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ONLINE TRAVEL BUYING BEHAVIOUR OF BUSINESS TRAVELLERS: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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Abstract : The aim of the paper is to conceptually interpret various theories of online buying behaviour and to design a new conceptual framework with website quality, which influences largely the online travel buying behaviour of business travellers. In the literature, it was found that website quality, risk, trust, satisfaction, social media consumption in different combination were integrated with existing theories of Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT). But, there is no much emphasis on the website quality and its constituting sub-elements in the existing theories of online buying behaviour of business traveller. Hence, it is intended to design a new model out of the selected theories by giving emphasis on website quality as a main construct and its associated sub-elements. This conceptual paper is limited to selected empirical research papers accessed from EBSCOhost, Web of Science, Scopus, ScienceDirect, ResearchGate, Academia, Google Scholar and Shodhganga. This paper provides a greater understanding over structural relationship among the constructs of website quality and useful for future researches and online tourism services providers as well.

Keywords: *Online consumer behaviour, Business travellers' Buying behaviour, Online buying behaviour, eTourism, Business travel.*

1. Introduction

In India, there were over 185 million internet shoppers in 2021. It is projected that in 2027, there would be 425 million shoppers annually (Statista, 2023b). Customers use the Internet in order to take benefit from the simplicity of the booking process and the availability of comparative prices. The tendency of online buying would further expand in India as the Cisco predicted that number internet users would surpass 900 million in 2023 (PTI, 2022) and that it would reach 1.5 billion in 2028 (Statista, 2023a). Internet, as a travel distribution channel has gained popularity which can be evidenced by the rapid growth of online travel bookings. The Indian online travel sector is expanding, and it has been estimated that one-third of the country's overall travel market is made up of online bookings (Phocuswright, 2011).

In India, the travel market was valued at US $75 billions in the fiscal year 2020, and it was predicted to increase by US $125 billions by the fiscal year 2027 (Statista, 2023c). In 2015, the online travel market in India was valued at US $5.7 billions, and by 2021, it was projected to reach US $13.6 billions (Economic Diplomacy Division, 2018). By the fiscal year 2027, the size of the internet travel market is anticipated to reach US $37 billions (Statista, 2023). About 95 per cent of buyers conduct online research before buying travel services (Octane Research, 2015). India ranks highest in annual business travel spending among the top 15 global markets at 11.4 per cent. (Travel Trends Today, 2018). India, ranked seventh globally in 2019, is expected to be among the top five travel markets by 2022, with the fastest expansion rate. (The Times of India, 2019). This sector has improved over the past ten years, rising from the 20th spot in 2007 to the 10th spot in 2017. India's business travel market was valued at US $30 billion in 2015, and FCM travel solution and KPMG's analysis projects that it will be more than triple to US $93 billion by 2030 (KPMG & FCM Travel Solutions, 2017). India's business travel expenditure surged 15% in 2015, projected to grow at a CAGR of 6% from 2020 to 12% in 2030, surpassing the combined growth of following three countries South Korea, Italy, and Brazil (Travel Trends Today, 2018).

In the light of above, it is clear that there is an enormous growth in online travel businesses and business travel. As it is continuously increasing number of internet users and business travellers, there is a need to examine business travellers' behaviours in relation to online travel services' buying intention. Social scientists studying travel and tourism management have not given much attention to business travel management from an academic perspective (Gustafson, 2012) and in general, there has been a lack of attention given to mobile applications in business travel. In this context, the researcher has reviewed literature to identify various theories proposed by authors and to understand the earlier studies focused on the online travel buying behaviour of business travellers.

2. Literature Review

The hospitality and tourism business has undergone substantial change and growth over the past few decades due to technology (Collins et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2015). The rise of information and communication technology has had a huge impact on how travellers behave (Buhalis & Law, 2008) and they rely on the Internet to search, organise, and make online bookings for their travel-related requirements (Jeong & Choi, 2004). Particularly internet, as a potent operational and marketing tool, has revolutionised business operations by offering remarkable prospects to the consumers and service providers in the industry (Amaro & Duarte, 2015). A consumer's decision to buy a travel service entails a complicated multistage procedure that is layered along a series of hierarchical actions (Jeng & Fesenmaier, 2002). Understanding how customers feel and the difficulty of finding, attracting, and retaining buyers on the Internet has become crucial success factors (Steinbauer & Werthner, 2007). The decision to buy travel services and the process of organising a trip both heavily depend on social media (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Further, the researcher has identified theories and relevant studies on travellers' online buying behaviour, which are grounded on Ajzen's Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen, 1985), Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991, 2002), Davis's Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989), Roger's Innovation Diffusion Theory (Rogers, 1995) and other constructs like Perceived Risk, Trust, Social Media Consumption and website quality. An over view of these existing theories are presented below.

