

Impact of Online Consumer Reviews on Hotel Booking Intentions: The Case of Pakistan

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Abstract

This study is aimed at empirically investigating the influence of online consumer reviews such as realism, positive reviews, negative reviews and volume of online reviews on hotel booking intentions in Pakistan through mediational mechanism. Data was collected from 250 part-time business graduates of University of Punjab, the largest Public-Sector University of Provincial Capital of Pakistan. SPSS and AMOS were carried out to analyze the results and determine the impact of online reviews on hotel booking intentions. Results indicated that realism, the volume of reviews and positive reviews are the most influential dimensions of online consumer reviews. Moreover, trust act as an intervening variable between positive reviews, the volume of reviews, realism and hotel booking intentions. Empirical analysis also indicated that negative online reviews have no direct and indirect impact on hotel booking intentions of online customers. This study is an effort in proposing a combination of online consumer reviews dimensions in determining Hotel Booking Intentions.

Keywords: Hotel Booking Intentions, Realism, Positive reviews, Negative reviews, Volume of reviews, Trust

Introduction

The introduction of latest technologies in communication and transportation system has made world a global village, traveling within and outside the country had never been so easier. The implementation of internet-based marketing strategies used in hospitality and tourism industry expanded the market and open door to new customers. Imagine traveling to place which is unknown to you, or you have little information about it. Being a traveler, you would like to get concrete and reliable information of the destination, whether purpose is to live, enjoy or a business trip; you would like to get help from a friend, travel agency or internet to make a decision, in all this process there is one thing in common that is opinion seeking for decision making (Sparks & Browning, 2011). In this context social media platforms and online portals have gain pivotal role where users express their opinions about a product or service features thus making them most prominent source of information seeking (Del Chiappa *et al*, 2018; Gursoy, 2019) . The reviews provided by users are more reliable and user oriented as compared to company-based marketing because the final users provide rating of features from a consumer perspective and utility of the product or service (Wang & Emurian, 2005). Thus, making much easier for the consumer to use online reviews as baseline for trip planning's and decision making. The online reviews are believed as electronic form of Word of mouth marketing. However, studies by (Gremler *et al.*, 2004; Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004; Litvin *et al.*, 2008; Pantelidis, 2010) explains the key difference between e-WOM and WOM is that as compared to traditional WOM, marketing in e-WOM information spread and availability is expanded to greater audience and public. The Significance of word of mouth is generally acknowledged by fundamental marketing researchers. The WOM event has been changed into various WOM communication portals like Epinions.com, Booking.com etc. This mode of communication is called electronic Word of mouth e-WOM which has changed the behavior of people as more internet usage. Customer or shoppers usually decision is formed on online knowledge; in addition, likely to be trustworthy in the recommendations of others end users or shoppers when formed decision regarding those products, goods or services like movie or if they look for an investment decision (Sparks & Browning, 2011). As a link to the traditional WOM, Internet review is essential to shooting the actions of customers. First, unlike the WOM connections, reviews for customers either positive or negative are similarly displayed on various sources in the same area of the Internet (Tsao *et al.*, 2015). Although several scholars have distinguished the accurate and powerful WOM content. There are no assumptions made in those subjects to the negative reviews in the electronic word of mouth communication. Another feature of shoppers who procure online is reviews which are similar to rating. In the context of online reviews,

customers could effortlessly view and determine and gauge the excellence and quantity good & bad ideas as the buyer's online review has been pasted in writing (Park, Lee, & Han, 2007) . Additionally, numbers and resolution of e-word of mouth communication allow investigator to estimate how online customer reviews are sold for sales (especially for volume, valence, and distribution). Dellarocas *et al.*, (2010) have shown that equality of internet ranking could help as a helpful indication of human co-operation to participate in the WOM-optimization of purchases. This research not consider level of quality of electronic word of mouth communication but the quality only. Many studies have explored how advertising focuses on people, products and issues. Customer psychology embraces vicarious ways to assess how people, shoppers or customers alter their decisions (Sparks & Browning, 2011). Evaluating these approaches, researcher has got the idea of engaging in main precedent for more information and need for processing the same. Since e-WOM quantity and reach continuously growing over the time so it entice researchers to further explore the influence of online shared information on prospective customers (Serra Cantallops & Salvi, 2014). Tourism businesses are increasingly getting concerned about managing company reputation and e-WOM (Sparks *et al*, 2016). In this regard studies have been carried out to empirically analyses the relationship between online reviews such as positive reviews, negative reviews, valance and quantity of reviews, conformity of reviewers, website appearance and behavioral aspects of the customers on the hotel booking intentions of the customers, however to our knowledge studies are scant in the aspect which empirically analyses the mediatory mechanism between online reviews i.e. positive online reviews, negative online reviews, volume of online reviews and realism of online reviews on customers hotel booking intentions through trust as intervening variable.

