



Improving consumer commitment through the integration of self-service technologies: A transcendent consumer experience perspective

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ABSTRACT

An increasing number of hospitality firms have integrated self-service technologies (SSTs), yet limited studies exist concerning consumers' experience of using SSTs. The present research theorizes SSTs experience as a bi-dimensional (i.e., *extrinsic* and *intrinsic*) construct and tests its impact on consumer commitment (i.e., *affective*, *temporal*, and *instrumental* commitment). This research further examines the potential mediating effect of transcendent consumer experience (TCE) on the tested relationships. Results of Structural Equation Modeling using a sample of 223 hotel and restaurant consumers reveal that TCE fully mediates the impacts of SSTs' extrinsic attributes on the instrumental commitment as well as the impacts of SSTs' intrinsic attributes on the instrumental and the temporal commitment. In contrast, TCE partially mediates the impacts of SSTs' extrinsic attributes on the affective and the temporal commitment as well as the impacts of SSTs' intrinsic attributes on the affective commitment. The paper concludes with theoretical implications and managerial implications.

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1. Introduction

From work, to transportation, to a person's leisure activities, technologies significantly transform the way people go about their daily lives in modern times. Particularly in service-oriented industries, companies have begun to integrate various technologies where consumers deliver service themselves via some form of a technological interface (Beatson et al., 2006; Kim et al., 2012). These technologies have been referred to as self-service technologies (SSTs) (Beatson et al., 2006), such as telephone banking, online investment trading, and electronic retailing (Wang and Wang, 2010). Kasavana (2008) suggested that the three most popular types of SSTs were vending, kiosk, and web applications. Following the step of banking and airlines industry, major hotel chains, including Sheraton, Marriott, Hilton, Hyatt, and Fairmont, have added self-service kiosks to their conventional front desk for expediting the check in/check out process (Kasavana and Connolly, 2005). In

a similar fashion, restaurants have also introduced SSTs, mainly in the form of tablet computers, to their service encounters in order to empower guests to place orders and pay bills (Konrad, 2013). Many quick service restaurants have added kiosks to help customers place orders. The foregoing phenomena have attributed to the increasing role that SSTs play in hospitality service encounters. Some studies have been conducted to understand employees' willingness to adopt such technologies (e.g., Lema, 2009). While SSTs result in labor savings for the companies, it is pertinent to understand what it means for consumers. Consequently, additional research is called for to provide a deeper understanding of consumer experience involving the usage of SSTs in the hospitality and tourism settings.

Seeking to understand consumers' reaction to SSTs, prior studies have focused on the potential factors influencing customers' willingness to use SSTs in a variety of settings (e.g., Collier and Sherrell, 2010; Danaher et al., 2008). While these studies have made important contributions to the SST literature, the researchers identified three major gaps in this stream of literature. First, despite a large amount of SST literature in certain contexts such as libraries (Oyedele and Simpson, 2007) and e-government services (Hsu et al., 2010), relatively insufficient empirical work has been done in the

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hospitality industry with few exceptions (e.g., Kim and Qu, 2014; Kim et al., 2012). Second, among the limited work in a hospitality context, researchers have paid greater attention to the functionality or extrinsic attributes associated with SSTs (Wang and Wang, 2010). The experiential aspect of SSTs, or how SSTs may make consumers feel intrinsically, is significantly lacking yet potentially important for facilitating an extraordinary consumer experience. Finally, whereas prior studies have called for particular investigation of the impacts of SSTs on consumer retention (Meuter et al., 2000), abundant SSTs research has focused on one's SSTs adoption intention (e.g., Doong et al., 2010), leaving consumers' subjective experience with SSTs as well as its impact on consumers' behavioral intentions relatively understudied. The discussions above warrant the necessity to investigate consumers' SSTs experience in service encounters as well as its role in influencing consumer commitment toward a hospitality firm.

Seeking to fill research gaps as well as to expand the literature, the present research sought to develop and test a conceptual model that illustrates how hospitality consumers' subjective experience of the extrinsic and intrinsic attributes of SSTs may influence their commitment. Furthermore, this research explored three types of consumer commitment: affective, temporal, and instrumental. As an amalgam of tangible and intangible products and services, the hospitality product is claimed to lead to customer loyalty behaviors only when it can create a memorable, transcendent experience (Kim, 2014; Pizam, 2010). Thus, the present study further examined the potential mediating effect of Transcendent Customer Experience (TCE) on the relationship between SST user experience and the various dimensions of commitment. More specifically, the researchers proposed the following research objectives: (1) to assess the influence of the extrinsic attributes of SSTs on consumer commitment to the hospitality service organization; (2) to investigate the impact of the intrinsic attributes of SSTs on consumer commitment to the hospitality service organization; and (3) to ascertain the mediating effect of transcendent customer experience on the tested causal relationships.

