

RESEARCH BRIEF

Factors Affecting an International Traveler’s Attitude in Purchasing Online Travel Services

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In 2019, Thai government officials have projected that 41.1 million foreign tourists will visit Thailand and spend \$69.351 billion (“Record 38.27m tourists in 2018,” 2019). Foreign tourist receipts account for about 12% of Thailand’s gross domestic product (Sriring, 2019), with tourism a key growth engine. Furthermore, Figure 1 shows that in 2018, Thailand received approximately \$63.162 billion in revenue

from the arrival of 38.27 million international tourists (Kasikornbank Research Center, 2019), making the Kingdom the 10th most visited country in the world (Hutton, 2018).

Additionally, Thailand is the fourth most profitable tourism destination in the world, with international visitors spending more money in Thailand than anywhere else in Asia (Ekstein, 2018). Also, Thailand

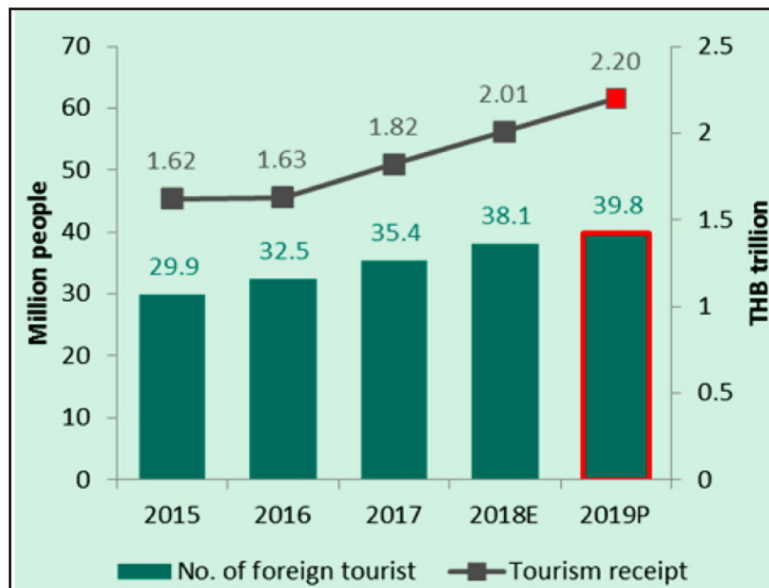


Figure 1. Thailand’s international tourist arrivals 2015–2019.

Source: Kasikornbank Research Center (2019).

is first in Asia when it comes to tourism spending, with East Asian tourists accounting for 73% percent of all arrivals (Stapornchai, 2018), with the tourism sector accounting for 5.8 million jobs or 15.5% of the country's total employment.

Furthermore, these amazing tourism statistics find support in other statistics related to the Internet, social media (SM) use, and the advent of the mobile phone/smartphone/cellular phone. From a global 2019 Quarter 2 report, it was found that global Internet users have reached 4.437 billion, with 3.5 billion using some form of SM, with 98% of these SM users accessing SM platforms via mobile devices (Kemp, 2019). Some might say that SM and mobile devices (mobile social media – MSM) have overtaken all other forms of marketing communications processes, especially when global tourism is discussed. Travelers have become a generation of do-it-yourself (DIY) consumers who plan, manage, and book their travel online (Korneliussen, 2014).

As traditional tour operators come under pressure from fierce online competition and a general decline in demand for package holidays (Jeffries, 2018), this has had major impacts on traditional travel groups such as Thomas Cook (Kollewe, 2019). This tremendous disruption has been created by new technologies such as the Internet/web, ubiquitous mobile connectivity, and SM, which are changing the travel distribution landscape and the manner in which consumers shop,

plan, and purchase travel, in general, and tours, in particular (Gerra, 2014).

Furthermore, MSM has made huge impacts on the global tourism sector, with consumers using social networking media (SNM) sites to research trips, make informed travel decisions, and share their personal experiences of a particular hotel, restaurant, or airline. Lane and Coleman (2012) have reported that SNM sites first appeared in the 1990s, with an original intent to allow Internet users to bond with the outside world (Wink, 2010). Today, SNM sites have reached heights never originally envisioned, as Facebook today has 2.32 billion monthly active users, with YouTube, WhatsApp, and Instagram being other well-known names (Figure 2).

