

Drivers of Customer Satisfaction in Online Tourism-The Case of European Countries

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Abstract: Online tourism is one of the most successful e-commerce implementations (Turban *et al.*, 2010) and therefore investigating its success factors has increasing importance. This paper investigates the determinants of tourist satisfaction in on-line tourism. To this end, a factor analysis was performed. The results confirmed the five factor model illustrated by the study of e-satisfaction with on-line retailing in the United States, conducted by Szymansky and Hise (2000). In addition, the unique effect of each determinant on e-satisfaction was investigated using regression analysis. Then a comparison was made among the results of this study and those of other two studies which had studied e-satisfaction in different contexts. This research yields insights for managers of e-tourism firms, by introducing the factors with the highest impact on tourism e-satisfaction. Results show that the effect of the determinants of e-satisfaction cannot be generalized to the whole e-retailing sector, since the importance and effect of each determinant on e-satisfaction can vary in different industries.

Key words: Electronic satisfaction • E-tourism • E-business • Service marketing

INTRODUCTION

It is about fifty years that the first mainframe computer was developed, thirty years since the personal computer was introduced and more than two decades since the World Wide Web was launched and yet their influences on daily operations is pervasive. It was in the mid-1990s when a flurry of internet service providers began offering dial-up access and consequently e-services became widely available to mass consumers [1]. Due to the continuous growth of internet use, many tourism firms were motivated to offer their services on-line. Nowadays, being online is so important that if a tourism service is not on the web, it may well be ignored by the millions of people who now have access to internet and expect every tourism service to have a comprehensive presence on the web. Using internet and information technology is increasingly becoming critical for the success of tourism and hospitality organizations

[2]. In 2008, U.S. online travel sales increased 12 percent compare to 2007 and reached \$105 billion [3]. It is expected that U.S. online tourism sales reach \$163 billion by 2012 [3-4].

E-tourism is generated when traditional travel agents, tour operators, national tourist offices, airlines, car rental firms, hotels and other accommodation providers offer their services online. This enables the tourists to schedule their trip online and hence provides a new way of doing business for tourism service providers. Fast communication, global accessibility and minimal costs are the immediate consequences of going online for tourism organizations. E-tourism benefits both tourists and tourism organizations. Tourists can easily search for anything they require, obtain useful information and can book their travel needs on-line. On the other hand, tourism firms can offer tourism services on-line that can be sold directly to the customers and eliminate the high rates of commissions of intermediaries.

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Moreover, it improves customer services and encourages greater cooperation between providers of different services in the tourism industry.

Manufacturers of products can apply different marketing methods to attract customers. A study by Hu and his colleagues [5] showed that sampling is a strong indicator for product quality that reduces product uncertainty and attracts interested shoppers. However unlike durable goods, intangible tourism services, due to their nature, cannot be physically displayed or inspected at the point of sale before the trip. Therefore, tourism products are highly dependent on the way they are represented and offered by the tourism firms. As information constitutes the heart of the travel industry [6], utilizing and managing a suitable Information Technology is essential for tourism organizations to satisfy their customers.

One of the important issues in the e-business is to provide an appropriate level of quality of tourism services [7] which leads to tourists' satisfaction. Although a number of works have reported findings on tourists' satisfaction and on-line satisfaction separately, however despite its importance, few studies have been conducted on satisfaction of online tourism. This has mainly been due to the fact that the researches are usually done in a special context and then the author tries to generalize it to other contexts. However due to the importance of e-tourism and the differences of this industry with others, there is a crucial need to conduct such research in this context. Additionally it can be argued that relative to the importance of e-tourism this field has not received sufficient attention by researchers, therefore it requires more attention in the academic field.

This paper intends to fill this gap by identifying the most important determinants of e-satisfaction in the tourism industry. Like Szymanski and Hise [8] this study considers e-satisfaction (satisfaction in online context) to be the consumers' judgment of their online purchasing experiences as compared to their experiences with traditional stores.

