

Research Paper

The Interplay between Online Consumer Reviews and Firms Interventions from Four Stakeholders' Perspectives

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Abstract: This study presents the perspectives of the travel industry stakeholders, namely travellers, potential tourists, hospitality businesses, and travel agents. There is little literature available that covers the perspectives of all these stakeholders. The study tries to understand the preference of travellers, problems faced by them, the response of hospitality businesses on reviews posted by travellers, and the viewpoint of travel agents. A purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents for semi-structured interviews. A total of seven semi-structured interviews were conducted online to understand better the perspectives on the study topic. Thematic analysis was applied to the interview data and several themes related to each stakeholder emerged. The main themes include online presence, travellers' preference, hospitality businesses' response, and social media interaction. Travellers usually expect neat and clean rooms, washrooms, comfortable beds, and food. They expect services in accordance to the fee they pay. Hospitality businesses have dedicated staff to respond to every comment they receive. More positive reviews increase the chances of guest inflow and vice versa. There are no websites in Pakistan to review the travel agents' services, however, they are reviewed mostly on social media pages. These travel agents provide a one-stop solution to their guests and have to be very vigilant in addressing any inconvenience voiced by their customers. This research provides insights to all the stakeholders involved in the industry and gives valuable pointers to improve their services.

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Introduction

Information gathering is a key process before any purchase decision is made. In this respect, the management of hospitality establishments must comprehend the decision-making process of potential consumers who gather information from the internet and other sources. The sources of information used by consumers and the dynamics that can affect their decision-making should be well understood by the hotel management, particularly amidst the growth and development of online platforms. A clear comprehension of external information sources available to consumers and the significance given by consumers to each source will help marketers to modify their marketing approaches and messages. Failure to understand the changing marketing landscape will lead to ineffective marketing promotions and service delivery. Thus, information search is the most acute and difficult part of decision-making. This is very true for service industries like the hospitality industry where their services carry a substantial risk due to their observational and intangible nature. Consumers are not frequent users of hospitality services, therefore they rely more on collecting information and assessing options to reduce the risks connected with their purchase (Gursoy, 2019).

The significance of consumer evaluation has motivated much research in recent years. Previous research demonstrates that reviews can alter tourists' decisive behaviours. Many researchers have also highlighted features of consumer appraisals which include complexity, individuality, misrepresentation, and compensation. Most current investigations have focused on travellers' viewpoints while neglecting the perspectives of reviewers and hotel management. Given that very few research have combined the perspectives of all three stakeholders, i.e., hotel management companies, potential guests, and reviewers (Millanyani, 2020), this research will look into the purchase decision-making process from the perspectives of travel agents, potential guests, and reviewers.

Problem Statement

Online consumer reviews hold great significance in the travel industry as it influences consumer decision-making. It helps hospitality businesses to render and maintain services at a level close to the tourists' expectations. There are certain issues

associated with consumer reviews that are subjective and require a complex method of assessment, such as the existence of false reviews. Further, easy access to too many reviews may lead to information overload and confuse the potential traveller. There appears to be a contradiction in the literature regarding the influence of reviews. Some studies say that negative assessments of hotels harm their prestige while others say that it has a positive impact on them. There is also a divergence in the opinion of people regarding the hotel management's response to reviews. Some scholars consider it good for hotel management to respond to tourist online reviews while others believe that this approach hurts the hotels' reputation.

Due to these divergent opinions, an intensive investigation is needed of online reviews from the perspective of hotel management, potential guests, and travel agents. There is a dearth of research that describes the traveller's views, seemingly because finding tourists is more challenging than finding potential guests who are more influenced by reviews. There is also little research that gives us the viewpoints of businesses. This is a significant exclusion as they are a major player in the online conversation space. Moreover, there is rarely any research that has synthesised all three players' viewpoints i.e., travellers, potential guests, hospitality businesses, and travel agents, although it is crucial to see the interplay of these perspectives with regard to online reviews and responses.

Research Aims

This research investigated hotel management response to online reviews, analysing hotels' response and consumers' views about the response. Based on the findings, suitable response approaches are recommended, which can be used by the hotel management in their response towards online consumer comments. This study hopes to elucidate the relationship between online consumer reviews and business feedback, from the perspectives of reviewers, probable guests, hospitality businesses and travel agents (Millanyani, 2020).

