Customer Booking Habits and Attitudes Towards AI-Powered Features in Online Travel Agencies

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ABSTRACT

The use of modern technologies, especially AI enabled features, has led to significant changes in the hospitality and tourism industry, both for travellers and service providers. Thanks to the rapid development of various AI features, the Internet of Things and other technologies, travellers can enjoy personalised and tailored booking and travel experiences. Online travel agencies (OTAs) are websites or mobile applications where users can book a variety of travel-related services such as accommodation, cruises, airline tickets, car hire and many other travel items. The focus of this study is on the impact of the introduction of AI technology in OTAs (online travel agencies) on travellers. It represents the realisation of the fourth phase of the research, which focuses on the analysis of travellers' habits and key demographic characteristics, as well as significant differences between genders and the travelling' frequency of the respondents. For this purpose, an originally developed questionnaire with specific demographic questions, OTA booking habits and 12 questions on different AI features in OTAs was used. One-way ANOVA (for frequency of travel) and a two-sample t-test (for gender) were used for this study. The results obtained showed significant differences in responses for some questions, both for gender and travel frequency, and are presented in detail in the Results and Discussion section.

Key words: AI features, booking habits, OTA, tourism and hospitality industry

1. INTRODUCTION

The process of integrating digital technologies into a company's processes, interaction with customers and data analysis enables companies to increase their productivity, gain a competitive advantage in an increasingly digital environment and streamline their operations [1]. Artificial intelligence (AI) is the latest popular technology that is taking technology to a higher level [2]. The integration of modern technologies, especially artificial intelligence, has revolutionised the hospitality and tourism industry and significantly changed the dynamics between service providers and travellers [3]. In this area, mobile and smart technologies have played a key role, revolutionising the way hotels operate and interact with guests. These innovations have opened a chapter where convenience, personalisation and an enhanced guest experience are paramount. The ability for guests to control their own journey, from booking to accessing customised services, has become at the heart of modern hospitality. The emergence of digital tourism, characterised by the application of technology to enhance the travel experience at all stages of the journey, has become a defining feature of today's tourism sector [4]. As the industry adapts to rapid advances in AI capabilities, it is becoming increasingly clear that these technologies are enabling personalised and tailored travel experiences, enhancing customer satisfaction and operational efficiency. Online travel agencies (OTAs) are playing a key role in this transformation [5], [6] by using artificial intelligence to streamline the booking process and provide tailored recommendations based on users' preferences and behaviour. In addition to artificial intelligence, with the proliferation of smartphones, hotels have also taken advantage of mobile applications to simplify communication, optimise operations and offer tailored services that match guests' individual preferences [7].

This study focuses on the impact of AI technologies in OTAs to investigate how these innovations influence travellers' experiences and decision-making processes. Using an initially developed questionnaire that captures demographic variables, OTA booking habits and specific AI features, this study seeks to identify significant differences in responses based on gender and frequency of travel. Using statistical methods such as one-way ANOVA and two-sample t-tests, the study aims to shed light on how different demographic factors influence the perception of the integration of artificial intelligence in travel services. In short, the main objectives of the paper are as follows:

1) To analyse key demographics and habits in relation to OTAs and travel,

2) Analyse responses to identify significant differences in terms of gender,

3) Analyse responses to identify significant differences in the frequency with which respondents travel.

Descriptive statistics were used for the first objective, while a one-way ANOVA (with post hoc t-test) and a two-sample t-test were used for the second and third objectives. Two hypotheses, H1 and H2, were formulated for the second and third objectives:

$H1_0$: There are no significant differences between the responses in terms of gender (males and females).
$H1_1$: There are significant differences between the responses in terms of gender (males and females).

$H2_0$: There are no significant differences between the responses regarding the frequency of travelling (once, twice or 3-6 times a year).
$H2_1$: There are significant differences between the responses regarding the frequency of travelling (once, twice or 3-6 times a year).

The results of this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of the impact of artificial intelligence in the hospitality industry, particularly in relation to customer loyalty and satisfaction. By exploring the intersection of technology and consumer behaviour, this study will provide valuable insights for industry players looking to optimise their service offering and improve the overall travel experience.

2. RELATED WORK

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into online travel agencies (OTAs) has significantly transformed the hospitality and tourism industry by improving the booking experience for travellers and optimising service delivery for suppliers. Recent studies highlight the central role of AI features such as chatbots and personalised recommendations in influencing consumer behaviour and preferences when booking travel. They show, for example, that AI chatbots in OTAs can respond effectively to customer requests and thus improve user satisfaction and engagement [8]. This is in line with the findings of OTAs, which emphasise that service innovation driven by new information and communication technologies is essential for OTAs to maintain competitive advantages in a rapidly evolving market [9].

