

## Chapter 2

# Traveler Decision Making in Online vs. Offline Buying Behavior: A Contrasting Perspective

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The growing preference of consumers to search for information and make web purchases in travel and tourism context is forcing a number of enterprises to go online. Looking at the complexity that already lies in offline decision making, attracting consumers online, understanding their psychology, and making them purchase is becoming a stringent job for the marketers. Though significant research work has been done in terms of adoption of website services for travel websites, a comparative understanding of the offline and online purchase decision-making process of the consumer and how that can be leveraged in making the consumer loyal through continuous usage of the website services still needs an in-depth understanding. In this chapter, the authors have tried to differentiate between online and offline behavior and proposed a model based on intention adoption and continuance framework which will surely provide insights to both the academicians and marketers/website developers in terms of improving the online buying behavior of consumers in travel and tourism context.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Understanding consumer behaviour has been a key area of concern for academicians for several decades, however decoding the nuances of consumer buying have over time become more and more complex especially with the growing emergence of online travel related services (Olsen & Connolly 2000). Although the steps in consumer decision making that persuades consumers in the offline world are applicable in the online platform also, still there are differences which needs to be highlighted in a specific manner. The change in the context and medium makes a huge psychological impact on the consumer behaviour making it more challenging for the marketer to understand the online consumer decision making process (Rayman-Bacchus & Molina, 2001). On one hand a consumer may walk into a store look at every option and may decide to buy online a concept called as show-rooming or vice versa a concept known as web-rooming, where a customer checks the products or services online but decides to make the purchase offline making it more complex for the marketers to formulate an integrated marketing mix strategy (Holm, 2006). However understanding this contrasting behaviour is critical for marketers as many companies are accessible to consumers through both offline and online mediums (Chatterjee, 2001).

Consumer purchase decision making procedures are made out of a few factors that impact buyer decision for specific items and services. Travellers may pick lodging, depending on its area, brand name, different offices, service quality, price, loyalty program, and quality evaluations by past visitors. Value delivery is an essential concept in retaining clients be it online or offline. Past research has discovered that value is directly connected with behavioural expectations in all kind of industries and travel & tourism is not an exception to it. In this way, it is vital for hoteliers to examine the key predecessors affecting the procurement goals in order to positively impact clients from the pre-buying stage itself. Arranging a trip includes a worldly, dynamic, progressive, and multistage unexpected choice process (Starkov, 2001). Information needs and information seeking strategies can be accepted to fluctuate for various stages in the decision making process (Li et al., 2013; Litvin et al., 2008). Likewise, travel arranging includes a huge number of factors for which decision choices should be made.

Advances in data innovation and the presentation of new techniques for correspondence have prompted progressively critical changes in consumer behaviour. These progressions have created a stir in organizations marketing strategies and business administration, particularly in the travel business. The Internet enables potential visitors to accumulate data about lodging pleasantries and facilities in a utilitarian nature since they can think about costs without reaching a hotels sales

representative or travel operator and set up their travel agendas while seating in front of a screen. As a result of high penetration of web-based business, effectively receiving a more successful internet business channel has turned into a huge issue for travel organizations.

Online business in hospitality and the travel industry has advanced in later a long time from the fundamental offers of less-complex items, for example, carrier tickets, lodging and auto rentals, to grasp more complex items including excursion bundles and travels. While the business condition for the travel business proceeds to be in motion, the quick multiplication of new items and services makes it always a troublesome for firms to get it what clients want and will pay for. Making things much additionally difficult, potential market contributions in the travel business have become progressively perplexing due in extensive measure to propels in data innovation that enable clients to look at and deliberately evaluate the relative expenses and advantages of various choices. Though recently travel enterprises have reacted to the open doors offered by online business by creating sites to take full preferred standpoint of the viable and inventive business employments of the internet but still it is in infancy stage with quite a bit of learning curve to attain competitive advantage in this continuously evolving business opportunities offered by information technology.