Research Questions

The research emphasises the following inquiries:

1. How do reviewers, potential visitors, and hospitality businesses/travel agents perceive online consumer reviews and companies' reactions to these reviews?
 2. What tactics do customers and hospitality businesses apply in understanding online consumer reviews?
 3. How do hospitality businesses/travel agents respond to customer reviews?
 4. What are the consequences of the interplay between consumer reviews and hospitality businesses' involvement for travel and service promotion?
- (Millanyani, 2020)

Significance of the Study

This research adds to the existing literature on the influence of both online consumer reviews and hospitality businesses' response. As opposed to the bulk of current literature that investigated online reviews or hospitality businesses' responses separately, this study gives a complete view of the influence of both online reviews and hospitality businesses' response from every stakeholder's perspective. By examining the interaction among all three stakeholders, the following observations can be made:

1. The findings reveal many paradoxes that can happen when the three stakeholders interact at the same time. The implications are paradoxical because they can be instantaneously fruitful and harmful to the contributors.
2. The findings offer many tactics that can be used by online consumers and accommodation proprietors to address the flaws highlighted and augment the benefits.
3. The work adds to the consumer behavior literature by elucidating the use of the self-concept theory used by consumers when they are assessing perplexing reviews.
4. The study enlightens us on consumer motivation behind the reviews, instead of only complaints about the service provider.
5. The study also reveals that some consumers remain indifferent to replies from hospitality businesses and give more importance to reviews. However, non-responses can lead to bad impressions.
6. The study also provides some insights on the marketing communication theory regarding the origin of message and response time.

Literature Review

The omnipresent and extensive use of the internet has boosted the growth of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). Consumers now use diverse social networks, including social media platforms, buyer evaluation sites, blogs, and social groups to convey their product and service experiences to others. Naturally, the increase in eWOM has increased the number of online reviews which has an impact on buyer decisions. Similarly, in the travel industry, this has enabled travellers to express their opinions about their trips or travels. Tripadvisor is a very prominent tourism website and around 57% of potential travellers visit this website before planning a trip or booking a hotel. Researchers have stressed the significance of online evaluations to travellers/consumers in the accommodation industry that relies on the proficiency and assurance of consumers (Reyes-Menendez et al., 2020).

Hospitality Businesses' Response to Online Reviews

Hospitality businesses' responses, enabled by social media today, have become prominent in handling undesirable evaluations. This online communication is increasingly getting more recognition among potential travellers. Research suggests that potential travellers are more likely to select accommodation providers that respond to online consumer reviews and a considerate response to an unfavorable evaluation raises the establishment's reputation in their minds (Han, 2021).

A compelling management response indicates their concern for guest satisfaction and service excellence. An accommodation provider's response to negative feedback from guests is considered crucial as it has a substantial influence on guests' impression and accordingly, on the hotel's reputation and operations. The response influences potential visitors as well about the business' service commitment and the degree to which it is concerned about its guests (Rose & Blodgett, 2016; So et al., 2016). Guests are more likely to give a positive assessment when they see that all previous critical reviews have been addressed by the business. In their study on management reply and customer gratification, Gu and Ye (2014) found that highly disgruntled customers are more positively inclined to managerial responses.

Studies also show that a dissatisfied guest can be assuaged by online responses from the hospitality business. Consequently, responding to guests' online reviews would ultimately affect their financial performance. Responding to good or encouraging reviews is necessary as a gesture of gratitude, but responding to undesirable comments is considered essential as this reflects the business' interest in its customers and needs or requirements. Potential guests are influenced more by bad comments than good reviews, thus, online prestige management is associated more closely with e-criticism than e-adulation (Alrawadieh & Dincer, 2019).

A study acknowledged that 95% of all online hotel accounts reply to online consumer feedback (May, 2015). Guests' opinions of hotels can be disparate due to customer relationship management (CRM). In the conventional form of CRM, the lodging manager connects with a specific customer personally or via phone, to placate a disgruntled customer himself/ herself. Today's digital marketing enables consumers to view all other consumer assessments online and the responses from the product or service provider. Access to this information influences and shapes the impressions of potential guests (Zhang et al., 2019).

Publicity specialists acknowledge that corresponding through digital media provides businesses a chance to connect with consumers via a refined or informal voice. In public relations studies, the informal voice is often treated as a compelling feature in the response to a difficult situation or business crisis, particularly when the company has been the focus of a negative discourse (Schultz et al., 2011). Online prestige management has to be done on many fronts such as on Twitter, Facebook,

and other digital media. Public relations management requires that the complainants are treated with esteem, informal communication is encouraged and an immediate response is given (Zhang & Vásquez, 2014).

