How Airport Technology Enhances Tourist Experiences And Influences Word-Of-Mouth: A Study Of Tan Son Nhat International Airport

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how airport technologies, specifically smart tourism tools, enhance tourist experiences and influence their intentions to engage in word-of-mouth (WOM) communication. Focusing on Tan Son Nhat International Airport, we surveyed 423 travelers who used integrated smart tools during their journey. Our findings show that airport technologies significantly improve traveler satisfaction and increase the likelihood of positive WOM. These technologies help airports transform from mere transit points into attractions, offering a competitive advantage and supporting the sustainable growth of the aviation sector. Despite slower adoption in developing countries like Vietnam, our research highlights the importance of modern technological solutions in improving customer experiences. Using the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) framework, we show that self-service and support technologies at Tan Son Nhat Airport boost traveler confidence and enjoyment, encouraging positive WOM.

KEYWORDS: Stimulus-Organism-Response theory, Tourist experience, Technology-driven tourism experiences, Tan Son Nhat International Airport, Word-of-mouth

1. Introduction

Modern airports in Europe, America, the Middle East, and Asia are increasingly adopting advanced technologies as part of their digital transformation. However, airports in developing countries often struggle to keep up due to outdated infrastructure and traditional operational practices (Jayasuriya & Rajapaksha, 2020). As tourism grows rapidly, airports must implement sophisticated technologies to improve operational efficiency, maximize limited resources, and meet the evolving demands of passengers (Medvedev et al., 2017).

Despite the adoption of these technologies, many airports still fail to fully meet traveler expectations and satisfaction (Bogicevic et al., 2017; Moon et al., 2017; Phan Thanh & Hoang Anh, 2023). Travelers today expect more than just efficient services; they seek seamless access to accurate information, self-service options, and modern technological tools (Jayasuriya & Rajapaksha, 2020; Bogicevic et al., 2017). The convergence of innovations such as biometric verification, mobile applications, and self-service systems has led to the rise of "intelligent airports" (Jayasuriya & Rajapaksha, 2020). These technologies can significantly reduce processing times and improve the passenger experience, ultimately contributing to higher satisfaction (Rubio-Andrada et al., 2023; Zamorano et al., 2020).

However, despite the growing interest in the link between airport technology and tourist experience, research in developing countries remains limited. For instance, while Tan Son Nhat International Airport in Vietnam has adopted modern technologies to improve operations, there is little research on how these technologies affect tourist experience and behavioral intentions, especially in the context of developing nations. The airport's recent integration into the Airport Collaborative Decision-Making (A-CDM) network in 2022 highlights its efforts to improve operational efficiency, but the impact on tourists' experiences and their intention to share positive word-of-mouth (WOM) remains under-explored.

This study aims to address this gap by investigating how airport technologies influence tourist experiences and WOM intentions at Tan Son Nhat International Airport. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following research questions:

How do airport technologies influence the tourist experience at Tan Son Nhat International Airport?

What is the relationship between airport technology implementation and tourists' intentions to engage in word-of-mouth communication?

How do tourists in developing countries perceive the digital tools available at airports?

The paper is organized as follows: the next section presents the theoretical framework, focusing on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory. This is followed by a review of relevant literature, a description of the survey design and data collection methodology, and an analysis of the results and discussion. The conclusion summarizes the study's contributions and suggests avenues for future research.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development

2.1. Theoretical Foundation

2.1.1. Smart Airports

A smart airport is defined as one that integrates advanced technologies to enhance the efficiency and quality of its operations, creating a more seamless and responsive environment for passengers. Qi & Pan (2018) describe smart airports as those that incorporate "man-machine" interactions, utilizing technologies like the Internet of Things (IoT), mobile networking, and big data to optimize airport services. This integration allows for real-time monitoring and control of various systems, improving safety and operational efficiency (Almashari et al., 2018). In case of any malfunction, issues can be quickly identified and addressed, contributing to a safer environment for both passengers and staff.

