

Consumers' Willingness to Adopt and Attitudes towards Self-Service Technology in Hotels

Introduction

The vast evolution of technology and its use on numerous occasions in every-day life, is a trend that has impacted the majority of businesses throughout various industries, including hotels. The introduction of Self-Service Technology (SST) in hotels is often viewed “as a replacement of human-based service transactions,” that offers a number of benefits (Oh, Jeong and Baloglu, 2013). However, hoteliers are hesitant to introduce Self-Service Technology, since a significant part of the literature regarding consumer adoption of SSTs focuses on evaluating factors such as ease of use, perceived usefulness and relative advantages of SSTs, rather than examining willingness to adopt and desire for personal interaction (Kaushik, Agrawal and Rahman, 2015). After evaluating the existing literature regarding consumers' attitudes and willingness to adopt Self-Service Technologies in hotels, I have chosen to review certain journals that I feel have addressed the topic thoroughly. These sources have been categorized according to the findings and conclusions they offer.

Literature Review

Harkinson highlighted the “importance of the human touch” in luxury hotels and lodges (2017). According to her, “the hospitality industry is a people-orientated business,” in which personal service highly affects the overall experience of guests. Considering that most luxury accommodations provide similar benefits to the consumers, a hotel's competitive advantage and opportunity to differentiate its offerings from others is the quality of personal services and hotel staff (Harkinson, 2017). To conclude in these findings, Harkinson conducted a study, in which she interviewed 81 individuals from six luxury hotels or lodges. Direct quotations were used in the article to prove that “managers, employees and guests all saw how important the staff are at the hotels and lodges, and that they play an important part in the creation of the luxury hotel and lodge experience” (Harkinson, 2017).

Moreover, Oh, Jeong and Baloglu utilized the Technology Adoption Model (TAM), providing an extension of the original (2013). Oh et al conducted an in-depth analysis of the extrinsic and intrinsic motivations, in addition to the SST characteristics, that affect a customer's decision towards using Self-Service Technology or Personal Service (2013). The article also highlights the importance of a customer's intrinsic desire for interaction, which “often is a critical reason for loyalty to a company” (Oh, Jeong and Baloglu, 2013). Similarly, Kaushik, Agrawal and Rahman enrich the original TAM by including “need for interaction” and “perceived performance

risk”, but also evaluating the significance of “trust and subjective norm” as variables affecting consumers’ adoption of SSTs (2015). Both articles recognize the importance of “perceived ease of use” and “perceived usefulness” of Self-Service Technology but focus their analysis on the interdependence of other intrinsic variables, as mentioned above. In the case of Kaushik et al, they conclude that desire for interaction is rather insignificant, compared to other variables such as trust, performance risk and subjective norm (2015). Based on their findings, both articles recommend that hotels choose a “hybrid” system that coordinates the use of staff and self-service technology to maximize customer satisfaction and avoid being viewed as inattentive (Oh, Jeong and Baloglu, 2013; Kaushik, Agrawal and Rahman, 2015).

Kucukusta, Heung and Hui discussed the consumers’ willingness to shift from one type of service to another (2014). More specifically they suggest that “customers’ satisfaction with either interpersonal service or SST will dictate their willingness to shift” from one to the other (Kucukusta, Heung and Hui, 2014). They also researched the demographic characteristics of people who tend to prefer SSTs over Personal Service, discovering that males between the ages of 20 and 49 had higher expectations and a more favorable attitude towards the use of SSTs, while, in general, the user profile was described as “younger, single and more educated” (Kucukusta, Heung and Hui, 2014). Kucukusta et al conclude that in order to be able to serve all consumer segments in the hotel, managers should introduce a combination of Self-Service Technology and Staff, while making sure that all guests are familiar with the technology, its benefits and the way to use it effectively (2014).

Giebelhausen et al. approached the topic of Self-Service Technology by incorporating role and script theories (2014). More specifically, they discussed how customers and staff take on specific roles during a service interaction, and therefore following a script that, if broken, the customer experiences psychological discomfort (Giebelhausen et al., 2014). Giebelhausen et al. found that consumer perceptions towards SSTs are affected by the value of the personal service and therefore enhance the experience if the personal service is of low quality but degrade the experience during high-quality personal service (2014). Based on their findings, they conclude that the use of SST can enhance the overall experience, however the value of personal service is much higher and therefore the two types of service should be used in a combination to maximize consumer experience and satisfaction (Giebelhausen et al., 2014).

Finally, Beatson, Lee and Coote discussed the key success attributes of both SSTs and personal service, stating that “positive and negative attribute performance impacted on overall satisfaction and repeat purchase in different ways” (2007). According to Beatson et al., when preferring personal service, consumers seek “friendliness, responsiveness, trustworthiness, courtesy and professionalism”, while through the use of SSTs, they value “reliability [...], convenience [...], customization [...] and enjoyment of using the technology” (2007). The results showed that the performance of these attributes affect overall satisfaction and impact the consumers’ decision to use SSTs or not (Beatson, Lee and Coote, 2007). Regarding the introduction of Self-Service Technology, Beatson et al recommend that hoteliers should decide on

a case-by-case basis, considering the commitment of consumers and the quality of each service type (2007).

