

Abstract

The change in the landscape of online distribution channels in the tourism and hospitality industry has led to a multi-channel behavior of consumers when it comes to purchasing travel products online. Consumers have become empowered players who are enabled to choose from a variety of different channels to search for information and to make their purchase decision. Despite the efforts of hotels to drive direct reservations through their website, the Online Travel Agency Booking.com currently dominates the European market in online hotel bookings and the two continue to compete against each other for future customers.

To gain current insights into consumers' behavior in online hotel booking a new research model was proposed by this study, consisting of six product and channel related factors that aimed to predict consumers' choice for an online booking channel. This study focused on consumers' choice for the OTA Booking.com or to book directly through an individual hotel website. Data obtained from 180 participants of an online questionnaire were analyzed. Results of the multiple regression analysis showed that *perceived relative advantage* and *customer relationship* were significantly affecting participants' purchase intention and thus channel choice. Only the latter was significantly affecting the direct booker's purchase intention. It was therefore found that consumers are more likely to book through a channel if they perceive it as more convenient, time-saving, and more exciting compared to other channels. They also prefer a channel that offers them a larger product variety and if they are familiar with the booking process, implying that they prefer a channel that they have used in the past.

Lastly, this study tried to investigate what role the concept of *consumer empowerment* plays for consumers in an online hotel booking context. Even though it was not among the most important factors, participants still found it important to have the possibility to customize their stay already when booking but considered it as less important to add ancillary products or services to the room booking. By considering *consumer empowerment* as a potential factor influencing channel choice, a new and relatively unexplored perspective to this field of study was presented.