Smart Tourism Industry in Iran

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Introduction

Smart tourism is a progress for the tourism industry from traditional concepts to the integration of web-based technologies that led to the emergence of new tourism-related practices (Gretzel, Sigala, Xiang, & Koo, 2015). In the Internet era, around the world, there are more and more tourists search online before they make tourism decisions.

Iran was considered to be one of the Middle East's top tourist destinations for both Western and regional visitors during the period 1967–1977 (Morakabati, 2011). For example, Iran had 700,000 tourists from the USA, UK, West Germany, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia in 1978. However, the Iranian tourism industry, despite enormous potential, has suffered significantly since the Iranian Revolution in 1979 (also referred to as the 'Islamic Revolution'). The revolution also gave subsequent negative imagery in many tourism-generating markets (Seyfi, Hall, & Kuhzady, 2018).

Thanks to the internet and the new technology, there are many online websites that allow Iranians to shop and look for products' information online nowadays. For instances, Digikala (digikala.com) is an online shopping website which is like Amazon, and Takhfifan (takhfifan.com) is a website that introduces the businesses with discount (which is like Groupon) and many other websites. Tourism and hospitality industries are included in these changes. For instance, people use online booking websites to make their hotel and tour reservations online. With more and more Iranians shopping and conducting business online, smart tourism has become an emerging field of development in Iran. To facilitate the smart tourism industry, investigating how Iranian consumers perceive the tourism websites is a warrant.

Literature Review

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

Davis (1986) suggested the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) explore the effect of technology on user behavior. The model concentrates on the process of using technology, where "Perceived Usefulness" and "Perceived Ease of Use" are the two key factors that affect an individual's intention to use a technology(Liu, Chen, Sun, Wible, &

Kuo, 2010). In the previous literature, perceived ease of use is defined as "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance" (Liu et al, 2010, p.601); while perceived usefulness is defined as "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free from effort (Liu et al, 2010, p.601). In the context of this study, perceived ease of use will be defined as the degree to which a person believes that using a tourism website would enhance his or her goals to searching for tourism-related information or completing related booking activities; and perceived usefulness will be defined as the degree to which a person believes that using a tourism website would be free from effort to search for tourism-related information or booking related activities. The TAM model is illustrated in the Figure 1.
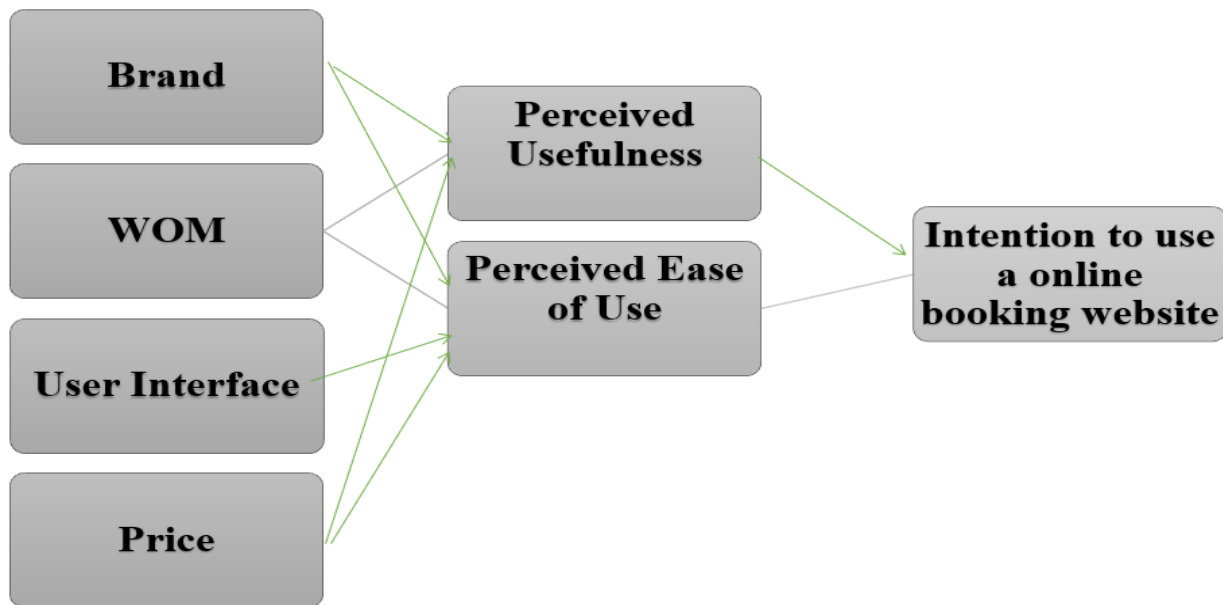

Figure 1 Technology acceptance Model (TAM)

Intentions to use an online booking website

Herrero and San Martín (2012) explored the adoption of tourism accommodation websites and found that the intention to use such websites is determined by the usefulness and ease of use of websites as accepted by visitors. Their results indicate that adequacy of information positively influences the website's perceived usefulness, whereas the

interactivity and navigability have a positive effect on their perceived ease of use. In the context of smart tourism, the focus should be on effective and reliable search systems, easy navigation, and orderly presentation of complete and consistent information. Such characteristics in the online hotel booking context include location, attractions close, restaurants, amenities, and prices (Bilgihan & Bujisic, 2015).

Methods

An online questionnaire will be developed on an online survey website to investigate the perceptions of Iranian of the current tourism related websites. Using online survey method, data will be collected through social media platforms such as Telegram (web.telegram.org). Telegram is one of the most used platforms by Iranian with more than 40 million users (Azali, 2017). The period for collecting data will be four weeks. The targeted sample size is 300. The targeted participants should have visited at least one tourism-booking site in the last 12 months. The data will be screened and cleaned for further statistical analyses. IBM SPSS 24 will be used for data analyses.

Potential Contribution and Implications

The findings of this research will be helpful for academics and practitioners. For theoretical implications, this research would help to the current literature by introducing Iran as one of the countries that are developing in the smart tourism which have been not been deeply studied in the tourism field. In practical implications, this research brings a practical sense for management to implement update methods and also build customer loyalties.

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