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What makes you choose Airbnb again? An examination of users' perceptions toward the website and their stay

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ABSTRACT

Despite Airbnb's popularity as a sharing economy platform, few studies have simultaneously examined its customers' attitudes toward its website and satisfaction with their Airbnb stay. Adopting the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT), this study attempts to examine Airbnb customers' psychological behavior toward the entire Airbnb experience. Researchers conduct a self-administered online survey and obtain 212 valid responses. The results indicate that personal innovativeness is a significant antecedent of perceived ease of use, usefulness, and trust. Customers' attitudes toward the Airbnb website are determined by perceived usefulness and trust, and their satisfaction with the Airbnb stay is affected by amenities and host-guest relationship, leading to loyal customers and repeat business. The findings extend extant literature in sharing economy and provide practical implications for Airbnb website developers and Airbnb hosts to increase customers' intentions to choose Airbnb again as an accommodation option.

1. Introduction

The sharing economy has been capturing the consumer market with its unprecedented offerings and social influence. Years ago, people often asked “at which hotel did you stay during your vacation?” Whereas, today's conversations among consumers have changed to “have you booked a room via Airbnb?” In 2010, the sharing system had an estimated market volume of \$100 billion (Lamberton and Rose, 2012). In the U.S. lodging sector, specifically, 12.6 million adults were using sharing services in 2016, and Statista (2017) forecasts that by 2020 over 19 million adults will choose sharing accommodations as alternatives to traditional hotels. Practically, the sharing economy makes great economic sense for consumers, environments, communities, and businesses that are sufficiently innovative and forward thinking (Belk, 2014). Such an eco-technological phenomenon is leading an unparalleled industry reform by changing consumers' spending patterns in the lodging industry.

It took about 30 years to formalize the sharing economy concept. Belk (2007, p.126) was one of the pioneers who proposed the sharing concept as “the act and process of distributing what is ours to others for their use and/or the act and process of receiving or taking something from others for our use”. The term “sharing economy” officially

appeared in the Oxford Dictionaries in 2015 as “an economic system in which assets/services are shared between private individuals, either for free or for a fee, typically by means of the Internet.” In the lodging industry, sharing economy services are provided through tourists and residents sharing their homes, cars, meals, and so on (OECD, 2016). Because of the rapid development of the sharing economy, it is crucial to understand how it penetrates the solid commercial lodging markets.

The most popular sharing economy platform in the lodging sector is Airbnb (Guttentag, 2015). It was founded in San Francisco in 2007 as a trusted community marketplace for people to list, discover, and book unique accommodations around the world (Airbnb, 2016). In 2016, Airbnb catered to more than 60 million guests in over 3400 cities worldwide with a value of \$25.5 billion. About 57% of Airbnb's listed spaces were entire apartments and homes and 40% of guests were Americans with an average age of 35 (Airbnb, 2016). With its strong market share, homelike offerings, and online platform dynamics, Airbnb has been positioned successfully and recognized as the most prominent lodging option (Guttentag, 2015). Airbnb, as a sharing economy start-up, has become a key competitor of not only other Online Travel Agents (OTAs) (e.g. TripAdvisor, Expedia, Travelocity) but also traditional hotels.

Like other emerging technologies, Airbnb's website triggered

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controversial issues on its implementation and affected its competitors profoundly. Although the interface of the Airbnb website was nicely designed and the interaction function between guests and hosts was appealing, the website had glitches. For example, the Instant Booking turned on and off without the hosts being aware of it and users' confidentiality was not guaranteed (Zervas et al., 2015). Despite such controversies, the Airbnb website still won a place in the consumer market. As Airbnb is a non-traditional lodging service, the Airbnb website becomes a more crucial platform for users to search information and complete transactions, compared to traditional OTAs (Guttentag, 2015). Moreover, conventional hotels such as Marriott started to resemble their sharing economy counterparts in embedding similar design and functions on their homepage, in order not to fall behind of current market situations (Cusumano, 2015).

Due to Airbnb's prevalence, researchers have conducted studies in various areas including Airbnb's pricing (Wang and Nicolau, 2017), policy making (Lee, 2016), reputation (Zervas et al., 2015), and impact on traditional hotels (Zervas et al., 2014). However, there is a lack of empirical studies that holistically investigate Airbnb users' perceptions and their subsequent behavior (Liang et al., 2017). Prior studies have examined fragmented phenomena of Airbnb customers' behavior: one stream of studies focused on users' adoption of the Airbnb website (Panda et al., 2015; Griffith and Gilly, 2012); the other stream focused on guests' satisfaction with the Airbnb stay (Möhlmann, 2015). In order to fill the research gap by combining these two streams, this study proposes a holistic theoretical model with specific purposes: 1) to assess key factors that affect consumers' attitudes toward booking through the Airbnb website; 2) to examine influential factors on consumers' satisfaction with staying with Airbnb; and 3) to determine the relationships between consumers' attitudes, satisfaction and their future intentions to use Airbnb again.