In their study, Zhang and Vásquez (2014) revealed a total of 10 specific responses, among which eight were the most recurrent. Out of the eight, acknowledgment and excuse were the most common. Further, the company is prone to assert a business identity when responding to negative comments.

Sparks et al. (2016) proposed that responses from hospitality businesses should be made on time. There seems to be less benefit in responding to reviews after a certain period of time has passed, specifically if the purpose is to recoup trust among potential customers. The study also highlighted that in writing replies, the writing style should be informal involving a conversation style that represents accountability, clarity, and a helpful communication accent.

Pelsmacker et al. (2018) studied the impact of digital marketing plans on hotel room ownership and revenue performance. Results of the study indicate that more reviews drive room occupancy and review demeanor like positive or negative influences revenue performance. The volume and different nature of reviews received is influenced by the digital marketing strategies and impacts more on bigger chains of hotels and lesser on low-tier hotels.

Online Consumer Reviews

Online customer reviews are recognised as a beneficial instrument for studying customer attitudes. Compared to surveys and online conversations, assessments offer a new and compelling way to study consumer attitude. A study of online restaurant comments demonstrated that aspects like quality of food, service, surroundings, price, menu, and decoration influence consumer concept. Experimental research indicates that the presence of online reviews, hotel publicity, and assessors' proficiency all improve consumers' perception of hotels (Ye et al., 2014).

Li et al. (2013) did a content analysis of 42,668 online consumer reviews of 774 hotels to determine factors which guests considered as vital for their comfort while staying in hotels. The study found 15 factors affecting customer gratification which were grouped into six groups. Room, logistics availability, easily reachable tourist destinations, and value of money topped the list, whereas parking facilities, room air conditioning, and audiovisual amenities in the room were at the bottom. In short, it is quite clear that hotels have to improve their facilities to attain guest gratification. Guests rated room facilities as being very important for their comfort but were not delighted by it. Both affluent and economical hotels presented similar results, excluding soundproofing and lobby.

Consumer purchase motivation rises if the positive trait of evaluations is sustained. Quality positive feedbacks include fair reviews, the utility of the good, and appropriate endorsements (Park et al., 2007). A study examined 16,680 hotels in 249 tourist destinations and found that most online evaluations were constructive and almost 70% of reviews were positive. Online evaluations have a good and compelling influence on hotel booking intent. Higher positive evaluation for a particular hotel raises the chances of more online hotel bookings (Melián-González et al., 2013). Danish et al. (2019) investigated the impact of four crucial determinants that affect the viewpoints of the consumer.

The four determinants are realism, volume of reviews, positive reviews, and trust. Realism refers to the credibility of the reviews. If the reviews appear to be genuine, then they affect the tourist decision. Volume refers to the number of reviews; if this number is large, then it influences tourist decisions. Optimistic comments about a hotel influence the tourist decision. Trust in the reviews helps the tourist to decide about the hotel. In contrast, negative reviews do not affect the decision of the tourist as long as they find the positive reviews to be credible (Danish et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, other studies have shown that consumers believe online evaluations without considering the nature of the reviews. Guests' trust in online evaluations constructively impacts their intentions to hotel booking (Sparks & Browning, 2011). Similarly, consumers are more prone to buying products if they feel that the advertisements and evaluations are truthful.

Adverse evaluations of a hotel on a large scale can negatively affect the hotel's reputation and booking intention of potential guests. However, lone negative evaluations do not influence the booking plans of consumers (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009). Unfavorable online reviews posted before positive feedback is likely to decline the booking plans of potential guests. However, positive evaluations supported with data can diminish the adverse impact of bad reviews and influence consumers to constructively book (Sparks & Browning, 2011). The theory of negative impact explains that individuals tend to be biased more by adverse information as compared to positive facts (Zhang & Austin, 2009).

Online sales are impacted by trust. Trust is considered as voluntary readiness to rely on a trade partner (Ladhari & Michaud, 2015). Trust works on lessening the negotiation-related ambiguity, concern, and susceptibility, and it ultimately raises the contentment and influences the e-WOM, especially in the case of intricate and first-hand services (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Potential customers use online reviews to lessen the anxiety associated with the product or service buying; therefore, these online evaluations help customers to ascertain the confidence level. It can therefore be deduced that guest intent to make bookings is connected to trust, and trust is significantly shaped by online evaluations (Ladhari & Michaud, 2015).

According to Danish et al. (2019), online booking intent can be affected by numerous factors. With regard to online reviews, the implications (good or bad), the amount, the trustworthiness of reviews as well as one's faith in online reviews can all affect hotel booking intention.

