

# CONTINUED USE OF ONLINE CONSUMER REVIEW SITES: THE INFLUENCE OF INFORMATION QUALITY

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of information quality on user satisfaction with online review websites and on customers' behavioural intention to continue using guest house review websites. Data used in the analysis was collected using a structured questionnaire from 306 users of customer review sites from Gauteng, South Africa. The data was analysed using version 24 of SPSS. The findings revealed that perceived quality of information on review sites has positive influence on user satisfaction and on continued use intentions of the review websites. The findings also revealed a positive relationship between user satisfaction with a review website and behavioural intention. The findings point to the need for guesthouse owners to recognise that users go through a purchasing decision process, the first step of which is conducting research through online review sites. Site owners should promote provision of high quality information on review sites and should ensure that reviews accurately reflect their guest house.

**Keywords:** Information quality, satisfaction, behavioural intention, guesthouses, online customer reviews.

## INTRODUCTION

The internet is increasingly being used for conducting research on organizations' offerings before purchasing, as well as providing brands with reviews regarding their experiences or opinions about the brand (Black & Veloutsou, 2017; Mpinganjira, 2016). One industry where online reviews have gained a lot of popularity is in the tourism and hospitality industry (Litvin et al., 2008; Matikiti et al., 2017). Travelers can easily find discussions about consumers' experiences and preferences with specific service providers by simply visiting review sites (Tang, 2017). Online review websites are used as a platform for customers to get honest assessment about an organisation's offering as the sources of such information are mostly past customers with first-hand experience with the product or service. Lui (2017) pointed out that consumer-generated reviews are intended to provide help to potential consumers in making a more informed offering evaluation. Apart from benefiting customers, service providers can also benefit from such sites by tracking content customers are communicating about the services and using collected market intelligence to inform their marketing strategies. Previous empirical findings show that online reviews have a significant effect on the brand image and customer purchase intention (Jin and Phua 2014).

While this is so, the quality of information provided on such sites can sometimes be questionable. This is more so as anyone can virtually share content on customer review sites. The accuracy of such information cannot always be guaranteed. Information quality is however important if customers are to make well informed choices. Phillips et al., (2014) argued that information quality is critical to enhancing decision confidence. With the rise in internet usage as well as in sites providing customer reviews, understanding customers' perceptions on information quality is useful to any industry including the tourism and hospitality industry as such information can assist in explaining purchase behaviours (Dickinger, 2011). The study

aims to contribute to this understanding. The study focuses on the tourism and hospitality industry, specifically the guesthouse market in South Africa.

The tourism industry plays a vital role in the South African economy. In 2017 the industry's contribution to the GDP was R R412 billion which was 9.4 percent of the country's GDP (Smith, 2017). Small and medium sized establishments such as guesthouses in the industry stand to benefit more from use of websites that allow for sharing of information about service experience. The guesthouse industry is a niche of the travel and hospitality industry. Guesthouse establishments are run mainly as small and medium businesses, providing budget friendly accommodation option that offers travelers a unique experience that is designed to provide a personalized approach, one that is an escape but with the comfort of home (Cavanaugh, 2011). PWC (2015) observed that most guesthouses are private homes that have been converted for use as a lodging business.

Cavanaugh (2011) notes that the guesthouse market is a potential growth area for many economies. Huang (2008), pointed out that it is important that the use of websites for marketing be considered by small establishments in the hospitality industry such as guesthouse businesses as their financial capabilities are limited compared to that of the big hotel chains. Online review sites can be helpful in this regard hence the need to empirically examine information quality about guest houses on online review sites and the influence this has on intentions to continue using such sites when selecting a guesthouse.

The primary purpose of this paper is to investigate levels of perceived information quality of online customer reviews and the influence this has on behavioural intention to continue using the online review site when selecting guesthouses in South Africa. The specific objectives of the study are (i) to examine perceived levels of information quality of online customer reviews of guesthouses in South Africa; (ii) to examine the influence of perceived information quality on satisfaction with online customer review sites; (iii) to examine the influence of perceived information quality on behavioral intentions to continue using an online customer review site when selecting a guest house and (iv) to investigate the relationship between satisfaction with online customer review site and behavioral intentions.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Underlying Theory: The Uses and Gratifications Theory**

This study makes use of the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) to understand the intentions of travelers to continue using online customer review websites when selecting a guest house. The Uses and Gratification Theory is based on the notion of active audience proposed by Katz et al (1974). According to Katz et.al (1974) an active audience makes use of media according to its ability to meet users' needs. The theory was first developed to explain individual behavior towards radio communication, (Gan & Li, 2018). While this is so, the theory has been used to understand consumer behavior towards a wide range of media including social media (Ifinedo 2016; Phua et al., 2017).

People derive different types of gratification through use of media including utilitarian gratification and hedonic gratification. Core to utilitarian gratification in social media are issues on information sharing and information documentation while hedonic gratification focuses on

enjoyment and passing of time (Gan & Li, 2018). Of interest in this study is utilitarian gratification. This is because the main reason why customers visit customer review sites is to get information about establishments. In line with the Uses and Gratification Theory this study argues that information quality is key to explaining consumers' intentions to continue using customer review websites when selecting guesthouse accommodation.

