

Implication of Online Consumer Reviews on Hotel Bookings in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

Travellers are increasingly shifting to booking hotels online to save time, minimize costs and enjoy the convenience it brings. In this study, the implications of online consumer reviews were examined to understand how it affects hotel bookings in Saudi Arabia. The study's constructs were trust, valence, volume, realism and hotel booking intentions. Structural equation modelling and descriptive statistics were used to analyze the results from 400 respondents. It was found that the Saudi Arabian's intentions to trust on online hotel reviews are influenced significantly by the valence and realism of the reviews. The hotel booking intentions are significantly influenced by trust, valence, and realism of the reviews. The volume of reviews did not have a statistically significant influence on trust on the online reviews or the hotel booking intentions. Therefore, the study concludes that the valence, realism, and trust on online reviews are significant in shaping hotel reservation intentions.

Keywords: online reviews, booking intention, hotels industry, vision 2030, Saudi Arabia

1. Introduction

The rise of new technologies such as broadband internet and Web 2.0 and now Web 3.0 applications have increased support for human communication and access to digital information to people from all over the world. There has been a rapid increase in consumer-generated media platforms that are transforming traditional communication mediums such as word-of-mouth to electronic communities and virtual networks (Ye, Law, & Gu, 2011; Zhao et al., 2014). With the advent of the internet and the ability to produce content online, new forms of word-of-mouth (WOM) have emerged as social media (Sparks and Browning, 2011). Social media is enabling extensive distribution of comments and offers the ability to distribute information about specific products or services through review sites. The Word of the Web is not limited by the size of the social network (Hart and Blackshaw 2006; p. 21). These tools available to consumers on the internet enable them to create, distribute, collaborate and consume information remotely and have significant implications on consumers' decision-making (Sparks & Browning, 2014).

Unlike in the past, people now have the ability and an opportunity to post their experiences and perceptions of the quality of services or products purchased. Consumers can publicly post positive or negative consumption-related experiences and their evaluations online for other interested parties (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh & Gremler, 2004). Discussions ensue about product or service attributes providing insight into the target product. The process can detract from or enhance the value of a brand. (Sparks, and Browning, 2011). Livtin, Goldsmith and Pan (2008) assert that consumers rely on electronic word-of-mouth as a vital source of information about services and products. As part of their decision-making process, potential purchasers search for past purchasers to gain important insights into the service or product before making a purchase (Ha & Stoel, 2009).

Consumers are relying on online searches such as review sites, forums and blog pages to guide their decision-making. Xiang and Gretzel (2010) observe that for travellers, obtaining 'independent' third-party opinions and minimizing potential risks is driving consumers to conduct online searches. There is a multitude of reasons why consumers go online to post their reviews or experiences. These include concern for other consumers, disappointment with the service or product or betrayal by the service or product provider. Future

purchasers perceive past reviews as unbiased and independent of marketers. These reviews play a significant influence on the service or product choice (Hazbar, Salem Mohammed, & Karim, 2019).

The government of Saudi Arabia is actively trying to promote the hospitality and tourism sector in line with its Vision 2030. Saudi Arabia plans to double the number of hotels before 2030 in a bid to boost non-oil revenue. Along the Red Sea coast, the government plans to spend over \$575 constructing office spaces, homes and over 100,000 hotel rooms (Knight Frank, 2022). Similarly, in Riyadh, 12,000 new hotel rooms will also be completed by 2023. Additionally, the government has also awarded more than \$3.5 billion worth of hotel construction contracts. In total, more than 310,000 hotel rooms are targeted for the Kingdom's Gig projects at a total cost of \$110 billion (Knight Frank, 2022). Saudi Arabia is a major religious tourism destination for Muslims across the world. The country is also seeking to attract and increase other forms of tourism and is actively marketing itself on the international scene. Hotel management faces the challenge of meeting the expectations of the diverse customer base, especially with the number of customers relying on realistic feedback and public opinions on the quality of the services offered and the features of the hotels. The hotel management needs to not only understand the importance of the reviews but also understand the implications of the reviews on the customer booking intentions.

