Trust or Convenience: Which Is More Correlated to Continuous Usage of Chatbot Applications in the Travel Trade Industry?

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Abstract: Chatbot applications have benefited not only individual users but also corporate users, such as travel trade specialists. This research examined the unique characteristics of chatbot applications and the ongoing adoption of chatbots by travel agencies that provide airline-related services in the Philippines. Applying the Theory of Reasoned Action, this study evaluated respondents' perceptions of how chatbot applications addressed aspects of trust and convenience. This addressed the empirical research gap on the use of trust and ubiquity as correlates of continuous use of chatbot applications, as well as the scope gap by analysing the perceptions of travel trade specialists, which is innovative given that previous studies focused on individual customers as end-users of chatbot applications. Using survey research among travel trade specialists, the study revealed that either chatbot trust or chatbot ubiquity correlates with continuous usage. The study found that travel trade companies are more likely to use chatbots continuously when they have higher levels of trust and perceive chatbots as ubiquitous. Specifically, trust in chatbots strongly influences the intention to use them consistently, as these companies rely on them to manage risks across their business processes. While both trust and ubiquity play significant roles in chatbot adoption, developers should recognize that travel trade companies prioritize trust when embracing technological applications like chatbots.

Keywords: Chatbot Applications, Trust, Ubiquity, Continuous Usage, Travel Trade Specialists

1. Introduction

One emerging Industry 4.0 application within the construct of artificial intelligence is chatbots (Hsu and Lin, 2023). A chatbot is a computer program that simulates a conversation with its intended users online (Adamopoulou and Moussiades, 2020). Chatbots are used in the industry to serve customers of manufacturing or service companies through the convenience, relevance, and appropriateness of their functions, which supplement customer service (Hsu and Lin, 2023; Petersson, Pawar, and Fagerstrøm, 2023). In e-commerce, chatbot applications foster a positive attitude towards the brand among users, encouraging them to use the application (Li and Wang, 2023). Various studies have identified the antecedents of chatbot satisfaction that led to usage intention (Petersson, Pawar, and Fagerstrøm, 2023; Liu et al., 2023), but there are still limited studies that explore chatbot repeat usage intention (Nazir et al., 2023). Repeat usage, or usage continuity, plays a significant role in evaluating the effectiveness of an online application because it thrives on the consistent satisfaction of user expectations, which often reflects loyalty (Nugroho, Setyorini, and Novitasari, 2019).

The applications of chatbots in the tourism industry significantly enhance the customer experience (Chi, 2022; Cheng et al., 2022). The tourism industry is one of the largest global economies, operating to provide customer service (Hadjielias et al., 2021). The airline and aviation industries are significant players in the tourism industry, whose primary operations focus on meeting transportation needs and requirements (Steven, Dong, and Dresner, 2012; Chow, 2014). The airline industry optimizes the use of chatbots to address passenger inquiries and process reservations, adding value through convenience and functionality (Melián-González, Gutiérrez-Taño, and Bulchand-Gidumal, 2019). The role of artificial intelligence in these steps can be attributed to providing instant responses and feedback based on the values added to the database management (Hadjielias et al., 2021; Melián-González, Gutiérrez-Taño, and Bulchand-Gidumal, 2019). However, the few studies that have explored chatbot applications for customers in the airline industry have primarily focused on the experiences of tourists, passengers, or individual users (Steven, Dong, and Dresner, 2011; Chow, 2014). The analysis of chatbot application use among B2B users, such as travel trade companies like travel agencies, has not yet been fully explored in the academic literature. Previous studies have only focused on the experiences of travel agency customers and their interactions with A.I.-enabled travel agents (Singh, Rana, and Parayitam, 2022; Lalicic and Weismayer, 2021). Given that chatbot applications are now designed to deliver value in business-to-business

transactions (Kushwaha, Kumar, and Kar, 2021), understanding how airlines manage the experience of their travel agencies or travel trade partners can contribute to the body of knowledge in this field.

