

The Attitude of Tehranian Customers toward Tourism Electronic Services

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Abstract: *This paper seeks to examine the attitude of Tehranian travelers within the context of online travel Website functionality and content preferences as well as surfing behavior. The attitude of travelers to use electronic services of tourism is an important variant that is studied here. Our theoretical framework in this study is The Theory of Reasoned Action formulated by Ajzen and Fishbein. It suggests that a person's behavior is determined by his/her intention to perform a behavior and that this intention is, in turn, a function of his/her attitude toward the same behavior and his/her subjective norm. A test of this model, with data collected from a sample of 600 Tehranian consumers using a questionnaire constructed by the authors indicates that using on-line services of tourism is strongly influenced by attitude toward on-line services of tourism, normative beliefs, and respondents' trust to internet space..*

Keywords: *E-tourism; Attitude; Subjective norms; tehranian travelers; the theory of Reasoned Action*

Introduction

Information technology represents an increasingly important element of activity in the tourism sector. These days, most airline companies and travel agencies are using the internet. The numbers of users are increasing in all the world and statistics shows that using internet has grown up to 305.5 percent from 2000 to 2008 (Bell & Tong, 1998).

Of course this trend affects using electronic services in tourism industry. The efficient use of the Internet helps travel businesses to reduce costs, improve service quality, and realize profits by targeting new markets that otherwise cannot be attained (Kim & Lee, 2004).

Today Internet provides, at modest cost, an unprecedented level of connectivity and the ability to communicate with customers efficiently, effectively and directly. According to Yao (2004), the emergence of the Internet has led to a rapid growth of electronic commerce and this has had an effect on the nature of the tourism industry. Today, World Wide Web makes possibilities for travelers regarding to travel services, accommodation, and attractions arrangement and also getting tourism information about destinations at the shortest time.

On the whole, information searching, booking, and payment through the emergence of the internet in tourism industry have affected the role of intermediaries too. In fact tourism services and products coupled with a rapid increase in tourism demand have driven the wide scale adoption of IT in general and the internet as an electronic intermediary in particular. In other words, the internet serves as a new communication and distribution channel for E-travelers and suppliers of travel services and products. This new channel also enables tourism businesses to improve their competitiveness and performance (Law, 2004).

Tourism researchers have emphasized the importance of the internet on travel and tourism. For tourism suppliers, the internet provides a way to sell their products globally to potential travelers at any time. The successful factors for a travel website, from a supplier's perspective are lower distribution costs, higher revenues and a larger market share. For travelers, the internet allows them to communicate directly with tourism suppliers to request information and to purchase products/services at any time and any place.

To some researchers, the accessibility of online travel website reduces the importance of travel agencies and might ultimately result in travelers bypassing travel agencies altogether. Today the role of different sectors of tourism industry is changed. Tour operators can be seen as product aggregators, i.e., they produce a new product by combining basic products or components. Travel agents can be viewed as information brokers, providing the consumer with relevant information and booking facilities.

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Computerized Reservation Systems/Global Distribution Systems (CRS/GDS) cover airline offerings as well as other tourism relevant products such as packaged holidays, and other means of transport. They provide the main links to tour operator systems and to travel agents. ICT has played an important role in previous phases of the development of modern tourism. CRS is developed and operated by airlines in order to cope with the increasing volume of passengers and the related logistic and operational problems were among the first worldwide applications of information technology, leading to systems with several ten-thousand participating companies (Werthner, 1999).

Today, tourism is among the most important application domains in the World Wide Web. It is estimated that approximately 33% of Internet transactions are tourism-based (Strassel, 1997). Schuster (1998), based on a Delphi study with 40 participants from the German speaking countries, estimates that within the next 10 years 30% of the tourism business will be Internet based (cited in Werthner, 1999). According to Poon (2001) the amount of online direct sales by travel suppliers would grow from 22 percent in 1997 to 30 percent in 2002 (Law, 2004). These statistics shows that flurry of activities going on worldwide to transform the distribution of travel through new technologies using the Internet, which will profoundly reshape the way the travel products are distributed. New technologies in the marketplace such as the Internet, electronic ticketing and kiosks are having considerable effects on the travel industry (Vasudavan, 1999). Therefore, using internet for receiving tourism services is going to be a must not only preference. This survey tries to assess the attitude of Iranian travelers to electronic tourism.

Better understanding of visitor behavior and use will enable providers to serve their customers better and to distribute their products more effectively in an increasingly competitive marketplace, too.