Previous studies have shown that the most significant dimensions of online service quality were information quality, responsiveness, outcome quality, customer service, information quality, convenience, reliability, attractiveness, security, credibility, enjoyment and empathy (Jun, Yang, Kim, 2004; So, Wong, & Sculli, 2005; Ha, S., & Stoel, 2009). These are the service dimensions that inform their decisions. Mohd Sam and Tahir (2009) contend that to increase booking intentions, service providers need to enhance customer trust and provide services with empathy. As, Tang, Wang and Kim (2022) observe visits to hotel booking websites do not guarantee bookings or revenue generation. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of hotel reviews on customers' booking intentions.

2. Literature

Hafeez, Ali, Shahid and Nadeem (2019) find that realism, the volume of the reviews and the number of positive reviews had a significant influence on the consumers' hotel reservation intention. They find that negative reviews did not have a direct or indirect effect on hotel booking intentions. The importance of word of mouth is widely documented in the literature and the era of the internet, its distribution and effect are more significant as individuals can express their opinions on platforms that are easily accessible to millions of people. Ye, Law and Gu (2008) find that in China, WOM significantly influences the number of hotel bookings. Torres, Singh and Robertson-Ring (2015) find that the number of reviews on TripAdvisor has a positive relationship with the size of online bookings on 178 hotels in the US. They find that hotels with a higher overall rating and a larger number of reviews enjoy higher hotel bookings. e-commerce in the tourism and hospital industry is the second top-ranked field in online shopping categories (Tang, Wang, & Kim, 2022).

2.1 Hypothesis Development

2.1.1 Online Purchase/Booking Intentions

Booking or purchase intention is the decision-making process before a service or product is purchased (Dodds, Monroe, & Grewal, 1991; Bai, Law & Wen, 2008). It refers to the tendency of consumers to take actions related to purchases as measured by the possibility of them making the purchase (Aristio, Supardi, Hendrawan and Hidayat (2019). Consumers' intentions are influenced by external stimulants that can be obtained and processed by the customer depending on their respective characteristics before they take their final decisions. Aristio, Supardi, Hendrawan and Hidayat (2019) observe that purchase intention is shaped by consumer behaviours such as their preferences and explorative interests. Explorative interests refer to the buyer's tendency to look for information about the product/service and looking for information to support the product's positive nature (Hazbar, alem Mohammed, & Karim, 2019). Aristio, et al (2019) found that WOM had a significant influence on the intention to purchase. The intention to purchase is influenced by customer trust.

Oktadiana and Kurnia (2011) also argue that booking intention is a process. The process is influenced by personal and impersonal factors. Impersonal factors such as group references, culture and subculture and personal factors such as learning, perception, motivation, needs and wants and lifestyle influence booking intentions. Customers collect information about a product or service and then select the best one. The last stage of evaluation of purchasing is the evaluation of services and products; whether it is satisfying or not. Sparks and Browning (2011) observe that understanding the impact of electronic WOM is important for services such as hotels, restaurants and airlines where the purchasers are likely to book or buy them online. Online information and comments help potential purchasers to create destination images. Gretzel and Yoo (2008) reported that up to

three-quarters of travellers consider online customer reviews as an information source. Consequently, many questions arise for managers and researchers regarding the influence of past reviews on future consumers' purchase intentions.

2.2 Valence of Reviews

Satisfaction is a significant aspect of competitiveness in this era, especially in the accommodation establishment (Oliveira, Baldam, Costa, and Pelissari, 2020). This is more significant now as the channels for consumers to share their experiences whether good or bad become increasingly easier to access and easy to use. Dickinger and Mazanec, (2008) found that hotels with good reviews led to an increase in part-worth utilities with credential-sensitive such as prior users' recommendations to others being most significant. The research established that reviews with pictures were more important than the star rating and the locations. Booking intentions were associated with previous customers' experiences and pictorial claims and not the hotel star ratings.

