



Empirical Research Article

Service Quality and Information Value of Online Travel Chat - A Case from KTO's 1330 Chat

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Abstract

Tourism businesses use chat services to provide immediate customer support and to help users navigate within a website, but there are more outcomes of this interaction that should be examined. The current study aimed to discover if the online travel chat service quality and information value of the online travel chat service lead to user satisfaction with the service and visit intention to a recommended destination by Korea Tourism Organization's 1330 Live Chat. The results indicate that information value (functional and innovation) and online travel chat service quality (reliability, assurance, and security) lead to satisfaction with the live chat service and visit intention to a recommended destination. The results can benefit practitioners who want to expand and improve their customer service interaction and recommendations, and to scholars who study the relationship between customer services in tourism recommendation and sales context.

Key words

Online travel chat service quality, online travel chat information value, travel recommendation, visit intention

1. Introduction

Chats are an inseparable form of communication in the present-day world, and clients use them for faster communication with businesses, to reduce the waiting time when customers try to get through to a customer service representative, to improve customer inquiry management, task completion speed, and flow (Schutt, 2021).

Research on chat services has been conducted several contexts from the early 2000s, and more recent studies were in the fields of e-commerce (Elmorshidy, 2013), Asian contact centres (Lockwood, 2017), online service (McLean & Osei-Frimpong, 2019), banking industry (Rajaobelina et al., 2019), and finally just recently in the online travel purchase context (McLean et al., 2020).

However, there is still not enough knowledge on the outcome of chat services use in tourism context. Until now research considered chat services as an aiding function of the website or as an intermediary (McLean et al., 2020), or it has been an outdated topic such as acceptance of the technology. Researching about the evaluation of the chat service as a separate service provided by a tourism organization, and the subsequent behavioral intentions evoked by the its use is still in a nascent stage. In addition, researching about the information value of chat service could expand the knowledge on the information value topic in travel and tourism information search context as this topic has been under examination in travel-related social media (Jung et al., 2018) but not chats. As So and Li (2020) addressed, there is a lack of research on instant messaging in tourism especially when it has the potential to improve communication between customers and organizations

The current research proposes an empirical model to test whether online travel chat service quality and online travel chat information value lead to satisfaction and visit intention to a recommended destination. To discover whether such relationship exists, the study uses the Korea Tourism Organization's 1330 Travel Help Line (hereinafter 1330 Online Live Travel Chat) as a medium between the users, who are prospective tourists to South Korea, and the online travel chat service operators who assist and recommend through the chat window. This attempt towards uncovering the role of the information value of the online travel chat service is expected to contribute to the information value literature and to further explore the outcomes of the use of online travel chat service that can benefit practitioners such as OTAs and DMOs who want to expand their information base and communication channels with their clients.

1. 2. Literature review

1.1. 2.1. Implementing online live chat service

Chats are an easy-to-learn and free-of-charge method to communicate (Hvass & Myer, 2008) that supports a bi-directional interaction (Kang et al., 2015). In the context of the current study, we focus on the business-to-customer aspect of the chat service use.

Until now, the studied outcomes of the use of chat services are continuance intentions as a result of authentic and friendly communication with the chat operator (Turel et al., 2013), adoption of the service as an outcome of the technological functionality such as perceived usefulness and ease (Elmorshidy et al., 2015), and purchase intentions formed by increased responsiveness and relevance (Lv et al., 2018). Research would go as far as to study the comparison between human and virtual agents where employing artificial agents may induce feelings of deception when seeking assistance (Sangle-Ferriere & Voyer, 2019). In such cases, clients could assume that the organization is not making much effort into communicating with them and help them solve problems.

There is one study that examines the role of the chat in purchase intentions and the antecedents to it such as attitude and trust towards travel websites, and perceived usefulness of the live chat (McLean et al., 2020). However, this study does not focus on the chat service as a separate entity from the website. Although McLean et al. (2020) recognized the research gap in the use of chats in travel purchases, we attempt to expand and further and uncover new whether use of such service will lead to visit intention to a recommended destination, contributing to the knowledge on tourism customer services and tourism recommendation sources.