On the practical side from the last couple of years, Pakistan has seen a boom in local tourism, moreover, international tourists also have shown great interest in visiting Pakistan for tourism purpose. Many international renowned organizations have marked Pakistan among world top tourist destinations. (British Backpackers society, 2018) listed Pakistan as a top choice among world best 20 destinations for tourism, moreover Pakistan also able to take a place in Forbes 2019 top 10 tourist places to visit for. These international acknowledgments believe to increase the inflow of foreign tourists which on one hand will help tourism and hospitality industry to get pace in growth and financial stability, but on another hand it poses challenges for the management of hospitality industry to meet the expectations to remain in the competition. The websites like TripAdvisor and Booking.com provides a platform to the customers to provide realistic feedback and public opinion on the quality of services and other features of the hoteling and tourism industry (Li *et al.*, 2017). So, the management of the Pakistani hospitality industry must consider

the importance of online reviews and devise strategies to use these platforms to increase the performance of their business. The second prominent objective of our study is to provide practical guidelines for management in devising strategies to better understand the online review's impact on hotel booking intentions which can transform a challenge into an opportunity.

Thus, the aim of our research is two fold, first is to provide practical guidelines for managerial assistance and the second one is to fill out the research gap by analyzing the novel model in the context of the developing countries hospitality industry, especially in Pakistan.

Literature review

The online hotel bookings intentions of the customers consists of three major thresholds, the first one is customer assume that the information provided over the website of the relevant hotel and provided by third parties is reliable and accurate, second confidentiality of customer data particularly credit card information must be secured by strong functional mechanism of website security, the final threshold customers look for is that their booking and reservation is finalized according to their selected options (Ratnasingam, 2012). Online reviews and evaluations of hotels play a significant role in consumers hotel booking decisions, thus making it is imperative for businesses especially the tourism industry focus on these opinions (Ba & Pavlou, 2002). The research studies such as (Ba & Pavlou, 2002; Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Burgee & Steffes, 2009; Karakaya & Ganim Barnes, 2010; Lee, Park, & Han, 2008; Park, Lee, & Han, 2007) concluded that online reviews are becoming paramount for businesses since positive reviews generates positive attitudes and a possibility for a purchase, whereas, negative online opinions effects negatively on purchasing behavior of the customer. Moreover, the broken window theory explains the negative phenomenon is which cause the spread of negative information and message on an exaggerated level. The customers in hospitality industry are using online reviews as decisive factor for hotel bookings and for trip planning, in this context negative reviews of the hotel can halt their bookings and sales (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009), so, making it indispensable for management to manage customers feedback and complaints in a timely manner to mitigate the adverse effects of negative comments.

Hypotheses Development:

Positive Online Reviews

Park *et al.*, (2007) found that intentions of the consumers buying increase if the quality of reviews is maintained, they highlight that quality positive reviews are which includes objective evaluation, the usefulness of the product and relative recommendations. Bulchand-Gidumal *et al.*, (2013) in their research they analyzed the sample of 16,680 hotels in 249 tourist

destinations and found that positive reviews are more frequent in the hospitality industry as compared to negative reviews, positive e-WOM almost account for 70% reviews on TripAdvisor. They also argue that online reviews have a positive and significant impact on the hotel bookings intentions thus the online reviews should be managed as a proper strategical communication channel. More the quantity of positive reviews it will be more likely to influence consumers for an online hotel booking. (Ladhari & Michaud, 2015) stated that the more the positively inclined feedback more it will influence consumers attitude positively, whereas, negative comments will affect vice versa. Furthermore, the combination and reputation of online reviews have an exponential effect on persuasions of the review valance (Cox & Cox, 1988). Thus, from the above arguments it's evident that online positive reviews have a significant impact on the hotel booking intentions of the customers. On these bases, we postulate our first hypothesis that is

H1. Positive online reviews have an impact on hotel booking intentions of the customers.

