

Impact of Online Reviews on Hotel Booking for Novice Travelers

Siddharth Shimpi*, Sagar Bhadange**, Sachin Patil***, Hemant Anbhule****

Abstract *It is quite a common to read online reviews before making a purchase decision. Online reviews have transformed the way individuals make their purchase decisions. Online reviews are more than just a way to collect the information. The present study explained and explored the impact of online reviews on purchase decision among novice travelers for hotel bookings. A structured and un-disguised questionnaire was developed and used to collect the primary data from 427 respondents. Conceptual model was examined by using structural equation modelling. Study delivered detailed insight on various elements used for analysis and revealed that online review score and volume, online review platform, online reviewer expertise, timeliness of review influenced trust of novice travelers. Further, study confirmed mediating role of trust between the online review score and volume, online review platform, online reviewer expertise, timeliness of review and purchase decision for hotel bookings by first time travelers.*

Keywords: *Online Reviews, Trust, Purchase Decision, Novice Travelers*

INTRODUCTION AND CONCEPT OF NOVICE TRAVELERS

Travel and tourism industry is one of the world's largest industries. In 2016, it has indirectly contributed over 7.6 trillion US dollars to global economy. Statistics shows that there are 1323 millions of tourist arrives internationally every year. People travel for various reasons from vacation for discovering sites and culture to education. Many a times, no matter how hard travelers plan and prepare to make their travel smooth, things don't go according to plan. When things are thrown off, it sets off panic, anger, and frustration among travelers. To overcome this problem, travelers always seek help of external entities like travel agencies assuming their expertise in managing the tours. However, travel agents services come at cost and cost varies based on the services that travelers seek from agents. Situation goes more complicated when people travel abroad i.e. other than their home county and that to first time. These first time travelers are called as novice travelers.

Novice is the word derived from the Latin word 'NOVUS,' means new or beginner. Among the ancient Romans, a novice was typically a new enslaved person, who had to be skilled in his or her responsibilities and duties. It is a term used to define inexperienced person or someone who is new to his circumstances. According to the widely accepted constructive learning model of learning, for novice it is very difficult to decide the vital parts of the information needed in the constructive process. Usually, the novices lack the basic schemas for problems solving therefore information provided by experts play a decisive part in his decision.

Novice traveler is the concept defined by several researchers and authors. Novice travelers are unknown or least known about the various travelling facilities and options available for touring including stay at the travel destination. As stated by Olabe, Basogain and Olabe (2016) novice travelers are people who have never been to that city before and has no long-term memories to access and they have to rely on maps an effortful search. Moreover, they are the travelers who

* Associate Professor, Symbiosis Skills and Professional University, Pune, Maharashtra, India. Email: siddharth.shimpi@sspu.ac.in

** Assistant Professor, Symbiosis Skills and Professional University, Pune, Maharashtra, India.

*** Assistant Professor, Global Business School & Research Centre, Dr. D. Y. Patil Vidyapeeth, Pune, Maharashtra, India.

**** Assistant Professor, School of Management, MIT-WPU, Pune, Maharashtra, India.

particularly seek help of tour agencies or internet websites for all sorts of bookings including booking of hotels for stay purpose. First time travelers may be independent person who wants to explore the destination, may be a group of friends, business group or family members or couple who want to visit the destination for fun, leisure or any other purpose. These travelers are always thought of the risk associated with travel as they are going to visits the unknown places. Couple, particularly, may look for more safety options while booking hotel or a group of friends look for convenience and comfort about hotel, group of family member who specifically will look for safety and comfort.

Due to inexperience (Siddiqi & Akhtar, 2021) to a place, novice travelers may approach tour agencies to get the best choices of the hotel but at the same time they may be suspicious as they know tour agencies are going to get commission on the hotel booking so by any how the reliance on tour agency get compromised. In this situation travelers want to get neutral opinion which will help them to decide on travel plan and other bookings like hotels, stay, etc. This lead novice customers to approach to their friends and family who have already experienced the place they are planning to visit. The comments received from the peer help novice travelers to make perfect plan for their journey. Most travelers believe that peer reviewers are more neutral and honest in comparison to information shared by various platforms run by business communities.

Moreover, it was observed that novice travelers also seek information from Web 2.0 platforms. There are positive as well as negative reviews posted on internet, on various platforms. There are almost millions of options and reviews available on these user-generated content platforms. Social media, retailers' websites, video sharing platforms, independent reviewing platforms and personal blogs share the big volume of customers reviews (Holleschovsky, 2015) that are used by novice travelers to plan their trips to unknown destinations.

