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Website Quality And Consumer Online Purchase Intention Of Air Ticket

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Abstract—Internet application has been used by many firms especially the low-cost airline service providers in supporting their marketing activities. Thus, it is crucial to know whether firms' website is giving an added advantage that could trigger online purchase intention. In this study, we examine six website quality factors: usability, website design, information quality, trust, perceived risk and empathy as antecedents of online purchase intention of air ticket. A self-administered questionnaire was used and 208 usable responses were collected in Klang Valley, Malaysia areas. Correlations and regressions were used to analyze the data. The findings showed that empathy and trust are the most direct influential factors in predicting online purchase intention. To improve consumers online purchase intention, service providers should provide service with empathy and enhance customers' trust. The results of study provide a valuable insight on the direct impact of website quality factors towards online purchase intention of air tickets.

Index Terms— Online purchase, low-cost airline, website

I. INTRODUCTION

With the increasing popularity of online shopping, business around the world now try to enhance their competitive advantages by focusing their resources on the virtual business environment. In airline industry, e-ticketing has changed the airline industry and behavior of consumers with reducing cost and providing new channel for communication and support. Airline service providers try to offer services through electronic infrastructures, especially through the web, to decrease their cost, expand revenue, creating reliable database of customers for future customer relationship management plans (Dehbashi & Nahavandi, 2007) [9], [32], [35]. In the academic literature, website quality has generally been recognized as a critical factor to drive business online. As such, numerous studies have been devoted to website quality and evaluations (Bai et al., 2008) [2], [18], [20], [35]. However, most of the studies focus on relationship between website quality and customer satisfaction. Specific research examines the direct impact of website quality on consumer online purchase intention with regard to low-cost carrier airline service is lacking [24], [30]. Since low-cost carrier operators aim at cost reduction, it is critical for them to identify key factors that directly effect customer purchase intention [1], [4], [9]. In addition they are using online air ticketing, which means their website quality is of key element that contribute towards company performance [27], [33]. Therefore, this study aims at examining direct relationship between website quality dimensions as antecedents of consumer purchase intention of air ticket with regard to low-cost carrier airline service [8], [12], [34].

II. PANTECEDENTS OF PURCHASE INTENTION

Purchase intention is defined as the probability that the consumer will purchase the product. According to Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), an individual's performance of a certain behavior is determined by his or her intent to perform

that behavior [3], [8], [9]. Intent is itself informed by attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms about engaging in the behavior, and perceptions about whether the individual will be able to successfully engage in the target behavior (George, 2004) [11], [28].

Moreover, previous studies have indicated that some of the most used key dimensions of online service quality research were navigability, playfulness, information quality, trust, personalization and responsiveness (Nusair & Kandampully, 2008) [15], [20], [35], outcome quality, consumer service, process controllability, ease of use, information quality, website design (Su et al., 2008) [22], [31], technical adequacy, content quality, specific content and appearance (Chang & Chen, 2008) [3], [31], perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, perceived social presence, trust, enjoyment (Hassanein & Head, 2007) [17], [20], [29], site design, convenience, financial security, product information, product offering (Moharrer et al., 2006) [27], website design, reliability, responsiveness, trust, personalization (Lee & Lin, 2005) [24], reliability/prompt responses, access, ease of use, attentiveness, security, credibility (Jun et al., 2004) [20], usefulness, ease of use, enjoyment (Monuwe et al., 2004) [26], ease of use, information quality, website design, customer service, process controllability and outcome quality (Su et al, 2008) [34], ease of use, security, responsiveness, empathy, customization (Madu & Madu, 2002) [16], [21] and content website and design website (Huizingh, 2000) [17].

Therefore, this study adapted the Barnes and Vidgen's (2006) [2] model that focusing on usability of use, information quality, website design, trust and empathy. Another dimension, perceived risk, is added to the model due to its role in influencing online consumer behavior (Grabner-Kraeuter & Faullant, 2008; So & Sculli, 2002) [14].

