

Online Search Behavioural Intention: The Travel Information Seekers' Perspective

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Abstract

Internet usage is becoming increasingly important to travellers due to colossal information available, including travel-related information such as accommodation, tourist attractions, transportation, and recreation activities. Due to internet technology, information seekers' attitudes and behaviour toward the online search for travel information are crucial for tourism marketers. This study intends to identify the relationship between attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control of travel information seekers towards behavioural intention in online search for travel information. A sample of 338 university employees was taken from a public university in Malaysia to evaluate the relationships among the variables. Regression analysis was conducted to test the hypotheses. The findings show that travel information seeker attributes of attitude, subjective norm, and behavioural control predict behavioural intention. This research carries value to tourism marketers and travel-related authorities in targeting a specific group's incentive for using online travel information. Future studies could expand the research scope to a different setting in validating the research model.

Keywords: Online Search, Travel Information, Behavioural Intention, Information Seeker, Tourism Marketers

Introduction

Individuals worldwide can use the Internet to access a vast amount of online information (Jordan et al., 2013). In June 2022, over 5.4 billion people had internet access worldwide, representing a 1416% increase in global internet usage since 2000, with Asia accounting for more than 2.9 billion users (Internet World Statistics, 2022). According to a Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission report, the percentage of internet users in 2020 was 88.7% (29 million), up 1.3% from 2018 (MCMC Internet User Survey Report, 2020). According to a similar report, 74.3% of online activities are for information gathering, with

the most common locations for internet access being at home (70.5%), on the go (64.4%), and at work (30.1%). Smartphones remain the most popular method of Internet access (98.7%), indicating that the country is a mobile-oriented society. This report demonstrates that people use the internet daily, which is prevalent in tourism. As shown in Figure 1, the most popular activity among Malaysian internet users is information gathering. When Malaysian citizens' internet usage was ranked in the top ten in Asia's Internet Use, this trend indicates that the internet is becoming increasingly important (Internet World Statistics, 2015). Because of the vast amount of information available on the internet, searching has become the dominant mode in travellers' use of the internet to obtain any information, including travel-related information such as lodging, tourist attractions, transportation, and activities (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Nonetheless, there has been little research into information seekers' attitudes and behaviour toward online information search processes (Irwana et al., 2014; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

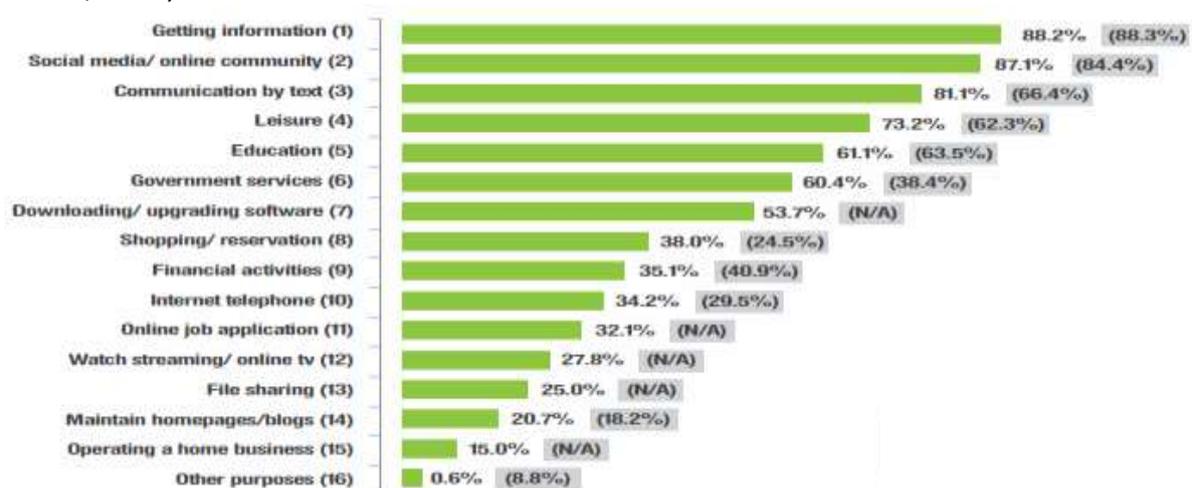


Figure 1: Percentage of distribution of users by the purpose of Internet use
Source: Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (2014)

