Influence of Online Reviews on Hotel Reservation Intentions: Insights from Bangladeshi Travellers

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ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this research is to undertake an empirical investigation of the overall influence of online reviews on hotel booking intentions within the context of Bangladesh. The study involved the execution of semi-structured interviews with a sample of 25 individuals with a recent history of frequent travel and hotel stays. Subsequently, a thematic analysis of the responses was conducted with the goal of elucidating the outcomes and ascertaining the influence of online reviews on individuals' predispositions towards booking a hotel for their accommodation facility. The findings of the study revealed that positive reviews wield the most substantial influence among the various dimensions of tourists' reviews. Notably, the idea of "trust" appeared within the identified indicators as a mediating variable in the association between reviews and the intention to book a hotel. Moreover, this empirical study also showed that unfavorable online reviews significantly influence individuals 'intents to reserve hotels, whereas positive reviews do not yield an equivalent impact. Considering these outcomes, the authors draw a series of management implications, including the need to use this information to promote stakeholder engagement and collaboration, to use these indicators for the management of hotels to adopt a more holistic approach to address the service gap in the hospitality industry, and to focus on resilient planning for sustainable smart tourism development.

Keywords: Consumer behaviour, Hotel booking intention, User-generated content, and e-WOM.

INTRODUCTION:

The internet has revolutionized the way individuals establish connections, engage in communication, and reach judgments within the modern global context. The exponential growth of digital platforms has significy-cantly transformed the manner in which individuals obtain information, assess alternatives, and express their views on a multitude of subjects, including their experiences with products and services (Bhat *et al*., 2023). The domain of online opinions, particularly in the context of hotel bookings, has generated significant interest and is acknowledged as a potent force in shaping consumer decision-making (Nazir *et al.,* 2023). This study explores the significant impact of internet reviews on molding perceptions and decision-making, specifically within the ever-evolving hotel Industry (Aznar *et al*., 2018). In light of the emergence of the internet and the extensive integration of digital platforms, the consumers have become increasingly dependent on the abundant online information at their disposal (Shohel Md & Tanvir, 2019). Within this particular context, in which hotel booking selection

process is becoming more influenced by the existing online reviews of the hotels, most of the time play a significant role in forming the image of the hotel in the pre-booking stage (Huang *et al*., 2017; Zhang *et al*., 2019). Empirical data has indicated that the online evaluations have a significant impact on shaping individuals' intent to make a purchase (Leung *et al*., 2013). In contemporary times, the hospitality and the tourist sectors have wholeheartedly embraced the era of digitalization, wherein a significant number of reservations are conducted through the online platforms (Buhalis, 2020). The primary objective of this study is to investigate the complex correlation between online reviews and hotel reservation intentions in Bangladesh. As the country embraces the digital era and witnesses a surge in online booking platforms, understanding how online reviews impact decision-making becomes the imperative (Hossain *et al*., 2020). This study seeks to explore the intricate dynamics and discern the specific features within evaluations that exert the most influence by the employing qualitative research methods, specifically semi-structured interviews (Adams, 2015).

This study aims to address the relationship between online reviews and hotel booking intents within the context of a rapidly changing digital ecosystem. By examining the dynamics that influence contemporary decision-making processes, this research seeks to fill the existing gap in knowledge. The significance of this study extends beyond academic inquiry, as it provides valuable practical insights for hotel management and enterprises operating within the tourism industry. This resource offers significant insights on the strategic utilization of the online reviews to improve brand positioning, foster customer engagement, and boost overall service quality. Furthermore, the knowledge gained from this study empowers consumers to make informed decisions & encourages hospitality establishments to continually adapt and improve.

Review of Literature

The influence of internet evaluations on consumer decision-making within the tourism sector is a widely recognized subject of considerable significance in reducing uncertainty and cultivating trust among those who engage in travel activities (Liu & Park, 2015). Moreover, the study conducted by the Biswas, (2023),

reveals that the hotel website credibility, perceived website interactivity, and perceived ease of the use significantly contribute to perceived usefulness, amplifying travellers' online hotel booking intention (OHB-I).The implementation of online review management is a key form of advertising tactic that plays a vital role in upholding a positive reputation among travellers (Nafi & Ahmed, 2018; Rasty *et al*., 2013; Sparks & Browning, 2011). This literature review can be divided into three main segments. The present literature review can be categorized into three primary sections. The initial section of the investigation explores the significance of online reviews as influential channels of information for tourists, facilitating the dissemination of word-of-mouth recommendations. The subsequent section explores the level of trust that travellers have in internet evaluations, which plays a substantial role in shaping their choices about bookings. Finally, the third section delves into the domain of online booking, the providing a comprehensive the understanding of the influence of online reviews on the hospitality industry.