This paper is organized as follows. In section 2, we will review the related literature and section 3 is devoted to the methodology of our research. Section 4 demonstrates the characteristics of the respondents to the questionnaire. The results of our work are demonstrated in section 5. Finally in section 6, a discussion on the obtained results concludes the paper.

Literature Review: Tourism and information communication technology (ICT) are two of the most important and dynamic motivators of the evolving global economy [9-10]. Today, due to the nature of tourism products and services, consumers are more interested than ever in gaining as much information as possible regarding tourism products and services to minimize their buying risk and increase their satisfaction. Travelers cannot pre-test the product or easily get a refund if the trip does not meet their expectations; hence access to reliable, accurate, timely and relevant information is crucial to help them make an appropriate choice [11].

Tourism-related services have emerged as a leading product type for promotion and distribution through the Internet [12]. However, a good representation of the services is as important as being online to make the business successful. In fact, making tourism service information accessible to customers does not guarantee their effective distribution. Well-designed mechanisms must allow customers to process their purchase efficiently [13]. If a tourism organization can better represent its destination (services) on the internet than others, then it may attract those tourists who are uncertain about where to travel.

As the usage of e-tourism increases, understanding what creates a satisfying customer experience becomes crucial. Unfortunately despite this importance there have been few investigations related to the satisfaction with on-line industries especially on-line tourism. There have been several works related to satisfaction with traditional ways of businesses [14-20] and in particular, there have been plenty of studies related to tourists' satisfaction in the traditional (offline) model of tourism [21-24]. These authors have introduced several models and determinants of tourists' satisfaction.

Park and his colleagues [25] examined the role of perceived web site quality on willingness to use online travel agencies. They found that ease of use of the website is the most important dimension in determining willingness to use online travel agencies. Attributes based on which customers evaluate e-services are studied by scholars like Finn [26] and Parasuraman *et al.* [27]. Moreover, studying the different aspects of online shopping has been the subject of some researches. Jarvenpa and Todd [28] applied a conceptual approach to their investigation of consumer attitudes towards early features of e-shopping. They divided shopping factors perceived by online buyers into four categories: product perceptions, shopping experience, customer service and

consumer risks. Burke [29] conducted similar research in a different context. Burke's work reported that on-line shoppers were most satisfied with the convenience, product quality, value provided and product selection offered by the on-line shopping experience. Szymansky and Hise [8] discussed an e-satisfaction model for online purchasing and have introduced five factors affecting e-satisfaction. They conceptualized e-satisfaction as the consumers' judgment of their Internet retail experience compared to their experiences with traditional retail stores. Their study was among the first studies considering satisfaction in an online context. However they considered the general context of e-retailing, hence, there is a need to study e-satisfaction in other contexts. This will assist both practice and academia to investigate factors affecting e-satisfaction in various contexts to see if this model can be generalized to all contexts.

Knowing what satisfies tourists while they search online and scheduling their trip, which is the first phase of the process, is a very important issue for tourism firms' managers that helps them survive in such a competitive market. Moreover, as Evanschitzky *et al.* [30] have mentioned, the examination of consumer satisfaction in an on-line context is not only a critical performance outcome, but also a primary predictor of customer loyalty and an internet retailer's success. Anderson and Srinivason [31] showed that the impact of e-satisfaction on e-loyalty is the greatest contingent to the presence of some customer level moderators such as convenience, motivation, purchase size and business level factors such as trust and perceived value.

Usually scholars of e-commerce conduct their researches in the general context of online shopping and try to generalize their studies. However, due to the nature of the tourism industry, specific research in this context is needed. The current study attempts to find factors which affect tourist's satisfaction while they are purchasing online. Following on from Szymansky and Hise's [8] work in e-retailing to identify factors affecting e-satisfaction in tourism industry, we have investigated the consumers' judgment of their e-tourism experience compared with their experience of traditional travel agencies.

Methodology: The first part of this work that constitutes its qualitative part is focused on the design of a questionnaire. The next part is quantitative and elaborates on gathering survey data to test the e-satisfaction model and assess determinants of the e-satisfaction model in the tourism industry.