2.2 Online live travel chat service quality

The SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al., 1985) model was adapted to various tourism and hospitality-related contexts but not all not all dimensions of the SERVQUAL model could be equally applied across contexts, and there are cases where the model could be modified. As Yarimoglu (2015) stated, an industry-specific instrument to measure service quality is needed. The study focuses on the online travel chat service quality, and dimensions such as tangibles and empathy are not applicable because they are relevant in contexts where the customer receives services in the material world and in a situation that requires the customer to test the empathic behaviour of the service provider. Evidence for the previous statement is the results obtained by Li et al. (2009) who discovered that empathy and website design had no significant effect on e-service quality evaluation. On the other hand, McLean and Osei-Frimpong (2019)

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discovered that website aesthetics are positively related to the use of live chat; however, this is more related to the difficult navigation within the website and the use of chat to aid the use of it. Others advise that to enhance to user experience, a creative design should be used (Rajaobelina et al., 2022).

Early studies of the e-travel service quality discovered that security, information quality or accuracy, and responsiveness or timely responses (Ho & Lee, 2007) are important factors while recent studies on chats report that security and privacy features do not impact neither positive, nor negative emotions in users as these elements are considered default (Rajaobelina et al., 2022). One should not assume that sensitive information is not handed over during the exploratory stage of the travel journey, and that the information in the chat window should be protected.

Chats enable greater interactivity between the buyer and the seller (Kang et al., 2015) because it saves time, and as Marino and Presti (2018) claim, the immediacy of messaging applications, and their interactivity are usable methods to manage relations with customers. In such cases when users of the online live travel chat service inquire about their journey, it could allow operators to prepare a recommendation and inform the user thoroughly. This presents an opportunity for the managing organization to strengthen its credibility and customer relations.

2.3 Information value of the online live travel chat service

Nowadays there are variety of information sources in tourism, and as Chung and Buhalis (2008) stated, since the sources of information have increased, it is hard to find which ones are reliable and accurate. The credibility of the information source and the value it holds are two critical points that tourism marketers have to understand. They have to understand why information search is performed and how responding to customers' inquiries could help the decision-making process and at the same time, reduce the possibility of using information intermediaries. Song and Christen (2019) suggested that chat operators could go beyond what is asked of them and relay additional information. This will be helpful to the customer when the operator clearly understands what is requested of him or her.

Research on information needs in tourism put them into categories, some of which are the functional and innovation needs (Vogt & Fesenmaier, 1998). Subsequent research discovered that functional needs (efficiency, reducing uncertainty, and increasing knowledge) are the most important (Choe et al., 2017). Since online travel chats are sources of information that can assist and recommend in real-time, it must be discovered what is their information value. Kahn (2002) described several dimensions of information quality that are relevant to the information value of online live travel chat services such as the right amount of information, information completeness, relevancy, and display of credibility of the organization. And one of the most important qualities of information is the added value of the gained advantages (Kahn, 2002).

Travelers can use different information sources during the trip stages, and these sources may require users to make a different degree of effort when searching for destinations (Carneiro & Crompton, 2009) and when there is more information available to a tourist about a destination, the need to search for external sources will be reduced due to the increased expertise and familiarity (Gursoy & McLeary, 2004). For example, the research of Hwang et al. (2013) presents an example of how information needs lead to asking about information in a forum about accommodations and attractions.

3. Hypothesis Development

3.1. Online travel chat service quality and satisfaction with the online live travel chat service

According to Kourouthanassis (2017), formal information sources are preferred when the validity and accuracy of the information on the Internet could not be proven. When the online live travel chat operator displays deep knowledge about a destination, activities, accommodations, and others, credibility and validity of the information could be assured. Lee and Lin (2005) discovered that reliability and trust have a positive effect on overall service quality and subsequently, on customer satisfaction. Security is related to the feeling of trust. When the service provider could be trusted with sensitive information, the customer will be satisfied with the service. Interestingly, Li et al. (2009) discovered that reliability had a significant effect on e-service quality evaluation of online travel services while privacy did not. Later, Ayo et al. (2016) documented that a e-service quality (reliability, privacy, and competence) is a predictor

of satisfaction and that it could be related to the assurance of the employees' knowledge, confidence, and trust. Carlson and O'Cass (2010) also documented that web content-driven service quality influences customer satisfaction. Safety and security are one of the factors that have a significant influence on the overall satisfaction of online customers and also on repurchase intention in the context of OTAs. Intangible e-service quality had a significant relationship with customer satisfaction (Moon, 2013) where reliability and security were dimensions of intangible e-service quality. Also, Li (2020) discovered that there is a positive relationship between reliability and assurance with customer satisfaction in luxury hotels in Malaysia. As documented by Oghuma et al. (2016), the perceived service quality of mobile instant messaging exerts a significant effect on satisfaction.

