



Coping with the risk of internet connectivity in hotels: Perspectives from American consumers traveling internationally[☆]



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HIGHLIGHTS

- The study conceptualized coping intentions regarding the task of connecting mobile devices to hotel networks.
- The task conceptualized in this study reflects IS utilization that is integral to the contemporary hospitality experience.
- This study offered a contextual conceptualization of risk based on three distinct dimensions.
- This study elucidated the role of habit as an antecedent of benefit and risk: a differential effect on the dyad.

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ABSTRACT

A reliable and secure Internet connection may represent the only viable solution for international travelers to complete communication tasks in hotels (e.g., talking with loved ones at home, engaging in work-related activities, accessing restricted resources). Yet, the current cyber-environment accessible by connecting a mobile device to the Internet is characterized by a certain degree of risk, to which consumers generally respond via coping mechanisms. Based on data from a sample of 1017 American consumers who traveled internationally, this study validated a conceptual model that explains consumers' intentions to cope with the risk of connecting their mobile devices to hotel networks in order to access the Internet. The study recognizes consumers' risk-benefit calculative mechanisms that influence coping intentions, and the roles of knowledge, habit, and convenience orientation in influencing the benefit-risk dyad.

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1. Introduction

Internet connectivity in hotels has become a fundamental component of the augmented hotel stay experience that results in added value (Nyheim & Connolly, 2012). Such value becomes increasingly evident in international travel, where data services are difficult to access by U.S. subscribers or expensive to purchase. Thus, connecting a traveler's mobile device to a hotel's network represents sometimes the only viable solution for consumers engaging in tasks over the Internet (e.g., communicating with employers or family members, accessing work or leisure-related information, paying online to visit attractions to avoid waiting lines). In their attempt to offer consumption experiences that

emulate consumers' home/work environments, hotels have designed information system (IS) infrastructures that include Internet connectivity services and business models that take advantage of the stratified nature of the hotel consumer markets (Stellin, 2012). In turn, consumers developed expectations of Internet reliability and security, which align with their expectations from their home/work environments (Liu, Denizci Guillet, Xiao, & Law, 2014). Yet, consumers do not always have the capability to properly evaluate the risks associated with connecting their mobile devices to unknown hotel networks to access the Internet.

Today's cyber-security risk in hotels extends to hotel networks, and applies to the hardware, software, and business/IT protocols that facilitate guest device connectivity. The risk also encompasses various interconnected hotel IS, such as point of sale (McMillan, 2016) and card payment systems (Scott, 2016). Such risk made an increasing number of scholars and industry experts agree that cyber-security is a critical contemporary issue (Berezina, Cobanoglu, Miller, & Kwansa, 2012). The recent cyber-security incidents reiterated the notion that connecting consumers' mobile

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devices to the Internet via hotel networks is not risk-free, and securing such networks is fundamentally difficult (Osborne, 2016). Yet, consumers have idiosyncratic motivations for connectivity, which they extend from their day-to-day lives into hotel consumption episodes, most likely aided by opportunities offered by hotels to enhance value from connectivity (e.g., social media access) (Baum, Rowley, Shipilov, & Chuang, 2005). Such motivations are strong enough to guide consumers on paths to Internet connectivity, even when the networks are public and the particularities of connectivity protocols are not entirely understood, thus risking negative consequences.

Despite the negative consequences for both consumers and hotels (e.g., loss of data, brand dilution), to date, there is only limited literature presenting any systematic examination of IS-related tasks that are characterized by substantially higher risk than transaction-related risk (e.g., compromising a primary account number (PAN)), thus marking a first critical research lacuna. Most research in IS and related disciplines focuses predominantly on transactional aspects of risk (e.g., Chang & Wu, 2012; Wang & Wang, 2010) while research addressing the security risk of mobile environments remains rare (Martins, Oliveira, & Popović, 2014; Taylor, 2016). Yet, the risk incurred when guests connect their mobile devices to hotel networks exceeds the typical transactional risks, and may result in destruction of hardware, loss of data, public disclosure of private information, or compromising proprietary data (e.g., client/patient/student lists, trade secrets, etc.) Such risk is exacerbated when traveling abroad, due to the variability of hotel managerial practices, Internet/IT regulations and enforcement, and consumer connectivity protocols from country to country (e.g., firms requiring their employees to not leave their device from sight at any point during travel).