The initial questionnaire for the current study was designed in different sections and the questionnaire was finalized after conducting a pilot test. The first section of the questionnaire is designed to obtain the respondents' demographic data and behavioral characteristics: gender, age, occupation, purposes of their trip and the number of times travel agencies and e-tourism websites were used per year. Sections 2 and 3 consist of the main questions related to the model in this research. Items are gathered from the previous studies, in particular the Servequal Model [23] and the e-satisfaction model [8].

In section 2, items presented pertain to the different aspects of tourism services that can affect customer satisfaction. The items questions in this section investigate the perceptions of tourists toward on-line tourism organizations compared with traditional travel agencies. This comparison between e-shops and their counterparts in the traditional market is done using the same methodology as [8] in their e-satisfaction model. The traditional travel agencies are considered as the reference because almost everyone has had an experience with them therefore it would be a suitable comparison for inferring their e-satisfaction. In this section respondents are asked to compare each item regarding on-line tourism with traditional travel agencies, relating to their previous experiences. Their e-satisfaction level measure is in a 5-point scale, (1) Much worse than, (2) Worse than, (3) The same, (4) Better than and (5) Much better than.

Items in section 3 are related to tourism websites' design. In this section respondents are asked to mention their satisfaction level on a 5-point scale - (1) Very dissatisfied, (2) Dissatisfied, (3) Fair, (4) Satisfied and (5) Very satisfied. After designing the questionnaire a pre-test was also conducted.

Before data collection, in order to validate the questionnaire, the questionnaire was reviewed by tourism experts and scholars expert in designing questionnaires. Then a pilot test was conducted and the questionnaire was given to 10 people from our sample to check if all items and questions are easy to understand and whether any changes were required. Some modifications were applied after fulfilling these two phases.

The suitable population to collect data from for this study are those who have experienced e-tourism at least once before. For the purpose of data collection, Beauvais airport in Paris agreed to cooperate with this research. The airport serves airlines like Ryanair, which sell the majority of their tickets online. Beauvais airport permitted us to distribute the questionnaire in the airport area in

front of check-in desks. As the questionnaire was in English, people were asked first if they spoke English and the questionnaires were given to those whose responses were positive. In order to get better results and eliminate redundant results, only one questionnaire was given to each group. The advantage of this sampling was that the respondents were completing the questionnaire during their trip and the problem of recalling information, which usually exists in data collection, is not an issue here.

A Total of 150 questionnaires were distributed. 115 questionnaires were returned and after eliminating void, missing valued questionnaires and outliers the number of valid responses was reduced to 99.

Respondent Characteristics: Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of respondents. 53% of respondents are female and more than 50% of the respondents are aged between 18-34 years old. Table 2 shows the purpose of the trip and also the usage of travel agencies and tourism websites per year. It demonstrates that more than half of the respondents use travel agencies once a year at most but the percentage for using tourism websites is different. About 50% of responders use tourism websites at least four times a year.

Using SPSS 13, an exploratory factor analysis using principal component with varimax rotation was performed to investigate the underlying factors which affect the satisfaction of customers with e-tourism. In effect, we identify the dimensions that affect tourists' satisfaction while they are purchasing on-line compared with the occasions they used traditional travel agencies.

To verify if factor analysis could be applied, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO measurement) and Bartlett's test analysis were conducted. Results show that KMO is greater than 0.5, (=0.79) which signifies the number of samples is big enough to use factor analysis (Table 3). Moreover the Bartlett's test is significant (significant level 0), which proves the applicability of factor analysis.

In order to test the reliability and internal consistency of each factor, Cronbach's alpha scores and correlation coefficient were calculated. Cronbach's alpha was calculated only for convenience and site design, since other factors i.e. product information, product offering and financial security, include only 2 items. For factors with 2 items, instead of Cronbach's alpha, correlation coefficient between the two items was calculated (Table 4). The Cronbach's alpha scores and the correlation coefficient ranged from 0.53 to 0.82 for the five factors.

