality and to meet customer's needs. For instance, the website design could also add to the increasing interest in intention to book, actual bookings and trust perceptions. Other than that, future research may also look at the credibility of the review writers on influencing people to book as some companies may violate the intentions of some review sites by posting false reviews.

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