Negative Online Reviews

In their study (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009) analyzed the negative impact of online reviews on hotel bookings and found that negative reviews on a mass level cause negative attitude towards hotel bookings, nevertheless, they also stated that the single negative comments do not impact the booking intention of the customers. Moreover, a study by (Sparks & Browning, 2011) explains that the negative information framed before the positive information tends to decrease booking intentions of the customers, nevertheless, positive information provided with numerical ratings diminishes the negative effect along with influencing customers positively for bookings of hotels. The online bookings of hotels pretty much depend on how customers perceive the credibility of the website and information provided over the website. Sparks & Browning, (2011) found that favorable comments have a positive impact on the ratings of the hotels and negative opinions effects vice versa. Moreover, The theory of negative effects explains that individuals are more prone to influence by negative information as compared to a positive one (Zhang *et al.*, 2009). Hence, we postulate our second hypothesis that

H2. Negative online reviews have an impact on hotel booking intentions of the customers.

The volume of Online Reviews

Although positive and negative online reviews play a significant role in the economic activity of the tourism industry, in addition, quantity of online reviews matters a lot. The number of total WOM interactions is called Volume. Volume measures the total amount of WOM interactions, while

valence captures whether a comment is positive or negative. Many studies such as (Pantelidis, 2010; Sparks & Browning, 2011; Sparks et al., 2016; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009) have investigated the positive and negative reviews on booking intentions, however, studies are limited which empirically investigated the role of volume on potential customers perceptions. Ye *et al.*, (2009) examined the effect of e-WOM on hotel rooms sales by calculating the number of reviews posted on the travel website, which they used as a proxy of room sales. From the above discussion, we postulate that the

H3. The volume of online reviews has an impact on hotel booking intentions of the customers.

Realism

In their research (Sparks & Browning, 2011) studied realism impact on hotel booking intentions of the customers and found that customers believability on reviews positively influence the customer's intentions. Moreover, (Mutter & Mutter, 2000) argued that consumers are more inclined towards buying products if they perceive that the advertisements and reviews are realistic. Thus, we postulate our fourth hypothesis that the

H4. Realism has an impact on hotel booking intentions of the customers.

Trust

In their work (Ladhari & Michaud, 2015) explains that actual online sales are mainly influenced by Trust. Generally speaking, Trust is seen as an intentional willingness to depend on exchange partner (the dependable person who keep promises). Trust involves in mitigating the transaction related uncertainty, anxiety, and vulnerability, which increase the satisfaction and effects the e-WOM, particularly in the context of complex and experiential services (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004). Sparks & Browning, (2011) explains that prospective customers use online opinions to abate uncertainty and risk which is related to the product or service purchase, so these online reviews assist them to determine the trust level. Thus, It can be assumed that customers intentions to book a room is linked with trust, and trust is greatly influenced by online feedback (Ladhari & Michaud, 2015). Trust is the main factor which explains the relationship between online reviews and consumer booking intentions. Wang & Emurian, (2005) explains that trust is the main factor which motivates consumers for an online purchase. Trust can be influenced by consumer previous buying experience, information (Chen & Xie, 2008) argue that the volume and valance of online reviews reduce the level of risk and uncertainty for future consumers. Moreover, (Sparks & Browning, 2011) argue that the overall volume of online reviews will have an impact on customers intentions to book a hotel given the situation that positive reviews

will increase trust on hotel which resultantly increase the hotel booking and the negative reviews will have negative impact on trust and hotel bookings. So, it is evident from literature that trust plays a role of bridge between online reviews and hotel booking intentions. Therefore, we propose that trust mediates the relationship between Positive, Negative, Volume and Realism of online reviews and hotel booking intentions. Following are the hypotheses:

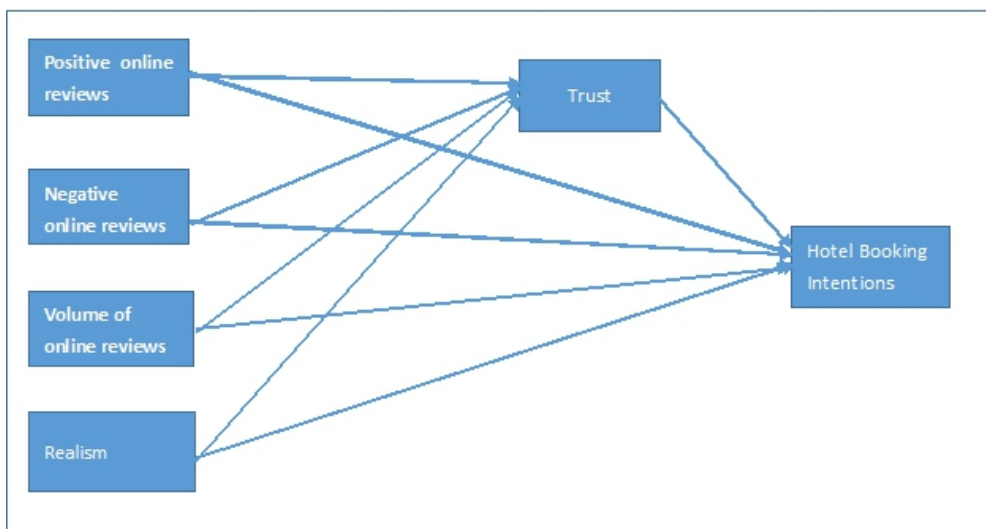
H5. Trust mediates the relationship between positive online reviews and hotel booking intentions of the customers.

