

TRAVELLERS ATTITUDE TOWARDS ONLINE PURCHASE OF TRAVEL PRODUCTS: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF ONLINE TRAVEL PORTALS

Bivek DATTA*

Amity Institute of Travel and Tourism, Amity University Uttar Pradesh,
Sector-125, Noida, India, e-mail:bdatta@amity.edu

Manohar SAJNANI

Amity University Uttar Pradesh, Dean Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism,
Sector-125, Noida, India, e-mail:msajnani@amity.edu

Joby THOMAS

Christ University, Department of Tourism Studies, Hosur Road,
Bengaluru, India, e-mail:joby.thomas@christuniversity.in

Abstract: The exponential growth of the online purchases and a cyber war in the digital space among the service providers for grabbing the lion's share in the online space requires an understanding of the effect of demographic features on the online purchase behaviour of the travellers. Such valuable information will help the service providers to understand and eventually segment their markets and implement effective marketing instruments. The empirical study was carried out amongst 450 travelers who booked their travel online through Online Travel Portals in Delhi National Capital Region out of which 400 questionnaires were found to be complete in all respects and can be used for data analysis. The data was collected from the departure lounge of Indira Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi. The study investigates the traveler's attitude towards online purchase of travel products and investigates the factors influencing the online purchase of travel products by the travelers. The findings denote that income and age group influence the online purchase attitude of travellers. It also identifies whether a gap existed between expectation and satisfaction of online purchase of travel products using Online Travel Portals in Delhi National Capital Region. The largest positive gap (positive disconfirmation) came from reliability in financial transactions, pertinent information, flexible packages and location while completeness in terms of services, integration on social media, usefulness, accuracy, flexible payment, information quality had a negative gap (negative disconfirmation) between the higher level of importance and lower levels of satisfaction. No significant mean differences were observed between expectations and experiences of proficient Grievance redressal system and timeliness in refund.

Key Words: Online purchase, travel products, expectation, satisfaction, Delhi NCR

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* Corresponding author

INTRODUCTION

Many of the economies have restructured and reconstructed themselves using the tourism potential to the fullest (National Tourism Policy, 2002, Government of India). The Information and Communication Technology i.e. sector in India is expected to grow by about 11.6% from 2015-19 which is majorly attributed to the burgeoning domestic market, emergence of start-up companies and plethora of techies (Swissnex, India, 2017). The market value of this booming industry is expected to be worth 38 trillion Indian Rupees by 2019 (Swissnex India, 2017). The technological outbreak and high speed internet has helped the travellers to book their flight tickets, hotel rooms online. The impact of internet is so much that it gives more information on the place we are going than ever before. It is a generation of do it yourself travellers who plan, manage and book travel online. Online travel agents are the clear winner of this digital revolution for the last fifteen years (How Technology has transformed the travel industry. The Guardian, 29th February, 2016). With a massive population of 1.25 billion people enthusiastic to participate in the technological advancements, India is all set to make the most of the digital developments transforming the payments ecosystem (Source: Digital Payments 2020, The making of a 500 billion USD ecosystem in India, BCG July, 2016). Online booking websites have carved a niche for themselves and have gained prominence. All these sites have helped us to plan our own trips by booking online directly with airlines and hotels. These websites have helped us to find out economical air fares and hotel rates. Millennials are the fastest growing segments who are using them (<http://www.nomadicmatt.com/travel-blogs/using-travel-agents/>).

