



Online purchasing tickets for low cost carriers: An application of the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT) model



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HIGHLIGHTS

- We examine determinants of purchasing flights from low-cost carrier websites.
- Intention is mainly influenced by trust, habit, price saving, facilitating condition.
- Trust is influenced by information quality, perceived security and perceived privacy.
- Online purchase is affected by purchase intention, habit and facilitating conditions.

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines determinants of purchasing flights from low-cost carrier (LCC) websites. In doing so an extended unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT) model is proposed building on earlier work by Venkatesh, Thong, and Xu (2012). The results, derived from a sample of 1096 Spanish consumers of LCC flights, indicate that key determinants of purchasing are trust, habit, cost saving, ease of use, performance and expended effort, hedonic motivation and social factors. Of these variables, online purchase intentions, habit and ease of use are the most important.

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1. Introduction

The deregulation of the air travel market has presented new opportunities for airlines, and the main impact has been the rise of the low-cost carrier (LCC) sector with substantial growth rates in the number of LCC customers (Graham, 2013). Although LCCs first appeared in the USA in 1971, this low-cost model has spread rapidly almost everywhere in the world (Doganis, 2010). Thus, worldwide, in 2011, LCCs accounted for 24% of all aircraft seats compared with only 8% in 2001 (Graham, 2013). For 2011, LCCs achieved a market share of 36% in Europe and 30% in North America (Graham, 2013). The main target market sector for LCCs to date has been tourist passengers (Brons, Pels, Nijkamp, & Rietveld, 2002), and the growth

and success of LCCs have, in turn, had a great influence on the growth of tourism (Barrett, 2008). LCCs characteristically provide a basic air transport service with no “frills” and lower fares: the average LCC fares are 40–60% cheaper than those of the typical full service carriers (FSCs) (Kim & Lee, 2012; Oliveira, 2008). LCCs achieve significant cost savings by means of fleet commonality, low distribution costs by selling air tickets directly to consumers via their websites (thus avoiding travel agents’ commission), point-to-point service (rather than hub-to-hub), and non-refundable tickets (Francis, Humphreys, & Ison, 2004; Kim & Lee, 2012). As stated, LCCs achieve their objective of offering significantly lower fares than FSCs by operating with a significantly lower cost structure (Francis, Dennis, Ison, & Humphreys, 2007, 2004; Pels, Njegovan, & Behrens, 2009). Although the low fares of LCCs are one of the main reasons why consumers choose them, there are other factors that determine the demand for LCCs, such as perceived cost saving and ease of booking (Jou, Lam, Hensher, Chen, & Kuo, 2008; Ryan & Birks, 2005). Since direct selling to customers via their website is

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the main distribution channel for the tickets of LCCs, as opposed to travel agents for the FSCs (Chang & Hung, 2013), the future growth of the LCCs will depend on consumers continuing to access LCC websites to purchase tickets.

The use of the Internet and other information and communication technologies (ICTs) by consumers is enabling many companies in the tourism industry to secure valuable competitive advantages (Kim, Lee, & Law, 2008), offering lower distribution costs (Kim, Kim, & Shin, 2009), greater tourist satisfaction, and greater competitiveness and marketing efficacy (Tsai, Huang, & Lin, 2005). On the other hand, these technologies, especially the Internet, are modifying tourist behavior with respect to the search for information and, to a lesser extent, to the actual acquisition of tourism products and services (Law, Qi, & Buhalis, 2010). In the Spanish context, 68.3% of Spanish Internet users choose their tourism products and services based on information found on the Internet and 13.5% of these Internet users have bought this type of product online (Bigné, Sanz, Ruiz, & Aldás, 2010). In addition, the Internet facilitates the direct interaction of consumers with the tourism industry (Buhalis & Law, 2008). In Spain in particular, the product category of “tickets for transport by aircraft, train, ship and coach” is the product most frequently purchased online (AIMC, 2012). From the point of view of supply, the development of LCCs is associated with growing use of new information technologies such as the Internet, which allows information search and the purchase of air tickets directly through the websites of LCCs (Aguiló, Rey, Roselló, & Torres, 2007). In fact, the principal European LCCs such as Ryanair and EasyJet now sell more than 90% of their tickets directly through their websites (Koo, Mantin, & O’Connor, 2011).

The considerable development experienced by the LCC sector and its impact on the growth of tourism (Barrett, 2008) explains the increasing interest of researchers in the sector. Previous studies on LCCs have centered on determining the management and marketing of LCC services (Grigolon, Kemperman, & Timmermans, 2012; Kim & Lee, 2012), on defining the influence of LCCs on tourism (Aguiló et al., 2007; Rey, Myro, & Galera, 2011), and on examining the impacts of LCCs on airports, including the relationship between LCCs and airport operators, and the corresponding competitive airport strategies that have been developed (Francis et al., 2004; Graham, 2013). The study described here falls within the first-mentioned line of research. In this field, research questions arise due to the need to get a better knowledge of the factors influencing LCC air ticket online purchase acceptance and use by customers. Specifically, this research focuses on examining the customer factors affecting the intention to purchase online and the use of LCC e-commerce websites to make actual purchases of air tickets directly through these websites.