H6. Trust mediates the relationship between negative online reviews and hotel booking intentions of the customers.

H7. Trust mediates the relationship between the volume of online reviews and hotel booking intentions of the customers.

H8. Trust mediates the relationship between realism and hotel booking intentions of the customers.

Conceptual Model



Methodology

This study was undertaken to find out the Impact of Online Consumer Reviews on Hotel Booking Intentions in Pakistani context. The nature of the study was quantitative and causal. The target population was part time business graduates of University of the Punjab, Lahore. Our rationale to select part time business graduates is that these students have full time employment and have to travel frequently for business. A total of 250 questionnaires were distributed by determining the sample size of 250 through item response theory. Among those 250 questionnaires 195 were received as usable and filled, where 55 were excluded due to fact that they were incomplete. We used

convenience sampling technique because we had shortage of time and resources. In this survey research we used self-administrated questionnaire to receive the response of the target sample size, the questionnaire was comprised of 25 items.

Results and scale.

Construct	Items	α	Source	Mean	STD
1.Trust	5	0.896	(Ladhari & Michaud, 2015) & (Sichtmann, 2007)	3.379	.81176
2.Negative	4	0.838	(Sparks & Browning, 2011)	3.724	.84455
3.Volume	6	0.843	(Sparks & Browning, 2011) & (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009)	3.029	.73257
4.realism	3	0.636	(Sparks & Browning, 2011)	2.772	.64140
5.positive	4	0.883	(Sparks & Browning, 2011)	3.406	.84754
6.Hotel-booking intentions	3	0.800	(Sparks & Browning, 2011)	3.998	1.0173

Table 1. Scale and mean results:

All the reliability values are above the threshold value of .70 (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2009). The details of the questionnaire can be found in appendix A.

Demographics:

DEMOGRAPHICAL CHARACTERISTICS	GROUPS	FREQUENC Y	PERCENTAGE
AGE	20-25 years	16	8.2
	25-30 years	162	83.1
	30-35 years	17	8.7
GENDER	Male	184	94.4
	Female	11	5.6

Table 2. Demographics

Measurement Model:

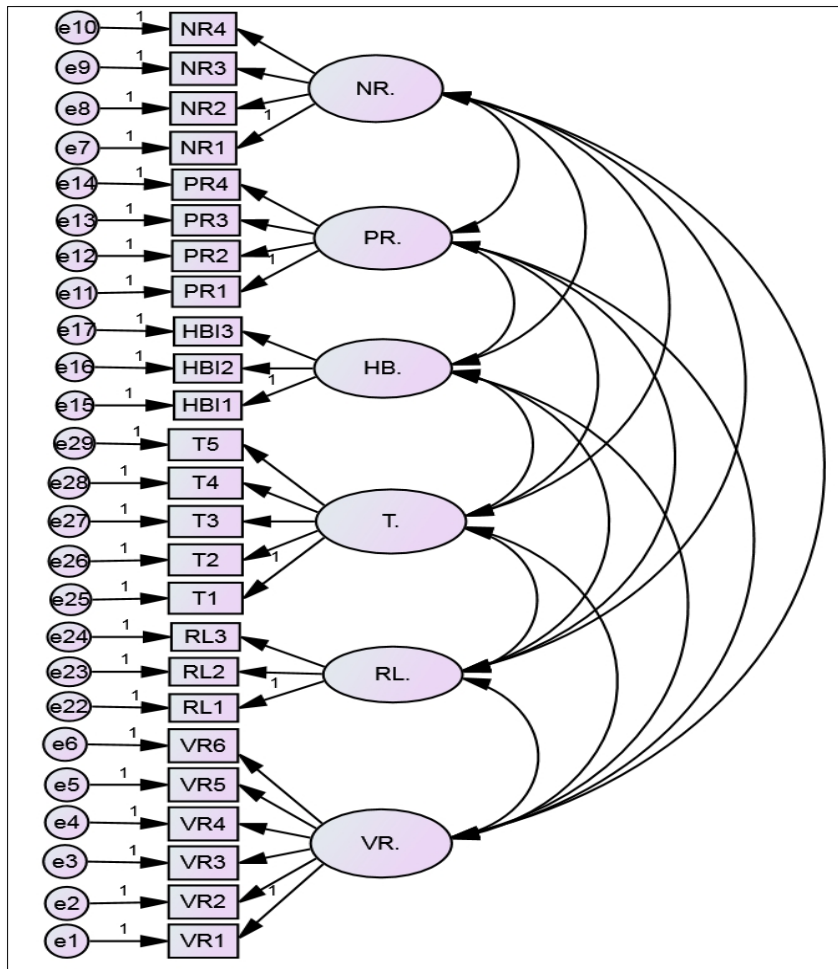


Fig2. Measurement Model

Model Fitness summary:

Variables	CMIN/DF	CFI	AGFI	GFI	RMSEA
Positive Reviews	2.718	.992	.930	.986	.073
Negative Reviews	.589	1.00	.985	.997	.001
Volume of the Reviews	1.728	.991	.938	.982	.061
Realism	2.343	.921	.912	.899	.072
Trust	.929	1.00	.973	.993	.002
Hotel Booking Intention	.877	1.00	.921	.943	.003
Threshold Values	<3	>.90	>.80	>.90	<.08

Table3. Model fitness criteria

Confirmatory factor analysis

Items	Positive	Negative	Volume	Realism	Trust	Booking-Intention
P1	.757					
P2	.824					
P3	.802					
P4	.741					
NR1		.704				
NR2		.601				
NR3		.873				
NR4		.582				
VR1			.788			
VR2			.873			
VR3			.537			
VR4			.632			
VR5			.549			
VR6			.799			
R1				.770		
R2				.498		
R3				.672		
T1					.808	
T2					.888	
T3					.799	
T4					.839	
T5					.778	
HB1						.872
HB2						.674
HB3						.757

Table4. Factors Loading

The confirmatory factor analysis shows that all items factor loadings are over .300 at significance level of .001

Structural Equational Modeling

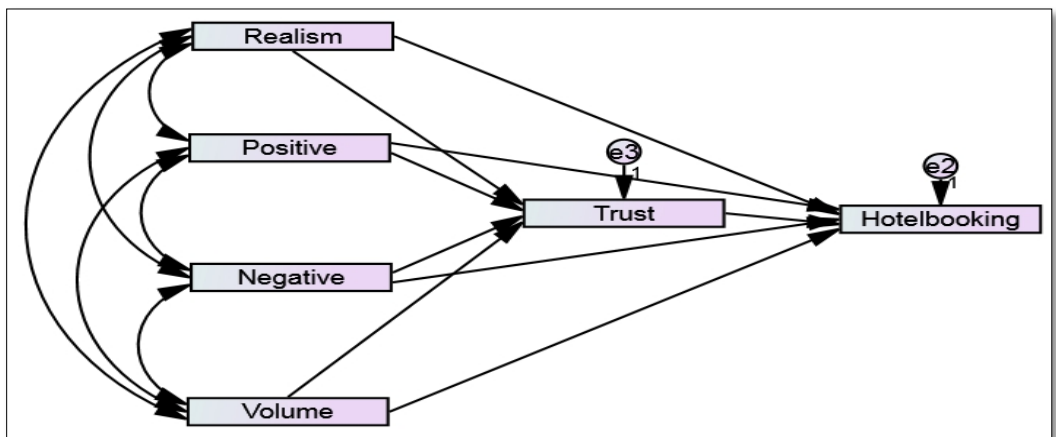


Fig3. Structural model

Regression Weights

			Estimate	P
TR.	<---	RL.	.912	***
TR.	<---	PR.	.341	***
TR.	<---	NR.	-.007	.838
TR.	<---	VR.	.700	***
HB.	<---	RL.	.345	.002
HB.	<---	PR.	.341	***
HB.	<---	NR.	-.053	.452
HB.	<---	VR.	.730	***
HB.	<---	TR.	.512	***

Table5. Regression weights

Mediation Results:

	Direct Beta W/O Mediation	Direct Beta with Mediation	Indirect beta	Results
Realism-→trust-→hotel booking	.345***	.205***	.278***	Partial
Positive-→trust-→hotel booking	.341***	.206***	.283***	Partial
Negative-→trust-→hotel booking	.023(NS)	.015(NS)	.033(NS)	No Mediation
Volume-→trust-→ hotel booking	.505***	.419***	.179***	Partial