The internet and social media constantly “attacks” shoppers with a plethora of information regarding numerous developments in product and service offerings. There is presence of online word of mouth from fellow consumers whose opinions and suggestions through resources like online reviews and comments have gained much importance over time. Tweets, blogs/vlogs, comments, reviews etc. have become key factors of consideration for consumers before purchase. Over the years services offered by travel industry is moving towards self-service technologies especially, with the growth in third party websites and apps like TripAdvisor and Trivago, where travellers can accumulate all the information from company as well as fellow travellers which may aid in their travelling decisions (Filieri & McLeay, 2014). The amount of information also poses challenges for managers and consumers both. On one hand managers are constantly trying to influence travellers by finding better ways to manage the amount of information, whereas on the other hand, consumers are having trust and credibility issues related to message and message sources. Today online buying decisions involve thinking about concerns like privacy and security also (Park & Lee, 2009). Thus understanding the behaviour of tourists in itself has become a complicated task for the travel managers.

A close up assessment of literature in this area uncovers that the majority of the consumer behaviour theory has been applied to the study of online consumer behaviour in hospitality and tourism context but still there are significant differences between off line and online consumer behaviour especially when it comes to travel

bookings that require a distinguishing conceptualization (Song & Zahedi, 2001; Vijayasarathy, 2001). Thus studying online consumer behavior and factors that affect the continuous usage of online services especially in travel context is need of the hour for marketers. Accordingly this study has been structured to 1) provide a systematic and exhaustive review of consumer behaviour in the context of online vs. offline based on the basic consumer decision making process and 2) also to propose a conceptual model for understanding the underlying driving components of continuous online usage behaviour of the consumer in travel and tourism context. The following section highlights the consumer decision making process in online environment followed by the proposed model describing the antecedents affecting the continuous online service usage behaviour of the customers in travel and tourism context.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Consumer Decision Making Process in Online Environment**

It is not very easy to define tourism marketplace because it contains a combination of heterogeneous business services like transportation, accommodation restaurant and many more (Carlsen & Liburd, 2008). This is aggravated by the nonattendance of an important scientific classification in literature that can outline key qualities between travel items. Travel decision making in tourism has always remained a vastly researched area for a very long time period (Jeng & Fesenmaier, 2002; Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005) and with the advent of internet it has become much more intensified. Despite the fact that electronic commerce (web-based business) is in its outset, buying through the web is a standout amongst the most quickly developing types of shopping (Levy et al., 2012).

The internet is a substitute dissemination channel that can be perfect with existing channels (Rayman-Bacchus & Molina, 2001). The utilization of websites in hospitality associations goes past just elevating and pitching items to shoppers. The adoption of websites too gives the hospitality firms vital business openings and focused edges. Utilizing the internet as a reservation technique can profit the hospitality firms and likewise the clients by lessening costs and giving real life information to both parties. However online travel portals have not been that effective as expected for creating loyal customers (Hassan, 2013). Hence there is a need to understand consumer behaviour online and how it differs from the off-line mode to formulate strategies to increase customer loyalty in terms of the website usage and purchase intentions from the website in travel and tourism context. In the following

section the authors have explained the online decision making behaviour based on the consumer decision making process proposed by Kotler & Keller (2006), of the consumers and how it differs from the offline mode.

## **Need Recognition Stage**

In the traditional sense need recognition occurs when a customer faces a gap in his/her actual state and desired state. Marketing plays a crucial role in bridging this gap as the consumer uses information provided by organizations through their marketing campaigns to move to a desired state. With the digitization of marketing practices the way consumer is presented with information and the way consumer uses the information to identify his/her need have changed over the years. Today consumers face a challenge in evaluating online information (Akhtar et al., 2019). (For example, we all receive push notification through emails or text messages for a holiday package with a list of suggested places like hotels and offers which can motivate the recipient to start the process of making a travel plan.

The delivery of promotional content, news, product or service related information to potential consumers has become very convenient for marketers. Now, the situation is that consumers are perplexed by too much information. Marketers need to find ways to provide important and crucial information to very specific target audience in order to take advantage of the digital environment. Using several data analytics tools marketers should try to predict the behaviour in this stage of decision making and accordingly proceed with the information for consumers. This is the stage where consumption of eWOM has not happened yet, so it is of vital importance to understand what happens before eWOM consumption, that is, what factors determine the extent to which consumers use eWOM (O'Rielly et al., 2018).