H1: There is a significant relationship between online travel chat service quality and satisfaction with the between online travel chat service

3.2. Information value of online travel chat service quality and satisfaction with the online live travel chat service

Maqableh et al. (2021) described information value as the advantage one obtains from expert sources of information such as Facebook or friends. The functional value of the information source that can fulfil knowledge needs and reduce uncertainty when tourists have to decide whether to visit a destination or not, or improve their knowledge about it. Kah et al. (2010) discovered that functional value and innovation value of the Internet induce travel motivation, especially the experiential information value that includes innovation value. Hwang et al. (2013) later discovered the dominance of functional information needs in travel forums and more specifically, how more posts about different aspects of a destination are posted in less than seven days before departure, meaning that the closer the travel is, the more knowledge will be sought.

Subsequent studies that focus on information value in travel-related social media documented that information value positively influenced the affect of travel social media (Jung et al., 2018). More importantly, what Jung et al. (2018) presented is that innovation value and functional value are reliable factors of the information value construct, and in studies where the focus is on the informativeness of the source, positive relation with the utilitarian aspect is shown. Also, from Jung et al. (2018) study, it appears that the information value affects the near-term consequences that are related to having timely information about a destination. Thus, once the information source (online live travel chat) is recognized for its information value, its capabilities could be highly evaluated. On the other hand, Yen (2013) discovered that there is no significant relationship between information value and satisfaction.

As Cho and Jang (2008) stated, information value should not be regarded as a single-dimension construct but as a second-order construct that consists of several underlying dimensions. Following their suggestion, replicating the model may validate it, so in this study, we try to verify if in the context of online travel chat services, we can study the information value construct as a second-order construct.

H2: There is a significant relationship between online live travel chat service information value and satisfaction with the online live travel chat service.

3.3. Satisfaction with the online travel chat service and visit intention to a recommended destination

Countless are the studies that examine if satisfaction with service in travel and tourism leads to loyalty, re-purchase intention, visit, and re-visit intention. For example, Oh and Kim (2017) documented that some of the dependent variables in 480 research articles in Hospitality and Tourism journals are satisfaction and behavioural intentions. However, whether satisfaction with the online live travel chat service leads to visit intention to a recommended destination is yet to be explored.

Regarding satisfaction, Neal and Gursoy (2008) stated that overall satisfaction or dissatisfaction with a trip will be affected if the traveler is dis/satisfied with an organization during different trip stages. Oghuma et al. (2016) discovered that perceived service quality of the instant messaging leads to satisfaction, and continuance intention is an outcome of it. Thus, there is evidence for supporting that satisfaction with the service will lead to behavioral intentions.

As Perugini and Bagozzi (2004) describe, what differentiates desires from intentions is the temporal framing. Since intentions are more closely located in time, it is logical to try and collect as much information about a destination as possible to reinforce the travel plan. An example is the above-mentioned study of Hwang et al. (2013).

In tourism, behavioural intentions could be evoked by different sources such as DMO Websites (Chung et al., 2015b,) and even augmented reality (Chung et al., 2015a). One study by Carlson and O’Cass (2010) documented that customer satisfaction influences behavioural intentions in the context of web-driven content, and Assaker and Hallak (2013) discovered that tourists ascribe a different level of importance to aspects

of their travel and according to their novelty-seeking tendency, the intent to revisit a destination is different.

H3: There is a significant relationship between satisfaction and visit intention to a destination recommended by online travel chat operator

The research model is presented below in Fig. 1 with the hypothesized relationships.