Trust issues are pressing the perceived value and effectiveness of using A.I.-enabled applications (Sasikumar et al., 2022; Youn and Jin, 2021). Digital trust refers to the level of confidence users have in the technology and the processes that underpin its operation (Sasikumar et al., 2022; Weck and Afanassieva, 2022). Digital trust corresponds to the value users place in the application based on its features, thereby reducing the anxiety and worries users have about its functionality (Szumski, 2020). Online application developers strive to establish digital trust among their users, as it has been proven to be linked to online user satisfaction and gratitude (Yamamoto et al., 2022). User trust in online applications has been widely explored among end users (Steven, Dong, and Dresner, 2012; Kushwaha, Kumar, and Kar, 2021). There are still limited studies exploring digital trust in B2B transactions, where intended users are industrial businesses, such as travel agencies, that use chatbots to facilitate transactions with other tourism service suppliers (Kushwaha, Kumar, and Kar, 2021).

Convenience has been considered a critical outcome of digital technologies and applications (Melián-González, Gutiérrez-Taño, and Bulchand-Gidumal, 2019). Previous studies emphasized the value of convenience, such as automatic responses and the dependability of artificial intelligence applications, when users intend to use them (Uzir et al., 2021; Amagasa and Moriya, 2022). Perceived ubiquity is a specific factor related to user convenience, which refers to the ease with which customers can complete a transaction when needed (Benedicenti, 2017; Okazaki & Mendez, 2013). Artificial intelligence applications in various industries are considered convenient because they eliminate temporal and spatial constraints (Kelly, Kaye, and Oviedo-Trespalacios, 2022). The ubiquity of chatbots has been less explored because they are intended to provide convenience to end users during business transactions (Alagarsamy and Mehrolia, 2023; Wang et al., 2023). The chatbot application among travel agencies that work with other suppliers may need to leverage ubiquitous applications to achieve better operational outcomes (Lalicic and Weismayer, 2021). As the use of chatbot applications grows to improve the user experience for industrial businesses, such as B2B firms, this gap needs to be bridged.

This study examines the individual characteristics of chatbot applications and the ongoing use of chatbots by travel agencies collaborating with airline companies in the Philippines. Specifically, it addresses the following research questions: (a) What is the perceived chatbot trust, perceived chatbot ubiquity, and continuous chatbot usage intentions of travel agents in dealing with airline companies? and (b) What is the extent of the relationship between perceived trust and ubiquity and the continuous usage of chatbots among travel agents whenever they depend on chatbots in dealing with airline companies? This research examines the knowledge gap that exists in the analysis of the perceived trust and ubiquity of chatbot applications used by travel agents in dealing with airline A.I.-enabled services. Moreover, there is still a gap in the limited studies that have analysed chatbot applications for continuous use, as most previous studies have focused only on usage intention.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development

This research investigates the relationship between chatbot trust, ubiquity, and continuous usage, grounded in the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). The Theory of Reasoned Action, developed by Fishbein and Ajzen, suggests that individual action is driven by human attitudes and behaviour (Mishra, Akman, and Mishra, 2014; Skewes and Gonzalez, 2013). In this study, trust is selected as the human attitude for the topic because these variables are constructed relatively in terms of technology use (Modliński, Gwiaździński, and Karpińska-Krakowiak, 2022). Ubiquity is also considered a key aspect of human behaviour for study because previous studies have identified it as a behavioural outcome of artificial intelligence applications (Paz-Lopez et al., 2013). Meanwhile, continuous usage is the human action intended as the study's outcome to bridge the gap in reasoned action, as previous studies have explored usage intention only.