2.1 Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA): Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen first put forth this theory in 1967. It is regarded as one of the most important theories for understanding why people act in certain ways. TRA is one of the attitude theories that is used to explore the association between behaviour and attitude (figure 1). Numerous theories have established that attitudes towards a particular behaviour typically serve as the driving force behind that behaviour. TRA is focused on behavioural intentions which are an outcome of a person's attitude towards their actions and of the subjective norm that surround its performance what motivate individual behaviour. The individual's feelings about performing behaviour are referred to as their attitude towards the behaviour. It is decided by an evaluation of one's beliefs regarding the results of behaviour and a judgment of how desirable these outcomes are (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Hill, 1977). The overall attitude can be measured by combining individual consequence x and desirability judgments for all anticipated consequences of a behaviour. An individual's assessment of whether person close to them believe the behaviour should be carried out is known as a subjective norm. Subjective norms are the belief that a significant individual or group will endorse or encourage a particular behavior, influenced by social pressure and the obligation to express opinions. The importance of a referent's viewpoint is measured by how much a person feels obliged to fulfil their wishes. (LaCaille, 2020).

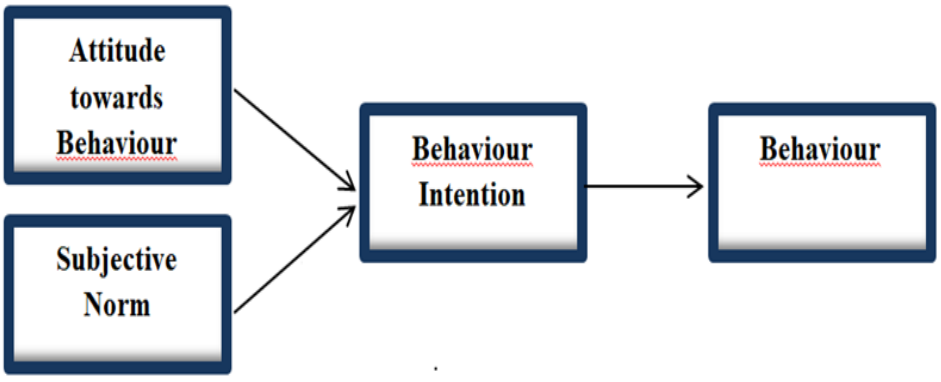

Figure 1: Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975)

The subjective norm can be calculated by combining the total individual perception x motivation scores of all relevant referent. This theory can be expressed algebraically as $B \sim I = w_1A_B + w_2SN$, here "B" indicates behaviour of interests, "I" indicates the individual's intention to perform behaviour "B", "A_B" indicates the individual's attitude towards performing behaviour "B", "SN" indicates person's subjective norm with respect to performance of behaviour "B". "w_1" and "w_2" represent weights reflecting the importance of each item namely "A_B" and "SN". The wavy line ("~", "tilde symbol" is an expression of nearly equal to) in the equation is included to suggest that behaviour is only predicted by intention if the intention hasn't changed before the behaviour is performed. It indicates that the intention itself is directly correlated with the total of the weighted attitudes towards the behaviour and the subjective norm. Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) argues that behavioural intentions, which are a result of a person's attitude towards behaviour and the subjective norms around behaviour execution, are what propel individuals to act (Ajzen, 1985).

2.2. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) : It is formed by the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and has the advantage of addressing behaviour on which people have little volitional control and evading the limitations of the original paradigm (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Other factors that may have an impact on the manner in which a behaviour is performed may also have an effect on a person's behaviour (Ajzen, 2002). As a result, perceived behavioural control has been added as a new

antecedent of intentions to act in the TRA (figure 2). A person exhibits a high level of perceived behavioural control when they are confident in their ability to engage in the behaviour and feel equipped to deal with opportunity and limitation (Ajzen, 2002).

