

# **Consumer Intentions in Terms of Electronic Travel Distribution: Implications for Future Market Structures**

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## **Abstract**

The disintermediation hypothesis, or the supposition that the role of middlemen will be eliminated or reduced with the emergence of digital networks, has gathered much attention among scholars and in the business press. The information-intensive travel industry has been seen as especially interesting in terms of bypass threats, as it is an outstanding example of a sector where the position of the intermediaries – the travel agencies – traditionally has been strong, yet they have been seen as an unnecessary overhead by the suppliers. This paper reports on a national mail survey conducted to investigate the plausibility of the disintermediation hypothesis in travel by drawing on consumer intention data. The results indicate that nearly all Finnish Internet adopters use the Internet to look for travel-related information, but that only a small portion of the consumers has any experience with self-booking services. Nevertheless, the data reveal an intention by a significantly growing number of consumers to abandon high street travel agencies when booking holiday journeys. Approximately half of the existing and prospective Internet bookers intend to use direct distribution (disintermediating) approaches, whereas half intend to use the Internet merely as a communications channel to human travel agents, thereby primarily fostering reintermediation. The study also shows that the emergence of travel reservation services through mobile electronic channels is likely to reinforce and expedite the disintermediation phenomenon by attracting a large portion of the many non-shopping Internet users to electronic markets.

**Keywords:** Electronic commerce, Mobile commerce, Travel agents, Disintermediation, Reintermediation, Consumer survey