Understanding the Drivers and Consequences of Trust Toward Hotel Websites Under Different Cultural Contexts

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of this study is to develop a model that links guests’ characteristics, hotel characteristics, website infrastructure, interactions, perceived website trust, and the guest intentions to book hotels online. The present study adopted a positivist research philosophy with a quantitative method to assess the suggested model and the model was tested using structural equation modelling (SEM). The results show that perceived ease of use, service quality and reputation are the most influential determinants of perceived website trust for Egyptian consumers. While at the same time, perceived usefulness, service quality, and satisfaction are the most influential determinants of perceived website trust for the UK consumers. Furthermore, the findings of group comparison analysis assert that the strength of perceived usefulness of the UK customers is significantly stronger than that of Egyptian customers. Moreover, perceived website trust has a stronger influence on guests’ intention to book hotel online for the UK sample than for the Egyptian sample.

KEYWORDS

Cross-Cultural Research, Guests Characteristics, Hotel Characteristics, Intention To Book Hotel Online, Perceived Website Trust, Positive WOM, Website Infrastructure

INTRODUCTION

Over the past fifty years, the evolution of information technology leads to great development in the hospitality industry (Agag and El-Masry, 2017; Ponte et al., 2015; Law et al., 2019). Online purchasing of goods and services via the Internet have been rapidly increased (Oliveira et al., 2017). Internet allows online hotel providers to sell their products anytime and anywhere (Agag and El-Masry, 2017). Transactions via the internet represent a new stage in the hospitality industry, which works to develop better commercial practices (Kim et al., 2011). Online hospitality transactions account for 25 percent of sales of hospitality products (US Census Bureau, 2017). Based on the Market Intelligence Centre forecast, online hospitality business represents the Internet largest business area (62%), which generates over 555 billion United States dollars of revenue in 2017, online hotels sales grew 16% between 2014 and 2018 and prediction until 2020 has shown that online hospitality revenues grow at 10% yearly (Statista, 2019).

In the hospitality context, Kim et al. (2011) pointed out that trust plays a crucial role in making online booking transactions successful. Numerous studies examined the antecedents of trust in the online context (Sollner and Marco, 2015; Aimeur et al., 2016; Sebastianelli and Tamimi, 2018; Cheng et al., 2019). For instance, Agag and El-Masry (2017) investigate factors affecting trust and the influence of consumers trust, attitude, and perceive risk on travelers’ intention to buy travel products

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online in Egypt. Since uncertainties exist in online transactions, numerous studies have pointed out that trust is a major factor affecting e-commerce successful proliferation (Kim et al., 2016; Kim and Peterson, 2017). Trust plays an important role in online travel and tourism context (Agag and El-Masry, 2017; Mariani et al., 2019), and understanding its drivers and outcomes is a major concern for several reasons. First, antecedents of online trust help online service providers to identify the relative importance of factors affecting online trust. Therefore, online service providers will be able to devise suitable measures in order to build customer trust. Second, consequences of online trust assist online service providers to identify the significance of trust and its effects on purchasing behavior.

Culture is widely believed to affect customers’ behavior and value (Matzler et al., 2016; Fan et al., 2018). Srite and Karahanna (2006) pointed out that models of customers’ behavior do not universally hold across cultures. Ashraf et al. (2014) pointed out that consumers at different adoption stages exhibit different behaviors. Jarvenpaa et al. (1999) pointed out that customers in different cultures have differing expectations of what makes an online service provider trustworthy. Furthermore, due to the online shopping unique nature (i.e. customers cannot taste, feel, or touch the products), consumers perceive it as risky (Pavlou, 2003; Thongpapanl et al., 2018). Online hotels have rapidly proliferated, even in emerging markets. However, though it is now global, online hospitality studies have been conducted almost exclusively in advanced countries. In addition, regardless the fact that differences in national culture can influence consumer behavior, most online hospitality research has ignored the influence of culture (Matzler et al., 2016; Thongpapanl et al., 2018). Current studies on trust towards hotel websites under different cultures, however, remain equivocal (Agag and El-Masry, 2017).

In fact, hospitality researchers have paid a considerable attention to the determinants of intention to book hotel online (Agag and El-Masry, 2017; Ponte et al., 2015). However, research examining the drivers and outcomes of customer trust in hotel websites under different cultural contexts is a paucity in hospitality industry (Filieri, 2015; Agag and El-Masry, 2016b; Thongpapanl et al., 2018) and whether online trust influences guests’ behavior. The questions that have been raised: 1) what make guests’ trust hotels websites? How does trust encourage guests to book hotel online under different cultural contexts? Therefore, the current study attempts to answer these questions. Such a novel model to investigate the drivers and outcomes of online trust is also lacking in the Egyptian hospitality context.

With the above discussion in mind, the current study adopts a distinct approach to provide a complete model for investigating the drivers of guests’ trust and its effects on word of mouth, commitment, and intention to book hotel online under different cultures contexts, if it proves successful, the present study can contribute the following to the hospitality and tourism literature: 1) a robust framework that can provide a comprehensive understanding of guests’ trust toward hotel website; 2) examine the influence of trust on guests’ word of mouth, commitment, and intention to book hotel online; (3) identify the relative importance of the factors affecting guests’ trust toward hotel websites under different cultural contexts. The findings of this study have implications for hotel managers and international marketers to build consumer trust in different societies and identify whether they need to apply different strategies to do so.

**LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT**

**Trust in High – and Low Context Cultures**

Prior studies examine the influence of national culture on trust can be divided into two categories: first category explore the influence of culture on trust by conducting a comparative cross-cultural analysis (e.g. Park et al., 2012; Ashraf et al., 2014; Bidault et al., 2018; Thongpapanl et al., 2018). Second category of studies investigate the effect of national cultures dimensions (collectivism, individualism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity, and long-term orientation) on trust (Hallikainen and Laukkanen, 2018). In the international e-commerce context, building consumer
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