Searching for information is the most popular activity among internet users. More people are acquiring information online rather than in person. This affects how travellers locate and use travel information to plan trips. Search engines, for example, play an essential role in the search for travel information and influence travellers' search results (Xiang et al., 2008). Another study concluded that knowing how information technology reflects consumer behaviour is a vital business foundation (Xiang et al., 2015). Few studies have examined how travellers' attributes affect their behaviour. As a result, this study aims to identify the extent to which information seeker attributes influence the behavioural intention of using online search for travel information. The following questions were investigated in this study:

1. Are information seekers' attributes, significant predictors of behavioural intention when searching online for travel information?
2. Is attitude a significant predictor of behavioural intention when searching for travel information on the internet?
3. Is subjective norm a significant predictor of behavioural intention when searching for travel information on the internet?
4. Is perceived behavioural control a significant predictor of behavioural intention when searching for travel information on the internet?

The internet has changed how people search for information and conduct leisure and economic activities. Tourist information search techniques are a dynamic process in which travellers employ a variety of information sources to respond to internal and external holiday planning changes (Fodness & Murray, 1999). The findings are crucial for tourism marketers, travel agents, and policymakers because they allow them to segment travel behaviour based on attributes and target the correct set of travellers for particular places and activities.

Research Framework and Hypotheses

This study employed the model proposed by the theory of planned behaviour (TPB), intended to predict and explain human behaviour within a particular environment. Ajzen's theory of reasoned action (TRA) is extended by the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). The TPB adds that perceived behavioural control is an additional component leading to intention. This aspect pertains to the consumer's perception of whether or not they can regulate their behaviour (Li-Ming & Wai, 2013). According to the TPB, customers' intentions and attitudes can be predicted (Alatawy, 2017). Individuals' behavioural intent and actions are predicted by three variables: attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control (Li-Ming & Wai, 2013). The theory postulates that a person's purpose of attaining a particular behaviour is the most critical immediate determinant of that behaviour. Figure 2 displays the research framework of the study.

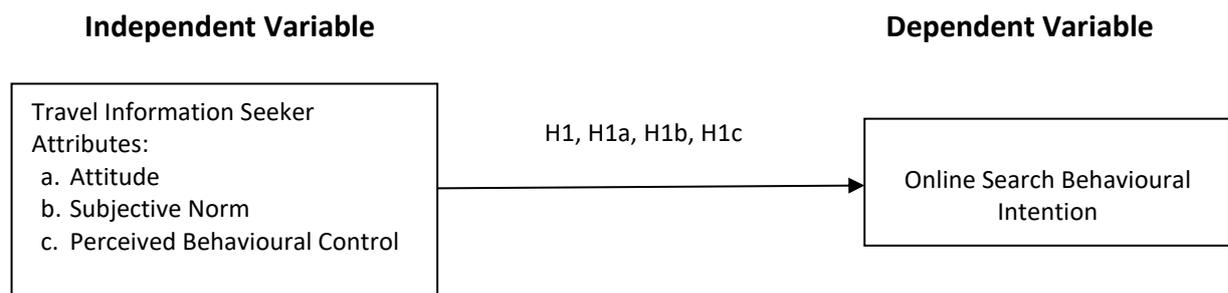


Figure 2: Research Framework

Adapted from Alatawy (2017) & Li-Ming and Wai (2013)

