Hotel Booking Website Quality, Travel Agent Satisfaction and Purchase Intention

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Abstract

Website quality is one of the features that organisations increasingly use to maintain a competitive advantage. In the hospitality sector in particular, the growing use of a website as a sales channel has necessitated that hotel distribution companies understand the influence of website quality on their customers' purchase behaviour. The purpose of this study was to assess the impact of Business-to-Business (B2B) third-party hotel booking website quality features on travel agents' satisfaction, and their subsequent purchase intention. Quantitative data was collected from South African travel agents using an online survey. Three website quality dimensions namely ease of use, information quality and visual appearance, as well as customer satisfaction and purchase intention were measured. Results indicate that there is a positive relationship between website quality and customer satisfaction, and between customer satisfaction and purchase intention. Information quality appears to have the strongest relationship with customer satisfaction. Regression analyses revealed that the relationship between website quality and purchase intention is mediated by customer satisfaction. The study makes a predominantly empirical contribution as there does not appear to be a similar study conducted within an African context. From a practical contribution perspective, the findings may assist third-party hotel distribution companies with meeting the demands of travel agents, and thereby improve their overall business performance.

Keywords: website quality, travel agents, customer satisfaction, purchase intention

Introduction

A rapid rise in technology use has transformed the way companies conduct business. To achieve their organisational goals, businesses are increasingly adopting online business models (Ali, 2016; George & Kumar, 2014). For an online business in particular, competition is rampant since competitors are only a click away (Hsu, Chang & Chen, 2012). For stakeholders within the hospitality sector, remaining competitive is currently of utmost priority as the sector attempts to revive itself following the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on tourism (Tung, 2021). As websites are one of the primary marketing and sales channels within the hospitality sector, there needs to be increased focus on understanding the aspects of websites that are important to customers (Ali, 2016; Jeong, Oh & Gregoire, 2003; Tandon, Kiran, & Sah, 2017).

Website quality can be viewed as a stimulus that influences a customer's internal and psychological states, such as customer satisfaction (Ali, 2016). When customers are satisfied, they tend to display positive behavioural intentions, such as purchase intention, as a final response action (Lam, Chan, Fong & Lo, 2011). Some scholars have thus concluded that website quality should be regarded as vital in increasing customers' intention to purchase

online, with studies in the hospitality industry, in particular, confirming that website quality can directly affect customer satisfaction and lead to purchase intention (Bai, Law & Wen, 2008; Hsu et al., 2012).

Extant literature does cover the relationship between website quality, customer satisfaction and purchase intention (Bai et al., 2008; Hsu et al., 2012; Tandon et al., 2017). However, most of the available literature in the hospitality industry focuses solely on Asian markets (Ali, 2016; Bai et al., 2008), and American markets (Park, Gretzel & Sirakaya-Turk, 2007) with little or no mention of African markets such as South Africa. According to Wang, Law, Guillet, Hung, and Fong (2015), interpretation of customer behaviour should also consider the cultural context. Different regions have different cultures, and culture influences behaviour through its manifestations, such as values and rites, with each cultural group possessing different cultural manifestations (Luna & Gupta, 2001). It is, therefore, imperative to assess the impact of website quality across different cultures (Park et al., 2007).

Furthermore, existing studies tend to focus on the satisfaction and purchase intention of the individual end consumer (traveller). However, not all bookings are made by the end consumer, and travel agencies therefore remain important points of contact for travellers who wish to travel locally or abroad. The focus of this study was thus on the purchase intention of travel agents as online customers, who are responsible for making hotel bookings on behalf of travellers on various hotel booking websites (Dhiman & Chauhan, 2020). This study assesses how website quality affects customer behaviour in the B2B sector in the South African market.

Literature review
Customer behaviour theories
Theories such as the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), and the Stimuli-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework have been widely used to explain the customer decision-making process. The TAM and TRA are similar in that they both assume that humans are rational in their decision-making process. This assumption has been criticised by scholars for failing to explain the affective side of customer behaviour (Moon, Khalid, Awan, Attiq, Rasool & Kiran, 2017).

