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A PLS Analysis of hotel guests' acceptance of social media networks

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Abstract

Although social media networks (SMNs) have been established for a number of years, research on the acceptance of SMNs within the hospitality industry has been limited. The study uses an extended technology acceptance model (TAM) to assess hotel guests' acceptance of SMNs within the luxury hotel industry. A total of 258 usable data was collected and path least square analysis using SmartPLS conducted. The findings show that there are five external variables that influence hotel guests' continued usage of SMNs including accessibility, trust, social influence, enjoyment and perceived benefits. A key contribution of the study is the presentation and validation of a SMN acceptance model and the importance for the luxury hotel industry to integrate mobile services and applications into their marketing strategies

Keywords: Social media networks; luxury hotel industry; technology acceptance model; PLS

1. Introduction

The importance of social media networks (SMNs) for marketing purposes within the intangible tourism and hospitality industry has been acknowledged by a number of researchers (Hudson & Thal, 2013). Within the intangible tourism and hospitality industry, SMNs are perceived as extremely valuable as travellers consider word-of-mouth from previous travellers as the most trustworthy source of information (Ayeh et al., 2013). As with all new technologies and online distribution channels, it is important to evaluate consumers' acceptance (Aldhaban, 2012). Travellers' acceptance of SMNs has been examined by a number of scholars (Ayeh, et al., 2013; Parra-López et al., 2011). Hotel guests' intention to engage in electronic word-of-mouth has been researched by Leung et al. (2013) however, the acceptance of luxury hotel guests' in regards to SMNs has not received attention within the literature. Thus, the current research aims to fill the gap in the literature by focusing on guests' acceptance of SMNs within the luxury four and five star hotel industry in the UK and the Republic of Ireland.

2. Research Model

The technology acceptance model (TAM), originally proposed by Davis in 1989, is considered the most prominent technology acceptance framework and aims to understand users' reasons and motivations to accept new technologies and innovations with the assumption that the intention to use a technology is determined by two major constructs: perceived ease of use (PEOU) and perceived usefulness (PU). Earlier research commonly focused on the intention to use a technology and the actual usage behaviour. However, SMNs exist for a number of years and hotel guests that already follow hotels on SMNs are the sample therefore, the aim of the study will be to assess the

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continued usage behaviour rather than the actual usage behaviour or intention to use. In addition, a number of researchers identified that attitude and satisfaction play an important mediating role within technology acceptance research, being influenced by external variables (Agarwal & Prasad, 1999; Wixom & Todd, 2005). The research is part of a mixed-method methodology and draws on a previous qualitative study identifying external variables that influence hotel guests' acceptance of SMNs. Interviews with sixteen hotel guests' from the UK and the Republic of Ireland identified that social influence, accessibility, trust, enjoyment and perceived benefits need to be empirically tested as factors influencing guests' continued usage of SMNs. Based on this, the research model shown in Figure 1 was developed.

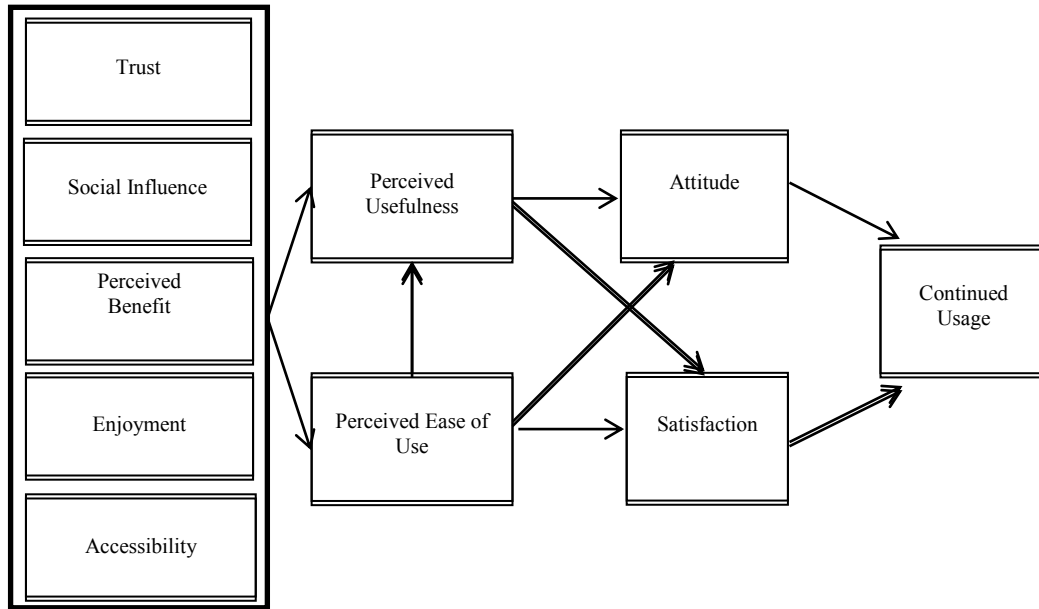


Fig. 1. Research Model

3. Methods

The research aims to empirically test the social media network acceptance model. This research used surveys for the primary data collection. The focus of the survey was on the rating of measurement items for the variables of trust, accessibility, perceived benefits, enjoyment, social influence, PEOU, PU, attitude and satisfaction as well as continued usage. All items employed a five point Likert-scale with 1 being “strongly disagree” and 5 being “strongly agree”. Each variable was measured by four to seven measurement items which were formulated based on previous research. A two-step pilot test ensured the reliability of the measurement items. The online link to the questionnaire was posted by ten 4 and 5 star independent and chain hotels from May 15 to September 18, 2012 on their Facebook and Twitter pages resulting in 258 usable responses from domestic hotel guests in the UK and the Republic of Ireland. For the estimation of the measurement model, the partial least square (PLS) technique has been applied using SmartPLS 2.0 (M3) Beta software (Ringle et al., 2005).