## **Information Search Stage**

Traditionally in consumer behaviour when information search was discussed due importance was given to sources of information, which were categorised as internal and external. However the lines are not that simple when online information search is discussed. With the advent of Web 2.0, the reach and popularity of online sources of information search has rapidly increased over the past years. Traditional word of mouth (WOM) has been replaced by electronic word of mouth (eWOM) as resources like online reviews, tweets and social media posts generated by consumers as well as companies have gained prominence. Since information search process is one of the early stages where marketers can stimulate consumers decision making process, it becomes essential for academicians and practitioners to understand how hospitality consumers attain information through online and off-line information sources (Gursoy 2019).

Consumer driven messages are more effective in marketing than company driven messages. One such popular consumer generated message is online review, defined as “peer-generated product evaluations posted on company or third-party website” (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010). Online reviews have become one of the most popular sources for consumers to get product and service related information. Customers prefer online reviews, because these reviews are largely conveyed through feedback platforms and websites which are independent from official or corporate content (Forman et al., 2008).

Consumer generated platforms like personal social media pages or company fan pages are very popular among buyers as they are highly trusted. Third party websites are also a popular source of information for many consumers. Although company websites and company sponsored web pages have a lot of relevant product and service information, consumers still give priority to consumer generated information. Website administrators have devised several ways of providing cues to website visitors about the authenticity of information on their websites, which is discussed in the next section.

With the plethora of information available consumers are perplexed with the genuineness of the information that they use for purchase decisions, hence a huge challenge for marketers is now to assure consumers about the trustworthiness of the information. Ratings have also evolved over time; today consumers can view not only ratings for products and services but also ratings for reviews as well. Aggregate ratings, star ratings and numeric ratings are just a few forms of ratings which are available to potential buyers which aid to their purchase decisions. Moreover credibility cues are also assigned to the person who is posting the review, in order to provide potential buyers with information about authenticity of the reviewers. So, a traveller today would take all the above mentioned information cues to take a purchase decision.

## **Evaluation of Alternatives**

Traditional offline shopping experiences have limitations, such as the amount of available product alternatives and the amount of information about varied products to compare alternatives. While online shopping has limitations, such as feel, or limited trial of products. Devices like smart phones enable consumers to experience best features of offline and online shopping environments at the same time.

In the travel and tourism context consumers are presented with vivid information about the travel arrangements which a company can make available to the consumer. Customers have become intelligent users and search online for the unbiased, honest information that will guide them while taking decisions (Baka, 2016). Consumer evaluate alternative after going through images of destinations, or hotels, or

testimonials of previous travellers. The decision to simply choose one option over the other has become very complicated in the digital age. For a marketing organization to increase the likelihood that their services for example travel products and brand, become a part of the consideration set for many consumers, they need to understand specific consumer benefits and what features are most significant to their decision-making process. The internet has made it easier for customers to do in-depth research compare and contrast, and they do not want to make a purchase without proper information.

## **Purchase Stage**

During purchase, protection/security, payment systems, exchange capacities and speed of activity may influence satisfaction of the customers. Contrasted with the conventional economy, online customers are more definitely mindful of the requirement for protection/security (Culnan & Armstrong, 1999; Friedman et al., 2000; Grewal et al., 1998). Deficient foundation, absence of trust, and protection and security concerns frequently lead to lost deals (Grabner-Kraeuter, 2002; Yianakos, 2002). In addition, online customers are also known for low resistance (Chen & Chang, 2003). A webpage designer need to think not only about its appearance and usefulness, but also it's as stacking time (Weinberg & Pogrebisky, 2000). The importance of understanding the purchase of tourist products creates the need for thorough research on this topic (Pereira, 2016). Most tourism related decisions are of high involvement that require extensive decision-making because of the relatively high risk and monetary and non-monetary costs involved in these decisions (Bianchi 2016). A frequently referred to explanation behind internet shopping is comfort (Chen & Chang, 2003). Along these lines, to raise the client's level of satisfaction web designers has to enhance the website's exchange ability, plan a safe and advantageous payment mechanism instrument, and guarantee finishing of all web-based shopping activities and spare the client's task time.