Trust in E-servicescape

The notion of "servicescape," initially developed to describe the physical setting of service establishments, has evolved into "e-servicescape" in the digital age (Lee & Jeong, 2012). E-servicescape is a term used to describe a feature within the online environment that influences service delivery (Harris & Goode, 2010). It consists of three elements, namely visual appeal, layout and functioning, and financial security (Shukla & Mishra, 2023). The concept of visual appeal encompasses the overall atmosphere of the online environment, whereas layout and functionality specifically address the structure and operation of a website. The concept of financial security encompasses the subjective evaluations made by the consumers regarding the safety of websites and the processes involved in making payments, which are the considered vital for ensuring customer happiness (Lee & Jeong, 2012; Szymanski & Hise, 2000). Trust, a key outcome of the e-servicescape, influences cognitive, emotional, and physical responses, the shaping online behaviours (Hopkins *et al.*, 2009; Lai *et al*., 2014). According to the findings of Wakefield *et al.* (2004), it was observed that clients tend to place a higher level of trust in a website that possesses a superior e-servicescape. The

influence of the internet evaluations on the consumer decision-making within the tourism sector is a widely recognized subject of considerable significance in reducing uncertainty and cultivating trust among those who engage in travel activities (Liu & Park, 2015).

Online Review

Customers' reviews, ratings, and experiences with a product or service are now readily accessible due to the expansion of the Internet (Sen & Lerman, 2007). The phenomenon of word-of-mouth communication, which was traditionally limited to face-to-face conversations, has seen significant transformations in recent years, notably within the digital domain (López & Sicilia, 2014). The concept of "Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM)" refers to the sharing of thoughts regarding products, services, and companies within the digital realm. The rise of online reviews in virtual communities & social media has significantly elevated the impact of electronic word of mouth (Ladhari & Michaud, 2015; Nie *et al.,* 2020; Purnawirawan *et al.,* 2012; Shohel Md & Tanvir, 2019; Zhao *et al.*, 2015).

Research findings indicate that individuals who consult online reviews before making a purchase demonstrate a higher propensity to the proceed with the intended transaction (Zhang *et al.,* 2014). The utilization of social media platforms has gained significant prominence as a means for the consumers to express their opinions regarding various products and services (Godey *et al.,* 2016). The reviews play a crucial role in the marketing communication mix since they have a significant impact on consumer decision-making (Park *et al.*, 2007). In the specific context of Bangladesh, online reviews, particularly those related to hotels, significantly influence the decision-making process of travelers. Online platforms such as TripAdvisor and Booking.com provide users with a medium to articulate their viewpoints pertaining to diverse facets within the realm of hospitality and tourism (Li *et al.,* 2017). According to Xie *et al.* (2015), Bangladeshi clients heavily depend on internet reviews as a means of evaluating their hotel options (Shohel Md & Tanvir, 2019). These customers tend to prioritize recent evaluations, as they feel them to be more pertinent and useful in their decision-making process. Within the hospitality industry of Bangladesh, travellers exhibit a significant reliance on online evaluations as a dependable means of the obtaining information regarding the quality of hotels (Nafi & Ahmed, 2018).

Authenticity in Online Reviews

The surge in online reviews on mega platforms has significantly influenced travellers' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors towards locations, hotels, and restaurants (Boo & Busser, 2018). Antón *et al.* (2019) highlighted in their studies that, in recent years, there has been a growing trend among travellers to rely on comprehensive review platforms as a means of the obtaining travel-related information. This practice serves to mitigate uncertainties associated with tourist services. Moreover, the significance of authenticity is crucial for creating a positive image in the pre-booking stage of hotel selection. As buyers actively pursue real content on websites and authentic pursuable reviews on overall experience (Narangajavana Kaosiri *et al.*, 2019). The construct of authenticity, as described by Kim and Kim, (2020) encompasses various elements like originality, trustworthiness, reliability, and genuineness. The expectations of travellers are heavily influenced by their perception of authenticity, as portrayed in online evaluations (Nafi & Ahmed, 2017). They rely on these evaluations to provide accurate depictions of real experiences with services connected to their chosen destination (Rickly, 2022). Moreover, the perceived authenticity of online reviews significantly impacts travellers' trust in mega-review websites, directly influencing their decisions & contributing to the platforms' overall success (Liang *et al.*, 2018).

