



Tourists' adoption of self-service technologies at resort hotels

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ABSTRACT

This study proposes and tests a model of travelers' self-service technology adoption to explain why travelers choose self-service technologies over service staff. Desire for interaction with service staff serves as a countervailing construct against technology-related perceptions and a subsequent technology adoption decision. Based on a resort hotel industry and data from a national sample, the proposed model provides cogent explanations for the two service transaction options' counteracting nature (self-service technologies vs. the service staff) toward the traveler's technology adoption in business transaction situations. The study shows the differently conceptualized role of the customer's desire for interaction. The proposed model allows service providers to examine the customer's willingness to adopt or avoid using self-service technologies and to determine a proper combination of technology and staff deployment.

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1. Introduction

As technological advances profoundly impact on business and marketing strategy, self-service technologies (SSTs) surface as an alternative or as a replacement of human-based service transactions (Rust & Espinoza, 2006). SST adoption benefits include labor cost reduction over time (Chang & Yang, 2008; Erdly & Chatterjee, 2003; Walker, Craig-Lees, Hecker, & Francis, 2002), creation of competitive niches and differentiation (Meuter & Bitner, 1998; Slifka, 2010), and improvement in consumer service and operational efficiency (Carline, 2007; Curran, Meuter, & Surprenant, 2003; Dabholkar, 1996; Meuter, Ostrom, Bitner, & Roundtree, 2003). Operators and managers remain hesitant to adopting SSTs due to their significant drain on resources if SSTs are not accepted by consumers (Curran & Meuter, 2005; Meuter et al., 2003). Service organizations fear losing customer–employee interactions may inhibit service recovery efforts, shatter social bonds between consumers and the organization, reduce up-selling opportunities, and cause service staff resentment of the technology (Beatson, Coote, & Drennan, 2006; Bitner, 2001; Curran et al., 2003; Meuter & Bitner, 1998).

In the hospitality and tourism industry, SST applications have increased substantially in recent years. Traveling consumers today

encounter many SSTs such as airport self check-in kiosks, electronic tourist guides, tourism information kiosks, self-service systems in dining facilities, hotel self check-in, and automated hotel check-out (Kincaid & Baloglu, 2005; Riebeck, Stark, Modsching, & Kawalek, 2008; Stockdale, 2007). Stockdale (2007) uses the label “self-service tourist” to refer to travelers experiencing a wide variety of technology applications online and offline, before (information search), during (actual visit), and after visitation. Tourism operation managers need to know how the two competing choices—SSTs vs. the service staff—affect travelers. Under what conditions will travelers adopt or reject SSTs?

This study shows how the traveler's intrinsic desire for interaction-based service encounters counteracts perceptions and adoption of SSTs as a method of service transactions. In particular, this study enriches the Technology Adoption Model's (TAM) by introducing an intrinsic factor, the desire for human interaction and related constructs such as the traveler's desires for privacy, autonomy, and effectiveness. Extending the literature, this study models both perceived usefulness of SSTs and desire for interaction as key mediating variables. How do the traveler's perceived usefulness of SSTs and desire for human interaction mediate the effects of perceived ease of use and technology-related instrumental desires toward SST adoption?

1.1. Conceptual background

1.1.1. Extrinsic desires

Extrinsic motivation theory provides a conceptual framework for understanding TAM and many other related studies (Davis, Bagozzi,

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& Warshaw, 1992; Meuter, Bitner, Ostrom, & Brown, 2005). According to Deci (1971) and Deci and Ryan (2000, p. 60), extrinsic motivation pertains whenever a person performs an activity in order to attain some separable outcomes. The theory posits that people engage in performing activities because of the rewards they want to obtain or the punishments (or losses) they want to avoid. Webster and Martocchio (1992) define extrinsic motivation as the motivation to perform an activity because the activity produces the valued outcomes that are distinct from the activity itself. A visitor may shop at a farmers market to save money or get fresh products rather than enjoying the shopping activity. Shopping at a farmers market becomes a means to these purchase-related ends (saving money or getting fresh products), extrinsic (or instrumental) motivations or values.

In the context of the consumer's adoption and use of SSTs, completing a service transaction fast or avoiding service congestion serve as a general extrinsic motivator leading the consumer to choosing SSTs instead of a service staff (Dabholkar, 1996; Meuter et al., 2003). Consumers' beliefs in the ease of use and usefulness of the focal technology for enhancing the performance of an intended task facilitate or reinforce choice of SSTs over the service staff (Davis, 1989; Davis, Bagozzi, & Warshaw, 1989; Lu, Chou, & Ling, 2009). Other SST-related extrinsic motivations include self-esteem (Standing, McManus, Standing, & Karjaluoto, 2008), a reliable transaction and satisfaction (Chang & Yang, 2008; Rangarajan, Falk, & Schillewaert, 2007), process control and autonomy (Chang & Yang, 2008; Ding, Hu, & Sheng, 2010; Oyedele & Simpson, 2007), and social acceptance (Curran et al., 2003). For tourism, a descriptive study assesses user acceptance of electronic tourist guides based on two dimensions: social habit and practical acceptability (Riebeck et al., 2008). The practical acceptability includes usability, utility, cost, support, reliability, and compatibility—all extrinsic motivators.

