

“Exploring consumers’ intention toward online hotel reservations: insights from Malaysia”

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SECTION 1. Macroeconomic processes and regional economies management

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Exploring consumers' intention toward online hotel reservations: insights from Malaysia

Abstract

The rapid development of communication technologies and the pervasiveness of the Internet have made online reservation a predominant method to book a hotel room. With very little effort or time, hoteliers can publish hotel information on their website and customers can make room reservations online. To understand the mechanisms surrounding these transactions, this study investigates the relationships among perceived price, trust, social influence, prior online purchase experience and perceived risk with consumers' intentions toward online hotel reservations. The findings reveal that perceived price, trust, prior online purchase experience and perceived risk are related to customers' intentions toward online hotel reservation while social influence was found to have no significant influence in this regard.

Keywords: trust, perceived price, perceived risk, online hotel reservation intention, Malaysia.

JEL Classification: M31.

Introduction

The rapid transformation of information technology and the expansion of the Internet offer a new marketing platform for the hotel industry. In the tourism and hospitality context, the Internet has become an essential tool for consumers to research information and purchase tourism products (Crnojevac, Gugić & Karlovčan, 2010). As Tse (2013) proposed creative use of the internet as a key success factor when launching a new hotel. The new technologies have also given a raise to the development of new internet applications for hotel room reservations (Law, 2008), and most hotels would find it difficult to survive without online transactions (Tse, 2013).

With the increase in the internet penetration, the trend in online purchase of tourism related products is expected to grow (Euromonitor International, 2013). Online travel websites (OTAs), such as Expedia.com, Booking.com, and Agoda.com, have made it easy for customers to search and access precise information about booking hotel rooms (Crnojevac et al., 2010). Moreover, for hotel operators, the latest information on availability of hotel rooms can be easily updated on the hotel's website. This kind of direct communication between hotels and their customers is cost efficient (Law & Lau, 2004). However, according to Tse (2013) using the Internet as a marketing platform in the hotel industry does bring challenges and issues which

need to be resolved by the marketing managers (Ong, 2012). In this regard, research on consumers' purchasing behaviors when making online hotel room reservations is crucial and relevant.

A review of the literature reveals that online hotel reservations are commonplace in several countries in Asia. For instance, Wong and Law (2005) studied online purchase intentions of travellers in Hong Kong, and Kim and Kim (2004) investigated the factors affecting online hotel reservation intention between online and non-online customers in Korea. Moreover, in Southeast Asia, Chatchotitham and Soponprapapon (2011) examined the behavior of Thai consumers toward online hotel reservations, and Abu Bakar and Hashim (2008) studied the determinants of online hotel reservations among university staff in a public university in Kedah, Malaysia. In the same vein, Abu Bakar and Hashim (2008) suggested future research should consider the general population in Malaysia in understanding the determinants of online hotel reservations. Consequently, such a study is crucial to provide insights about Malaysia.

Based on Euromonitor International report (2013), tourism in Malaysia is a key resilient economic sector and a main contributor to GDP. However, comprehensive studies about customers' intentions and online hotel reservations is limited within this developing country (i.e. Malaysia). Therefore, this study could provide valuable insights not only for Malaysia, but also for other emerging and developing countries. To this end, the present study aims to investigate the determinants of consumers' intentions toward online hotel reservations. Specifically, this study intends to explore whether perceived price, trust, social influence, prior online

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purchase experience, and perceived risk have any significant effect on consumers' intentions toward online hotel reservations.

1. Literature review and hypotheses development

1.1. Online hotel reservation intentions. According to Fishbein and Ajzen (1980), consumers' purchase intentions are one of the most significant determinants of purchasing behavior. Purchase intentions have been shown to be significantly influenced by attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral controls in both face-to-face and online situations (Ajzen, 1991). For instance, Wu (2003) described online purchase intention as customers' intentions to buy a particular product or service using the Internet. In the hotel context, online hotel reservations refer to customers making reservations using independent or hotel-provided online reservation systems (Ratnasingam, 2012). In this study, online hotel reservation intention is defined as the condition in which customers are willing and have the intention to participate in an online transaction for booking a hotel room.