Credibility in Online Reviews

According to a study conducted by the Khwaja *et al.* (2020), it has been found that customers are inclined to have more confidence in information from trustworthy websites. The authenticity of an online review is the dependent on consumers' trust in the veracity of the information provided (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Consumers perceive honesty, reasonableness, and overall credibility as characteristics of a credible online review (Filieri, 2016). Consumers assess the validity (Chakraborty & Bhat, 2018) and accuracy (Zha *et al*., 2015) of online reviews to the determine their credibility. The credibility of a website serves as a reliable indicator of the accuracy of its information, with people generally relying on information from trust-worthy sources (Khwaja *et al.*, 2020).

Online Booking Intention

Online reviews, consist of both positive and negative feedback from consumers who have had first-hand experience with a product or service, are a widely prevalent manifestation of electronic word of mouth (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Online reviews, which are generated by consumers and consist of evaluations, have a substantial influence on the decision-making process of consumers (Filieri, 2016). According to the studies of Agag and El-Masry, (2016), Customers' booking intentions involve relying on accurate inform-ation, trusting the website's transaction processing and data security during reservation and a sense of the confidence in the execution of their booking decisions by the hotel's website. The significance of the online reviews and ratings in influencing travellers' hotel booking decisions requires careful consideration from businesses, particularly those operating in the tourist sector (Agag *et al*., 2020). Positive online reviews have a significant influence on the shaping favourable attitudes, whilst bad reviews exert an adverse effect on purchasing behavior (Filieri & McLeay, 2014). As a result, these reviews play a crucial role in determining online bookings within the hospitality business (Can-tallops & Salvi, 2014).

Influence of User Provided Photos on the Booking Intention

Consumers actively seek online reviews, comprising textual descriptions and visual representations, as part of their purchasing decision-making process (Li *et al.,* 2023). Photography holds a significant position within the hospitality and tourism sectors, as it contributes substantially to the overall travel experience and serves as a valuable tool for the documenting and sharing experiences (Cuesta-Valiño *et al.*, 2023).

According to the Shukla and Mishra, (2021), platforms like TripAdvisor and Yelp allow users to accompany their reviews with photographs, influencing consumer perceptions during the decision-making phase. The use of the user-generated images, particularly those show-casing the amenities and surroundings of their hotel rooms serves to the increase the credibility of reviews in the hotel booking process. These user-generated photographs possess intrinsic the informational value, pertaining to the utility or significance of materials derived from their content for the both hotel guests and the managers (Mezgebe, 2020; Ahmed and Åkesson, 2022).

Influence of Online Reviews on the Hotel Booking Intention

Confidence in a service or product prompts customers to share their attitudes through reviews on social media platforms (Ye *et al.,* 2011). Positive online reviews wield substantial influence over travellers' purchasing decisions, as consumers place higher value on user-generated content compared to marketing-generated material (El-Said, 2020). Conversely Lee *et al.* (2017) argued in their study that negative online reviews posted on a social network have a greater influence on consumer behaviour than positive reviews. In addition, Zhao *et al.* (2015) also provided evidence that negative online reviews have a greater influence on prospective hotel guests behaviour than positive reviews. The study conducted by Lee *et al.* (2017) complimented previous investigations by investigating deeper into this phenomenon and have found that, the presence of substantial number of the negative internet reviews, portrays that there is a possible discrepancy between the expenses incurred and the desired level of satis-faction (Nguyen and Tong, 2023). Ultimately these travel based review sharing facility on social media platforms has enabled prospective travellers to capture users' feedback beforehand and allowed hotel man-agers to address the existing service gap for service improvement (Ji *et al.,* 2023).