Chen, Samaranayanke, Cen, Qi and Lan (2022) found that online hotel booking intentions are formed by a variety of factors. In regards to the reviews, the study found that gender has a moderating effect on the customers' attention to detail. Females give more attention to negative comments as compared to positive ones. Yu et al (2010) demonstrate that consumer reviews contain negative and positive emotions. Positive emotions tend to prompt consumers to generate emotional trust and increase their confidence and trust in the product. These positive reviews have a strong persuasive effect on potential purchasers. On the other hand, negative reviews hinder the buying intention by hindering emotional trust. Chevalier and Mayzlin, (2006) reiterate that consumers will avoid risking a purchase if there is a negative review about it.

Pongpatipat (2014) find that consumers have a less favourable attitude to products with negative reviews and are less likely to purchase them if the review comes from other consumers. The perceived credibility and the perceived diagnosticity of the pleasant and unpleasant reviews were observed by Guo, Wang, and Wu (2020) to have a significant influence on the purchase decisions. Nonetheless, positive emotion bias for customer reviews has more practical implications for the customers and sellers. In a similar vein, Cracin and Moore (2019) also find that negative bias is driven by emotions embedded in the content of negative word of mouth. Females were found to respond negatively to negative WOM whereas positive WOM is perceived as helpful and credible. Alhuwalia et al (2000) also observe that negative information is perceived as being more valuable as compared to positive comments. Chen et al (2022) find that criticism has a greater influence on purchasing tendencies as compared to a compliment. Therefore, as the literature reveals that emotions tend to influence the consumers' intentions to purchase services or products, this paper investigates the influence of emotional valence of hotel booking on hotel booking intention. The following hypothesis is proposed;

H1: The valence of reviews has a statistically significant influence on online hotel booking intention

H2: The valence of reviews has a significant influence on consumers' trust in online reviews

2.3 Volume of the Reviews

Liu (2006) argues that volume is an important attribute of WOM. It measures the total amount of interactive messages. Bone (1995) further regards it as a key antecedent of the WOM effect. The variations in the volumes of online customer reviews are important indicators that not all hotels are treated equally; hence not all reviews are treated equally. (Danish, Hafeez, Ali, Shahid, and Nadeem, 2019). conducted a study to examine the influence of the volume of reviews on hotel reservation intentions. The study found that the total number of reviews; both positive and negative have an impact on hotel booking intentions. Other studies by Davis and Khazanchi (2008); Bowman and Narayandas (2001) and Liu (2006) found that the volume of online reviews significantly correlated with consumer behaviours. The researchers observe that increasing customer awareness is influencing the role of review volumes on their purchase intentions. Higher volumes of content, whether positive or negative are likely to attract information seekers increasing customer awareness of a service or product. This study adopts the assumption presented by Zhao and Wang (2015) who argue that information asymmetry and the unique features of the hospitality industry increase the perceived risks. Sparks and Browning (2011) state that the total volume of online reviews affects the intentions of customers to book hotels where the positive reviews will have negative.

Therefore, a higher volume of online reviews may result in lowered risk perceptions and this is tested in the following hypothesis;

H3: Volume of online reviews will positively influence hotel online booking intentions

H4: Volume of online reviews will positively influence hotels on trust in online reviews

2.4 Realism

Realism refers to the treatment of the common average and everyday life. It is concerned with the now, here, the specific actions and their verifiable consequences. It represents a one-to-one relationship between the subject and the representation. Therefore, concerning online reviews, realism refers to perceived reliability, integrity and the ability to evaluate the hotel based on the reviews present online. Sparks and Browning (2011) found that customers' intentions influence the believability of the reviews they read online. Further, Danish et al (2019) also found that there is a significant relationship between the customers' perceived reliability and integrity of the reviews with increased booking intentions.

H5: Realism of online reviews will positively influence hotel online booking intentions

H6: Realism of online reviews will positively influence consumers' trust in online reviews

2.5 Trust in Online Review

Morgan and Hunt (1994) developed the commitment trust theory in marketing arguing that trust and commitment mediate the relationship between shared value, relationship benefits, communication and opportunistic behaviours. These influence the uncertainty, acquiescence, cooperation and the propensity to leave. In e-commerce, trust is important as customers are likely to be on sites that they do not trust. Several antecedents of trust have been examined and found to be significant in determining the purchasers' intentions (Agag, and El-Masry 2016). Danish et al (2019) define trust as the intentional willingness to depend on an exchange partner. They reiterate that it is dependable on the person who keeps the promise. For trust to prevail, issues such as anxiety, vulnerability and uncertainty should be mitigated. Sparks and Browning (2011) reiterate that online customers face many uncertainties and risks related to the service or product. Through online reviews, customers can address any concerns they have about the quality of the service or product and its suitability to their needs and wants.