The S-O-R framework, on the other hand, enables researchers to assess both cognitive and affective influences of behaviour (Chang & Chen, 2008; Eroglu, Machleit & Davis, 2001; Moon et al., 2017). As depicted in Figure 1, the S-O-R framework postulates that the shopping environment contains stimuli which affects an individual's emotional state, and results in an approach or avoidance response in behaviours such as a purchase or repurchase intention (Chang & Chen, 2008). The organism, therefore, mediates the relationship between stimuli and individual response.
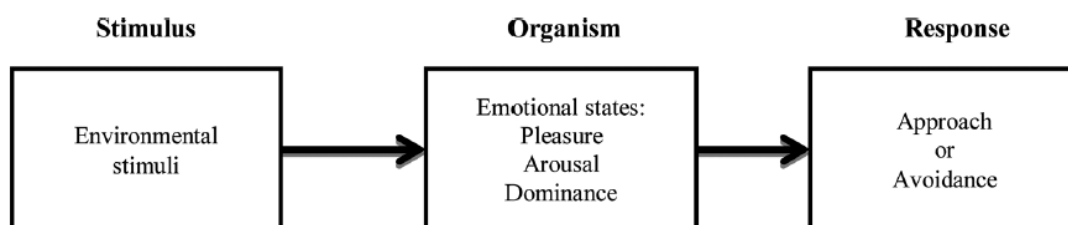

Figure 1: Original S-O-R framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974 as cited by Peng & Kim, 2014)

The S-O-R framework is thus useful for understanding the relationship between characteristics of a website, emotional reactions and response behaviours of the consumer (Kim & Lennon, 2013).

Stimulus: Website quality

Due to the effect of website quality on the internal state of the customer, website quality is viewed as the primary stimulus in online shopping (Hsu et al., 2012). The rise of e-commerce has accelerated business innovation, with websites now being used as the main communication channel between service providers and customers (Ali, 2016; Mihajlovic, 2017). According to Chiou, Lin and Perng (2010), websites do not only provide a convenient way for customers to access information about products and services that are offered by a company, but they are also used as an avenue to generate sales by attracting more customers. In the hospitality industry, in particular, websites are the most commonly cited channel for travellers researching and booking rooms (Ali, 2016). To attract and retain customers, it is therefore imperative for travel companies to develop quality websites as they can act as a critical success factor for customer purchase intentions (Ali, 2016).

Having a high-quality website leads to better business performance because high quality websites tend to attract more customers compared to low-quality websites (Lee & Kozar, 2006). Studies have shown that poor online experiences hurt sales, eventually leading to loss of customers (Leung, Law & Lee, 2016). Website quality is therefore deemed to be a critical driver of business growth (Bai et al., 2008).

Despite the increasing importance of website quality, there does not appear to be consensus amongst researchers on a universal definition of website quality. Jeong et al. (2003: 162) defined website quality as the "overall excellence or effectiveness of a website in delivering intended messages to its audience and viewers". This definition, however, has received criticism for failing to incorporate customers' perspectives in defining website quality (Ali, 2016). Chang and Chen (2008) defined website quality as the customer's evaluation of whether a website meets the customer's needs and reflects the overall excellence of the website. This definition has been lauded for its customer-centric approach, as the definition emphasises the importance of understanding aspects of a website that are of value to the customer. Defining the construct from the lens of the customer as well as adoption by several researchers who have assessed customer behaviour (Ali, 2016; Chang & Chen, 2008; Wang et al., 2015), provided support for the continued use of Chang and Chen's (2008) definition in this study.

Park et al. (2007) empirically tested the impact of six dimensions of website quality, namely ease of use, information or content, responsiveness, fulfilment, security and privacy, and visual appeal. Similarly, Jeong et al. (2003) identified six variables, namely information accuracy, clarity, completeness, ease of use, navigational quality, and colour combinations. Hsu et al. (2012) and Lee and Kozar (2006) focused on dimensions relating to information quality, service quality and system quality. Lee and Kozar (2006) also assessed an additional fourth dimension relating to vendor-specific quality. Tandon et al. (2017) focused on eight dimensions that include ease of understanding, information usefulness, website design, navigation, ease of use, security and privacy, ease of ordering, and customisation.

