HOW PERCEIVED EASE OF USE, TRUST, AND PERCEIVED USEFULNESS INFLUENCE TOURISTS' DECISION TO BOOK HOMESTAY SERVICES ONLINE

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Abstract: This research aims to investigate the relationships between perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, tourist trust, and online booking intention. 450 tourists around Thailand were invited to join this research via survey questionnaires. This research applied a structural equation model (SEM) to analyze the collected data. Findings from the statistical analysis indicated that IT ease of use significantly influenced tourists' perceived usefulness. Moreover, tourist trust was influenced by only perceived usefulness. Finally, trust and perceived usefulness significantly influenced tourists' intention to book homestay services online. The results of this research can enable policymakers of this industry to develop effective policies to attract online booking intention among tourists.

Keywords: trust, decision, online, information technology, perceived ease of use, usefulness

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INTRODUCTION

In the current digital era, various types of commercial activities between buyers and sellers are at the tips of individuals' fingers (Amin et al., 2021). With the advancement of technology, online booking services become more convenient and faster; thus, it can result in low costs of searching for services and fast purchase decision-making (Talwar et al., 2020). These days consumers can log in to the firms' websites, search for service information, customize service preferences, and book available services that meet their consumption purposes (Park et al., 2019).

This allows online booking services to become an effective and efficient reservation system for all consumers. Subsequently, these advantages promote consumers' intention to book services online. Past studies have found that online booking intention has significant associations with actual online purchase behavior (Lai et al., 2024), sale performance (Sujood et al., 2024), and business sustainability (Park et al., 2019). In this sense, it seems that online booking intention can significantly influence firms' business growth and sustainability in the current digital era. Therefore, all service firms have to find ways to promote online consumers' booking intentions.

Meanwhile, Thailand is one of the popular tourist destinations in Southeast Asia, particularly Southern Thailand, where its tourist attraction sites such as mountains, rivers, beaches, temples, etc. have attracted both local and international tourists to visit locations, enjoy nature, and relax with their friends and families (Amazing Thailand, 29.12.2023, 01; Smart Local Thailand, 13.07.2023, 01). With the environmental-friendly policy supported by the Thai government, those areas have significantly reduced their carbon footprint and continuously conserved their natural resources making the areas clean and fresh. Subsequently, the areas have become tourists' favorite destinations during their holidays.

By witnessing these opportunities, the homestay services have been developed and opened their doors to all tourists to make their accommodation reservations (Chapel, 2024). Since many customers actively search for service information and make their purchases online (Amin et al., 2021; Sujood et al., 2024), online booking service systems that allow customers to customize their searching functions and settings (e.g., sizes, locations, prices, brands, payment methods, etc.) are developed to smoothen various types of transactions for all customers. Likewise, homestay service firms also upgrade their ICT in their websites and social media to create their online booking service systems available for their customers to check and reserve all available rooms, houses, and locations. Despite the availability of online booking service systems to all tourists, information regardless of factors influencing the intention to book homestay services online has remained narrow in the existing literature. Consequently, the lack of this information makes policymakers and managers in the homestay service industry difficult to understand their tourists' online booking behaviors; thus, the related firms cannot find any

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solutions to improve the key areas that can satisfy their tourists' demands. This creates high uncertainty where the homestay service firms are unable to estimate their business growth, sustainability, and success rate. Hence, investigating factors influencing online booking intention is the primary mission to all homestay service firms.

