



Antecedents of Consumers' Trust towards Online Travel Websites

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Abstract

Due to the increasing dependency on the social networking sites, the question of their trustworthiness arrives before the users. Consumers actively use the online travel sites especially the review sites to gain information. There are many factors which affect the reliability and trustworthiness of these websites. The objective of the study is to disclose the grounds of trust and distrust in Online Travel Review Sites, to identify factors affecting online trust, and to investigate users' behavior concerning trustworthiness in online websites. Tourists rely on the websites which are under control of the tourism organizations and service providers and specially the review sites. Posting of reviews using fake ID, promotional reviews, inexperienced personnel, and risk etc. are the major reasons the potential consumers tend to distrust the online networking sites. The aspects related to the online content, the content writer, intermediaries, sellers, and readers affect the trustworthiness of online travel websites. The experienced consumers trust the online sites more than the inexperienced. The reviewers should be aggravated to share their identity and other reliable and necessary information about themselves for being of assistance to the potentials to evaluate the trustworthiness.

Key Words: Trustworthiness, Online Trust, Travel Reviews, Social Networking Sites, Travel Information.

Introduction

Due to the changing technologies and increasing number of social networking sites tourists are promptly using these for sharing experiences and getting knowledge (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Volo, 2010). They rely on the information provided on different social networking sites and review sites. People are now confident while doing online functions. The different types of online sources providing travel-related information have a different degree of trust. Trust is not defined by any term across the world. Trustworthiness is all about the message sender and the receiver when the sender provides information without being partial and the receiver receives it without being hypercritical (Greer, 2003). In the comparison of dealing through traditional media, trust plays important role in online transactions because consumers are not known to the online dealing parties and are uncertain about the same (Kim, D.J., 2014). As there are possibilities of having hints about the information provider through his body language, facial expressions, dressings etc. but not such cues can be sorted out through online channels as through WOM. Consumers are concerned about being cheated and many have already faced the scam done through online purchasing (Statista, 2018). Trust and distrust are counted as two opposite terms but have their own role to play. Distrust is all about of feeling negative about the issues one is unknown to (Lee, J. Dual, 2014, McKnight, D.H.; Choudhury, V., 2006). Three dimensions are regarded for illustrating trust in e-commerce; intrapersonal-level trust (i.e., purchaser), system-level trust (i.e., mediator), and interpersonal-level trust (i.e., supplier) (McKnight, D.H.; Choudhury, V.; Kacmar, C., 2002). There are many factors which affect the reliability and trustworthiness of these websites. The objective of the study is to disclose the grounds of trust and distrust in Online Travel Review sites, to identify factors affecting online trust, and to investigate users' behavior concerning trustworthiness in online sites.

The Grounds of Trust and Distrust in Online Travel Review Sites

Now online sellers act two ways provide information regarded the products in the form of seller created information and they use various online platforms for this purpose and assist potential tourists by providing Online Travel Review (OTR) as consumer-created information (Park, Lee, and Han, 2007). Both terms User-Generated Reviews (UGC) and

Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) are associated to each other. UGC are basically counted as a medium of e-marketing between a consumer to another (Ahujs, Michels, Walker & Weissbuch, 2007).

Being third party review sites, the user-generated review sites act as a mediator between the seller and consumer. It affects the trustworthiness of the sites (Gretzel 2006). Being service based industry where the products are intangible, experience based, the credibility becomes more vital. The travel experiences not only effect the economic but psychological risk is also associated with the same (Loda, Teichmann, and Zins 2009, Dickinger (2011). The trustworthiness and expertise of the UGC platforms have minor and no affect on behavioral intentions. Trustworthiness is found to be more impactful than expertise (Pornpitakpan, 2004). The social networking sites being operated by different kind of personals with different skills and knowledge there are always possibilities that they are not experts and know a little about publishing information online (Humphreys, 2008). These are widely spread and people from all around the world use these for different purposes. It's hard to implement the same policies, restrictions and follow the same law worldwide (Zapinta, 2007). Now a day, the number of cases are increasing due to status spoiled through social networking sites (Rosenblum, 2007). The social sites especially the review websites have now come up with few guidelines to be followed by the users. Travelocity, Trip Advisor.com etc. state that if they found any review against their guidelines such as providing a personal message, any link to another site, any destructive review they can edit and remove the review from the site. While such restrictions are not clearly demonstrated by other social networking sites (Burgess, S., Sellitto, C., Cox, C., & Buultjens, J., 2011).