1.2. Perceived price. Perceived price, defined as the perceived level of price of one vendor compared to the prices offered by others (Kim, Xu & Gupta, 2012), positively influences repeat purchase intentions with online shopping (Kim et al., 2012). In an empirical study by Wong and Law (2005), it was highlighted that customers would consider making an online hotel reservation if the hotel offered a discount rate to its online customers. Their study revealed that more than 82% of the respondents viewed price as an important factor when making decisions for online hotel reservations. This is in line with another study by Broekhuizen and Huizingh (2009) that pointed out consumers expected lower prices from online stores compared to the bricks and mortar stores. As such, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Perceived price has a positive and significant influence on consumers' intentions toward online hotel reservations.

1.3. Trust. Trust is defined as customers' belief or confidence in a trusted partner, such as hotel offering services (Ratnasingam, 2012). According to Kim, Xu and Koh (2004), consumers have trust in online vendors when the reputation of the vendor is well established, quality information is provided to the customers by the vendors and also the customers are satisfied with their previous experience (Kim et al. 2004). Once consumers establish trust in a vendor, this influences their attitudes toward online purchases (Chen, Gillenson, & Sherrell, 2004), and removes the uncertainty associated with online transactions (Wen, 2009). Li and Miniard (2006)

found out when consumers trust a firm, they are definitely inclined to have a stronger buying intention. In the hospitality context, trust is critical, as it determines the level of relationship between the hotel and its customers (Wen, 2009). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is developed:

Hypothesis 2: Trust has a positive and significant influence on consumers' intentions toward online hotel reservations.

1.4. Social influence. Social influence refers to the acceptance of opinions from one's social circle, family, friends, and peers (Al-maghrabi, Dennis, Halliday & Ali, 2011; Pilgrim & Lawrence, 2001). A study conducted by Al-maghrabi et al. (2011) on online shoppers in Saudi Arabia identified social influence as a main factor to repeat online purchase intentions. As online consumers tend to seek advice from their peers and family (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000), a consumer's social circle has a significant impact on online purchasing behaviors (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000). From a study by Foucault and Scheufele (2002) on online textbook purchases, social influence from professors turned out to have a significant relationship with online purchasing behavior. Consequently, social influence forms the basis of a hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Social influence has a positive and significant influence on consumers' purchase intentions toward online hotel reservations.

1.5. Prior online purchase experience. The terms of online shopping and online purchasing have been used interchangeably in the extant literature to refer to a process where consumers make a purchase transaction via the Internet (Tamimi, Rajan & Sebastianelli, 2003). However, online shopping channels are still considered more hazardous than the conventional ways (Cho & Park, 2001; Laroche, Yang, McDougall & Bergeron, 2005). Overcoming these concerns is largely the result of gaining experience, and as Kwek, Lau, and Tan (2010) noted, prior online purchase experience has a positive relationship with the online purchase intentions. Besides, Lee and Tan (2003) pointed out customers without any online purchase experience that feel uncertainty compared to the customers who have shopped online before. Furthermore, Shim, Eastlick, Lotz and Warrington (2001) supported that consumers' online purchase experience is a factor which determines future purchase intention via the Internet. Thus, the fourth hypothesis is as the following:

Hypothesis 4: Prior online purchase experience has a positive and significant influence on consumers' online purchase intention toward hotel reservations.

1.6. Perceived risk. Perceived risk refers to a consumer's personal opinion about bearing a loss in order to have a desired result (Pavlou, 2003), which plays a key role in consumers' willingness to purchase products online (Barnes, Bauer, Neumann, & Huber, 2007; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007). Samadi and Yaghoob-Nejadi (2009) found out that risk is a major concern for online consumers, and Huang, Schrank, and Dubinsky (2006) revealed that online buyers have lower levels of perceived risk compared to the non-online buyers. Similarly, a study by Vila and Kuster (2012) supported that decreasing perceived risk stimulates internet users' buying intentions. Accordingly, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 5: Perceived risk has a negative and significant influence on consumers' online purchase intention toward hotel reservations.