Undoubtedly, internet technology along with the social media usage has transformed the way people think, interact and purchase. For every valuable purchase decisions, customers normally verify the details of company and products on digital platforms like company websites or social media sites. These digital platforms not only consist and present the contents generated by marketers but they are the platforms where users of the sites can also publish their views on the topics. This emergences an electric word of mouth, generally refereed as online reviews or eWOM. Like word of mouth, online reviews also play very important role in acquiring and retaining the customers for the organizations. Like word of mouth, online equally stand effective in generating sales and revenue for all offerings of the organizations in the form of goods or services. However, online reviews are more powerful tool compared to word of mouth as electronic

reviews have power to reach too many by one review writer. Jalilvand and Samiei (2012) defined online reviews as positive or negative reviews given by current, potential or old customer via internet.

Today, it becomes equally important for organizations to provide quality products and after sales services as users of products can produce the content on social media about their experiences, may be good or bad. This may further influence the prospects to decide on their purchases.

Study conducted by Lee, Park and Han (2008) revealed that there are set of customers who demonstrate good interest in the consumption and buying behaviour of other customers and moreover, they are the advocates who want to help other customers for their greater shopping experiences. It has been also observed that these customers are setting online community platforms for sharing their views and feedbacks of about specific products. There are so many online communities available on leading social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube where one customer with his insights on the products tries to inform and educate the other customer.

Understanding and experiencing the power of social media sites for e-reviews, organizations are feeling very pressurised to maintain healthy relationship with their customers and this attitude of organizations has immensely multiplied in today's business era. This is the true power of customer where customer is referred as king. Online reviews or eWOM, to some extent, remained very effective tool in proving that the customer is the king.

However, there are few issues noticed by few researchers about electronic reviews or eWOM. First, there are organizations who are writing fake reviews on social media sites about their products or about competitors' products. Second, authenticity of reviews is a big question as readers are completely unaware about the intention of writer in producing these reviews. Third, the platform use to share these reviews from the view point of credibility also impacts the readers. Thus, the present study is focusing on the impact of online reviews in decision making for novice travelers for hotel bookings.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND DEVELOPMENT OF HYPOTHESES

In the following section, the paper presents the review of literature describing the hypothesized relationships among various variables of the study.

Online Review Score and Volume

An online review contains several types of information such as review text, review title and review score. Positive reviews

containing high score, positive sentiments and positive title make readers to trust on the offerings by organizations. Moreover, volume of the electronic reviews decides the change in the consumer behaviour (Amblee & Bui, 2007). Study demonstrated by Eslami and Ghasemaghahi (2018) revealed that review title, review score and text sentiments positively influences sales for both, high and low involvement products. Further, Zablocki, Schlegelmilch and Houston (2019) have verified that the characteristics of online reviews (sentiments, volume, and inconsistency) influence attitude of customers towards brands.

Undoubtedly, online reviews are one of the major information sources available for consumers and moreover, as stated by Hu, Liu and Zhang (2008) consumers understand the value difference between favourable and unfavourable online reviews and respond accordingly. Like, product communication activities, the potential customers also positively trust online reviews (Ziegele & Weber, 2015). Thus, it can be concluded that online reviews have become one of the most influential communication tools in consumers purchase decision where organizations have very low control in terms of creation of content. However, value of online reviews, potential customers' perception towards reviews and sentiments of reviews surely needs to be understood and tested.

Online Review Platform

Online review platforms freely allow customers to post their views and experiences about the products they have purchased and used. Online review platforms are also seen as engagement tools from the organizational perspectives where direct connect with the customers is possible. Nevertheless, there are many online review platforms available, understanding their characteristics is equally important (Schweidel & Moe, 2014; Berger & Iyengar, 2013). Online review platforms are characterised as social media platforms, review platforms and e-commerce sites. As found by Babić Rosario, Sotgiu, De Valck and Bijmolt (2016), online reviews displayed on e-commerce sites are very effective and are positively linked to the greatest extent to the sales and revenue. However, for social media sites, the unstructured display of online reviews with homophile details of writers positively creates the trust among readers and future customers (Babić Rosario, 2016).