Literature review

Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) is a widely studied model in social psychology to explain an individual's behavior. According to Ajzen and Fishbein, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the factors influencing behavior, it is required to look for the determinants of the attitudinal and normative components. They believe that a person's behavior is predicted by intentions, and intentions are jointly determined by the person's attitude and subjective norm concerning the behavior. TRA is a general model, which does not specify beliefs about performing a particular behavior. Social norm has been reconsidered in improving the understanding of users regarding adoption of a behavior. Social norm, as included in the original TRA, is defined as a "person's perception that most people who are important to him think (s)he should or should not perform the behavior in question" (HSU & LU, 2005) Therefore, according to TRA, we propose social norms and group cohesion as sociable factors affect the person's perception. Subjective norm represents the person's perception of social influence to perform the given behavior. Subjective norm is also a function of expectations of a particular referent and motivation to comply with these expectations. According to TRA, attitude refers to the person's evaluation about performing the target behavior. Attitude is a function of the product of beliefs about consequences of performing a specific behavior and the consequences of evaluation.

Specifically, this model posits that a person's behavior (B) is determined by the person's intention to perform the behavior (BI), which in turn is predicted by the person's attitude (A) and subjective norm toward the behavior (SN): $B = w_1 BI$,

Where, w_1 , w_2 , and w_3 are the subjective weights for a particular person. (Lee, 2006)

In this paper, the TRA has provided theoretical insights to information search and using electronic tourism services. In particular, the attitude and subjective norms are surveyed to explain information search, booking and payment of tourism services in internet.

In summary, we hypothesize that the act of information seeking is influenced by the psychological implications of the searched information on the social environment in which the information is sought. Thus, to predict searching and purchasing behaviors regarding electronic tourism services, it is necessary to measure a person's attitude, subjective norm and intention to perform the behavior.

Some Studies have implemented the TRA to explain the internet behaviors. A study by HSU & LU (2005) focused on consumer behavior in online game communities. This study applied the theory of reasoned action (TRA) and modified the technology acceptance model (TAM) to propose a research model. The results indicated that customer loyalty was influenced by perceived enjoyment, social norms and preferences. The proposed model was validly verified in explaining and predicting users' behaviors in the online game community context.

The theoretical framework that Vijayasathy (2003) applied for predicting consumer intentions to use on-line shopping was Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). This model was derived from the theory of reasoned action, and focuses on two specific salient beliefs—ease of use and usefulness. Besides ease of use and usefulness, compatibility, privacy, security, normative beliefs, and self- efficacy were included in an augmented TAM. A test of this model, with data collected from 281 consumers, showed empirical support for seven of nine research hypotheses. Specifically, compatibility, usefulness, ease of use, and security were found to be significant predictors of attitude towards on-line shopping, but privacy was not. Further, intention to use on-line shopping was strongly influenced by attitude toward on-line shopping, normative beliefs, and self-efficacy.

Another study carried out by Lee and his colleagues (2006) focused on the impact of personal innovativeness on online travel shopping behavior. This study, utilizing Fishbein and Ajzen's theory, examined how online travelers' decision may vary according to the traveler's personal innovativeness level. The results indicated that highly innovative travelers were mainly influenced by their positive attitudes when they embraced online shopping.

These studies show that the Theory of Reasoned Action gains much support from research. As such, the correlation between attitude and subjective norm with behavior is theoretically acceptable.

Conceptual definitions

There are some key concepts that need to be clarified in this paper including electronic tourism, attitude and subjective norm.

Electronic tourism: Today, Tourism websites are among the most important application domains in the World Wide Web. According to some estimates approximately 33% of the internet transactions are tourism-based. (Werthner, 1999)

In fact, there is a flurry of activities going on worldwide to transform the distribution of travel through internet which will profoundly reshape the way the travel products are distributed as suppliers, using this technology can communicate directly with the consumer (Vasudavan, 1999). Internet allows consumers to request information, and to purchase products/services at any time and any place (law, 2004). In other words, tourists can now receive comprehensive, timely and relevant information in a virtual environment to assist their decision making process.

Internet allows consumers' direct access through the internet to global distribution system (GDS). There are currently four major world-wide GDSs: Sabre, Amadeus, Galilea and Wordspan that travel agents have direct connection to these systems. The internet has made it possible to make global distribution networks accessible for customers on the internet as Sabre has done by establishing Travelocity. Galileo has acquired Trip.com and Amadeus takes stake in Opudo and E-Travel. Expedia, created by Microsoft, and Travelocity are the largest online travel agents covering more than 50% of the online trading market (Wig, 2002). Infrastructures of electronic tourism are website, E-Visa and E-booking (transport, accommodation, attractions). (Naghshine, 2007)

Today payment for transportation and accommodation is possible through the internet. Many new payment collection forms such as smart cards and digital cash have emerged in electronic commerce (Wang, 2001) that provide consumers tourism services through structures and processes that are fast, flexible and flat (Palmer, 2000).