To understand consumer behavior on information technology (IT) of a particular application system, past research recommends checking perceived ease of use (Sujood et al., 2024) and perceived usefulness (Hamzah et al., 2022). These factors have significant impacts on online booking behaviors as the users perceive the application system can help them finish e-transactions easily and improve their task productivity. Unlike these electronic factors, it has been suggested that individual users are triggered by their psychological factors, particularly consumer trust (Wang et al., 2024). If online consumers trust the service information provided online, they are likely to contact the online sellers to book or purchase the services. Even though past research emphasizes the significant impacts of these factors influencing consumers' online booking behaviors, respectively; integrating these factors and investigating how these factors influence online booking intention in the homestay service industry have been neglected. The current gap in the literature indicates low awareness of the associated factors influencing online booking intention among tourists leaving the homestay service industry with fewer effective solutions to improve the key areas for promoting their tourists' online booking intention. To fill in the gap in the literature, this research proposes a constructive model aiming to investigate the relationships between perceived ease of use, tourist trust, perceived usefulness, and online booking intention. The exploration process and results can contribute more knowledge and solutions to enhance tourists' online booking intention in the homestay service industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Online Booking Intention and Technology Acceptance Model
In the last two decades, the evolution of information communication technology (ICT) has been developed at a fast rate (Amin et al., 2021) allowing travelers and tourists to change their ways of searching for information regardless of their trips and booking accommodations. So far, tourists now rely significantly on the Internet, which is considered a convenient way to access information information on websites that they can seek and book accommodation online with less time, effort, and boundary (Talwar et al., 2020). In the hospitality service industry, many related firms have developed online booking systems in which customers can customize their preferred services by arranging accommodation types, spaces, numbers of rooms, locations, and prices (Amin et al., 2021); therefore, it becomes even more convenient for all tourists to reserve the accommodation by themselves. As a result, many hospitality service firms such as guesthouses, hotels, and homestays have applied ICT to develop their online booking systems which make the systems become the new marketing and distribution channels on their websites after they have realized that their potential customers depend heavily on it (Park et al., 2019). Subsequently, online booking systems have become virtual platforms for all tourists and traveling customers allowing all related firms to engage in fierce competition with each other. Despite their fierce competition to attract more booking intentions from customers, their common fundamental purpose is to provide their customers with booking accommodation online through virtual platforms (Talwar et al., 2020).

From theoretical underpinning, the technology acceptance model (TAM) is applied and integrated to study users' intentions and behaviors in numerous application systems of ICT (Amin et al., 2021). TAM is introduced by Davis (1989) to analyze computer users' behavior and technology acceptance by examining the relationship between perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness. Different contextual studies have adopted TAM to analyze consumer behaviors in different fields, namely e-banking (Naeem et al., 2023), education (Saif et al., 2024), online marketplace (Mofokeng, 2023), and tourism (Amin et al., 2021). Even though TAM has been extensively applied and well accepted in the field of online purchasing environments (Abu-Alsondos et al., 2023; Jiang et al., 2023; Lai et al., 2024), previous studies have confirmed that it has some drawbacks because the original model neglects other causes and aspects that may potentially influence user behaviors. Excluding those causes and aspects from the TAM may not provide enough valid reasons to justify user behaviors in technology since those excluded factors seem to affect the user behaviors following their own environments. To the authors' best understanding, different factors including, both technological and psychological factors, should be involved in the IT behavior analysis. So far, recent studies in the hospitality service industry have been investigated to extend the IT user behaviors which can be found in Table 1.

To differentiate from past studies, this research extends the TAM by examining the associations between perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, trust, and online booking intention which can be found in Figure 1.

Table 1. Past focused factors in TAM in the hospitality service industry

Source	Investigated Factors
(Amin et al., 2021)	Perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, visual presentation, online review
(Biswas, 2023)	Credibility, perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, interactivity, affordability, and risk
(Sujood et al., 2024)	Perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control
(Gupta et al., 2024)	Perceived value, compatibility, enjoyment, social influence, and satisfaction
(Kim et al., 2024)	Perceived ease of use, self-efficacy, perceived usefulness, and anxiety
(Rafdinal et al., 2024)	VR quality, enjoyment, immersion, perceived usefulness, cost, risk, complexity, and perceived value

Perceived Ease or Ease of Use
Perceived ease of use which is sometimes called "perceived ease" in technology refers to a user's belief that he or she can use a particular application system to complete their tasks with effort-free (AbdulKareem and Oladimeji, 2024). In