2.1.2. Smart Aviation Technology

Self-Service Technologies (SSTs)

Self-service technologies (SSTs) are digital platforms that enable consumers to independently complete service tasks without the direct involvement of staff (Elliott & Maguire, 2008). Examples of SSTs in various industries include ATMs, self-checkout systems, and online banking (Halstead & Richards, 2014). In the context of airports, SSTs, such as ticketing kiosks, check-in counters, and baggage check-in stations, are increasingly being adopted to streamline operations and improve customer satisfaction (Rubio-Andrada et al., 2023). These technologies allow passengers to perform tasks independently, improving convenience and reducing service waiting times (Arif et al., 2013).

Airport Supporting Technologies (ASTs)

Airport supporting technologies (ASTs) refer to technological infrastructures designed to improve the passenger experience, enhance operational efficiency, and support airport operators in achieving business goals. These technologies include mobile apps for indoor navigation, USB charging stations, and business center facilities. These technologies help meet passenger needs beyond service optimization, such as providing comfort and enhancing accessibility (Bilgihan et al., 2024). The integration of ASTs can increase passenger satisfaction, similar to how business centers enhance guest satisfaction in the hotel industry (Jayasuriya & Rajapaksha, 2020).

2.2. Hypothesis Development

Traveler Confidence Benefits

Traveler confidence benefits refer to the reduced anxiety, lower perceived risks, and increased trust in the service provider, which are particularly relevant to low-complexity services like air travel (Gwinner et al., 1998). SSTs empower passengers to manage their airport experiences independently, enhancing their sense of control and predictability. This increased sense of control positively affects their confidence and overall satisfaction (Bogicevic et al., 2017). From this understanding, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1a: Self-service technologies (SSTs) positively influence traveler confidence benefits.

H2a: Airport supporting technologies (ASTs) positively influence traveler confidence benefits.

Traveler Enjoyment

Traveler enjoyment plays a crucial role in assessing the overall airport experience. Studies have shown that enjoyment influences technology adoption and satisfaction (Bogicevic et al., 2017). In airports, where passengers often experience long waiting times, personal technology devices serve as key sources of entertainment and engagement. Restrictions on access to these devices can negatively impact satisfaction. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H_{1b}: Self-service technologies (SSTs) positively influence traveler enjoyment.

H_{2b}: Airport supporting technologies (ASTs) positively influence traveler enjoyment.

Traveler Satisfaction

Traveler satisfaction is a critical factor in encouraging repeat visits and generating positive word-of-mouth. This study adopts a cognitive-affective approach to examine how passengers' evaluations of airport technologies influence their satisfaction levels (Bogicevic et al., 2017; Rubio-Andrada et al., 2023). Satisfaction is expected to be influenced by both confidence benefits and traveler enjoyment, as both factors contribute to an overall positive experience. The following hypothesis is proposed:

H_3: Traveler confidence benefits (H3a) and traveler enjoyment (H3b) positively influence traveler satisfaction.

Word-of-Mouth (WOM)

Research suggests that tourists' use of SSTs and ASTs leads to higher satisfaction, which in turn increases their intention to share positive word-of-mouth (WOM) (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021; Torabi et al., 2023). As the adoption of smart technologies improves the overall travel experience, tourists are more likely to recommend the destination and share their experiences with others. From this, the following hypothesis is developed:

H_4: Satisfaction positively influences tourists' word-of-mouth.

2.3. Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Theory

The S-O-R theory, developed by Mehrabian & Russell (1974), originates from environmental psychology and posits that external stimuli (S) influence an individual's internal state (O), which in turn triggers a behavioral response (R). This model is particularly applicable to tourism research, as it explains how tourists perceive and respond to external stimuli, such as technology, and how these perceptions influence their behaviors (Manthiou et al., 2017).

