



The Impact of Content Characteristics of Online Reviews on Travellers' Hotel Booking Intention

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Abstract

Since the internet provides an ideal platform for sharing and distributing information, online consumer reviews have become an important source of information to travellers in recent years. Consumers now have wide opportunity and ability to post positive or negative consumption-related experiences and evaluations for any interested party to review. Much of the existing researches focus on identifying the causal relationship between online reviews and travellers' hotel booking intentions but sheds less light on identifying the individual impact of different content characteristics of online reviews on hotel booking intention separately. Therefore, this study mainly focuses on identifying how the content attributes: Usefulness, Reviewer Expertise, Timeliness, Volume, Valence, Comprehensiveness and Anonymity of online reviews affect travellers' hotel booking intention. The sample consists of 384 inbound travellers visited Sri Lanka and the judgmental sampling method was applied. To achieve the proposed research objective, the quantitative research method was adopted and data were gathered through self-administered structured questionnaires from the inbound travellers visited Sri Lanka. Collected data were analysed using SPSS package and basic descriptive statistics, correlation analysis and stepwise regression test were run on data to find out the answer for the research question. Consequently, the findings revealed that usefulness of online reviews, valence of online reviews and timeliness of online reviews have positive and significant impact on hotel booking intention. Further, usefulness of online reviews is the most influential content characteristic of online reviews which has the strongest predicting power on hotel booking intention of travellers. Hospitality practitioners can enhance their consumer review management by applying the recommendations provided based on the findings of this study.

Introduction

Tourism and hospitality industry is probably being one of the mostly affected industry by the internet as this industry largely depends on the distribution of information where internet provides a good platform for distribution of information. Therefore, today consumers are more empowered than ever (Broniarczyk & Griffin, 2014). Consumers can share their experiences, ideas, suggestions, criticisms and opinions via internet as a form of word of mouth, to reach a wide audience (Chen et al., 2011) and interact with one another (King et al., 2014). Consequently, the way people search, locate, and access information has been changed with the emergence of the internet (Kasavana et al., 2010). Intangible nature of the services leads consumers to rely more on recommendations and suggestions of others especially for the products and services related to the tourism and hospitality industry since purchasing intangible products and services involves higher risk (Ranasinghe, 2017, Park & Kim, 2008). According to Xiang & Gretzel (2010) three quarters of travellers have considered recommendations and suggestions available on the internet as a major information source when planning their tours. Jalilvand et al., (2011) defined that online consumer reviews are one form of eWOM and it is included positive or negative statements made by the consumers about their experiences

or opinions on a product or service they consumed. Accordingly, eWOM lays a foundation for online consumer reviews and is experiencing massive growth

(Brown et al., 2007) and are one of the most reliable sources of information for selecting a better product and services. With the availability of travel

information over the internet, travellers can search for required information on products and services, compare and evaluate the alternatives and, finally, make their reservations at various tourism service providers; hotels, restaurants, entertainment providers etc. (Law et al., 2009). A growing number of individual are now actively taking the advantage of this opportunity. According to eMarketer (2017) 25% of infrequent travellers, 36% of leisure travellers and 33% of frequent travellers report having changed their hotel stay based on reviews provided by other consumers.

It is generally accepted that travel reviews have either positive or negative impacts on a hotel's reputation to attract or repel potential customers from a hotel (Sparks et al., 2013). On the other hand, the influence of consumer reviews is particularly important in tourism and hospitality industry, since the quality is

only perceived after the consumption of the particular service or facility (Ye et al., 2009).

Multiple opinions about same product and services from different travellers from different countries and different cultural backgrounds are available on the blog pages, review sites and even in social media, facilitating the potential travellers to have a good understanding about the specific product and service before consuming and experiencing them by themselves (Kim & Lee, 2015). Furthermore, consumers are not following any vested or structured pattern to post their experiences and recommendations on the Web (Park & Kim, 2008). Consequently, those reviews comprise with different characteristics rather than positivity and negativity.

Even though numbers of empirical studies have indicated effect of eWOM on sales (Zhang et al., 2011), consumer purchasing decision-making (Lee et al., 2008), customer satisfaction and their revisit intentions (Berezina et al., 2012) and consumer attitude (Ranasinghe, 2018), little is known regarding how individual travellers integrate opinions from several reviews presented in multiple ways in the online context for planning their tours with various intangible and high involving tourism service oriented products.