Business Traveller Vs Leisure Traveller

Leisure travellers 66% use online search engines to research travel in comparison to 59% in case of business travelers. 40% of both travellers use Airline websites, 36% of both the travellers use hotel websites and 40% of leisure travellers and 32% of business travellers use destination sites for booking their last trip (TripAdvisor, 2013) 49% of business traveller and 47% of leisure traveller (TripAdvisor, 2013) booked accommodation at the same time as key segments. 33% of business traveller and 32% of leisure traveller booked insurance and 29% of business traveller and 21% of leisure traveller booked car rentals. Both the travellers are choosing to book online (TripAdvisor, 2013). 75% of the leisure travellers think that the online booking should be cost effective whereas 64% of business travellers feel that the online travel services should be cost effective. 61% of both leisure and business travellers want a simpler booking process while 58% of them want it to be faster. Both travellers want a variety of services at one place, easy booking process, reduce complexity and improve travel research (TripAdvisor, 2013). Both travellers want a secure payment system. Internet is transforming the travel industry for business and leisure travellers but it is not replacing other sources of information gathering such as getting information from friends, families and colleagues. Printed material, television and professional advice still have a role in the travellers sojourn. Websites such as Facebook, twitter, YouTube are transforming the idea of word of mouth and extending the influence of these social networking sites. Both the technology driven travellers demand updated information and services that facilitate a truly personalized travel experience (TripAdvisor, 2013).

Indian Perspective:

Indian passenger travel market is expected to grow at 11-11.5% to \$48 Billion by 2020 with the biggest contributor, air travel, expected to grow at 15% to \$30 billion (The Hindu Newspaper, India published on 2nd July, 2017). Hotels will grow at 13 per cent to \$13 billion by 2020 while railways will remain \$5 billion, according to Boston Consulting Group

(BCG) and Google India report (Demystifying the Indian Online Traveller, June, 2017). Additionally, as more people have adopted the online mode, smartphone penetration increases and use of digital payments goes up, the report estimates that India's online hotel market will grow to \$4 billion with 31 per cent penetration at a compounded annual growth rate of 25%. Demystifying the travel planning journey, a report on the typical Indian consumer displays that for many Indian consumers, a vacation is an event planned in advance as opposed to being an impulse purchase. Consumers typically spend 46 days on an average to plan their trip. They spend 49 minutes online on their travel research and visit as many as 17 touch points during their booking journey (Demystifying the Indian Online Traveller, June, 2017). However, the length of each online session is less than three minutes, due to the ubiquity of mobile. Through their journey, Indian travellers tend to move back and forth across different online channels, checking availability, comparing prices and assessing connectivity (Demystifying the Indian Online Traveller, June, 2017).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Internet has become an important information source for end consumers in many industries. It has brought higher levels of market transparency, permitting consumers to observe information that previously was not available via other distribution channels. Review of literature indicates that in the framework of e-commerce there are many functional service qualities which are valued by customers during online purchase such as fast connectivity, security issues and user friendly network (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000). Prospective Customers think that the prices quoted on the internet are less than the prices quoted by traditional travel agencies and 66% of all buyers had used an online discount in the previous one year to buy travel online (Source: Joint Hospitality Industry Congress, 2000 and Forrester Research, 2001). Online Travel Portals have several unique competitive characteristics. Online Travel Portals can utilize and select only those which are offered by the airlines and do not have the ability to change the prices or other product features. Online travel portals helps customers to find the best available ticket according to their needs (Clemons et al., 2002).

Online Travel Portals offers multiple options for a given search. It can serve multiple customers simultaneously, electronic markets on the internet have made it easier for consumers to search for services from various electronic markets (O'Connor & Frew, 2002). E-Commerce has revolutionized many organizations and the evolution of ICT has spurred fierce competition between organizations and have to adapt technology in order to survive in the digital space. Online travel portals provide the first point of contact through the Internet to help the prospective customers to search for air fares and suitable flights and come to a decision and simultaneously book the ticket through the Internet (O'Connor & Murphy, 2004). Electronic medium has new horizons for travel related information, price comparison and availability which will assist customers to book travel products online. The advent of reservations online is the most striking discovery in the digital space and these online travel portals are likely to be used by individuals as well as business travel planners (Carroll & Siguaw, 2003). Online travel portals and suppliers of online travel products provide common array of travel products. The common elements include the content of information, structure, security aspects, ease of use (Kim et al., 2004). Online Travel Portals are facing fierce competition in the digital market place and they are feeling the heat to assess the efficiency of their websites (Park et al., 2007). Perceived value is built during the purchasing process whereas satisfaction is evaluated post purchase as revealed through various studies. Perceived value is related to the trade-off between benefits and sacrifices (Chang et al., 2009). Prior studies indicate that service quality is linked with