What is apparent from the literature reviewed is that different terms are in some instances used to refer to the same dimensions. For example, most studies focused on top-order dimensions relating to information, system and service quality. Other scholars, however, chose to assess specific variables that fall under these top-order dimensions. Specific variables that were assessed such as relevance, currency, understandability (Lee & Kozar, 2006), usefulness, completeness (Liang & Chen, 2009), informativeness and security (Lin, 2007) fall under the information quality dimension. Empathy, reliability, responsiveness (Lee & Kozar, 2006; Lin, 2007; Liang & Chen, 2009) and trust (Lin, 2007) fall under the service quality dimension. Ease of use, functionality (Liang & Chen, 2009) navigability, response time, personalisation (Lee & Kozar, 2006) website design and interactivity (Lin, 2007) fall under the system quality dimension. Extant literature thus reveals that the three most important dimensions of website

quality appear to be information, the system and service quality. Other dimensions that were assessed can be categorised under one of these three dimensions.

It is evident that the level of importance of the various website quality variables differs. Park et al. (2007) concluded that ease of use was found to be the most important dimension, while security and privacy were found to be the least important dimensions. Visual appeal, according to Park et al. (2007), was found to have no significant influence on customer behaviour. This finding is contrary to Jeong et al. (2003) who concluded that colour combination, which is an integral part of visual appeal, has an influence on customer behaviour, and this influence is especially stronger when evaluating websites for hotels that target customers searching for lower-priced hotels. Hsu et al. (2012) found that in the context of online shopping, service quality is more influential than system and information quality. These findings are contrary to Wang et al. (2015) who found that the three most important dimensions of website quality were usability (a system quality variable), functionality (an information quality variable) and security and privacy (an information quality variable). Tandon et al. (2017) found that navigation, a system quality variable, was the most important factor.

Lee and Kozar (2006) found that the level of importance of website quality dimensions depends on the type of website that is being evaluated. For instance, in the selection of a travel website, information quality was viewed to be more relevant than service and system quality. The findings by Lee and Kozar (2006) and the disparate findings from the studies mentioned previously suggests that online businesses need to be cognisant of website quality dimensions that are relevant to the services that they offer. Different levels of importance can be observed in websites offering different types of services (Lee & Kozar, 2006).

Measuring website quality

The WebQual instrument is one of the most widely used instruments to measure website quality (Chi, 2018). However, a limitation of Barnes and Vidgen's (2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2002) versions of WebQual is that they are based on websites that offer goods as opposed to services (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Malhotra, 2005).

In order to develop a comprehensive instrument, that is tested on different types of websites, Loiacono, Watson and Goodhue (2007) developed a website quality measuring instrument, also called WebQual, which is based on the TRA and the TAM. Twelve different types of websites, including hotel booking websites, were used to test the validity of Loiacono et al.'s (2007) WebQual version. Loiacono et al.'s (2007) WebQual instrument consists of 12 dimensions comprising information fit-to-task, tailored information, trust, response time, ease of understanding, intuitive operations, visual appeal, innovativeness, emotional appeal, consistent image, online completeness, and relative advantage. These 12 dimensions are further categorised into four distinct dimensions of website quality, namely ease-of-use, information quality, usefulness in carrying out transactions, and entertainment value (Loiacono et al., 2007). In a systematic review of 83 articles on website evaluation, Chiou et al. (2010) found that ease of use was the most assessed factor in website evaluation, followed by information quality and visual appearance, a dimension related to entertainment value. These three technical dimensions have also been used previously to measure website quality specifically in hospitality studies (Ali, 2016; Bai et al., 2008; Park et al., 2007). Ease of use, information quality and visual appearance were therefore selected as the three dimensions of website quality to be measured in the present study.