Further, many research studies conducted by various scholars such as Lee et al., (2008), Ye et al., (2009), and Vermeulen & Seegers, (2009), have focused on examining the causal relationship between online reviews and travellers' purchase intention and behaviours. These studies were mainly carried out to investigate how online reviews as a whole influence travellers' attitudes toward tourism products and services, and then traveling intentions/behaviours (Lee et al., 2008; Ye et al., 2009). However, there is little evidence on how the content attributes of online reviews individually effect on purchase intention of travellers.

Findings of many research studies have proven that online reviews have a significant effect on consumer behaviour in different industries. However, few researches have examined the impact of online reviews specifically in the hotel sector. On the other hand, some previous studies reported that online consumer reviews are perceived as having lower credibility due to the absence of source cues on the internet (Smith et al., 2005; Dellarocas & Narayana, 2006). Therefore, the influence of consumer reviews needs to be further tested in different contexts.

Therefore, to fill these gaps, this study mainly focuses to identify how the different content characteristics of online reviews effect on travellers' hotel booking intention.

Conceptual Background and Hypotheses Development

Online Consumer Reviews

Jalilvand et al., (2011) stated that online consumer reviews are one form of eWOM and it is included positive or negative statements made by the consumers about their experiences or opinions on a product or service they consumed. Many research studies have been carried out to identify the reasons for consumers to rely on other consumers' reviews. Li & Bernoff (2008) stated that it's mainly due to the unbiasedness of the reviews and independent from marketing and editorial personnel. According to Chen (2008) consumers rely on other consumers reviews to reduce the risk and uncertainty of the purchase decision. Additionally, the opinions and recommendations of other consumers may help in determining whether to trust the product or firm under consideration (Sparks et al., 2013). eMarketer (2017) stated that six out of ten consumers have a preference for the web sites which have peer written reviews. As a result of that most of the firms are now taking the advantage of online consumer reviews as a new marketing tool (Dellarocas & Narayana, 2006). Online consumer reviews play two distinct roles: 1) role as an informant where it provides user oriented information for consumers; and 2) role as a recommender where it provides positive or negative indication of product or service (Park et al., 2007).

83% of online shoppers stated that their purchasing decisions are based on online product evaluations and reviews (Opinion Research Corporation, 2008).

In the context of online reviews, understanding the ways of processing multiple opinions and suggestions made by the different consumers, is critical for the potential consumers (Kim & Lee, 2015). Consumers using online reviews are challenged with large volume of conflicting information (Sen & Lerman, 2007) and therefore, the consumers' perception, intention and decisions depends on its content attributes and presentation (Wathen & Burkell, 2002), such as valence (Sparks & Browning, 2011), informational cues (Hansen, 2005) and source credibility (Pornpitakpan, 2004).

Content Characteristics of Online Reviews

Usefulness of online reviews

The traveller's decision making process is significantly influenced by the consumer reviews available in review websites and hotels' interactive web sites, particularly if they found the information available is truly useful and relevant to their purchasing decision (Herrero et al., 2015). Therefore, it's reasonable to argue that usefulness of online reviews undoubtedly influences consumer expectations (Zhao et al., 2015). Park et al., (2009) define the usefulness of online review as "the degree to which consumers believe that online reviews would facilitate their purchase decision-making process". Potential consumer's evaluation of the usefulness of online reviews is significantly important since it performs as a predecessor to information adoption in both offline and online environments (Rieh, 2002). Willemsen et al., (2011) suggest that the key aspect of consumers to rely on online reviews is mainly due to the usefulness of the reviews. Further, the potential customers believe that the reviews of other consumers increase the confidence of them and reduce the risk by assisting them with making imaginations of the product or service easily before purchasing (Yoo & Gretzel, 2008). On the other hand, there are number of consumer reports which prove that individuals trust other consumers' views, opinions and suggestions posted online (Intelliseek Research, 2004). Usefulness of online reviews can be considered as an effective predictor of consumers' intent to comply with an online review (Park & Lee, 2009). Several other scholars also have suggested that usefulness of online reviews could also determine the frequency of usage (Davis, 1989; Wöber, 2003).