In the context of this study, the external stimuli are the airport technologies, including both self-service and supporting technologies. These technologies influence the internal state of the tourist (organism), shaping their perceptions of trust, enjoyment, and satisfaction. Satisfaction, in turn, affects post-travel behaviors, such as the intention to revisit or recommend the destination to others (Jang & Namkung, 2009; Kozak & Rimmington, 2000).

Based on the synthesis of documents, the authors propose a conceptual research model established as follows:

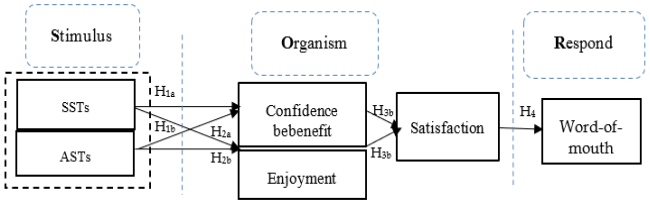

Figure 1: Conceptual model

(Source: The research proposal from the research team, 2024)

3. Methodology

Study Site

Tan Son Nhat Airport is one of the most important airports in Vietnam, continuing to develop and improve to meet growing customer needs. Passengers' flying experience at Tan Son Nhat Airport is enhanced due to the application of new technology, such as A-CDM, a new flight procedure system, and configurations for the segmentation of control centers. However, this airport is still in the infancy of technological transformation. Technology only accounts for 10% to 20% of the operational processes, and the remaining 80% still requires human participation.

Self-service technology (SSTs) at Tan Son Nhat Airport: tourists can order tickets and luggage through applications from airlines such as Vietnam Airlines, VietjetAir, etc. Confirming tickets online without printing tickets: you can print tickets at check-in kiosks available at the airport if you cannot check in online yourself. Going through customs using the automatic immigration gate at the international terminal (Autogate) has been implemented since August 2023. There are automatic teller machines (ATMs) and automatic non-stop toll collection machines for cars and easy payment via online banking (Internet banking) for all types of expenses.

Airport supporting technologies (ASTs) at Tan Son Nhat Airport has an application called "Tan Son Nhat Airport SGN Info" that will be developed in the summer of 2022; aside from providing flight information, this application also provides tourism information; specifically, these are attractions in and outside Ho Chi Minh City. In addition, a section called Top Destinations lists attractive destinations in the world that can be visited, including Nha Trang, Hanoi, and Da Nang. Nang, Phu Quoc, Da Lat, Hue, and Con Son islands of Vietnam. On the pillars at the airport are QR codes for picking up a car, viewing flight information, and evaluating service quality. While such technologies are not within the scope of an airport's core technology, focusing on service optimization processes, they complement the airport's technology experience by facilitating the benefits of passengers' use of mobile and personal devices at the airport.

Sampling and Data Collection

The questionnaire was initially developed in English and then translated into Vietnamese, followed by back-translation to ensure the validity of the items (Moswete & Darley, 2012). The survey questions were designed to be clear, concise, and specific in order to minimize ambiguity. Attention check questions were included to ensure data quality, and respondents who did not meet the minimum completion criteria were excluded from the analysis. The target sample consisted of travelers who had visited Tan Son Nhat Airport and used innovative technologies during their trips. A convenience sampling method was employed, and 423 travelers participated in the survey at the airport. Among the respondents, 60.5% were male (n = 256) and 39.5% were female (n = 167), with over 50% of respondents aged between 21 and 30 years. The majority of participants were business professionals (n = 165).

The measurement scales for self-service technologies (SSTs) and airport supporting technologies (ASTs) were adapted from Bogicevic et al. (2017) and refined through two rounds of in-depth expert interviews using the Fuzzy Delphi method. Each scale included 4 items for SSTs and ASTs, 3 items for traveler confidence benefits, 4 items for traveler enjoyment, and 4 items for traveler satisfaction. The word-of-mouth (WOM) scale was adapted from Torabi et al. (2023) and consisted of 4 items. All measurement scales had been validated in previous studies and were assessed using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Data Analysis Method

Descriptive data analysis was performed using SPSS 27. To evaluate the measurement and structural models, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed using SmartPLS software version 4.0 (Hair et al., 2019). This analysis allowed for the assessment of the relationships between constructs and the evaluation of the theoretical model's fit with the collected data.