1.1.2. Intrinsic desires

Self-determination theory recognizes strong intrinsic motivation's operation in human action (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Ryan and Deci (2000, p. 56) define intrinsic motivation as "the doing of an activity for its inherent satisfactions rather than for some separable consequence." When intrinsically motivated, a person performs an act for the fun or challenge rather than because of external prods, pressures, or rewards. Buying fresh products and saving money may be secondary motivations for people to shop at a farmers market. Some shoppers' motivations include the fun and enjoyment they get through the shopping activity or process at a farmers market.

Consumers may adopt new technologies for intrinsic reasons. For example, employees adopt new technologies when they expect to enjoy the new system (Curran et al., 2003; Dabholkar, 1996; Davis et al., 1992). The *playfulness* of the web-based technology is a significant intrinsic reason for people to utilize web-based technologies (e.g., Moon & Kim, 2001; Novak, Hoffman, & Yung, 2000). Similarly, *fun* is an intrinsic motivation relevant to technology adoption (Chang & Yang, 2008; Dabholkar & Bagozzi, 2002; Rangarajan et al., 2007). When people fulfill their intrinsic motivations during the performance of an activity, they tend to reach a state of *flow* (Csikszentimihalyi, 1975).

Facing two different options—SSTs vs. service staff—to achieve the same task goal, consumer preference likely hinges on the strength of extrinsic or intrinsic motivations each option promises to satisfy. For example, a hotel check-in service is a situation where a speedy check-in service typically is viewed as high quality (Oh & Parks, 1997). Traveler choices include checking in through either the traditional front desk or a newly deployed SST kiosk.

In this case, the SST kiosk does not allow an ideal opportunity for the traveler to satisfy technology-oriented intrinsic needs due to the expected presence of social and system pressures (e.g., other customers are waiting in line behind). Choosing the front desk offers an opportunity to interact with a service staff. Travelers choosing

the kiosk may be motivated more by extrinsic desires such as speedy check-in, while those guests electing the service desk satisfy intrinsic desires for interaction with the staff. When travelers face these contrasting choices, one type of desires likely suppresses or countervails the other desire because the two options are countervailing.

1.1.3. The conceptual model and hypotheses

Fig. 1 presents the conceptual model guiding this study. The model reflects a situation where both staff and SST options are available and a transaction through SSTs requires the traveler's reaction to some degree. The model extends the TAM by incorporating other extrinsic and intrinsic desires relevant to choosing SSTs vs. staff-based service. Perceived usefulness mediates the effects of four motivations toward intention to use SSTs, while desire for interaction serves as a countervailing mediator of the four motivations toward both perceived usefulness and intention to use SSTs.

In addition to TAM, the proposed model includes desire for privacy, autonomy, and effectiveness as motivations commonly related to the choice of either SSTs or the service staff for a transaction. Fig. 1 summarizes the hypothesized relationships and their directions.

Based on attitude theory (Ajzen, 2002), intention to use SSTs is defined as an individual's readiness to engage in a behavior. SST intention is operationalized as the likelihood of choosing to use SSTs instead of the service staff for a service transaction. Meuter et al. (2005) conceptualizes that both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations are direct predictors of trying SSTs. TAM and related studies provide evidence for perceived usefulness as a direct antecedent of intention to use SSTs (Lanseng & Andreassen, 2007; Lu et al., 2009). In a sense, perceived usefulness is a required condition to form an intention to use SSTs in lieu of the service staff (Meuter et al., 2003). An ineffective SST triggers a search for an alternative method of transaction if available.

Perceived SST usefulness increases the likeliness of use, especially in the presence of an alternative service transaction method such as staffed counters.

H1. Intention to choose and use SSTs relates positively to perceived usefulness of SSTs.

Desire for interaction is defined as a need to retain personal contact with others (e.g., service staff) during a service encounter (Curran & Meuter, 2005; Dabholkar, 1996). Human interaction is a valued experience in service encounters (Bitner, Booms, & Mohr, 1994; Bolton & Drew, 1991) and thus travelers actively seek to maximize the experience whenever possible. Although researchers report mixed findings, desire for interaction plays either a direct or indirect predictor of intention to use SSTs (e.g., Dabholkar, 1996; Langeard, 1981; Meuter et al., 2005). In a retail setting, customers with a greater need for interpersonal contact tend to avoid machines (Forman & Sriram, 1991; Prendergast & Marr, 1994), while other people purposefully avoid interacting with personnel to demonstrate independence (Anselmsson, 2001; Meuter, Ostrom, Roundtree, & Bitner, 2000).

Therefore, greater desire for interpersonal interaction likely decreases customer willingness to use SSTs.

H2. Intention to choose to use SSTs relates negatively to desire for interaction with the service staff.

Following Davis (1989), perceived usefulness is the degree to which the traveler believes that using SSTs enhances his or her service transaction. In a situation where SSTs and service staff are available as competing check-in methods, elicited motivations likely affect the traveler's choice. When one option is chosen against another, the consumer exerts mental efforts to justify his or her choice and, furthermore, criticizes the rejected choice in order to avoid any potential inner conflict (Festinger, 1957; Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959).

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