Thus, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: The usefulness of online reviews has a positive impact on travellers' hotel booking intention

Reviewer Expertise

In the online context, the knowledge and the competence of a reviewer cannot be evaluated straightforwardly due to the limited asses to personal attributes and their background. Therefore, web sites strategically take the duty of evaluating the reviewer by rating him or her based on many factors (Zhao et al., 2015). Further, it is accepted that the individuals who have highly ranked in expertise are more likely to have sound knowledge of alternative products and services available (Mitchell & Dacin, 1996). As suggested by Applbaum & Anatol (1972), the expertness is the extent of skillfulness, authoritativeness, competence and qualification an individual possess about the specific field. Consumers tend to evaluate the expertise of reviewers based on their past behaviour or records in terms of the number of reviews written and the content of the reviews or information provided for others' queries and form opinions of the present message (Weiss et al, 2008).

However, the role of online reviewer expertise is still unclear because some scholars specify that source expertise to strengthen the impact of message or review whereas others indicate consumers to rely more on non-expert sources (Senecal & Nantel, 2004). In accordance with these research studies, consumers believe fellow consumers' opinions and suggestions are less biased and their experiences are easier to relate with their expectations (Bickart & Schindler, 2001). According to vermulan & Seegers (2009), reviewer expertise plays a

significant role in hotel booking intention and reviews made by experts have an overall positive impact on hotel consideration and booking intention than the reviews by non-experts. On the other hand, most of the research studies on reviews are focused on features of the review content only (Ghose and Ipeirotis, 2011). However, the information about the reviewer himself such as his own character, social relation has not been given much importance in many studies. These characters of reviewers need to be keenly studied in order to find if the review is helpful or not. Based on the aforementioned statement, the following hypothesis is, therefore, proposed:

H2: Reviewer expertise has a positive impact on travellers' hotel booking intention

Timeliness of Online Reviews

During the information search stage, consumers tend to consider higher amount of relevant information which is associated with a specific time period. This scenario leads to the research concept of timeliness (Zhao et al., 2015). Timeliness defines as the availability of the output information at a time suitable for its use (Bailey & Pearson, 1983). Different consumers may post their ideas about hotels, especially renowned or infamous ones, in different time periods. Therefore, timeliness of consumer generated content may influence the potential consumers' purchasing decisions (Zhao et al., 2015). From the consumers' point of view, the average usefulness of online reviews may decline as the time elapses (Liu, 2006). Jindal & Liu (2008) suggest that in the online consumer review context, more recent product reviews used to get more user attentions. When the consumer reviews an online review which is not updated recently, he gets confused whether the message contain with the information which is still valid or not. Therefore, the timelier the information is, the higher the perceived information usefulness of the content.

Thus, another hypothesis is proposed:

H3: The timeliness of online reviews has a positive impact on travellers' hotel booking intention

Volume of Online Reviews

Volume measures the total number of interactive messages and opinions which is one of the major attributes of WOM (Liu, 2006). According to Davis & Khazanchi (2008), in online context, volume is defined as the total number of comments from different reviewers about a specific product or service. A recent study by Steffes & Burgee (2009), suggests that consumers can acquire a better evaluation when the number of online review increases. The number of reviews in online context, relevant to a specific product is used as an experimental tool by consumers to assess the quality of the product (Yang & Mai, 2010). On the other hand, a total number of online reviews of a product indicate the popularity of the product since it directly relates with the sales volume of the product as well (Chen & Xie, 2005). Further, large number of online reviews plays a role as a risk reduction strategy for many consumers by eliminating or reducing the uncomfortable feeling of risk exposure which will ultimately lead to increase the purchase intention (Buttle, 1998). However, some research studies argued that increase in volume of online consumer reviews alone does not have significant impact on book sales in e-commerce multi product sales (Davis & Khazanchi, 2008). It has also been identified that consumers rarely view comments beyond the first two pages in review sites (Pavlou & Domoka, 2006). Nevertheless, Duan et al., (2008), have argued that that the volume of online reviews has a direct association with the product sales. Therefore, by considering the information irregularity and the unique features of tourism and hospitality products intangibility and incorporation of production and consumption, this research argue that higher volume of online reviews may reduce a perception of risk, and hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: The Volume of online reviews has a positive impact on travellers' hotel booking intention

Valence of Online Reviews

Both positive and negative online reviews can influence consumers' attitudes towards a given company. (Zhao et al., 2015). Positive consumer reviews are defined as reviews which offer positive arguments in support of a particular product or service. Negative Consumer reviews are defined as reviews which offer negative opinions against a particular product or service (Sen & Lerman, 2007). Therefore, Message valence emphasizes on either the positive (benefits gained) or negative (benefits lost) product and service attributes (Maheswaran & Meyers-Levy, 1990). However, the valence of online reviews, either positive or negative, has been strongly perceived to influence the consumer product judgment (Sen & Lerman, 2007), since both positive and negative comments can be presented concurrently to potential consumers particularly in the online context (Herr et al., 1991).