Reviewers Perspective on Hotel Satisfaction

Adverse evaluations of a hotel can be caused by the hotel's general features like price, area, and amenities. Other aspects such as room or bathroom condition, room size, or staff service that are dissatisfactory can also result in online complaints by guests. Hotel management should strive to address and improve guest complaints (Alrawadieh & Law, 2019). Hotel service, room features, and unscrupulous deals were identified as factors affecting guest contentment in the Hong Kong hotel industry (Choi & Chu, 2001). In another study, it was found that guest aggregate comfort was influenced by cleanliness level and front desk personnel attitude (Gundersen et al., 1996). With the development and expansion of Web 2.0 and tourism-related platforms, analysts can find sufficient data to investigate tourist viewpoints, attitudes, and requests. Thus, online tourism evaluations furnish large datasets of financial information to comprehend guest contentment (Zhou & Wang, 2014).

Some of the factors influencing guest satisfaction include room conditions, ease of logistics, distance to travellers' home, and value-for-money deals (Li et al., 2013). Another study investigated factors influencing guest contentment and found three factors which were hotel condition, personnel, and room (Kim et al., 2016). Guest contentment level and complaint vary from hotel to hotel. Causes of guest contentment are related to essential services whereas those related to disapproval are connected to staff personal demeanor (Xu & Li, 2016).

Knowledgeable tourists recognise what to anticipate when going to a hotel, and they can comprehend what a particular hotel can or cannot provide (Jeong & Jang, 2011). In addition, knowledgeable tourists may act more composed in contrast to unfamiliar tourists and may display more finesse when giving assessments and posting appraisals (Shanteau et al., 2002; Willemsen et al., 2012). Inexperienced tourists resort to undue criticism as they do not comprehend the industry well, have an unrealistic anticipations, and are unaware of whom to hold answerable if some mistake occurs (Black & Kelley, 2009). Accordingly, knowledgeable and inexperienced evaluators act differently when they evaluate products or services. A knowledgeable analyst with a better status is more impartial as compared to inexperienced evaluators who are demanding and want attention (Kim et al., 2011).

The rapid growth of online tour companies has made the industry more competitive and aggressive, particularly in attracting consumers to buy tour packages online. Tour operators' main source of attracting more and more travellers is trust. This trust is accomplished when consumers read good reviews of the tour operators

online. Positive feedback reduces consumer anxiety and endorses that the tour operator matches the consumer's desired expectations (Hamdan & Yuliantini, 2021).

(Xu (2017) explored the online review behavior of travellers by using text mining and text regression which revealed three main findings. First, common complaints include noisy environment, unsteady Wi-Fi, dirty washrooms or uncomfortable beds. Second, an irregular relationship exists between factors identified by text mining and text regression. Third, while the factors for satisfaction and dissatisfaction of travellers are the same, the feedback depends on the composition of the co-traveller. Prior studies found that customer comfort and complaints are influenced by the traits of the guests including demographics or purpose of travel (Kashyap & Bojanic, 2000; Mittal & Kamakura, 2001). There was a divergence found in the viewpoint of business and leisure travellers. Liu et al., (2013) found dissimilarity in tourists' opinions when they travel with different groups.

Philosophy of Travel

Brodsky-Porges (1981) examined several factors such as religion and health which affected the evolution of the Grand Tour. Grand Tour refers to trips taken by the rich people of England in pursuit of education, which formed the early philosophy of travel. The objectives and desire of the journey, as well as the students themselves underwent changes over the past 200 years (1600–1800). The Grand Tour evolved into what is now known as tourism. In other words, early thinkers/philosophers identified traveling as an educational means. Mencius (A. D. 385–289 B.C.) stated, “To experience something is superior to reading it a hundred times”. “Bacon (1561–1626) in his essay, *On Travel* recorded that “Travelling when one is young is education and when one is elderly is experience” (Brodsky-Porges, 1981).

Religion also has an important influence on travel. One outstanding example of the religious tour is the Muslim's obligation of Hajj which is performed every year. Similarly, Christians visit the Vatican and Jerusalem as part of their pilgrimage. Further, health was and is still an inspiring force for traveling. Montaigne in 1580 visited Germany and Italy to try the baths to comfort his old-age and unstable body. Today, health clubs are still found in great numbers around the world.

The least advocated motivation for travel was leisure. Affluence in early Greece encouraged recreational travel but it was only in the late 1500–1600 period that it began as a medium of education. It was during this time that the practice of the elite class sending their children abroad for education started, first as a trial and later on became a culture.