Danish et al (2019) assume that the customers' intentions can be linked to trust. This trust is influenced by many factors including the customers' previous buying experiences and the availability of information which can support purchase intention. Wu, Chen and Chiung (2010) reiterate that trust is central to the buyers and sellers' relationship. It builds when customers have confidence that the service provider has integrity and is reliable. The customers' trust in the service. Lien, Web, Huang and Wu (2015) find that trust does not have an impact on the purchase intention among Taiwanese hoteliers. This is despite the role of consumers' trust in the service providers and its role in reducing cognitive risk and insecurity.

H7: Trust in online reviews will positively influence hotel online booking intentions

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Model

The study aimed to extend the current knowledge by integrating five attributes of online reviews and empirically testing their effects on hotel booking intentions for Saudi Arabian travellers. The research model consists of the antecedents of online reviews such as the valence of the reviews, the realism, trust and the volume of reviews and their effects on hotel booking intention. The proposed model is shown in figure 1.

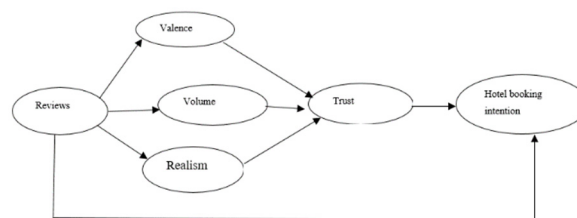


Figure 1. Proposed model

3.2 Data Collection

Two criteria were used to select the sample for the study. To get accurate results, an inclusion criterion was set where only respondents who had reserved a hotel room through an online platform or hotel website in the last 12 months qualified for the survey. The survey also targeted respondents above the age of 18 years.

For sampling, a scenario approach was used where it was assumed that the respondents are planning to travel and

reserve a hotel in Saudi Arabia. An online survey was conducted targeting Saudi Arabians online. In total, 1050 questionnaires were sent to online survey network platforms. This step relied on a simple random sampling technique which yielded a total of 557 respondents. This made a response rate of from which 400 were successfully filled and were usable. The response rate was 38.095%.

3.3 Survey Instrument

Empirical research was done where first, the measurement scales were developed to reflect the constructs' meanings. First, an initial generation of items and their confirmation was done. This entailed identifying the measurement items which entailed a literature search, data collection and measurement purification (Churchill, 1979; Zhao, and Wang 2015). In this study, developing the measurement of the scale was characterized by an extensive search of the literature (Hung and Petrick, 2010). Following an extensive review of the literature, the online review items were modified from Chiang and Jang (2007); Sparks and Browning (2011); Ladhari & Michaud, 2015; Danish, Hafeez & Ali et al (2019). The questionnaires were self-administered and comprised of two sections; Section A collected the demographic and general information while Section B comprised 25 items categorized into five major aspects; valence, realism, trust, volume and hotel booking intentions (Sparks & Browning, 2011; Ladhari and Michaud 2015). The items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree= 1" to "strongly agree= 5."

Table 1 shows the breakdown of the respondents' demographic and general information. Among the respondents, 63.3% were male, 36.8% were female, 28.5% were aged 18-27, 48% were between the ages 28-37, 21.5% were aged 38-47 and only 2% were above 48 years of age. In regards to education, 9.5% had high school level or less qualification, 53% had a bachelor's, 29.3% had a Master's and 8.3% had a PhD. Among the respondents, 28.5% earned less than 5,000 Saudi Riyals monthly while 21.8% earned 5,000-9,999, 23.5% earned 10,000-14,999, 14% and 12.3% earned between 15,000-19,999 and more than 20,000 respectively. The majority of respondents spent more than six hours online weekly where 14% spent between 1-5 hours, 22.5% spent 6-10 hours, 31.3% spend 11-20 hours and 32.3% spent more than 21 hours online weekly.

