An investigation on the Acceptance of Facebook by Travellers for Travel Planning

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Abstract

Due to the emergence of social media and web 2.0 applications within the last few years, tourists' travel behaviour and decision-making changed. This study investigates tourists' behavioural intentions to use Facebook for travel planning purposes. To address this objective, a combination of survey and 19 interviews provided qualitative and quantitative data. Results indicated that Information search, Sharing travel experiences and Trust were the main determinants of intention to use Facebook. In particular, travellers view Facebook as a tourism information source, they are more willing to share their experiences on their own profile rather than a providers page and that they trust other tourism related sites more than Facebook. Practical and theoretical implications are discussed.

Keywords: social media; Facebook; technology acceptance; tourism

1 Introduction

Undoubtedly, the internet and social media have transformed people's behaviours and business's marketing strategies within the tourism and hospitality industry. Due to the implementation and usage of social media, it is argued that the power in the marketplace has shifted from suppliers to customers as customers are in control of sharing information and knowledge through electronic word-of-mouth (Constantinides and Fountain, 2008). As research by Xiang and Gretzel (2010) as well as Yoo and Gretzel (2011) for instance demonstrated, especially tourists' travel information search has been affected by social media. Although Facebook, apart from Twitter, is considered to be the most popular and most widely adopted social media application, there is however limited research on its usage. The purpose of this study therefore is to investigate tourists' intentions to use Facebook for travel-related purposes in order to gain an understanding of their motivations and reasons to use the social network.

2 Literature review

Extensive amount of online travel information available has empowered tourists and changed their travel behaviour (Buhalis and Law, 2008; Sigala, 2011). Social media enabled tourists to find information quicker, more detailed and actually experienced by other travellers, which leads to tourists being very well informed not only in terms of destinations in general but local resources, special offers, reduced prices and

insider tips (Buhalis and Law, 2008). Research by Xiang and Gretzel (2011) showed that travellers frequently use search engines as well as social media such as blogs, social networks and micro-blogging for their travel information search. This is supported by Parra-López et al. (2011) stating that tourists increasingly use web 2.0 applications to obtain information before or during their holidays. Social media provides information and experiences from travellers who have been to certain destinations or stayed at certain hotels (Casaló et al., 2010; Sparks and Browning, 2011). This information is considered to be more up-to-date and reliable as well as more enjoyable to read than information provided by travel agencies as highlighted by Ye et al. (2011). As further indicated by Sparks and Browning (2011), tourists trust these pieces of information and recommendations as they are "real" and haven't been arranged by marketers. Yoo and Gretzel (2011) moreover refer to research conducted by Henning-Thurau et al. (2004, in Yoo and Gretzel, 2011, p.611) suggesting main motivators for content creation and information sharing such as presenting negative experiences, concern for other users, gaining social benefits and providing or seeking advice.

In order to explore and understand tourists' intentions to use Facebook for travel-related purposes, Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) was deployed as a theoretical framework. The TAM has been widely used as a framework to investigate the use and acceptance of social media and social network sites (Hossain and de Silva, 2009; Kwon and Wen, 2010; Lee et al., 2012; Moon and Kim, 2001; Castañeda et al., 2009; Casaló et al., 2010; Sparks and Browning, 2011; Ayeh et al., 2012). The initial model used in this research hypothesised trust and perceived enjoyment to have an influence on Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease Of Use (PEOU) respectively, which in turn would affect tourists' behavioural intentions to use Facebook for travel-related purposes.

3   Methodology

To address the objective of the study, a mixed methods approach, comprising of inductive and deductive elements, was used. Primary research was conducted using a survey and semi-structured interviews. The responses to the questionnaires provided the foundation for the type of questions to be asked on the interviews and served as means of adding validity and reliability to the interview questions. The survey involved administering questionnaires to 259 Austrian hotel guests, 19 of which were willing to participate in the follow-up interviews. The data collection took place during the period of May to July 2012. The questionnaire design was based on scales adapted from previous studies and measured by multiple item 5-point Likert-type scales. Perceived Enjoyment and Trust were measured following the studies of Lee et al (2012), Hsu and Lin (2008) and Sparks and Browning (2011). The scale items for PEOU and PU were taken from Davis (1989), Lee et al (2012) and Kwon and Wen (2010). BI was measured following the studies of Lee et al (2012) and Hsu and Lin (2008).

