

Research Title:

Impact of Online Guest Reviews on Booking Decisions in the Hotel Industry.

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Introduction

Research Background

Digital technologies and the internet have largely changed the nature of the hospitality industry because of the increased rate of their development. Within the hospitality industry, various online platforms enable past customers to provide comments on the quality of the hospitality accommodation facilities, hotel location, cleanliness, facilities, and value for money (Kim and Kim, 2022). For instance, online travel agencies and online review websites, including TripAdvisor, Booking.com and Expedia websites, present travellers with high amounts of user-generated ratings, reviews, and photographs (Viglia et al., 2016; Guo, 2025; Liu, 2024). This type of information enables potential customers with the insights that are usually seen as more genuine compared to the marketing messages that are created by the hotel itself (Viglia et al., 2016; Pelsmacker et al., 2018).

Due to the growing use of online platforms to conduct travel planning, the effects of online guest reviews on hotel bookings are a topic of relevant research. This paper aims to explore the effect of online guest reviews on consumer behaviour in the hotel segment and the impact of the nature of reviews on the booking intentions of travellers.

Research Rationale

A number of studies point out that online reviews have a strong influence on consumer buying decisions in the tourism industry (Vermeulen and Seegers, 2009; Sparks and Browning, 2011). The studies have proven that travellers commonly utilise the reviews found online to compare hotels and book trips (Sparks and Browning, 2011). The reviews are an informative source of information concerning the experiences of the customers, as potential guests can decide on the quality of service ahead of the booking (Viglia et al., 2016; Kim and Kim, 2022). Therefore, more bookings may be received by hotels that have better ratings and favourable reviews.

Regardless of the increasing significance of online reviews, the picture still requires the enhancement of knowledge about the impact that certain features of reviews have on booking behaviour. Most of the literature has concentrated mainly on the total rating of

hotels and less on other key review features like review credibility, review volume, sentiment and trustworthiness (Sparks and Browning, 2011). Such factors might affect the perceptions of consumers in various ways and thus should be investigated further.

Thus, this paper will examine the role of online guest reviews when it comes to hotel booking. Considering the perspective and behaviour of a consumer concerning online reviews, the research attempts to come up with insights that can benefit the field of academic knowledge as well as the business of making and deciding in the hospitality sector.

Research contribution and motivation

Academically, the research reports on the existing literature on the topic of digital consumer behaviour within the hospitality industry. Although the influence of online reviews and their effects on consumer behaviour has been studied in the past (Viglia et al., 2016; Vermeulen and Seegers, 2009; Sparks and Browning, 2011), with the fast-growing online platforms and technological advancements in the travel sector, the topic needs to be explored further regarding how review features affect customer decisions on hotel booking. The study will serve the purpose of giving current information on the use of online reviews by travellers in accommodation choice.

The research topic also provides practical implications for managers and marketers of a hotel. The issue of online reputation has turned out to be an important competitive element of the hospitality sector (Viglia et al., 2016). Hotels that have good reviews on online platforms have higher chances of drawing customers and getting the highest guest numbers (Sparks and Browning, 2011). Knowing which online review features lead to booking of a hotel, the hotel managers will be able to come up with a better strategy to handle the customer reviews and provide services to a higher standard.

Research Aim, objectives and questions

Research Aim: This research aims to examine the impact of online guest reviews on booking decisions in the hotel industry.

Research objectives:

- To assess the role of online reviews in influencing hotel booking decisions.
- To analyse how different online review characteristics like review volume, review recency, ratings, etc., influence customer perceptions.
- To explore the level of trust travellers place in online guest reviews when selecting hotels.
- To evaluate the implications of online reviews for marketing strategies and reputation management of hotels.

Research Questions:

1. How do online hotel reviews affect the booking decisions of guests?
2. How do different online review characteristics influence customer perceptions?
3. To what extent do travellers believe in online guest reviews?
4. How can online reviews shape marketing and reputation management strategies of hotels?

