



# Relationships between technology attachment, experiential relationship quality, experiential risk and experiential sharing intentions in a smart hotel



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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the relationships among the dimensions of technology attachment, the dimensions of experiential relationship quality, experiential risk and experiential sharing intentions. The findings of this study are based on structural equation modeling (SEM) and hierarchical regression analysis (HRA) of a convenience sample of 525 guests during check out from the LINQ Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas, indicating that the proposed model fits the data. The analysis results contribute to the services marketing theory by providing additional insights into the dimensions of technology attachment, the dimensions of experiential relationship quality, experiential risk and experiential sharing intentions. The results of this study will also assist smart hotel management in developing and implementing market-oriented service strategies to increase the dimensions of technology attachment and the dimensions of experiential relationship quality, decrease experiential risk and create experiential sharing intentions.

## 1. Introduction

Market observation indicates the development of a new model for running a business in the hospitality industry, referred to as smart hotels. This model is specifically distinguished by new information and communication technologies (ICT). The concept of smart hotels is relatively new and can be considered as an innovative solution in tourism. The hospitality industry represents, beyond any doubt, one of these economy sectors which take an increasingly intensive advantage of the available ICT. It plays a particular role and is seen as the key factor of smart hotels' effective functioning. It not only allows improved management effectiveness and higher efficiency of functioning, but also facilitates achieving such service level which, in the times of technological advancement in daily life, can lead to much better satisfaction of the demanding guests (Jaremen, Jędrasiak, & Rapacz, 2016). A smart hotel is an intelligent hotel with a range of information technologies working together to let the guests have an honorable and convenient vacation environment. It allows guests to have a profound image about not only the hotel, but also the city and the country. Moreover, it can increase guest loyalty and repurchase rates as well. Accordingly, developing a smart hotel is critical for the hospitality industry in practice (Lai & Hung, 2017). Returning to the term of a smart hotel, it is worth paying attention to the fact that it is used more by practitioners than theorists. A smart hotel is usually encountered in the subject literature

and in the opinions of hospitality industry specialists. As a result, the idea of smart hotels does not stand for a theoretical concept, created as a result of scientific thought development, describing the functioning of a hotel enterprise. Instead, it is rather a practical business model which adapts new information and communication technologies in the hospitality business. In accordance with its assumptions, hotel competitiveness depends on supporting its operations by applying technological solutions (Jaremen et al., 2016). Smart technology for hotels provides an arsenal of options to not only provide a wow factor for guests, but also make the property run more efficiently. With over 85% of the traveling population owning a smartphone or tablet, prospective guests are incorporating their mobile experiences into their lives at an increasing level. It only makes sense for hotels to follow suit and satisfy the guest need in the more intimate, mobile environment, enabling them to personally enhance their quality of stay in the hotel (D'Amico, 2016). When the benefits from adopting new smart technologies or norms are high, such as may be the case during a period of rapid environmental change (Potts, 2013), experiential sharing intentions evolve and rapidly become dominant in the hospitality industry (Kang & Namkung, 2016; Sotiriadis & Sotiriadis, 2017).

According to Brown, Altman, and Werner (2012), place attachment is the positive bond developed from behavioral, cognitive and affective ties between an individual or groups and their socio-physical environments. The developmental theory of place attachment attempts to bring

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together attachment theories in psychology (e.g. Bowlby, 1982) and theories of place. According to this theory, place attachment emerges from social interactions and one's evaluation of the environment. Place attachment has been considered as a developmental process in which experiences in a place are internalized at the unconscious level and subjectively manifested into an attachment to the place (Morgan, 2010). It is a meaningful construct at the end of a tourist trip, when all tourism experiences are complete. From the perspective of people–environment interactions, place attachment would thus represent an overall connection or bond between a person and a location (Tuan, 1980). Place attachment has been studied extensively in tourism (e.g. Ramkissoon, Weiler, & Smith, 2012, 2013c; Ramkissoon, Smith, & Weiler, 2013a, 2013b; Chen, Dwyer, & Firth, 2014; Ram, Björk, & Weidenfeld, 2016; Ramkissoon, Smith, & Kneebone, 2014; Veasna, Wu, & Huang, 2013; Yüksel, Yüksel, & Bilim, 2010). Studying tourists' attachment to national parks and recreational areas to predict pro-environmental behavior dominates the existing research tradition (e.g. Hwang, Lee, & Chen, 2005; Ramkissoon, Smith, & Weiler, 2013b; Tonge, Ryan, Moore, & Beckley, 2015). According to Ramkissoon et al. (2014), place attachment has often been conceptualized as consisting of multiple dimensions. In general, place attachment includes place dependence (Stokols & Shumacker, 1981), place identity (Vaske & Kobrin, 2001; Walker & Chapman, 2003), place social bonding (Kyle, Mowen, & Tarrant, 2004), and, relatively more recently, place affection (Halpenny, 2010; Ramkissoon et al., 2013b, 2013a). Place dependence, place identity, place affection and place social bonding reflect the range of feelings individuals associate with specific environments and, as such, warrant further investigation for their application in recreation and tourism research (Kyle, Graefe, & Manning, 2005; Lee & Shen, 2013; Ramkissoon et al., 2013b, 2013a).