Consumers are more doubtful at the credibility of the review sites, a form of eWOM then the traditional WOM, which is derived from people they somehow know. But UGC are typically written by people who are totally unknown to them (Park et al, 2007, Litvin et al, 2008).). There are possibilities that service providers use their own people to write positive about their business on the review sites and post ill about their competitors (Laitive et al, 2008). People tend to create fake ID' and do not disclose their identity and then concealed motivation behind posting review increases distrust. This directly guides them to post negative views on the social media (Ahmad, W., & Sun, J. (2018). The reviewer posts

his/her views on the review sites with the motive of influencing the readers against purchasing any specific product or service. Through UGC, the information is provided by the consumer rather than the marketers themselves as they do it through traditional marketing (Fernando, 2007).

Criteria for Assessing Trustworthiness

In comparison to other general social media sites such as Facebook or any other, the websites particularly dominated to travel are counted as more trustworthy by the tourists. (Burgess, S., Sellitto, C., Cox, C., & Buultjens, J., 2011, Wasserman, 2006). Further consumers consider the UGC websites more effective and trust these in spite of any website of the tourism service providers such as travel agents, tour operators, hoteliers etc. as these are set up for commercial purpose (Laitive et al, 2008).

For assessing the reviewer trustworthiness OTR readers consider not only reviewer's related information but the reasons behind their writing review (Dou et al, 2012; Filieri, 2016). If they find the reasons behind posting a review more authentic then the readers are likely to reckon it more truthful (Qiu et al, 2012). It is found that even the consumers with valid reason post false reviews this is done thoroughly by tricking with the identity. This simply directs them to post negative online reviews (Forman et al, 2008). Trust on reviews is decreasing due to tourists' opinion regarding the OTR's sources which are supposed to be prejudiced and skeptical (Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016). In case the travel review sites do not have strong provisions for reviewer's identification discloser, the reviewers will keep posting reviews from fake ID's automatically decreasing trust in the sources (Filieri, 2016).

Reviewer trustworthiness is directly in proportionate of his/her participation, sociability, familiarity, positivity, repute and capability (Banerjee, S., Bhattacharyya, S., & Bose, I., 2017). There is need of identifying and ranking the top trustworthy reviewers by the enterprise for posting their views on the site. This can be done by using the reviewers' related factors such as their identity, expertise etc. (Banerjee, S., et al, 2017). A number of studies are already done focusing on the identity discloser in UGC, as many a time the question arises over the credibility of the message when these are widely spread online (Cheung & Thadani, 2010; Cox et al., 2009). The expertise and trustworthiness of the reviewer affect readers' trust in the content provided online (Yoo et al., 2009). In comparison to the content

available on other social media sites, readers trust user-generated reviews. But the potential consumers do not maintain belief in the content if they do not get any reliable information about the reviewer (Cox et al., 2009). Various reviewers' related factors such as his/her locality, travel motivation, price, review content etc. affect reviewers' credibility in the mindset of the readers. It is regarded as a basic and very important hint for maintaining trustworthiness for the reviewers (Park, H., Xiang, Z., Josiam, B., & Kim, H., 2014).

Sometimes there are disinterested parties between the sellers and the purchasers. The consumers' trust in these directly increases trust in the seller and ultimately influences users' purchase decisions. Distrust in intermediaries effects the consumers' decisions and increases risk associated with this. It is the quality and assertion of the websites of mediators who increase trust in these (Lee, S. J., Ahn, C., Song, K. M., & Ahn, H., 2018). Potential tourists believe eWOM more when these are posted on the official tourism departments' websites. They believe in reviewers' intentions and trust in their content. Being a major influencing and assisting in planning for the potential tourists' trust in OTR is reckoned very significant (Yoo, K. H., & Gretzel, U., 2010). The overall size and the market share are the two aspects of measuring the size of an online website (Doney and Cannon, 1997). Consumers judge websites with larger size trustful due to their problem solving and handling abilities and hope for reimbursement in case of disappointment (Beldad et al., 2010; Jarvenpaa et al., 2000; Hsu et al., 2014). Davis, (1989) perceived ease of use, as the level where using any system is hassle-free to the users. Transactions are done on mutual trust between the service providers and consumers benefiting both parties and consumers count the transaction website as more useful (Gefen et al., 2003). Users define the quality of websites on the bases of their needs and features and performance of websites Chang and Chen (2008, p. 821). The online travel website is regarded as predominantly remarkable only when it guarantees safe transactions; receptiveness, understanding, alleviate consumers direction-finding, and asserting (Agag, G. M., & El-Masry, A. A., 2017). Potential and actual consumers' trust towards online travel websites is based on the tendency of their trust, the reputation of online tourism service provides and helpfulness of website. It's quality, usefulness are the key measurements (Agag, G. M., et al 2017). The reputation of a website is in direct proportionate to the trust over it rather than the size of the website (Agag, G. M., et al 2017).