People nowadays travel to take relief from their busy schedules and enjoy nature. These days people are so much occupied with their work that they do not get time to enjoy or relax. The main aim of leisure travel today is to enjoy and take respite from a busy and ordinary life (Correia et al., 2007).

Methodology

This study investigated the travel industry stakeholders' viewpoints regarding online consumer reviews, and the significance of online communication between hotels and travellers. It was important to choose a qualitative method for this research, interviews, to help the researchers gain a clear comprehension on the study topic. Qualitative research is different from the survey or experiment approach as it gives investigators the ability to explore insights, ideas, and perspectives of related parties who will be at their liberty to communicate their opinions about the problem under study (Millanyani, 2020). Qualitative research helps the researchers to establish a clear picture of the study topic by revealing the viewpoints of all the stakeholders involved. Moreover, surveys are not suitable to assess demeanor (Dolnicar, 2018) whereas experiments concentrate on noticed behavior which bounds investigators' capability to research the mental mechanism hidden behind a certain practice (Gneezy, 2017).

Research Philosophy: Epistemology and Theoretical Perspectives

There are various explanations of research philosophy. Guba and Lincoln described the research paradigm as the basic viewpoint that directs the researcher not only in the selection of methods but also differentiates between the ontological and epistemological approach (1994). Deshpande depicted research philosophy as a set of the associated supposition that is shared by investigators interested in researching a particular problem (1983). According to Guba and Lincoln, there are four approaches to research which are positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, and constructivism (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), whereas Deshpande claimed that there are two forms of research, namely qualitative and quantitative (Deshpande, 1983). Another viewpoint is that there are two concepts of research, namely positivist and interpretive, and each has its own ontological, axiological, and epistemological premises (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). Some scholars argue qualitative research has three epistemological viewpoints, namely interpretivism, hermeneutics, and social constructionism (Schwandt, 2000).

Another viewpoint of qualitative research is that it consists of four basic elements in epistemology which are objectivism, constructionism, and subjectivism, while positivism, interpretivism, critical inquiry, feminism, postmodernism are considered as theoretical viewpoints (Crotty, 2009). This research adopted Crotty's stance and used the terms described by him. The first element is epistemology which is related to the nature and scope of knowledge. According to Crotty, there are three types of epistemologies, namely objectivism, constructionism, and subjectivism. According to objectivist epistemologists, reality prevails apart from the working of any perception. Constructivists argue that there is no reality waiting to be explored and meanings are constructed by our confrontation with the realities of the world. Thus, meanings are

constructed and not identified. According to constructionism, different people may interpret the same concepts in different ways. In subjectivism, meanings can come from anything and not just from the interaction between the subject and the object to which it is attributed (Crotty, 2009).

Scholars do not differentiate between the terms constructivism and social constructionism (Crotty, 2009); the difference prevails because of the word "social". Constructivists emphasise what is going on in the minds of individuals while social constructivists concentrate on what is going on between people as they interact to conceive reality (Guterman, 2013). Social constructionist or constructivism was chosen for this study as it studied the interaction between reviewers and hospitality businesses and the significance of this interaction on potential guests.

The participants of the study developed an attitude after reading reviews (reviews here refer to those available on different websites and/or their replies). Further, different people developed different attitudes towards the same message because of the diversity in the research participant backgrounds. The difference in the meaning of reviews and replies of the hospitality businesses is appreciated by the researcher. It is under this context that the interaction between hospitality businesses and reviews exist (Millanyani, 2020).

Theoretical outlook consists of the presumption chosen within a methodology that provides a framework for the process involved and support for its logic and its standard, or, it is the technique behind a philosophical viewpoint (Crotty, 2009). Coherent with the constructionist epistemology, it is believed that reality can be approached through language, realisation, shared meanings, and instruments (Myers, 2013). The researchers, therefore, found interpretivism to be the appropriate theoretical outlook for studying reality because interpretivism "holds that social reality is a subjective construction established on analysis and interplay (Quinlan et al., 2011, p. 96). Moreover, interpretivists attempt to define realities that are not previously known as they are time and situation-specific (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). Interpretation is an inspirational process in which the researcher derives from his or her reserve of background information and personal exposure to extract understanding from interview data (Thompson, 2006).