information technology (IT), ease of use gives users a variety of functional utilities to complete their tasks with less time and effort. In the link with perceived usefulness, the application system that offers more ease of use can save more time and effort for the users (Go et al., 2024). These days the IT ease of use can help users accomplish their tasks effort-free and receive quicker outcomes. It has been revealed that the ease of use of technology provides users with innovative ways that can be considered as technological advantages to let users get better work outputs (Latreche et al., 2024).
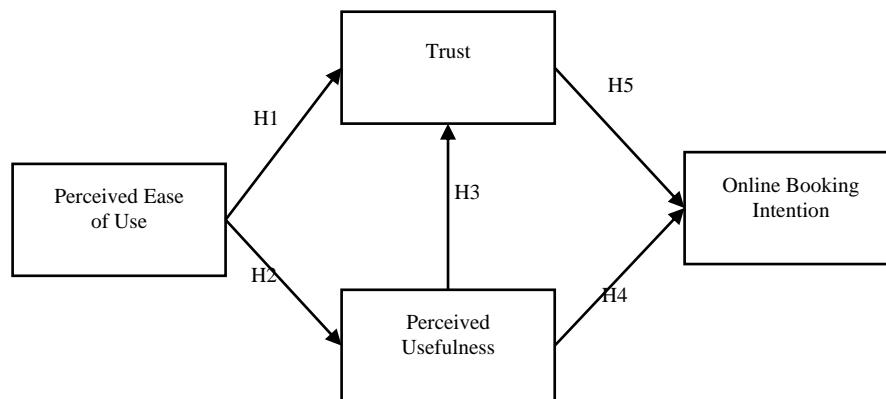
Figure 1. A Constructive Model Diagnosing Tourists' Online Booking Intention

In link with trust, users often see the ease of use of technology as the way to get tasks done efficiently (Tan et al., 2024). Ease of use of any application system is a uniqueness of achieving quick results giving the users more confidence in using the application system with the firms. Past research found that users feel less risky with the application system when they are sure that it provides more convenient functions to complete their tasks on time (Shahzad et al., 2024). Therefore, this research can hypothesize the relationships as follows:

H1: Perceived ease of use significantly influences perceived usefulness.

H2: Perceived ease of use significantly influences tourist trust.

Perceived Usefulness

Perceived usefulness refers to a user's belief that technology existing in a certain application system can promote their work productivity (Mican and Sitar-Taut, 2024). It outlines the users' perceived benefits and advantages that are derived from using any technology existing within the application system. In the link with trust, users can experience smooth task completion after using the technological support (ElSayad, 2024). The technological benefit can convince users to believe in the capability of the application system to handle their work issues and ensure better work results. Therefore, the application system can be found as a promising service system that users can rely on (Nguyen et al., 2024).

In the link with online booking intention, users find the usefulness of the application system as a means to access the necessary information they need (Madi et al., 2024). The benefits of the system can serve the users' purposes and demands. Therefore, it motivates users to further contact the sellers for possible reservations of their desired services and products (Baydeniz et al., 2024). In the online booking system, the users do not hesitate to book their product and service reservations when the system is useful for completing the booking transactions for consumers. Therefore, this research can hypothesize the relationships as follows:

H3: Perceived usefulness significantly influences tourist trust.

H4: Perceived usefulness significantly influences online booking intention.

Trust

Trust refers to a person's willingness to accept a vulnerability based on his or her positive expectations of products or services offered by another party (Baidoun and Salem, 2024). Trust is a psychological state that influences a person's attitudes and behaviors. In the link with online booking intention, when users trust a particular application system, they appear to demonstrate their positive attitudes (e.g., accepting or continued intention) toward the application system (Akhtar and Siddiqi, 2024). Based on perspectives in technology, users can conduct their electronic activities (e.g., shopping, reservation, and contacting the dealers) without any concerns when they already believe in the firms' application system. In the e-reservation system of the hospitality sector, consumers are willing to book for room reservation when they trust the online booking system (Wang et al., 2024). Therefore, this research can hypothesize the relationships as follows:

H5: Trust significantly influences online booking intention.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sample and Data Collection

This research employed a convenience sampling method to collect data from 450 tourists around Thailand to join this research via survey questionnaires. This method allowed the researchers to survey all related participants with convenience sampling method through both various social media (e.g., Instagram, Line, and Facebook) and face-to-face approach at public locations such as parks, supermarkets, malls, railway stations, etc. allowing them to meet random

participants at different locations. To join the survey process, participants had to be at least 18 years old and used to visit any tourist destination in Thailand. This research intented to explore the intention to book homestay services in Southern Thailand through online. In this case, only those participants who were curious to explore and try or currently looking for homestay services at Southern Areas of Thailand are the main targets of this research.

In sample criteria exclusion, those who had low intention or preferred other destinations rather than southern areas of Thailand were not included in the survey processes. Moreover, they had to be familiar with online booking service activities through digital devices such as laptops, smartphones, and tablets. Therefore, all participants need to pass a screening question before answering the rest of the questionnaire "Are you interested in booking homestay service through online?" Once the participants met these minimum criteria, the researchers asked for their consent to join the survey. Finally, the participants received copies of questionnaires with an approximate time (10-15 minutes) when they agreed to participate. Finally, researchers applied a snowball sampling method to ask the participants to give further suggestions about other qualified participants so the researcher could further contact them to join this research.