Today, where web users can create and disseminate content on internet sites, Rodgers and Wang (2011) have classified these platforms on the basis of their characteristics as feedback systems or consumer review sites and online communities or electronic discussion boards.

Nevertheless various eWOM platforms positively affect consumers; however, apparent credibility of eWOM is

fully concerned with the risk associated with the product purchase (Yan, Wu, Zhou & Zhang, 2018). As suggested by Tadelis (2016), in order to rescue from confusion, the online platform should be careful about the product review and seller review. Also, marketing and promotion on third party review platforms is still an effective marketing tool (Hong, Xu, Wang & Fan, 2017).

Online Reviewer's Expertise

Online review expert is a person who posts the reviews online to add the content database. There is difference between the expert reviewer and non-expert reviewer. Objectives behind the review is also different in both the cases as experts are generally inspired to post the accurate review or judgement to build the 'bank of knowledge' however in other way non-expert are lacking in expertise and they don't have any interest to build the knowledge base but primarily they are more inspired by purchase intention or purchase outcome (Bloch, Sherrell & Ridgway, 1986).

Richardson (2003) acknowledged that world of electronic online-communication has become possible source of news and information to everyone. However, he is worried about the way participants examine asynchronous newsgroups and show their concern for the trustworthiness of their own and others' contributions to debate. The question for credibility of the expertise is difficult in online system of communication. Reviewers may use different name and identity to publish their reviews online. It is difficult to judge the reliability of reviewer. However, as suggested by Mackiewicz (2010) reviewer's expertise is judged by the questions asked in the post. Also, use of specific terminologies explains the reviewer's credibility. Another way that online reviewers establish credibility is through asserts expertise. Moreover, comments about reviews by readers ratify and contribute to reviewer credibility.

Indeed, online reviews provide additional information about product to reduce uncertainty. Hence, consumers often trust online reviews to form purchase decision. However, a rise in online review brings the problem of overload of information to individuals. Identifying valuable information from large number of reviews becomes increasingly complex to consumers. Text readability and reviewer's characteristics affect the perceived value of review (Fang, Ye, Kucukusta & Law, 2016; Racherla & Friske, 2012).

Timeliness of Review

Easy access to web has changed the way people shop for almost everything and even the way they plan their travel. It is rare for people to blindly make purchase decision without reading several online reviews. Good (or bad) reviews have

a way of quick spreading online. Encouraging customers to review company online is one of the easiest ways to expand company's offering and create brand awareness. When people have good things to say, they are also more likely to share negative reviews online platforms. One of the important challenge company faces with online reviews is it cannot easily delete them. Online reviews always remain in stock for easy reference at any given point. However, timeliness of reviews has more impact on decision making of customers (Stevens, Spaid, Breazeale & Jones, 2018). The most recent review has more ability to influence the customer than the old review (Fu, Bin, Xie, Liuli & Yu, 2011). Time of post of online review is associated with content relevancy. It has observed that people always prefer to read recent post (Jindal & Liu, 2008). Undoubtedly, timeliness of review is one of the impactful factors that need consideration.

Trust

As stated by Williamson (1993), trust is a term with many meanings. Though several authors have defined trust in their studies, there still remains collective lack of consensus about trust's meaning. According to Lucier, Boucher, White and Kowalski (1992) trust is a clustering of perceptions; however, Dasgupta (2000) refers trust as a commodity as a central to all transactions. Indeed, trust makes cooperative endeavours happen with a positive interpersonal relationship among 2 parties of any business. Trust includes both - emotional and cognitive dimensions (Lewis & Weigert, 1985).

For online platforms, there are many facets of trust. Reliance on online platform (Lee, Park & Han, 2011), faith on e-reviewer's expertise (Racherla, Mandviwalla & Connolly, 2012), belief on the online content published, and conviction on the purpose of online content cumulatively contributes to trust. Further, Sparks and Browning (2011) found positive effect of trust on purchase intentions and study by Hsiao, Lin, Wang, Lu and Yu (2010) revealed an optimistic effect of trust on online product recommendations.

From the literature study and arguments above, following hypotheses are proposed for validation:

H₁: Online review score and volume will positively influence trust among novice travelers for hotel bookings.

H₂: Online review platform will positively influence trust among novice travelers for hotel bookings.

H₃: Online reviewer expertise will positively influence trust among novice travelers for hotel bookings.

H₄: Timeliness of review will positively influence trust among novice travelers for hotel bookings.