## **Post-Purchase Assessment**

Post-purchase assessment in an online setting is for the most part affected by two factors to be specific: the effectiveness of logistics/conveyance and client service quality/after sales service. The most well-known kinds of grumblings about Internet exchanges incorporate refund and exchange policies, return and exchange arrangements, faulty items, poor client service, out of stock items and deferral in conveyance (Brooker 2000; Chen & Chang, 2003; Stone 2000; Vogelstein & Holstein 1999). Shoppers need assistance with item choice (for example, estimate, shading, textures), gift services, contact data for sales agents, a FAQ area for quick

answers, data about the security of their exchanges, organization return, instalment and credit approaches. Data about delivery and dealing with costs, certifications, and articulations about item quality will enhance the store image in the eyes of customers. Buyers need cautious, consistent, helpful and auspicious correspondence crosswise over geographic barriers (Lohse & Spiller, 1998). In the online business order, not only is the utilization of merchandise isolated from generation, in this way making it important for products to be conveyed to purchasers before utilization, but there is also a deferral in the conveyance of products on account of the time hole between the request and physical transportation of the products to the shopper doorstep who may dwell far from the retailer.

## **FRAMEWORK FOR PROPOSED MODEL**

Earlier research studies concentrated more on how consumers adopt and use technology to make purchase online. But over the time both the academicians and marketers have realized that in this current digital economy competitors are a click away, and intention and adoption of technology by the consumers will just ensure initial success. For long term sustenance and growth, they will require loyal customers and which will happen once the customers keeps on using the online services on a frequent basis. Hence research in customer continuance behaviour becomes crucial especially in online context. While most of the information technology models focussed on consumer behaviour in the form of intention to use and adoption like TAM by Davis (1989), TPB by Ajzen (1991), Fishbein's Attitudinal Model by Lilien et al (1995) very few addressed the issue of post purchase behaviour or technology continuance behaviour like, Expectance-Confirmation model by Oliver (1980) and IS continuance model by Bhattacharjee (2001). Existing studies on the determinants of online consumer behaviour can be separated into five major domain areas, including individual /consumer characteristics (Gefen, 2002; Kim & Lim, 2001) environmental influences (Khalifa & Limayen, 2003; Soh & Markus, 2002), product/service characteristics (Bobbitt & Dabholkar, 2001; Jarvenpaa & Todd, 1996), medium characteristics (Chau et al., 2000) and online merchant and intermediary characteristics (Lohse & Spiller, 1998). In this chapter the authors have adopted the integrative model of online consumer behaviour proposed by Cheung et al (2005) to explain the factors affecting the consumer online purchase intention, adoption (purchase) and continuance (repurchase) in the context of online travel bookings. This proposed framework will provide effective insights to both marketers as well as academicians in terms of continuous usage behaviour in online tourism and hospitality context.



## **Propositions Developed**

### **Flow**

“Flow” is the term used to describe the “holistic sensation that people feel when they act with total involvement” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). Across divergent disciplines, academicians have found the concept of an optimal state of experience notionally constructive and have used it to study a miscellaneous set of deeds from mountaineering and ocean cruising to contemplation and usual work process (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1988). In information literature, the concept of flow has derived considerable attention as it is related to “user satisfaction” (Baroudi & Orlikowski, 1988). Though client satisfaction has been considered the most suitable construct for estimating the amplex of most customary data frameworks, flow appears to be a progressively fitting build for depicting and estimating the sort of interest and creativity improving conduct which is the objective of numerous information systems (Elam & Mead, 1990). Extending the applicability of flow in online environment, Hoffman & Novak (1996) defined flow as the state that happens during network navigation which is 1) portrayed by a consistent grouping of reactions encouraged by machine intuitiveness, (2) characteristically pleasant, (3) joined by lost reluctance, and (4) self-fortifying. Flow is a multidimensional construct that speaks to the client’s view of the medium as lively and exploratory (Bridges & Florsheim 2008; Hoffman & Novak, 2009; Koufaris, 2002). The Flow theory proposes that involvement in a lively, exploratory experience is self-spurring since it is pleasurable and empowers reiteration (Miller, 1973). People who interact all the more lively with a website will see the interaction more positively than the individuals who communicate less lively, and thusly they might be progressively spurred to take part in connections later on (Webster et al., 1993). Thus it is quite likely that websites/online services which depict high flow will be visited or used more regularly with purchase intentions (Berthon et al., 1996; Siekpe 2005). Considering the importance of flow in both online and offline environment the authors have used flow as a dependent variable construct in our proposed framework signifying those online travel and tourism websites/services which exhibit flow experience to the users will have greater chance of succeeding in terms of sustenance and growth through purchase intentions of loyal customers.