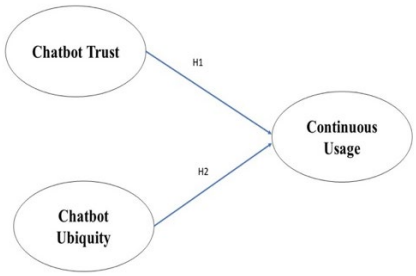

Figure 1: Research Framework

2.1 Chatbot Trust and Continuous Usage

Several studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between trust and customer action (Mangus et al., 2023; Mofokeng, 2023). Previous studies have shown that attitude outcomes can lead to continued use because they foster a positive image in users' perceptions (Liu et al., 2023). The technological application's usage extends significantly due to the established trust in its features, which deliver the user's requirements (Jiang, Wang, and Yuen, 2021). In the tourism and hospitality industry, studies have revealed that users who trust the application tend to exhibit extended usage, as they depend on the technology's reliability to deliver results (Shen et al., 2022). Despite the widespread use of chatbots, there remains a need to explore their relevance to the operations of tourism and hospitality establishments (Li and Wang, 2023; Chow, 2014). Given the long history of chatbot applications and their ongoing improvements and updates, these developments could have positive implications for the efficiency of tourism and hospitality operations (Adamopoulou and Moussiades, 2020). Thus, if results are delivered to meet the expectations of users of chatbot applications in the travel trade sector of the tourism industry, it is hypothesized that:

H1: Chatbot trust is highly correlated with continuous usage of chatbot applications.

2.2 Chatbot Ubiquity and Continuous Usage

Convenience is considered a behavioural outcome because users aspire to achieve it in assessing the functionality of the product they are using (Chang and Polonsky, 2012). In terms of technological use, chatbot ubiquity is directly linked to user convenience, as it underscores the application's reliability when the user needs it (Paz-Lopez et al., 2013). This implies that users who depend on a particular technological application do not experience any hassle with its use if it becomes available when and how they wish to use it (Chekembayeva, Garaus, and Schmidt, 2023; Park and Zhang, 2021). In the tourism and hospitality industry, a chatbot convenience assessment was conducted based on users' intention to use the application repeatedly, reflecting the satisfaction they experienced (Chang and Polonsky, 2012). The dearth of studies focusing on chatbot application usage in the travel trade sector opens opportunities for exploration, provided that operational functionality differs from end-user use. However, chatbot applications showed positive results for customer loyalty in the tourism industry (Lee and Li, 2023) and thus, result in the following hypothesis:

H2: The ubiquity of chatbots is highly correlated with continuous usage of chatbot applications.

3. Methodology

The methodological gap highlighted in this research is the scarcity of studies focusing on the experience of technology users in business-to-business transactions (Kushwaha, Kumar, and Kar, 2021), rather than on individual customer interactions.

3.1 Research Design

This research follows a descriptive–correlational study, employing a quantitative mode of inquiry. A previous perspective on similar designs found that tourism research benefits from this approach, as it provides empirical evidence, particularly on measurable items such as individual users' perceptions (Dolnicar, 2019; Suominen et al., 2022). Moreover, the benefits of a correlational study can shed light on which of the identified independent variables are associated with the expected behavioural outcome, which, in this context, pertains to continuous use of chatbot applications (Suominen et al., 2022).

3.2 Sampling Procedure

To identify respondents for this study, a purposive sampling technique was employed, screening them based on the identified criteria. To qualify as respondents, travel trade sector specialists must be (a) have worked in the travel trade sector of the Philippines for at least three years, (b) have utilized chatbot applications in dealing with airline reservations partners for at least a year, and (c) must have clearly shown knowledge and context in the usage of chatbot applications in dealing with business-to-business transactions. The following criteria for respondents were established based on the strength of validating data sources from previous literature on chatbot applications and usage (Liu et al., 2023; Chi, 2022). A total of 420 surveys were distributed, but only those respondents who met the set criteria were included in the screening process. Around 67 travel trade specialists were disqualified based on the screening questions' requirements. Meanwhile, another seven

responses were deleted because they were evident straight responses to scale items. Three hundred forty-five travel trade specialists in the Philippines qualified for this study.