4. Results

Table 1. Demographic and general information

Measurements		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	253	63.3
	Female	147	36.8
Age	18-27	114	28.5
	28-37	192	48.0
	38-47	86	21.5
	>48	8	2.0
	High School or Less	38	9.5
Education	Bachelors	212	53.0
	Master	117	29.3
	PhD	33	8.3
Income (Saudi Riyad)	<5000	114	28.5
	5,000-9,999	87	21.8
	10,000-14,999	94	23.5
	15,000-19,999	56	14.0
	>20,000	49	12.3
Hours Spent on the Internet	1-5 hours	56	14.0
	6-10 hours	90	22.5
	11-20 hours	125	31.3
	21 hours or more	129	32.3
Employment Status	Employed	235	58.8
	Unemployed	28	7.0
	Self-employed	24	6.0
	Student	113	28.3

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 2. The Mean and Standard Deviation values of the research instruments

Descriptive Statistics		
	Mean	Std. Deviation
Valence		
PST1	4.22	.758
PST2	4.16	.747
PST3	4.42	.711
PST4	4.33	.662
PST5	4.22	.811
NGT1	3.91	.805
NGT2	4.25	.631
NGT3	3.85	.942
NGT4	3.83	.890
Overall mean	4.13	.773
Hotel Booking Intention		
HTBINT1	3.65	1.022
HTBINT2	4.20	.864
HTBINT3	3.72	1.008
Overall mean	3.85	
Trust		
TRST1	3.58	.967
TRST2	4.12	.838
TRST3	3.59	.913
TRST4	3.69	.921
Overall Mean	3.75	
Realism		
RLSM1	3.62	.926
RLSM2	3.66	.930
RLSM3	3.45	1.005
Overall Mean	3.58	
Volume		
VLME1	3.92	.822
VLME2	4.00	.677
VLME3	3.93	.919
VLME4	3.43	.873
VLME5	3.85	.846
VLM6	3.50	1.104
Overall Mean	3.77	.873

The mean and standard deviation values of the research instruments are presented in table 2. The overall mean for valence was 4.13 implying that the respondents generally agreed that they look for the negative and positive reviews on the online websites. The positive reviews and second aspect of negative aspects of the valence had a higher mean average value of 4.22, 4.15, 4.33, 4.22 and 4.25 respectively which implies that in valence, the positive reviews receive much more attention from the respondents. On the other hand, hotel booking intentions had an average mean of 3.85 implying that the respondents had intentions to book hotels with online reviews. The other aspect was the respondents' trust in the online reviews with a mean average of 3.75 which suggests that the combined effect of the volume, valence and realism affected the respondents' trust in the online reviews. Realism had a mean average value of 3.58 while the volume of the reviews had a mean average value of 3.77. These findings imply that the respondents did not generally agree with aspects of online review realism whereas they took into account the volume of the reviews.

Table 3 shows that the respondent's gender had a statistically significant influence on valence, booking intention, trust, realism and volume (p value= 0.000) respectively. These findings imply that the respondents' gender

affects how they perceive the online reviews including whether they trust the online reviews and their intention to book the hotels. Similarly, the respondent's age, education level, income, employment status, and the hours spent on the internet have a significant association with the aspects of the online reviews (valence p value=0.000, realism p value 0.000, and volume p value= 0.000) respectively. The findings also reveal that the respondents' gender, age, employment status, income, and hours spent on the internet have a statistically significant impact on their trust in online reviews and their intentions to book hotels online (p -value 0.000).