Table 1: Demographic profile of the respondents

	Variable	Percent
Gender	Male	53
	Female	47
Age Group	18 – 24	24.8
	25 – 34	25.7
	35 – 44	20.4
	45 – 54	17.7
	55 – 64	10.5
	>65	0.9
Occupation	Executive	20.9
	Professional	18.2
	Clerical Work	10.0
	Student	26.4
	Retired	0.9
	Housewife	1.8
	Others	21.8

Table 2: Purpose of respondent's current trip and usage of travel agency and tourism website/year

	Variable	Percent
Purpose of the trip	Business	11.5
	Leisure	57.5
	Visiting Friends and Family	23.9
	Others	7.1
Use of Travel Agency per year	Less than one	37.3
	Once	20
	Twice	18.2
	Three times	13.6
	Four times	2.7
	Five times or more	8.2
Use of tourism websites per year	Less than one	11.5
	Once	10.6
	Twice	11.5
	Three times	20.4
	Four times	10.6
	Five times or more	35.4

Table 3: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.790
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	560.772
	Df	91
	Sig.	0.000

Since 0.5 is the minimum value for accepting the reliability test [32] the results of factor analysis in this research are considered reliable. The factor loadings are also shown in Table 4.

RESULTS

To investigate the factors affecting customer satisfaction in e-tourism and to determine whether the Szymansky and Hise [8] five-factor measurement model reflects the underlying mental model in e-tourism or not,

Table 4: Factor loading and reliability results (Cronbach's alpha for factors including more than 2 items, Correlation Coefficient for factors including 2 items)

	Factors	Factor Loading	Cronbach's alpha	Correlation coefficient
Factor 1: Site Design	Attractive website	0.864	0.817	-
	Friendliness ease of use	0.682		
	Uncluttered screens	0.645		
Factor 2: Convenience	Purchase any time	0.797	0.682	-
	Purchase anywhere	0.737		
	Time efficiency	0.711		
Factor 3: Financial Security	Formal privacy	0.897	-	0.65
	Safe feeling in transactions	0.807		
Factor 4: Product Information	Quantity of information	0.832	-	0.643
	Quality of information	0.740		
Factor 5: Product Offering	Number of tourism services	0.753	-	0.53
	Variety of tourism services	0.789		

Table 5: Coefficients (Dependent Variable: E-satisfaction)

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
Fact 1: Site Design	5.328	1.196	0.377	4.455	0.000
Fact 2: Convenience	5.280	1.189	0.375	4.439	0.000
Fact 3: Financial Security	1.674	1.191	0.119	1.405	0.163
Fact 4: Product Information	2.039	1.193	0.144	1.709 *	0.091
Fact 5: Product Offering	2.290	1.190	0.163	1.924 *	0.057

*: ρ Value <0.1

Table 6: Regression result, comparison of the three studies

Predictor Variable	E-satisfaction in Tourism (Current study)	E-satisfaction (Szymansky, 2000)	E-satisfaction model In e-finance (Evanschitzky <i>et al.</i> , 2004)
Site design	0.377	0.21	0.26
Convenience	0.375	0.24	0.27
Financial Security	0.119 *	0.21	0.03 *
Product information	0.144	0.11	0.14
Product offering	0.163	0.01 *	0.03 *

*: Not significant

a factor analysis was performed on the independent variables. Obtained results revealed that the five factors explain 72% of variance in the data. All items are loaded heavily onto one of the factors and all five factors are logically and easily interpretable (Table 4). The factors are *site design*, *convenience*, *financial security*, *product information* and *product offering*.

Similar to [8] and [30] a regression analysis was used to estimate the unique effect of each individual factor on consumers' e-satisfaction level. Cases with standard residuals above three were identified as outliers and were eliminated. The results of the regression analysis are shown in Table 5.

Table 5 shows that the regression coefficient for site design and convenience are statistically significant ($\rho=0$). In addition, product information and product offering are significant ($\rho<0.1$) as well. But despite the expectations, financial security does not have any significant relationship with e-satisfaction. Moreover, the result shows that site design and convenience with $\beta=0.38$, have been tied as the first most important factors that affect on-line satisfaction in tourism industry. The results demonstrate that the product offering is the third affecting factor and product information is the next important factor in tourism e-satisfaction.

