



Influence of E-service quality on customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions: A review study

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Abstract

The study of impact of e - service quality on customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions has grown many folds over the years with the rapid use of travel websites by travelers for planning their trip. Thus, it is evident that the scholars in the field of tourism & hospitality have enriched the body of literature and continue to discuss on the relationship of service quality of travel websites, customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions. Understanding and reviewing the present literature of their relationships enable not only to have a conceptual clarity of these variables but also help in exploring the future areas of research in this domain. Even the management of travel or hotel companies having websites should carefully think over the importance of service quality for gaining a competitive advantage over other companies and to deliver better services to their customers. Hence, information on this topic is pivotal for both academicians as well as for practitioners. To suffice the information needs, the present research paper involves review of the previous literature and its synthesis to summarize impact of e-service quality on customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions. The findings of the study suggest that e-service quality of travel or hospitality websites is directly related to online customer satisfactions which consequently result in forming positive behavioural intentions about the website.

Keywords: Service quality, customer satisfaction, behavioural intentions, travel websites, E-service quality

Introduction

Internet is a major vehicle in the marketing & promotion of travel related services as tourism industry is based on information (Doolin *et al.*, 2002) ^[15]. It is of significant importance to travel service providers as it provides them reasonably priced universal accessibility, updated information, distinctive customization competency and an unmatched ability to interact with customers (Bender 1997; Feng *et al.*, 2003; Baloglu & Pekcan, 2006; Wang & Fessenmaier, 2006; Yuan *et al.*, 2006) ^[8, 7, 44]. To tap this multifold potential of internet, travel service providers have created websites which act as an information gateway to their services. These websites not only provide information to its customers but also help in increasing the profitability of the company. A well designed website with effectively constructed information for customers and appealing features can hold the interest of customers and which will eventually result into affecting their buying behavior. But if the website is not designed properly, then the customers will not devote their time and that finally results into loss of the potential customer for that company. Previous studies have also highlighted the significance of high quality websites by proving that high quality websites have the ability to engage more web surfers and purchasers in comparison to websites of inferior quality (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Malhotra, 2004; Wang & Tang, 2003; Yoo & Donthu, 2001) ^[39]. Therefore, the websites of travel service providers become more crucial in the present arena when more and more customers are becoming techno-savvy which is impacting significantly their buying behavior. It is further confirmed by the report of Statistica Brain (2017) that “more than 148.3 million people use the internet to make reservations for their accommodations, tours, and activities, which is more than 57 % of all travel reservations each year”. Another report of Amadeus (2017) ^[5] also stated that “60% of leisure and 41% of business travelers make their travel

arrangement via internet”. These reports consolidate the argument that the websites influence the buying behavior of their customers. Since electronic service quality is a major player in forming buying behavior of e -consumers (lee & lin 2005), the present study analyses the existing literature on the influence of e-service quality on customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions to provide an insight into the dimensions of e – service quality which impact satisfaction and behavioural intentions of travelers about the service providers’ website. It also makes efforts to put forward the latest trends which are coming up in research in customer satisfaction and purchase behaviour assessment in hospitality/travel sector with regard to web services, which will act as a torch bearer for future research.

Methodology

For this study research papers are extracted primarily from Google Scholar. This search engine was selected due to large database and credibility among scholars. Besides this, the references and forward citations of the selected papers were also checked to track the relevant articles for the study. Year 2000 was set as the starting point of study. Since, research on website’s service quality initiated from this year. The articles were included or excluded on the basis of following parameters

Table 1

Study Population	Travel websites, Hospitality/tourism service provider websites
Evaluation Field	Website quality ‘s impact on customer satisfaction Website quality ‘s influence on Behavioural intentions
Type of Study	Empirical
Publication year	2000 – 2022
Journal	Scopus Listed

The studies which were falling in the above criteria were excluded. Since, our primary focus was to study the effect of e – SQ on satisfaction and behavioural intentions, we included only those studies which are discussing about them. Hence, 40 empirical studies were utilized for this review. Following data was extracted from these papers for analysis

- Objective
- Hypotheses
- Sample
- Statistical tests
- Findings

Review of Literature

The literature review is divided into following two subthemes to get conceptual clarity on the relationship between e-service quality, customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions:

Literature Review on E-Service Quality in Tourism/Hospitality Sector

Website quality is of great importance for every online enterprise because of its ability to influence decision making of customers (Jeong *et al.*, 2003; Jeong 2004; Bai *et al.* 2008; Forgas *et al.*, 2012; Wen 2012) ^[22, 6, 17]. Due to this, it has received great attention from researchers and managers of this domain. Several scholars have tried to describe dimensions of websites' which are of significance for customers when they are browsing the websites of service providers. But no consensus on the website features have been reached yet which could be easily validated by having a quick glance on the various attributes of websites (Table 2) proposed by different scholars. But, the review on the extant literature reported some commonalities in these dimensions and tried to synthesize them by grouping the common attributes in one dimension, which are summarized as follows