customer satisfaction (Hawari & Mouakket, 2012) and loyalty intention (Sadeh et al., 2012). Very few studies have been conducted to investigate the impact of service quality on perceived value and the ones who have conducted research does not differentiate between the functional and hedonic dimensions of service quality which leaves area for further research (Ravald & Gronroos, 1996) touched upon the value concept as the ability to provide superior quality to the customers and came to a conclusion that customer satisfaction was more than just a perception of the quality received. Consumers tend to buy familiar and well known products as they feel more confident with what they are actually buying (Chi et al., 2009). A positive image through word of mouth is essential for boosting brand awareness (Hong, 2004). Huang (2008) found that loyalty to an online travel agency resulted in an increased intention to purchase from that agency. Loyalty refers to the psychological commitment that a customer makes in the act of purchasing (Nam et al., 2011). This commitment may eventually result in the final intention to purchase or recommend. Brand loyalty has a strong impact on purchasing intention (Hawes & Lumpkin, 1984). Lang (2000) indicates that many travel consumers are surfing the web but are reluctant to book online, preferring more conventional and traditional travel networks. Internet is serving as a mode to extract information while very few users who surf the net book online. This makes the literature review indecisive on how to represent the online purchasing behaviour of consumers. Purchasing intention does not in any way represent a shortcoming as there is significant indication of the existence of a causal link between intention and buying behaviour (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study investigates attitude of travellers towards online purchase of travel products in Delhi National Capital Region through online travel portals. The study will provide solution to three research questions:

1. Does the online purchase of travel products vary among the demographic variables chosen i.e. Gender, Age, income?
2. Which are the factors influencing the online purchase of travel products?
3. Is there any difference between pre-trip expectations and post-trip expectations of online purchase of travel products using Online Travel Portals.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The first research question will be answered through three null hypotheses generated:

H1: There is no significant difference in the traveler's attitudes towards online purchase of travel products among both males and females.

H2: There is no significant difference in the traveler's attitudes towards online purchase of travel products among different age groups.

H3: There is no significant difference in the traveler's attitudes towards online purchase of travel products among different income groups.

The second research question will be answered through the statistical analysis of the data received through structured questionnaire.

The third research question will be answered through a paired t-test to investigate whether a gap existed between expectation and satisfaction of online purchase of travel products using Online Travel Portals.

Objectives of the Study

1. To investigate the travellers attitude towards online purchase of travel products;
2. To study the impact of demographic variables on travellers attitude towards online purchase of travel products;

3. To identify the factors influencing purchase of travel products through online purchase;
4. To identify whether a gap existed between expectation and satisfaction of online purchase of travel products using Online Travel Portals.

Conceptual Framework: One of the earliest accepted theory pertaining to the factors that influence online purchase behaviour of consumers is the theory of reasoned action. Njite and Parsa (2005) emphasized the importance of trust in electronic business transaction. Technology acceptance model is the extension of the theory of reasoned action explained by the constructs of usefulness and ease of use of technology in the area of information systems.

Research Design: The data for the study was collected through structured questionnaire collected from 450 travellers at Indira Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi out of which 400 were complete in all respects. Demographic variables were first studied followed by the factors influencing the purchase of online travel products. The responses were measured with 5 point Likert Scale. The demographics of the travellers at Indira Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi are mentioned in Table 1. The below mentioned Figure 1 throws light on the gender of the respondents at Indira Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi. Figure 2 indicates the Age Group of the Respondents at Indira Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Travellers at Indira Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi
(Source: Primary Data collected at Indira Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi)