Moreover, consumers are reluctant to give personal information particularly data on financial status and credit facilities to the internet due to the fact that there is no direct eye-contact and thus, consumers are concern about unauthorized use of their private information that could cost them considerable financial loss (Grabner-Krauter & Faullant, 2008) [14]. Thus, to reduce this negative perception and attitude, airline service providers need to understand aspects of perceived risk from the perspective of its consumers in regards to e-ticketing purchase intention. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H5: Risk perception on website is negatively associated with consumers online purchase intention.

2.6 Empathy

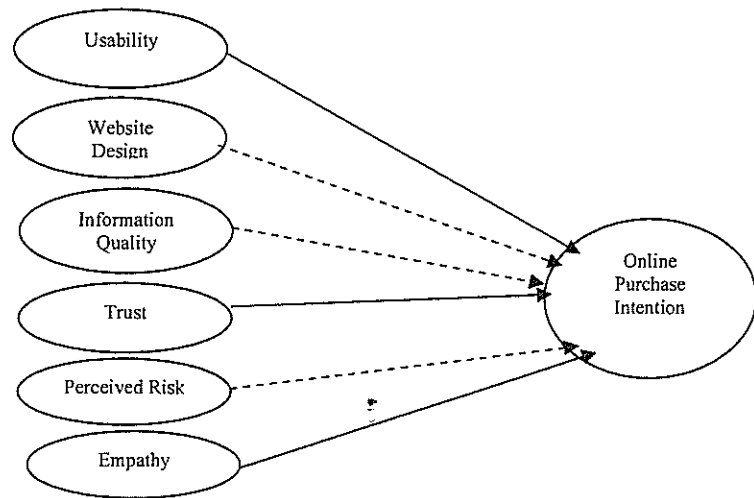
Empathy is a non direct human element interaction that deals with the provision of caring and individualized attention to customers such as e-mail communication. This includes providing individualized attention to customer concerns and request rather than a generic auto reply (Madu & Madu, 2002) [16, [21]. Other researchers associated empathy as 'personalization' which includes understanding the specific needs of customers and providing service related convenience (Nusair & Kandampully, 2008) [29]. Generally, the personalization is a unique dimension that does not exist in many travel sites and as a result by providing personalized services to customers would help to enhance value (Nusair and Kandampully, 2008) [29]. Hence, it is hypothesized that:

H6: Empathy feature of online service is positively associated with consumers online purchase intention.

III. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

This study adapted the Barnes & Vidgen's (2006) [2] model which focusing on usability, website design, information quality, trust and empathy as website quality factors. Perceived risk is added to the model due its role in influencing online consumer behavior (Grabner-Kraeuter & Faullant, 2008; So & Sculli, 2002) [16], [33]. A review of the literature on website evaluation revealed no comprehensive instruments aimed at airlines web services. Therefore, we adapted the quality statements items which consist of usability or ease of use and empathy which were adapted from Barnes & Vidgen (2006) [2], information quality and website design were adapted from Su et al., (2008) [19], [34], trust, perceived risk and purchase intentions are adapted from Chang & Chen (2008) [3]. These constructs were selected due to their frequently appeared in website quality research and their acceptable constructs reliabilities. The proposed research framework is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1 The Proposed Research Framework



3.1 RESEARCH METHOD

3.1.1 Sample

The sample consists of online users, both students and working adults in Klang Valley, Malaysia. Students were chosen because they had experience browsing and/or purchasing products online. In general, college students are more likely than older adults to use the internet. However, type of usage varies by age, with internet users younger than 29 more likely to engage in communication and creative activities, but less likely to purchase online than users aged 29-69 (Rainie & Horrigan, 2005 cited in Ha, 2008) [7], [13], [6]. Thus, working adults not only students were invited to participate in this study. One of Malaysia-based the low-cost carrier service providers' website and e-ticketing service was used to test the model.