The present research aimed to investigate the interaction between consumer reviews and hospitality businesses' responses, and their impact on potential guests. The inclusion of all related stakeholder parties in this research is very important as it aims to produce "an all-inclusive overall investigation" (Noy, 2008). It therefore became apparent that qualitative methodology would be the most suited for this study.

Generating complete information is possible by reviewing texts from the respondents' interview manuscript and drawing inferences established on information acquired from the literature. It should be noted that in using this viewpoint, the interview process is a process of cooperation between two parties and not an inactive

one-way communication from one party (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The research is concerned with observing the social world from the perspective of the different actors (Bryman, 1984).

Selection of Qualitative Methodology

The choice to use a qualitative methodology for this research conforms with a need for more qualitative studies in consumer research, which is governed by the positivistic model (Shankar & Goulding, 2001). The researchers felt the need for a personal mode of investigation, particularly developed to focus on socially established phenomena (Hirschman, 1986). The researchers endorse the perspective of Hirschman and believe that the qualitative methodology was the most appropriate for this study as it allowed them to study a specific subject exhaustively (Myers, 2013) and include an explanatory, realistic attitude to the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013).

Method

Methods are ways to collect and evaluate data related to any research question or hypothesis (Crotty, 2009). The research used semi-structured interview to collect data. Semi-structured interview allows participants to clarify their reply, ensuring a good grasp of the topic being examined (Qu & Dumay, 2011).

The interview protocol contained four parts: Introductory questions, changeover questions, essential questions, and final questions. The interview questions should strike a balance between inquiry and dialogue (ibid); they need to guide the interviewer without limiting their ingenuity (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

Data Analysis

For data analysis, thematic analysis was selected as it is adaptable and applicable to a range of theoretical and epistemological orientations (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The use of thematic analysis in tourist research has gained wide acceptance, especially for the analysis of written data such as interview transcripts (Walters, 2016). Thematic analysis will enable the presentation of a more detailed and rich account of multiple viewpoints on online customer reviews utilising an inductive technique.

Establishing the Quality of Study

In qualitative research, reliability and validity is replaced by believability and accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Believability contains four features which are soundness, interchangeability, reliability, and affirmability while accuracy consists of honesty, ontological confirmation, educative confirmation, and strategic confirmation. These ideas have been debated by several qualitative researchers, and the quest for

appropriate measures for establishing precision is still ongoing resulting in a surplus of terms and standards (Cypress, 2017), for example, correctness, soundness, and necessity (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993) or triangulation (Tobin & Begley, 2004).

Sampling Technique

To prepare the study sample, the researchers utilised purposive sampling. The sample consisted of three travellers, and four hospitality businesses representatives, or potential guests who used Booking.com, Tripadvisor.com, or had some web presence like social media accounts.

Results and Analysis

The interviews were conducted online and transcribed by the researchers. The interview data were then subjected to thematic analysis (TA). Care was taken to ensure that the researcher backgrounds did not in any way influence the findings.

Interviews with Travellers

The main themes that emerged from interviews with travellers were: 1) Online hotel presence, 2) Reviews, 3) Hospitality businesses' responses, and 4) Travellers' preferences.

All the travellers interviewed said that they read reviews of the hotels on Booking.com, Tripadvisor, and other websites. Some of the excerpts are as follows:

They use Trip Advisor, Booking.com and other sources for booking hotels online.

They knew in advance what to expect from the hotel by reading traveller's reviews.

The travellers interviewed said that they made their decisions based on online reviews. They also admitted that they read all the reviews, both positive and negative, as shared here.

I read it extensively and read at least 5 to 6 reviews. Do not make any judgment by reading just 1 or 2 reviews. Yes, I do trust them. I review different sites like Facebook pages, booking.com, tripadvisor.com and once you feel comfortable you go and book.

I read all the reviews both positive and negative as it gives me first-hand experience of the hotel experience.

We feel relieved when we share our experience on the online community. Both positive and negative experiences motivate us to share our experience on the online community. They said that if someone has provided very good service then we feel obliged to give good feedback. When we have a very bad experience then we would like to share it with the hospitality company and other travellers.

With regard to responses, the travellers said that sometimes they received a response from hospitality businesses that they had commented on. If the travellers have given a good review, then they received a good response. If the review was bad, only sometimes, they received a response from the hotels. The travellers agreed that if they received a response for a negative review from a hospitality business, they feel that the company shows concern to its customers.

Yes the replies from the company show that it cares about its clients and will try to improve on its shortcomings.

The travellers also highlighted their preferences as follows:

Cleanliness in room and washrooms. Beds to be comfortable as the traveller get tired during travel and want to rest comfortably.