Literature shows that a compelling flow experience is positively associated with attitude toward website and firm (Mathwick & Rigdon, 2004). Cyr et al (2005) showed that customers who perceived flow during online shopping are likely to consider revisits to the website or purchasing from the website in the future. Hoffman and Novak (1996) posited that while surfing the internet, once an individual has a series of seamless interaction with the machine, enjoyment, loss of self-awareness and a heightened sense of the self will ensue, the more likely flow experience is to

ensue. Wu and Chang (2005) showed that flow is positively related to transaction intentions and in the context of travel communities defined flow as a temporarily unaware experience, where members of online travel communities engage in the travel web sites process with enjoyment and time distortion. People who experience flow on a travel related website is more likely to return to the website and may show purchase intentions. So we coherently argue that flow may positively affect purchase intention.

**Proposition One:** Online travel and tourism websites/services exhibiting flow experience to the customers/users has a greater chance of purchase intentions by the customers/users.

### Information Quality

Information quality has been studied in the literature through several dimensions like relevance, accuracy, timeliness, comprehensiveness etc. Information quality in the context of e-WOM has been conceptualised differently in various studies; for instance, Cheung et al (2005) measured online review quality in terms of review completeness, timeliness, accuracy, and relevance, whereas Park and Gretzel (2007) considered credibility, objectivity, clarity, and logic. These scholars have primarily drawn from information systems research to select the information quality dimensions (Bailey & Pearson, 1983); however, consumers may assess the quality of information contained in websites differently than the employees of an organisation would assess the quality of the information contained in information management systems.

Informational influences are based on the receiver's judgement of the relevant content of a message and include elements such as information quality dimensions, whereas normative cues indicate the social pressure on individuals to conform to the opinions and expectations of others and include elements such as crowd opinions.

**Proposition Two:** Information quality positively affects flow in an online travel & tourism website/services.

### Source Quality

Consumers today can access a vast majority of product or service related information in much smaller time span. Further, consumers have options of selecting the most credible information by going through multiple cues like ratings, votes and likes. Potential consumers can find marketer as well as consumer generated recommendations on several online websites, research has shown that consumer associate more trust and credibility to consumer generated WOM.

Extant researches reveal that credibility of the message source has the ability to affect and alter readers attitude, and that information provided by a person more credible produces higher believability and acceptance of the message (Cheung et al., 2005). Further, credibility of the source enhances several perceptions of consumers like usefulness of online WOM (Cheng & Ho, 2015), purchase intentions (Sparks & Browning, 2011), and message credibility (Wu & Wang, 2011). Source of a message can be attributed to a website or an expert who has provided the information. Consumers may prefer the information on a website as more credible and use the information in purchase decisions. Travel related websites have gained popularity over the years like Trivago and TripAdvisor. The online reviews and quality of reviewers generates credibility perceptions about the website. Literature has shown that consumer generated websites are trusted more as compared to company generated websites.

Marketers and website developers have to focus on increasing trustworthiness of their websites. Consumers should feel that the website and the informative content on the website meet high standards of credibility.