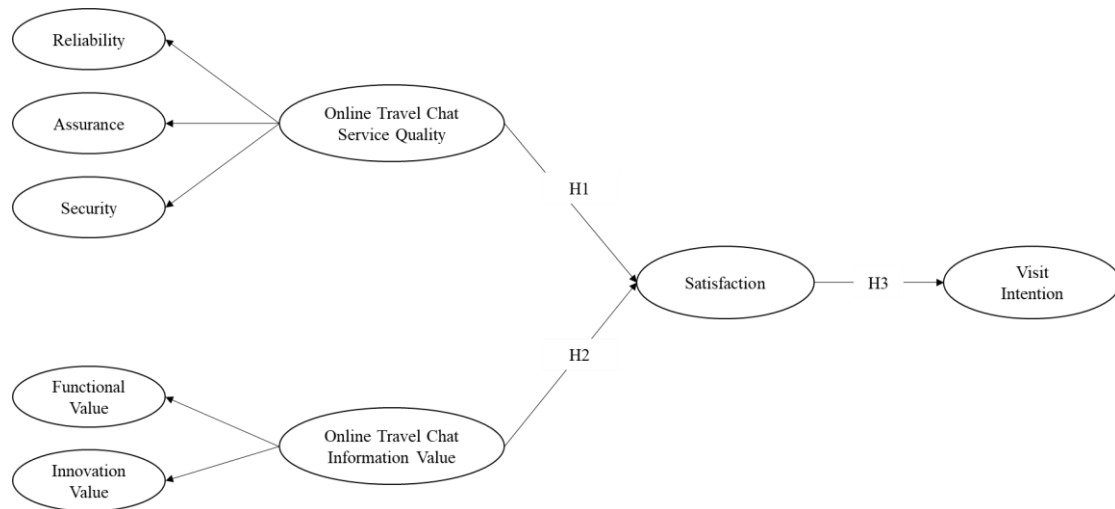


Fig. 1 Research model.

4. Research Methodology

4.1. Questionnaire development

We developed a questionnaire based on the previous literature and adapted to fit the context of the study. The questionnaire consisted demographic, travel patterns, as KTO’s 1330 live travel chat use-related questions. The questions were evaluated on a seven-point Likert scale from 1-strongly disagree to 7-strongly agree, written in Korean and English, and verified by a Korean speaker and the KTO before the questionnaire was published online via Qualtrics.com. The research model is a reflective first-order, reflective-second order research model (Schuberth et al., 2020) with both Online Travel Chat Service Quality (OTCSQ) and Online Travel Chat Information Value (OTCIV) being operationalized as second-order reflective constructs with reliability, assurance, and security as dimensions of OTCSQ variable, and functional and innovation value for the OTCIV variable. IBM SPSS 25 was used for the descriptive statistics and SmartPLS 3 was used for the model testing.

4.2. Research context

This study is based in South Korea and the Korea Tourism Organization’s 1330 Travel Helpline helped us to study the service quality of the online travel chat service and the information value of it. The 1330 Travel Helpline was chosen because this platform not only has a telephone helpline operated by KTO information service agent who can interpret, but also because it has a chat service in real time which is available through the KTO website, KakaoTalk, other SNS platforms, and the KTO’s mobile application. The chat service is accessible 24/7 in various languages (Lee, 2022) and it allows users to inquire about travelling to Korea, including recommendations, advice, and others. Especially when there could be a fear of language barrier, the chat is a tool that enables faster communication, synthesized in several messages that contain all the information the user needs. In addition, this service reduces the use of intermediaries for travel-related information as it is a service developed by the KTO. As Marino and Presti (2019) said, such instant messaging applications are rapid, and they are an incentive to organizations that use them.

4.3. Data collection

The data was collected through an online survey between Nov. 15 and Nov. 26 2021, with the assistance of KTO in Qualtrics.com. When a Korean or an international user of KTO’s 1330 online travel live chat ended the chat conversation, they received a survey link to the survey. Upon successful completion of the survey, the respondents received a Starbucks coupon as an incentive. If the survey was not finished until the end, a reminder e-mail was sent. The total collected surveys were 45 (English) and 136 (Korean) (181 in total), however, the responses had to be cleansed for incomplete and duplicate responses (Hair et al., 2017), and the remaining 115 responses were used for hypothesis testing.