4 Findings

4.1 Survey Results

A total of 259 participants were randomly included in the survey which was considered a satisfying response rate. Participants comprised of 166 (64.1%) female tourists and 93 (35.9%) male tourists. The majority of participants (47.9%) was between 18 and 25 years old, followed by 38.2% aged between 25 and 35 and 8.9% aged between 35 and 50. The vast majority (71.4%) of tourists were from Europe followed by tourists from America and Asia with 13.1% and 12.0% respectively. Apart from the three items representing Trust (.677) all components reached the suggested Cronbach value ranging from .708 to .791, indicating a strong relationship among the items. Exploratory factor analysis indicated a KMO value of .906 and Bartlett's test proved to be statistically significant (p= .000). Varimax rotation revealed three reliable factors, each of which loads .667 and above. None of the hypothesis could be confirmed, although trust could be identified to have an influence on behavioural intentions as presented in Figure 1. However, a new model emerged comprising of the factors sharing travel experiences (SE), information search (IS) and trust (T), which influence behavioural intentions to use Facebook. Regression analysis was statistically significant (p= .000) indicating that that the total variance explained by the model was 58.3% (r^2=0.583). It was furthermore identified that information search contributes most (50.4%) to the prediction of behavioural intentions to use Facebook, followed by trust (factor 3) with 34% and sharing travel experiences which makes a contribution of 11.2%.
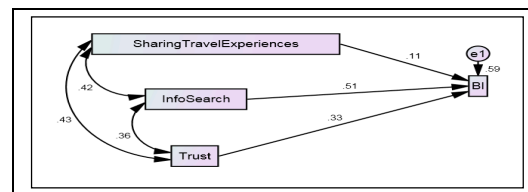

Fig.1: Suggested Social TAM

4.2 Qualitative findings

A total of 19 interviews with tourists using Facebook for travel-related purposes have been conducted. Participants stated that they have never used and probably will not use Facebook for searching travel-related information in the future. Approximately half of the tourists asked instantly referred to TripAdvisor or booking.com when being asked where they usually get their travel information from. However, tourists do use Facebook during or after their holidays. Main motivations to use the social network for travel-related purposes have been identified as sharing travel experiences, staying in contact with family and friends whilst being on holiday and looking at friends' Facebook pages to get up-dates on their holidays and view their pictures. It has to be mentioned though that people rather post and share their experiences and photos on their own Facebook pages but are rather reluctant to share them on hotels' Facebook pages. Moreover, people's comments and posts about their holidays on

Facebook were expressed as a reason to consider the social network for travel planning. On the other hand, respondents claimed to be reluctant to use Facebook or hotels' Facebook pages for tourism purposes due to preferred usage of TripAdvisor and lack of trustworthiness in Facebook.

5 Conclusion and Recommendations

As demonstrated by this study, tourists' behavioural intentions to use Facebook for travel-related purposes are influenced by information search, trust and sharing travel experiences. Searching for travel-related information has been identified by various researchers (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010; Ye et al., 2011; Ho et al., 2012) to be essential concerning social media usage which could be confirmed by quantitative findings of this research. Interestingly, 18 out of 19 respondents claimed to never have used the social network for travel information search. However, tourists do look at their friends' Facebook pages whilst they are on holiday in order to view their pictures and learn about their experiences which could be considered as information search. As a consequence, it could be proposed that the likelihood to use Facebook for travel-related purposes increases with satisfying information found on the social network. The second contributor to tourists' behavioural intentions to use Facebook for travel-related purposes has been identified as sharing travel experiences. Various researchers (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010; Parra-López et al., 2011; Ye et al., 2011) suggested that tourists increasingly use social media to share information, their experiences and opinions which could be confirmed by this research. Findings indicated that respondents who use Facebook whilst being on holiday, do so in order to stay in contact with family and friends. However, travel experiences are rather shared on personal Facebook pages as opposed to hotels' Facebook pages. Hence, sharing travel experiences such as posting pictures, using the check-in function and posting status updates for friends and family directly influences the usage of the social network. The third factor was trust with a contribution of 34%. This is in accordance with research by Casaló et al. (2010), Yoo and Gretzel (2011) as well as Ayeh et al. (2012) suggesting that tourists trust information generated by other travellers. Qualitative findings of this study however revealed that tourists consider information provided on Facebook to be subjective and non-representative, thus not trustworthy. As however indicated by Parra-López et al. (2011), trust in the whole community that contributes relevant knowledge is considered to be more important than trust in individuals, which could explain trust being the second strongest predictor for tourists' intentions to use Facebook for travel-related purposes. This study initially used the TAM relating constructs to explain acceptance of a particular system (Facebook). However, results indicated that there may be other constructs that can explain acceptance of Facebook that are not part of the traditional technology acceptance framework. With regards to information search and sharing travel experiences for instance, it seems that the more people search for information and/or share information on Facebook the more they intent to use it, as the interaction becomes the focal point, rather than system use as conceptualised in the traditional IS sense. Thus, future research should reassess the relevance of TAM for measuring networking sites acceptance. Further research should also concentrate on refining these constructs in both conceptual and

operational level (scale development), as well as explore potential differences between diverse groups of tourists.

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