**Proposition Three:** Source Quality positively affects flow in an online travel and tourism website/services.

## Internet Experience

Past research studies have identified online experience as a major determinant of online consumer buying behaviour (Beldona et al., 2003; Bellman et al., 1999; Ratchford et al., 2001). Results showed greater a user/consumer spends time online combined with the frequency of internet usage greater are the chances of that user to buy online (Beldona et al., 2003; Bellman et al., 1999; Weber & Roehl, 1999). Internet experience is related to the ability to process information effectively, which in turn is affected by several factors like education, intelligence, product experience, relevant knowledge, and message difficulty (MacInnis & Jaworski, 1989). Past studies have showed, that users with prior internet experience feels more comfortable to interact with technologically advanced websites with novel features as they can posit more control on those websites which come from the experience and time they have spent on the internet (Alwitt & Hamer, 2000; Hoffman & Novak, 1996). Hammond et al (1998), indicated that previous internet experience is an imperative moderator of users' attitudes towards the Web, although its influence is not linear. The heaviest users of web are enthusiasts for the medium who uses the medium for fun and entertainment mainly and not just for information search unlike the light users. As evident from the literature on flow concept that the more control a user has in operating a website the more he feels to be in flow state (Ghani, 1995) and

in the above case it is natural with more internet experience. Hence based on the above discussion the authors have proposed that more the internet experience one has the more he will experience flow in a website in online travel context

**Proposition Four:** The higher the internet experience one has the higher he will experience flow in an online travel & tourism website/services.

## Convenience

One of the crucial benefits provided by the online marketers to the online consumer consumers is to shop while seating at the convenience of their home irrespective of the physical/regional barriers separating the consumer from the shop (Alba et al., 1997; Hofacker, 2001). Since consumer rarely visits the physical store prior to purchase (Newman & Staelin 1972), interactive shopping helps him/her to reduce the costs of pre-purchase product information while increasing the information search benefits by providing a wide array of product varieties at a small incremental cost (Bakos, 1991). These benefits occur particularly at a time when the consumer is under time pressure (Beatty & Smith 1987) making the convenience of interactive shopping more advantageous to the consumers. The convenience in online shopping increases search efficiency with the ability to shop at home. Convenience includes both when the consumer wants to shop and where he wants to shop. Consumers who perceive online shopping to be convenient are more likely to consider online platform as both useful and ease to use (Childers et al., 2001). Reductions in the frustration related to physical shopping makes the convenience of online shopping more enjoyable (Childers et al., 2001) leading to the experience of the state of flow. Hence based on the above discussion the authors have proposed that more the convenience one feels in using online services the higher he will experience state of flow.

**Proposition Five:** The more convenience one feels in using online travel and tourism website/services the higher he will experience state of flow.

## Review Quality

Online reviews in travel context mainly includes review of core product that happens to be hotel room in majority of cases and the quality of service provided by the hoteliers to the consumers are the ancillary product. Product reviews do affect the consumer decision making a lot now-day (Hu et al., 2008). Online product reviews are considered effective as they are viewed as non-biased source of information by most of the consumers (Park & Gretzel, 2007). Provided the uncertainty that exists in the online environment in terms of product quality, it makes the creditability of

the online product reviews more crucial. In tourism and hospitality context earlier studies have investigated the role of online reviews in the decision making process for general trips (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010), hotels (Sparks & Browning, 2011), and restaurants (Racherla & Friske, 2012), as well as in estimating the market shares of travel products, such as hotels (Duverger, 2013; Ogut & Tas, 2012) and restaurants (Zhang et al., 2010). Effective product review has always found to be effective in creation of travel awareness, travel consideration and ultimately making online purchase (Chevalier & Mayzlin 2006; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009; Ye et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2010). Valuable data in a product review may help the clients to assess the characteristics of the service in order to fabricate trust in the source (Gupta & Harris, 2010). Probability to settle on better choices and experience satisfaction with the online travel platforms, information searchers experience various bits of helpful data that influence their choices. This infers that online travel sites with progressively helpful product reviews offer more prominent potential incentive to clients and add to building trust in their purchasing decisions (Liu & Park, 2015). Literature says that more control one feels through appropriate feedback on a product using an online service the more he feels to be in a state of flow as one of the antecedents to flow happens to be information about the product available in the website (Skadberg & Kimmel, 2004). Hence based on this the authors have proposed that higher the quality of product review available in an online website in travel and tourism context higher the state of flow one will experience in using that website.