Table 3. Demographic and general factors

Measurement		X^2	df	P value
Gender	Valence	96.782	21	0.000
	Booking intention	80.048	10	0.000
	Trust	80.608	13	0.000
	Realism	86.376	11	0.0000
	Volume	75.572	18	0.000
Age	Valence	191.687	63	0.000
	Booking intention	143.531	30	0.000
	Trust	165.450	39	0.000
	Realism	107.009	33	0.000
	Volume	213.347	54	0.000
Education	Valence	126.768	63	0.000
	Booking intention	130.403	30	0.000
	Trust	225.377	39	0.000
	Realism	156.719	33	0.000
	Volume	170.617	54	0.000
Income (Saudi Riyad)	Valence	223.993	60	0.000
	Booking intention	167.953	40	0.000
	Trust	249.896	52	0.000
	Realism	257.452	44	0.000
	Volume	333.887	72	0.000
Hours Spent on the Internet	Valence	148.468	63	0.000
	Booking intention	118.269	30	0.000
	Trust	204.494	39	0.000
	Realism	203.846	33	0.000
	Volume	276.064	54	0.000
Employment Status	Valence	179.596	45	0.000
	Booking intention	167.305	63	0.000
	Trust	180.503	39	0.000
	Realism	211.672	33	0.000
	Volume	236.714	54	0.000

4.2 Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

The hypothesized model is tested using structural equation modelling (SEM) using SPSS AMOS 26. The first process of the SEM was conducting the confirmatory analysis (CFA) tests. The CFA tests the measurement theory based on the overall fit of the model and other constructs of validity and reliability under maximum loading. The second stage of the SEM was measuring the information and examining the structural relationship among the five constructs under examination as outlined by Hair, Black, Babin and Henderson (2010). The final model is displayed in figure 2.

CFA was applied to test how well the 25 measures represented the constructs under study. In overall, the model has a χ^2 of 1091.7, df 251 and was statistically significant at a p -value of <0.000. The findings imply that the model was not adequate, but as Hu and Bentler (1999) explain, the χ^2 is very sensitive to the sample size and they recommend it to be used for sample sizes between 100-200. In this case, the study's large sample size of 400 respondents, and other indices were relied upon to conduct the test of fitness.

The RMSEA is an absolute fit measure and is widely used to test the model fit. The RMSEA value of 0.091 which is less than 0.10 indicates an excellent model fit (Kline, 2011). Moreover, the GFI value of 0.826 (>0.8)

which also supports the good model fit. The CMIN DF was also 4.333 (<5) which further supports the hypothesized model fit with the data collected. (MacCallum, & Hong, 1997; Kline, 2011). So, in general, the hypothesized model exhibits a good fit with the data collected.

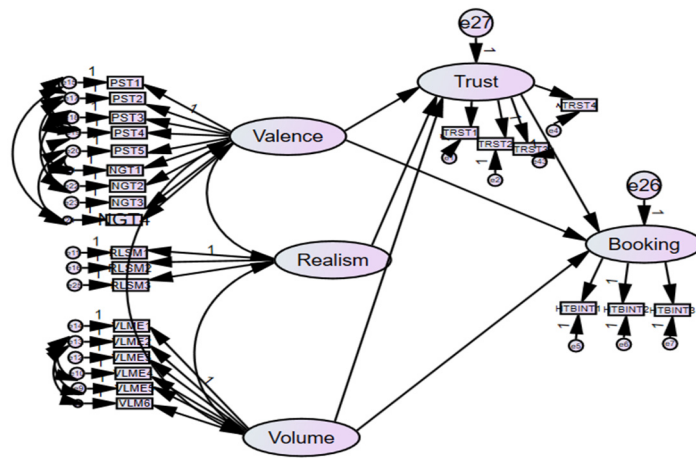


Figure 2. SEM Model

Factor loading shows the variance explained by the variable on a particular factor. The rule of thumb is that the loading factor should be 0.7 or higher (Vinzi, Chin, Henseler, & Wang, 2010). The CFA results displayed in table 4 show that a number of the indicators did not have a loading of 0.7 or higher. However, the bulk of the constructs exceeds 0.5 (Hair et al, 2010). The results show that the factor loading was higher than the threshold to determine the reliability. Even though there were factor loadings less than 0.5 and 0.70, the indicators were not eliminated as their removal may have had an impact on the composite reliability, convergent validity and content. As Hair et al., (2016) reiterate, outer loadings shall only be considered for removal if the deletion of the results would increase the average variance extracted and composite reliability over the recommended value which was not the case in this paper.