Variable	Number of Respondents		Percentage
Gender	Male	276	69%
	Female	124	31%
Age	18-25	110	27.5%
	26-35	206	51.5%
	36-50	64	16%
	51-65	20	5%
Income (Monthly) in Indian Rupees	Less than 15000	100	25%
	15001-20000	140	35%
	20001-25000	98	24.5%
	25001-30000	38	9.5%
	More than 30000	24	6%

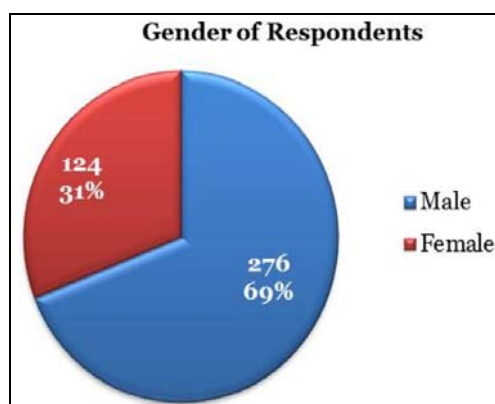


Figure 1. Gender of the Respondents at Indira Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi

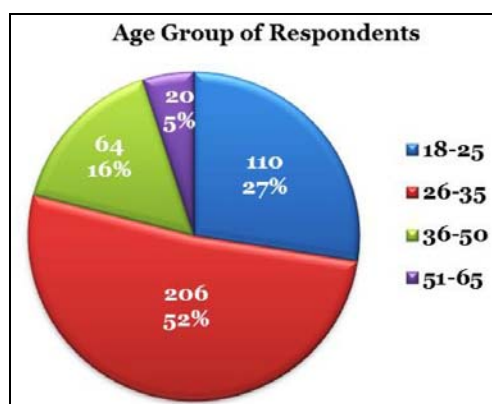


Figure 2. Age Group of the Respondents at Indira Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi

To test the three hypotheses generated data was collected from the first section i.e. the demographic profile of the travellers which contains pertinent information on the demographic variables of the respondents (gender, age and income) and the use of online travel booking on the basis of frequency, duration and the pattern of purchase. To understand the difference in travellers attitude towards online travel purchase due to demographic variables i.e. gender, age and income chi-square test was used. The information collected from the following section two of the questionnaire contains 12 statements measuring the purchase behaviour of travel products to study the factors affecting the online purchase of travel products. These 12 statements were drawn after extensive literature review and were measured on a five point Likert Scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The higher score reflects more favorable traveller's attitude. These 12 statements were further analyzed through factor analysis for identification of the key factors chosen by the travellers.

Factor Analysis identifies the common dimensional factors from the observed variables that have high degree of correlation with the observed variables and unrelated variables but no correlation among the 12 factors. The factors are extracted in such a manner that the first factor accounts for highest variance in the data, followed by the second factor and so on. Principal Component Analysis will be used in this case as our aim is to find the minimum number of factors that will describe maximum variance in data. Varimax Rotation is used to simplify the structure of the factors. In this case only factors with Eigen values more than 1 will be preferred. Eigen Value represents the amount of variance associated with the factors. The below mentioned Figure 3 provides insight into the income of the Respondents expressed in months collected at Indira Gandhi International Airport and represented in Indian Rupees.

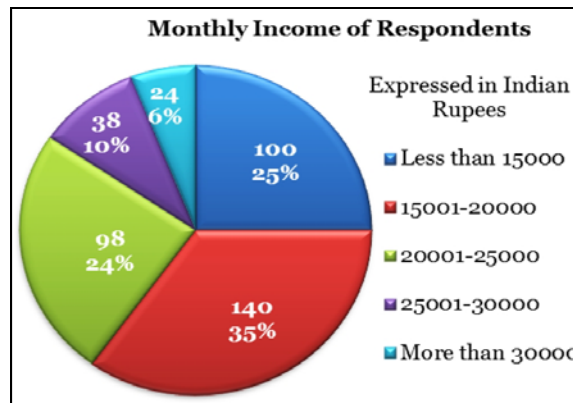


Figure 3. Income of the Respondents (in months) at Indira Gandhi International Airport and represented in Indian Rupees

Data Analysis: The chi square test values will help to understand the differences if any persist in traveller's attitude towards online purchase of travel products due to demographic variables of gender, age and income.