According to the results of a credible study on the use of OTAs, customers' plans to use OTAs are usually influenced by things such as pricing options, ease of use, reliability in service delivery, maintaining a high level of service and the potential to benefit from promotional offers [5], [10], [11].

By integrating chatbots into their web platforms, hotels can provide answers to frequently asked questions, deliver personalised marketing messages and support customers during the booking process. The benefits of chatbot integration lie not only in increasing direct bookings, but also in enabling hotels to sell additional services such as wellness or dinner appointments, improve the guest experience and generate more revenue. [12].

Various AI applications are becoming more present in tourism and hospitality sector: chatbots [13], [14], image recognition [15], 24/7 customer service [16], robots [17], voice-based services [18], blockchain [19] and various possibility of personalisation and smart suggestion [20], [21].

Furthermore, the influence of AI on consumer decision-making is highlighted in a study that examines the complexity of consumer confusion related to OTAs and suggests that effective service recovery strategies and clear communication are crucial for strengthening customer loyalty [22].

3. METHODOLOGY

This paper presents the fourth phase (Table 1) of the research, which began with the creation of the originally developed Kano questionnaire to determine user acceptance of AI features in OTAs. Methodology and results can be found in more detail in [23] and [24].

Table 1: Methodology by research phases

Phases	Results
Phase 1 – **completed**, published [23]	Experts' analysis, identification of AI features to be included in the originally developed Kano questionnaire and verification of the validity and reliability of the questionnaire
Phase 2 – **completed**, accepted for publication in [24]	Survey deployment and data collection
Phase 3 – **completed**, accepted for publication in [24]	Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the responses to the Kano questionnaire; identification of AI features related to satisfaction and dissatisfaction
Phase 4 – in this paper	Statistical analysis of demographic data and booking behaviour of respondents. Identification of significant differences between responses in terms of gender and frequency of booking/travelling

For this study, only positively formulated questions from Kano's existing questionnaire [23] were used (in the first three phases there were 12 pairs of positively/functional and negatively/dysfunctional formulated statements pointing to respondents' feelings when the feature is present and their feelings when the feature is absent), along with specific demographic questions and questions about respondents' booking and travelling habits. The main part of the

questionnaire (12 positive, so-called functional statements) was reported on a 5-point Kano scale, where:

1 - I dislike it,
2 - I can live with,
3 - I'm neutral,
4 - I expect it/It must be,
5 - I like it.

It differs from the 5-point Likert scale as it is usually used together with functional and dysfunctional questions. However, in this study, we considered each value with Kano semantics, where 1 means that the customer is not satisfied at all if the feature is present, 2 and 3 describe the fact that the feature does not bother if it is present, 4 expresses that the customer absolutely expects the feature to be present, while 5 means that the feature is attractive and triggers pleasure in the customer.

The collection of responses via the online questionnaire was conducted in Croatia from the end of 2023 to January 2024. Originally, 386 responses were collected, but for this study only 252 were relevant and were completed. The questions that were taken from the original questionnaire [23] are listed in the Table 2.

Table 2: Questions from the questionnaire that are relevant for this research phase

Questions Q1-Q7	Answer options
Q1. Gender	Male, Female, Other
Q2. Age group	18-30, 31-45, 46-65, and 66+
Q3. I leave everything to the traditional travel agency when it comes to organising the trip	**5-point Likert scale**: 1 - strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – neutral, 4 – agree, and 5 - strongly agree
Q4. When organising the trip, I do everything myself via online travel agencies (OTAs)	**5-point Likert scale**
Q5. When organising the trip, I use both traditional travel agencies and online travel agencies	**5-point Likert scale**
Q6. How many times a year do you usually organise a trip?	I do not travel at all, Once a year, Twice a year, 3-6 times a year, Every month, and More times in a month
Q7. Which OTAs have you already used?	Booking.com, Airbnb, Tripadvisor, Expedia, Lastminute, Agoda, Other (name)
Questions Kano K1-K12	
K1. OTA provides a personalized user interface based on previous searches and user preferences	Kano 1-5 scale
K2.OTA provides personalized travel suggestions based on previous searches and previous trips:	Kano 1-5 scale
K3.OTA enables forecasting of accommodation prices and other travel items (flights, additional facilities...)	Kano 1-5 scale
K4. OTA enables search based on speech via a voice assistant (instead of text, search and filters are determined by speech)	Kano 1-5 scale
K5. OTA provides chatbots for complete customer support and support for booking travel items 24/7	Kano 1-5 scale
K6. OTA gives to the user notifications about the best price, discounts and important dates (via the application, e-mail, sms, etc.) for accommodation, flights and other items	Kano 1-5 scale
K7. OTA enables image-based search	Kano 1-5 scale
K8. OTA enables the generation of a text description of the summary of the accommodation and accompanying attractions, helping users to better understand what to expect.	Kano 1-5 scale
K9. OTA allows the user to receive relevant reviews on items of interest to him in terms of accommodation and travel	Kano 1-5 scale
K10. OTA offers personalized loyalty and reward programs	Kano 1-5 scale
K11. OTA offers automated and personalized travel itinerary planning by suggesting combinations of flights, accommodation and activities.	Kano 1-5 scale
K12. OTA offers additional notifications about important news, restrictions and/or emerging risks related to the upcoming trip	Kano 1-5 scale

Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data for questions Q1-Q7, while a two-sample t-test (originally F-test to detect equal or unequal variances) and one-way ANOVA were used to detect significant differences in responses related to gender and frequency of bookings and travel (for K1-K12).

Some questions, such as age group, were not analysed due to the large percentage differences between groups (the majority were in the 18-30 group). Also, in the ANOVA analysis of booking and travelling frequency, only three response groups were considered (once a year, twice a year and 3-6 times a

year), while the others were discarded due to the low percentages. Two groups were considered for the two-sample t-test: males and females. The null hypothesis states that the variances of the groups are equal. If the p-value is < 0.05 (significance level), the null hypothesis is rejected, which means that the variance differs between the groups.

The results with discussion are presented in the next section Results and discussion.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Of the total of 252 completed responses, 124 were female, 128 were male and 0 were other. The results for the age group can be found in the Table 3.

Table 3: Age distribution of respondents (Q2)

Age group	Frequency
18-30	135
31-45	51
46-65	42
66+	24

For the Q3. *I leave everything to the traditional travel agency when it comes to organising the trip*, the results show that the majority of respondents do not or only rarely use the services of traditional travel agencies (see Table 4).

Table 4: Q3 answers frequencies with average

Likert scale	Frequency
1	**92**
2	**84**
3	34
4	26
5	16
Total	**252**
Average	**2.17**

Answers to question Q4. *When organising the trip, I do everything myself via online travel agencies (OTAs)* show that the majority of respondents organise their trips themselves via OTAs, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Q4 answers frequencies with average

Likert scale	Frequency
1	17
2	23
3	47
4	**99**
5	**66**
Total	**252**
Average	**3.69**

Question Q5. *When organising the trip, I use both traditional travel agencies and online travel agencies* indicated percentage of respondents who still use traditional and online travel agencies to organise their trips (see Table 6).

Table 6: Q5 answers frequencies with average

Likert scale	Frequency
1	60
2	91
3	45
4	33
5	23
Total	**252**
Average	**2.48**

The frequency of bookings and traveling (Q6. *How many times a year do you usually organise a trip?*) is shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Frequency of bookings and traveling (Q6)

Booking habit	Frequency
I do not travel at all	23
Once a year	82
Twice a year	78
3-6 times a year	52
Every month	12
More times in a month	5
Total	**252**

The popularity of various OTAs (Q7., *respondents from Croatia at the beginning of 2024.*) is shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Popularity of OTAs (January 2024)

OTA	Frequency
Booking.com	207
Tripadvisor	69
Airbnb	110
Lastminute	11
Expedia	7
Agoda	1

The number of OTAs used by each respondent was calculated and is shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Number of OTAs used by the respondents

Number of uses of OTAs	Frequencies
0	23
1	103
2	73
3	45
4	8
Total	252

Looking at gender and the average use of OTAs, females use more different OTAs than males (females 1.79, males 1.50).

For questions K1-K12, the significant differences in terms of gender (Q1) and booking/travel frequency (Q6) were analysed using a two-sample t-test (for gender) and a one-way ANOVA (for travel frequency). The F-test was used to determine the equality or inequality of the variances (if p<0.05 the variance is unequal, otherwise it is equal) in order to apply the t-test appropriately. The results are shown in Table 10. suggest applications and extensions.

Table 10: F-test and t-test for significant differences between gender (males, females)

Questions	F-test p-value	Variance	p-value	t-Stat	Female mean		Male mean
K1	0.408	equal	0.065	1.852	3.750	>	3.510
K2	0.058	equal	0.901	-0.125	3.690	<	3.710
K3	0.485	equal	0.932	0.086	4.096	>	4.086
K4	0.218	equal	0.630	0.482	3.104	>	3.031
K5	0.111	equal	**0.008**	2.691	3.870	>	3.468
K6	0.204	equal	0.077	1.777	4.080	>	3.810
K7	*0.020*	unequal	**0.008**	2.664	4.202	>	3.813
K8	0.430	equal	**0.020**	2.349	4.080	>	3.804
K9	0.487	equal	0.093	1.686	4.410	>	4.250
K10	*0.004*	unequal	**0.000**	3.590	4.226	>	3.766
K11	0.495	equal	**0.012**	2.543	4.040	>	3.695
K12	*0.003*	unequal	0.809	-0.242	4.194	<	4.227