Traveller's want to know the hotel in advance. i.e. Are there any Gyms, parking facility and in case of travellers being accompanied by Children they need to know if they have carrycots for kids available with them?

Table 1. Themes from interviews with travellers

Themes	Details
Online hotel presence	Consumers use Tripadvisor, Booking.com, and other websites for booking
Reviews	Consumers decisions are now based on online reviews
Hospitality businesses' responses	Responses to negative reviews enhances a business' reputation in the eyes of the consumers
Travellers' preferences	Travellers prefer cleanliness, comfortability, and availability of different services available at hotels

Interviews with Hospitality Businesses

Three themes emerged from the interviews with hospitality business representatives these are : 1) Responses to reviews, 2) Service improvements, and 3) Travellers' preferences.

Representatives of the hospitality businesses who were interviewed believed that businesses reply to every comment which is posted on Tripadvisor, Booking.com, or Facebook page. They admitted that in today's digital era of marketing, consumers are attracted to a particular hotel after seeing online reviews. Thus, they believe that hospitality businesses should strive to respond to every comment that is posted on social media.

We reply to both positive and negative replies.

When there is a negative reply, we contact the respondent in person and try to relieve his/her complaint. In some cases, we also compensate the traveller for the problem encountered. In certain cases, the complaints are not genuine and are ignored by the hospitality businesses.

Hospitality businesses say that when reviewers start to use very bad language in reviews then the firms start avoiding such reviewers.

Hospitality businesses were of the view that bad reviews are part and parcel of this business. It all depends on the ratio of good and bad reviews. If the ratio of good reviews is high then it is a good thing.

The respondents also shared that hospitality businesses tend to improve their services after being reviewed by consumers.

After receiving genuine consumer complaints we make sure that we improve our services.

Further, the respondents believed that travellers prefer the following things:

Neat and clean washrooms.

Travellers cannot get food according to their preference on hill stations. The hotels hire people who are aware of the traveller's taste and make foods accordingly.

Table 2. Themes from interviews with hospitality businesses

Themes	Details
Responses to reviews	Every comment should be responded to and negative comments are the most important. Consumers value hotels that reply to their customers

Table 2. (con't)

Themes	Details
Service improvement	Online consumer reviews improve hotel's service standards
Travellers' preference	Neat and clean washrooms. Food according to traveller's choice

Interviews with Potential Guests

One dominant theme that emerged from interviews with potential guests was online reviews that influence potential guests.

We make our bookings from online websites like Tripadvisor, Booking.com and look at the reviews from different participants.

Potential guests also see the responses of hospitality businesses and if the company is responding to guest reviews then it has a good impact on them.

Table 3. Theme from interviews with potential guests

Theme	Details
Online reviews that influence potential guests	Potential guests look at online reviews before planning visits and observe online responses by hotels to any negative comments. Hotels that respond to consumer complaints improve their reputation.

Interviews with Travel Agents

Three themes emerged from the interviews with this group of stakeholders: 1) Need for website for reviewing travel agents, 2) Travellers' preference, and 3) Social media interaction.

There are no independent platforms for travel agents where they can be rated.

There are some private websites but it is marked by favoritism.

Travellers' preference includes neat and clean bathrooms, clean rooms, clean beds and blankets, comfortable beds, and competitive travel packages. It also includes spacious cars for traveling as people who cannot travel comfortably cannot enjoy the trip very well.

People review travel agents on their Facebook pages.

Travel agents also receive negative reviews on their Facebook pages and they interact with such travellers and try to compensate them in every way.

Table 4. Themes from interviews with travel agents

Themes	Details
Need for website for reviewing travel agents	No proper website for reviewing travel agents, Mostly private pages but these are riddled with favoritism
Travellers' preference	Guests look for comfortable road trip, bathroom cleanliness, room cleanliness, bed and blankets in good condition, competitive travel packages
Social media interaction	Travel agents obtain feedback about their services on their Facebook pages

Discussion

Based on the thematic analysis, it can be concluded that the online presence of every stakeholder in the travel industry has made it easy to interact with each other. Travellers' preferences and expectations from hospitality businesses and likewise, can also be easily understood. Further, hospitality businesses can also improve their services by looking at the reviews of travellers. Potential guests who are planning to visit a destination can also improve the purchase decisions for their trip by reading in advance the comments of past travellers. Next, travel agents also have the opportunity to understand better the different preferences and requirements of the travel industry stakeholders, particularly travellers, to improve their services accordingly.