Purchase Decision

The consumer buying process starts long before the actual purchase and continues till post purchase behaviour. The impact of marketing mix along with sociocultural influences, psychological influences and situational influences determines what consumers decide to purchase and how they use what they buy. However, for online purchases consumers always experience some level of risk due to inherent nature of digital business. In this uncertain situation when consumers have to act, Luhmann (2000) believed that trust comes into play as a solution for the specific problems of risk. Consumers in digital era consider three stages of purchase decision as initial consideration stage, the elaboration stage and the moment of purchase stage. Mittal (1989) has also found that the purchase decision and involvement of consumer in purchase decision is distinguished from product to product. Conventionally, for hotel bookings four main areas as location, price, facilities and cleanliness influences selection decision (Lockyer, 2005). As revealed by Cai, Feng and Breiter (2004) that online information significantly important by tourist for decision; however, it differs based on level of purchase decision involvement to another. Similarly, Bansal and Voyer (2000) discovered a positive effect of receiver's expertise, receiver's perceived risk, and sender's expertise on purchase decision.

Based on above discussion, following hypothesis is proposed to validate:

H₅: Trust will positively influence hotel bookings among the first time travelers.

Moderating Role of Trust

Considering the role of relationship of Trust and all others variable this study proposes mediating role of trust between online review score and volume, online review platform, online reviewer expertise, timeliness of review and purchase decision. Thus, hypothesis states as:

H₆: Trust will mediate between the online review score and volume, online review platform, online reviewer expertise, timeliness of review and purchase decision for hotel bookings first time travelers.

Based on the relevant review of literature, a conceptual framework is proposed (Fig. 1) for validation.

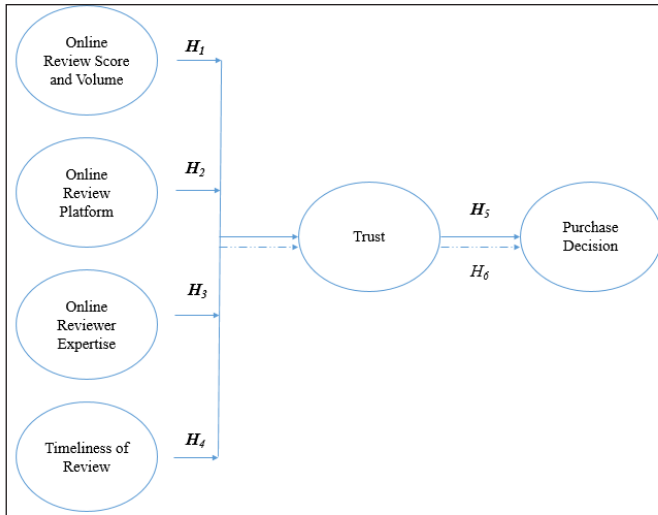


Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework

METHOD AND ANALYSIS

For the present study, researchers have adopted a descriptive research design through survey method with a large sample size. Before analysis of data, the data set was screened for incorrect data entry and missing values. Moreover, data set was checked for normality and outliers. To facilitate validation of psychometric properties of perception scale, researchers have used confirmatory factor analysis. Structural equation modelling was used to validate the hypotheses, as proposed in the conceptual framework (Fig. 1).

Measures

Structured and un-disguised questionnaire was developed and used as research instruments with items from validated scales for measuring online review score and volume, online review platform, online reviewer expertise, timeliness of review, trust and purchase decision (Appendix A). Questionnaire was tested through pilot survey of 30 respondents to find out relevancy of the questions, willingness of the respondents to participate and share the information, understanding of the questions by the respondents for desire responses, ease and time taken by the respondents for completion of the questionnaire and likely range of responses.

Sampling Method

The responses were taken from the novice travelers, citizens of India and are aged above 18 years. These travelers were both male and female who were travelling abroad first time

either for business trip or leisure outing. The responses were collected from Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur cities from where flights to international destinations depart. Population-wise and economically Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur are top three cities of Maharashtra. According to data published by AC Nielsen ORG-MARG for Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, Mumbai contributes to 25 percent of domestic visitors and 79 percent of foreign visitors followed by Pune (14 percent) and Nagpur. The final samples were selected using a combination of convenient and accidental sampling techniques.