2. Methodology

A quantitative survey approach was employed for this exploratory study and 200 self-administered questionnaires were distributed to the respondents in Penang, Malaysia. The focus of the research was individuals who had used the Internet to make hotel reservations. The sampling method for this study was non-probability snowball sampling, in which the researchers made initial contacts with a small group of relevant respondents and through them established contacts with others (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

The survey instruments were adapted from previous empirical research by Al-maghrabi et al. (2011), Chang and Chen (2008), Kim et al. (2011), Kim et al. (2004), and Kwek et al. (2010). A five-point Likert-type scale was applied ranging from (1) *strongly disagree* to (5) *strongly agree*. Smart Partial Least Squares (PLS) software was used to test and analyze the relationships among variables in the research model (Ringle, Wende & Will, 2005).

3. Results

Among the 200 of survey questionnaires sent via email to the respondents, only 142 questionnaires (71%) were returned. Only respondents who had online hotel reservation experience were selected for the statistical analyses, therefore, 122 (61%) were valid responses.

From the total of 122 respondents, 63 of them were male (51.6%) while 59 were female (48.4%). The majority of the respondents were in the 25-34 years age group (67.2%), followed by 35-44 years age group (14.8%). Most of the respondents held post-

graduate qualifications (45.1%) and the majority of respondents (91%) indicated they had more than five years of Internet experience. The findings also showed that most of the respondents (48.4%) used the Internet for more than 21 hours every week. Nearly half (45.9%) of the respondents had made one or two online hotel reservations during the last year, and 27.9% had made three to four online reservations. In terms of occupation, 38.5% of the respondents were at the executive level, followed by 24.6% from managerial levels. Table 1 illustrates the respondents' profile.

Table 1. Profile of respondents

Description	Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Online Hotel reservations experience	Yes	122	100
Gender	Male	63	51.6
	Female	59	48.4
Age	18-24	12	9.8
	25-34	82	67.2
	35-44	18	14.8
	Above 45	10	8.2
Education	Secondary level and below	11	9.0
	Diploma level	14	11.5
	Undergraduate	42	34.4
	Post-graduate	55	45.1
Internet experience	< 6 months	1	0.8
	1-2 years	1	0.8
	3-4 years	9	7.4
	> 5 years	111	91.0
Weekly use of the Internet	< 7 hours	8	6.6
	7-14 hours	26	21.3
	15-21 hours	29	23.8
	> 21 hours	59	48.4
Online hotel reservations during last year	0 reservation	15	12.3
	1-2 reservations	56	45.9
	3-4 reservations	34	27.9
	> 5 purchases	17	13.9
Occupation/position	Self-employed	13	10.7
	Managerial	30	24.6
	Executive	47	38.5
	Engineering	13	10.7
	Others	19	15.6

3.1. Construct validity. The two main elements, convergent and discriminant validity (Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson, 2010) were used to assess whether the measurements fit the theoretical model. Loadings and cross loadings of the variables were significant at 0.5 or greater (Hair et al., 2010), and Table 2 shows all the items have significant construct validity.

Table 2. Loadings and cross loadings

	Purchase experience	Online purchase Intention	Social influence	Perceived price	Perceived risk	Trust
E1	0.894	0.488	0.514	0.375	-0.357	0.456
E2	0.892	0.477	0.526	0.401	-0.326	0.490
E3	0.919	0.532	0.560	0.334	-0.380	0.533
E4	0.853	0.483	0.432	0.438	-0.333	0.452
HR1	0.430	0.863	0.467	0.463	-0.272	0.571
HR2	0.574	0.943	0.492	0.530	-0.407	0.576
HR3	0.516	0.932	0.479	0.429	-0.344	0.596
I1	0.487	0.443	0.815	0.350	-0.200	0.613
I2	0.538	0.489	0.891	0.337	-0.151	0.640
I3	0.447	0.448	0.785	0.395	-0.156	0.548
I4	0.483	0.359	0.851	0.381	-0.112	0.511
I5	0.446	0.441	0.890	0.354	-0.147	0.583
I6	0.520	0.483	0.884	0.410	-0.164	0.610
P1	0.375	0.454	0.325	0.857	-0.211	0.387
P2	0.408	0.523	0.371	0.909	-0.198	0.471
P3	0.355	0.428	0.468	0.839	-0.074	0.435
P4	0.378	0.403	0.367	0.905	-0.157	0.397
PR1	-0.314	-0.338	-0.181	-0.112	0.882	-0.292
PR2	-0.280	-0.247	-0.133	-0.126	0.852	-0.283
PR3	-0.334	-0.317	-0.176	-0.144	0.877	-0.273
PR4	-0.330	-0.344	-0.133	-0.238	0.812	-0.309
PR5	-0.312	-0.295	-0.108	-0.117	0.865	-0.265
PR6	-0.421	-0.360	-0.194	-0.194	0.839	-0.283
T1	0.443	0.553	0.470	0.427	-0.326	0.847
T2	0.444	0.468	0.574	0.440	-0.324	0.858
T3	0.414	0.558	0.661	0.421	-0.230	0.907
T4	0.571	0.606	0.672	0.394	-0.283	0.855