Scope & Objectives

This study focuses on consumers' attitudes towards the use of Self-Service Technology in hotels and their willingness to adopt. The main objective of this research is to gather the data required for hotel managers to decide on whether to introduce Self-Service Technology and the effect of that decision on consumer satisfaction and commitment towards the hotel. The study also seeks to understand the hidden motives of consumers when choosing between personal service and self-service technology, and the attributes that each type of service must possess to enhance consumers' overall experience.

Data & Methodology

When looking into consumer behavior and willingness to adopt, researchers often use a variety of quantitative and qualitative data to reach a conclusion and provide valuable recommendations on the subject being analysed. One of the articles mentioned previously gathered the necessary information by targeting guests of six luxury properties and interviewing 81 of them. With the use of direct quotations from the interviews, an in-depth analysis of the data was provided (Harkinson, 2017). In addition, two sources utilized the Technology Adoption Model theory, which combines external and internal factors affecting the willingness to adopt and actual adoption of a new technology. The two basic external components of TAM describe the perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness that people attribute to a technological interface, which, in combination with the behavioral intention of consumers towards adopting SSTs, form their final decision (Oh, Jeong and Baloglu, 2013; Kaushik, Agrawal and Rahman, 2015). Another article of the ones mentioned above also preferred personal interviews of consumers that "had stayed in hotels over the previous 12 months and [were] familiar with personal service and self-service technology", but mainly focused on the services' impact on consumer commitment, based on the attributes of either SST or Personal Service (Beatson, Lee and Coote, 2007). Moreover, the theory of diffusion of innovation was used by one of the sources, where consumers filled out a questionnaire about their perceptions on "the seven dimensions of innovation adapted from Rogers' diffusion of innovations model. These factors are relative advantage, compatibility, divisibility, communicability, complexity, product risks and psychological risks" (Kucukusta, Heung and Hui, 2014). Finally, one of the articles presented findings from two studies that sought to discover the interdependence between personal service and self-service technology, and how the perceived value of one affected consumer attitudes towards the other (Giebelhausen et al., 2014).

After thorough evaluation of the methods used by other researchers concerning willingness to adopt and consumer behavior towards SST, I have decided to use a combination of primary and secondary data. In order to gather the primary information needed for my research, I will use a questionnaire that will include questions regarding consumer satisfaction, preferences,

commitment and overall perceptions towards hotels and the use of Self-Service Technology. The questionnaire will be distributed online, and it will take approximately 2 minutes to complete. For my sample, I will target people over the age of 20, that have stayed in a hotel with Self-Service Technology during the past year. I will try to maximize sample diversity, in order to examine how different demographics affect consumer behavior towards SSTs, while keeping in mind the findings of the secondary data reviewed above. By combining the results of the questionnaire with the data provided by other researchers, I seek to provide hoteliers with the necessary information to decide between Self-Service Technology and Personal Service. My analysis will mainly be qualitative, since I believe that it is a topic that requires in-depth information, rather than plain statistics.

References

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Appendix - Preliminary Questionnaire

Q1: Have you stayed in a hotel during the last 12 months?

Yes

No

Q2: Do you know what Self-Service Technology is?

Yes

No

Q3: Have you recently used any form of Self-Service Technology in a hotel?

Yes

Maybe

No

Q4: What types of Self-Service Technology have you used? (Click all that apply)

Automated check-in/check-out systems

Online booking services

Automated room service systems

Automated housekeeping services

Other: _____

Q5: How important do you think personal service is in a hotel? (1 = "not at all" & 7 = "highly important")

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Q6: If both Personal Service and Self-Service Technology were available, which one would you choose?

Personal Service

Self-Service Technology

Both (Combination)

Q7: What characteristics should a staff member have for a successful personal service experience?

	Unimportant	Neutral	Highly Important
Friendliness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Responsiveness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Trustworthiness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professionalism	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ability to help	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q8: What characteristics do you value when using Self-Service Technology?

	Unimportant	Neutral	Highly Important
Speed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ease of Use / Complexity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Usefulness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fun	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q9: Complete the following sentence: "I feel that Self-Service Technology

- enhances my stay in a hotel"
- degrades my stay in a hotel"

Q10: Would you be willing to stay in a hotel that mainly uses Self-Service Technology, with limited staff?

- Yes
- Maybe
- No

Q11: Which of the following would you trust more for a service transaction?

- Hotel Staff
- Self-Service Technology
- Combination

Q12: Click your gender

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary

Q13: Click your age group:

- 20-29
- 30-39

40-49

Q14: What is your level of education?

High School Graduate

University Student

University Degree

Postgraduate Student

Postgraduate Degree