Ease of use: Davis (1989) defined perceived ease of use as the extent to which an individual believes that the use of a particular system would be without effort. Ease of use comprises accessibility, navigability (Chiou et al., 2010) and simplicity of use (Casaló, Flavián & Guinalíu, 2008). Since both ease of use and usability have been used by scholars (Ali, 2016;

Bai et al., 2008; Casaló et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2015) to refer to the effortlessness of accessing and navigating a website, they can be used interchangeably. In this study, the term 'ease of use' will be used to refer to the effort required to access and navigate a website.

Information quality: Eppler and Wittig (2000) defined information quality as information that is fit for use by information consumers, and comprises characteristics such as variety, scope, currency, conciseness, accuracy, authority, reliability and uniqueness of the information. According to Lee and Kozar (2006), the order of importance of information quality factors varies amongst different types of stakeholders. For example, a website designer may value relevance while a customer may value understandability. Different preferences by different stakeholders also indicates that website quality features that are prioritised by consumers in a business-to-consumer (B2C) business and customers in a business-to-business (B2B) business may also differ. In an online business context, information quality refers to the ability of an online system to deliver relevant, updated, and easy to understand information that will significantly influence customers' attitude, satisfaction and purchases (Lee & Kozar, 2006). Online customers are unable to touch or feel items for sale online, and they therefore rely on detailed and clear information to make purchase decisions (Leung et al., 2016).

Ease of use and information quality relate to a website's utilitarian attributes. According to Moon et al. (2017), online retailers should also prioritise hedonic attributes, such as visual appearance, in the formulation of an online business strategy.

Visual appearance: According to Park et al. (2007), visual appeal is a factor that relates to the aesthetics, consistent style, and proper multimedia presentation of a website. Wang et al. (2011: 52), however, also found that website aesthetics is a "bi-dimensional concept" that comprises aesthetic formality and aesthetic appeal. Aesthetic formality, according to Wang et al. (2011: 47), refers to the "order, legibility and simplicity of a website, whereas aesthetic appeal refers to the impressiveness of a website". This bi-dimensional aspect, therefore, implies that website aesthetics have both a utilitarian attribute (aesthetic formality) and a hedonic attribute (aesthetics appeal).

Organism: Customer satisfaction

In the S-O-R framework, the organism is represented by the intermediary affective and cognitive states and processes that intervene in the relationship between the stimuli and individual's responses (Chang & Chen, 2008; Chang & Chen, 2012; Eroglu et al., 2001; Hsu, Kim & Lennon, 2013).

In the original S-O-R framework, the cognitive and affective states were represented by pleasure, arousal and dominance (PAD) (Chang & Chen, 2008; Eroglu et al., 2001). Chang and Chen (2008) as well as Kim and Lennon (2013) criticised the focus on PAD alone as it excluded various emotional states that can be evoked by environmental stimuli. Eroglu et al. (2001) recommended that scholars should consider other organismic states that can be evoked by environmental stimuli such as perceived flow (Ali, 2016; Hsu et al., 2012;), perceived playfulness (Hsu et al., 2012), perceived risk (Chang & Chen, 2008; Kim & Lennon, 2013), trust (Chang & Chen, 2008) and customer satisfaction (Lam et al., 2011). Satisfied customers form the foundation of any successful business as customer satisfaction leads to repeat purchase as well as increased sales (Tandon et al., 2017).

Response: Purchase intention

In the S-O-R framework, response represents the approach or avoidance behaviour of a customer (Chang & Chen, 2008). Approach behaviours are manifested by positive actions such as purchase intention while avoidance behaviours are manifested by negative actions such as abandoning a purchase (Chang & Chen, 2008; Eroglu et al., 2001). According to Bagozzi's

(1992) self-regulatory process theory, self-regulatory processes play a significant role in predicting customer behavioural intentions. Attitude, according to Bagozzi (1992), is an appraisal process that stimulates emotional reaction, which leads to the response of intention. Bagozzi (1992) seems to imply that attitudes stimulate emotions such as customer satisfaction, and such emotions then lead to specific intentions such as purchase intention.