3.3 Instrumentation and Data Collection

This research utilized an adapted survey questionnaire contextualizing the measures of chatbot applications and usage. For the chatbot trust items, the items were adapted from previous literature (Alagarsamy and Mehrolia, 2023). For chatbot ubiquity, the adaptation was based on previous literature (Li and Wang, 2023). The behavioural outcome identified in continuous usage also aligns with previous literature on technological continuity (Nugroho, Setyorini, and Novitasari, 2019). The question items were modified to reflect the context of business-to-business transactions in the travel trade sector, as they involve representatives from airlines. This research bridges the gap in the empirical focus on these operations because travel trade requires immediate, yet accurate, responses from their airline counterparts during reservation transactions (Lee and Li, 2023).

An online survey approach was adopted, with strict monitoring of respondents' profiles based on the study's set criteria (Suominen et al., 2022). A reliability test was processed following the modification and combination of scale items from related literature. Two items from chatbot trust, two items from chatbot ubiquity, and one item from chatbot continuous usage intention were deleted because their Cronbach's alphas were below 0.70. After deleting items, the overall Cronbach's alpha was 0.82, indicating the reliability of the research instrument.

3.4 Data Analysis and Ethical Considerations

In a correlational study, Spearman's rho was used to assess the significance of the association between the independent and dependent variables. To address the main research question, the analysis determines which of chatbot trust and chatbot ubiquity leads to greater continuous usage. The higher R values can help determine which, among trust and convenience, is considered a predictive factor for the constant use of chatbot applications by travel trade specialists dealing with airline reservations officers. Meanwhile, data processing was kept anonymous to prevent bias in the analysis. Moreover, data storage and confidentiality were ensured for respondents, ensuring that their personal information would be protected.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Perceived Trust

No	Perceived Chatbot Trust		
	Scale Items	Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Chatbot applications can provide beneficial information to help us achieve our objectives.	3.75	0.76
2	Chatbot applications deliver answers to our queries from our business partners.	4.26	0.91
3	Chatbot applications present trustworthy results from our requests or concerns.	4.10	0.83
	Over-all	4.04	0.83

This result aligns with previous literature highlighting the importance of chatbot trust, grounded in its functionality in delivering responses that address end-users' concerns or queries (Liu et al., 2023; Szumski, 2020). This also demonstrates that chatbot functionality is crucial to its trustworthiness, as travel trade specialists must fulfill the demands of users conveyed to their customers (Yamamoto et al., 2022; Amagasa and Moriya, 2022). Their trust in using chatbot applications is primarily defined by the accuracy of responses to submitted questions, as travel arrangements in the airline industry require a high level of precision and error-free service (Chekembayeva, Garaus, and Schmidt, 2023). Connecting the descriptive result to TRA, travel trade specialists perceived the level of chatbot trust primarily based on the promptness with which chatbots delivered answers when asked questions. This implies the development of a positive human attitude towards chatbots once they address users' concerns (Mishra, Akman, and Mishra, 2014). No matter how beneficial the information provided

by chatbots is, they should be able to answer transactional queries because they have a critical effect on the service offered by travel trade specialists, which justifies the perception of chatbots (Li and Wang, 2023; Shen et al., 2022).

Table 2: Perceived Ubiquity

No	Perceived Chatbot Ubiquity		
	Scale Items	Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Chatbot applications are available anytime our office needs them	4.25	0.83
2	Chatbot applications are easily accessible when the need arises	4.45	0.87
3	Chatbot applications on different platforms make it easier to utilize	4.40	0.91
	Over-all	4.37	0.87

This result supported previous literature (Li and Wang, 2023; Amagasa and Moriya, 2022) that emphasized the convenience value of chatbot applications. Among ubiquity items, it revealed that "Chatbot applications are easily accessible when the need arises" has the highest weighted mean, indicating that its accessibility across different platforms makes it easier for the travel trade specialists who are meant to be using different technological systems in their function (Weck and Afanassieva, 2022; Paz-Lopez et al., 2013). Moreover, the availability of chatbot applications has a significant impact on their utilization (Chang and Polonsky, 2012). Connecting the result to TRA, the item with the highest mean indicates that travel trade specialists found chatbots more convenient when they were easily accessible when needed. The same transactional feature was assessed by users, who deemed the chatbot to be ubiquitous when it can easily provide value in circumstances that call for urgent access (Paz-Lopez et al., 2013). The reliability of chatbots, which are readily available at any time and as needed, justified travel trade specialists' perception of chatbot ubiquity (Chekembayeva, Garaus, and Schmidt, 2023; Park and Zhang, 2021).