Survey Construct

A full survey construct included four main variables, and their items were mainly developed by interviewing 20 homestay owners who have established their homestay services in Southern Thailand for more than 8 years. The interviews focused on issues related to variables such as perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, trust, and online booking intention. Subsequently, interviewees gave all updated answers following the current situation of their customer behavior in the homestay service industry. After completing each interview, researchers recorded and summarized all items regardless of the main variables. Thus, the items were developed as follows.

First, four items of perceived ease of use were developed. Next, three items of perceived usefulness were developed. Then, four items of trust were developed. Finally, four items of online booking intention were developed. Additionally, a 5-point Likert scale technique was applied to let the participants rate each item.

All items were adapted from different contextual research, and their contents were revised and modified to be more suitable in the homestay service context. Next, the whole survey construct was conducted in the pilot with 30 tourists to check content reliability and validity before conducting a full-scale data collection. In content reliability, Cronbach's Alpha scores (>0.7) were used to check the reliability statistics (Kim et al., 2024). In Table 2, the statistics underlined the content reliability since all variables were obtained above the thresholds. In content validity, the researchers further revised and adjusted some items to enhance the content clarity following the pilot testing participants. Finally, the full-scale data collection was conducted with 450 tourists. The whole survey tool along with pilot testing results were reported in Table 2.

Table 2. Survey Measurement and Pilot Test

Variable	Items	Pilot Alpha(α)
Perceived ease of use	1) I think online booking services is easy to use. 2) I think online booking services offers various search functions about the homestay services and price. 3) I think everyone who is interested in finding homestay services in Southern Thailand can easily find all related information in both social media and google. 4) I think online booking services (e.g., Agoda) saves my time and effort when searching for available homestay services in Southern Thailand.	0.90
Perceived usefulness	1) I think online booking services for homestay services in Southern Thailand are really help for both foreigners and Thais. 2) I think online booking services help both foreigners and Thais access to all special promotion about homestay services in Southern Thailand. 3) I think online booking services can be a good platform for foreigners and Thais to learn more about homestay services in Southern Thailand.	0.84
Trust	1) I think homestay services in Southern Thailand can be a good choice for visitors. 2) I think I am confident with service performance of homestay services in Southern Thailand. 3) I believe in homestay services offering good hospitality and food services. 4) I believe information mentioned in online about homestay services in Southern Thailand.	0.82
Online Booking Intention	1) I will book any available room through online booking services next month. 2) I plan to search through online regardless of any available homestay services in Southern Thailand. 3) I think I will study more about homestay services in Southern Thailand through various websites. 4) I will recommend my friends and relatives to search for homestay services in Southern Thailand if they want to travel and relax in Thailand.	0.91

RESULTS
Data Statistics

This research applied a structural equation model (SEM) to analyze the data. Before conducting the data analysis, several statistical assessments were provided. First, loading factors' scores for items were kept for analysis if their scores were above 0.6. Next, the content reliability of each variable was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) (scores $\geq$0.7). After that, the convergent validity of each variable had to be higher than 0.5.

Based on Table 3, all of the above-assessed indicators were at acceptable levels since their scores passed the thresholds. Finally, model fitness was evaluated using fitness indicators such as CMIN^2/df, GFI, NFI, CFI, PCLOSE,

AGFI, and RMSEA following the suggestion of Kim et al. (2024). In Table 4, the model construct of this research obtained good fitness scores; thus, the regression statistics of SEM could be performed for analysis.

Table 3. Model Measurement of SEM

Variable	Items	Loading Factors	Alpha (α)	CR	AVE
Ease of Use	EU1	0.84	0.88	0.77	0.66
	EU2	0.65			
	EU3	0.78			
	EU4	0.79			
Perceived Usefulness	PU1	0.86	0.96	0.81	0.78
	PU2	0.83			
	PU3	0.94			
Trust	T1	0.78	0.76	0.85	0.81
	T2	0.76			
	T3	0.76			
	T4	0.84			
Online Booking Intention	OBI1	0.73	0.90	0.93	0.69
	OBI2	0.73			
	OBI3	0.69			
	OBI4	0.89			