Within the travel industry, sites such as TripAdvisor have had wide-reaching effects. In January 2019, TripAdvisor reported that its site had accumulated 490 million unique visitors, who use other tourists to actively seek out travel information and advice (Smith, 2019). In 2018 alone, the site generated 730 million user reviews and opinions covering over eight million listings for restaurants, hotels, vacation rentals, and attractions.

Additionally, online travel agencies (OTAs) have become sophisticated marketing channels for hoteliers of all sizes, which now offer access to markets that were once unattainable by small hoteliers and hostel owners. Popular OTAs sites include Booking.com,

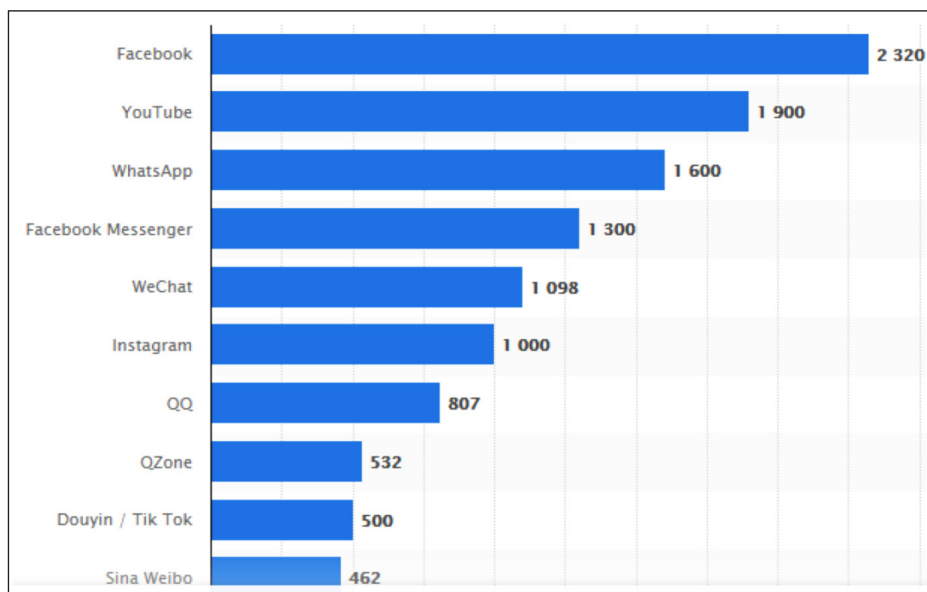


Figure 2. Global social networks ranked in millions of active users, as of April 2019

Source: Kemp (2019)

Expedia, and Priceline, which now give travelers easy access to different travel options in terms of time, location, and price (Gaggioli, 2015). This is consistent with Bharadwaj, Chaudhary, Kittikachorn, and Rastogi (2017), which reported that within Thailand, a new e-commerce SM model had been created, with 40% of all purchases digitally affected.

Another aspect concerning a traveler's online use is the traveler's attitude (AT). Lee, Rodgers, and Kim (2009) pointed out that even a moderate amount of negativity negates other extremely positive reviews concerning AT towards a brand. Fethi and Mohammed (2019) also reported that AT and the perceived ease of use of the technology for online reservation users were identified as the most important factors driving consumers to adopt online Booking.com services. Furthermore, the quality of a travel website's design and the consumers' attitudes and satisfaction have a significant influence on a traveler's purchase intention (Wen, 2012). Liu, Brock, Shi, Chu, and Tseng (2013) also determined that price benefit, convenience benefit, and recreational benefit had a significant and positive influence on a consumer's AT toward purchasing products or services online.

