



Customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions of Indian customers about the E– service quality of Indian travel websites: An empirical study

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between e-service quality, customer satisfaction, and behavioral intentions among Indian customers using travel websites. Data was collected from 500 respondents through an online survey. The results indicate that dimensions of e-service quality, particularly website design, reliability, responsiveness, and security, significantly influence customer satisfaction. Furthermore, customer satisfaction is found to be a strong predictor of behavioral intentions, including repeat purchases and positive word-of-mouth. These findings offer valuable insights for online travel agencies in enhancing their service quality to improve customer satisfaction and foster positive behavioral intentions.

Keywords: Customer satisfaction, behavioral intentions, E-service quality, Indian travel websites, empirical study

Introduction

The advent of the internet has drastically transformed the travel industry, with online travel agencies (OTAs) and travel websites becoming pivotal in travel planning and booking. In India, the online travel market has seen substantial growth due to increased internet accessibility and a rising middle class with higher disposable incomes (Statista, 2022) ^[4]. According to a recent report by RedSeer Consulting (2023) ^[3], the Indian online travel market is projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 14% to reach \$31 billion by 2028. Consequently, the quality of e-service provided by travel websites is critical in shaping customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions.

Customer satisfaction in the online travel context is influenced by various dimensions of e-service quality such as website design, reliability, responsiveness, and security (Zeithaml *et al.*, 2002) ^[5, 12]. Understanding how these dimensions affect customer perceptions and behaviors is crucial for travel websites striving to maintain a competitive edge. Recent studies have reinforced this, highlighting the significance of e-service quality in determining customer satisfaction and loyalty. For example, a study by Anitha and Patil (2020) ^[1] found that website design, information quality, and service reliability are critical factors influencing customer satisfaction in the Indian online travel industry. Similarly, Chakraborty and Sahoo (2021) ^[2] emphasized the role of security and privacy concerns in shaping user trust and satisfaction on travel websites.

This study aims to fill the existing gap in literature by empirically examining the relationship between e-service quality, customer satisfaction, and behavioral intentions among Indian customers of travel websites. By doing so, it seeks to provide valuable insights for practitioners and contribute to the existing body of literature on e-service quality in the travel industry.

Literature Review

E-Service Quality in the Travel Industry

E-service quality refers to the overall support provided by a website during the process of purchasing and delivery of products or services. Key dimensions include website

design, reliability, responsiveness, and security (Zeithaml *et al.*, 2002) ^[5, 12]. The importance of e-service quality in the travel industry has been highlighted by numerous studies, emphasizing its impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty (Jeong & Lambert, 2001; Tsang *et al.*, 2010) ^[7, 11, 17].

Recent studies have further elaborated on the dimensions of e-service quality and their impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty. For instance, Liu and Wei (2021) ^[8] conducted a study on Chinese online travel agencies and found that website design and ease of navigation significantly influence customer satisfaction. The study also highlighted the role of personalized services and interactive features in enhancing the overall customer experience.

Similarly, a study by Gupta and Kapoor (2022) ^[6] on Indian travel websites revealed that reliability and responsiveness are critical factors affecting customer trust and satisfaction. The researchers emphasized that timely and accurate information, along with efficient customer support, plays a pivotal role in building customer loyalty in the online travel industry.

In addition, a comprehensive review by Sharma *et al.* (2023) identified security as a paramount concern for online travel consumers. The study indicated that secure payment gateways and data privacy measures are essential for fostering customer trust and encouraging repeat business. This aligns with earlier findings by Ribbink *et al.* (2004) ^[9], which underscored the importance of trust in online transactions.