Table 4. CFA

Confirmatory Analysis	Factor	Factor Loading
PST1	I value positive reviews	.430
PST2	I pay a lot of attention to positive reviews	.678
PST3	I give more value to hotels that have more reviews	.654
PST5	Large volumes of positive reviews are important	.634
PST4	Positive reviews are of more value to me	.896
HTBINT1	I only book hotels that have reviews	.894
HTBINT2	I always pay close attention to hotel reviews when I book hotels	.617
HTBINT3	Online reviews are my main information channel	.772
TRST1	I judge a hotel's integrity based on the reviews	.766
TRST2	The reviews help me determine whether the hotel is reliable	.550
TRST4	If I was to discuss this hotel with others, I would probably say positive things based on the reviews	.775
TRST3	I would have trust in this hotel based on the reviews	.545
RLSM1	I think the hotel review site is realistic	.801
RLSM3	I feel I could imagine myself using a website with reviews to search for hotels	.747
RLSM2	I can evaluate hotels based on their reviews	.762

Confirmatory Analysis	Factor	Factor Loading
PST1	I value positive reviews	.430
NGT1	I look for the number of negative reviews on hotel sites	.186
NGT2	I dislike hotels with many positive reviews	.005
NGT3	Negative reviews will terminate your booking intentions	.323
NGT4	I will not book from a hotel if any negative reviews about it are spotted	.072
VLME1	I pay more attention to hotels having a larger volume of online review	.643
VLME5	Larger volume of online reviews will increase my booking intentions	.777
VLME4	Volume of online reviews relates to attentions a hotel gets	.456
VLME3	Larger volume of online reviews means more equally distributed negative and positive reviews	.722
VLME2	Larger volume of online reviews reflects that many people are interested in a hotel	.654
VLME 6	I will read all available reviews about a hotel	.500

Evaluating the structural model was necessary to examine the hypothesized relationships. The path coefficients' value and significance were used and it appears valence and realism have a significant influence on trust and hotel booking intention ($p < 0.000$). The value of the relationship is also positive. Therefore, H1, H2, H5, H6 & H7 are accepted as all the values have a significantly positive association with trust and intention to book hotels at p -value < 0.000 . Volume was positively associated with trust, but there was no statistically significant association between the two latent variables ($p > 0.666$). Similarly, volume did not have a significant influence on booking intention ($p > 0.065$). Therefore, H3 and H4 are not accepted.

Table 5. Regression weights

		S.E.	P
Trust	<--- Valence	.071	***
Trust	<--- Realism	.089	***
Trust	<--- Volume	.141	.666
Booking Intentions	<--- Trust	.200	***
Booking Intentions	<--- Valence	.085	***
Booking Intentions	<--- Volume	.190	.065
TRST1	<--- Trust	.132	***
TRST3	<--- Trust	.127	***
TRST4	<--- Trust	.139	***
HTBINT1	<--- Booking Intentions	.106	***
HTBINT2	<--- Booking Intentions		
PST1	<--- Valence	.083	***
PST2	<--- Valence		
PST3	<--- Valence	.080	***
PST4	<--- Valence	.083	***
PST5	<--- Valence	.091	***
NGT1	<--- Valence	.090	***
NGT2	<--- Valence	.067	.931
NGT3	<--- Valence	.101	***
NGT4	<--- Valence	.094	.181
RLSM1	<--- Realism	.066	***
RLSM2	<--- Realism		
RLSM3	<--- Realism	.072	***
VLME1	<--- Volume	.113	***
VLME2	<--- Realism		

			S.E.	P
VLME3	<---	Volume	.130	***
VLME4	<---	Volume	.113	***
VLME5	<---	Volume	.136	***
TRST2	<---	Trust		
HTBINT3	<---	Booking Intentions	.116	***
VLM6	<---	Valence	.149	***

5. Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Discussion of Findings

This study contributes to the literature on the effect of hotel online reviews on online booking intentions in Saudi Arabia. It focused on the influence of the volume of reviews, realism and valence on trust and their influence on hotel booking intentions. The effect of gender, age, time spent online, education level, and income were found to have a significant influence on all the constructs under study. The valence and the realism of the reviews were found to have a positive and significant relationship with trust and hotel booking intentions in online reviews (Bowman & Narayandas, 2001; Liu 2006; Davis & Khazanchi, 2008; Wu, Chen, & Chiung 2010; Agag, & El-Masry, 2016). Similarly, trust has a positive and statistically significant influence on hotel booking intentions (Danish et al., 2019). Only volume did not have any significant association with the intention to book hotels or the respondent's trust which is contrary to the findings of Danish et al., 2019).