Davis (1989) was an early leader in the discussion concerning the usefulness and ease of use (EU) of technology in what was called the technology acceptance model (TAM). Additionally, TAM demonstrated that the perceptions of technology and its perceived ease of use and usefulness (Saade, 2007) have a significant impact on its use and, ultimately, performance (Venkatesh & Bala, 2008). Additional support for EU comes from Poddar, Donthu, and Wei (2009), who indicated that a website's personality could influence a site's customer orientation, web site quality, and purchase intentions. McDonald (2009) has also stated that effective SM sites include excellent user content, which is dynamic and creates an awesome user experience.

Dowling and Staelin (1994) defined the idea of the perception of risk (PR) as "the consumer's perception of the uncertainty and adverse consequences of buying a product or service" (p. 119). Jacoby and Kaplan (1972) earlier stated that numerous researchers had utilized the construct of PR to investigate various aspects of consumer behavior. Kim, Ferrin, and Rao (2008) examined the Internet consumers' trust and PR in Hong Kong and determined that both have strong impacts on a consumer's purchasing decisions.

Trust (TR) also plays an essential role in online purchasing (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), and determines the commitment between consumers and organizations. This is consistent with Marakanon and Panjakajornsak's (2017) study, which also determined that TR is the foundation of communication relationships in providing consumer services, with consumer TR having a direct influence on customer loyalty and an organization's effectiveness (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001).

The importance of TR was also supported by a speech made to a travel conference in Cadiz, Spain, in which BBC journalist Sarah Smith stated, "We are living through a crisis of trust" ("Top BBC journalist," 2019, par. 4). She warned the travel agents before her that they could no longer command respect by representing a public organization, whether it is the BBC or an established travel company ("Top BBC journalist," 2019).

Also, website cues of visual appeal, website ease of use, and product availability are important precursors towards purchase decisions (Liu, Li, & Hu, 2013). Amaro and Duarte (2016) also determined that a traveler's AT, perceived risk, and perceived behavioral control have a significant influence on the willingness to purchase travel online.

Conceptual Model

We, therefore, synthesized the large body of literature and determined that an international traveler's attitude (AT) was affected by a variety of variables. These included social media (SM), their perception of the website's ease of use (EU), the perception of risk (PR), and their overall trust (TR) of both the website's information and the company who is behind it. Therefore, Figure 3 shows the relationships of the following seven hypotheses:

- H1: SM directly influences EU.
- H2: SM directly influences PR.
- H3: EU directly influences TR.
- H4: EU directly influences AT.
- H5: PR directly influences TR.
- H6: PR directly influences AT.
- H7: TR directly influences AT.