Note: bold values are loadings for items which are above the recommended value of 0.5.

3.2. Convergent validity. Convergent validity assesses whether variables correlate positively with other measures of the same construct (Hair, Hult, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2013). Composite reliability and average variance extracted methods (Hair et al., 2010) were employed, which require significant values greater than 0.7 and 0.5 respectively. Table 3 displays the composite reliability values for each construct, ranging from 0.924 to 0.942 which exceed suggested minimum value (Hair et al., 2010). The average variance extracted values are 0.729 to 0.834 which also exceed the recommended value of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 3. Results of the measurement model

Model construct	Measurement item	Loading	Composite reliability	AVE
Online purchase intention	HR1	0.863	0.938	0.834
	HR2	0.943		
	HR3	0.932		
Perceived price	P1	0.857	0.931	0.770
	P2	0.909		
	P3	0.839		
	P4	0.905		
Perceived risk	PR1	0.882	0.942	0.731
	PR2	0.852		

	PR3	0.877		
	PR4	0.812		
	PR5	0.865		
	PR6	0.839		
Purchase experience	E1	0.894	0.938	0.791
	E2	0.892		
	E3	0.919		
	E4	0.853		
Social influence	I1	0.815	0.941	0.729
	I2	0.891		
	I3	0.785		
	I4	0.851		
	I5	0.890		
	I6	0.884		
Trust	T1	0.847	0.924	0.752
	T2	0.858		
	T3	0.907		
	T4	0.855		

3.3. Discriminant validity. Discriminant validity was measured by testing whether the correlations between the measures possibly overlap (Compeau, Higgins & Huff, 1999). As shown in Table 4, the average variance extracted values shared between each construct were higher than the variance shared

between the construct and other constructs (Compeau et al., 1999). The average variance extracted value is

in the range of 0.729 to 0.834, confirming that all the constructs have adequate discriminant validity.

Table 4. Discriminant validity of construct

Constructs	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Online purchase intention	0.834					
2. Perceived price	0.520	0.770				
3. Perceived risk	-0.376	-0.185	0.731			
4. Purchase experience	0.557	0.433	-0.393	0.791		
5. Social influence	0.525	0.435	-0.183	0.572	0.729	
6. Trust	0.635	0.484	-0.333	0.544	0.689	0.752

Note: bold values represent the average variance extracted (AVE) while the other entries represent the squared correlations.

3.4. Hypothesis testing using bootstrapping. Present in Figure 1, the R^2 value was 0.519, which denotes that 51.9% of the variance extent in online purchase intention towards hotel reservations can be explained by perceived price, trust, social influence,

prior online purchase experience, and perceived risk. The balance, 48.1%, could be due to errors or could be explained by other factors which are not included in this study. In this study, the R^2 value was 0.519 indicating that the model fits the data.