Gender: The first hypothesis states that there is no significant difference in the traveller's attitudes towards online purchase of travel products among both males and females. To test this hypothesis chi square test was used to deduce if there is any association between travellers attitude towards online purchase of travel products and the gender of the respondents. The calculated value came out to be 0.079. The table value of

chi square at 1 df was 3.48. The calculated value is less than the critical value so the null hypothesis is accepted. It is further deduced that there is no significant difference in the traveler's attitude towards online purchase of travel products due to gender.

Age: The second hypothesis states that there is no significant difference in the traveler's attitudes towards online purchase of travel products among different age groups. To test this hypothesis chi square test was used to deduce if there is any association between travellers attitude towards online purchase of travel products and the age of the respondents, The calculated value came out to be 16.826 (Analysis of the Primary Data collected from travellers at Indira Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi). The table value of chi square at 3df was 7.62. The calculated value is more than the critical value so we can reject the null hypothesis. It is further deduced that there exists a significant difference in the traveler's attitude towards online purchase of travel products due to age. This further demonstrates that different age groups travellers have different attitudes towards online purchase of travel products.

Income: The third hypothesis states that there is no significant difference in the traveler's attitudes towards online purchase of travel products among different income groups. To test this hypothesis chi square test was used to deduce if there is any association between travellers attitude towards online purchase of travel products and the income of the respondents. The calculated value came out to be 32.797 (Analysis of the Primary Data collected from travellers at Indira Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi). The table value of chi square at 4 df was 9.82. The calculated value is more than the critical value so we can reject the null hypothesis. It is further deduced that there exists a significant difference in the traveler's attitude towards online purchase of travel products due to income. It is therefore deduced that income seems to have an impact on the traveler's attitude towards online purchase of travel products. The higher income group displays higher mean score. Therefore higher income group of travellers are likely to display more favourable attitude towards online purchase of travel products.

Table 2. Factors influencing the Online Purchase Behaviour for Travel related Products
(Source: Five factor solution with loading of items and having Eigen value greater than 1)

Factor	Percentage Variance Explained	Variables included in the Factor
F1	Convenience (19.14) Eigen Value-2.055	Purchase of online travel products online is very convenient (0.69) Purchasing travel products online is easy (0.71) Purchasing travel products online saves a lot of time (0.63) Purchasing online travel products is possible from any geographical corner (0.61)
F2	Trust (17.89) Eigen Value-2.087	I don't want to share my credit card details (0.58) I don't trust online transaction (0.59) I don't trust the payment safety gateway (0.76) I don't trust the online portals (0.61)
F3	Service (14.26) Eigen Value-1.651	I think the a wide array of services would induce travellers to purchase online travel products (0.67) I think a well mechanized online environment will help travellers to purchase online travel products (0.68)
F4	Awareness (12.23) Eigen Value-1.237	I think the social media should play a major role in creating awareness of the travel related products (0.71) I think online travel portals should have more digital presence on the social media (0.62)
F5	Network (9.6) Eigen Value-1.017	I believe that the online travel service provider should be a recognizable brand (0.59) The network should have a greater geographical reach (0.58)

Results of factor analysis answer the second research question. Table 2 displays a five factor solution with loading of items and having Eigen value greater than 1. These five factors are Convenience, Trust, service, Awareness, Network given in Table 3.

Table 3. Five Factors derived from Factor Analysis

Convenience	19.14
Trust	17.89
Service	14.26
Awareness	12.23
Network	9.6

The extracted factors explained 73% of the total variance and only 27% of the information content is lost after reducing the number of factors to five out of the 12 factors. 73% is retained by the five factors extracted out of the twelve variables.