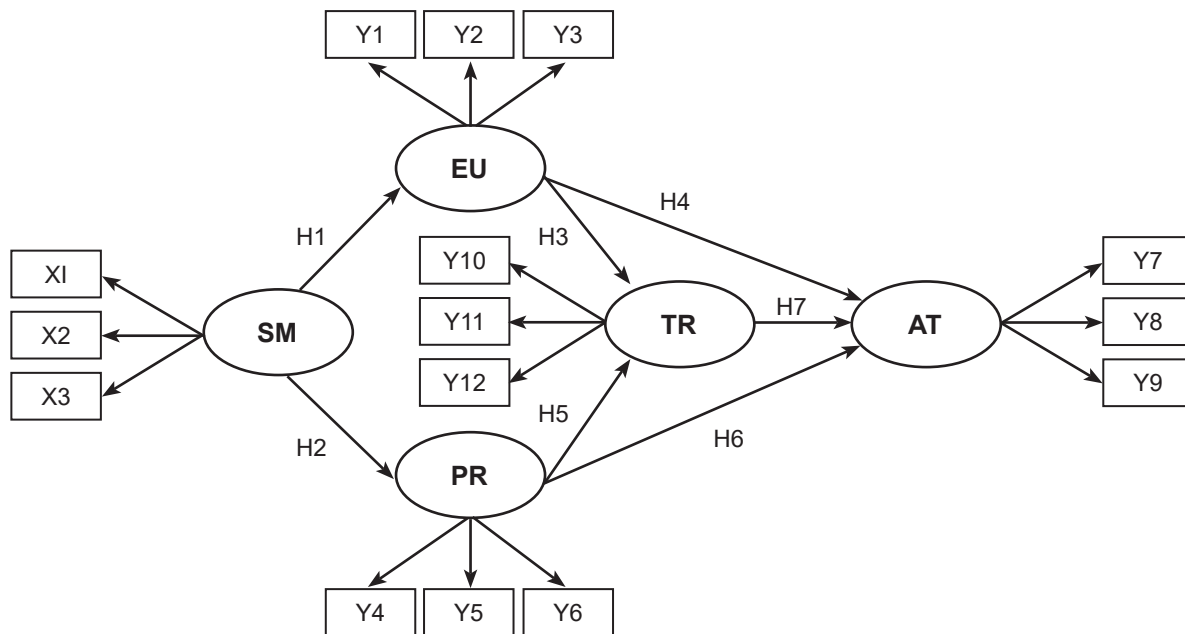


Figure 3. The conceptual framework.

Methods

Loehlin (1992) suggested that, in CFA, a researcher’s sample is better if it includes at least 200 individuals. However, Jackson (2001) felt that, in CFA analysis, the sample size should range between 200–400, and the magnitude of the loadings should have standardized values ≥ 0.60 . Other scholars have suggested larger sample sizes of at least 400, as larger sample sizes assure higher CFA results (Bartholomew, Steele, Moustaki, & Galbraith, 2008; Gagne & Hancock, 2006).

Therefore, starting in May 2017, graduate student teams were granted permission from officials at Bangkok’s main international airport, Suvarnabhumi Airport, to survey inbound, international tourists who were not traveling with tour groups or on non-scheduled airlines (chartered flights). Additional screening was conducted by asking each tourist in English if they had used an online service to book their travel arrangements. If the answer was “yes,” every fifth individual was randomly selected to complete the survey. From this process, 585 travelers responded and completed the student-assisted survey in six months.

The questionnaire consisted of 40 items in two sections. Section one contained the five items concerned

with the international traveler’s characteristics and online website preferences. In Section two, there were five parts that used a seven-level Likert scale with “7” to indicate “strongly agree,” “4” to indicate “moderate agreement,” and “1” to indicate “strongly disagree.” Cho and Kim (2015) have also indicated that Cronbach’s α is a good measure of a model’s reliability testing. Thus, the questionnaire’s results show that for SM with eight items, $\alpha = 0.89$; TR with seven items, $\alpha = 0.91$; PR with six items, $\alpha = 0.80$; EU with seven items, $\alpha = 0.90$; and AT with seven items, $\alpha = 0.90$. These results are viewed as good to excellent. The observed variables and their CFA results from the analysis can also be found in Table 2 and Table 3.

The analysis of the accuracy of the SEM of the variables that influence an international traveler’s AT was conducted using the LISREL 9.1 software program. The study used path analysis and the goodness of fit index (GFI) statistics to verify reliability and validity, with Byrne (2010) suggesting that χ^2/df should be ≤ 2.00 . Additional index criteria are $p \geq 0.05$, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) ≤ 0.05 , comparative fit index (CFI) ≥ 0.95 , the GFI ≥ 0.90 , adjusted goodness of fit (AGFI) ≥ 0.90 , and root mean square residual (RMR) ≤ 0.05 , and the standardized root mean square residual [SRMR ≤ 0.05]. Also, the

Table 1*A Traveler's Attitude Descriptive Analysis (n =585)*

Gender	Frequency	Percent
male	304	51.97
female	281	48.03
Total	585	100
Age		
Under 21 years of age	105	17.95
21–30 years of age	214	36.58
31–40 years of age	111	18.97
41–50 years of age	60	10.26
51–60 years of age	55	9.40
Over 60 years of age	40	6.84
Total	585	100
Highest education level		
Secondary school only	112	19.15
Diploma	143	24.44
Bachelor degree	203	34.70
Graduate degree	113	19.32
Unknown	14	2.39
Total	585	100
The continent where you reside		
America	132	22.56
Europe	352	60.17
Australia	34	5.81
Asia	48	8.21
Africa	13	2.22
Unknown	6	1.03
Total	585	100
Which online travel site did you use to book your trip?		
Agoda	124	21.20
Expedia	67	11.45
Hotels	32	5.47
Booking.com	223	38.12
TripAdvisor	35	5.98
Other	57	9.74
Unknown	47	8.03
Total	585	100

normed fit index [NFI] ≥ 0.90. See Table 4 for further supporting theory.