Literature review

Theoretical foundations

Information Adoption Model (IAM): The Information Adoption Model (IAM) is a model that was created to describe the process by which individuals analyse and embrace information that they receive in an electronic communication (Sussman and Siegal 2003). According to the model, the chances of accepting and using information are high when individuals consider the information to be credible, useful, and high quality. IAM was initially created to gain insight into knowledge adoption on the virtual platform and has ever since been used extensively in research investigating the effect of online reviews and electronic word-of-mouth.

Theory of planned behaviour (TPB): Another relevant theory on consumer decision-making is the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), suggested by Ajzen (1991). TPB indicates that behavioural intentions determine the behaviour of an individual and are

influenced by three main factors, which are attitudes to the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control.

TPB has enjoyed the rave in tourism and hospitality studies as one of the models explaining consumer intention and travel behaviour. Sparks and Browning (2011) discovered that online reviews have a positive impact on the attitude and booking intentions of travellers, which explains the use of TPB in elucidating the influence of online information on decision making in the hospitality sector.

Signalling Theory: Introduced by Spence (1973), Signalling Theory is a theory that describes the role of information signals in minimising information asymmetry between buyers and sellers. Information asymmetry is a situation that arises when a firm possesses more information on a product or service than others. Consumers usually experience uncertainty in the hospitality industry since they do not have the ability to directly experience the hotel services prior to making a booking. Consequently, the travellers are using numerous signals to assess the quality and reliability of hotels.

Electronic word of mouth and its importance

Electronic word-of-mouth has become a critical component of marketing communication in the tourism and hospitality industry (Viglia et al., 2016). The intangible nature of hospitality services means that potential guests cannot directly evaluate service quality before making a booking decision. Online reviews provide detailed information about various aspects of hotel services, including cleanliness, staff behaviour, amenities, and value for money (Kim and Kim, 2022).

Several studies highlight the significant influence of eWOM on consumer behaviour in the tourism sector. Ye, Law and Gu (2009) found that online reviews have a measurable impact on hotel room sales, indicating that positive reviews can increase demand for hotel accommodation. Similarly, Vermeulen and Seegers (2009) suggest that exposure to online hotel reviews increases consumer awareness and improves attitudes toward hotels, which can positively influence booking intentions.

Customer trust in online reviews

Trust in online reviews is the degree to which consumers think that the information on the online reviews given by other consumers is truthful, precise and useful (Filiari 2016). Trust does depend on the online reviews based on a number of factors, such as credibility of the review, expertise level of the reviewer and the reliability of the review site (Filiari 2016). As far as hotel booking choices are concerned, a consumer is more likely to trust reviews that seem genuine and can be detailed with respect to the experiences that the guests have had.

Online review characteristics

Online reviews differ, with some having different content, format, and informational value. There are a few distinctiveness of online reviews that may determine the way in which consumers handle review information and take it into account during the booking processes (Zhao et al., 2015). According to the previous studies, there are several important features of online reviews that influence consumer perception and behaviour, including review ratings, review volume, review valence, review recency, review usefulness and comprehensiveness, as well as credibility (Sparks and Browning, 2011; Zhao et al., 2015). These features should be used as information clues, as they assist travellers in judging hotel services and decrease uncertainty in the process of making a reservation.

Effect of online reviews on booking decisions

Reviews left by online guests have become a significant determinant in the decision-making of consumers within the hospitality sector. Travellers do not look too far as they increasingly depend on online reviews and ratings to assess accommodation alternatives. Online reviews are one of the most effective ways to be informed of the quality of the services, facilities, and customer experiences (Viglia et al., 2016), and thus allow future guests to determine how well a particular hotel suits their choice of a hotel to make a reservation. Therefore, online reviews have a tremendous effect on consumer perception, booking habits and performance of a hotel generally (Zhao et al., 2015).

Research Gaps

Numerous past studies have given more attention to the general rating of the hotels as the major factor that can influence consumer booking behaviour. Although review ratings make a good summary analysis of customer satisfaction, it is only a feature of online reviews. The other key attributes of the review, like review volume, valence, credibility, and usefulness, can also have an impact on consumer perceptions and booking intent (Zhao et al., 2015). Nevertheless, these aspects have not been thoroughly studied in numerous studies.