Due to lack of proper sampling frame with regard to online users in Malaysia, a snowballing sampling method was used. In social science research, snowball sampling is a technique for developing a research sample where existing study subjects recruit future subject from among their acquaintances and the sample group appears will grow like a rolling snowball. This study adopted this technique due to its practicality and also better way to filter samples that already experience browsing airline service website. Participations were on voluntary basis; students and working adults were ensured of their anonymous contributions.

A sum of 208 usable questionnaires was collected. The questionnaires were first check for any missing items (data) and to ensure that all respondents have experienced browsing the airline service websites. Of the 208 respondents, 51.4 percent were females and 48.6 percent were males; 52.3 percent were single and 47.7 percent were marries. As for the age group, 28.4 percent of the respondents were in the range of 24-29; 22.6 percent, 23 and below; 21.2 percent, 30 -35;

relationship between the other independent constructs (usability, website design, information quality and perceived risk) and dependent construct (online purchase intention). This assumption is made on the basis that trust and empathy which is affective components of attitudes might mediate the cognitive or perception of consumers towards its website quality factors which would later influence the consumers' online purchase intention.

In the study, there is a significant and positive relationship between empathy and online purchase intention. This finding contradicts the findings of Loonam & O'Loughlin (2008) [25], where it is found that empathy is a *redundant factor* in customers' perception of overall website quality. This may be due to different contexts of study, whereby the study by Loonam & O'Loughlin [25] explores consumers' e-banking interaction and experiences looking from the process and outcome perspectives. In the current study, empathy is looked upon as a standalone construct to service quality.

The opposite result may also be due to the different industry involved (e-banking vs. airline). Empathy refers to the extent to which a website provides caring, individualized information and intention to customers and is of great importance to hospitality services such as the airline industry. Moreover, each service provider has a different nature of communication that exists between them and their customer.

IV. CONCLUSION

E-commerce forces changes in the shopping habit of customers. Customers no longer rely solely on physical cues for their purchase decision. Online environment cues such as website quality, trust and empathy are found to be the critical cues that affect customer purchase intention. This study reveals that usability, website design, information quality, trust and empathy are positively related to online purchase intention. The findings reinforce the need to develop website quality, trust and empathy to increase online purchase intention. In order to strengthen competitiveness, service providers should pay more attention to website quality in the form of improving the website usability, design and information quality. This is because these factors might influence online purchase intention. On top of that, they also need to increase consumers' trust towards their services.

Another crucial factor that service providers need to focus on is customer relationship because this will increase the sense of empathy to the customers. Service providers need to search for ways to enhance their customer relationship management (CRM) that earns customer trust and perceived empathy. Providing products and services that are competent, excellent and reliable may increase customer trust. Therefore, service providers need to restructure their e-CRM strategy to create and maintain a two-way relationship to improve customer online purchase intention. Since empathy plays a major role in influencing the customer's online purchase intention, it is suggested that airline service providers incorporate interactive website activities within the contact of Business to Consumers interface.

Like any other study, this study is not without its limitations. Care should be taken when generalizing the results of this study. The study only provides some initial findings in investigating the factors that contribute directly to the online purchase intention with regard to low-cost carrier service industry. As mentioned earlier in the literature review, website quality is a multi-faceted concept. However, this study only explores six factors, namely usability, website design, information quality, trust, perceived risk and empathy. Other components of website quality may yield different results. Thus, future studies should explore other dimensions that are not covered in this study.

While this study focused on users' perception of websites based on browsing experience, as the browsing took place prior to the data collection, the effect of timing on the changes in their perception of the importance of various website quality factors was not discovered. There might be other factors such as internet experience and knowledge, incentive, programmed awareness and brand image that influence customer perception of website quality. However, these factors are outwith the scope of this study. Therefore, we suggest future research to explore their impact on online purchase intention. The results of this study suggest that there is a possibility that both trust and empathy play a mediating role in the relationship between the four constructs (usability, website design, information quality and perceived risk) and online purchase intention. Therefore, future research should examine the mediating effect of affective features (trust and empathy) on purchase intention.

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