The relationship between website quality, customer satisfaction and purchase intention

Although the relationship between website quality, customer satisfaction and purchase intention has been studied in various contexts, there appears to be a lack of consensus among scholars on the aspects of website quality that can significantly impact customer satisfaction and ultimately lead to purchase intention specifically within the hospitality sector. In this study, three website quality dimensions, namely ease of use, information quality and visual appearance, were selected in order to assess the impact of website quality on customer satisfaction and purchase intention.

The proposed research framework is depicted in Figure 2. As illustrated, customer satisfaction is expected to mediate the relationship between website quality and purchase intention.

Figure **Error! No text of specified style in document.**: Proposed research framework (adapted from Bai et al. (2008) and Wang et al. (2011))

Method

A descriptive research approach using primary quantitative data was adopted. Descriptive research was considered appropriate for this study which sought to obtain specific details about customers and their purchasing behaviour (Kolb, 2008), in order to understand the relationship between website quality, customer satisfaction and purchase intention.

An online, self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data. An online survey was preferred because it makes it easier to contact people over great geographical distances (Toepoel, 2016). Since travel agents across South Africa needed to be surveyed, an online survey was deemed most appropriate.

To ensure validity and reliability, measurement items were adapted from existing scales. Three dimensions of website quality (ease of use, information quality and visual appearance) were measured using items adapted from Loiacono et al.'s. (2007) WebQual instrument. Customer satisfaction was measured by four items adapted from Bai et al. (2008) and Hsu et al. (2012). Purchase intention was measured by three items adapted from Hsu et al. (2012). Table 1 contains the list of variables, the corresponding measurement scales, and sources used.

Construct	Source	Measurement Scale Items
Website Quality (WQ)	Loiacono et al. (2007)	**Ease of Use (EU)** • It was easy for me to learn to use this website • It was easy for me to check availability on this website • It was easy for me to make a booking on this website • It was easy for me to cancel a booking on this website • It was easy for me to make changes on a booking on this website
		Information quality (IQ) • The information on the website is easy to understand • The information on the website is relevant • The information provided on the website helps me to make a hotel booking on the website • The website provides accurate information about the accommodation • The information provided on the website is adequate
		Visual Appeal (VA) • The website looks attractive • The website looks organised • The colours that are used on the website are attractive • The website is visually pleasing • The website displays visually pleasing design
Customer satisfaction (CS)	Tandon et al. (2017) Hsu et al. (2012)	**Customer Satisfaction (CS)** • I was satisfied with the information I received on this website • My interaction with this website was very satisfying • I was happy with my decision to make a booking on this website • My choice to book accommodation on this website was a wise one
Purchase Intention (PI)	Hsu et al. (2012)	**Purchase Intention (PI)** • It is likely that I will make a booking on this website in the near future • Given a chance, I will consider booking from this website in the near future • Given a chance, I intend to book accommodation on this website in the near future • Given a chance, I predict that I should use this website in the near future

Table 1: Measurement instrument used to collect data

Before responding to the survey items, respondents were requested to look at one of three selected websites which would be used as a point of reference when answering the questions. Three B2B third party websites were used as a point of reference. B2B third-party websites, otherwise known as bedbanks, are only accessible to travel professionals who have contractual agreements with the wholesale accommodation provider and are not accessible to the general public A bedbank is a company that negotiates rates with hoteliers and acts as a wholesaler, selling rooms to customers on behalf of the accommodation provider (Cole, 2019; Skidmore, 2020). According to Skidmore (2020), bedbanks are widely used by travel agencies to get access to hotel beds. There are approximately 100 bedbanks in the hospitality industry which have been consolidated to a few major players. Two of the major players are Hotelbeds Group and Webbeds, owned by Webjet (Skidmore, 2020). Hotelbeds is the largest wholesale group, followed by Webbeds (Cole, 2019). One website was selected from the Hotelbeds group and two websites were selected from the Webbeds group. Following review of one of the bedbanks, respondents could answer the survey questions which were close-ended and scaled according to a five-point Likert scale.