Table 3: Perceived Chatbot Continous Usage Intention

No	Perceived Chatbot Continuous Usage Intention		
	Scale Items	Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation
1	I continue using chatbot applications after the benefits I experienced in using them	3.85	0.78
2	I use chatbot applications more frequently than I do manual processing.	3.95	0.81
3	I have processed more transactions through chatbot applications since I started using them.	4.10	0.85
	Over-all	3.97	0.81

This finding aligns with previous literature that emphasizes the value of chatbots in the industry (Lee and Li, 2023). This can be explained by the hectic travel trade specialists' schedules and their high demand for accessibility, which can be met through the use of chatbot applications (Kushwaha, Kumar, and Kar, 2021; Kelly, Kaye, and Oviedo-Trespalacios, 2022). Among the various items, the productivity value of chatbot applications has the highest mean of 4.10, reflecting how travel trade specialists optimize their usage to process more transactions due to the speed of response and feedback (Youn and Jin, 2021; Cheng et al., 2022).

4.2 Inferential Statistics

Based on previous literature (Hou, Guo, and Pan, 2023; Benedicenti, 2017), users who trust and are familiar with their technological applications tend to exhibit continuous usage. However, a deductive analysis, which would lead to constant use to a greater extent, has not yet been undertaken, especially in the field of chatbot applications within a B2B transaction model.

Table 4: Relationship of Trust and Ubiquity to Continuous Usage Intention

No	Relationship of Chatbot Trust and Ubiquity towards Continuous Usage Intention			
	Variable	Correlation Coefficient (r)	P-Value (Sig)	Strength of Relationship
1	Chatbot Trust	0.769	0.000	Strong
2	Chatbot Ubiquity	0.367	0.031	Moderate

The analysis revealed that both perceived trust and the ubiquity of chatbot applications are significantly correlated with a continuous usage intention, with p-values below 0.05, which fall below the threshold for significance. This indicates that both H1 and H2 should be accepted, as these two attributes led to a continuous usage intention for chatbot applications, with p-values of 0.000 and 0.031, respectively, which align with previous studies (Chang and Polonsky, 2012; Modliński, Gwiaździński, and Karpińska-Krakowiak, 2022).

However, a deeper analysis revealed that the relationship coefficients of these two variables differ in their degree of association with continuous usage intention. It showed that chatbot trust (r = 0.769) has a strong positive relationship. In contrast, chatbot ubiquity (r = 0.367) has only a moderate positive relationship with the continuous usage intention of the chatbot application, aligning with the critical values prescribed in the literature (Mofokeng, 2023). These findings supported the arguments of previous studies (Petersson, Pawar, and Fagerstrøm, 2023; Melián-González, Gutiérrez-Taño, and Bulchand-Gidumal, 2019), which explained that users of technological applications behave more proactively in their use if anxiety associated with its use is managed. Chatbot trust has a stronger relationship with continuous usage intention because travel trade companies systematically validate their mechanisms before integrating a step into their business transactions (Nugroho, Setyorini, and Novitasari, 2019). Even though chatbot ubiquity also has a significant relationship with continuous usage intention, the deductive analysis revealed that users are willing to continuously use chatbot applications, whether easy or challenging, as long as they are comfortable in using it without the burden of doubts in processing their transactions (Youn and Jin, 2021; Weck and Afanassieva, 2022).