An experimental study conducted by Vermeulen & Seegers (2009) to investigate the impact of online hotel reviews on consumer consideration in Netherlands discovered that positive consumer reviews have a positive impact on consumer consideration, whereas negative consumer reviews have no significant impact on consumer consideration. Even though, negative consumer reviews decrease consumer attitudes towards hotels, the enhanced hotel awareness compensates for this effect, causing no effect on consideration (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009). Therefore, the findings of previous studies on the impact of message valence, negative or positive, are inconsistent (Zhao et al., 2015). According to Westbrook (1987), consumers' loyalty, product evaluation and purchase decisions can be influenced by both positive and negative information. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: The Valence of online reviews has a significant impact on travellers' hotel booking intention

Comprehensiveness of Online Reviews

In online context, different types of messages are available for information seekers ranging from simple recommendations to more complex and detailed comments with factual deceptions. This can be identified as comprehensiveness; completeness of the message, which is a measure of how detailed and complete the messages are (Cheung et al., 2008). Sullivan (1999) suggests that, the more detailed information brings a wider breadth of user categories and user orientation of the online customer review, resulting a greater likelihood of user acquisition and user retention. Further, the consumers who obtained comprehensive online information have significant influence on their purchase intention (Lee et al., 2009)

In unfamiliar situations, potential consumers always seek for detailed and specific information to make their purchasing decisions (Anderson, 1998). Therefore, particularly in uncertain online context, the comprehensiveness of a review could be a key factor to be considered by the consumers when making their purchasing decisions based on the contents available online (Zhao et al., 2015). More detailed the reviews are; more customers can understand and satisfy their awareness about a specific product or service. Not only the number of words that affect, but also the comprehensiveness, since incomplete information will be interpreted by different customers in different ways (Sa'ait et al., 2016). Therefore, study proposes the following hypothesis:

H6: The comprehensiveness of online reviews has a positive impact on travellers' hotel booking intention

Anonymity of Online Reviews

Online consumer reviews are generally posted and shared anonymously among the strangers (Sen & Lerman, 2007). Many previous studies have shown that consumers always struggle to identify fake reviews (Walther et al., 2001; Kiran & Vasantha, 2015). Online reviews with the reviewer's identity disclosure are perceived to be more useful than reviews which lack such information (Sen & Lerman, 2007). This lack of identity generates issues regarding the credibility and trustworthiness of the information posted on the online since the sources of the information are not clear (Rains & Scott, 2007). Even though the term of

anonymity as a research construct is being discussed for more than a decade (Reed et al., 1998) it seems that confusions and misunderstanding regarding the concept still exist. Douglas & McGarty (2001) defined anonymity as condition of being unknown (nameless) to others.

However, some previous research studies suggest that online consumer reviews are perceived to be with lack of credibility than the traditional WOM due to this anonymous nature (Dellarocas & Narayana, 2006). Forman et al., (2007) find that when online reviewers in Amazon.com reveal their demographic information; age, gender and location, it has a positive impact on sales. Surprisingly, it was found from the same study that the presence of socio-demographic information such as real name and photo did not contribute significantly to the perception of usefulness. Further, it is commonly believed that consumers tend to form impressions of reviewers even with relatively limited non-verbal and social cues available in the online context (Racherla & Friske, 2013). However, the role of anonymity in the consumers' purchase intention is still underexplored empirically (Lee et al., 2008). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H7: The anonymity of online reviews has a negative impact on travellers' hotel booking intention

Methodology

This study seeks to extend existing knowledge by integrating seven content characteristics of online reviews and empirically testifying their impact upon inbound travellers' hotel booking intention. The study sample consisted of inbound travellers visited Sri Lanka and stayed in a hotel. Hence, the primary unit of analysis of this study is an inbound tourist. At a 95% confidence level (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009), a total number of 384 inbound tourists were targeted for collecting primary data and self-administered close ended questionnaires were distributed to collect raw data. Judgmental sampling technique was applied to this study and it involves selecting the cases from the population based on the researcher's knowledge and judgment which brings more accurate results. 337 complete responses were obtained and used for further data analysis giving a valid response rate of 87.76 percent. Participants of this research presented their degree of agreement on each item by using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) "Strongly disagree" to (5) "Strongly agree".