Table6. Mediation results

Hypotheses results:

H1	<i>Positive online reviews have an impact on hotel booking intentions of the customers.</i>	Accepted
H2	<i>Negative online reviews have an impact on hotel booking intentions of the customers.</i>	Rejected
H3	<i>The volume of online reviews has an impact on hotel booking intentions of the customers.</i>	Accepted
H4	<i>Realism has an impact on hotel booking intentions of the customers.</i>	Accepted
H5	<i>Trust mediates the relationship between positive online reviews and hotel booking intentions of the customers.</i>	Accepted
H6	<i>Trust mediates the relationship between negative online reviews and hotel booking intentions of the customers.</i>	Rejected
H7	<i>Trust mediates the relationship between the volume of online reviews and hotel booking intentions of the customers.</i>	Accepted
H8	<i>Trust mediates the relationship between realism and hotel booking intentions of the customers.</i>	Accepted

Table7. Hypotheses results

Discussion

A growing reliance on the Internet as an information source when making choices about tourism products raises the need for more research into

the electronic word of mouth. Within a hotel context, this study explores the role of four key factors that influence perceptions of consumer choice. This study developed a research model and empirically examined the model by collecting data from student travelers at the University of the Punjab, Lahore. Consumers seem to be more influenced by early negative information, especially when the overall set of reviews is negative. However, positively framed information increases both booking intentions and consumer trust. The results suggest that consumers tend to rely on easy-to-process information when evaluating a hotel based upon reviews. Online Customer Review provides product information and recommendations from customers' perspectives to the people who may have a buying intention of the product or service. Our study examines the impact of the number of online customers considering the natural cycle for the processing of information. The test system is used to describe the stimulus of the number of online customer reviews especially the negative ones depending on the involvement of the customers. If the person wants to book a hotel it does not consider the negative comments. Negative reviews could not change the intention of the person due to their need for hotel booking. The largest number of customers involved in the internet makes a corresponding agreement. As the number of online customers rises, a large number of people tend to adapt to views by reviewers or customers or shoppers, depending on the quality of reviews; On the other hand, some customers involved often adapt to the opinion of reviewers regardless of the quality of online review of customers.

Conclusion

This paper demonstrated that booking intentions are influenced by multiple factors. The effect of information such as reviews (positive or negative), the volume of reviews, the reliability of reviews and trust influence hotel booking intentions. Research such as that presented in the current paper provides further theoretical and practical knowledge in this important area.

Practical implications

Hospitality practitioners could enhance consumer review management by applying the underlying factors of reviews in the present study to find out the ways of increasing consumers' booking intentions in specific hotel contexts.

Research limitations/implications

The major limitation of this study is the generalizability of the results. This study only considered the students of University of the Punjab, Lahore. As such, it offered more comprehensive suggestions for practitioners in how to better utilize online reviews as a marketing tool

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Appendix A

The five-point Likert scale was used in designing the questionnaire ranging from lowest score to the highest score i.e. (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

Positive online reviews

1. I pay more attentions to positive reviews
2. Positive reviews are of more values
3. I pay more attentions to hotels which have
4. Larger volume of positive reviews

Negative online reviews

1. The volume of negative reviews is important
2. An abundance of positive reviews will make you dislike a hotel
3. Negative reviews will terminate your booking intentions
4. I will not book from a hotel if any negative reviews about it are spotted

Hotel Booking Intentions

1. I only book branded hotels.
2. I always pay close attention to hotel reviews when I book hotels.
3. Online reviews are my main information channel.

Trust

4. I think this hotel would have high integrity.
5. I believe this hotel would be reliable.
6. If I was to discuss this hotel with others, I would probably say positive things
7. I would have trust in this hotel.
8. This appears like a good quality hotel.

Realism

1. I think the hotel review site was realistic.
2. I felt I could imagine myself using a website like this to search for hotels.
3. For the purpose of this survey I was able to imagine using this website to evaluate this hotel.

Volume of Online reviews

1. I pay more attentions to hotels having larger volume of online review
2. Volume of online reviews relates to attentions a hotel gets
3. Larger volume of online reviews reflects that many people are interested in a hotel
4. Larger volume of online reviews means more equally distributed negative and positive reviews
5. Larger volume of online reviews will increase my booking intentions
6. I will read all available reviews about a hotel