Information Quality: This quadrant was found to be present in all the studies irrespective of its nomenclature. Kaynama & Black (2000) ^[23] named it content while Jeong & Lambert (2001) ^[21], Kline & Morrison (2004) ^[31] and Bai *et al.* (2008) ^[6] incorporated information quality quadrant in perceived usefulness, marketing effectiveness and functionality respectively. Therefore, it is validated that customers give considerable value to it while browsing the sites. Information quality of a site is determined by its importance and clarity in the minds of consumers. While perceived importance is ascertained by its relevance for potential buyers and clarity is ascertained by its easy readability and non ambiguous nature (Larcker and Lessig, 1980).

Design Quality: The design of the website was also reported in all the studies. The terms which are used interchangeably for design are – Perceived ease of use, usability, site attractiveness and technical quality, structure and ease of use and design and presentation. Quality of website design is the overall assessment of its navigation, accessibility and transaction functions (Ho & lee, 2007; Kim & Lee, 2004; Cox & Dale, 2001; Perdue, 2001; Novak *et al.*, 2000) ^[20, 41].

Service quality: This dimension was crafted on the lines of DeLone and McLean's (2003) IS success model due to the

similarity of attributes of past studies with its quadrants of service quality. This assertion can further be validated by the wide adoption of this construct and model in previous studies (Kuan, Bock & Vathanophas, 2008; Wen, 2009; Lin, Wu & Chang, 2011; Kim *et al.* 2012; Lieu & Zhang, 2014) ^[32]. This dimension covers security & privacy, fulfillment, responsiveness, assurance, customization, empathy and interactivity.

Moderating dimensions: The attributes which were not fitting in the aforementioned dimensions are grouped under this dimension such as flow, e- trust, perceived playfulness, innovativeness, viable substitute and so on. They are grouped in this category due to their presence as mediating variables in the extant literature (table 3)

Literature Review on Online Customer Satisfaction and Behavioural Intentions in Relation to E -Service Quality in Tourism/Hospitality Sector

Table 3 – Key studies on influence of e-service quality on online customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions.

Anderson and Srinivasan (2003, p. 125) opined that “satisfaction may be best understood as an ongoing evaluation of the surprise inherent in a product acquisition and/or consumption experience”. In the context of e-commerce, this definition affirms that customer satisfaction is the outcome of overall evaluation of the website features. Therefore, it is necessary to determine the features of website which influence the satisfaction of customer. Furthermore, it becomes more pivotal for hospitality service providers as it guides the behavioural intentions of customers (Jeong *et al.*, 2003; Jeong, 2004; Kao *et al.*, 2005; Bai *et al.*, 2008; Forgas *et al.*, 2012; Wen, 2012; Faizan Ali, 2016; Vladimirov, 2018) ^[22, 6, 17].

Behavioural intentions on the other hand are the intentions to book from a site, to spread a positive or negative e – word of mouth about the site and repurchase intentions about the site. Since these intentions decide the success or failure of a company, numerous studies have been done to measure the impact of e – service quality on customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions. The researchers on first ten years of e- service quality's influence on its outcomes were keen on exploring the relationship of e- sq' s dimensions with online satisfaction and behaviour. The results of their study highlighted that web quality lays a direct and positive impact on both the focused variables of the study, while customer satisfaction acts as a mediator between the relation of e-sq and behavioural intentions. Furthermore, the results affirmed that information quality and ease of use dimensions of e- SQ lays stronger impact on customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions (Jeong & Lambert, 2001; Wong & Law 2005; Cho & Agrusa, 2006; Kuan, Bock & Vathanophas, 2008) ^[21, 12, 32, 45]. In line with these studies, it is worth to highlight the study of Kuan, Bock & Vathanophas (2008) ^[32] who proposed that information quality holds relevance to the customer only till the purchase is being made after the purchase it is the service quality of the online aggregator which will bring further business from the client. Therefore, it is necessary to take account of the each aspect of e- SQ. It goes in line with the study of Park, Gretzel & Turk (2007) ^[40] where they reported a significant influence of Fulfillment construct on online satisfaction and purchase intentions. Their findings also affirmed that ease of access; cheaper prices and

familiarity with the OTA's are the reasons of selecting them over traditional providers of travel. Next decade of studies (2011 -2020) on relationship of e- SQ, online customer satisfaction and purchasing behaviour showed a drift from the previous studies since, most of the studies emphasized on studying one or two attributes relation with their outcomes. The main purpose behind it was to find the relevance of e-SQ constructs on the studied outcomes. The key dimensions which exert significant impact on customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions identified from studies are security & privacy, information quality, design, tailor made information. The other key findings of the studies were that there are some dimensions which act as a moderator in the relation and plays a pivotal role in guiding the satisfaction of customers i.e. perceived flow, playfulness, e – trust, telepresence, hedonic & utilitarian variables and website image.