The phrase "Self-efficacy" refers to a person's belief in their ability to carry out certain behaviour or accomplish a specific objective. It is a vital component of the Albert Bandura, a psychologist, established social cognitive theory. Self-efficacy beliefs might impact a person's choice of activities, preparation for an activity, effort put forth during performance, as well as thinking processes and emotional responses. Self-efficacy beliefs are formed from various experiences, such as firsthand knowledge, peer pressure, and verbal persuasion (Bandura, 1982).

High self-efficacy individuals are more willing to take on challenging tasks, persevere, and bounce back from failures, while those with inadequate self-efficacy may shy away, give up easily, and experience negative emotions like anxiety and depression. Self-efficacy beliefs can be improved in a number of ways, including through fostering mastery experiences, practising successful behaviours, verbally encouraging and providing feedback, and lowering stress and anxiety. People can enhance their overall well-being, performance, and motivation by strengthening their self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997).

The term "controllability" refers to a person's belief that they have an ability to control or influence how a specific event or behaviour will turn out. It is an important idea in social psychology and has connections to the idea of perceived behavioural control. An individual's behaviour and emotions can be significantly impacted by controllability. People are more likely to act and feel in control of their situation when they believe that they have some control over the problem at hand. However, when people believe a situation is out of their control, they could feel helpless, nervous, or depressed. Personal attributes, circumstances, and social support are just a few of the variables that might have an impact on how controllable something is seen to be (Bandura, 1977, 1989, 1997). Individuals with high self-efficacy and a belief in their ability to control their surroundings tend to perceive things as under their control (Bandura, 1991). In a similar vein, those who have resources and social support are more inclined to think they can manage their circumstances. The way that information is presented can also have an impact on controllability. Giving people knowledge about a situation's controllability, for instance, can provide them a greater sense of control and minimise their overall feeling of helplessness. Additionally, imparting problem-solving techniques and coping mechanisms might help them feel more in control of their circumstances. In general, how someone feels and behaves is greatly influenced by their idea of controllability (Ajzen, 2002).

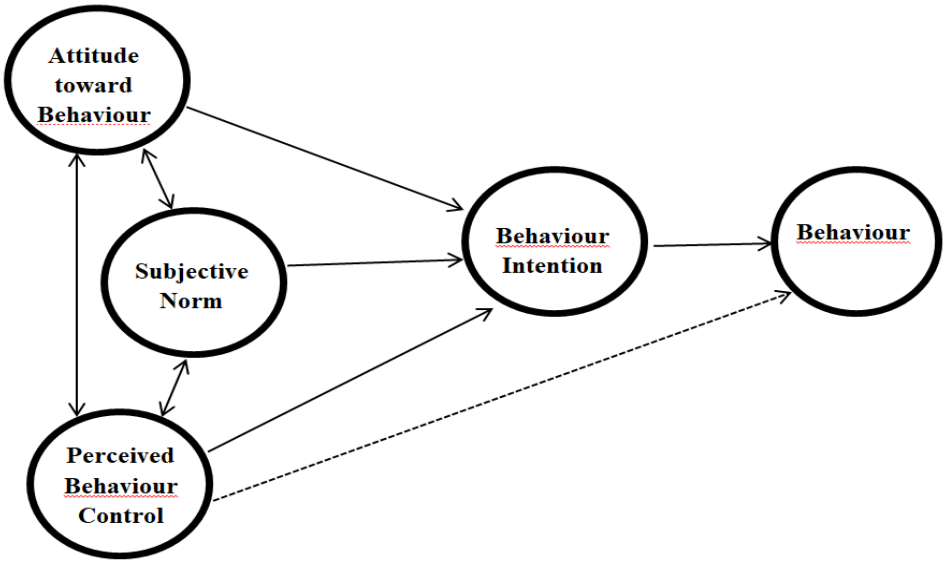

Figure 2: Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991)

2.3 The Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT) seeks to explain how, why, and at what rate at which novel concepts and innovations propagate within a system of society. Everett Rogers made the theory more widely known in 1962 in his book "Diffusion of Innovations". According to the diffusion of innovation theory, media and interpersonal contacts both spread information and shape people's opinions and judgements. The "process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels among the members of a social system over a period of time" is known as diffusion (figure 3). The goal of innovation diffusion study is to explain the factors that affect users' adoption of new information channels, like the Internet, and how and why they do so (Rogers, 1962).

