

THE EFFECTS OF ELECTRONIC WORD-OF-MOUTH (EWOM), PERCEIVED EASE OF USE, PERCEIVED USEFULNESS AND PERCEIVED RISK ON ONLINE HOTEL BOOKING APPLICATION LOYALTY OF YOUNG CONSUMERS

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Abstract

Customers adopted and used the online hotel booking application to reserve the hotels with the current business environment. In addition, the young consumers represented the new group of tourists with familiarity with the online business environments. Therefore, understanding the factors affecting their loyalty towards the hotel booking applications is highly useful for developing and improving their services effectively. The questionnaires were used to collect the data and 490 young consumers participated in the current study. The current study explored the effects of electronic Word-of-Mouth (EWOM), perceived risk, perceived ease of use, and perceived usefulness towards application loyalty for online hotel booking. The results indicated that perceived ease of use provided the strongest influence on application loyalty, followed by electronic Word-of-Mouth (EWOM), perceived usefulness, respectively, while perceived risk had no significant effect on application loyalty. Online hotel booking application developers and hotel managers should focus on the user-friendliness of the application. Furthermore, providing helpful information, reviews, and comments regarding the hotel services and tourism destinations can affect the application loyalty. Discussions with the past literature and conclusions as well as detailed recommendations were provided.



Introduction

Online services are a crucial part of our everyday life, ranging from shopping online, e-commerce, and online learning (Fan & Miao, 2012; Dimensions of Perceived Usefulness: Toward Enhanced Assessment, 2007; T. Zhang et al., 2019). In the context of tourism and hospitality, the hotel industry has relied heavily on the service of online travel agencies (OTA) to support hotel room reservation activities and to communicate with online consumers (Belarmino & Koh, 2018; Falk & Vieru, 2018).

Due to the higher competition among hotels and other accommodations, the hotel businesses face challenging times to attract new customers and retain current customers to use or reuse the hotel services (Moliner-Velázquez et al., 2019). In addition, the intensive application of online travel agencies (OTA) has been increasingly crucial among the hotel managers, and many hotels consider the adoption of OTA as the principal channel to provide hotel rooms to the customers (Chang et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2014). Furthermore, the rise of new hotels and accommodations forces the hotel managers to find new ways to develop their marketing strategies to outperform their competitors. With the popularity of online hotel booking and the fast-growing group of young consumers, hotel businesses need to ensure the effectiveness of the online hotel booking applications that those applications meet with the young customers' demand, leading to a long-term relationship and higher loyalty towards the booking applications.

The research question was “What are the most influential factors (e.g. Electronic Word-of-Mouth, perceived risk, perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness) affecting the online hotel booking application loyalty?”. The objective of the current study was to identify the effects of electronic Word-of-mouth, perceived risk, perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness in the context of online hotel booking, and their effects on application loyalty. The benefits of the study can help the practitioners improve the quality of hotel booking applications to enhance the loyalty toward using the application to book the hotel and accommodations in the long run. The past research studies highlighted that young consumers are the primary users of online applications and bookings (Kucukusta et al., 2015).

The young generation of hotel customers represents the fast-growing group with high purchasing power, and understanding their intention or behaviors can be helpful to predict their purchasing behaviors (Anubha & Shome, 2020). This current study emphasizes the young generations and their loyalty towards online hotel booking applications.

Literature review

This part provided the details of the definitions and background of major keywords used in the current study, including online hotel booking or electronic booking, electronic Word-of-Mouth (EWOM), perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, perceived risk, and application loyalty.



Electronic or online hotel booking

Online hotel booking, also known as electronic booking (e-booking), has become the primary method for customers to search and find the potential hotels of their choices for their vacations or business travel purposes (Akhtar et al., 2020; Gulati, 2021; Yan et al., 2018). In addition, online booking for hotel rooms or accommodation has become more common in recent years, compared to traditional booking or booking directly at the hotel. The use of online travel agencies (OTA) is widespread among tourists worldwide (Kirillova & Chan, 2018). Online booking usually was conducted via smartphone application when the customers make the room reservation (Bae et al., 2020).