Sample

Researcher has distributed over 1100 questionnaires across Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur city. In response to that, researcher has received 427 appropriate responses, which was 38.81 percent of rate of response. As suggested by Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson and Tatham (1998), the sample size exceeds the recommended minimum. These responses were collected during the period from October, 2019 to February, 2020.

RESULTS

For the present study, researchers have used structural equation modelling to validate the hypotheses as proposed in the conceptual model. To test the proposed research model, data analyses for both the measurement model and structural model were performed using Generalized Least Squares. However, before that to ensure the appropriateness of the research instrument, researchers have tested for content validity and reliability statistics.

Content Validity

Content validity is ensured through the relevant literature review on the subject of the study. Pilot study of questionnaire was conducted with the help of panel of expert consisting of professors and due changes were incorporated to improve the content and clarity of questions in the instrument. Further, pilot test of the questionnaire was carried among the sample respondents, separated from those were included in the final study.

Reliability Statistics

For the present study, researchers have used Cronbach's Alpha reliability method to check the reliability of items. From the analysis, the reliability coefficient value was

observed as 0.812 and it described high reliability of the questionnaire.

Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin Measures of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity

Researchers have carried Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) Measures of Sampling Adequacy to signifying that the sample was sufficient to contemplate the data as normally distributed and value of KMO is observed as 0.768, above accepted level. Similarly, researchers have carried out Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity to test the null hypothesis that the item-to-item correlation matrix was an identity matrix. The hypothesis was tested through Chi-square test. The value of Chi-square was found to be 3627.333, which was highly significant at 1 per cent level of significance. Therefore, null hypothesis was rejected and results of the analysis indicated that the item-to-item correlation matrix was not an identity matrix and thus suitable for factor analysis. Test measures are presented in the Table 1.

Table 1: KMO and Bartlett’s Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.766
Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3627.333
	df	231
	sig.	.000

MEASUREMENT MODEL AND CONFIRMATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS

Researchers have carried out confirmatory factor analysis with ‘Generalized Least Squares’ extraction method and the analysis of data is presented with the help of Measurement Model (Fig. 2). Statistics of Co-variances of Latent Variables and Measurement Fit Index Model are presented in the Tables 2 and 3 respectively.

The measurement model is tested considering the specified relationship as proposed in the hypotheses. The overall fit indicates for the measurement model is revealed a Chi-square of 788.466 with 174 degrees of freedom. For this measurement model RMSEA was 0.079, within the

acceptable level. The GFI=0.867, RMR=0.137, NFI=0.925, PGFI=0.653 and PNFI=0.562, all were within acceptable level.

Table 2: Co-variances of Latent Variables

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
ORSV	<-->	ORP	.143	.024	5.859	***
ORSV	<-->	ORE	.144	.024	6.073	***
ORSV	<-->	TOR	.137	.031	4.392	***
ORSV	<-->	TRU	.052	.019	2.705	.007
ORSV	<-->	PD	.066	.018	3.747	***
ORP	<-->	ORE	.148	.021	7.131	***
ORP	<-->	TOR	.083	.021	4.009	***
ORP	<-->	TRU	.074	.017	4.509	***
ORP	<-->	PD	.095	.021	4.502	***
ORE	<-->	TOR	.092	.023	4.085	***
ORE	<-->	TRU	.104	.020	5.230	***
ORE	<-->	PD	.052	.014	3.807	***
TOR	<-->	TRU	.087	.021	4.125	***
TOR	<-->	PD	.021	.011	1.991	.047
TRU	<-->	PD	.060	.016	3.840	***

Source: Primary data analysis.

