revenues were insignificant, leading the researchers to conclude that “Airbnb consumers are generally uninterested in hostel options” and that hostel users are “not active Airbnb users.” Rather than representing a threat to existing operators, it seems that Airbnb has generated new markets by attracting budget conscious families. This, the researchers note, has “expanded the tourism economy for the benefit of all industry players.”

Regulating the Home Rental Market

All of the interviewees agreed that regulations are needed to guide the home rental market. In particular, they suggested that third party management companies should be allowed to “transact on behalf of home owners and tenants,” which would allow them to be held responsible by local authorities and ensure compliance in terms of “tax payment and other regulations.” Airbnb rentals should also be made to comply with standard safety regulations, such as maintaining guest registers and installing CCTV cameras, because poor safety standards could compromise Singapore’s reputation as a safe city. Another problem area that was highlighted by the interviewees is the employment of foreign domestic workers as “level playing field.” For instance, traditional operators and Airbnb home rental market means that “Airbnb’s Perspective

The Airbnb interviewee did not see the company as a direct competitor to traditional hotels, but rather as “filling a demand gap, namely the budget conscious family segment.” The interviewee emphasised that the company is quite different from a hotel chain, and merely offers a platform to facilitate transactions, with revenues flowing directly to homeowners. In response to calls by hotels to regulate the home rental market, the representative said that the company is “keen and ready to operate within a fair regulatory framework” and would adhere to any new legislation.

In Control with Mobile Booking Apps?

Whether consumers believe they have control over events in their lives determines their likelihood of reusing hotel booking apps, find the SHTM’s Professor Rob and co-authors in a recently published study. This belief is known as “locus of control” (LoC), the researchers explain, and consumers with an internal LoC are more likely to use hotel booking apps because they feel more positive about their ability to use technology and overcome any difficulties they may encounter. In contrast, consumers with an external LoC are likely to only use travel apps with user-friendly interfaces that also offer plenty of support when difficulties arise. Practitioners aiming to introduce or improve mobile booking apps will benefit from the useful recommendations the researchers offer for addressing the concerns of different user types.

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Adopting Mobile Technology

Smartphones are increasingly popular, with more people now owning them than personal computers. The researchers note that this increase in smartphone use has improved performance and online travel agents to develop mobile apps to facilitate easier reservations. By 2015, almost half of all travel bookings in China were made through mobile apps, as they are highly convenient and offer consumers a “pleasant booking experience.” China’s huge outbound tourism market offers great promise for the further development of tourism-related apps, and “global tourism practitioners are adjusting their strategies” to secure their share of this market.

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These results suggest that app developers need to provide user-friendly interfaces and the booking process should be similar to that on the website to "reduce the effort and time required of users". As support services are also highly important, online consultation functions should be available to minimise the constraints encountered by users, and providing a frequently asked questions section is also important for supporting users through the booking process.

Social influence also played a part, as participants who had friends who used booking apps and who encouraged them to do so too were more likely to use apps for future bookings. However, word of mouth did not seem to be as influential as ease of use and support services. Perhaps surprisingly, although perceived risk had a negative effect on intention to use, it was weaker than the effects of the other cognitive factors. Nevertheless, the researchers caution that the effect is "not negligible" and app developers "are obliged to optimize system security" to reassure users and reduce their risk.

Locus of Control

Next, the researchers examined how participants’ LoC, in combination with the above cognitive factors, influenced their intention to reuse booking apps. Participants with an internal LoC, believing they were in control of events, perceived mobile apps as easy to use and felt more able to overcome any difficulties. They were thus highly likely to use them for future bookings. However, participants who perceived events to be controlled more by chance were less likely to use mobile apps in the future. The researchers explain that these participants tended to focus on the negatives: they perceived apps as difficult to use and were more concerned about the risks. People with a chance LoC tend to be female, young and with a low level of education, so it is important for app developers to survey these groups to find out which aspects of app use they find most difficult and thus "minimise the adverse effects of effort expectancy".

Those who believed in "control by powerful others" were only likely to reuse booking apps if they felt that plenty of support services were available to help them complete their bookings. For these users, the researchers suggest, it would be particularly helpful to provide online instant consultations, perhaps through "popular peer-to-peer platforms in China, such as WeChat," because they believe that outcomes depend more on other people than on themselves.

Importance of Dispositional and Cognitive Factors

The researchers show that understanding consumers’ LoC can be helpful for developing targeted marketing strategies. This is a novel area of study in tourism research, despite LoC being a consistent predictor of attitudes, emotions and behaviour in other fields. Given that both dispositional and cognitive factors are known to strongly influence the adoption of technology, the study provides important information for tourism practitioners to understand how they can harness this knowledge to encourage consumers to use their mobile apps.

POINTS TO NOTE

- Mobile apps are an increasingly important resource for travel-related bookings
- Willingness to use mobile apps is influenced by the user’s locus of control
- Ease of use and support services are important factors in determining app use
- Tourism practitioners and app developers need to understand customers’ different needs


MicroMasters in International Hospitality Management Relaunched

The SHTM’s MicroMasters in International Hospitality Management, a unique and highly successful Master’s level introductory programme offered on the world-renowned edX online learning platform, is yet again breaking new ground. Having already attracted close to 38,000 participants from 175 countries, the programme – featuring courses on Luxury Management, Hospitality and Tourism Technology and Innovation, Managing Marketing in the Hospitality and Tourism Industry, and Managing Human Resources in the Hospitality and Tourism Industry – has just been launched for a second time, with repeat launches scheduled for May and September.

The overwhelming demand for places in the programme is matched by participants’ enthusiasm for what they gain from it. Claudine Weatherford, a participant in the marketing course from the United States, commented that the luxury management course made her “realise that even though I always felt comfortable being a Sales Manager, I would actually enjoy more working in Communications and PR”.

The SHTM specialises in such transformative educational experiences, and they are now within your reach. For more information on the programme and enrolments, please visit https://www.edx.org/micromasters/hkpolyux-international-hospitality-management.