4. Results of research

Measurement model

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to identify potential patterns among items. Following Hair et al. (2022), we removed items with low loading and cross-loading (< 0.6) when the Cronbach's alphas of corresponding constructs increased, resulting in only 23 items left. As shown in Table 1, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) values of all constructs were greater than 0., indicating satisfactory internal reliability of the items in this study. Additionally, the average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.53 to 0.72, exceeding the threshold value of 0.5. Moreover, the outer loadings ranged from 0.78 to 0.88, all statistically significant at the p = 0.001 level, supporting construct convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019). Discriminant validity was assessed by comparing the square root of the AVE for each construct with the inter-construct correlations. As shown in Table 2, all the diagonal values (the square roots of AVEs) exceeded the inter-construct correlations, satisfying the criterion for discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, AVE

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted (AVE)
SSTs	0.86	0.90	0.72
ASTs	0.76	0.85	0.59
Traveler confidence benefits	0.79	0.88	0.71

Traveler enjoyment	0.84	0.89	0.68
Traveler satisfaction	0.69	0.82	0.53
Word-of-mouth	0.76	0.85	0.60

(Source: The authors, 2024)

Table 2: Fornell-Larcker Criteria

	AST	CB	E	S	SST	Wom
AST	0,768					
CB	0,375	0,845				
E	0,404	0,560	0,824			
S	0,480	0,498	0,503	0,729		
SST	0,464	0,398	0,469	0,410	0,838	
Wom	0,449	0,532	0,516	0,660	0,434	0,772

Note: CB (Traveler confidence benefits); E (Traveler enjoyment); S (Traveler satisfaction); Wom (Word-of-mouth)

(Source: The authors, 2024)

Structural model

Results of hypotheses testing

To test the hypotheses, the study measured the explained variance (R2) of the dependent and mediating variables, their path coefficients (β), and their significance level (t-value) obtained from resampling (5000 observations) to evaluate the significance of hypothesized relationships. The results show that all p=0.00<0.05, meaning all hypotheses are accepted. Specifically, self-service technology and assistive technology at Tan Son Nhat Airport positively impact the benefits of tourists' trust and interest in travel. The benefits of tourists' travel trust and interest in traveling have a positive influence on tourist satisfaction. Satisfaction has a positive influence on tourists' WOM intention. Results of the hypotheses testing are summarized in Table 3 and figure 2.

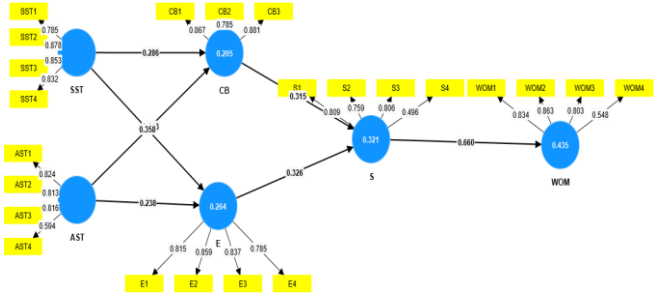

Figure 2: Results of the PLS-SEM Structural Model

(Source: The authors, 2024)

Table 3: Hypotheses Testing Results

	Path	Coefficient	T values	P values	Result
H1a	SST -> CB	0.29	4.48	0.000	Supported
H2a	AST -> CB	0.24	3.53	0.000	Supported
H1b	SST -> E	0.36	6.93	0.000	Supported
H2b	AST -> E	0.24	4.08	0.000	Supported
H3a	CB -> S	0.32	5.37	0.000	Supported
H3b	E -> S	0.33	5.02	0.000	Supported
H4	S -> WOM	0.66	4.73	0.000	Supported