5. Data analysis

5.1. Profile of the respondents

The majority of respondents were Korean (n=92), females were the most (n=89), by age, most respondents were in their 30s, most of the respondents were married (n=52), and by education, most were university graduates (n=76). 32 respondents answered that they had an office job, and by average monthly pay those making between \$2000 and \$2999 were 35, and by residence, 102 indicated that they were living in South Korea by the time they answered the survey. Table 1 below presents a detailed description of the respondents and Table 2 presents general travel information about the respondents.

We asked the respondents about their previous use of the online live travel chat and 71 stated that they have never used the chat service before the time they used in when they filled the survey. As the survey was conducted in one of the most difficult times about South Korea’s travel industry during the pandemic, we asked the respondents to rate their desire to travel internationally after COVID-19 pandemic is over from 10 to 100.

Table 1 Respondents' profile (n=115)

Characteristics		Frequency (n=115)	Percent
Gender	Male	26	22.6
	Female	89	77.4
Age mean (28.8).	20s	19	16.5
	30s	45	39.1
	40s	30	26.1
	50s and above	21	18.3
Marital status	Single	51	44.2
	Married	62	53.9
	Other	2	1.7
Educational level	High school diploma	11	9.6
	Enrolled in university	5	4.3
	University graduate	76	66.1
	Enrolled in graduate school	18	15.7
	Graduate school graduate	3	2.6
	Above graduate school	2	1.7
Occupation	Managerial position	12	10.4
	Office	32	27.8
	Professional	13	11.3
	Service/sales	4	3.5
	Student	8	7.0
	Public officer	9	7.8
	Self-employed	5	4.3
	Other	32	27.8
Average monthly income	Less or equal to \$999	18	15.7
	\$1000-\$1999	12	10.4
	\$2000-\$2999	35	30.4
	\$3000-\$3999	21	18.3
	\$4000-\$4999	11	9.6
	Above \$5000	18	15.7
Do you live in South Korea currently?	Yes	102	88.7
	No	13	11.3

Table 2 General travel information about the respondents

Characteristics		Frequency (n=115)	Percent
Travelling internationally before COVID-19	1 time	53	46.1
	2-5 times	38	33.0
	6-10 times	6	5.2
	More than 10 times	2	1.7
	None	16	13.9
Travelling domestically before COVID-19	1 time	13	11.3
	2-5 times	54	47.0
	6-10 times	24	20.9
	More than 10 times	3	2.6
	None	21	18.3
Travelling internationally during COVID-19	1 time	26	22.6
	2-5 times	13	11.3
	6-10 times	3	2.6
	More than 10 times	1	0.9
	None	72	32.6
Travelling domestically during COVID-19	1 time	16	13.9
	2-5 times	53	46.1
	6-10 times	25	21.7
	More than 10 times	2	1.7
	None	19	16.5
Have you ever used the 1330 Live chat before?	Yes	44	38.8
	No	71	61.7
Stage of travel chat use (If "Yes" is selected)	None	71	61.7
	Pre-trip	26	22.6
	Pre-trip, others	2	1.7
	Pre-trip, on-trip	4	3.5
	Pre-trip, on-trip, post-trip	2	1.7
	On-trip	9	7.8
	Post-trip	1	0.9
Use of 1330 Live chat now	Pre-trip	72	62.6
	Pre-trip, others	1	0.9
	Pre-trip, on-trip	4	3.5
	Pre-trip, on-trip, post-trip	2	1.7
	Others	18	15.7
	On-trip	15	13
Desire to travelling domestically after COVID-19			
	Mean = 79.48		
Desire to travel internationally after COVID-19			
	Mean = 72.09		

5.2. Measurement Model Testing

We used a two-step approach for the two second-order reflective constructs, and measured the model in SmartPLS 3 for the constructs' reliability and validity. First, the Cronbach's alpha of each variable was between 0.866 ~ 0.945 and the composite reliability (CR) was between 0.843 ~ 0.965 which is above the threshold of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2017) which could be deemed satisfactory with ranges between 0.7 ~ 0.9 (Hair et al., 2017). For discriminant validity, the square root of AVE that was greater

than its highest correlated to another construct (Farell, 2010; Hair et al., 2019) with values between 0.739 ~ 0.945. One item of the construct Visit intention to a recommended destination (VI3) was dropped due to low loadings (0,374). Variance inflation factor (VIF) values were below the critical values (maximum 3,221 in the current study). Table 3 presents the results from the CFA. Table 4 and 5 display the results from the discriminant validity evaluation.