Influence of 'Online Reputation Management' on Hotel Booking Intention

Proserpio and Zervas, (2017) conducted a study on the response of hotels addressing internet reviews, regard-less of their content, and determined that the level of responsiveness was the similar. In addition Xie *et al.* (2014) argues, hotel managers tend to respond atten-tively and appreciatively to positive online reviews. This response has a significant impact on the perceived quality, trust, and the customer satisfaction, ultimately influencing the number of online reservations made. The study conducted by Rose and Blodgett, (2016) places significant emphasis on the role of management measures in minimizing undesirable consequences. In cases of negative feedback, management responses offer hotels an opportunity for the service recovery,

fostering trust and potentially increasing future sales. Brady and Cronin Jr, (2001) emphasizes the significant influence that response qualities, including promptness, speed, duration, and tone, have on influencing consumers' opinions of service quality. The effectiveness of these replies is the especially evident among consumers who are unsatisfied, leading to increased levels of the satisfaction and intention to book an accommodation facility (Liat *et al.*, 2017).

METHODOLOGY:

Research Approach

To examine the impact of the online opinions on the decision-making process concerning hotel bookings, an experimental methodology was the employed to investigate the intricate dynamics at play. Notably, This strategy is in accordance with a widely recognized convention in the academic literature, as other previous research have also utilized a comparable methodology, specifically focusing on the analysis of online comments as influential determinants (Agag & El-Masry, 2017; Nie *et al.*, 2020). In addition, in order to thoroughly explore the diverse range of individual viewpoints on the internet evaluations, a qualitative research approach was carefully chosen, incorporating the perspectives of the renowned researchers in the relevant academic discipline (Bryman, 2016). Although the acquisition of the precise quantitative data holds significance in the comprehending this research comprehensively, the primary objective is to attain profound insights and highly valuable data. Therefore, a qualitative research method was judiciously employyed to unearth the nuanced perspectives & motivations of the participants (Liu & Park, 2015). Allowing new important concepts to emerge through the contemplation of collected facts and their interpretation within the research process (Collins and Stockton, 2018). Subsequently, The results that were acquired have been systematically examined and are presented using an abductive research strategy in contrast to the more traditional techniques of the induction & deduction, abduction is the frequently perceived as a cohesive amalgamation of both methodologies (Stylos *et al.*, 2021).

Study Area, Sample Size and Technique

The primary aim of this study is to collect data from Bangladeshi tourists who have actively participated in hotel booking activities, utilizing internet reviews as crucial factors in their decision-making processes. The composition of the research sample is the carefully designed to include a broad and heterogeneous group of participants. This cohort consists of the individuals from different age groups, each with distinct travel preferences and travel frequencies. Significantly, all participants possess the shared characteristic of the employing digital channels with the explicit intention of coordinating and ensuring accommodations(Lee *et al*., 2020). In order to achieve this goal, the study interviewed participants who voluntarily participated in the research who have booked and stayed in the hotels of Dhaka and Cox's Bazar, both geographically situated within the vibrant landscape of Bangladesh. The selection of Dhaka as the main site for data collection is based on its significant position as a centre for the global business hub, which provides a comprehensive sample of the intended demographic (Bhuiyan & Darda, 2020). Cox's Bazar is chosen as a strategic location due to its esteemed status as a worldwide recognized tourist attraction, largely due to its claim of having the world's largest sea beach (Ahmed *et al*., 2010; Hossain & Islam, 2019). The process of selecting hotels for this study was carried out with careful consideration, based on the criteria of exceptional internet evaluations and ratings. The meticulous selection process guarantees the incorporation of businesses that have received favourable recognition in their specific areas, so enhancing the comprehensiveness and excellence of the data to be gathered. A specific sample size is determined to draw conclusions about a population (Liat *et al*., 2017). The sample size for this investigation was 25. This study employed a method of purposive sampling in which specific individuals were interviewed based on their relevance to the topic of the study (Bryman, 2016). Purposive sampling necessitated a close examination of the "parameters of the population" in order to select suitable cases (Silverman, 2021).