(Source: The authors, 2024)

Robustness of the Model

This study used R^2 and Q^2 to consider the structural model's explanatory power and predictive relevance respectively (Hair et al., 2022). R^2 is the variance in the endogenous latent variables (dependent variables) explained by the exogenous latent variables (independent variables) in the structural model. The R^2 value of intention to revisit was 0.596, meaning that 59.6% of the variance in intention to revisit was explained by tourists' satisfaction. Finally, according to Hair et al. (2017), a Q^2 value greater than 0.00 indicates that the research model predicts a particular dependency structure. As shown in Table 4, the Q^2 values of all constructs were greater than 0.00, indicating that the structural model has predictive relevance.

Table 4: Q^2 values

	SSO	SSE	Q^2 (=1-SSE/SSO)
SSTs	904	585.254	0.353
ASTs	1356	750.429	0.447
Traveler confidence benefits	2712	1194.577	0.56
Traveler enjoyment	1808	879.935	0.513
Traveler satisfaction	1808	930.52	0.485
Word-of-mouth	1356	1165.47	0.141

(Source: The authors, 2024)

5. Discussion

This study provides valuable insights into the impact of airport technologies on tourist experiences, their intention to engage in word-of-mouth (WOM) communication, and their perceptions of digital tools at airports, with a specific focus on Tan Son Nhat International Airport. The results of this study largely align with previous research in the field, including the findings of Bogicevic et al. (2017), confirming the robustness and applicability of the research model across different airport settings. Specifically, both Self-Service Technologies (SSTs) and Airport Supporting Technologies (ASTs) were found to positively influence key dimensions of the tourist experience, such as traveler confidence, enjoyment, and satisfaction, as well as their intention to share positive WOM. These findings suggest that the model used in this study is suitable for analyzing various airport contexts, including developing countries like Vietnam.

The first, The study found that both SSTs and ASTs significantly impact travelers' perceptions of their experience at Tan Son Nhat Airport. The positive influence of SSTs on traveler confidence (H1a) and enjoyment (H1b) aligns with the results of previous studies, such as those by Bogicevic et al. (2017) and Meuter et al. (2003), which highlighted that SSTs enhance passenger empowerment by offering self-service options, thereby reducing perceived stress and increasing satisfaction. This study also extends these findings by showing that both SSTs and ASTs at Tan Son Nhat Airport enhance travelers' confidence and enjoyment, which are crucial elements

in shaping their overall experience. ASTs, such as mobile apps, USB charging stations, and interactive digital displays, also play a significant role in making the airport experience more comfortable and engaging. However, the study also indicates that while the current technologies at Tan Son Nhat Airport are positively influencing the traveler experience, there is room for improvement. The diversification of SST offerings, such as incorporating services like baggage wrapping, passport renewal, and currency exchange, would further elevate passenger convenience and satisfaction. Moreover, integrating biometric identification systems and artificial intelligence (AI) for personalized recommendations could streamline airport processes, offering a more seamless travel experience.

The second, The study demonstrates that satisfaction significantly influences tourists' WOM intentions (H4), reinforcing the findings of Rasoolimanesh et al. (2021) and Torabi et al. (2023), which emphasize that technology-driven satisfaction can lead to a greater likelihood of positive WOM. As satisfaction increases, tourists are more likely to share their positive experiences with others, potentially driving future tourist traffic and enhancing the airport's reputation. The results indicate that both SSTs and ASTs indirectly influence WOM through traveler satisfaction, underscoring the importance of investing in technologies that enhance satisfaction and create memorable travel experiences. These findings are particularly relevant in the context of Tan Son Nhat Airport, as they suggest that technology adoption is not just a matter of improving operational efficiency but also an important driver of customer loyalty and advocacy. Airports that successfully integrate technologies that foster confidence and enjoyment among passengers are likely to see a higher likelihood of positive WOM, which is a powerful marketing tool.