The notion of "rate of adoption" refers to the relative speed with which people acquire a new idea. A social system's adoption rate is often determined by how long it takes for a given proportion of its members to accept an innovative idea. Innovation adoption rates depend on an individual's adopter category. Innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards or later adopters are the five categories into which the theory classifies adopters. It presents its key contribution by proposing that people appraise innovations based on five criteria, namely, relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability and observability that determine their rate of innovation adoption (Rogers, 1995). Nonetheless, only the following traits, compatibility, relative advantage, and complexity, are in tune with an individual adopting an innovation (Tornatzky & Klein, 1982).

2.4 Technology acceptance model (TAM) is adjusted and modified form of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) to the field of information system. TAM states that an individual's intention to use a system is based on how easy (perceived ease of use) and beneficial (perceived usefulness) they think it is, and that this intention functions as a mediator between actual system use and intended use (figure 4). Perceived ease of use is also observed to have a direct impact on perceived usefulness. By excluding the attitude component from TRA from the current definition, researchers have simplified TAM (Venkatesh et al., 2003). TRA and TAM, which both have significant behavioural components, presuppose that an individual will have free rein to act upon forming an intention to do so. Two main ideas impact an individual's attitude towards using an information system: perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. (Davis, 1985). The study evaluates consumer perceptions of the advantages of online travel agency reservations over traditional channels using these concepts.

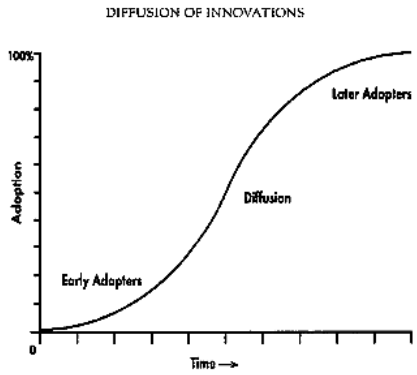

Figure 3 Diffusion of Innovations Theory (Everett M Rogers, 2003)

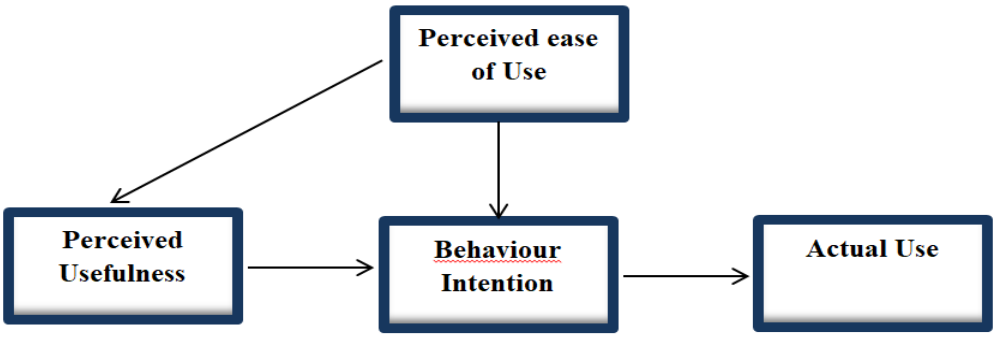

Figure 4: Technology Acceptance Model: (Davis et al., 1989), (Venkatesh et al., 2003)

They are comparable to constructs from IDT concerning perceived relative advantage and perceived complexity. According to literature, the perceived relative advantages of buying travel services online have reportedly often been taken into account convenience (Jensen, 2009; Kim et al., 2006; Kolsaker et al., 2004), financial advantages, such as discounts, loyalty points (Kim et al., 2006; Morrison et al., 2001), enjoyment (Powley et al., 2004), time saving (Christou & Kassianidis, 2002) and product variety i.e. many options (Jensen, 2009). The advantages of booking travel services online are formed in the current research as a multidimensional construct called relative advantage.

2.5 Studies on Other Variables

According to studies, the *Perceived risk* is found to be negatively related to online buying intention towards shopping of travel services (Kolsaker et al., 2004), *perceived usefulness* (Kamarulzaman, 2007), *attitude* towards doing travel buying process online (Bigné et al., 2010) and trust (Bigné et al., 2010). Previous studies have demonstrated that customers are more likely to buy products or services online when they show a higher level of *trust* in the process (Corbitt et al., 2003). Trust has an effect on people's attitudes about shopping online (Bigné et al., 2010). Also, the results of (Bigné et al., 2010)'s research demonstrated that it had no effect on users' intention to buy airline tickets online, nevertheless they did demonstrate that it had an effect on attitude, which in turn had an effect on *intention*.