Factors Affecting Online Trust

The media platforms where the consumer's generated contents are written, the content writer as well as the reader's personality traits affect the trust (Yoo, K. H., & Gretzel, U., 2010). Consumers related factors and websites feature both are the key forerunner of online trust (Bart et al., 2005). Experience of users, websites features, perceived market direction etc. are the influencing factors of trustworthiness (Corbitt, Thanasankit, and Yi, 2003). Trust in information available online is the result of trust in traditional media source of information (Menon et al, 2002). The corporate branding of enterprise has a direct relation to the trust in its website (Gefen, 2000). Content's sumptuousness and cues during online interaction have an effect on the trust.

Consumers' satisfaction, the image of the hotel and peer response are the major factors which affect trust in any accommodation unit (Wang et al. 2014). The holiday making decisions, distinguished risk, tourists' outlook are envisaged through the trust showed by the potential tourists. Their trust on the travel websites are affected by various aspects such as perceived helpfulness, tendency to trust, ease of use, status, perceived website size, and website quality while travelers' experience has no direct relation with it (Agag, G. M., & El-Masry, A. A., 2017). Trust plays a significant role in attracting tourists towards using social media sites for gaining knowledge and doing the online transaction (Beldad, et al., 2010). Filieri, R., Alguezaui, S., & McLeay, F., (2015), found that website quality, source reliability and trustworthiness, consumer satisfaction and information quality etc. are the major factors which persuade the tourist's trust toward consumer-generated media except for source credibility and users expectations. The trust in the review sites directly motivates the potential tourists to consider the opinions of actual consumers. The source credibility, website quality, customer satisfaction are forecasted through the value of information (Filieri, R., Alguezaui, S., & McLeay, F., 2015).

Users' Behavior Concerning Trustworthiness in Online Sites

Tourists rely on the websites which are under control of the tourism organizations and service providers. Trip Advisor, was considered the most trustful website (Ayeh, J. K., Au, N., and Law, R., 2013). It was interesting finding that trustworthiness of any site matters more to the readers who visit the sites for gaining knowledge and information about any

particular product or service then those who post their opinions on these sites and in the actual sense are active contributors (Ayeh, J. K., et al, 2013). In case of trustworthiness all types of tourists whether young or older, they equally assess online sites. But the young generation below 35 age is more active on social media. The older travelers consider the destination management organizations, tourism official websites and microblogging sites more trustful than the younger travelers. But they also like to share their experiences on Trip Advisor (Ayeh, J. K., et al, 2013).

Customers who have experienced online transactions and use online networking sites, they do not believe in them as much as the inexperienced users do. They are aware of the happenings during online dealing and are skilled in such matters (Aiken and Boush, 2006). The experienced customers are convinced even during dealing with the untrustworthy website. But for the inexperienced consumers, it is hard to discriminate the reliable and unreliable travel sites. They adopt vigilance behavior while dealing online (Agag, G. M., & El-Masry, A. A., 2017). During the unspecific conditions, the tourists who do not consider online sites reliable prompt to give negative opinions (Falcone, et al., 2001; Graziano & Tobin, 2002). This distrust directly affects their motive of going for new experiences, while consumers with a high degree of trust do the opposite (Graziano & Tobin, 2002). The reputation of any online service provider matters a lot especially to the first time customers who trust them only based on their status (Chen, 2006; Koufaris & Hampton-Sosa, 2004).

The trust on user-generated review website dramatically decreases due to negative views and distrust in preceding eWOM consumers tend to give more negative reviews due to disconfirmation and displeasure but not because of earlier reviews (Nam, K., Baker, J., Ahmad, N., & Goo, J., 2018). Tourists do not post negative opinions even if they found the earlier ones unreliable. They evaluate the product on their own (Nam, K., Baker, J., Ahmad, N., & Goo, J., 2018). Due to increasing number of negative reviews, the potential consumers do not trust the website much but Doh and Hwang (2009), found that there is always a requirement of having a certain number of negative reviews for maintaining the site trustful. Although it varies in social networking sites and consumers pay attention a lot while selecting sites to share their views (Ayeh, J. K., et al, 2013).

Conclusion

Trust in e-commerce basically encroaches on the purchaser, mediator and the seller. In spite of the other social networking sites, the travel-specific sites were considered trustworthy. Potential travelers believe the online sites controlled by the tourism officials and travel service providers especially. Potential and actual consumers' trust towards online travel websites is based on the tendency of their trust, the reputation of online tourism service provides and quality, helpfulness of website. Consumers who have dealt with the online sites previously are comfortable while transacting through these than the others. In case of trustworthiness all types of tourists whether young or older they equally assess online sites. The review sites should continuously motivate the reviewers to share their identity and other reliable and necessary information about themselves in order to help the potentials to evaluate the credibility. For making the information more useful they should be inspired to share their opinions on the third party review sites, official websites of tourism officials, tourism service providers in spite of writing on blogs and other social networking sites (Yoo, K. H., & Gretzel, U., 2010).

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