Furthermore, validity was measured using convergent validity to assure that the expected relationships between the constructs do exist. Construct validity, which included the GFI, CFI, RMSEA, and chi-square/df statistic (Hooper, Coughlan, & Mullen, 2005), and discriminant validity were also used in the goodness-of-fit (GoF) assessment (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2014).

Results

In Table 1, the descriptive analysis from the 585 questionnaires is shown. From it, we can see that the majority were between 21–30 years of age (36.58%), with 60.17% of the international travelers being from Europe. Results from the use of OTAs also determined that Booking.com was the most widely used (38.12%), with Agoda in second place (21.20%).

Table 2

External Latent Variable CFA of SM

constructs	α	AVE	t-value	manifest variables	loading	R ²
Social media (SM)	0.89	0.63	0.84	website familiarity (x1)	0.80	0.64
				decision to purchase travel services online (x2)	0.83	0.68
				exchange of information with other travelers (x3)	0.75	0.57

Note. $\chi^2 = 0.00$, $df = 0$, p -value = 1.00000, RMSEA = 0.000

Table 3

Internal Latent Variables CFA of TR, PR, EU, and AT

constructs	α	AVE	t-value	manifest variables	loading	R ²
Trust (TR)	0.91	0.66	0.85	website reliability (y10)	0.81	0.66
				responsibility and responsiveness (y11)	0.84	0.71
				confidence and safety (y12)	0.79	0.63
Perception of Risk (PR)	0.80	0.43	0.66	proper storage (y4)	0.59	0.35
				data security (y5)	0.93	0.88
				data accuracy (y6)	0.29	0.09
Perception of Ease of Use (EU)	0.90	0.62	0.83	website interaction ease (y1)	0.86	0.73
				website access ease (y2)	0.77	0.60
				website use ease (y3)	0.73	0.54
Attitude (AT)	0.90	0.73	0.89	comfortable and interesting (y7)	0.85	0.72
				value and satisfaction (y8)	0.84	0.71
				positive impression of website services (y9)	0.88	0.77

Note. $\chi^2 = 22.41$, $df = 27$, p -value = 0.71625, RMSEA = 0.000

CFA Results

LISREL 9.10 software was used to conduct both the study's CFA and SEM. Table 2 details the CFA results for the external latent variable AM. Table 3 shows the results for the internal latent variables of TR, PR, EU, and AT (Anderson & Gerbing, 1998).

SEM Modeling

Table 4 shows the confirmation of the GoF analysis results, along with the supporting theory for the criteria used. Figure 4 and Table 7 show the SEM results from the analysis of the effects of the variables

on an international traveler's AT towards purchasing online travel services. Additionally, support for the importance of AT in purchasing online travel services is confirmed as all the factors have an AVE ≥ 0.5 , and the composite reliabilities are between 0.82 and 0.87 (Table 5). From the GoF analysis, it was concluded that the measurement model had satisfied the criteria of convergent validity, with the SEM results indicating that the overall model R^2 was 0.42 (Table 6)—42% of all the variance could be explained by the combination of these variables. Therefore, all model causal factors had a positive effect on AT.

