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# Examining Tourists' Mobile Experiences in using Online Booking Platforms

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## **Introduction**

The use of smart phones in tourism has become a common practice over the last years. Over 69 percent of businesses, compared to 63 percent of tourists, plan their travel by visiting an average of 22 internet sites, in search for information, using their smartphones prior to making a decision (Google's manager for travel Bucholz, 2011). In 2011, for example, a vast majority of destination selectors in the United States of America, France, Germany and the United Kingdom, used smartphones to visit travel review websites before choosing their leisure travel destination (PhoCusWright, 2012). Nylund (2012), contend that the rapid development of this mobile technology has drastically changed the way tourists are able to experience web content. Moreover, Tillmans (2013), cited, that the mobile offshoot "mobile website" of Lufthansa now receives 140,000 visits per day searching for flight information. In addition to that, about 1,000 tickets are now booked on mobile phones a day. However, it should be noted that the interaction from using mobile phones to search for travel information online, is greatly different as opposed to the traditional interaction style of using a computer (Nylund, 2012). The design aspects of the content have to change to accommodate the touch screen interaction style thereby creating optimum user experience (Nylund, 2012). A study by Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier (2007), indicates, that the information and communication technology, has the potential to have substantial impacts on tourists' online travel market experiences. Therefore having in mind that travel planning and booking is shifting to the mobile cyberspace, there is a need to augment tourists' mobile experiences using online booking platforms. This study intends to explore how the tourists' experiences can be enhanced by using mobile phones to search for travel information online and how it influences their decision making.

## **Aims and objectives:**

The study aims at exploring how tourists' mobile experiences can be enhanced during the use of online booking platforms. The specific objectives of the study are: a) Identify strategies that could be used to enhance the quality of online services and maximize sales; b) analyze how their mobile experience contributes to their overall brand perception of online booking platforms; c) formulate an approach or strategy to increase tourists' confidence in using the online booking platforms. Since the rapid

development of information and communication technologies have deviated the entire functionality of tourism businesses, a wider range of opportunities as well as threats for its stakeholders have also been triggered (Buhalis and Law, 2008). Therefore, it will be useful to explore ways to bring life to the online booking platforms and thus, it will be useful to review the concept of tourists' experiences and its paradigms.

### **Research Questions**

**RQ: 1.** What are the tourists' perceived mobile experiences during the use of online booking platform and what strategies can be used to enhance these experiences?

**RQ: 2.** Does the tourists' mobile experience contribute to their overall brand perception of an Online booking platform?

### **Literature Review**

Tourists experience has always been the main focus of the tourism service providers (St. Hilaire, 2009). This is due to the nature of the tourism products; its intangibility, perishability, seasonality etc. This holds the concept that since the tourism product is intangible, it is the experience that the tourists gain during consumption (Raakish, 2009). Experience is known to be subjective and intangible. It encompasses knowledge, and skills gained through involvement and or exposure in an activity or event (Morgan et. al, 2010). Lis et. al, (2008), cited that tourists experiences are socially constructed, in the tourists interactions and they are associated with different social and environmental components of the visited destination. Furthermore, Urry (2002), proposed, the gaze concept and showed its significant influence on the tourists' experiences. Urry (2002), further claims that gaze is the process by which tourists try to objectify their experiences of the destination visited. However, it should be noted that with the advancement of information and communication technology, the demand and supply of tourism products takes place in the cyberspace. According to Fesenmaier et. al,( online n. d), extensive research has begun to prove convincing evidence that tourists have widely adopted the use of mobile phones to plan and purchase travel related services, consequently creating experiences. At the same time, Fesenmaier et. al (online n. d), cited that there are numerous variables that compel tourists to search for travel information ranging from purely functional to hedonistic. In fact, tourists experience modeling starts from trip planning, information source used, staying and after visit (Fesenmaier et. al, online n.d). The tourist experience develops in three phases; anticipatory, experimental and reflective phases (Gayle, 2006). And the tourist's experiences are becoming more and more mediated, with the advent of ICTs (Lis, 2008). It can be gained through the use of multimedia features, video streaming, text, virtual reality giving tourists prior feeling and experience of a destination (Lis, online, n.d). The key trend indicates that technology co-creates and enhances tourists experiences (Neuhofer, 2012). Technology such as mobile phones has become fully valuable to distribute travel products. Information and communication technologies are becoming the key catalysts for enhancing experiences through the facilitation, empowerment, and co-creation which will of course generate additional value for the consumers (Neuhofer, 2012). Moreover, Feinberg (2012), claims, that technologies such as mobile devices constitute an average of 10 percent to 20 percent of digital experiences. In all stages of the

travel process, experience co-creation between the company and consumers is enabled and enhanced by technology (Neuhofer, 2012).

### **Research methodology**

This study is tailored using appropriate scientific research approaches. A research methodology is a body of knowledge that helps to explain and analyse methods, indicating their limitations and resources, identifying their presuppositions and consequences, as well as relating their potentialities to research advances. It underpins the types of questions, that can be addressed and the nature of the evidence that is generated (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Therefore, the issue of research methodology is important to any study. An appropriation between research paradigm, type of data, and collection methods has significant implications upon the research findings. However, as Altinay and Paraskevas (2008), cited, researchers should offer justification why a chosen research approach is appropriate for their study. Taking into account that Gouthro (2010), outlines, that there is a missing consensus of proposed methodological approaches for research in the area of experience, this study, uses mixed research methods. The qualitative method allows the possibilities to explore and get a deeper insight of the subject matter (Bryman and Bell, 2007). While a quantitative research method portrays an accurate profile of events or situation in study. It also allows the possibility to study a larger sample size, (Robson, 2002). Therefore, using both methods are appropriate to fulfill the purpose of this study.

### **Expected Outcome**

Getting a deeper insight of tourists' online behavior using mobile phones is of paramount importance in order to derive techniques and plan of action that can be used to elucidate these tourists' experiences. Neuhofer (2012), claimed, that tourists demand for experiences are constantly growing. In addition, tourists have the ability to forth mobile devices and their behaviors are fast changing. Tourists use their mobile phones to check information, price and availability of offer on booking platforms. If they cannot find what they are looking for, they will find other platforms. Mobile technology contributes to tourists' decision making (Feinberg, 2012). Therefore, it is important to enhance tourists' experiences. It is expected that this study should achieve its objectives. As such, in concluding this study, the author should identify techniques and latest mobile support services and or applications that could be used to improve the quality of online services and bring more life to mobile experiences for the tourists. It is also expected that the study should identify and formulate a strategic framework that could be used as guiding principles across mobile-optimized sites to enhance tourists experiences.

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