Explanatory factor analysis was used to determine the dimensions of the variables and only the items with factor loading greater than 0.6 were employed for further analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure used to determine the adequacy of the sample size and presented in Table 01. Further, to purify the measures, a reliability analysis was undertaken and the Cronbach's alpha for each variable checked. The result of the reliability analysis indicates that the alpha coefficients of all constructs were above 0.6 indicating acceptable internal consistency.

Table 01: Results of Principle Component Analysis and Reliability Test

Variable	No. of Items	KMO	Bartlett's Test Chi Square Value	Cronbach's alpha
Usefulness of online reviews	11	.916	2421.846***	.925
Reviewer expertise	07	.861	1047.123***	.864
Timeliness of online reviews	03	.641	250.090***	.733
Volume of online reviews	06	.841	1220.688***	.894
Valence of online reviews	10	.861	1312.131***	.856
Comprehensiveness of online reviews	05	.737	902.599***	.840

Anonymity of online reviews	03	.729	540.728***	.875
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Data Analysis

Respondents' Profile

According to the respondents' socio demographic profile, the sample was balanced in terms of gender; there were approximately 52% male and 48% female respondents. The participants' age category was mostly between 25-34 years (34%), followed by 35-44 years (26%), 16 -24 years (20.8%), 45- 60 (13.6%) and above 60 years (4.7%). Further, a vast majority of the travellers (43%) stay in between 8 to 14 days in Sri Lanka. approximately 28% of the respondents have stayed in four-star hotels in Sri Lanka while 19% in five-star hotels, 14% in three-star hotels, 11% in resorts and 10% in small luxury hotels and budget hotels equally in each. Further, approximately 25% of respondents have booked their hotels through booking engines, 23% through the travel agencies in their home countries, 21% through travel agencies in Sri Lanka, 19% through the hotel web site and 10% through e mails, telephones. In terms of purpose of visiting Sri Lanka, overwhelming majority (71%) is visiting Sri Lanka for leisure purpose and 9% for their business purposes.

Results and Discussion

The study has developed seven causal hypotheses in order to identify the causal impact of independent variables on dependent variable which were tested through the stepwise regression analysis. The relationship between dependent variable and independent variables was investigated using correlation analysis. The association between variables is strong when $r > 0.5$ (Cohen, 2013). According to the table 02, correlation coefficient of usefulness of online reviews and hotel booking intention was .683 and sig value was 0.000 which indicates a positive strong statistically significance association between usefulness of online reviews and hotel booking intention. The correlation coefficient of reviewer expertise, timeliness of online reviews and volume of online reviews with hotel booking intention consecutively demonstrated as 0.521, 0.585 and 0.592 where the sig value also less than standard (0.05). It implies that there was a strong, positive correlation among the hotel booking intention and independent variables: reviewer expertise, timeliness of online reviews and volume of online reviews. Further, as indicated by the table, valence of online reviews ($r = 0.672$) and comprehensiveness of online reviews ($r = 0.558$) had a strong and positive statistically significant association with the hotel booking intention. However, the relationship between anonymity of online reviews and hotel booking intention showed a positive but weak correlation with $r = 0.081$ and $\text{sig} = 0.139$.

Table 02: Correlation Analysis

Variable	Booking Intention	Usefulness of online reviews	Reviewer Expertise	Timeliness of online reviews	Volume of online reviews	Valence of online reviews	Comprehensiveness of online reviews	Anonymity of online reviews
Booking Intention	1.000							
Usefulness of online reviews	.683**	1.000						
Reviewer Expertise	.521**	.633**	1.000					
Timeliness of online reviews	.585**	.667**	.519**	1.000				
Volume of online reviews	.592**	.726**	.626**	.637**	1.000			

Valence of online reviews	.672**	.747**	.612**	.693**	.738**	1.000	
Comprehensiveness of online reviews	.558**	.558**	.516**	.627**	.714**	.713**	1.000
Anonymity of online reviews	.081	.040	.218**	.039	.067	.040	.089