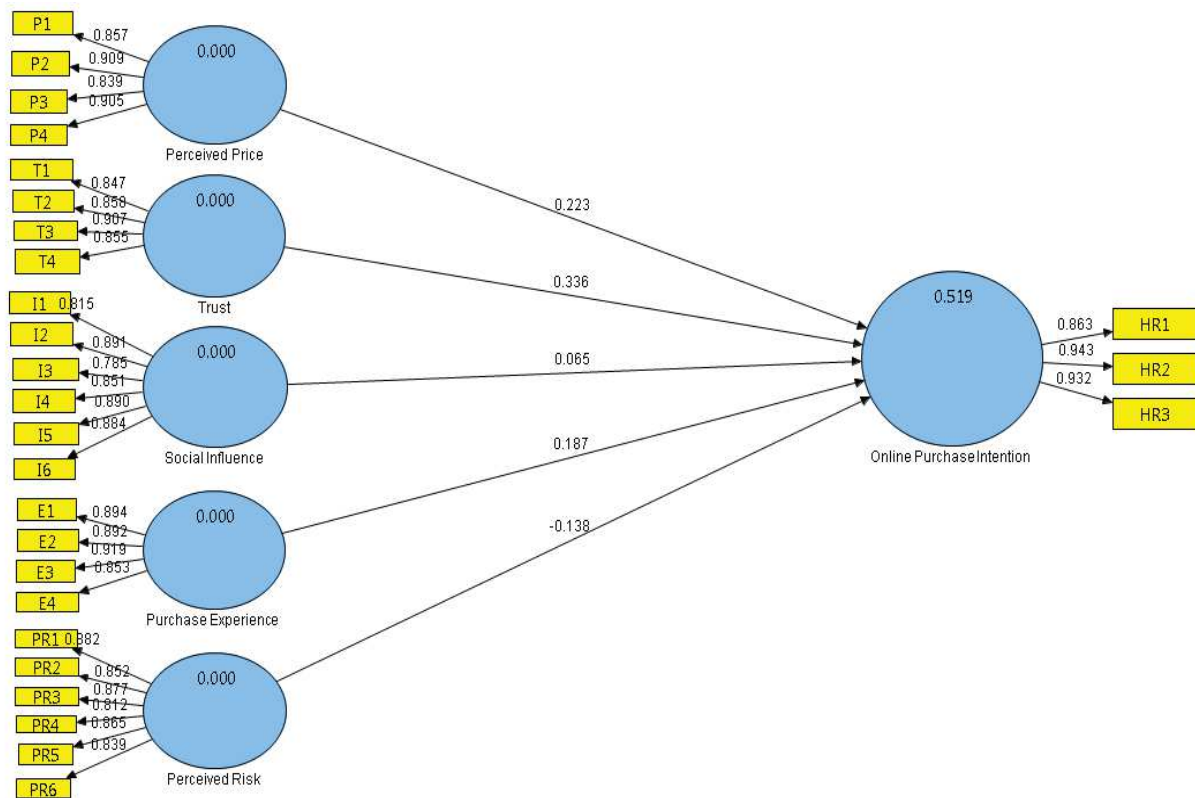


Fig. 1. Results of the path analysis

3.5. Bootstrapping analysis. In this analysis, 122 cases were used for each of the 5,000 bootstrap samples. Table 5 and Figure 2 present the path coefficients resulting from the bootstrapping process. The findings show that only social influence was not significant and not supported in the relationship with online purchase intention

($\beta = 0.065$, $p > 0.05$). Whereas, perceived price ($\beta = 0.223$, $p < 0.01$), trust ($\beta = 0.336$, $p < 0.01$), prior online purchase experience ($\beta = 0.187$, $p < 0.05$) and perceived risk ($\beta = -0.138$, $p < 0.05$), were statistically significant. Hence, H1, H2, H4 and H5 were supported, but H3 was not supported.