The findings of this study highlight that tourists in developing countries, such as Vietnam, exhibit positive perceptions of the digital tools available at Tan Son Nhat Airport. The results align with previous research on technology adoption in developing countries (Jayasuriya & Rajapaksha, 2020), where passengers have increasingly embraced digital tools that enhance convenience, comfort, and safety. The implementation of SSTs and ASTs, though still limited, was well-received by travelers who appreciated the ease and efficiency they provided. However, the study also indicates that there is potential for further enhancing tourists' perceptions by expanding the range of digital services. For example, the introduction of more advanced biometric systems for check-in and security checks, along with the integration of personalized digital services like virtual assistants and predictive maintenance, could further improve tourists' perceptions and their overall satisfaction.

6. Limitation and future direction

Limitation

This study, while providing significant insights into how airport technologies enhance tourist experiences and influence word-of-mouth (WOM) communication, also has several limitations that should be acknowledged:

The study is limited to Tan Son Nhat International Airport in Vietnam. The findings may not be generalizable to other airports, especially those in different countries with varying levels of technological adoption. The cultural and infrastructural context of Vietnam could influence travelers' perceptions differently compared to airports in more developed regions.

This research primarily focused on self-service technologies (SSTs) and airport supporting technologies (ASTs). Other emerging technologies such as biometric identification, AI-based systems, or virtual reality were not explored in-depth, even though these technologies have the potential to further influence traveler experiences.

The study's cross-sectional nature means that the data were collected at a single point in time. This limits the ability to assess how travelers' experiences with airport technologies evolve over time. Longitudinal studies could provide a deeper understanding of the long-term impact of technological advancements on traveler satisfaction and WOM.

The study used convenience sampling, which might not fully represent the entire spectrum of travelers who pass through Tan Son Nhat International Airport. Factors such as age, nationality, or the purpose of travel could influence how different groups perceive and use airport technologies. A more diverse sample could provide a clearer picture of the general traveler experience.

Future Directions

To build on the findings of this study, several future research directions can be considered:

Future research could expand the scope by comparing Tan Son Nhat Airport with other international airports, especially those in developing countries, to identify whether similar patterns in technology adoption and traveler satisfaction are observed. Comparing airports with varying levels of technological integration could also help highlight the specific technologies that most effectively enhance traveler experiences.

As airport technologies continue to evolve, future studies should explore the role of emerging technologies such as biometrics, artificial intelligence (AI), and big data analytics. These innovations may provide deeper insights into how airports can improve operational efficiency, enhance traveler satisfaction, and influence WOM in more profound ways.

Conducting longitudinal studies would allow researchers to track how travelers' perceptions of technology evolve over time and how these perceptions influence repeated visits or continued engagement with the airport. Understanding the long-term impact of airport technology on loyalty and WOM would be valuable for airports aiming to foster repeat business.

Future research could investigate how cultural differences influence the adoption and effectiveness of airport technologies. Travelers' attitudes toward technology may vary depending on their cultural backgrounds, and understanding these nuances can help airports tailor their services to different demographic groups.

Investigating the economic and psychological factors behind passengers' decisions to engage in WOM and repeat visits can offer a deeper understanding of the motivations driving their behavior. This could involve exploring how perceived value, trust in technology, and social influence contribute to WOM intentions.

Airports could benefit from integrating technologies that extend beyond operational tasks, such as personalized travel

recommendations, entertainment options, or virtual concierge services. Future studies could explore how these types of services, which focus more on traveler enjoyment rather than efficiency, can further enhance the overall experience and influence WOM.

In conclusion, while this study provides an important foundation for understanding how technology affects tourist experiences and WOM at Tan Son Nhat International Airport, there is significant potential for future research to explore broader technological contexts, long-term effects, and cultural differences. Such studies would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of airport technologies in shaping the modern travel experience.

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