The results of regression analysis are shown in the Table 6. A comparison of the results with those obtained in [8] in on-line retailing and [30] in the e-finance application, are also provided in the table.

In replication research, the "sameness" of the results is emphasized [33], therefore it should be noted that in this study similar to [8] and [30], site design and convenience were the two factors which had the highest impact on e-satisfaction. Moreover, regression results in [8] confirmed the significant effect of only four of the factors, similar to the regression result in our study. On the other hand, this research and the one conducted by Evanschitzky [30], found no support for the impact of financial security on e-satisfaction, whilst [8] confirmed that financial security has a significant impact on customer satisfaction in e-retailing. Notably, [8] and [30] found no significant support for the impact of product offering on e-satisfaction while in this study, product offering has been shown to have a significant impact on e-satisfaction in the tourism industry. This comparison shows that we cannot generalize the result of an e-satisfaction model to different industries, since the effect of each determinant on e-satisfaction can vary in different industries.

DISCUSSIONS

Although e-satisfaction has a great role in the retention and loyalty of customers and consequently helps to maximize the profit of the tourism organization, no research has investigated the predictors of e-satisfaction in this industry. It might be due to the fact that the scholars usually try to generalize the result of research to different industries. This research illustrates a model identifying factors that affect e-satisfaction in tourism industry. These factors are convenience, site design, product information, product offering and financial security.

Obtained results showed that site design and convenience have the highest influence on e-satisfaction in the tourism industry. Being tied together, these two factors constitute the most important determinants of tourism e-satisfaction. Convenience factor encompasses the increase in the time efficiency and the possibility for customers to shop anytime and from anywhere which are important issues for tourists. Moreover Site design factor implies that a good website offering e-tourism services should be fast, friendly and uncluttered. This confirms other studies by [34-35] in the context of e-tourism, indicating the quality of firm web sites is a key indicator of how well a company is likely to satisfy its customers.

Notable benefits behind purchasing on line would be counted as the larger variety of product offerings and more product information [8]. In the context of this research, we observed that the perception of superior product information and product offering do not have a dramatic impact on e-satisfaction level. Although superior product information and product offering do impact e-satisfaction to a statistically significant degree, it can be argued that the practical significance of these effects is not that great. In fact the coefficients of these two factors are less than the half the coefficient values of site design and convenience. Findings of this research show that special attention to site design and convenience would result in improvements pertaining to satisfaction in the tourism industry. Moreover, it shows that e-tourism firms should increase the trust of their customers in the security of financial related issues.

As mentioned, the current study and the replication by Evanschitzky [30] found no support for the impact of financial security on e-satisfaction while in [8] Szymansky and Hise stated that financial security has a significant impact on customer satisfaction in e-retailing. Since the results of the two later studies are similar but different from the older one, it can be argued that the difference is due to the passage of time rather than the difference in the industries. It can be stated that although several solutions have been proposed for increasing financial security in the recent years, the risks and the volume of internet frauds have increased too, which in turn have decreased the trust and the satisfaction of online customers toward financial security. Moreover, [8] and [30] found no significant support for the impact of product offering on e-satisfaction while this factor, i.e. product offering, has a significant impact on e-satisfaction in tourism industry. This would be due to the nature of tourism industry and the high dependence of tourists' satisfaction on the products and services which are offered by tourism firms. The above discussion shows that we cannot generalize the result of this model to different industries, since the effect of each determinant on e-satisfaction can vary in different industries. The work presented in this paper provides a theoretic foundation for reducing risk in new advances in e-tourism. However it should be noticed that the findings of this research are more representative of European countries.

For future study different sectors of tourism industry should be considered, hence it would be useful to re-examine this research in different sections of this industry separately (e.g. airlines, tickets, booking, hotel reservation systems, museums). In addition a cross cultural analysis of this research would contribute to the literature of e-commerce in international business.

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