Table 5. Path coefficients and hypothesis testing from bootstrapping results

Hypothesis	Relationship	Coefficient	t value	p-value	Decision
H1	Perceived price → online purchase intention	0.223	2.541***	0.006	Supported
H2	Trust → online purchase intention	0.336	2.491***	0.007	Supported
H3	Social influence → online purchase intention	0.065	0.500	0.309	Not supported
H4	Purchase experience → online purchase intention	0.187	1.787**	0.038	Supported
H5	Perceived risk → online purchase intention	-0.138	1.839**	0.034	Supported

Note: ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

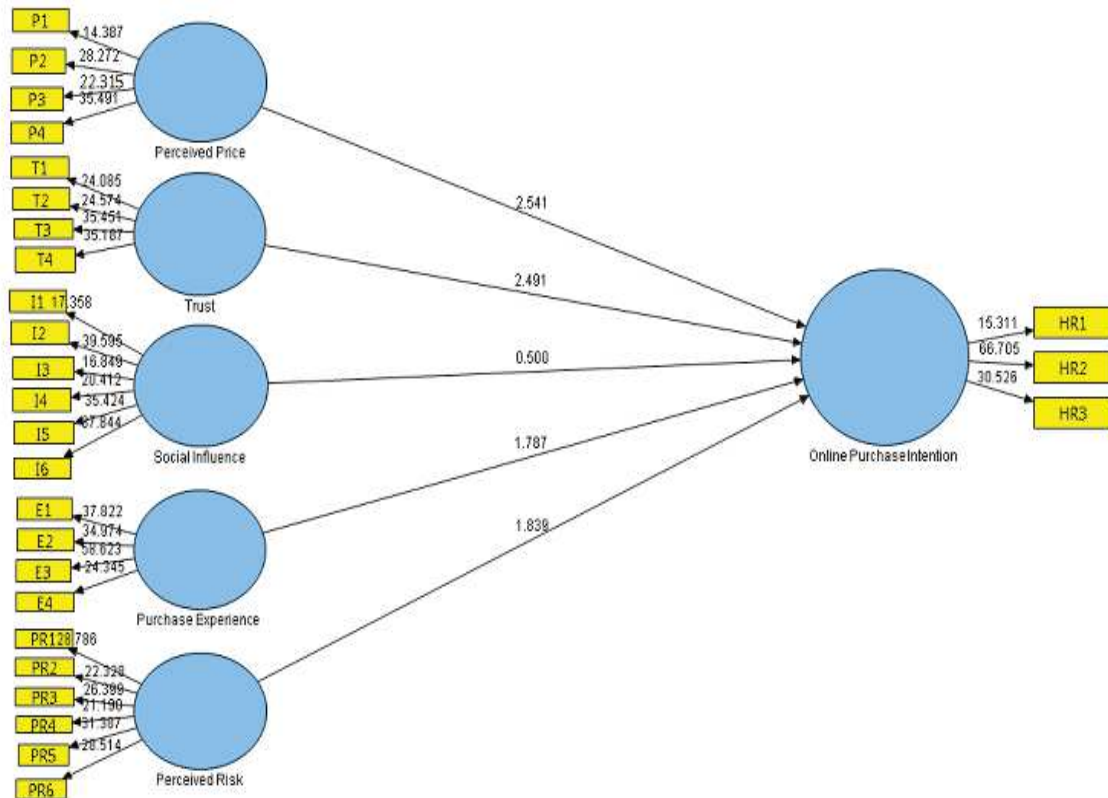


Fig. 2. Results of path coefficient from bootstrapping

4. Discussion and implications of the study

The authors concluded that perceived price, trust, prior online purchase experience and perceived risk influence consumers' intention to make online hotel reservations. Surprisingly, social influence did not play any significant role in online hotel reservations.

Perceived price was expected to positively and significantly influence purchase intentions toward online hotel reservations in Penang. Consistent with the previous studies (e.g. Delafrooz, Paim & Khatibi, 2011; Kim et al., 2012), the findings indicate a strong relationship between the variables. With this knowledge in mind, hoteliers could develop more competitive pricing strategies to cater for customers who are more price conscious, such as offering early bird or last-minute promotions that maximize occupancy rates in the hotel.

The findings of this study are in line with the findings of the studies by Kim et al. (2004) and

Ratnasingam (2012) where trust is found to have a positive and significant relationship with online purchase intentions. By realizing the importance of trust, hoteliers should manage service delivery to the highest possible standard. For example, images of accommodation or facilities posted on the hotel website should not only impress consumers before they make the reservations, but also satisfy them as promised during their stay.