**Proposition Six:** Higher the quality of product review available in online travel and tourism website/services higher the state of flow one will experience in using that website/services.

## Brand Image

Keller (1993) defined brand image as perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory. The link to a brand will be stronger when that particular link is based on consumer's experiences/exposures to communications depending upon the strength of the brand association (Aaker, 1991). Brand image not only acts as a cue for evaluating product and service by the consumer before purchasing (Zeithmal, 1998) it also affects consumers subjective perceptions and consecutive behaviours (Ryu et al., 2008). Brand image helps to distinguish a particular product from similar other products (Anwar et al., 2011) as well as creating a positive attitude towards the brand and its attributes. Past research studies have explored the impact of brand image on consumer behaviour in the service sector (Aghekyan-Simonian et al., 2012; Ryu et al., 2008). Due to the intangible elements of the tourism and hospitality industry, some tangible cues, e.g., hotel

brand name and onsite amenities are important in influencing customers' behaviour. To build a strong brand, every travel enterprise should develop its own distinctive image specially in online context as consumers are more likely to purchase from established brand names rather than unknown ones because a good brand image not only improves a consumer's trust but it also reduces the risk of purchase online (Aghekyan-Simonian et al., 2012; Chen, 2010; Chiang & Jang, 2007). As already discussed in flow literature the greater the control and enjoyment one feels in using an online website /services the greater he will be in the state of flow which is quite usual in the above case. Through proficient brand image a user feels more confident in using an online service thus leading to the state of flow experience. Hence based on the above discussion the authors have proposed that the greater brand image of a travel and tourism enterprise in online website/service context the greater will be the user's state of flow experience.

**Proposition Seven:** The greater the brand image of a travel and tourism enterprise in online website/service context the greater will be the user's state of flow experience in that online website/service.

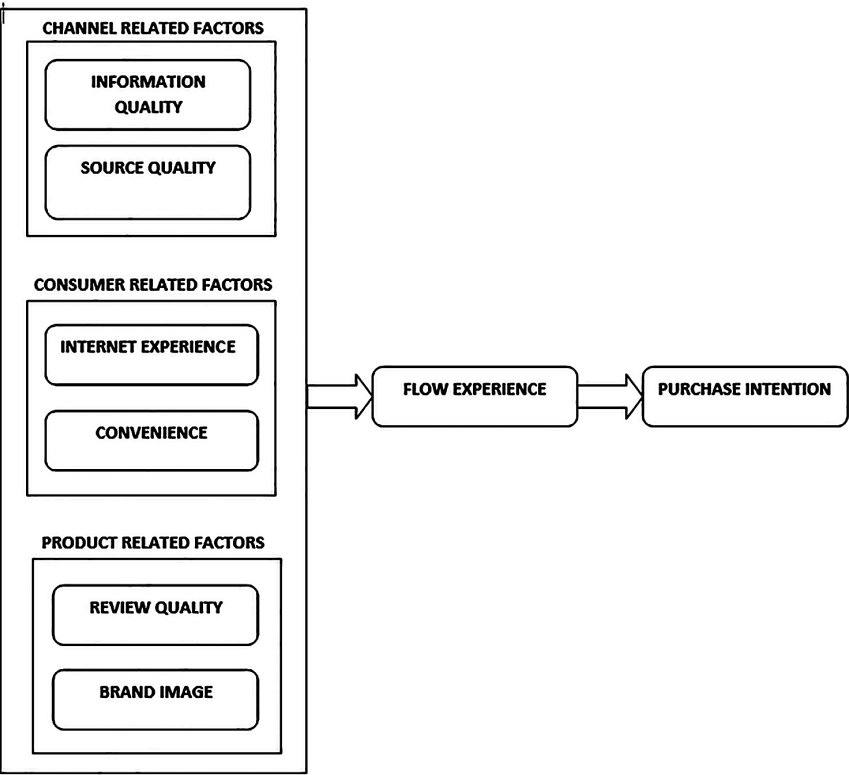
In the figure below we present the proposed model based on constructs characterized.