It has been found that consumer's involvement in doing travel buying process online has a positive effect with respect to buying travel services online (Kamarulzaman, 2007; Moital et al., 2009). Other studies examined the relationship between behavioural beliefs regarding perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use of reviews with the intention to buy travel services using the TAM. The findings indicated a positive correlation between business travellers' usefulness of reviews and intention to buy. Additionally, the study revealed that age had a moderating effect on ease of use of reviews (Memarzadeh et al., 2016). Another most important variable is website quality (system quality, information quality, and service quality), which is taken into consideration as the three outlined the effectiveness characteristics of a travel website design (Wen, 2009). Prior research has established information quality, service quality, and system quality as reliable metrics for assessing the design quality of travel-related websites and travellers' intent for shopping online is significantly influenced by their attitudes, the quality of the travel website design, and customer satisfaction (Wen, 2012).

3. Methodology

The researcher has adopted exploratory research method to develop this qualitative paper. In order to gain an in-depth knowledge of the theoretical foundation of online travel buying behaviour, the researcher did a thorough and systematic screening of academic publications, books, journals, and conference proceedings to establish its antecedents, and its association with business travel. To make sure that additional noteworthy articles from peer-reviewed journals are not overlooked in this review, online databases for academic publications are also searched. Other well-known authors have used web databases to look for relevant papers for literature reviews (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Ip et al., 2011). Further, relevant literature was reviewed based on two key criteria: keywords and peer-reviewed articles. The key words used in search of relevant data are online Buying behaviour of business traveller, Online travel buying, Online travel shopping, Online travel purchase, Business travellers' buying intention, Online consumer behaviour of business traveller.

The second criteria, peer-reviewed full-length articles has been collected from ScienceDirect, EBSCOhost, Web of Science, Scopus, Academia, ResearchGate, Google Scholar, Shodhganga databases. The most relevant journals are Journal of Information technology and tourism, Journal of hospitality and travel technology and proceeding of prominent conference in the context of travel and information technology, like ENTER. The greater part of the literature under review is published between 1996 and 2023. Interestingly, in year 1996, the first online travel agency, Expedia, debuted (Microsoft, 1996) after the internet was launched in India in 1995 (Mint, 2020). Only detailed peer-reviewed articles that indicated an association to intentions to book travel online or actual Internet use to complete the transactions were considered. In view of the identified gap in literature review, researcher has attempted to propose a model with selected sub-components of website quality to understand online travel buying behaviour of business traveller in a holistic manner.

4. Proposed Behavioural Model – Website Quality

The major contribution of this paper is to incorporate website quality with its sub-components namely information quality, service quality, system quality, security and privacy in the model developed on existing behavioural theories. The current studies are based on Ajzen's Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen, 1985) and Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991, 2002), Davis's Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) and Roger's Innovation Diffusion Theory (Rogers, 1995).