4. Results and Discussion

The majority of respondents (73.3%) were female. The respondents were distributed across all age groups, with the majority being between 25 and 54. In terms of highest qualification, there was a fair representation of all

degrees, with the biggest part having an undergraduate degree (29.5%). With regards to nationalities, 83.3% were British nationals and 14.0% Irish nationals. For the country of residence, 84.9% revealed to live in the UK and the remaining 15.1% lived in the Republic of Ireland.

The measurement model has been confirmed through identifying factor loadings and average variance extracted. In addition, all square-roots of AVE have been higher than the inter construct correlations and therefore the measurement model has been confirmed. The measurement model has been assessed through the bootstrapping technique, whereby the questionnaire sample of 258 has been re-sampled to 5000 cases (Henseler et al., 2009) and the results are shown in Table 1. In particular the original and slightly adopted TAM paths involving the relationships between PEOU, PU, satisfaction, attitude and continued usage have been supported at $p < 0.001$. In addition, the paths between accessibility and PEOU, trust and PEOU as well as social influence and PU accounted for strong relationships at $p < 0.001$. The paths between PU and satisfaction, perceived benefits and PEOU as well as accessibility and PU have been confirmed at a confidence level of $p < 0.05$. Additionally, a weak relationship, significant at $p < 0.1$, was confirmed among enjoyment and PU. In total, four relationships were not supported involving the paths of trust to PU; social influence to PEOU; perceived benefits to PU and enjoyment to PEOU. The assessment of the measurement model revealed that 48.6% of the variance in continued usage was explained by satisfaction and attitude. Further, 45.5% of the variance in attitude was explained by PEOU and PU. In addition, 45.6% of the variance in satisfaction was explained by PU and PEOU. Lastly, 57.7% of the variance in PU and 63.7% of the variance in PEOU were explained by the external variables of social influence, accessibility, enjoyment, trust and perceived benefits.

Table 1. Model Testing

Path	Path Coefficient	T-Value
Attitude→Continued Usage	0.5126	9.799****
Satisfaction→ Continued Usage	0.2872	4.752****
Perceived Usefulness→Attitude	0.4671	6.434****
Perceived Usefulness→Satisfaction	0.1456	1.988**
Perceived Ease of Use→ Perceived Usefulness	0.4130	5.847****
Perceived Ease of Use→Attitude	0.2577	3.677****
Perceived Ease of Use→Satisfaction	0.5648	7.366****
Trust→ Perceived Usefulness	0.0329	0.506
Trust→ Perceived Ease of Use	0.2242	3.602****
Social Influence→ Perceived Usefulness	0.1484	3.450****
Social Influence→ Perceived Ease of Use	-0.0133	0.297
Perceived Benefits→ Perceived Usefulness	0.1039	1.607
Perceived Benefits → Perceived Ease of Use	0.1594	2.264**
Enjoyment → Perceived Usefulness	0.1179	1.691*
Enjoyment → Perceived Ease of Use	0.0741	1.275
Accessibility → Perceived Usefulness	0.1822	1.986**
Accessibility → Perceived Ease of Use	0.3934	7.428****

Note: These significance levels are determined via bootstrapping analysis (Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt, 2011).
 ****significant at $p < 0.001$. ***significant at $p < 0.01$. ** significant at $p < 0.05$. *significant at $p < 0.1$

There have been a number of interesting findings within the current research. Accessibility turned out to be the most important determinant of technology acceptance. This can be considered one of the main outcomes and contribution of the current research, especially considering that accessibility as an external variable only received limited attention from previous acceptance researchers (Kang, et al., 2011; Karahanna & Straub, 1999). Overall, this

shows the importance of the mobility and accessibility aspect of social networks which is especially the case in today's emerging tablets and smartphone market, which enable the convenient access of SMNs (Lopez-Nicolas, et al., 2008). Interestingly, enjoyment revealed to be a relatively weak predictor of SMN acceptance within the luxury hotel context. The path of perceived benefits towards PEOU was supported at $p < 0.05$, however the path towards PU was identified to be insignificant. The path of social influence towards PU has been supported at the highest confidence level, whereas the present study failed to find a significant influence towards PEOU. The present study supported the relevance of the trust construct within SMN acceptance research and confirmed the relationship of trust towards PEOU at the highest confidence level. This finding shows the importance of word-of-mouth and trustworthy content for hotel guests' perceived ease of using hotel pages on SMNs.

5. Conclusion

The present study was conducted due to a lack in SMN acceptance research within the hotel and particularly the luxury hotel context. The present study revealed that there are five external variables (social influence, trust, perceived benefits, enjoyment and accessibility) that influence hotel guests' continued usage of SMNs. Every technological innovation and development has different characteristics. The present study identified that within the luxury hotel context, accessibility is the most important consideration in terms of SMN acceptance among hotel guests. In the past years, the online landscape has changed constantly and Persaud and Azhar (2012) pointed out the growing importance of smartphones and tablets led to an increased usage of SMNs while travelling. The current research has picked up this trend by suggesting the high importance of the external variable of accessibility. For the luxury hotel industry, one of the most important implications of the current research is to adapt to the fast changing technological environment and implement the mobile aspect into their marketing strategies. The current research furthermore revealed the importance of trust within the intangible hospitality industry. Therefore, an important implication for the luxury hotel industry is to focus on maintaining positive word-of-mouth on platforms such as Facebook. Encouraging guests' to leave recommendations should be a priority in terms of SMN strategy.

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