As a means to address these gaps, the current study will measure the influence of online guest reviews over hotel reservation decisions through an evaluation of the different attributes of reviews and potential consumer interpretation and confidence in online reviews. In resolving them, the study aims to provide contributions to the current body of knowledge on electronic word-of-mouth and offer effective advice to hospitality managers on how to manage their online reputation.

Research methodologies

This chapter employs Saunderson's Research Onion model to demonstrate research methodologies applied in this project.

Research philosophy

In this paper, there will be the use of positivism philosophy that presupposes that reality is objective and measurable (Saunders et al., 2019) will be discussed. Positivism is suitable as this research aims to measure the effects of the attributes of online reviews on the choice of booking and test hypotheses based on the available theory (Tengli, 2020).

Research approach

An empirical deductive approach is taken that goes between theory and empirical observation. A literature review leads to the development of hypotheses and is built in the framework of the study and tested with the help of quantitative data, which is gathered among hotel consumers (Tengli, 2020).

Research strategy

The study is quantitative based on a survey methodology, where structured information is obtained in a sample of hotel consumers (Saunders et al., 2019). The surveys suit the testing hypothesis and measure the relationship concerning variables such as review ratings, volume, valence, comprehensiveness, credibility, and booking intentions.

Research horizon

It uses a cross-sectional study design in which the data were taken at one time of the year (Saunders et al., 2019). The design is suitable since the research seeks to obtain the perceptions and intentions of travellers regarding online reviews at the time of the research (Phair and Warren, 2021).

Research methods

Data Collection Method: This study will use primary data that a structured questionnaire will collect from a sample of consumers who have used online hotel shopping in the last 12 months (Phair and Warren, 2021). The contextual awareness of the online reviews in the hospitality industry is supported by secondary data, such as academic and industry reports.

Sampling Strategy: The whole target population will be participants who have used online review websites to make decisions on their hotel reservations. Non-probability purposive sampling methodology is used to identify participants who use the services (Tengli, 2020), else engaged with platforms like TripAdvisor and Booking.com. The targeted sample size is 50 respondents, which is believed to be enough to use in the regression analysis and hypothesis testing.

Data Analysis Techniques:

Descriptive and inferential statistics will be used in the analysis of collected data (Saunders et al., 2019). The demographic features and the review of perceptions will be summarised with the descriptive analysis, such as frequency distributions and mean scores. Correlation analysis will also evaluate the relationship between review characteristics and booking intentions, and the multiple regression analysis will evaluate the predictive strength of independent variables against booking decisions (Tengli, 2020).

Stata and MS Excel software will be used to carry out statistical analysis in order to guarantee the accuracy and reliability of the results.

Ethical Considerations

The codes of ethics are strictly followed. The informed consent of the participants is obtained prior to the participation, and all the data will be gathered anonymously to protect confidentiality (Govil, 2013). The respondents are made to understand that they can participate voluntarily and can quit at any time. No personal information or data are gathered, and the responses gathered in the course of the survey have been kept in a safe place in line with the research ethics (Govil, 2013).

Expected findings

Based on the literature review, the following research outcomes are expected:

- Higher online ratings have a significant positive impact on hotel booking decisions.
- Higher volume of online reviews positively affects hotel booking decisions.
- Positive online review sentiment has a positive relationship with hotel booking decisions.
- Higher quality and detailed online reviews positively affect hotel booking decisions.
- Consumer trust in online guest reviews positively impacts hotel booking decisions.

Limitations

This research is subject to several limitations. To begin with, the researcher has time and resource constraints due to the academic nature of the research. The research is based on data collected through a self-governed online questionnaire that is prone to bias. Besides, the small sample size limits the reliability of the tests and findings. Moreover, a small sample size has limited representation of the entire population.

Timeframe (Gantt Chart)

Week/activities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Research topic selection																
Research Proposal																
Literature review																
Research methodology																
Data collection																
Data analysis																
Report writing																
Final review and submission																

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