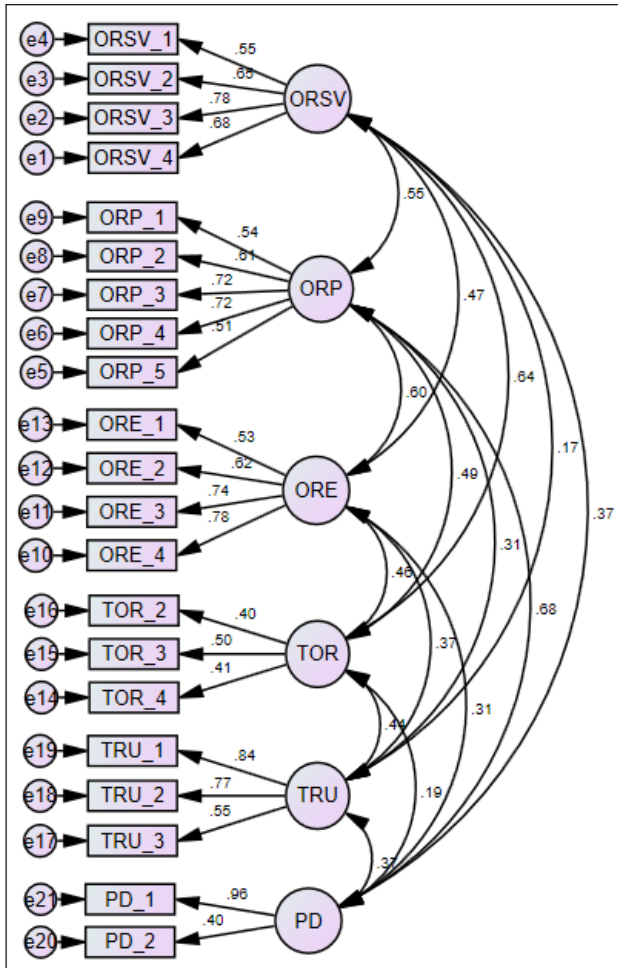
Note: ORSV = Online Review Score and Volume, ORP = Online Review Platform, ORE = Online Review Expertise, TOR = Timeliness of Review, TRU = Trust and PD = Purchase Decision.

Table 3: Measurement Fit Index Model

Model Fit Index	Recommended Value	Structural Model	Remarks
X ² /df	≤ 5	4.531	Accepted Fit
RMSEA	≤ .08	0.079	Accepted Fit
RMR	≤ .90	0.137	Accepted Fit
NFI	> .90	0.925	Accepted Fit
GFI	> .80	0.867	Accepted Fit
AGFI	> .80	0.824	Accepted Fit
PGFI	> .50	0.653	Accepted Fit
PNFI	> .50	0.562	Accepted Fit

Source: Primary data analysis.

Note: RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation, RMR = Root Mean Square Residual, NFI = Normed Fit Index, GFI = Goodness of Fit Index, AGFI = Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index, PGFI = Parsimony Goodness of Fit Index, PNFI = Parsimony-Adjusted Measures Index.



Note: ORSV = Online Review Score and Volume, ORP = Online Review Platform, ORE = Online Review Expertise, TOR = Timeliness of Review, TRU = Trust and PD = Purchase Decision.

Fig. 2: Measurement Model

Model Fit Summary

The statistics of regression weights, reliability statistics and model fit index are presented in the Table 4, 5 and 6 respectively.

In the analysis, to investigate conceptual model, researchers have used structural equation modelling; also, the impacts of external constructs on internal construct were tested. In addition, fitness indexes of the model were used for investigating the measuring and structural section of model judgment.

In measuring section, the relationship between the items along with the related structure was explained where factor loading of items was larger than 0.40 and t-value of them was greater than 1.96. All these values of factor loadings and t-values supported the reliability of the structure using measurement. As observed through data analysis, all factor

loadings were above 0.40 and the overall fit of the model was acceptable. The reliability of the constructs were measured and evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha.

Table 4: Regression Weights

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
TRU	<---	ORSV	.235	.081	2.903	***	par_11
TRU	<---	ORP	.241	.118	2.045	***	par_12
TRU	<---	TOR	.282	.100	2.813	.005	par_13
TRU	<---	ORE	.452	.100	4.528	***	par_14
PD	<---	TRU	.297	.080	3.694	***	par_15

Source: Primary data analysis

(Note: ORSV = Online Review Score and Volume, ORP = Online Review Platform, ORE = Online Review Expertise, TOR = Timeliness of Review, TRU = Trust and PD = Purchase Decision).

Table 5: Reliability Statistics

Construct	Item	Factor Loading	't'	R2	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
ORSV	ORSV_1	0.63	-*	0.630	0.799
	ORSV_2	0.72	6.57	0.715	
	ORSV_3	0.50	7.13	0.499	
ORP	ORP_1	0.53	-*	0.238	0.777
	ORP_2	0.63	2.22	0.939	
	ORP_3	0.45	4.93	0.447	
ORE	ORE_2	0.53	7.96	0.530	0.774
	ORE_3	0.74	7.87	0.745	
	ORE_4	0.66	-*	0.658	
TOR	TOR_2	0.53	-*	0.526	0.743
	TOR_3	0.52	2.72	0.519	
TRU	TRU_1	0.80	10.82	0.800	0.773
	TRU_2	0.80	10.86	0.802	
	TRU_3	0.56	-*	0.561	
PD	PD_1	0.65	-*	0.645	0.722
	PD_2	0.40	3.66	0.399	

Source: Primary data analysis.