Travel Information Search and Behavioural Intention

In parallel to the rapid expansion of the Internet, online information searching behaviour has emerged as an essential research topic (Morrison et al., 2007). Furthermore, tourists' online information search behaviour reveals why, what, where, who, when, and how they search (Peng et al., 2013). There are numerous and diverse sources of travel information searches, such as travel websites and search engines (Luo et al., 2007). Internet users may also interact with online travel agencies and other travel-related stakeholders who were previously traditional travel companies but have embraced the internet to expand their business. Two factors influence behavioural intention: situational influences and product characteristics (Fodness & Murray, 1999). Because of differences in internet literacy, the purpose of travel, such as business or pleasure, revisiting a destination, lifestyles, and socioeconomic status, internet users' behaviour and decisions on a travel search varied (Luo et al., 2007). Behavioural intention reflects an individual's likelihood of engaging in the desired behaviour (Ajzen & Madden, 1986). The intention is the extent to which the user wishes to return to the website in the future. However, browsing a tourist website leads to changes in attitude and behaviour, such as requesting more information, returning to the website, and visiting the

destination (Skadberg & Kimmel, 2004; Yan & Li-ming, 2015). Another study discovered that the valuable components that determine behaviour are measured by two items: internet use and the extent to which the internet was used for making travel reservations (Ryan & Rao, 2008). Hence, the attributes of information seekers may vary and be subject to their intention of using the online platform. In this study, the researcher chose three characteristics of the information seekers: attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control, to examine whether these characteristics significantly predict the behavioural intention of using the internet platform to look for travel information. The research framework presented in Figure 2 is adapted from past studies (Alatawy, 2017; Li-Ming & Wai, 2013).

Attitude and Behavioural Intention

The term "attitude" refers to the extent to which an individual has a positive or negative evaluation of the behaviour under consideration (Alatawy, 2017). It is necessary to consider the consequences of acting in such a manner. Users' attitude toward online reservations is the essential factor influencing their behaviour when making online purchases (Li-Ming & Wai, 2013). The mindset of the user is a critical aspect of their purchasing behaviour and has a direct impact on the decisions they make. It refers to thoughts, feelings, or beliefs about a specific thing or behaviour (Ahmad & Juhdi, 2008). Because people will only intend to perform behaviours that make them feel good, attitude is strongly related to behavioural intention (Cheng & Cho, 2011). In a nutshell, people's intentions reveal what actions they will take in the future, and attitude is thought to be directly related to intention-behavior.

Subjective Norm and Behavioural Intention

A subjective norm, also known as a social norm, is the user's perception regarding whether most people favour or disfavour a given behaviour. This belief can also be referred to as a social norm. It investigates if the person's significant others, such as family members, friends, and coworkers (Afendi et al., 2014), believe that the individual should engage in the behaviour. A normative group of people essential to the decision-maker is produced when social norms are followed (Alatawy, 2017). A subjective norm assesses the social pressure individuals are under to perform or not perform a specific behaviour. It is related to a person's motivation to comply with the views of others (Ahmad & Juhdi, 2008), and it significantly impacts a person's performance intention. A subjective norm measures the social pressure individuals are under to perform or not perform a specific behaviour (Lada et al., 2009).

Perceived Behavioural Control and Behavioural Intention

Perceived behavioural control refers to an individual's ability to carry out a specific behaviour and varies according to individual circumstances—an individual must change perceptions of behavioural control depending on the situation (Alatawy, 2017; Ajzen, 1991). As a result, a person with self-efficacy or ability may notice that they can use a new method easily, which may eventually influence them to adopt the new approach (Ahmad & Juhdi, 2008). It was discovered that perceived behavioural control positively influences intention (Kim et al., 2011). On the other hand, perceived behavioral control refers to the environmental factors that make a behaviour easy or difficult (Cheng & Cho, 2011). Thus, it is determined by the individual's belief in the ability of both situational and internal factors to facilitate behaviour performance.

Even though previous research has examined the relationship between information searching behaviour and behavioural intention (e.g., Yan & Li-ming, 2015; Li-Ming & Wai, 2013; Peng et al., 2013; Cheng & Cho, 2011; Afendi et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2011; Lada et al., 2009; Ahmad & Juhdi, 2008), the existing literature does not identify which characteristics affect travel information seekers' behavioural intention in using online search for travel information. As a result, to fill this research gap, this study employs a quantitative research approach. The three characteristics of travel information seekers (attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control) are used as independent variables in the research model, with behavioural intention in using online information search as the dependent variable. Hypotheses were thus developed:

H1: Information seekers' attributes being significant predictors when searching online for travel information:

H1a: Attitude is a significant predictor of behavioural intention when searching online for travel information.