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Stepwise regression analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis. Consequently, three models under three steps were generated through the SPSS. The stepwise regression excluded the variables “reviewer expertise, volume of online reviews, comprehensiveness of online reviews and anonymity of online reviews” from the model due to insignificant explanatory powers of the respective variables. Hence, stepwise regression was limited to three variables; Usefulness of Online Reviews, Valence of Online Reviews, and Timeliness of Online reviews. R² equals to 0.533 in the third model and It highlighted that when other factors are constant, these three variables; usefulness of online reviews, valence of online reviews, timeliness of online reviews explain 53.3 percent variation of hotel booking intention. After adding variable “timeliness of online reviews” in to the model, R² was increased by 0.007 and reduced F value by 5.039. The change of F value was significant at 0.05 level. Further, the sig value of ANOVA test was 0.000. It was less than the standard level (0.05) indicating that regression coefficient of usefulness of online reviews, valence of online reviews and timeliness of online reviews were not equal to zero. Hence, the model is strong enough to predict linear relationship between independent variables and the hotel booking intention.

Table 03: Regression Coefficient Table

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	T	Collinearity Statistics		
				B	Std. Error	Tolerance
3 (Constant)	.361	.194	1.863***			
Usefulness of Online Reviews	.420	.067	.369	6.232***	.399	2.503
Valence of Online Reviews	.385	.076	.311	5.088***	.374	2.671
Timeliness of Online reviews	.132	.059	.123	2.245***	.469	2.131
Excluded Variables						
4 Reviewer Expertise	0.60			1.194***	.233	1.810
Volume of Online Reviews	0.43			.712***	.477	2.653
Comprehensiveness of Online Reviews	0.25			.433***	.665	2.321
Anonymity of Online Reviews	0.59			1.568***	.118	1.012

As Shown in the table 03, hotel booking intention of inbound travellers visiting Sri Lanka was affected by usefulness of online reviews, valence of online reviews and timeliness of online reviews significantly. Hence study only accepted hypothesis 01, 03 and 05.

The usefulness of online reviews is the most powerful variable which determines the intention of booking a hotel. The findings of the study were positively aligned with the findings of (Zhao et al., 2015; Racherla & Friske, 2013). The usefulness of online reviews can be increased by ensuring the following factors: 1.) online travel reviews should be related to the particular product or service concern, 2.) content of the online reviews should be beneficial, credible, reliable, genuine, neutral, understandable and accurate, 3.) Online reviews should encourage the travellers to book the hotel concern, 4.) Online travel reviews should ensure the smartness of online shopping on travellers mind while making them easy to book the hotel.

Both positive and negative reviews should be there in the web sites to have a better understanding of a hotel. Therefore, the presence of both positive and negative online reviews is paramount important to increase the trustworthiness of the respective hotel. This finding is further supported by the previous scholars: (Westbrook, 1987; Zhao et al., 2015) as well. Therefore, it's recommended to have a good valence of the online reviews about a particular hotel. Not only the positively valence reviews but also negatively valence reviews also should be there to increase the trustworthiness of the hotel. This is important due to the fact that tourism and hospitality industry is a service-oriented industry where everything is not constant every time; service failures can occur due to human errors even in a well reputed luxury hotel. Therefore, absence of negative reviews will diminish the trustworthiness of the hotel. However, according to the findings, abundance of negative reviews also diminishes the hotel booking intention. Therefore, it's recommended to carefully manage the valence of the online reviews. It is further recommended to indicate the summery of the number of positive or negative online reviews which may help consumers to grasp the level of valence of the reviews and is a good strategy to regulate consumers' information processing, as well as influence the hotel booking intention.

When a traveller reviews an online review, which is not updated recently, he gets confused whether the message contains with the information which is still valid or not. Therefore, the timelier the information is, the higher the perceived information usefulness of the content. This finding extends previous studies (Kim & Lee, 2015; Zhao et al., 2015) suggesting that timeliness of the content is one of the key factors that travellers concern when they review online reviews. If the available reviews about a particular hotel tend to be old, the validity of the reviews in the present context is doubtful which leads to a diminution of the booking intention about the respective hotel.

The travellers who post online reviews are not always experts in the tourism and hospitality field. They only post comments based on their personal experiences, opinions and recommendations. The study conducted by Zhao et al. (2015) found a positive significant relationship between reviewer expertise and travellers' hotel booking intentions which is consistent with the study done by Vermulan & Seegers (2009). However, the finding of this study is contradictory with the previous findings. Therefore, researcher contacted few inbound travellers and professional from the industry where they suggested that the individuals when they read the reviews of others, tend to struggle only to identify whether the content of the review is truth and honest, not whether the reviewer is an expert or not. Further, Senecal & Nantel (2004) suggested that the role of online reviewer expertise is still unclear because some scholars specify that source expertise to strengthen the impact of message or review whereas others indicate consumers to rely more on non-expert sources. Therefore, web sites, specially the third-party review sites should welcome the travel reviews posted by non-expert travellers as well.