2. Literature review

2.1. Technology acceptance model (TAM)

TAM is one of the most widely employed theoretical models to assess users' adoption of emerging technologies and Internet platforms (Davis, 1986) such as the Airbnb website. TAM applies Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Fishbein, 1979) to investigate the causalities between the two key constructs perceived ease of use (PEOU) and perceived usefulness (PU) and users' attitudes, intentions, and actual adoption behavior (Davis, 1989). The model is robust across different settings, samples, and technologies through applications and replications (Venkatesh and Davis, 1996; Chin and Todd, 1995; Adams et al., 1992) in e-commerce (Wu and Wang, 2005), e-learning (Roca et al., 2006), and Internet adoption (Moon and Kim, 2001). Therefore, TAM provides theoretical foundations for the current study.

2.1.1. PEOU and PU

PEOU and PU function as the primary constructs of TAM (Davis et al., 1989). PEOU refers to the extent to which a person believes that using a technology would be free of effort, and PU ties to an individual's assessment of whether using a specific system would enhance his/her performance (Davis et al., 1989). These two constructs are recognized as key indicators of one's attitudes toward new technologies (Bruner and Kumar, 2005; Taylor and Todd, 1995). Researchers in the hospitality field have confirmed the significant impact of PEOU and PU on consumers' technology adoption behavior (Kim et al., 2009; Kim et al., 2008; Morosan and Jeong, 2008).

There exist controversies regarding the magnitude and significance of PU and PEOU. In Casaló et al. (2010) study, for example, PEOU exerts greater impact on attitudes than PU, but Kim et al. (2008) stress that PEOU and PU demonstrate a similar impact on users' attitudes toward hotel websites. However, PEOU is found to be non-significant in recent studies. For instance, Chang and Caneday (2011) state that

tourists' attitudes toward using WebGIS to search tourism information are determined by PU, but not by PEOU. Likewise, Amaro et al. (2017) find that PU, not PEOU, is a significant factor for measuring users' attitudes toward Airbnb. These findings raise cautions in demonstrating the role of PEOU in the sharing economy context. In order to clearly identify the roles of PEOU and PU in the context of the sharing economy, this study posits the following hypotheses:

H1. Consumers' PEOU of the Airbnb website positively affects their attitudes toward the website.

H2. Consumers' PU of the Airbnb website positively affects their attitudes toward the website.

2.1.2. Perceived trust

Considering the features of online exchange platforms, trust has been regarded as a key factor affecting consumer behavior (Pavlou and Gefen 2004). Trust refers to the belief that people react in predictable ways (Pavlou, 2003); e-trust means general beliefs in online service providers that result in behavioral intentions (Gefen, 2000). Since the day Airbnb was introduced to the public, the debate of its trustworthiness has never ceased (Streitfeld, 2014). People have addressed concerns about online security when businesses occur via the Internet (Gefen and Straub, 2003), and such concerns are amplified in Airbnb due to its immature value co-creation system and new consumption mode (McNamara, 2015).

Scholars have extended TAM by adding trust as a critical construct in consumer behavior studies (Ha and Stoel, 2009; Davis et al., 1992). Dahlberg et al. (2003) trust-enhanced TAM is found to better explain consumers' technology adoption behavior than the original TAM. Moreover, empirical studies in e-commerce have confirmed the significant impact of trust on consumers' behavioral intentions toward new technologies (e.g., Chen and Tan, 2004; Corbitt et al., 2003; Gefen et al., 2003). Overall, trust is more critical in online shopping than in brick-and-mortar stores (Reichheld and Scheffer, 2000), requiring scholars to further examine its role in consumer behavior studies.

In the hospitality field, trust is essential in affecting consumers' attitudes toward websites with online purchase services (Bai et al., 2008; Chiang and Jang, 2007). The more consumers trust the website, the more they exhibit favorable attitudes. There is a positive impact of trust on users' participation intentions in the sharing economy (Yang et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2015; Hamari et al., 2015). Yang and Ahn (2016) confirm the positive effect of website reputation and trust on users' attitudes toward Airbnb. However, not many studies have integrated trust into TAM in the Airbnb context. Besides a lack of empirical support, studies have merely focused on trust of Airbnb in general rather than specifying whether the trust is from the property, the host, or the website. Therefore, this study proposes that:

H3. Consumers' trust of the Airbnb website positively affects their attitudes toward the website.

2.2. Innovation diffusion theory (IDT)

Another theory relevant to technology adoption behavior is IDT. Individuals react differently to a new idea, practice, or object due to their differences in innovativeness, a predisposed tendency toward adopting an innovation (Rogers, 2003). Some people are considered innovators or early adopters (Moore, 1999) as they are, by their nature, more willing to take risks to adopt an innovation (Yi et al., 2006). The perceptions early adopters form toward the features of innovations affect their adoption decisions (Rogers, 1995). In the late 1990s, researchers have applied IDT to IT (Webster and Martocchio, 1992) and psychology (Agarwal and Prasad, 1998) disciplines.

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