Table 4. Model Fitness Statistics

Indexes	Scores	Thresholds	Results
$CMIN^2/df$	2.322	≤3	Good
GFI	0.944	>9	Good
NFI	0.926	>9	Good
CFI	0.991	>9	Good
AGFI	0.935	>8	Good
RMSEA	0.041	<0.08	Good
PCLOSE	0.993	>0.05	Good

SEM Statistical Results

All statistical results of SEM were reported in Table 5. Results revealed that ease of use (β=0.50, p<0.001) significantly influenced perceived usefulness. Next, perceived usefulness (β=0.54, p<0.001), except ease of use (β=0.07, p>0.05), significantly influenced tourist trust. Finally, perceived usefulness (β=0.61, p<0.001) and tourist trust (β=0.79, p<0.001) significantly influenced online booking intention.

For mediating testing of Ease of Use→Perceived Usefulness→Trust, ease of use (β=0.35, p<0.001) showed an indirect impact on tourist trust. Therefore, perceived usefulness stood as a mediator between ease of use and tourist trust.

Table 5. Statistical Results and Hypotheses Summary (Note: ** indicates p-value<0.001)

Chanel A: Direct Path Testing					
Predictors	Dependent Variables	St.D Beta	p-value	Sig. Lv.	Hypotheses Results
Ease of Use	Perceived Usefulness	0.50	0.000**	Sig.	Accepted
Ease of Use	Trust	0.07	0.193	Insig.	Accepted
Perceived Usefulness		0.54	0.000**	Sig.	Accepted
Perceived Usefulness	Online Booking Intention	0.61	0.000**	Sig.	Accepted
Trust		0.79	0.000**	Sig.	Accepted
Chanel B: Mediating Path Testing					
Relationships		St.D Beta		p-value	Sig. Lv.	Mediating Results
		Direct	Indirect			
Ease of Use→Perceived Usefulness→Trust						
Ease of Use		0.07	0.35	0.000**	Sig.	Confirmed

Discussion and Theoretical Contributions

For the impact on perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use positively influenced perceived usefulness, accepting hypothesis 1. Ease of use of online booking systems allowed tourists to check and make available accommodation reservations for their homestays conveniently. They could also check the reviews, post comments, prices, etc. on the homestay service firms' websites and social media without going directly to the homestay service firms. Furthermore, they could also contact and question the service providers directly for more clarifications using the current online booking systems. With direct and automated online system responses, tourists could receive reservation information and other confirmed information regardless of the payment process with the homestay service firms. The ease of use of the online booking systems offered tourists significant advantages, ensuring the tourists to have a smooth and successful completion of their booking homestay services. Therefore, the advantages derived from IT ease of use made the tourists acknowledge the usefulness of online booking systems with the homestay service firms.

For the impacts on tourist trust, perceived usefulness positively influenced tourist trust, accepting hypothesis 3. Tourists found the online booking service systems useful for their accommodation reservations. The system allowed the tourists to customize booking forms, receive a quick automation payment report, record historical and personal booking transactions, have convenient access to the system, and receive confirmation from the homestay service providers. These offered the tourists more efficiency in searching and making their service reservations with the homestay service firms.

Based on the current technological processes of online booking systems, tourists could understand and evaluate some levels of the online booking system's performance, which ensured high accuracy and safety in completing online booking transactions with homestay service firms. Subsequently, it could lower the propensity of curiosity and perceived risk among the tourists making them trust the online booking homestay service system. As a result, the technological usefulness found in online booking service systems of homestay service firms significantly influenced tourist trust. In contrast, perceived ease of use did not significantly impact tourist trust, rejecting hypothesis 2. This research rejected the previous research results (Shahzad et al., 2024; Tan et al., 2024) that highlighted the significant impact of IT ease of use on user trust. In a further assessment of testing a mediation impact, this research found that perceived usefulness mediated the relationship between ease of use and tourist trust, making ease of use have an indirect impact on tourist trust. According to this result, it seemed that tourists saw the IT ease of use in the online booking service systems differently from other e-booking service platforms. The side effect of IT ease of use could not immediately convince tourists to trust without acknowledging the perceived usefulness of the online booking service systems.

They were likely to further check and assess the benefits of using online booking systems with the homestay service firms. Furthermore, this probably involved risk assessments before making their conclusions about the current online booking platforms. Hence, once they felt safe with the technological usefulness provided by the systems, it led to a positive psychological state indicating their degree of trust in the online booking systems.