Table 3 Results from the CFA

Variable	Item	Loading	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
OTCAS	OTCAS1	0.926	0.926	0.953	0.871
	OTCAS2	0.946			
	OTCAS3	0.928			
OTCFV	OTCFV1	0.889	0.934	0.953	0.835
	OTCFV2	0.922			
	OTCFV3	0.930			
	OTCFV4	0.914			
OTCIV	OTCINV1	0.937	0.939	0.961	0.891
	OTCINV2	0.957			
	OTCINV3	0.937			
OTCREL	OTCREL1	0.929	0.920	0.949	0.862
	OTCREL2	0.911			
	OTCREL3	0.946			
OTCSAT	OTCSAT1	0.959	0.945	0.965	0.902
	OTCSAT2	0.950			
	OTCSAT3	0.940			
OTCSEC	OTCSEC1	0.807	0.808	0.884	0.717
	OTCSEC2	0.867			
	OTCSEC3	0.865			
VI	VI1	0.968	0.739	0.843	0.670
	VI2	0.965			
	VI3*	*			

Note: * items are omitted due to low loadings (below 0,7)

Table 4 Results from DV (Fornell-Larcker criterion)

	OTCAS	OTCFV	OTCINV	OTCREL	OTCSAT	OTCSEC	VI
OTCAS	0.933						
OTCFV	0.769	0.914					
OTCINV	0.644	0.763	0.944				
OTCREL	0.802	0.790	0.690	0.929			
OTCSAT	0.713	0.753	0.765	0.750	0.950		
OTCSEC	0.722	0.752	0.641	0.752	0.682	0.847	
VI	0.572	0.700	0.766	0.637	0.746	0.679	0.818

Note: values in bold are the square root of AVE

Table 5 Results from the Heterotrait-monotrait ratio

	OTCAS	OTCFV	OTCINV	OTCREL	OTCSAT	OTCSEC	VI
OTCAS							
OTCFV	0.821						
OTCINV	0.686	0.814					
OTCREL	0.866	0.850	0.738				
OTCSAT	0.759	0.797	0.810	0.800			
OTCSEC	0.822	0.843	0.721	0.851	0.754		
VI	0.594	0.787	0.865	0.696	0.783	0.820	

5.3. Structural model test

The structural model was tested with a bootstrapping sample of 500 in SMART PLS 3. There are two second-order reflective constructs - the online travel chat service quality and the online travel chat information value. The results indicate that H1 is supported ($\beta = 0.353, t = 2.611, p < .05$), H2 is also supported ($\beta = 0.516, t = 3.605, p < .001$), and finally, the third

hypothesis is also supported ($\beta = 0.757, t = 11.261, p < .001$). We wanted to see if there is a difference in the perceptions of the users depending on their gender, so we included gender as a control variable. However, the results showed no difference depending on gender ($\beta = 0.080, t = 1.683, p > .05$). Table 6 and Fig. 2 present the results from the structural model test.

Table 6 Results from SEM analysis

Hypothesis	β	t	P	Supported
OTCSQ → OTCSAT	0.353	2.611	< .05	Yes
OTCIV → OTCSAT	0.516	3.605	< .001	Yes
OTCSAT → VI	0.757	11.261	< .001	Yes
GEN → OTCSAT	0.80	1.683	> 0.5	No