H1b: Subjective norm is a significant predictor of behavioural intention when searching online for travel information.

H1c: Perceived behavioural control is a significant predictor of behavioural intention when searching online for travel information.

Methodology

Original data obtained directly by the researcher were used to achieve the study's objectives. The non-probability sampling approach with a purposive selection strategy was utilised, in which the sample was selected based on particular considerations or criteria (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Multiple factors were used to identify the respondents, including internet use, familiarity with online travel information searches, and vacation travel plans. During working days, 400 questionnaires were delivered to respondents, of which 338 (84.5%) were deemed useful for analysis. Each participant was an employee of a public university. This study employed a cross-sectional model methodology. This study used a self-reported questionnaire to obtain data. All items for the two categories (travel information seeker traits and behavioural intention) were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, with one representing "strongly disagree" and five representing "strongly agree."

In this study, factor analysis was employed to reduce many variables to a meaningful, interpretable, and practically applicable set of factors (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Initial tests utilising the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's test of sphericity indicated that KMO values were 0.792 and that all factor loadings for 26 items (Attitude-11, Subjective Norm-3, Perceive Behavioural Control-4, and Behavioural Intention-8 items) exceeded 0.40 (ranging from 0.602 to 0.904) by a statistically significant margin ($p = 0.00$). In the factor analysis, every item allocated to each construct is clustered in the same group. In addition, internal reliability analysis results for the four constructs ranged from 0.789% to 0.937% (Attitude: .937; Subjective Norm: .789; Perceived Behavioural Control: .862, and Behavioural Intention: .901). So, the 26 questions in the four constructs that made up the study instrument for the survey (Hair et al., 2015; Pallant, 2016) were valid and reliable.

Table 1

The Result of Factor Analysis on Attitude, Subjective Norms, Perceived Behavioural Control, and Behavioural Intention

Code	Item	F1	F2	F3	F4
Factor 1 (Attitude)					
BISA3	I am pleased with using the internet for information searching for travel products.	.904			
BISA2	I think using the internet for information searching for travel products would benefit me.	.888			
BISA1	I think using the internet for information searching for travel products would be good for me.	.852			
BISA5	I find using the internet for information searching for travel products useful.	.833			
BISA10	I find using the internet for information searching for travel products easy to use.	.742			
BISA7	Using the internet for information searching for travel products allows me to get my work done quicker	.699			
BISA8	Using the internet to search for travel products can improve my ability to make good decisions	.694			
BISA11	Using the internet for information searching for travel products requires little effort from me.	.632			
BISA9	Learning to use the internet for information searching for travel products would be easy for me.	.602			
Factor 2 (Subjective Norms)					
BISS2	Mass media reports convinced me to use online travel information search.		.863		
BISS3	I use online travel information search after reading advertisements in printed sources highlighting the benefits of online travel sites.		.821		
BISS1	I use online travel information because my friends/relatives use it.		.682		
Factor 3 (Perceived Behavioural Control)					
BISP3	I feel comfortable using the internet for information searching for travel products on my own.			.873	
BISP2	I think using the internet for information and searching for travel			.846	

	products would be entirely within my control.				
BISP1	I think that I can use the internet for information searching for travel products.			.793	
BISP4	I have the skill of finding information in a web directory.			.749	
Factor 4 (Behavioural Intention)					
CISB4	I strongly recommend that others use online travel information sites in planning/arranging their travelling/vacation.				.878
CISB5	I will use online travel information sites for making reservations.				.866
CISB7	I will use online travel information sites for purchasing travel-related products/services.				.832
CISB6	I will forward information from online travel information sites to friends/relatives.				.811
CISB3	I will frequently use online travel information sites for future travel arrangements.				.755
CISB8	I will use online travel information sites' links to go to other sites.				.682
CISB2	I will browse/view online travel information sites for travelling/vacation purposes.				.610
CISB1	I will use online travel information sites to seek information.				.485
	Eigenvalues	5.84	4.55	3.25	2.32
	% of Variance	22.47	17.50	12.50	8.90
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO)		.792			
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity		7142.185			
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation. a. Rotation converged in 7 iterations					