The target population for this study was South African travel agents or travel consultants who have access to B2B third party hotel booking websites. Non-probability convenience sampling was used to select the sample. Two social media channels, Facebook and LinkedIn, were used to access the target population. On Facebook, a group for South African travel professionals that had approximately 8400 members was identified as an

appropriate group with which to share the survey link. On LinkedIn, the survey link was shared with two travel and tourism groups, which had approximately 1278 members and 11064 members respectively. After gaining permission from the group administrators, the survey link was then shared with the groups and the link was removed after 26 days. Respondents voluntarily chose to participate in the survey by clicking on the survey link that was shared with the social media groups. The data collected was exported and was analysed using Statistica.

Results

Of the 405 individuals who opened the link, a total of 117 travel agents completed the survey. Sixteen of the 117 respondents indicated that they had not used the booking sites recently and were therefore removed from the analysis. A total of 101 responses were retained for further analysis.

The sample comprised 89.1% females, 9.9% males, with 1 % choosing to not state their gender. The gender distribution is reflective of the distribution of the South African travel sector which is dominated by 73% female employees compared to 27% male employees (ASATA, 2018). The majority of the respondents were aged between 25 and 49 (90.1%). Only 1% was between 18 and 21, 5.9% were older than 50, while the remaining 3.0% chose to not state their age.

Cronbach's alpha coefficients, as contained in Table 2, were calculated for each of the measured variables to assess the internal consistency of the variables. According to Allen (2017), Cronbach alphas above 0.70 are considered sufficiently high in reliability, and all variables were therefore retained for further analysis.

Measured scales	Cronbach's alpha
Ease of use (EU)	0.86
Information quality (IQ)	0.93
Visual appearance (VA)	0.96
Customer satisfaction (CS)	0.93
Purchase intention (PI)	0.95

Table 2: Cronbach's alpha

To provide an overview of the results in relation to the measures of location and measures of dispersion, the descriptive statistics for the measured variables are shown in Table 3. The mean values of the variables measuring website quality range from 4.129 (EU) to 4.176 (IQ). CS returned a mean value of 4.057, and PI returned a mean value of 4.124. The median values for all variables range from 4.00 to 4.20. The median values are fairly close to the mean values, indicating data symmetry (Larson-Hall & Plonsky, 2015). The standard deviations range from 0.741 to 0.910. indicating that the data are clustered closely around the mean, signifying limited variation.

Variable	Valid n	Mean	Median	Minimum	Maximum	Lower Quartile	Upper Quartile	Standard Deviation
Ease of use (EU)	101	4.129	4.20	2.00	5.00	3.60	4.80	0.761
Information quality (IQ)	101	4.176	4.00	2.20	5.00	3.80	5.00	0.753
Visual appearance (VA)	101	4.141	4.00	1.80	5.00	3.80	5.00	0.741
Customer satisfaction (CS)	101	4.057	4.00	1.75	5.00	3.50	5.00	0.790

Purchase intention (PI)	101	4.124	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.50	5.00	0.910

Table 3: Descriptive statistics

Regression analysis was conducted to ascertain how the website quality dimensions (EU, IQ and VA) affect customer satisfaction and purchase intention. The regression analysis results, as contained in Table 4, indicates that there is a positive relationship between website quality dimensions and customer satisfaction. Information quality appears to have the strongest relationship with customer satisfaction, with 67.64% of the variation in customer satisfaction explained by information quality. Ease of use and visual appearance explain 56.92% and 46.81% of the variation in customer satisfaction respectively. A positive relationship also exists between the moderating variable, customer satisfaction, and purchase intention. Of the variation in purchase intention, 62.71% is explained by customer satisfaction, compared to between 35.69% and 46.26% variation which is explained by website quality variables. The results emphasise that even though a relationship exists between website quality and purchase intention, the relationship is strongly mediated by customer satisfaction. As the p-values are all less than the significance level of 0.05, it can be concluded that information quality, ease of use and visual appearance are significantly related to customer satisfaction, and customer satisfaction is significantly related to purchase intention.