The variable prior online purchase experience has a positive and significant relationship with purchase intention toward online hotel reservations. This finding is consistent with the previous empirical research by Monsuwe, Dellaert and Ruyter (2004) and Kwek et al. (2010). From this, hoteliers should consider offering special rates for customers who make their first online reservation. Incentives could attract new customers to make their first online purchase by overcoming their uncertainty, and encouraging them to visit the hotel again in the future.

In line with the previous studies, this study also revealed that perceived risk has a negative and significant relationship with purchase intentions toward online hotel reservations in Penang. Results from a study by Iqbal, Rahman and Hunjra (2012) showed that perceived risk negatively impacts customers' online purchase intentions in Pakistan. This knowledge could help hotelier reduce consumers' risk by offering free cancellations for online reservations. Therefore, with lower perceived risk, consumers' intention toward online reservations could be increased.

One finding that is inconsistent with the prior studies is that social influence has been found as a positive but insignificant factor in relation with online purchase intentions toward hotel reservations. In a study by Al-maghrabi et al. (2001), they revealed that social influence was the main determinant in online shopping for consumers in Saudi Arabia. However, the present results do find support with one study by Ibrahim, Khan, Rahman and Ramezanie (2013), which examined online shopping among Malaysian consumers. They postulated that Malaysian online shoppers are highly educated and skilful that they do not need guidance from their family, friends or peers (Ibrahim et al., 2013). Moreover, Malaysian consumers tend to be technologically savvy and experienced with the Internet (Ibrahim et al., 2013), as well as confident in their own judgment of online shopping websites and making transactions (Ibrahim et al., 2013). Hence, Malaysian consumers possess the skills and experience to make reservations; they do not need to rely on others' opinions, or guidance (Ibrahim et al., 2013).

The findings and information provided in this study are useful for the hotel industry. This study has confirmed the factors which influence consumers' online purchase intentions toward hotel reservations. With this information, hoteliers can plan their marketing strategies to encourage consumers to visit their hotel website and make a reservation. Moreover, this study could help to identify online shoppers' profile, such as gender, age, education, occupation, Internet experience, frequency of use of the Internet, and online hotel reservations experience. Hoteliers should rely on this information to identify market segmentation and product positioning.

5. Limitations and future study

We recognized several limitations within the current study. Firstly, this study did not examine or discuss perceived risk in detail. Previously, perceived risk was broken down into financial risk, product risk, time risk, delivery risk, social risk and information security, which Masoud (2013) examined in his study in Jordan.

Secondly, social influence in this study was just comprised of family, friends and peers. However, media could have been included in the social influence. Limayem, Khalifa and Frini (2000) examined social influence, which involved family, friends and media, in their study, and indicated that media does play an important role in influencing consumers' online purchase intentions.

Thirdly, although the results of this study showed that perceived price, trust, prior online purchase experience and perceived risk influence consumers' purchase intentions towards online hotel reservations, other factors might also affect consumers' intentions. The other factors might include website accessibility, perceived convenience, online purchase motivation and self-efficacy.

Fourthly, the sampling frame for this study only involved consumers in Penang area. Hence, the results of this study are unable to represent consumers who made online hotel reservations from other parts of Malaysia.

To address these limitations, future researchers may consider examining perceived risk in more details; including media as a social influence; exploring other variables that influence online purchase intentions as expanding the number of variables would help enhance predictive power of the model; and expanding the sampling frame to cover all parts of Malaysia instead of just a specific area or state. These actions would help future researchers understand consumers in Malaysia and also benefit hotels in other areas or states.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between perceived price, trust, social influence, prior online purchase experience, perceived risk, and consumer intentions toward online hotel reservations in Malaysia. Data were collected using an online questionnaire with a total of 122 respondents. The overall findings indicate that perceived price, trust, and prior online purchase experience have positive and significant relationships with consumers' intentions to make an online hotel reservation. Perceived risk, on the other hand, was found to be negatively significant with consumers' intentions toward online hotel reservations. Social influence was not found to be significant in association with consumers' intentions toward online hotel reservations. By integrating these findings into marketing campaigns and actions to induce new customers to make a purchase, the authors believe that hoteliers from Malaysia could ensure they fulfil the expectations of consumers who make online hotel reservations.

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