Note: N=338

The critical initial tests, as shown in Table 1, are the Keiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity. All KMO values were 0.792, or greater, and all factor loadings were statistically significant ($p = 0.00$). As a result, the instruments were appropriate for the survey (Hwang, Lee, & Chen, 2005). Factor 1 was related to attitude, represented by the eleven

items, and the factor loading ranged from .602 to .904. Subjective Norm was a factor that included three items that accounted for the factor loading ranging from 682 to 863—none of the three items deviated from the theme. The factor loading ranged between 749 and 873. Four items in Factor 3 represent Perceived Behavioural Control. All four items were grouped and formed into a single group. Factor 4 consisted of eight items labelled "Behavioral Intention," with factor loadings ranging from .485 to .878. All eight items were grouped and formed into a single group.

Table 2

Reliability Analysis for Internal Consistency

Dimensions	No of Items	Cronbach Alpha	Result*
Attitude (ATT)	11	.937	Excellent
Subjective Norms (SN)	3	.789	Acceptable
Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC)	4	.862	Good
Behavioural intention	8	.901	Excellent

* *George & Mallery (2003)*

All dimensions presented in Table 2 achieved Cronbach Alpha values above 0.70, which indicated high reliability for further analysis. Subjective Norm has the lowest Cronbach Alpha value (= 0.789), while Attitude has the highest (= 0.937). Hair et al (2015); Pallant (2016) suggest that the ideal Cronbach's Alpha coefficient should be above 0.70 to indicate high internal consistency. Thus, all the items used for the dimensions or construction are proven reliable.

Results

Demographic Data: Demographic data was collected from the 338 respondents in the form of identification of gender, age, marital status, education, income, experience using the internet, and the source of online information and information. Male and female respondents had equal representation (Male = 50% and Female = 50%). The majority of respondents (38.8%) were in the age range of 26–30 years, with the majority (42.3%) having a monthly income between RM2,001 and RM3,000. Most of the respondents (40.5%) held bachelor's degree qualifications. Most (60.7%) were single, while 39.3% were married.

Concerning the internet and online activity exposure, all of the respondents (100%) were familiar with online searches and had used the internet to search for travel information. A breakdown of the internet experience showed that the majority (33.4%) had more than seven years of experience in using the internet. At the same time, the prior experience in online travel information search was also substantial, with 33.4% having 1–3 years of such experience. Search engines were widely used as the primary source for searching for online travel information (44.7%) as compared to social networking (19.8%), travel blog websites (18.9%), and online travel agents (OTA) (16.6%). Travel cost was the most highly searched for (51.2%), followed by lodging and food (23.7%), travel route (9.8%), public security (8.6%), and transportation (6.8%).

Relationship between Online Travel Information Seekers' Attributes and Behavioural Intention

Single-step multiple regression was conducted to examine the relationships between online information seekers' constructs (attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control) and behavioural intention in travel information search.

Table 3

Results of Regression Analysis of Online Travel Information Seekers' Attributes and Behavioural Intention in Travel Information Search

r	R-Square	Adjusted R-Square	F-change	Standard Error of Estimate	P-Value
.486a	.236	.230	34.483	.45957	0.000

In this result, the construct of the online travel information seekers' attributes clarified 23.6 percent ($R^2 = .236$, $F\text{-change} = 34.483$, $p < .0001$) of the variance in the behavioural intention. The outcomes demonstrated that online travel information seekers' attributes significantly contributed to behavioural intention. The r values = .486 show that elements of online travel information seekers' attributes indicate a moderate positive impact on behavioural intention. The construct of online travel information seekers' attributes significantly influenced behavioral intention. Thus, the "Hypothesis H1: Travel information seekers' attributes (attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control) are the significant predictor of behavioural intention when searching online for travel information" was supported. Hence, the researcher rejects the null hypothesis and accepts the alternate hypothesis.