Research Instrument for fulfilling Objective 4: A structured questionnaire was used as research instrument. The questions measured the expectations and satisfactions of travellers towards online travel Portal. Travellers expectations were measured in terms of 12 areas i.e. accuracy, reliability in financial transactions, proficient grievance redressal system, flexible packages, flexible payment, location, information quality, pertinent information, integration on social media, usefulness, completeness in terms of services, timeliness in refund based on Wixon and Todd Model (2005). The scores of expectations and experiences of travellers pertaining to their usage of online travel portals were collected on a five point Likert-scale. The constructs were all reliable as the Cronbach alpha coefficients for all the constructs were higher than 0.7 (Hair et al., 2006).

Paired t-test: A paired t-test was carried out to find out whether there is a gap between expectation and satisfaction of travellers towards online travel portal. The t-test is applied to find out the significant difference between travellers expectations and experiences (Hui et al., 2007).

Table 3. Paired t-test on Online Travel Portals attributes and services
(Source: Primary Data, Wixon and Todd Model, 2005)

Attributes	Expectations (pre-booking)	Experiences (post-booking)	Gap	t-value	p value
Accuracy	3.496	3.319	-0.177	-3.505	0.001 ***
Reliability in financial transactions	3.832	4.224	0.392	6.093	0.000 ***
Proficient Grievance redressal system	3.683	3.638	-0.045	-0.865	0.388
Flexible packages	3.862	4.078	0.216	3.556	0.000 ***
Flexible payment	3.902	3.746	-0.156	-2.862	0.004 ***
Location	3.787	3.823	0.036	0.650	0.516
Information Quality	3.281	3.547	0.266	-1.839	0.067 ***
Pertinent information	3.281	3.281	0.000	4.028	0.000 ***
Integration on social media	3.676	3.373	-0.303	-4.912	0.000 ***
Usefulness	3.264	3.036	-0.228	-3.902	0.000 ***
Completeness in terms of services	3.897	3.394	-0.503	-8.901	0.000 ***
Timeliness in refund	3.795	3.721	-0.074	-1.349	0.178

Note *** p<0.01 ** p<0.05, * p<0.1 (2-tailed)

Table 3 displays that in nine of the twelve attributes the gap between expectations and experiences was statistically significant. The largest positive gap (positive disconfirmation) came from reliability in financial transactions, pertinent information,

flexible packages and location while completeness in terms of services, integration on social media, usefulness, accuracy, flexible payment, information quality had a negative gap (negative disconfirmation) between the higher level of importance and lower levels of satisfaction. No significant mean differences were observed between expectations and experiences of proficient Grievance redressal system and timeliness in refund.

CONCLUSION

From the study it is deduced that travellers have a positive attitude towards the purchase of travel products online but the traveler's attitude towards online purchase of travel products is low. The second objective is fulfilled through analyzing the primary data obtained through structured questionnaire. It was meant to study the impact of demographic variables on traveler's attitude towards online purchase of travel products. The analysis deduced that gender did not affect traveler's attitude towards online purchase of travel products whereas age and income indicated a significant association with the traveler's attitude pertaining to purchase of travel products. The travellers in the higher income group indulge more in online travel product purchase. The travellers in different age groups display different attitude towards purchase of online travel products. The third objective was to identify the factors influencing purchase of travel products through online purchase. On the basis of findings trust, service and awareness seems to be major concerns for the travellers but convenience and network play a major role in online travel purchase. The fourth objective was to identify whether a gap existed between expectation and satisfaction of online purchase of travel products using Online Travel Portals. The largest positive gap (positive disconfirmation) came from reliability in financial transactions, pertinent information, flexible packages and location. The positive difference value indicates that these four attributes are all higher than what the travellers have expected from online travel portals.

The attributes of completeness in terms of services, integration on social media, usefulness, accuracy, flexible payment, information quality had a negative gap (negative disconfirmation) between the higher level of importance and lower levels of satisfaction. No significant mean differences were observed between expectations and experiences of proficient Grievance redressal system and timeliness in refund. The negative gap value throws light that the satisfaction of travellers towards the online travel portals is less than their expectations.

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