Further, impact of both volume and comprehensiveness of online reviews on hotel booking intention was statistically insignificant at 0.05 percent level. The finding of the study is not positively associated with the findings of (Park et al., 2007; Duan et al., 2008; Zhao et al., 2015). However, some scholars have found that volume of online consumer reviews alone does not have a significant impact on purchase intention (Davis & Khazanchi, 2008). It has also been identified that consumers rarely view comments beyond the first two pages in review sites further highlighting the insignificant of the variable in booking intention (Pavlou & Domoka, 2006). Accordingly, finding of this study suggest that web sites should implement mechanisms to limit the number of online reviews by

avoiding the information overloaded. Though, in an uncertain context, travellers tend to read more comprehensive reviews, this might be changed when they are familiar with the hotel. In such situations, travels more rely on the reviews with few focused words. However, this finding is not aligning with the previous findings of Cheung et al., (2008) and Zhao et al., (2015). Therefore, researcher contacted few inbound travellers and professional from the industry where they suggested that in contemporary travel world, travellers; particularly the millennial, do not want to spend much time on reading lengthy reviews, rather they prefer to read short but clear comments from the other travellers. The majority of the respondents of this study were in the age group of 25 to 34 years old which further supports the conclusion. Therefore, increasing the number of reviews or posting lengthy reviews may not provide any batter impact on hotel booking intention. A rating system can be introduced to reader to evaluate the review and the reviews only with higher visitor rating can be making available to the readers avoiding them with an information overloading situation.

Racherl & Friske (2013) found that the demographic information of the reviewer such as gender, nationality and occupation does not influence the purchasing behaviour of consumers. Similarly, in Sri Lankan context, impact of anonymity of online reviews on hotel booking intention of the inbound travellers was statistically insignificant. Therefore, web sites, specially the third-party review sites and hotel owned web sites should welcome the travel reviews posted by the travellers who are not disclosing their identity. However, hoteliers and other relevant authorities need to invest resources in enabling their web site visitors to diagnose the usefulness of available reviews.

Conclusion

Online reviews play a major role in cyber space allowing consumers to obtain the ideas, experiences, recommendations, suggestions and criticisms of former consumers. It implies a need for a better understanding of their impact within the tourism and hospitality industry. Therefore, the primary objective of this study was to identify the impact of seven content characteristics of online reviews upon hotel booking intention. To achieve this objective, a model was developed, and data were collected to statistically examine the impact of content characteristics of online reviews on hotel booking intention. In conducting this research, several significant content characteristics of online reviews which affect hotel booking intention were identified. Usefulness of online reviews, valence of online reviews and timeliness of online reviews, were accepted indicating a statistically significant impact on hotel booking intention of the travellers visiting Sri Lanka. Therefore, understanding of the impact of these three factors and managing them accordingly by the respective authorities; hotels, third party travel review sites, booking engines etc., will lead to higher booking intention of the travellers about the respective hotels.

However, the findings of this study highlighted that reviewer expertise, volume of online reviews, comprehensiveness of online reviews and anonymity of online reviews had a statistically insignificant impact on the hotel booking intention of the respondents. Therefore, further investigation of these findings is important. Ultimately, it is hotel managers and employees responsibility to provide a better and memorable services, facilities and experiences to their hotel patrons and encourage them to post their opinions, experiences, to the hotel web sites, review sites, social networks and other relevant internet platforms to share with other travellers which will inevitably leads the potential travellers to book the hotel and to better utilize the online reviews as a gainful marketing tool.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although the findings of this study may have important implications, limitations do exist. The major limitation of this study was the language of the questionnaires distributed among travellers. The questionnaires were designed only in the English language. Hence, the future studies can be further improved by distributing questionnaires in other languages as well. Particularly in Sri Lankan context, there are many inbound travellers from China, India, France and German where the English is not the mother tongue. Further, this study focused only on the inbound travellers booking intention. However, in Sri

Lankan context there is a large number of domestic travellers as well. Therefore, it is recommended to conduct the study focusing on domestic travellers as well.

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