Although the literature explaining intentions to use IS for risky tasks is accumulating, only specific contextual evidence has been provided to enhance the current general understanding of users' coping intentions when risk and benefits coexist (Tu, Turel, Yuan, & Archer, 2015). Thus, it is not clear how consumers cope with the risk of IS use, and therefore outlining a second critical literature lacuna. Yet, understanding coping behaviors can enhance the general understanding of consumers' belief development and IS adoption behaviors (Cui, Bao, & Chan, 2009), which is instrumental to hotels designing (1) interfaces to stimulate consumer behaviors toward IS and (2) communication strategies to help consumers develop realistic expectations regarding their IS-related behaviors. A third lacuna is reflected by the equivocal interpretation of risk, which has been conceptualized both as unidimensional (e.g., Chang and Wu (2012)) and multi-dimensional (e.g., Lee, Watson-Manheim, and Chudoba (2014); Yang, Liu, Li, and Yu (2015)). Moreover, the conceptualizations of risk were grounded in theoretical foundations that recognize the duality of consumers' calculative processes and recognize the benefits-risk dyad (Rogers & Gould, 2015).

In this context, the goal of this study is to develop and empirically validate a conceptual model that explains hotel guests' coping intentions associated with connecting their mobile devices to hotel networks to access the Internet (hereafter referred to as "connecting to hotel networks") when traveling internationally. By focusing on the risk of connectivity to hotel networks, this study addresses the first lacuna – lack of research on connectivity risk – and occupies a unique and critical position within a literature that is dominated by transaction-risk studies. To accomplish its goal, the study follows three specific objectives, which together address the two remaining lacunae discussed above. First, the study creates a mapping of the benefit-risk calculative processes influencing consumers' coping intentions. Second, the study builds the conceptual model by using constructs that reflect specific consumer characteristics (e.g., knowledge, habit, convenience orientation), which

explain consumer IS utilization more comprehensively than traditional system beliefs. These two objectives address the lack of research on coping behaviors and provide insight into the antecedents of coping. Third, the study recognizes the multiple dimensions of risk and seeks to model risk according to the structural dimensions that reflect the international hotel IS environment, which addresses the third lacuna – predominant unidimensional view of risk.

2. Review of literature

2.1. Theoretical foundations

The theoretical foundation of this study was built on tenets that are capable of explaining the circumstances under which consumers develop mechanisms for coping with the uncertainty and risk of connecting their devices to hotel networks while acknowledging the benefits of such connections. Such theoretical foundation must capture the characteristics of the hotel IS task environment as well as consumers' socio-cognitive contexts outlined by their idiosyncratic behaviors and orientation toward learning, which stimulates the cognitive processes that lead to appraising the benefits and risk of IS utilization. A variety of theoretical foundations have been employed to explain IS processes in other industries and disciplinary contexts. Yet, they do not necessarily fit the international hotel IS task environment, which is defined by a number of unique characteristics, in contrast to the U.S. hotel environment.

A first characteristic of the international hotel environment is its fragmentation. A high percentage of the total hotel property population is not affiliated with chains outside the U.S., and, as a result, their IT protocols are more heterogeneous than in the U.S. (e.g., a wider variety of hardware/software protocols and business models, a wider variability in innovativeness/obsolescence). Second, as different countries are subject to different IT regulations, it is likely that those regulations (e.g., privacy protection, data exchange/storage) and their enforcement would be different in international markets than in the U.S. As a result, IS utilization behaviors may be different from country to country, even under the same brand. Moreover, such behaviors may be influenced by the local cultural norms, language differences, and consumers' ability to utilize IS from their home country when traveling. Third, human resources are likely to be different in international markets, which may influence the manner in which hotel staff maintain hotel IS systems that facilitate connectivity. Fourth, regional cultural norms may influence the manner in which consumer behaviors are developed (e.g., the use of shared credentials to access public Wi-Fi networks, the use of VPN services once connected to public Wi-Fi, etc.). Fifth, the current turbulent world events, which inevitably encompass IT, have raised the general population's awareness of cyber-security, while the regional economic, cultural, and technological discrepancies are likely to create differences in the way standard IT practices are translated into actual cyber-security norms, IS protocols, and consumer education. In contrast, the U.S. hotel connectivity infrastructure can be characterized by relatively uniform IS infrastructure, more predictable connectivity protocols, and the availability and high penetration of mobile carrier connectivity services that rival hotel connectivity in terms of bandwidth, pricing, and reliability.

The existence of such unique characteristics calls for the development of a theoretical foundation that is able to capture the specific attributes of network connectivity in international travel. Accordingly, to capture this complex task-technology environment, the conceptual model of this study was developed based on two main theoretical frameworks: (1) protection motivation theory (PMT) (Rogers, 1975) and (2) social cognitive theory (SCT) (Bandura, 1977).

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