Note: ORSV = Online Review Score and Volume, ORP = Online Review Platform, ORE = Online Review Expertise, TOR = Timeliness of Review, TRU = Trust and PD = Purchase Decision.

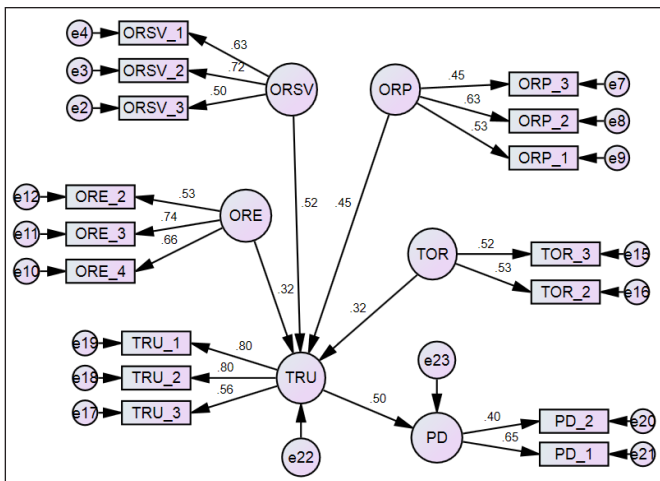
The model verified and confirmed the specified relationship proposed in the hypotheses. The overall fit for the structural model revealed a chi-square of 495.993 with 100 degrees of freedom. For this model, RMSEA was 0.074 and RMR was 0.167, both were within the acceptable level. The GFI=0.890, NFI=0.990 and PNFI=0.504, all were acceptable. The analysis of structural equation modelling on the proposed model has generated results which are illustrated in the Fig. 3.

Table 6: Fit Index Model

Model Fit Index	Recommended Value	Structural Model	Remarks
X ² /df	≤ 5	4.95	Accepted Fit
RMSEA	≤ .08	0.074	Accepted Fit
RMR	≤ .90	0.167	Accepted Fit
NFI	> .90	0.990	Accepted Fit
GFI	> .80	0.890	Accepted Fit
AGFI	> .80	0.849	Accepted Fit
PGFI	> .50	0.648	Accepted Fit
PNFI	> .50	0.504	Accepted Fit

Source: Primary data analysis

(Note: RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation, RMR = Root Mean Square Residual, NFI = Normed Fit Index, GFI = Goodness of Fit Index, AGFI = Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index, PGFI = Parsimony Goodness of Fit Index, PNFI = Parsimony-Adjusted Measures Index).



Note: ORSV = Online Review Score and Volume, ORP = Online Review Platform, ORE = Online Review Expertise, TOR = Timeliness of Review, TRU = Trust and PD = Purchase Decision.

Fig 3: Structural Model

Comments on Validation of the Hypotheses

Based on the findings of analysis of structural model, following observations were made on validation of hypotheses as proposed and tested in this study:

- Results of the study indicated that online review score and volume has positive influence on trust among novice travelers for hotel bookings and provided support for H_1 (alternate hypothesis).
- Results of the study confirmed that online review platform has positive influence on trust among novice travelers for hotel bookings, hypothesized in H_2 (alternate hypothesis).

- H_3 (alternate hypothesis) predicted a positive effect online reviewer expertise on trust among novice travelers for hotel bookings.
- H_4 (alternate hypothesis) predicted a positive effect of timeliness of review on trust among novice travelers for hotel bookings.
- Results of the study indicated that trust has positive influence on hotel bookings among the first time travelers, hypothesized in H_5 (alternate hypothesis).
- H_6 (alternate hypothesis) anticipated a mediating role of trust between the online review score and volume, online review platform, online reviewer expertise, timeliness of review and purchase decision for hotel bookings by first time travelers.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

With modern businesses, understanding factors influencing consumer decisions is of growing importance including impact of digital communication, either from marketers to customers or from customers to customers in the form of online reviews. As revealed by Utz, Kerkhof and Van Den Bos (2012) online reviews by customers empowers consumer decision making. The goal of present research paper is to contribute to understand how novice travelers make hotel booking decisions based on online reviews. Researchers, through literature review and statistical analysis, focused on defining the constructs for online reviews. Online review score and volume, online review platform, online reviewer expertise, and timeliness of review were identified elements taken into consideration under this study.