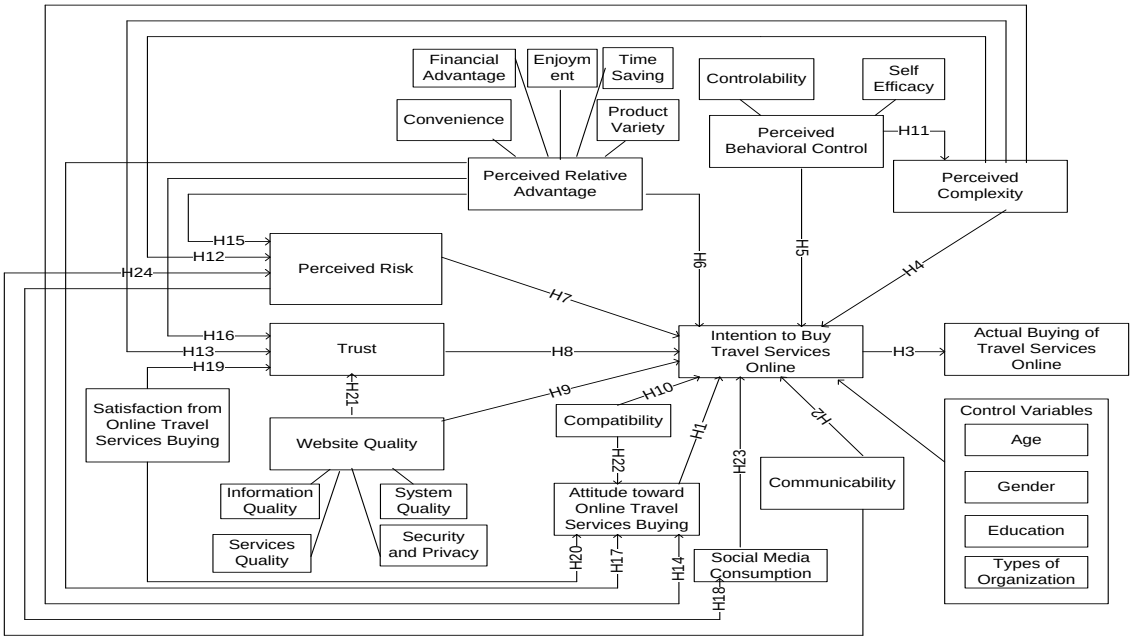

Figure 5: Proposed Behavioural Model with Website Quality

According to the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), people are motivated to act by their behavioural intentions, which are the outcome of their attitude towards behaviour and the subjective norms around the execution of that behaviour. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is a modification of the Theory of Reasoned Action, incorporating perceived behavioral control as a new antecedent of intentions to act. The Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT) and according to the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), an information system's perceived usefulness and ease of use have the biggest effects on people's attitudes towards using it.

One of the drawbacks of the TRA model is the high likelihood of confusion between attitudes and norms because attitudes can often be reframed as norms and vice versa. The idea that someone will be unrestricted in their acts once they intend to act is another constraint. As a matter of fact, the freedom to act will be limited by things like time constraints, unconscious habits, organisational or environmental constraints, and limited capacity. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) addresses this limitation by assuming that individuals act logically based on their attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Perceived behaviour control refers to an individual's assessment of how simple or complex a particular behaviour is to perform. Perceived behaviour control is a crucial aspect of the Theory of Planned Behaviour, predicting behaviour based on attitudes and arbitrary standards. The idea of perceived locus of control, which is a generalised expectancy that holds true across contexts and kinds of action, is distinct from perceived behaviour control. Perceived behaviour control can differ across contexts and behaviours, and it has a significant impact on how confident a person is in their capacity to carry out the behaviour.

The IDT and TAM evaluate innovations based on compatibility, relative advantage, and complexity, simplifying the Theory of Reasoned Action for information systems.

Business travellers are a significant segment of consumers who buy travel-related services online, such as flights, hotels, car rentals and tours. Online buying behaviour of business travellers has changed over time due to various factors, such as technological advancements, social media influence, COVID-19 pandemic and personal preferences. Some of the changing patterns of online buying behaviour of business travellers are:

- Business travelers increasingly utilize smartphones and tablets for online travel searches, comparisons, and bookings due to their convenience, flexibility, and accessibility. (Douglas et al., 2018). According to a report by FCM Travel Solutions, 85% of Indian business travellers used a mobile device to book flight by mobile application (KPMG & FCM Travel Solutions, 2017). Many online travel agencies (OTAs) and suppliers have developed mobile-friendly websites and applications to cater to the needs and expectations of mobile users.

- Greater reliance on social media and online reviews: Business travellers are influenced by social media marketing, online reviews (Memarzadeh et al., 2016), and word-of-mouth recommendations when making online travel buying decisions. Social media platforms, like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, provide information, inspiration, and interaction for potential and existing customers. Online reviews, such as those on TripAdvisor, Yelp, and Google, provide feedback, ratings, and suggestions from other travellers. Social media marketing has a positive and significant impact on brand trust, brand loyalty, and buying intention of online travel booking websites (Azhar et al., 2023).

4.1 Components of Website Quality

In e-commerce contexts, one of the major variables influencing customer satisfaction and online buying intention is website quality. A website's general layout, system quality, information quality, service quality and security and privacy are each considered as variables in its quality in terms of usability, credibility, functionality, and content. It influences how users view and engage with a website as well as how they decide which products or services to buy online. The inclusion of website quality with the proposed integrated model is not found in existing theories and online consumer behavioural researches done in the past with respect to the Indian business travellers by the best knowledge of researcher. Researcher extensively did application oriented online product management assignments on website quality professionally in the industry and found its suitability and utmost need to test it with the integrated model developed based on existing theories. These studies demonstrate the significance of website quality in understanding business travellers' buying behaviours. Business travellers are people who travel for work purposes such as (MICE) meetings, conferences, trade fairs and training sessions, etc. (Davidson, 1994). When it comes to online travel buying, they could have unique needs and preferences than other travellers' category. Therefore, it is essential for travel e-commerce website to understand how business travellers perceive and evaluate their websites before buying travel services online.

