Online travel shopping: A review

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Objectives | Over the past two decades, there has been increasing focus on the development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and the impact that they have had on the tourism industry and on travellers' behaviour. However, research on what drives consumers to purchase travel online has typically been fragmented. Therefore, in order to better understand consumers' behaviour towards online travel purchasing, this research offers a review of articles that were published in 17 leading tourism and hospitality journals and ENTER proceedings. The review also includes several articles from other peer reviewed journals, found on the main academic search databases. Thus, this paper provides re-searchers with a thorough review of online consumer behaviour in the travel context. Moreover it identifies several gaps and provides some directions for future studies.

Methodology | In order to find relevant articles addressing antecedents of online travel shopping, a threefold approach was used. First, a total of 15 leading research journals in hospitality and tourism were selected. This selection was based on Pechlaner, et al. (2004), Ryan (2005), McKercher et al. (2006) and Murphy and Law (2008) tourism and hospitality journal rankings. Secondly, the Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology, the Journal of Information Technology & Tourism and the annual proceedings of Enter Conferences, organized by the International Federation for Information Technology and Travel & Tourism since 1994 and published in Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism were added to the list of journals, as they address two important domains relevant to the literature review: Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) and Tourism. For each issue of each journal, the table of contents was examined from January 1995 to March 2011. The year of 1995 was considered to be the initial time span, as it was the year Internet began popular among the general public (Marcussen, 1999). A total of 42 articles were selected from these journals and Enter conferences proceedings. Finally, to guarantee that other relevant articles, from peer reviewed journals, were not excluded from this literature review, online databases for academic journals were used to search for suitable articles. The database search provided 13 relevant articles. Thus, a total of 55 full-length articles were considered relevant to the review.

Main results and contributions | The literature review revealed that prior work on online travel shopping has mainly focused on consumers' characteristics, such as demographic variables, internet and computer knowledge. In fact, numerous studies have provided useful profiles of travellers that purchase online, namely using demographics (e.g. Card et al., 2003; Morrison et al., 2001; Weber & Roehl, 1999). Yet, surprisingly, only one study (Moital et al., 2009) conducted a cluster analysis to identify market segments with similar views toward online travel purchasing. Another important line

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of research has been on the perceived channel characteristics, such as perceived risk, trust and relative advantages in online travel shopping.

Many contradictory results were found in this literature review. For example, Jensen (2011) found that using the Internet as a travel information source was positively related with online travel purchasing, while Li and Buhalis (2006) found that there was no relationship. Another example regards opinion leadership; Kamarulzaman (2007) found that it did not have an effect on the adoption of online travel, while Card *et al.* (2003) claimed that online travel purchasers tended to be opinion leaders.

The literature review revealed that research on online travel purchasing behaviour has been mainly conducted with travellers from the United States of America and China. On the other hand, the majority of the studies focus on travel products, without making a distinction between product categories. Other studies (e.g. Beldona *et al.*, 2005; Morrison *et al.*, 2001) have shown that online shopping motivations differed regarding the type of travel product bought, while others focused specifically on low complexity travel services, such as accommodation (e.g. Kim & Kim, 2004) or airline tickets (e.g. Kim *et al.*, 2009), but no research study focuses exclusively on a high complexity product, such as holiday packages or cruises.

Few studies have focused on personality traits of those who purchase travel online (e.g. Card *et al.*, 2003; Kamarulzaman, 2007; Li & Buhalis, 2006). It is known that online travel purchasers tend to be innovative, more high-tech prone and have higher degrees of involvement. Yet, further investigations should address the role of personality on online travel purchasing behaviour. It would be valuable to incorporate theories and models from other academic disciplines, such as psychology and sociology.

Most of the studies (Jensen, 2009; Lee *et al.*, 2007; Wong & Law, 2005) focus on intentional behaviour, rather than the actual behaviour. Although past studies have proven that intention leads to actual behaviour, this is questionable with online shopping, as Lee and Johnson (2002) point out in their work, since there are a large number of dropouts and also many who only browse and do not actually purchase. Future research should assert this relationship between intention and actual behaviour, in the specific context of online travel shopping.

Limitations | The review could be enriched with articles from other academic journals that address online travel shopping. On the other hand, although a structured methodology was conducted to search for suitable articles, it is possible that some relevant articles could be missing. In fact, occasionally, articles may address online travel purchase, but it may not be explicit by the title or keywords, making it difficult to find those articles.

Conclusions | This study overviews the main variables capable of influencing online travel shopping that have been identified in the 55 articles published over the past 15 years in the leading tourism and hospitality. Such a thorough review enabled the identification of many contradictory results and gaps, pointing to the need to further investigate which variables affect travellers to purchase travel online. This need increases due to the evolution of the social Internet that has changed how people search, shop for and purchase travel (PhoCusWright, 2011).

Academic researchers, tourism practitioners and marketers can take advantage of this study to better understand the adoption of online travel shopping and the work that has been carried out in the area. Understanding online traveller's buying behaviour is important to implement successful online marketing strategies (Lee *et al.*, 2007). Moreover, the suggestions for future work provide researchers with challenging directions for research.

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