As shown in the Table 10 (bold and underlined), significant differences were found between the answers of males and females for 5 variables (questions K5, K7, K8, K10 and K11), with the mean value of the female answers being greater than the mean value of the male answers. For example, women rated the following AI characteristics as more important (around vote 4 on the Kano scale, which means that the characteristic must be present in the OTA):

- K5. OTA provides chatbots for complete customer support and support for booking travel items 24/7
- K7. OTA enables image-based search
- K8. OTA enables the generation of a text description of the summary of the accommodation and accompanying attractions, helping users to better understand what to expect.

- K10. OTA offers personalized loyalty and reward programs
- K11. OTA offers automated and personalized travel itinerary planning by suggesting combinations of flights, accommodation and activities.

Based on the results obtained, hypothesis $H1_0$ is rejected, as significant differences ($p<0.05$) were found for 5 variables in relation to gender, and therefore $H1_1$ is accepted.

In order to analyse the significant differences between the booking/travel frequency of the respondents, a one-way ANOVA was carried out, the results of which are shown in Table 11.

Table 11: One-way ANOVA for three groups regarding booking/travel frequency (once a year, twice a year and 3-6 times a year)

	F value	P value	Once a year Mean	Twice a year Mean	3-6 times a year Mean
K1	1.684	0.188	3.679	3.475	**3.789**
K2	0.116	0.890	3.731	3.718	**3.808**
K3	1.454	0.236	**4.195**	4.064	3.885
K4	**7.162**	**0.001**	3.061	2.654	**3.442**
K5	0.214	0.807	3.659	**3.769**	3.750
K6	2.087	0.127	3.878	3.769	**4.212**
K7	0.866	0.422	4.110	4.269	**4.327**
K8	1.097	0.336	**4.012**	3.872	3.769
K9	0.817	0.443	4.256	4.372	**4.404**
K10	2.867	0.059	3.951	3.782	**4.212**
K11	0.089	0.915	**3.866**	3.795	3.827
K12	1.734	0.179	4.244	4.103	**4.442**

A significant difference was found for the variable K4 (OTA enables search based on speech via a voice assistant). In addition, each pair of groups with a two-sample t-test showed the significant differences for K4 between the groups with booking once and twice a year, but also between the groups with booking twice and 3-6 times a year. The highest mean values for most variables (K1, K2, K4, K6, K7, K9, K10 and K12) were found for the 3-6 times a year traveller group, indicating that travellers who use OTAs more frequently expect more AI features to be included in OTAs.

Based on the results obtained, hypothesis $H2_0$ can be rejected for the significant difference found for variable K4 and therefore $H2_1$ is accepted.

5. CONCLUSION

The increasing development of AI technology has had a major impact on the tourism and hospitality sector. OTAs are complex platforms where various features of applied AI are already present and there is a need to observe how they affect

the user/traveller experience. The research in four phases (Table 1 in the methodology section) was conducted from December 2023 to the first quarter of 2024 and this paper describes the fourth phase in detail. In this paper, the focus was on investigating booking and travel habits with a particular focus on AI features in OTAs. The aim was to analyse the key demographics and habits of using OTAs and to identify significant differences in terms of gender and the frequency with which respondents travel. To validate significant differences, two hypotheses, was proposed H1 and H2, each with a null and alternative form. The demographic data as well as booking and travel habits are analysed and presented in Tables 3 to 9. Respondents are clearly more inclined to use OTAs than traditional travel agencies. They mainly use 2 different OTAs, with females on average using more OTAs than males. Furthermore, Booking.com is the most popular in this study, followed by Airbnb and TripAdvisor. Respondents mainly travel once or twice a year, while 20% travel 3-6 times a year. A two-sample t-test was conducted to test for the presence of significant differences between the responses of males and females for variables K1-K12. The differences ($p<0.05$) were found for five variables (K5, K7, K8, K10 and K11) and thus $H1_1$ is accepted. In order to analyse the differences between the booking/travel frequencies (only the responses once a year, twice a year and 3-6 times a year were relevant), a one-way ANOVA was performed and a significant difference was found for variable K4. Therefore, $H2_1$ is accepted.

The limitation of the study is mainly reflected in the small number of respondents (only 252 out of 386 were completed correctly) and some answer options were not representative for the analysis. In addition, the origin of the respondents is limited to Croatia.

Future research plans include further monitoring of the implementation of AI technology in various areas of tourism and hospitality.

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