With present customers, it is quite a common to read online reviews before making a purchase. Undoubtedly, like word-of-mouth, online reviews have transformed the way individuals make their purchase decisions. Online reviews are more than just a way for novice travelers to collect the information about hotels for stay during travel. Where, online reviews are seen as powerful tool of customer engagement; this study has significantly verified that online reviews help to build the trust among of customers for positive purchase decisions and thus supports the findings of the study by von Helversen, Abramczuk, Kopeć and Nielek (2018).

As stated by Zhang, Lee and Zhao (2010) that online platforms are rich in review messages and review contributors. Further, authors positively investigated the impacts of online platforms on consumer’s decision making process. Similarly, from the present study, it is also found that online review platforms, as one of the constructs of online reviews as studied in this research, have become basis for novice travelers to make informed decisions about hotel bookings. Thus the study supports the finding of authors and acknowledges the role of online platforms on purchase decision.

Online reviews are typically consisting of positive or negative recommendations which are popular source of assessing quality of products. However, expertise of online reviewer is always remained a concern for customers referring those reviews for purchase decisions. Findings of the study revealed the positive effect of reviewers' expertise on purchase decision and provide support for two important studies in the area as conducted by Ahluwalia (2002) and Ketelaar, Willemsen, Slevin and Kerkhof (2015). Moreover, study also supports the findings of Fu, Bin, Xie, Liuli and Yu (2011), stating influence of timeliness of reviews of online reviews on purchase decision.

Theoretical and Managerial Implications

The findings of the present study to the literature in two important ways- First, study addresses the call for more research to review the effect of online reviews on purchase decision (Duan, Gu & Whinston, 2008; Hu Liu & Zhang, 2008). The results of the study confirms positive effect of online reviews on purchase decision and offers important insights how even first time travelers respond to it. Second, findings of the study confirm the mediating role of trust between online reviews constructs and purchase decisions, to reconcile the inconsistent findings found previously.

The results of the study also have important practical implications. Perhaps most important is that the hoteliers and travel agents as they think about how to collect, manage and promote online reviews to gain maximum output. Marketers can also use the insights of this study to manage the movement of online reviews and its effect for specific audiences.

Limitations of the Study and Scope for Further Research

The researchers are aware about the limitations of this work and the scope for future study. At the outset, researchers have considered the impact of online reviews for hotel booking by novice travelers; however, study could have been conducted with more business areas with availability of resources like time and money. The data for present study is collected from three cities different of Maharashtra as Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur. However, results are discussed in general without discussing separate results for each city or geographical spread.

While considering the limitations of the study, the researchers propose the following scope for the future study as statistical model developed by the researcher can further be refined to predict the purchase outcome. Moreover, purchase decisions with respect to diversified products can be studied and comparison can be presented. Further, case study approach can be adopted to get detailed insight into the subject.

APPENDIX A

Items Used for Survey

Item Code	Item Description
Online Review Score and Volume (ORSV)	
ORSV_1	Consciousness about Score
ORSV_2	Attention towards Volume
ORSV_3	Length and Credibility
ORSV_4	Volume and Credibility
Online Review Platform (ORP)	
ORP_1	Review Sites Attention
ORP_2	Preferring Multiple Reviews
ORP_3	Trust in E-Com Website Reviews
ORP_4	Trust in Social Media Reviews
ORP_5	Trust in Hotel Website Review
Online Review Expertise (ORE)	
ORE_1	Preference towards Expert Review
ORE_2	Review Source/Expertise Does Not Matter
ORE_3	Trustfulness towards Experts/Tour Guide Review
ORE_4	Trustfulness towards Customer Review
Timeliness of Review (TOR)	
TOR_1	Old Reviews Readings (older than a month)
TOR_2	New Reviews Readings (newly posted an hour, a day before, less than month old)
TOR_3	Timeliness and Creditworthy
TOR_4	Timeliness and Content Relevancy
Trust (TRU)	
TRU_1	Accuracy of the review
TRU_2	Likely to Recommend
TRU_3	Influence by Review
Purchase Decision (PD)	
PD_1	Follow Purchase Decision
PD_2	Influence Purchase Decision

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