Despite the increase recorded in research studies on ICTs and tourism, it is considered important to continue investigating the field of e-commerce and tourism, and especially to determine how users’ attitudes toward the websites influence their purchasing decision process (San Martín & Herrero, 2012). The acceptance and/or use by individuals of ICTs, such as e-commerce website technologies, has been analyzed using various different theoretical models. Prominent among these are the technology acceptance model (TAM) (Davis, 1989), the theory of planned behavior (TPB) (Schifter & Ajzen, 1985), and the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT) (Venkatesh, Morris, Davis, & Davis, 2003). In the field of tourism, these models have been applied to explain users’ adoption (intention to use the technology in the future, and its actual use in the past) of e-commerce websites or other types, for hotels (Herrero & San Martín, 2012; Izquierdo-Yusta & Calderon-Monge, 2011; T.G. Kim et al., 2008; Morosan & Jeong, 2008; San Martín & Herrero, 2012), for airlines (Bigné et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2009), in Web 2.0 (Casaló, Flavián, & Guinalíu, 2010;

Muñoz-Leiva, Hernández-Méndez, & Sánchez-Fernández, 2012), as an information source by tourists (Castañeda, Frías, & Rodríguez, 2009), and for tourism in general (Ryan & Rao, 2008; Usoro, Shoyelu, & Kuofie, 2010).

In the context of tourism, this study is based on a new model, UTAUT2, of the formulation of online purchase intentions and actual online purchases (Venkatesh et al., 2012). UTAUT2 incorporates several advances from the original UTAUT model to explain the intention to use and the actual use of e-commerce website technology when consumers purchase LCC air tickets directly. In addition, this paper includes two other factors, “perceived trust” and “consumers’ innovativeness”; it also adapts the construct “price value”, which is re-designated as “price saving”. Lastly, a new relationship is also incorporated, the direct influence of the adapted “price value” construct (“price saving”) that the consumer is able to obtain by using the website to purchase airline tickets. Despite the price saving that consumers can obtain by purchasing air tickets on LCC e-commerce websites, they have little confidence in these websites (Kim, Ferrin, & Rao, 2008); this would explain why they may have no intention of using the website to purchase LCC tickets. In addition, we include in this study consumers’ innovativeness because this variable can influence the online purchasing intentions of consumers (San Martín & Herrero, 2012). Given the relevance of trust to the online purchase intention, the influence on trust of those factors relating to the consumers’ perception, such as the quality of website information, perceived security and protection of privacy, is also analyzed in this study (D.J. Kim et al., 2008). In short, this study puts forward a model to explain online purchase intention and use that includes the basic explanatory variables of the UTAUT2 model (i.e. expectation of site performance, expectation of purchaser effort involved, social influence, facilitating conditions, hedonic motivation and habit) as well as the direct influence of the consumers’ innovativeness and trust on their online purchase intention, and lastly, the adaptation of a basic variable of the UTAUT2 model, price value (i.e. price saving) and its influences on website use. Again, given the importance of the variable trust, in this study we analyze the influence that some of the antecedents of trust, in particular perceived privacy, perceived security and quality of information, could exert on this variable.

Other studies carried out in Spain in which the intention to purchase via a website has been analyzed, have focused principally on hotels (Herrero & San Martín, 2012; Izquierdo-Yusta & Calderon-Monge, 2011; San Martín & Herrero, 2012), and only to a lesser extent on airlines (Bigné et al., 2010). None of those studies have examined the intention to purchase through the websites of LCCs. Moreover, those studies have only examined the consumer’s intention to use websites (in the future), and not the actual use made (in the past). In their study, San Martín and Herrero (2012) stated the need to investigate the actual use made of the website by consumers to make bookings or reservations. This study employs the UTAUT2 model to examine the process by which Spanish consumers accept and use the e-commerce websites of LCCs.

The issue of intention to purchase has previously been analyzed by means of the application of two models – the UTAUT model (San Martín & Herrero, 2012) and the TAM model (Bigné et al., 2010; Herrero & San Martín, 2012; Izquierdo-Yusta & Calderon-Monge, 2011; Kim et al., 2009; Ryan & Rao, 2008). These are models conceived for application in the organizational context (i.e. to understand those factors that influence employee acceptance and/or use of ICTs) but not in the consumer context (i.e. to explain specifically the acceptance and/or use of ICTs by consumers), as is the case of the UTAUT2 model. UTAUT2 is used in this paper because its purpose is to study the acceptance and use of LCC e-commerce websites to purchase air tickets by consumer, while UTAUT2 was devised to explain the acceptance and use of ICT by consumers.

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