2. Literature review and conceptual framework

2.1. The extrinsic and intrinsic attributes of SSTs experience

Pine and Gilmore (1998) described the consumer experience as an emerging economic offering, placing an emphasis on consumer experience management. Tourism activities, in particular, center on experiences, fulfillment, and rejuvenation rather than on things and places (King, 2002). Lodging brand management was also suggested to be more closely affiliated with consumer experience than price-based commodities (Cai and Hobson, 2004). Since the infusion of SSTs in service encounters has drastically shifted the nature of service delivery from human-based to SST-mediated (Kim and Qu, 2014; Rust and Espinoza, 2006), the growing recognition of consumer experience urged researchers to conduct empirical investigation of consumers' subjective experience of using SSTs instead of the widely discussed adoption intention of new technology (e.g., Kwon et al., 2013).

Recent years has witnessed a shift in consumer literature from the instrumental perspective to an experiential view, which provided the theoretical underpinning for the conceptualization of SST experience in the present study. Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) suggested that the information processing perspective can be supplemented with an experiential view encompassed by a steady flow of fantasies, funs, and feelings. In questioning the conventional approach to understanding hospitality and tourism experience, a growing number of researchers have begun to credit the hedonic and symbolic aspects of consumer experience (King, 2002). The

present study did not advocate the abandoning of the instrumental perspective, but rather supplementing it with the experiential view when studying SSTs-related experience. The extrinsic aspect focuses on economic outcomes (e.g., efficiency and economic value) and are instrumental in nature (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). In contrast, the intrinsic aspect emphasizes the consumption of fun, enjoyment, and playfulness rather than their consequences (Lofman, 1991). In the context of SSTs, a number of studies implied the importance of both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations in consumer trial of telephone-based SST and Internet SST (Meuter et al., 2005), users' engagement in using mobile devices (Chou et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2013), as well as tourism-related mobile applications (Wang et al., 2012) and travel websites (Morosan and Jeong, 2008).

Although the above-mentioned studies have examined the importance of extrinsic and intrinsic attributes, they focused only on the importance of these attributes to influence consumers' adoption intention or attitude toward SSTs. Additionally, in comparison to the extrinsic attributes of SSTs, the intrinsic attributes of SSTs (i.e., experiential aspects such as playfulness and enjoyment) remain less understood. The present research expands on the body of work by examining users' subjective experience with both the extrinsic and intrinsic attributes of SSTs and their relationships to various kinds of consumers' future behavioral and attitudinal intentions. This bi-dimensional conceptualization of SST experience indicates that consumers use SSTs not only for the extrinsic benefits; their use of SSTs per se is an experience that potentially affects their evaluation and memory of that service encounter. The extrinsic attributes of SST experience encapsulate the convenience, saved time, and efficiency that have been acknowledged as utilitarian outcomes of using SSTs (e.g., Kincaid and Baloglu, 2006; Kokkinou and Cranage, 2013; Meuter et al., 2003). The intrinsic attributes of SST experience include feelings of accomplishment, independence, confidence, novelty, and enjoyment that prior studies have found to increase one's technology acceptance intention (e.g., Meuter et al., 2005). Verhoef et al. (2009) suggested that technology-based systems, such as a self-service check-in/out kiosk, involve consumers' active engagement. These and many other technologies have also been recognized to have the power of empowering consumers and adding a fun element in consumer experience (Kasavana et al., 2010). Consequently, the researchers of this study added consumers' felt engagement and empowerment to the intrinsic attributes of SSTs.

2.2. The influence of SSTs experience on consumer commitment

Consumer commitment is important for organizational survival (Anderson et al., 1994). In consumer literature, the construct commitment has been widely operationalized as unidimensional and is often measured by affective commitment (Kim and Frazier, 1997). Although this conceptualization offers an easily interpretable measure of commitment, Gundlach et al. (1995) suggested the three-dimensional conceptualization to foster a more thorough comprehension of the construct. In this conceptualization, consumer commitment includes an attitudinal dimension (i.e., affective commitment), a temporal dimension (i.e., temporal commitment), and an instrumental dimension (i.e., instrumental commitment). Affective commitment has been defined as "identification with, involvement in, and emotional attachment to the organization" (Allen and Meyer, 1996, p. 253), which shares similarity with other attitudinal constructs such as identification, loyalty, and involvement (Achrol, 1997). Temporal commitment refers to the stability of the relationship over the long-term (Kim and Frazier, 1997) or expectations of continuity in an organization (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999). Finally, instrumental commitment denotes consumers' intention to stay with an organization based on their perceived opportunity costs of leaving it, including both economic

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