Relationships between online information seekers' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control toward behavioural intention in travel information search

The relationships between online information seekers' attributes that comprise attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control toward behavioural intention in travel information search were tested using multiple regression. The results of each sub-hypothesis are as follows

Table 4

Results of Regression Analysis of Attitude of Travel Information Seekers towards Behavioural Intention in Travel Information Search

Hypothesis Path	Correlation (r-value)	Regression Coefficient (β)	Std Error (SE)	95% Confidence Interval	P-value	Result
H1a: Attitudes toward Behavioural Intention	.143	.120	.0053	0.015, 0.224	.0000	Supported
Hb: Subjective Norms toward Behavioural Intention	0.109	0.124	0.037	0.097, 0.049	0.001	Supported
Hc: Perceived Behavioural Control towards Behavioural Intention	0.473	0.454	0.048	0.360, 0.548	0.000	Supported

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

The three dimensions of online information seekers' attributes (attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control) were found to influence behavioural intention significantly in travel information search based on statistical results for hypotheses H1a, Hb, and H1c in Table 4. As a result, the following hypotheses were supported:

H1a: Attitude is a significant predictor of behavioural intention when searching online for travel information.

H1b: Subjective norm is a significant predictor of behavioural intention when searching online for travel information.

H1c: Perceived behavioural control is a significant predictor of behavioural intention when searching online for travel information.

Discussions and Conclusion

The main objective of this study is to examine the relationships between online information seekers' attributes, which are attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control influence behavioural intention in searching for travel information. This study focuses on the construct of search intention and how it influences online travel search attributes in an emerging online travel market context. Through the explanation provided, the results revealed that a majority of the respondents were in the middle age group between 26 – 35 years old, which is referred to as Generation Y. Gen Y is more exposed to technology compared to other generations due to the nature of their daily activities in using the online platform. The results also revealed that most respondents like to use the internet to search for travel information through their primary sources, which were search engines, and most chose travel cost as their priority in the topic searched. In short, their responses in providing the antecedents and present situation relating to the subject of interest or objectives of this study are reliable.

The results indicated that perceived behavioural control ($r = 0.473$, $\beta = 0.454$, $p\text{-value} = 0.000$) was the most in the outcome of the relationships between attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control towards behavioral intention in travel information search influential factor towards behavioural intention. Huang et al (2011) noted that perceived behavioural control positively influences consumer intention to act in online contexts. It is evident that perceive behavioural control plays an essential role in influencing the behavioural intention of travel information seekers using online search for travel information. Perceived behavioural control is one of the critical contributions of the research study and the strength of independent factors contributing to search intention (Alatawy, 2017). Perhaps with the availability of internet facilities in the office environment, the employees feel at ease and able to search for travel information using the online travel website. This situation explained in the previous study (Cheng & Cho, 2011) that perceived behavioural control refers to the environmental factors that make a behaviour easy or difficult. Thus, it is determined by the individual's belief about the power of both situational and internal factors to facilitate the performing of the behaviour.

The results of this study provide several theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical perspective, this study significantly contributes to the hospitality and tourism literature on tourist behavioural intention towards the online search for travel information. This research model was applied in a different setting and instrument adapted from previous studies by Ajzen (1991); Alatawy (2017), which employed internet users among government servants as the sample to collect data.

The overall outcomes demonstrated that online travel information seekers' attributes significantly contributed to behavioural intention. In contrast, the attention paid to the use of online sites for tourism purposes is increasing rapidly. This study attempts to model an understanding of the characteristics of audiences such as attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control to have intention in using online search for travel information. Therefore, the findings provide marketing managers in creating opportunities for personal communication, such as travel site content targeting specific consumer segments, and focus on valuable themes underlying the various attributes identified in the marketing messages. Since this study scope is limited to a particular public university employee, thus the research model can be further tested in different populations and samples so that the future research findings will add to new insights specifically in the tourism industry and information technology setting.

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