Attitude: As Ajzen and Fishbein define, an attitude is an index of the degree to which a person likes or dislikes an object. Attitude has been characterized as a person's inclination to exhibit a certain response towards a concept or object. It has been suggested that attitude can be split into its cognitive and affective components. The former is modeled as salient beliefs in TRA, and the latter is deemed to comprise attitude. (Vijayasathy, 2002)

It is defined, here, as 'the extent to which a consumer likes on-line shopping and also considers it to be a good idea to use e-tourism services.

Subjective norm: Subjective norm is defined as "the degree to which the user perceives that others approve his/her participating in the behavior" of searching and using internet regarding tourism services. Also in this study, normative beliefs is defined as 'the extent to which a consumer believes that people who are important to him/her would recommend the consumer engagement in using e-tourism services.

Methodology

Figure 1 shows the model of our research that is generally adopted from Ajzen and Fishbein's theory. According to this model, positive attitude and subjective norms make person's trust to the internet. The figure demonstrates that the relationship between users' perceptions of the Internet and subjective norms affect the trust to the internet for using electronic tourism services and intentions to use may vary based on their perception that make information search, booking and payment behavior. These functions are related to four key sectors: attractions, transport, accommodation and visa.

Applying TRA in this research suggests that a person's attitude toward a particular behavior predicts his/her behavioral intention. Thus, these arguments suggest the following hypotheses. It is necessary to say that intention to receive information tourism is different from using electronic services in these hypotheses. In this research using electronic services means booking and payment but receiving means just searching information.

Hypothesis 1: Attitude toward electronic tourism services is associated with the intention to **receive** tourism information.

Hypothesis 2: Attitude toward electronic tourism services is associated with the intention to **use** electronic tourism services.

As Ajzen and Fishbein assert, a person's behavior can also be predicted by his/ her perceived opinion of referents as well as his/her attitude toward behavior. This implies that subjective norms are important for doing a certain behavior. So the following hypotheses were tested.

Hypothesis 3: Subjective norms toward electronic tourism services are associated with the intention to **receive** tourism information.

Hypothesis 4: Subjective norms toward electronic tourism services are associated with the intention to use electronic tourism services.

Trust is the variant made by positive attitude and subjective norm to Electronic tourism. Thus, two more hypotheses are offered that emphasize the importance of trust. **Hypothesis 5:** Trust to the internet is associated with **receiving** electronic tourism services.

Hypothesis 6: Trust to the internet is associated with **using** electronic tourism services.

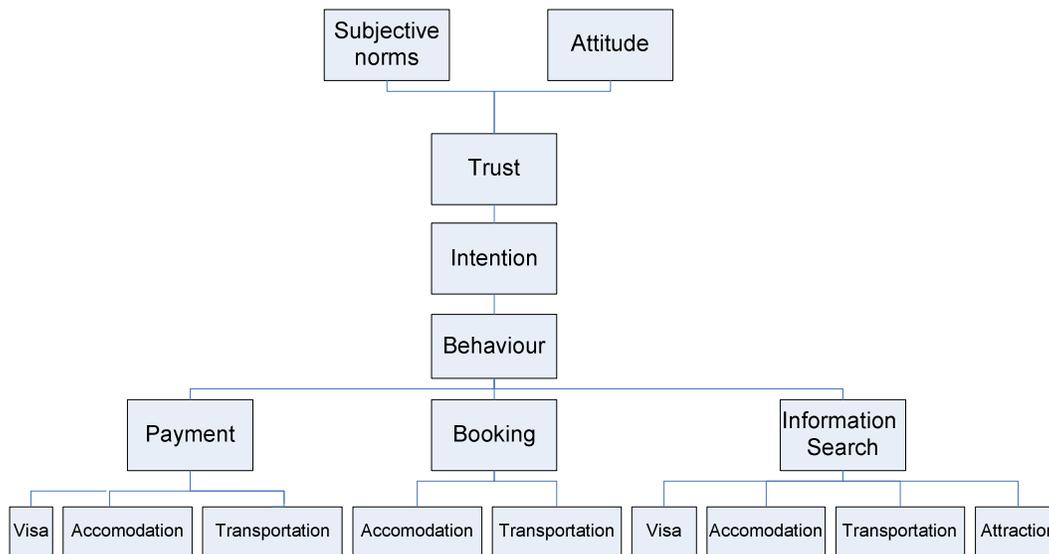


Figure 1

Survey instrument

A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect the data. The questionnaire was divided into three sections. The first section of the questionnaire asked about the respondents' personal information and also knowledge about second language, computer and internet, time of domestic and outsider journey. The second

section included 16 questions measuring the respondents' attitude, subjective norm, personal trust to internet, and intention according to hypotheses.