Application loyalty (Online hotel booking application loyalty)

Loyalty can be defined as one of the ultimate goals of all businesses to retain and to have their customers reuse, to revisit, to speak positively about the products and services, to encourage others to adopt or to use the products, and to recommend people around them to use the products (Bender Stringam & Gerdes, 2010; R. Lee et al., 2009; Ramanathan, 2012; Young et al., 2017). Online hotel booking application loyalty in this study can be defined as the attitudinal and behavioral intention of the consumers to continue to use and reuse the online hotel booking application to reserve the hotels or accommodations in the future (Hwang & Kandampully, 2012; S. Lee & Kim, 2021; Ryu et al., 2014).

Electronic Word-of-Mouth (EWOM)

Electronic Word-of-Mouth (EWOM) becomes the familiar word with the use of the Internet and social media to offer the information or to receive the information, and it is known to be a highly effective method in marketing and business management in the past decades (Breazeale, 2009; J. H. Chang & Wang, 2019; Reza Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Y. Zhang et al., 2021). The consumers adopted the information, comments, reviews, and other details regarding the products or services via the Internet, websites, or social media platform as a new trend in the lifestyles, especially for young generations (Abubakar et al., 2017; Suwandee et al., 2020)

Perceived risk

Perceived risk refers to the degree that a consumer believes that there is a probability of loss concerning the transactions or activities that one has to do or participate in, such as the privacy risk or product failure from using mobile applications (Kang & Namkung, 2019). Furthermore, perceived risk represented consumers' perception towards uncertain situations or negative consequences from their buying or consumption experiences (Ozturk, 2016). The perceived risk can also reflect the consumers' beliefs about the potentially negative experiences from the transactions from purchase either from online or offline experiences (Aldás-Manzano et al., 2009; Hadjikhani et al., 2011; Vida et al., 2012). The greater the degree of perception towards risk leads to the lower the probability of purchasing, consuming, or adopting the



products or services. Moreover, the concept of perceived risk has been used in the past research with its effects on intention to purchase, satisfaction, and loyalty (Chaudhuri, 1997; Hogg Margaret Bruce & Hill, 1998; Schlaegel, 2015; Tzavlopoulos et al., 2019). In addition, the importance of perceived risk has been raised in the context of consumer decision to book a hotel. (Bae et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2017)

Perceived ease of use

The technology acceptance model (Bae et al., 2020; Davis, 1989) stated the key factors, such as perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness when the users intend to use or use the new product, service of new technology (Akturan & Tezcan, 2012; Kucukusta et al., 2015; Park & Huang, 2017). Perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness are considered essential determinants of behavioral intention and loyalty (Daud et al., 2018; Van Der Heijden, 2004). Empirical research studies indicated that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use showed the influence on intention to book online (Kucukusta et al., 2015). Moreover, perceived ease of use showed a significant relationship with customer loyalty (Lin et al., 2019; Tzavlopoulos et al., 2019)

Perceived usefulness

The term of perceived usefulness represented the extent to which one

perceived or believed that the adoption of a product or service can improve their performance or achieve better outcomes (Aldás-Manzano et al., 2009; Calisir et al., 2009; Flavian et al., 2020; Reza Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012). Furthermore, perceived usefulness can lead to the intention to reuse or can have an impact on the satisfaction and loyalty of the customers (Ramayah et al., 2009). Furthermore, the relationship between perceived usefulness and loyalty is considered crucial to developing the long-term relationship between the business entity and the customers (Amoroso & Ogawa, 2013; Cha & Seo, 2020).

Research hypotheses

According to the past literature, the research hypotheses were developed as follows;

H1: Electronic Word-of-Mouth has a positive influence on Application Loyalty

H2: Perceived ease of use has a positive influence on Application Loyalty

H3: Perceived usefulness has a positive influence on Application Loyalty

H4: Perceived risk has a negative influence on Application Loyalty

The conceptual model based on the research hypotheses was presented as shown below.