Regardless the impacts on tourists' online booking intention, perceived usefulness positively influenced online booking intention, accepting hypothesis 4. The benefits of using online booking homestay service systems significantly influence tourists' booking decisions. Based on the tourists' perspectives, the online booking service systems allowed the tourists to immediately check and reserve the rooms, spaces, locations, and price tags with customizable functions within 24 hours with artificial intelligence (AI) monitoring and automatic responses to their tourists' online requests. This could instantly help tourists to generate the reservation criteria based on their preferences which saved their time and effort in further contacting the online reservation staff for customizable assistance.

Meanwhile, the current booking system also provides payment functions with e-payment methods which allow tourists to settle their payment transactions after confirming their online booking with the homestay service firms. These benefits offered transaction efficiency and positive customer experience with the online booking service systems with the homestay service firms. With these perceived benefits derived from technological performances, tourists could not overlook the online booking service systems as a means to reserve their accommodations for their upcoming holidays. Therefore, there could be high propensity of tourists' intention to make online reservations for their homestay services.

Finally, trust positively influenced online booking intention, accepting hypothesis 5. Based on psychological perspectives, having high trust in online booking homestay service systems could significantly convince tourists to make their online booking decisions with the firms. In the evaluation processes, the tourists already cross-checked the IT ease of use of the online booking system, and the benefits of using the current system before making their final judgments on the online booking service systems. Tourists may have found that these key indicators outlined the capability, convenience, and efficiency in helping the tourists accomplish their search and reservation tasks following their preferences; thus, it promoted more confidence and belief in the online booking service systems with the homestay service firms. With the outcomes of positive views and expectations, they possibly felt safe to make their online reservation and payments with the firms. With this level of trust, there could be high intention among tourists to make homestay reservations through the online booking systems. In terms of contributions, this research significantly advances the existing literature by conceptualizing, operationalizing, and analyzing the relationships between perceived ease of use, tourist trust, perceived usefulness, and online booking intention. First, IT ease of use offers tourists the ability to check and customize the accommodation services such as room sizes, locations, price tags, and payment methods which they can conveniently get the services following their preferences. Next, this research also enhances our understanding regardless of how tourist trust and perceived usefulness influence tourists' online booking decisions in the homestay service industry. Tourists can find many benefits in using online booking systems (e.g., search and booking efficiency, convenient e-payment, customization functions, and so on) making their lives easier to approach and obtain homestay services from the firms; thus, tourists see fewer risks of using the online booking systems with the firms. Subsequently, this creates high trust in the online booking systems when they can assess more information (e.g., comments, opinions, and reviews) from previous tourists' experiences along with their perspectives on the current system performances giving more opportunities to better understand the online booking homestay service system.

Based on these attitudes toward technology, tourists can finally make their decision to contact the homestay service firms to book available and preferred rooms for their upcoming trips. Finally, this research significantly contributes to the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989) by evaluating both technological (IT ease of use and perceived usefulness) and a psychological factor (tourist trust) on IT user behavior. The results of this evaluation can provide extra details regardless of how technological and psychological factors interact with each other which pave the way for the users to make their decisions to apply technology as a means to serve and accomplish their tasks. To sum up, it gives a logical and valid explanation for tourists' decisions to book homestay accommodation online.

CONCLUSION

The primary objective of this research was to examine the associations between ease of use, perceived usefulness, trust, and online booking intention. This research found that tourists' perceived usefulness was influenced by ease of use. Next, their trust was influenced by perceived usefulness, except for ease of use.

Finally, their online booking intention was influenced by trust and perceived usefulness. Despite achieving these objectives, this research still has some limitations. First, this research concentrated mainly on the influences of tourist trust, perceived usefulness, and ease of use on tourists' online booking intention.

Future research should consider adding more psychological factors such as perceived risk, perceived convenience, and perceived IT quality to further explore the new findings and conclusions. Second, this research focused on consumer behaviors in the hospitality service industry which can be limited to other service industries such as the e-banking and delivery service industry. Therefore, the current research model can be applied to explore consumers' insights in those industries. Finally, this research contained diverse participants who were from different demographic areas making the results broader generalization. It can be an interesting topic if future research can explore and elaborate deeper by comparing online booking behaviors between different genders or age groups.

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