Independent Variable	Dependant Variable	Multiple R	R Square	F	Std. error of estimate	t-statistic	p-value
Ease of use	Customer satisfaction	0.7544	0.5692	130.80	0.5209	11.43	0.00
Information quality	Customer satisfaction	0.8224	0.6764	206.89	0.4515	14.38	0.00
Visual appearance	Customer satisfaction	0.6842	0.4681	87.13	0.5788	9.3345	0.00
Ease of use	Purchase intention	0.6558	0.4301	74.70	0.6905	8.6432	0.00
Information quality	Purchase intention	0.6801	0.4626	85.23	0.6705	9.2322	0.00
Visual appearance	Purchase intention	0.5974	0.3569	54.94	0.7335	7.4118	0.00
Customer satisfaction	Purchase intention	0.7919	0.6271	166.49	0.5585	12.9033	0.00

Table 1: Regression analysis

Regression analysis confirmed the positive relationship between website quality and customer satisfaction, and the positive relationship between website quality and purchase intention. Information quality has the strongest correlation with both customer satisfaction and with purchase intention. While there is a direct relationship between the three website quality dimensions and purchase intention, this relationship is mediated by customer satisfaction.

Conclusion and recommendations
Scholars have confirmed that website quality directly impacts customer satisfaction and leads to purchase intention (Bai et al., 2008; Tandon et al., 2017). Previous studies, however, have predominantly focused on B2C sales, and have thus only taken the consumer (traveller) point of view into consideration. In contrast, the main objective of this study was to assess the impact of B2B third party hotel booking website quality features on travel agents' satisfaction, and ultimately their purchase intention. In alignment with Eroglu et al.'s (2001) recommendation that researchers should consider other organismic states that can be evoked by environmental stimuli leading to the response action of purchase intention, the mediating effect of customer satisfaction on the relationship between website quality and purchase intention was assessed.

Furthermore, despite an increase in literature on the impact of website quality on customer behaviour, literature focusing on African markets such as South Africa is scarce. The present study, based on the South African context, thus has unique value.

The results reveal that as the positive perception of website quality increases, travel agents' satisfaction and purchase intentions also increase. Although all three website quality dimensions have a positive correlation with travel agents' satisfaction, information quality has a more substantial impact on travel agents' satisfaction compared to ease of use and visual appearance. This finding is consistent with Wang et al. (2015) who concluded that information quality is of paramount importance in an online environment, because customers rely on the information that is provided on the website to make a decision.

The results also indicate that travel agents' satisfaction plays a mediating role between website quality and purchase intention. This finding is similar to Bai et al. (2008), who concluded that while the influence of website quality on purchase intentions exists, customer satisfaction does significantly mediate this effect. These findings are also congruent with findings from research done on a physical environment by Lam et al. (2011), who found that when customers are satisfied, they tend to display positive behavioural intentions, such as purchase intention.

Findings from this study will assist intermediary companies that distribute hotel accommodation to travel agents in understanding the impact of website quality features on the behaviour of their customers. To gain a competitive advantage and successfully attract travel agents to use their booking websites, companies need to be aware of the specific features that are deemed important by travel agents. Results suggest that information quality, which encompasses relevancy, accuracy and adequacy of the information, should be prioritised.

Limitations and future research

Website quality is a multi-dimensional construct. In this study, only three dimensions were assessed, namely information quality, ease of use and visual appearance. There are other dimensions that were not included in this study, such as service quality, security and privacy. In future research, measured website quality dimensions can be extended to include an array of other dimensions that may also have an impact on customer behaviour. This will enable website developers to have a comprehensive understanding of features that should be prioritised when designing hotel booking websites. This study only measured the impact of website quality on customer satisfaction and purchase intention. Further studies may also measure the impact of website quality on repurchase intention, as repurchase intention may help analyse the impact of website quality on customer loyalty. According to Chen, Yen, Kuo, and Capistrano (2016), repurchase intention is an additional but very crucial variable since repeat purchases are a reliable indicator of customer loyalty. Respondents in this study were asked to select one of the presented websites to respond to the survey questions. The purpose of selecting three websites was to ensure that respondents answered questions from the same reference point. In future, more websites can be included to avoid excluding travel agents who are not familiar with the selected websites.

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