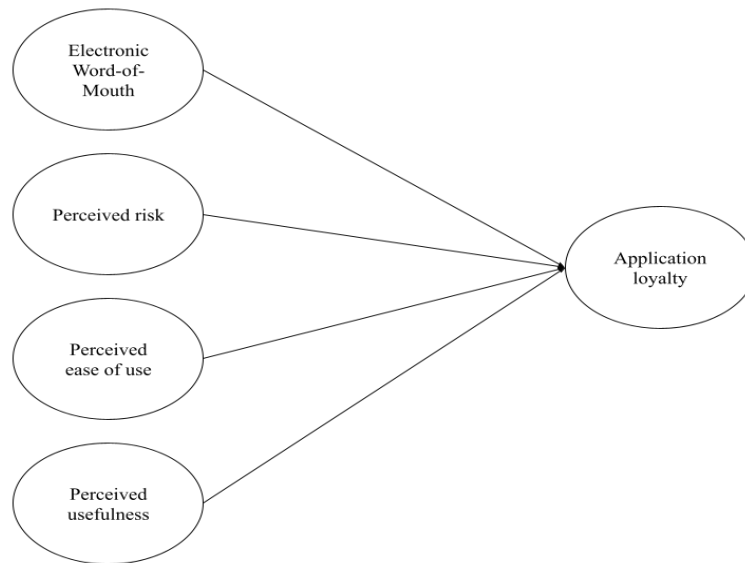


Figure 1 Conceptual model

Research methodology

The questionnaires were distributed to the college students to investigate the responses towards the factors including electronic Word-of-Mouth (EWOM), perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, perceived risk, and hotel booking application loyalty. All the participants had the experiences with the online hotel booking applications, such as Agoda and Booking.com. The questionnaires were developed by adopting and modifying the questions from the past literature. The 490 usable questionnaires were analyzed by descriptive statistics and multiple regression with SPSS software.

Results

From the data collected in the current

study, out of 490 college students, male respondents were 49.50%, and female respondents were 50.50%. Students from year 1 to year 4 participated in the study, while the third-year students represented 28.00%, 26.00% of the fourth-year students, 21.50% of the second-year students, and the rest was the first-year students. For the online hotel booking applications, the participants were asked to report the most frequently used application, and the participants used Agoda (35.50%), Booking.com (25.50%), Traveloka (20.50%), Expedia (15.00%), and other applications (3.50%). Moreover, in terms of the use of EWOM, most respondents reported that the most frequently used social media platform were as follows, YouTube (39.00%), Instagram (33.00%), Facebook (20.50%), and other applications (7.50%).



Table 1 Means, Standard deviation, Cronbach’s alpha of the factors

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach’s alpha	Number of Items
Application Loyalty	4.09	0.83	0.85	4
Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM)	4.15	0.88	0.81	4
Perceived Risk	3.03	0.93	0.78	4
Perceived Ease of Use	3.85	0.89	0.83	4
Perceived Usefulness	4.45	0.84	0.84	4

From the above Table 1, each factor offered the acceptable reliability values (Cronbach’s alpha), ranging from 0.78 to 0.85. The mean scores of the factors were

between 3.03 and 4.45. The scales of the above factors were provided in the Appendix.

Table 2 Model summary and ANOVA

Model	R	R Square	Model Summary			ANOVA	
			Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson	F	Sig.
1	.891	.793	.792	.37980	1.952	465.561	.000

Based on Table 2 above, the F-value of 465.561 and the ANOVA test showed the significant value of 0.000, indicating the appropriate regression model. R Square indicated that 79.30% of the Electronic Word-of-Mouth (EWOM), Perceived

Risk, Perceived Ease of Use, and Perceived Usefulness can explain the variation of application loyalty. Additionally, Durbin-Watson was closer to the value of 2, indicating no autocorrelation issues for the data.

Table 3 Regression model results

Model		Coefficients					Collinearity Statistics	
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
		B	Std. Error	Beta				
1	(Constant)	.354	.095		3.717	.000		
	Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM)	.300	.033	.319	9.006	.000	.340	2.941
	Perceived Risk	-.003	.016	-.004	-.189	.851	.944	1.060
	Perceived Ease of Use	.344	.030	.372	11.428	.000	.402	2.485
	Perceived Usefulness	.288	.035	.291	8.221	.000	.341	2.933

a. Dependent Variable: Application Loyalty



From Table 3 above, the variance inflating factors (VIFs) for all the factors were less than 10, proving that the model had no multicollinearity issues. Regarding the standardized coefficients, perceived ease of use provided the highest influence (.372) on application loyalty, followed by EWOM (.319), Perceived usefulness (.291), while perceived risk had no significant effect on application loyalty.