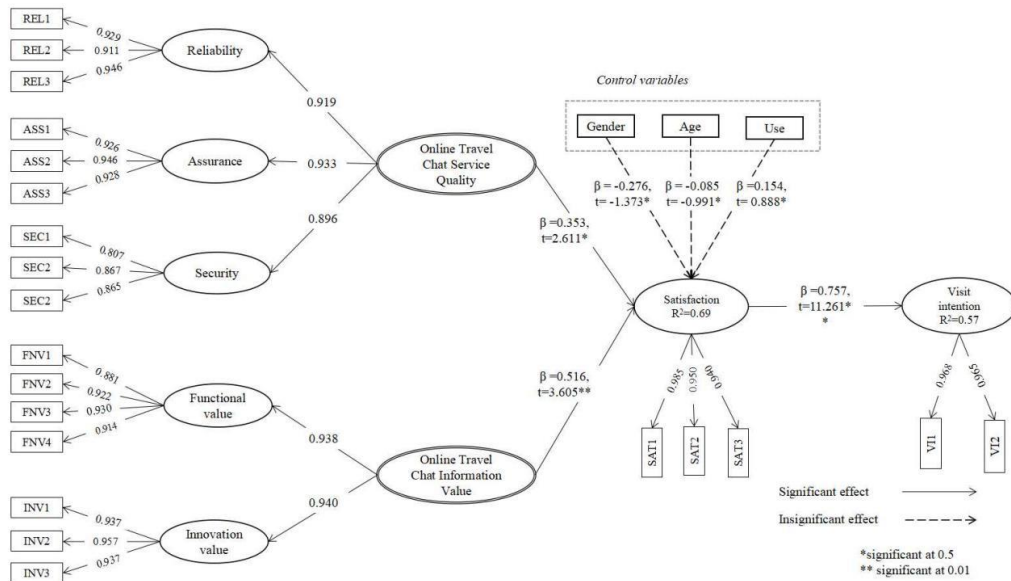


Fig 2. Results from the structural model test

6. Discussion

The current study attempted to raise interest in the research about online travel chat services and to contribute to the body of knowledge both in the chat service literature and tourism literature. More specifically, we attempted to expand the knowledge on the different outcomes of the use of the chat services applied in tourism context and how satisfaction with the service and its information value led to specific behavioral intentions such as visit intentions to a recommended destination. Unlike previous studies that focus on the chat as an aiding function of a website that helps users to navigate in it (McLean and Osei-Frimpong, 2019), we studied the KTO 1330 Online live travel chat service as a separate service from the website of the organization, and when the service is used for travel recommendation, there is a significant relationship between the service quality and the information value with satisfaction with the service and then with visit intention. This contributes not only to the chat services literature but also to the use of these services in tourism context. More specifically, how the use of such services and satisfaction with their use result in behavioral intentions. In addition, the study expands the information value literature as we discovered that innovation and functional values, as dimensions of the information value construct, lead to satisfaction with the service.

6.1. Theoretical implications

To the chat service quality literature, one contribution is that we examined the reliability, assurance, and security of the service. As mentioned before, not many studies are conducted in the field of chat services in tourism. One existing study documented a significant relationship between the usefulness of the live chat communication with positive attitudes and trust towards a website (McLean et al., 2020) but we took upon the task to research how the chat service quality is evaluated separately from the KTO website or as part of the KTO application. This is new because the chat function as a gadget of the website that helps users find what they are looking for has already been documented but we also discovered that reliability, assurance and

security are sub-dimensions of the OTCSQ and that it had a significant relationship with satisfaction with the service. The results coincide with those of Niu and Lee (2018) who discovered that there is a positive influence of safety on satisfaction, but also different from other research that discovered privacy is not a strong predictor of satisfaction (Mohammed et al., 2016).

Second, another contribution is to the information value literature. Adapting from Jung et al. (2018), the current study discovered that functional and innovation value of the online travel chat service lead to satisfaction with it, and this is new because other research discovered that information values such as hedonic and aesthetic values of travel magazines fulfil hedonic and aesthetic needs helping the decision-making process (Lee & Andereck, 2011), but in that context, the reader is presented with immediate visual stimuli, while in the travel chat there are no pictures or videos.

6.2. Practical implications

There are also practical contributions. First, we addressed the information value of the service and this can serve as a basis for online travel chat services operators to prepare databases with recommendations for accommodations, restaurants, hot places, and others. When users of the chat service ask about travel-related topics, such databases could help the operator to provide more information apart from what is being asked (Song & Christen, 2019). As addressed by Hvass and Myer (2008), it is important to manage service quality and staffing. Improving organization’s internal service process and educating travel chat operators to deliver reliable and timely information would make them a valuable and an irreplaceable asset even if the face of the ever-growing presence of AI and chatbots. Recently, users of chatbot technology prefer it for its expected performance, hedonism, and interest in the use of self-service technologies (Melián-González et al., 2019), but it would be interesting to discover how online live travel chat service can position itself as a reliable information source. Studies also found that human employees are more preferred for complicated tasks compared to AI because of their problem-solving skills (Xu et al., 2020). Selecting the

most gifted and capable employees would be a beneficial but education is also necessary since efficiency and sufficiency problems may arise when chat operators are overwhelmed when they have to manage more chats at the same time (Lockwood, 2017). That is, the less efficient the chat operator is in the conversation, the less sufficient the answer to the inquiry would be.