Attitude was measured with items asking subjects to indicate how they feel about using electronic tourism services. Subjective norm was measured with five items. The respondents were asked to indicate the importance of referents approving of their use of the Internet for tourism services. The third section consisted of 14 statements and all items were measured with five-point Likert scales ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Some modifications of the questionnaire were made, based on the comments collected through pre-test. To validate the questionnaire a pre-test, consisting of 30 randomly selected travelers in the Mehrabad Airport in Tehran was administered. Consequently, based on the feedback from the pilot test, minor modifications were also made and the final questionnaire was developed.

Sampling and survey procedures

The sampling method was used for data collection from travelers in the airport and travel agencies who liked to fill the questionnaire accidentally. First of all, the prepared questionnaire was administered on 30 travelers to assess the validation. Then, for the final version of the test, open and ambiguous questions were eliminated.

To assess the volume of final samples, two variants were used in the pre-rest consisting of degrees of education and the internet using knowledge shown in table 1 and 2.

Number	Degree of Education
0	Primary school
2	Guidance School
0	Gymnasium
12	Diploma
3	Post diploma
6	B.S
6	M.S
1	PHD
N=30	

Table 1

Number	Internet using knowledge
0	Nothing
6	Little
14	Medial
10	Much

Table 2

In order to assign the volume of final sampling, variance based on years of education was accounted, according to table 3.

X_i	$(X_i - \bar{X})$	$(X_i - \bar{X})^2$
14	-0.2	0.04
144	129.8	16848.04
42	28	784
96	82	6724
108	94	8836
22	8	64
$\sum = 426$	$\bar{X} = 14.2$	$\sum = 33256.08$

Table 3

$$S^2 = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n (X_i - \bar{X})^2}{n-1} = \frac{33256.08}{29} = 1147 \quad P=0.57$$

$$Q=1-P=0.57 \quad YN=P=(0.63)^2 \quad S^2=P.q=0.57 \times 0.43$$

$$N=10000 \quad E=(0.04)^2=0.0016 \quad T=1.96=(1.96)^2$$

$$n = \frac{t^2 \frac{s^2}{(Y N)^2}}{E^2 + \frac{1}{N} t^2 \frac{s^2}{(Y N)^2}}$$

$$\frac{(1.96)^2 \frac{(0.57)(0.43)}{(0.57)^2}}{(0.04)^2 + \frac{1}{10000} (1.96)^2 \frac{(0.57)(0.43)}{(0.57)^2}} = \frac{2.8977}{0.0049} = 591$$

According to the result, totally 600 questionnaire were completed during May to June 2008.

Data Analysis

The data gathered showed that 54.5% of the respondents were male and 45.5% were female, 55% were married and 44% were single, 58% had bachelor's or higher education degrees and 40% had school diplomas or less. The majority of the respondents (77%) were employed and the minority of them were housekeepers. Most of the respondents (92%) declared that they knew English well and 31% respondents knew using the internet completely. Also 61% had used the Internet for more than 3 years.

Table 1 shows that the majority of the respondents refer to travel agency to receive tourism services for outsider trip and just 13% of them use the internet.

TABLE 1: Information sources in foreign trips

	Frequency	Percent
No Answer	21	3.5
Brochure & Guide book	24	4.0
Experienced people	42	7.0
Internet	78	13.0
Travel Agency	105	17.5
All	330	55.0
Total	600	100.0

According to the result in table 2, 50% of the respondents use the internet for information about attraction tourism that does not need booking and payment.

TABLE 2: Use of the internet in foreign trips

	Frequency	Percent
No Answer	129	21.5
Attractions	303	50.5
Transportation	27	4.5
Accommodation	105	17.5
Visa	36	6.0
Total	600	100.0

As table 3 indicates, the majority of respondents refer to travel agencies to receive tourism services and just minority of them use the internet for domestic trips and 48% of the respondents use the internet for attractions information. Accordingly, most of the respondents prefer not using the internet for booking and payment in both foreign and domestic trips.