## **MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Marketers dealing with travellers should understand the changing need of travellers in the digital age. An understanding of the consumer decision making process in the online environment reveals the change in the traveller behaviour. Marketers would have to reach the consumer as and when they take various decisions regarding purchase of travel products. With focus on channel related, product related, and consumer related factors marketer may gain positive outcomes in the hospitality sector. There is a possibility of intervening and affecting consumer purchase decision in each and every stage of the decision making tool and with adoption of digital marketing techniques it has become easier as well as difficult for marketers to influence travellers. Today travellers are confident as well as scared of using online travel services for various reasons like elimination of middlemen, time convenience, ease to find information etc (on the positive side) while trust, skill set, privacy etc (on the negative side). Marketers not only needs to understand the online consumer decision making process of consumers that happens to be different from offline context but also the factors that could influence the continuous online services usage behaviour of the consumers. In the current time a website should be popular

*Figure 1. Proposed Model*

*Source: Author*



amongst travellers to influence their decisions and marketers and web developers should constantly strive to achieve this goal of becoming more credible and popular for potential travellers. This chapter totally supports the above argument by helping the marketers to understand not only the online decision making process of the consumers but also the factors that could make them loyal in using online services in travel and tourism context.

## **FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

Coming to the future research avenues, firstly researchers may use empirical investigation to statistically test the significance of the proposed hypotheses in the chapter. Secondly, research framework to understand other antecedents and consequences of flow should be conducted to better assess the online consumer

behaviour. Lastly, antecedents like information quality and its sub dimensions like accuracy; relevance etc. could be studied in depth to enhance the understanding towards traveller's behaviour on travel communities and websites.

## **CONCLUSION**

In this chapter the authors have tried to conduct a thorough analysis of online consumer behaviour and how it differs from offline mode in travel and tourism context. A research framework was proposed to highlight the existing gaps in the online literature in terms of consumer buying behaviour from travel portals. As research towards purchase/repurchase and continuous usage is fragmented in online context (considering the complexity of the process) this chapter additionally provides fruitful insights by proposing a conceptual model in respect to the continuance usage behaviour of the consumers apart from the exhaustive discussion about online consumer behaviour that justifies the main objective of this study. The antecedents proposed in the conceptual model are categorized into channel related, consumer related and product related factors which lead to in creating optimum flow experience in the online environment for the travel & tourism enterprise, and which in turn instigates the purchase intentions of the consumers. The authors have proposed flow as one of the crucial constructs for influencing the continuous usage/purchase intention behaviour of the consumers which is the most crucial input in terms of making an online travel portal effective in terms of developing loyal customers. This chapter will provide insights to both academicians as well as marketers/website developers in formulating strategies based on the framework proposed for understanding the online consumer behaviour and identifying the critical factors for creating a pleasant online environment in travel context.

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## KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

**Consumer Behavior:** Consumer behavior is the study of individuals, groups, or organizations and all the actions associated with buying, use and disposal of goods and services, including the consumer's emotional, mental, and behavioral responses that revolve around these activities.

**Consumer-Generated Content:** Consumer-generated content (CGC), alternatively known as user-created content (UCC), is any form of content, such as images, videos, text and audio, that have been posted by users on the internet.

**Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM):** Any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the internet.

**Hospitality Sector:** The hospitality industry is a broad category of fields within the service industry that includes lodging, food and drink service, event planning, theme parks, transportation, cruise line, traveling, and additional fields within the tourism industry.

**Online Shopping:** This is a form of electronic commerce which allows consumers to directly buy goods or services from a vendor over the internet from the seller's website or a third party website using a web browser.

**Social Media:** Websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking.

**Target Audience:** A particular group or intended audience at whom a product or a service such as holiday package is aimed through company-related communication.

**Tourism:** Tourism is a complex set of industries including accommodation, recreation and entertainment, food and beverage services, and transportation services for business, leisure, or other purposes.

**Web 2.0:** The second stage of improvement of the internet, characterized mainly by the change from static web pages to dynamic or user-generated content and the growth of social media.