Discussions

The results from regression analysis provided the empirical outputs for the study. Firstly, from *H1: Electronic Word-of-Mouth has a positive influence on Application Loyalty*; EWOM indicated a significant influence on application loyalty, similar to the works of other scholars (Ismagilova et al., 2017; Tzavlopoulos et al., 2019). Secondly, for *H2: Perceived ease of use has a positive influence on Application Loyalty*, the research findings also confirmed this hypothesis. The studies of past empirical studies (Daud et al., 2018; Lin et al., 2019) indicated similar findings. Thirdly, regarding *H3: Perceived usefulness positively influences Application Loyalty*, the perceived usefulness showed the statistically significant effect on the application loyalty. Past research studies confirmed the current study's findings (Bae et al., 2020; Daud et al., 2018; Lin et al., 2019). Lastly, for the last hypothesis, *H4: Perceived risk has a negative influence on Application Loyalty*, although several past research studies (Chaudhuri, 1997; Tzavlopoulos et al., 2019) indicated the negative relationship between perceived risk and loyalty. However, the current study

showed no influence of perceived risk and application loyalty.

Conclusions and managerial recommendations

The current study achieved its objective in identifying the influential factors affecting application loyalty. The research contribution from the current study includes the followings. Perceived ease of use offered the most significant effect on application loyalty. It demonstrated that the online hotel booking application developers should emphasize and improve the functions and features of the application with the concept of designs and ease of use as a focus of their development for the hotel booking applications. Perceived usefulness showed a significant and positive effect on application loyalty, showing that it is not only the functionality and effectiveness of the application to complete its functions but the provision of additional information, reviews, comments, and other details, such as recommendations of restaurants and tourism destinations around the hotels or other helpful information reflecting the usefulness of the application for the young consumers. All the application improvements should lead to reuse and long-term loyalty of the customers towards the online hotel booking application.

Next, managers of the application development business should improve the strategies to attract the customers to visit and re-booking the hotels or accommodations by focusing on the adoption of social media and frequent



updates of the contents, and offering tips and tricks to highlight the advantages and benefits of their stays at those hotels and accommodations. Further, it is beneficial for the hotel business to emphasize effective communication of useful information with clear and concise content to offer to their customers. Additionally, social media marketers, hotel managers, and application developers should always learn the new tools and technology to meet the expectations and demands of their customers to ensure that the customers can easily find the features and functions to help them make better decisions to select the hotel choices.

Limitations and directions for future research

The current research is not without limitations. Firstly, the research adopted a cross-sectional research design, and therefore, generalization of the findings, in the long run, should be used with caution. Secondly, the research was conducted with self-administered questionnaires, and there might be some errors due to the lack of supervision during data collection. Regarding direction for future research, qualitative research should be further continued on this topic to understand the insights or additional reasons behind the influential relationships of these factors in the current study. In addition, the comparisons among young, middle-aged, and mature consumers may provide greater understandings for different groups and segmentations of the customers.

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Appendix

The scales of factors in the study

Electronic Word-of-Mouth

1. I frequently read online reviews to know about the hotels.
2. Prior to choosing the hotel, I frequently read tourists' online hotel reviews.
3. I frequently check online hotel reviews and suggestions to help me choose a hotel.
4. I frequently collect information and other details from tourists' online hotel reviews before my trip.

Perceived ease of use

1. The use of online hotel booking application is clearly understandable.
2. I can easily navigate through the menus and toolbars in the online hotel booking application.
3. From my experience, the online hotel booking application is user-friendly.
4. I feel that online hotel booking application's interface is easy to use.

Perceived risk

1. Online hotel booking is likely to have the poor performance.
2. Comparing with other methods, online hotel booking has more uncertainties.
3. Online hotel booking would not be effective as I think.
4. It is risky for me to provide the information to the online hotel booking application.

Perceived usefulness

1. Using online hotel booking application would save time.
2. Using the online hotel booking application would improve my performance in choosing the hotel.
3. Using online hotel booking application makes it easier for me to conduct my hotel booking transaction.
4. I would find the online hotel booking application useful in conducting my hotel booking transaction.

Online hotel booking application loyalty

1. I will speak well about this online hotel booking application to other people.
2. I will recommend this online hotel booking application if someone ask for my advice.
3. I will encourage my friends and relatives to use this online hotel booking application.
4. I intend to use this online hotel booking application for my next hotel booking.