Recent studies in the hospitality literature have indicated that the concept of place attachment is a useful one in understanding aspects of consumer behavior (Alansari, 2016). It has, for example, been reported that an individual's emotional and functional attachment to a specific recreational place is related to a variety of behavioral outcomes, such as trust and satisfaction levels (Lee, 2015), authenticity (Ram et al., 2016), perceived crowding (Kyle, Bricker, Graefe, & Wickham, 2004) and tourist loyalty (Qiu, 2014). Previous studies have suggested that place attachment is a critical antecedent of behavioral intentions (Halpenny, 2010; Lee & Shen, 2013). People visit particular places on the basis of specific memories, images, associations and emotional attachments to places and meanings (Schama, 1996). Accordingly, viewing a film can create a strong emotional attachment to a place, leading to the intention to share that place (Lee & Shen, 2013; Wong & Lai, 2015). The literature on the interaction of place attachment and technology is limited (Oz, 2014). In Stals' (2012) study in the field of human-technology interaction, he builds the theoretical background on place attachment concepts and studies on how technology influences city experience. In addition, he proposes that design fictions (i.e. fictional devices) can be used to enhance and share user experience by the use of location and context aware devices and prospective new mobile apps. The research itself is a phenomenographic work that is based on interviews and map evaluations, making the research mostly qualitative and subject to interpretation. Farrelly (2013) investigates the nature of the relationship between people and places, how people use the place attachment information, the influences of mobile devices on place attachment and the potential of enhancing place attachment by making use of location-based services. Although dimensions of place attachment have been studied in the hotel industry (Hosany, Prayag, Van Der Veen, Huang, & Deesilatham, 2017; Io, 2018; Tlili & Amara, 2016), little research has been conducted on technology attachment (Roy, Ponnamp, & Mandal, 2017). Ismail, Hsan, and Mustapha (2018) and Roy et al. (2017) refer to technology attachment as an emotional attachment to a smart phone application. The work of Roy et al. (2017), introduces the term "smart phone attachment" and describes it as a bond between a person and a smart phone that differs in strength. Several researchers

(e.g. Bock et al., 2016; Hertlein & Twist, 2018; Kim, Jun, Han, Kim, & Kim, 2013; Kim et al., 2015; Li, 2014; Trub & Barbot, 2016) propose that technology attachment has been considered to be a multi-dimensional construct. Personalized hotel technology experiences will become increasingly important, not only for operating efficiency, but also for attracting more guests to stay. D'Amico (2016) describes that the hotel's property can be run more efficiently using smart technology. According to Jaremen et al. (2016), several well-known examples of smart hotels can be quoted here: The Upper House in Hong Kong (the guests receive iPod Touch at check-in, loaded with a set of games, music and information about the hotel for their own use); Novotel München Messe (the guests are greeted by both the real and a virtual receptionist, the hotel provides information and communication systems equipped in touchscreens, through the use of which guests can easily find the tourist information they need; Crowne Plaza in Copenhagen (owing to the application of new technologies, has become neutral in terms of CO2 emission, the entire energy used in it originates from renewable sources (e.g. bicycles propelled by the power of muscles of the guests working out in the hotel fitness club 2), Blow Up Hall, Poznań, the hotel guests receive iPhones, instead of keys or cards, which they use which to enter their rooms. The above listed hotels represent the examples of an effective implementation of new information and communication technologies in their functioning. These smart technologies may make guests feel emotionally attached to the smart hotel. Sigala (2018) indicates that technology attachment has been found to lead to new forms of technostress and anxiety influencing life satisfaction, well-being, workplace productivity, social and work relations. However, to the best of our knowledge, none of the studies focus on applying the dimensions of place attachment in the measurement of the dimensions of technology attachment (technology dependence, technology identity, technology affection and technology social bonding) in the hotel industry.

Liu, Guo, and Lee (2011) indicate that relationship quality comprises two dimensions, trust and satisfaction, which are each considered as an "emotional state that occurs in response to an evaluation of these interaction experiences". According to Chen, Petrick, and Shahvali (2016) and Jung and Soo (2012), customers strengthen their relationship with and come to trust a product and/or service when they enjoy a positive experience. Also, customers who have a pleasant experience generally agree that the service provider has exceeded their expectations, leading to the creation of a satisfying relationship (Rajaobelina, 2018). Marketers face the challenge of how to allocate resources across different channels (Baxendale, Macdonald, & Wilson, 2015; Mahrous & Hassan, 2017). Indeed, customer experiences differ from one channel to the next and consideration must be made for each (Verhoef et al., 2009). With customers open to multiple channel experiences (Stein & Ramaseshan, 2016), the relationship between customer experience and relationship quality varies based on the channels used. In general, when customers enjoy a positive experience, they strengthen their relationship with and come to trust and feel satisfied with an organization (Jung & Soo, 2012; Wong, Wu, & Cheng, 2015; Wu, 2017; Wu, Wei, Tseng, & Cheng, 2018e). Although the dimensions of relationship quality have been extensively conducted (e.g. Abdul-Rahman & Kamarulzaman, 2012; Kim & Cha, 2002; Pepur, Mihanović, & Arnerić, 2011; Rashid, Abu, & Ahmad, 2011), none of the studies focus on experiential relationship quality and its dimensions (experiential trust and experiential satisfaction) in the hotel industry.

Paulssen and Fournier (2007) indicate that consumer attachment has an influence on trust and satisfaction. Although some studies have demonstrated the links between place attachment and place satisfaction (e.g. Yüksel et al., 2010), further research is warranted to investigate the relationship between these two constructs. Evidence suggests that place attachment, conceptualized as place dependence, place identity (Prayag & Ryan, 2012) and place affection (Yüksel et al., 2010) may be a predictor of satisfaction. Wu, Cheng, and Ai (2018a, 2018b) and Wu, Cheng, Chen, and Hong (2018c) identify that the following pre-

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