TABLE 3: Information sources in domestic trips

	Frequency	Percent
No Answer	21	3.5
Brochure & Guide book	33	5.5
Experienced people	90	15.0
Internet	33	5.5
Travel Agency	147	24.5
All	276	46.0
Total	600	100.0

TABLE 4: Use of internet in domestic trips

	Frequency	Percent
No Answer	183	30.5
Attractions	288	48.0
Transportation	30	5.0
Accommodation	99	16.5
Visa	600	100.0

Table 5 shows attitude and trust of the respondents to use electronic tourism services. The results indicate that most of people trust the internet medially and they prefer to receive tourism services directly.

TABLE 5: Trust to electronic tourism services

	Frequency	Percent
No Answer	9	1.5
Very little	93	15.5
little	99	16.5
Medial	225	37.5
much	132	22.0
Very much	42	7.0
Total	600	100.0

Table 6 evaluates respondents' subjective norms. The results show whether the person is affected by his/her friends for doing payment.

TABLE 6: Payment for booking by respondents' friends

	Frequency	Percent
No Answer	297	49.5
Yes	147	24.5
No	123	20.5
Sometimes	33	5.5
Total	600	100.0

Research findings

Hierarchical moderated regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses. Hierarchical moderated regression attempts to improve standard regression estimates by adding a second-stage regression to an ordinary

model. It adds terms to the regression model in stages. At each stage, an additional term or terms are added to the model and the change in RSQ is calculated.

A hypothesis test was undertaken to test whether the change in R² is significantly different from zero. The significance of the interaction can be assessed after controlling all main effects. The attitude, subjective norms and trust were entered into the model to test the interaction effects between the variables and behavior. R square indicates the correlation between the variables and intention to behavior and the next step is the F statistics, which shows the equation is one that is extremely unlikely to have occurred by chance and if there is a significant correlation between variables.

This research shows that when a person believes that electronic tourism services are not disposable because of low speed of the internet, the respondent's attitude affect his/her behavior. Then, there is a relationship between attitude and behavior (R square=0.00< p=0.005). The correlation between a traveler's intention to stay at the hotel booked on the internet and respondents' attitude toward this behavior was highly and significantly correlated at 95% level. It can be concluded that the hypotheses 1 & 2, declaring attitude toward electronic tourism services is associated with the intention to **receive** tourism information and **use** electronic tourism services, are not rejected.

The correlation between doing online reservation and a traveler's subjective norms toward this behavior (R square=0.00< p=0.005) was highly and significantly correlated at 95% level. It is concluded that the hypothesis 3 & 4, declaring subjective norms toward electronic tourism services is associated with the intention to **receive** tourism information and **use** electronic tourism services; and attitude toward electronic tourism services is associated with the intention to **receive** tourism information and **use** electronic tourism services are not rejected.

The correlation between doing online reservation and a traveler's trust to the internet (R square=0.00< p=0.005) was high and significant correlated at 95% level. So, the hypotheses 5 & 6, declaring trust to the internet is associated with **receiving** and **using** electronic tourism services are not rejected.

Conclusion

This paper focused on consumers' attitudes toward electronic tourism services among people who took a domestic or foreign trip in Tehran according to the theory of reasoned action. The important element in receiving tourism services online is that a traveler should know the virtual space well and trust it completely. The research findings revealed that when a person had positive attitude and subjective norms toward the information search, booking and payment tourism services (attractions, transportation, accommodation and visa) she/he was more likely to do electronic tourism. Also, this paper studied the role of the important element, trust to the internet, and identified that when a respondent trusted the internet, she/he would do information search, booking and payment for hotels or other services she/he needed. The results of the research showed that respondents liked to use tourism services in the internet but unfortunately they did not trust the tourism websites especially Iranian ones. This paper revealed that doing reservation online needed electronic payment whereas the majority of respondents did not have these possibilities. Most of them preferred to confer to travel agencies to have their services directly in both domestic and foreign trips. They also believed that most of the tourism websites had unreal information and aimed to attract consumers through providing amusing advertisement. As such, they are not trustworthy. Results highlight the idea that the salient belief, trust, is highly relevant in assessing attitude toward receiving electronic tourism services while attitude is strongly associated with intention. Moreover, normative beliefs are also shown to be pertinent in acceptance of this behavior.

In conclusion, this research focused on E-commerce that is a vital requirement for improving E-tourism in Iran. The role of government in investing e-payment will be very vital in travelers' intention to booking and payment online. Besides, different websites will be associated with the other tourism websites to compete positively and make progress in attracting consumers.

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