Website quality is widely acknowledged in academic literature as a crucial first step in promoting company online. As a result, a great deal of research has been done on the assessment and quality of websites. Customer satisfaction is directly and positively influenced by the Website quality and customer satisfaction has a direct and positive impact on buying intentions (Bai et al., 2008).

The figure 5 depicts the proposed model which is the outcome of the literature review done to identity the variables and their associations in the behavioural theories of TRA, TPB, IDT and TAM and the relevant research papers. There are fourteen variables involved in the proposed model namely Attitude toward online travel services buying, Communicability, Compatibility, Social media consumption, Perceived complexity, Perceived risk, Trust, Satisfaction from online travel services buying, Web quality, Perceived behaviour control, Perceived relative advantage, Intention to buy travel services online, Actual buying of travel services online and also the control variables. Except Web quality, Perceived behaviour control and Perceived relative advantage, all are first order constructs. The most important dependent variable in the studies "Intention to buy travel services online" depends on following independent variables Attitude toward online travel services buying, Communicability, Compatibility, Social media consumption, Perceived complexity, Perceived risk, Trust, Satisfaction from online travel services buying, Web quality, Perceived behaviour control, and Perceived relative advantage. Actual buying of travel services online depends on Intention to buy travel services online. Control variables also influence the Intention to buy travel services online.

The attitude, intention and actual buying of travel services are taken from TRA and connected with the lines with the headed arrows. It shows the relationship between attitude toward the online travel services buying and Intention to buy travel services and also Intention to buy travel services and actual buying of travel services. Business travellers' attitude toward online buying has a effect on business traveller's online buying intention and business travellers' intention to buy travel services online is directly related with actual buying of travel services online. The perceived behaviour control, Perceived relative advantage and Web site quality are second order or multidimensional constructs. The perceived behaviour controls is formed by Controllability and Self efficacy and are drawn from TPB. It is connected with the lines with the headed arrows to Intention to buy travel services and shows its relationship with Intention to buy travel services.

The Perceived relative advantage, Compatibility and Perceived complexity are the most relevant variables which are part of five criteria of innovations appraised by people for innovation adoption and are part of IDT. Multidimensional construct Relative advantage is formed by convenience, financial advantages, enjoyment, time saving, and product variety. Perceived relative advantage has influence on Trust, Attitude, Perceived risk and also on Intention to buy travel services online. Perceived complexity has an effect on perceived risk, trust, Attitude and intention to buy travel services online. Compatibility influences both Attitude and Intention to buy travel services online.

Multidimensional construct Web quality is formed with information quality, service quality, system quality and security and privacy. Communicability has influence on perceived risk and Intention to buy travel services online. Social media consumption has influence on intention to buy travel services online. Perceived risk is connected with Social media consumption and Intention to buy travel services online. It has influence on Social media consumption and intention to buy travel services online. Trust has influence on Intention to buy travel services online. Satisfaction from online travel services buying in the last years has influence on trust as well as on attitude toward the online travel services buying. Website quality is the new construct proposed in this study and integrated with the model which is used in the earlier studies. It is connected with the line and headed arrow towards Intention to buy travel services online and Trust. It influences both intentions to buy travel services online and Trust. Control variables (gender, age, education and types of organisation) are connected with the Intention to buy travel services online. Type of organization is new variable added under control variable. Finally Intention to buy travel services online is connected with the line with headed arrow towards Actual buying of travel services online.

5. Conclusion

This study has made an effort to propose a conceptual framework for Online Buying Behaviour of Business Traveller based on existing theories TRA, TPB, TAM and IDT and the outcome of the empirical researches done in the past. This study has proposed Website Quality as important construct to be added with the integrated model developed based on theories and its interrelationships with customer satisfaction, buying intentions and actual buying with respect to business travellers. It has applications towards the online buying behaviour of travel services. The results of this study will assist providers of travel services in bringing all necessary features, functionality, content availability, trust, security and privacy issues attended on their online platform for different technologies to fulfil all search and buying needs and give a wonderful user experience to business travellers which will lead to online buying of travel services. It will contribute knowledge to academia in the area of business travellers' online consumer behaviour and etourism. It will provide better understanding to travel service providers to reduce the number of dropouts as many users browse online but leave the system without buying travel services online.

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