Online reviews are important in today's world where consumers are increasingly seeking services and products remotely. It is becoming a key driver in positively influencing booking or purchasing intentions. These outcomes are consistent with previous studies such as Ye, Law and Gu (2008); Hafeez, Ali, Shahid and Nadeem (2019) Torres, Singh and Robertson-Ring (2015). The improvement of the valence and the realism can strengthen the potential buyers' trust in the service or product (hotel). Consumers tend to consider the positive and negative reviews posted on the online platforms and from this, they determine whether they can trust the reviews or not. Where the reviews seem realistic, the potential buyer will have more confidence about the rating and this increases the likelihood of them booking the hotel. Generally, the positive reviews as argued by Wu, Chen and Chiung (2010) that trust is central to buyers' sellers' relationships. It builds when customers have confidence that the service provider has integrity and is reliable (Lien, Web, Huang, & Wu, 2015; Danish et al., 2015).

5.2 Managerial Implications

This study is crucial for several reasons. First, the study provides hoteliers in Saudi Arabia with a theoretical basis for providing exceptional services and ensuring that they have a good reputation, integrity and reliability as electronic WOM picks pace among travellers. Ensuring that they are consistent, reliable and practice integrity and exceptional customers services, hoteliers can increase their customers' positive experiences leading to positive reviews. Increasing the volume of reviews should not be paramount for hoteliers as the findings have shown that the volume of the reviews is not significantly associated with trust or intention to book hotels. Rather, they need to focus on ensuring they are realistic in order to enhance the customers' online booking intentions. As the findings revealed, trust is a significant indicator of booking intentions; hence the managers need to understand the customers' expectations and perceptions of good and valuable service provision. Moreover, hotels rely on the internet to offer services to their customers and to provide a platform for customers to give feedback on their stay. From this feedback, the hotels get their star ratings and individual quality rating from previous guests. Online reviews and user-generated content is a tool for word of mouth on the internet and as Callan (1998) state, for every second customer, the star category of a hotel serves as the basis for taking decisions. The hotels should, therefore, not only focus on their online/website reviews, but ensure that they meet the needs of the customers who no longer look at the hotel star rating, but rather the experiences of past customers. The hotels' management should work on designating employees who could respond and address any negative reviews posted about the hotels. By doing this, the management shows its seriousness in solving any difficulties that could discomfort the customers' experience and protect the hotels' reputation.

Second, Saudi Arabia is investing in high-end hotels in line with its vision 2030. Therefore, increasing value, not only through the brand image but also through improved customer experience is vital for the eventual success of the country's hotel industry. Understanding how different people from different backgrounds perceive hotel services and what they look for the online reviews is important for hotel managers. Therefore, hotels should devote time to developing an interactive online presence where concerns raised by previous customers are

addressed to improve the trust of potential travellers in the hotel services. This is because trust is significantly linked to booking intention and trust is shaped by previous experiences gathered through the number of reviews, how realistic the reviews are and whether or not the reviews reflect the different needs and wants of potential clients.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

The study is not without limitations. One of the limitations is the generalizability of the findings. The study investigated the influence of online reviews on the intention to book hotels in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized to other countries. Second, the study also only focused on four constructs of online booking which limited the scope of the study. Others constructs such as hotels category, hotel reputations should be considered in examining the relationship between online reviews and hotel booking intention.

Future studies should examine other constructs of online reviews. These may include things such as the diversity of the reviewers and how it affects the perceptions of potential bookers, the influence of the period with which the review was posted and other things such as the quality of the hotel reviews, the inclusion of pictures in the reviews and how it affects the booking intentions.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Canadian Center of Science and Education.

The journal and publisher adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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