Data Collection and Analysis

Semi-structured interviews were chosen to collect data for the purpose of gaining insight into the personal perceptions and perspectives of individuals because they enable flexibility for both the interviewer and the interviewees to the ask and answer questions (Smith,

1995). Following Bryman's, (2016) recommendations regarding the creation of an interview guide, the interview was standardised (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). To allow interviewees the freedom to feel and the communicate; an emphasis was placed on avoiding interruptions. To prevent data inaccuracies, interviews were audio-recorded (Harvey-Jordan & Long, 2001). After the completion of all interviews, the data was subjected to analysis using a thematic approach (Kallio *et al.*, 2016). This method involves the identification of themes that are pertinent to the research topic. Through the implementation of a theme analysis, the researchers were able to the discern and analyse the underlying significance extracted from a collection of the data, specifically the transcripts of the interviews (Galletta, 2013). By adhering to this methodology, the audio recordings were converted into written form. Upon completion of the transcription process, the initial phase involved conducting several readings of all interview transcripts with the aim of obtaining a full understanding of the content. Themes were identified from the data by the taking notes while reading the transcripts. In the second phase of the study, the statements provided by the interviewees were subjected to coding. Subsequently, the responses were categorised, and the interrelationships and connections among the various themes were the delineated. This comprehensive method facilitated the execution of an analysis, which was subsequently condensed and the conceptualised in the findings and discussion section (Kallio *et al*., 2016).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

The increasing dependence on the Internet for making travel decisions highlights the necessity of conducting a thorough investigation of electronic word of mouth. The increasing dependence on the Internet for making decisions related to tourism highlights the necessity of conducting a thorough investigation of electronic word of mouth. The research being conducted in the subject matter of hotel reservations, seeks to investigate the influence of tourists' impressions of internet reviews on their intentions to make bookings. The following analysis will examine the primary determinants that impact individuals' choices when booking hotels. Specifically, it will explore the prevalence of both authentic and fraudulent reviews as a means to the

evaluate their reliability. Additionally, it will investigate the consequences that positive and bad reviews have on travellers. Following this, this study will explore the ways in which these reviews influence customer expectations, the ultimately impacting their decision-making process. A multitude of determinants impact the hotel reservations of patrons, including but not limited to location, cost, ambiance, and service standard. However, in the context of online transactions, factors such as the convenience and product availability play significant roles. Based on the findings of Sohrabi *et al.* (2012), it was observed that guests place a high level of the importance on the friendliness and responsiveness of the staff members during their interactions. 12 out of 25 interviewee of this study expressed affirmative response with this observation. Their sentiment was perfectly represented with the statement of 'interviewee 18':

> *"Staff attributes are key for me. If reviews talk about friendly staff and great customer service, I am more likely to choose that hotel".*

Travelers place significant emphasis on well-known hotels that are recognized for their attentive staff, an image that is frequently formed based on internet reviews. Furthermore, it is worth noting that, a few respondents expressed that they place a high level of the importance on the geographical location of their accommodations. This sentiment aligns with the research conducted by Rhee and Yang, (2015) which highlights the significance of location as a key factor influencing the decision-making process when the selecting a hotel. The response from 'interviewee 10' sums it up perfectly:

> *"If I can tell by reading online reviews that a hotel is conveniently located near major attractions, it convinces me to book as it saves my time and transportation costs. It seems I can save myself from a lot of hassle just by staying in a prime location"*

It is worth mentioning that some of the participants for whom 'location" was a priority tend to exhibit this preference to stay near popular tourist destinations, with the added convenience of local convenience stores and food courts showing a similar tendency observed by the (Tussyadiah, 2020). The widespread

deployment of bots to boost up ratings and unethical practice of hiring freelancers to post fake reviews have made travellers sceptical about the authenticity of online reviews (Chang *et al.*, 2019). Travelers must discern the authenticity of online hotel reviews, with genuine ones positively influencing booking intent and fraudulent ones diminishing it. Despite the utility of social media reviews, concerns persist about reviewer reliability and sincerity (Camilleri & Filieri, 2023). Determining review authenticity relies on language analysis, with the unethical proliferation of the fake reviews significantly impacting hotel booking the decisions (Kim & Kim, 2020; Liang *et al*., 2018; Rickly, 2022). During the interview, when inquiring about the distinctions between genuine online reviews and fraudulent online reviews, the comment of the interviewee 2 stood significant:

"Fake reviews utilize extremely favorable or the critical wording without sufficient detail. I also check the reviewer's history and examine his other reviews on the platform against for accuracy"

With this similar notion, insights provided by the Interviewee 9 are also notable:

"I verify reviews that include images. Not the image taken for marketing or supplied with the packaging…... The ones taken by regular user with no photoshop, shaky hands and weird background…Those are the reviews that the matters"