Overall, these recent studies confirm that e-service quality dimensions such as website design, reliability, responsiveness, and security remain crucial in the travel industry. They also introduce new insights into the evolving expectations of online travel consumers, highlighting the need for continuous improvement in service delivery to enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is a critical factor in the success of online businesses. It is defined as the customer's overall evaluation of their experience with a service provider (Oliver, 1980). Factors influencing customer satisfaction in online settings include ease of use, information quality, and

service quality (Kim *et al.*, 2006) [18]. Studies on Indian travel websites have highlighted the importance of these factors in enhancing customer satisfaction (Bansal & Kumar, 2014) [14].

Behavioral Intentions

Behavioral intentions refer to a customer's planned future behavior towards a service provider. These include repeat purchases, willingness to pay more, and word-of-mouth recommendations (Zeithaml *et al.*, 1996). The relationship between customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions has been well-documented, with satisfied customers more likely to exhibit positive behavioral intentions (Anderson & Srinivasan, 2003) [13].

E – Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction

Several theoretical frameworks link e-service quality to customer satisfaction, such as the SERVQUAL model and the E-S-QUAL model (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988; Zeithaml *et al.*, 2002) [5, 12]. Empirical studies have consistently found a positive relationship between e-service quality and customer satisfaction in various contexts, including online travel (Ho & Lee, 2007; Law & Bai, 2008) [16, 19].

E – Service Quality and Behavioral Intentions

The impact of e-service quality on behavioral intentions has been explored in numerous studies. High e-service quality leads to increased customer satisfaction, which in turn fosters positive behavioral intentions such as repeat usage and positive word-of-mouth (Ribbink *et al.*, 2004; Chen & Tsai, 2007) [9, 15]. In the context of Indian travel websites, this relationship remains underexplored, necessitating further investigation.

Research Gaps and Objectives

Despite the significant body of literature, there is a lack of empirical studies focusing specifically on the Indian market. This study aims to bridge this gap by examining the relationship between e-service quality, customer satisfaction, and behavioral intentions among Indian customers using travel websites. The specific objectives are:

1. To assess the dimensions of e-service quality that significantly impact customer satisfaction.
2. To evaluate the influence of customer satisfaction on behavioral intentions.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative research design using an online survey to collect data. This approach is chosen to facilitate the collection of a large amount of data from a diverse population within a relatively short time frame.

Sampling Methods

The target population includes Indian customers who have used travel websites in the past six months. A convenience sampling technique was employed, and the sample size was set at 500 respondents to ensure statistical robustness.

Data Collection Procedures

Data was collected through an online questionnaire distributed via email and social media platforms. The questionnaire included items measuring e-service quality, customer satisfaction, and behavioral intentions, using a 5-

point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic profile of respondents. Inferential statistics, including correlation and regression analyses, were employed to test the hypothesized relationships.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The sample consisted of 500 respondents, with a fairly even distribution between genders (52% male, 48% female). The majority of respondents were aged between 25 and 34 years (45%), followed by those aged 35-44 years (30%). Most respondents had completed undergraduate education (60%) and had an annual income ranging from INR 5-10 lakhs (40%).

Inferential Statistics

Hypothesis 1: E-service quality dimensions positively influence customer satisfaction.

- Website design ($\beta = 0.45, p < 0.01$)
- Reliability ($\beta = 0.40, p < 0.01$)
- Responsiveness ($\beta = 0.35, p < 0.01$)
- Security ($\beta = 0.38, p < 0.01$)

Hypothesis 2: Customer satisfaction positively influences behavioral intentions.

- Repeat purchases ($\beta = 0.55, p < 0.01$)
- Word-of-mouth recommendations ($\beta = 0.50, p < 0.01$)

Discussion

Interpretation of Findings

The findings confirm that all dimensions of e-service quality significantly influence customer satisfaction. Website design emerged as the most influential factor, highlighting the importance of a user-friendly and aesthetically pleasing website. Reliability and security were also crucial, indicating that customers value dependable and secure online services. Responsiveness, although slightly less influential, remains important in addressing customer queries and concerns promptly.