The KTO 1330 Online Live Travel chat service is equipped with large information base that helped users reduce their uncertainty about future travel since our results showed that functional value, is also related to satisfaction with the service. As Kah et al. (2010) suggested, functional information value should be the focus of tourism marketers and different information sources in the tourism industry can enrich the knowledge about a destination, and help tourists facilitate travel planning. For OTAs and DMOs that implemented an online live travel chat such constant connection with the tourists will facilitate the organization's credibility. Managers of OTAs and DMOs that have employed online travel chat services could particularly pay attention to the time when users make an inquiry, for example, before traveling or during their journey. In our findings, 72 respondents stated that they were using the chat service in the pre-trip stage and 15 in the on-trip stage. In stat case, online travel chat service operators and managers could expand their recommendation information base to fit the travel plans of the users.

6.3. Limitations

The study limitations are as follows. The first limitation is concerned with the dimensions of the second-order construct. As the original SERVQUAL model includes two dimensions that were not included in this study. Empathy and tangibles were not examined. Tangibles such as design are important when it is not easy to navigate in a website (McLean & Osei-Frimpong, 2019) while empathy and design do not affect service quality evaluation (Li et al., 2009). Others discovered that empathy led to continuance use intention (Turel et al., 2013); however, the focus of this study is whether the use of the chat service will lead to visiting intention and not continued use of the chat service. In addition, social, hedonic, and aesthetic values were not examined because social value is concerned with communication with other people when relaying information, hedonic value is more related to the hedonistic feeling when using the chat service, and aesthetic value is more related to the imagination evoked by visual content (Lee & Andereck, 2011), that is not present in the chat window in form of pictures. Another limitation is the small sample (n=115). A bigger sample with more international respondents may diversify the sample and present another point of view in evaluating the online travel chat service.

6.4. Future research

Following the limitations of the research, some of the directions for future studies are as follows. First, researchers could try expand the research model with other variables, such as examining the social distance between the user and the chat operator because of the lack of social cues. Such studies could uncover new capabilities of the chat window and how it shortens the distance as well as what linguistic capabilities could be used to make the user feel like they are in a real life-like conversation. Also, since hedonic and aesthetic values were not included in the online travel information value model, future research may focus on how the chat window could stimulate the imagination of the user and influence their decision-making process. From our results it is evident that the KTO 1330 Live Chat is used in several trip stages, so researchers may study also the information quality in different trip stages.




Another proposition is to study how users of online travel chats understand and prefer either the human operator or a chatbot. Chatbot research is increasing in tourism and hospitality literature, so a study that compares human online live travel chat operators and chatbots could provide not only theoretical insights but also could point out the strong and weak points to managers who use these services. If interacting with human operators increases purchases (Kang et al., 2015), how do users react to recommendations from chatbots, and which one induces stronger visit intention could contribute to the chat service literature and the chatbot service literature in tourism and hospitality.

7. Conclusion

Although chat services-related literature provided insights on the technological introduction, acceptance, and development of the

technology across various fields, still the research about these services in tourism and hospitality-related literature is not well developed. The study examined how the online travel chat service quality and online travel chat information value induce satisfaction with the service and visit intention to a destination recommended by a travel chat operator, and we found significant relationships. This is important discovery as we focused on studying the online travel chat service itself rather as a function of a website that is used when navigation with the website is difficult, and its contribution towards the overall attitude towards the website. The study used the KTO's 1330 chat service that is an outstanding example of how travel and tourism organizations could use their database and multilingual operators to provide 24/7 communication with users from all over the world. Their model could serve as an example for other OTAs and DMOs that want develop online live travel chat service.

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Conflict of Interest statement

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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