According to the findings of (Ert & Fleischer, 2019), the inclusion of visual representations in the context of hotel experiences serves to enhance the credibility of user reviews. These reviews, which are the highly regarded and trusted by consumers, are a valuable form of the assessment. In light of a comprehensive market research poll conducted by Loth, (2018) it has revealed that a significant proportion of individuals, approximately 61%, harbor concerns about the authenticity of online reviews. This finding is noteworthy considering the relatively high level of awareness, estimated at 90%, among consumers regarding the presence of fake reviews. The concerns expressed by individuals may be attributed to the inherent challenges associated with the discerning fraudulent reviews, as the highlighted by the scholarly work of

(Moon *et al.*, 2021). As consumers become more conscious of fraudulent reviews, they are trying to imply their own ways of to verify the information they receive (Li *et al*., 2023). It is worth noting that positive reviews have a considerable impact on shaping the perceptions of clients and influencing their intentions to make bookings. These reviews tend to highlight various factors, including the location, amenities, and services offered by the establishment (Banerjee & Chua, 2019; Cheng *et al*., 2019; Moon *et al.*, 2021; Moro *et al.*, 2020). In contrast, Tankovic and Benazic (2018) introduces a nuanced perspective by proposing that the influence of positive reviews may be contingent upon their ability to emphasize critical features. From this perspective, interviewee 13 indicated that positive internet reviews impact booking intentions:

"Many positive remarks from other travelers reassure me. They reveal experience, cleanliness, and service. I feel more confident about my decision of booking and even motivate my travel mates about upcoming pleasant experience"

Simultaneously, interviewee 21 shared their thoughts saying,

"I notice nuances like the little touches that make a guest's stay memorable and the personalized care. Reading about visitor satisfaction and how the hotel exceeded expectations gave me the confidence to book".

According to (El-Said, 2020), influences consumers' perceptions of the establishment's quality, resulting in a negative attitude and reduced intent to book. Negative evaluations have the potential to greatly affect the perceived quality and credibility of a hotel (Kim & Kim, 2020). Furthermore, a study conducted by(Leong *et al*., 2019) found that good internet reviews influence consumer mindsets more than negative ones, increasing bookings. The majority of participants indicated that in the event of encountering poor evaluations, they would opt to seek out another option. Amidst their conversations, interviewee 4 expressed:

"A pattern of the negative reviews about poor cleanliness, unfriendly staff, or limited amenities makes me suspicious. I prefer hotels with highest positive feedback with the 500+ reviews since

statistically in my opinion large number of positive reviews makes it reliable"

Consumer sentiments worsen when negative internet reviews rise. Negative online reviews decrease hotel interest despite increased awareness (Rose & Blodgett, 2016). Interviewees mostly praise online reviews for connecting people and reserving hotels. Contrary to negative observations, the positive reviews stress a company's excellence and typically offer ideas. Due to the abundance of hotels, guests can now switch to one that seems to give a better experience. During the course of the interviews this study have found many respondents have altered their hotel booking plans, due to bad ratings (Sanjoy Kumar & Tanvir, 2023). Among the participants the comment of the interviewee 7 was noteworthy:

"When reviews noted unstable wi-fi, unpleasant personnel, and noisy rooms, I changed my hotel reservation to avoid a terrible experience. I want a comfortable and enjoyable stay, and the negative criticism made me reconsider"

According to Zhang *et al.* (2019) hotel management should handle positive as well as negative feedback as part of service recovery initiatives. The discrepancy between online reviews and actual hotel experiences can be due to deceptive or inaccurate evaluations, resulting in a mismatch between the expectations and actual experiences of the hotel. But response from hotel managers portrays positive assessments, attention and appreciation of consumer feedbacks and motivate future travellers by giving them a positive vibe, that the hotel management is listening and taking actions to rectify any mistakes that being made during service encounter. According to (Rose & Blodgett, 2016), such management measures can reduce unfavorable outcomes in certain contexts and offer a invaluable opportunity to decrease service-gap (Xie *et al.*, 2014). The majority of the participants had positive thoughts when asked about the response of hotel management. A participant (interviewee 12) conveyed their perspective on the impact of the hotel authorities' response to their inquiry on their desire to make a booking. Interviewee 12 revealed the following:

"Hotel staff's responses influenced my booking decision. I trusted their service because they were

prompt, friendly, and the informative. Feeling cherished as a guest reinforced my desire to book. I might distrust the hotel's quality if they weren't responsive"

From the perspective of the participants involved in this research endeavour, it is noteworthy to acknowledge that the authors were taken aback by the significant impact that hotel management responses have on online ratings and bookings. The management reactions of a hotel are influenced by the perceived quality, trustworthiness, and the customer satisfaction levels associated with it (Tsao *et al.*, 2015). As a result of adept and attentive hotel management, it is plausible that each of these factors has the potential to contribute to a rise in the hotel bookings (Liat *et al.*, 2017). Discordances occur when experience differs from expectations. Small discrepancies between one's experience and expectations make one more inclined to submit a reliable review. When the discrepancy is large, one is more likely to use the contrast effect strategy, which entails exaggeratedly moving toward one's own experience and away from expectations (Jha & Shah, 2021). Interviewee 20 voiced his thoughts in the following manner:

"Online reviews helped me choose a hotel that exceeded my expectations. My stay confirmed the warm atmosphere and pleasant staff in the reviews. Sometimes the experience matches the positive information, which is encouraging"

The information indicates a discernible increase in hotel booking intent, with travellers influencing others' decisions through sharing their real-life experiences, thereby extending their positive influence. Internet popularity allows travelers to quickly share and value online reviews as vital information sources. Many reviews influence purchasing decisions; thus, the hotel sector must understand and manage satisfaction to influence bookings (Shohel Md and Tanvir, 2019). Prospective guests sometimes use others' hotel reviews to mitigate booking worries. Reviews are crucial when buying experiential products because they help buyers fill the knowledge gap and reduce uncertainty (Roy *et al*., 2021). In the hospitality business, the big data analytics is used to mine online reviews for more accurate and complete client data (Stylos *et al*., 2021). Participants reported a favourable hotel booking

experience after reading online reviews. This tendency was particularly evident in the statement of interviewee 25,

"I booked a hotel after reading online evaluations and had a great time. Reviews appropriately described the hotel's luxury and excellent service. Although several reviews cited poor Wi-Fi, I had no issues during my stay"

All participants consistently indicated their preferences for utilizing review sites as a method of making well informed selections while reserving the hotels as a traveller, hence endorsing this technique for others (Agag *et al.*, 2020). All respondents strongly supported using online reviews to book hotels and recommended it to others. Their sentiment was perfectly represented with the statement of Interviewee,

"I usually go through several internet hotel reviews before booking. Look for extensive ratings on cleanliness, customer service, and location. Check recent reviews to ensure the information is current and relevant"

Likewise, interviewee 19 expressed his similar opinion by stating:

"I always tell my friends to read online reviews of the hotel, before booking them. As the former guests share their experiences, we can all know what to expect. In this way I avoid possible disappointments"

Because of this, the desire to reserve a room at a hotel is progressively growing as a consequence of legitimate online reviews and the suggestions of other people.

CONCLUSION:

This study delves into the impact of social media and online reviews on the decision-making process of travelers choosing hotels, particularly focusing on Bangladesh. Online reviews emerge as a pivotal factor in the country's tourism and the hospitality sectors, wielding considerable influence over the consumer choices. The research, employing qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews, underscores the ubiquitous role of online reviews in shaping informed decisions and the enabling communication between consumers and hotel management. Contrary to making broad generalizations about the absolute influence of online reviews on hotel bookings, the study finds that participants share a common belief that personal references and the opinions hold greater significance. However, they do recognize the important role that internet reviews play in offering thorough information for well-informed decision-making. Even if they might not be the only element, online reviews have a big influence on travelers' decisions and can change a lot of their trip plans. The survey emphasizes people's desire to make educated decisions about travel, and one way to the accomplish this is by using online evaluations as a resource. Participants interact with a variety of online content, especially when it comes to image-centric social media sites, which they use to feel validated. In the end, the results confirm how important internet reviews are in influencing Bangladeshi consumers' decisions when making hotel reservations. In conclusion, the study emphasizes how important internet reviews are in shaping people's decisions when it comes to hotel reservations in Bangladesh. Although recommendations & firsthand accounts are considered more important, online reviews make a significant contribution to a comprehensive under-standing and are vital in helping the travelers make well-informed decisions.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:
There is no conflict of interest to the publication of this manuscript.

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