In the relationship analysis, travel trade specialists showed a stronger relationship between their perceived trust in chatbot applications and continuous usage than between the perceived ubiquity of chatbots and constant usage. This implies that travel trade specialists formed a stronger, more positive attitude towards chatbots, mainly when their questions were addressed right away, because this reduced risk and uncertainty, given that human users are talking to non-human users (Mishra, Akman, and Mishra, 2014; Shen et al., 2022). Moreover, chatbots' perceived ubiquity or convenience was assessed as part of the subjective norm in service design between travel trade specialists and their suppliers using chatbot applications for communication and coordination (Chang and Polonsky, 2012; Park and Zhang, 2021). Perceived trust that results in a positive attitude is highly correlated with higher behavioural intention, which, in this case, is continuous usage, because trust development was deemed more challenging than convenience evaluation (Skewes and Gonzalez, 2013). Moreover, Filipino technology users do not readily trust an application unless the technology has contributed to solving their concerns, which, in this case, chatbot applications have managed to do (Yamamoto et al., 2022). Travel trade specialists in the country are more cautious about trusting chatbot applications, which is why, when chatbot applications earned trust by providing reliable information when needed, continuous usage intention emerged.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The findings revealed that travel trade companies have a higher intention to use chatbot applications continuously, provided they have a higher degree of trust and ubiquity towards these applications. Deductively, chatbot trust has a stronger relationship with chatbot continuous usage intention because travel trade companies showed a greater dependence on risk mitigation integrated into their business transaction processing. Although both factors were significantly related to chatbot applications, developers may consider how travel trade companies place a higher value on trust when patronizing technological applications, such as chatbots, continuously.

This research expanded the Theory of Reasoned Action by not only providing a specific context for the justification of continuous use of chatbot applications but also contextualizing the experience and perceptions of travel trade specialists working on a B2B model. The majority of studies that adopted TRA focused on the

experience of individual end users, such as customers. This study analyzed the evaluation of trust and ubiquity towards a tool that contributes to its functionality and operations.

It is recommended that chatbot developers consider these two factors when designing chatbot applications for travel trade companies. Both trust and ubiquity were significantly related to continuous usage; hence, developers should find ways to manage the perceived risks associated with the use of chatbot applications, as well as make their interfaces more straightforward to use and follow for convenience. For prioritization, developers should address potential risks that travel trade companies may encounter when processing transactions via chatbot applications. This can be achieved by promptly responding to queries, presenting evidence-based results, and enhancing assurance mechanisms within the chatbot system. To encourage continuous use of chatbot applications among travel trade specialists, suppliers should anticipate the questions that may arise during chatbot use. Understanding the service design behind travel trade operations will provide context for the most critical questions to address, because if chatbot applications can provide contextual information and answers to these questions when travel trade specialists raise them, this is highly related to a greater level of perceived trust. When chatbot trust is higher, a positive attitude towards chatbot applications can be associated with a greater level of continuous usage, as per TRA.

6. Limitations and Future Research

A positive attitude associated with trust is highly related to behavioral intention, which, in this context, focuses on continued use. However, this research focused on the experience and perceptions of travel trade specialists in the Philippines, where the adoption of AI and chatbot applications is not comparable to that in developed economies. Moreover, the topic focuses only on chatbot applications implemented by their suppliers, such as airlines and ticketing organizations. Conducting a study on the variety of chatbot interfaces with diverse modules and content may lead to a critical analysis of the results. Future researchers can explore the potential challenges of trust and ubiquity faced by travel trade companies, allowing systems designers of chatbot applications to develop a more specific, action-based approach. Moreover, a cross-sectional study across different sectors of the tourism industry and their use of chatbot applications can provide greater value to the existing body of knowledge on the ongoing use of chatbot applications in this growing industry.

Ethics Declaration

This paper underwent ethics review and approval on the research instrument, data collection, and data analysis phases. A basic ethics review was conducted because human subjects were involved only in the anonymized survey research.

AI Declaration

The researchers utilized Grammarly for language editing and proofreading.

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