Table 4

GoF Analysis

Index	Criteria	Values	Results	Literature Support
χ^2	$p \geq 0.05$	0.83	not significant	Jöreskog, Olsson, & Fan, 2016
χ^2/df	≤ 2.00	0.81	confirmed	Byrne, 2010
RMSEA	≤ 0.06	0.00	confirmed	Hu & Bentler, 1999
GFI	≥ 0.90	0.99	confirmed	Jöreskog et al., 2016
AGFI	≥ 0.90	0.98	confirmed	Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996
RMR	≤ 0.05	0.03	confirmed	Hu & Bentler, 1999
SRMR	≤ 0.05	0.03	confirmed	Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2000
NFI	≥ 0.90	0.99	confirmed	Bentler & Bonett, 1980
CFI	≥ 0.95	1.00	confirmed	Hooper et al., 2005
Cronbach's α	≥ 0.80	0.80-0.91	good - excellent	George & Mallery, 2010

Table 5

Correlation Coefficients Affecting Attitude in Purchasing Online Travel Services

Latent variables	SM	TR	PR	EU	AT
SM	1.00				
TR	.49**	1.00			
PR	.30**	.08**	1.00		
EU	.58**	.76**	.17**	1.00	
AT	.50**	.78**	.13**	.74**	1.00
ρ_v (AVE)	0.61	0.69	0.57	0.63	0.66
ρ_c (Composite Reliability)	0.82	0.87	0.80	0.84	0.85
\sqrt{AVE}	0.78	0.83	0.75	0.79	0.81

Note. **Sig. < .01

Table 6

Mediation Effects Influencing AT

Dependent variables	R ²	Effect	Independent variables			
			SM	EU	PR	TR
Perception of Ease of Use (EU)	.51	DE	0.71**			
		IE	–			
		TE	0.71**			
Perception of Risk (PR)	.08	DE	0.28**			
		IE	–			
		TE	0.28**			
Trust (TR)	.39	DE	–	0.92**	-0.13**	
		IE	0.62**	–	–	
		TE	0.62**	0.92**	-0.13**	
Attitude (AT)	.42	DE	–	0.54**	0.02	0.41*
		IE	0.65**	0.38*	-0.05	–
		TE	0.65**	0.92**	-0.03	0.41*

Note. *Sig. < .05, **Sig. < .01

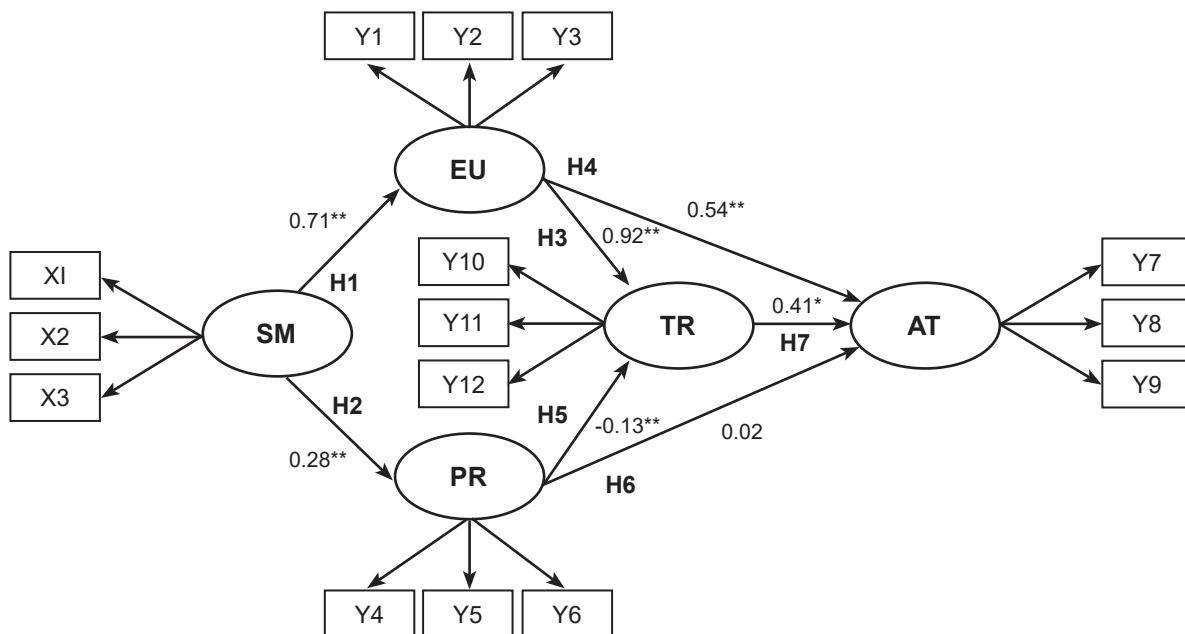


Figure 4. Final model.