Customer satisfaction was found to be a strong predictor of behavioral intentions. Satisfied customers are more likely to engage in repeat purchases and recommend the website to others, consistent with previous studies (Anderson & Srinivasan, 2003; Ribbink *et al.*, 2004) [9, 13].

Practical Implications

For online travel agencies (OTAs), focusing on enhancing website design, reliability, responsiveness, and security can significantly boost customer satisfaction. These improvements can lead to higher customer retention rates and positive word-of-mouth, which are vital for business growth. Here are some practical implications for OTAs.

Website Design Enhancement

User-Friendly Interface: Investing in intuitive and visually appealing website designs can make navigation easier for users, improving their overall experience. A well-designed website should have a clean layout, clear call-to-action buttons, and easy access to important information.

Mobile Optimization: With the increasing use of mobile devices for travel bookings, ensuring that the website is mobile-friendly is crucial. Responsive design ensures that the website adapts to various screen sizes, providing a seamless experience across devices.

Improving Reliability

- **Accurate Information:** Providing accurate and up-to-date information about travel packages, prices, and availability is essential. Inaccuracies can lead to customer dissatisfaction and a loss of trust.
- **Consistent Performance:** Ensuring that the website operates smoothly without crashes or slow load times can enhance reliability. Regular maintenance and updates can prevent technical issues that might disrupt user experience.

Enhancing Responsiveness

- **Quick Response Time:** Implementing live chat support and ensuring quick responses to customer inquiries can significantly enhance the customer experience. Providing 24/7 customer service can address issues promptly and improve customer satisfaction.
- **Personalized Assistance:** Utilizing AI and chatbots to offer personalized recommendations and assistance can make the service more responsive to individual customer needs.

Strengthening Security

- **Secure Transactions:** Implementing robust security measures such as SSL certificates and secure payment gateways can protect customer data and build trust. Highlighting these security features on the website can reassure customers about the safety of their transactions.
- **Privacy Protection:** Ensuring compliance with data protection regulations and clearly communicating privacy policies can enhance customer confidence. Regular audits and updates to security protocols can prevent data breaches and protect customer information.

Building Customer Trust and Loyalty

- **Transparency and Honesty:** Being transparent about terms and conditions, fees, and policies can build trust with customers. Clear and honest communication can prevent misunderstandings and enhance the overall customer relationship.
- **Loyalty Programs:** Implementing loyalty programs that reward repeat customers can encourage customer retention. Offering exclusive discounts, early access to deals, and personalized offers can incentivize customers to return.
- **Leveraging Customer Feedback**
 - **Continuous Improvement:** Actively seeking and acting on customer feedback can help OTAs identify areas for improvement. Regularly updating the website and services

based on user feedback can lead to a better customer experience.

- **Positive Reviews and Testimonials:** Encouraging satisfied customers to leave positive reviews and testimonials can enhance the OTA's reputation and attract new customers. Displaying these reviews on the website can provide social proof and build trust with potential customers.

By implementing these practical strategies, online travel agencies can enhance their e-service quality, leading to higher levels of customer satisfaction and loyalty. This, in turn, can drive business growth through increased customer retention, positive word-of-mouth, and a stronger competitive position in the market.

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence on the relationship between e-service quality, customer satisfaction, and behavioral intentions in the context of Indian travel websites. It validates the applicability of established theoretical frameworks in the Indian market.

Limitations and Future Research

The use of convenience sampling may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research should consider using random sampling techniques and larger sample sizes to enhance representativeness. Additionally, qualitative studies could provide deeper insights into customer perceptions and experiences.

Conclusion

This study underscores the importance of e-service quality in shaping customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions among Indian users of travel websites. The findings highlight that website design, reliability, responsiveness, and security are key dimensions influencing customer satisfaction. Moreover, satisfied customers exhibit stronger behavioral intentions, such as repeat purchases and positive word-of-mouth. These insights offer valuable guidance for online travel agencies aiming to enhance their service quality and customer loyalty.

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