Travellers also form their expectations based on online reviews and also on the amount of money they are paying to the hospitality businesses. Hospitality businesses also improve or modify their services based on the reviews of travellers; they may consider some whilst ignore others, depending on the genuineness of the reviews. In the same way, travel agencies or agents also obtain feedback on their Facebook pages and understand better travellers' preferences to improve their services accordingly.

Many review sites like Tripadvisor and Booking.com are used by tourists and travellers to share and rate their travel experience with hospitality businesses. These reviews are important for all stakeholders as it gives an overview of the service standard and potential improvements of hospitality businesses. In responding to consumer reviews, especially negative ones, hospitality businesses can placate disgruntled customers, as well as create a good impression on potential travellers as being caring towards their customers. Similarly, travel agents use feedback received online to improve their services.

Hospitality businesses have staff who monitor reviews received on social media sites and travel websites like Tripadvisor and Booking.com and respond to them

accordingly. Potential customers read all online reviews carefully before booking. Travel agents also respond to reviews received on social media sites. Consumer reviews are most often genuine and every step should be taken to heed them so that improvement can take place where it is needed.

There is more awareness now about travellers' preferences and this can help hospitality businesses to meet these demands and requirements. The service level continues to get better as feedback is recognised and used to improve shortcomings and weaknesses and this in turn, attracts more potential guests. Ultimately, the beneficiaries are travellers and potential guests who get to enjoy improved service hospitality businesses and travel agents.

Conclusion

This study provided an overview of the perspectives of the travel industry stakeholders, that is, travellers, hospitality businesses, potential guests, and travel agents. Travellers' preferences include neat and clean rooms, clean washrooms, comfortable beds, and availability of spacious transport. This finding concurs with past studies (Atkinson, 1988; Knutson, 1988; Saleh & Ryan, 1992). Travellers focus on five main aspects which are "lodging and restaurants," "shopping and tourist attractions," "transportation," "foods," as well as "environment and security" (Rittichainuwat & Qu, 2014). Many travellers today refer to online reviews before planning their travel. For this study, the consideration set theory was applied to see the influence of online reviews on travellers' selection. The findings reveal that publicity of online reviews (whether good or bad) increases a hotel's choice among travellers. The reason is that both good and bad reviews boost the publicity of the hotel, in particular, good reviews. Thus, reviews are definitely a boon to relatively less popular hotels (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009).

Indubitably, online reviews impact the reputation of a hospitality business. There are always good reviews and bad reviews but eventually, it all depends on the proportion of good and bad reviews. If there are more good reviews, this will attract more potential tourists to the hotels (Perez-Aranda et al., 2019). Potential tourists analyse the reviews of other travellers and then decide accordingly. As potential tourists trust the reviews given by other travellers, the more the positive reviews, the better it is for the reputation of the hotels (Jayathilaka et al., 2020).

Similarly, the reputation of travel agents depends on the reviews or feedback left on their social media or Facebook pages. Potential guests or travellers use these reviews to assess the quality of work of the travel agents (Senders et al., 2013). In summary, the interaction of all four stakeholders has provided a very holistic overview of their perspectives with regard to online reviews. These insights can be used by hospitality businesses and travel agents to further improve their services.

Practical Implications

The rapid growth of web 2.0 has necessitated hospitality businesses to secure their online presence. Many travellers planning their trips will visit the related hospitality business website or social media pages to get more details to help their decision making process. Some of the travellers also review travel websites like Tripadvisor or Booking.com before making a booking. These travellers read reviews given by the previous guests and are very much influenced by the reviews. Thus, hospitality businesses have to ensure that their services meet the needs of their guests so that satisfactory guests will leave good reviews online. Hospitality businesses also have to diligently manage their social media pages and other review websites to respond to any negative reviews that may jeopardise their reputation.

Travel agencies or agents provide package tours for different destinations. They handle all details and logistics of the trip or tour such accommodation, transportation, food, and itinerary of the travellers. The travel agents must ensure that the travellers' needs are met and have a wonderful experience of traveling with them. This will improve their reviews on social media pages and increase their future earnings.

Limitations and Future Research

It should be highlighted here that it was difficult to find respondents who use TripAdvisor or Booking.com for travelling. Moreover, many of the potential respondents were reluctant to participate in the study. Several travellers, hotel owners, and travel agents were contacted but only a few consented to participate in the study. Further, in some areas of Pakistan, Tripadvisor and Booking.com were not operational. Lastly, future research can include transport providers as another stakeholder group to further build on the present findings.

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