Table 7*SEM Hypotheses Testing Results*

Hypotheses	Coef.	t-value	Results
H1: SM directly influences EU.	0.71	15.33**	consistent
H2: SM directly influences PR.	0.28	5.74**	consistent
H3: EU directly influences TR.	0.92	17.61**	consistent
H4: EU directly influences AT.	-0.13	3.67**	consistent
H5: PR directly influences TR.	0.54	3.76**	consistent
H6: PR directly influences AT.	0.02	0.41	inconsistent
H7: TR directly influences AT.	0.41	3.01*	consistent

Note. **Sig. < 0.01

Mediation Effects

All causal variables in the model have a positive influence on AT, which can be combined to explain the variance of the factors affecting AT (R^2) by 42%. Furthermore, the direct effect [DE], indirect effect [IE], and total effect TE of each construct is shown in Table 6, which when ranked in importance are EU, SM, TR, and PR, with total effect [TE] values of 0.92, 0.65, 0.41 and -0.03, respectively. In Table 7, the hypotheses testing results are shown.

Discussion

Social Media

Hypotheses testing revealed that SM had a direct effect on EU (H1) and PR (H2). As technology and software have evolved and matured, the factors contributing to EU have increased, whereas the factors contributing to PR have decreased. As Briandana, Doktoralina, and Sukmajati (2018) pointed out, the tourism industry has witnessed significant changes due to the ease in which travelers can obtain information from various online media platforms. Additionally, emotions play a significant role in SM use (Palmer & Koenig-Lewis, 2009), as well as personal values in online purchasing (Jayawardhena, 2004). Hsiao, Lin, Wang, Lu, and Yu (2010) additionally detailed

the elements that influence purchase decision making on the SM site, with TR in product recommendations influencing a consumers' intention to purchase online.

Perception of the Ease of Use

The EU was also determined to have a direct effect on TR (H3) and AT (H4). Support for H3 is extensive, with Davis (1989) indicating that EU is the users' perception concerning if a particular technology is free of effort. Also, Cho and Sagynov (2015) indicated that there is a strong impact on online shopping intention, which arises from TR. Bressolle and Durrieu (2011) felt that quality also plays a role in increasing EU.

Perception of Risk

The PR was also found to have a direct influence on the study's international traveler's TR (H5), with Ariffin, Mohan, and Goh (2018) reporting that security risk was the riskiest factor in the process of online purchasing. However, support for H6's relationship between PR and AT was lacking, and the hypothesis was rejected. Support for H6's conclusion can be found in research from Yang, Liu, Li, and Yu (2015) in which perceived information asymmetry, the perception of technological and regulatory uncertainty, and perceived service intangibility were confirmed as the main determinants of perceived risk.

Trust

The international traveler's TR was tested in H7 and was determined to support AT positively. Support for this finding is extensive, with Zeba and Ganguli (2016) stating that word-of-mouth, trust, and perceived risk should be viewed as the mechanisms in the adoption process of online shopping in the extended technology acceptance model.

Conclusion

We investigated the interrelationships between AT and EU, SM, TR, and PR, with the final measurement model showing 42.0% of the variance of the underlying construct. Furthermore, the total effect values on an international traveler's AT from EU, SM, TR, and PR were 0.92, 0.65, 0.41, and -0.03, respectively. With recent studies reporting that 74% of shoppers make buying decisions based on SM, and with SM having a global penetration rate of 45% (3.5 billion users), the study of how AT and SM interact is of critical importance not only to hotel chains but to governments as well. Technology is also shifting a traveler's PR, as platforms become more secure and payment systems more convenient and robust. With these technological advancements, consumer use will increase even more, especially as entire countries move to "digital economies." Although some might consider it a cliché, social media has really become the elephant in the room.

Declaration of ownership

This report is our original work.

Conflict of interest

None.

Ethical clearance

This study was approved by the institution.

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