Key Findings and Conclusions

The present study analyzed the extant literature on E – service quality of travel and hospitality service providers' website and found that various dimensions of e –SQ are being explored on several studies, but no consensus on the attributes related to service quality of travel/hospitality websites have been reached till now. However, scholars of this domain agree upon the multi – dimension characteristic of e- SQ. The results of this study, also support this notion since dimensions of Electronic service quality reported in previous literature vary from 12 (Loiacono *et al.*, 2002) ^[35] to 2 (Perdue, 2001; Bai *et al.*, 2008) ^[6, 41]. The cause of this variability is not touched upon in the previous research till now. Hence, opens up a scope of research in this direction for scholars. However, Ladhari (2010) ^[46] opined that the variation in constructs is due to different service nature of the different service industries. But, hospitality/ tourism industry seem to contradict this argument as their service paradigm is same, and yet no generalization on dimensions of e –SQ have been attained so far.

The review also found that though there are several dimensions of e –SQ, but there exists some similarities in e – SQ dimensions and those similarities can be grouped together to form a single dimension, which will aid in better understanding of e – SQ construct. This assertion is on the lines of Delone and Mclean model (2003). This study also builds on this framework and crafts four dimensions of e-SQ namely – Information quality, System quality, Service quality and Moderating variables. This synthesis of dimensions is done by going through in detail of the literature on it. Furthermore, this viewpoint finds support in various studies, which were done by undertaking similar type of constructs (Kuan, Bock & Vathanophas, 2008; Wang *et al.*, 2015; Dedeke, 2016; Ali, 2016; Ongasakul *et al.*, 2020) ^[44, 4, 32]. The proposed dimensions applicability future research calls for its validation, as generalization of an idea is possible after it's testing.

The review on the evaluation of the effect of website attributes on customer satisfaction and behavioural outcomes is also being undertaken in this study. The findings of all studies consolidated the positive effect of website attributes on online customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions. Besides, this the major facts which emanated from this study are that customers in the initial phase of e- commerce outbreak gave more importance to information quality and system design / ease of use due to

the highly intangible and perishable nature of the services. It is the only source, which can mitigate their pre – purchase doubts about the services. Ease of use was proved significant due to their unawareness about how to use websites. Therefore, these dimensions formed the basis of customer satisfaction. But, as the humans evolved with their usage of technology various other dimensions or sub dimensions came into picture such as performance, realism, telepresence, hedonic attributes, perceived playfulness, perceived flow, empathy, information customization to name a few. Their impact assessment and understanding is crucial since, previous studies have highlighted that they exert a positive influence on customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions and play moderating role in their relationship. But to what extent they are moderating this relationship and are they necessary in each sub industry of hospitality/tourism (airline websites, hotel websites, travel websites, car rental websites etc.) is an debatable issue and can be explored in future studies.

The other significant finding of this review was that significant importance assigned to each variable while evaluating site, is influenced by certain factors present in the environment such as cultural values, age, market country profile, company' image, referent network size. Therefore, the marketers need to consider these aspects while measuring the relationship of study variables and the scholars should address these areas while planning to do research on impact ascertainment of websites on online customer satisfaction and behavioural intention.

Furthermore, it can be concluded that extant literature confirms the positive influence of website features on customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions. Moreover, online customer satisfaction acts as a mediator in the relationship.

Managerial Implications

In line with the findings of the study, we put forth several suggestions to management of online travel and hospitality service providers to increase the effectiveness of their marketing strategies. Firstly, the managers should take utmost attention while designing the information content of the site. Each element of the information (service offerings, rates, discounts, sales, videos & images) should be explained clearly and concisely as it is the first point of engaging contact of the customer with the site. They should try to incorporate alluring information presentation features on their site. Then they should lay thrust on the design feature of their site. It has to be catchy but at the same time user –friendly. Everything should be well organized on the site from arrangement of information to easy and quick check out from the site. They have to incorporate those designs, which users can easily use with minimal of effort (fast loading of the site, quick opening of linked web pages etc). Third, they need to gain trust of the customers by presenting clear information (service quality) about their policies (cancellation, amendment in booking, refund procedures, confidentiality of the client) and by establishing fast and secure gateways. They can mitigate the doubts of customers by incorporating new techniques and tools in their websites for example provision of video chat assistants, responding on time to customers queries, providing details frequently asked questions. It is of great significance to managers, since all other features can bring in first time clients but it is the service quality which helps

in retaining them. Since the results also highlighted the factors which prove crucial while forming attitude (age, gender, country profile, cultural values) about the site, therefore the marketers should take care of the needs of customers while designing features of website and should try to incorporate unique customer specific customizations for users and potential users of site. This will ameliorate the overall effectiveness of the site by triggering unique experiences with the site which will lead to satisfaction and favorable purchase behaviour formation.

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