### Proposed conceptual model

Figure 1 presents the proposed conceptual model of the study. The model argues that information quality has direct and indirect influence on continued review site use intentions. The indirect influence is through satisfaction with the review site. The proposed relationships are discussed below.

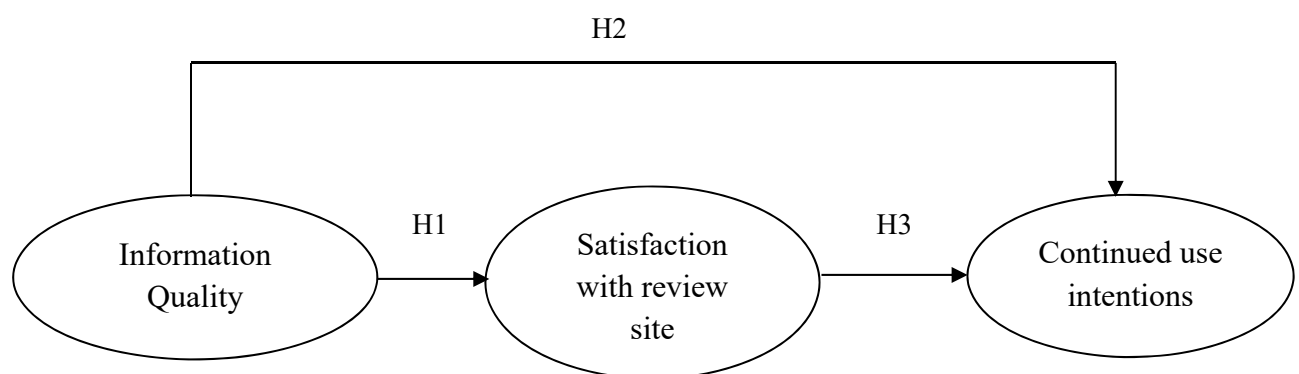


Figure 1: Proposed conceptual model

### Information Quality and Satisfaction with Review Site

Information quality is defined as the characteristics of information that are important to, or suitable for the consumers of information. Important characteristics associated with information quality include timeliness, completeness, believability, relevance and reputation (Pham and Ahammad 2017; Zhou et al., 2010). Timeliness is about up to datedness of information while completeness is about the extent to which information addresses all aspects of interest. Believability is about the extent to which the information is regarded as true and credible while reputation is about the extent to which information is regarded as authoritative. Relevance on the other hand is about the extent to which the information is important for a given purpose.

Satisfaction with a review site can be achieved by meeting or exceeding customer expectations. Customer expectations, in this context, refers to the wants and desires of the customer. Since customers who visit review sites do so mainly for utilitarian reasons of getting information, this study argues that the quality of information available on such sites can have significant influence on customer satisfaction with the site. Pham and Ahammad (2017) found that quality of information on online shopping sites exerts strong influence on customer satisfaction. Studies by Apostolou et al., (2017) as well as Zheng et al., (2013) also found that information quality influences levels of satisfaction. Hence the hypothesis proposed in this study is that:

H1 : Perceived information quality has a positive influence on satisfaction with online customer review site.

### **Information quality and behavioural intention**

According to Zeithaml et al., (1996) one of the important behavioural intentions in customer relations relates to the decision to either remain in or exit a relationship with the provider of the service. Zeithaml et al. (1996) pointed out that behavioural intention can be favourable or unfavourable. The behavioural intention of interest in this study is one that would be favourable i.e. the decision to continue using online review sites. The extent to which a user will likely continue using a review website is likely to depend on whether the website contains quality information. In their study Priyadarshini et al., (2017) claim that if user perception of the information quality contained on the website is misleading or inaccurate, it will result in decreased favourable behavioural intention towards the site. Koo et al., (2014) found that information quality of online health sites has direct influence on behavioral intentions. Thus the following hypothesis is put forward for this study:

*H2: Perceived information quality has positive influence on behavioral intentions to continue using an online customer review site when selecting a guest house*

### **Satisfaction and behavioural intention**

Wilson (2012) notes that meeting of customer expectations results in user satisfaction which in turn has a positive effect on future behavioural intention. The greater the satisfaction received by the user, the greater the likelihood of a positive continued behavioural intention will be. Studies by Zheng et al., (2013) as well as Zabkar et al., (2010) found that satisfaction has positive influence of behavioral intentions. Thus the following hypothesis is posited in this study:

H3: Satisfaction with online customer review site positively influences behavioural intentions to continue using an online customer review site when selecting a guesthouses.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study followed a descriptive research design. As stated by Mitchell and Jolley, (2013) descriptive research entails the collection of quantitative data to depict participants in an accurate way with the objective of uncovering answers to questions of research. In this study, the interest was on explaining perceived levels of information quality and its influence on continued use of review websites. Chen, (2012) explained that the use of quantitative research is best suited for situations where large amounts of data need to be collected and analysed using statistical methods. Collection of large amounts of data is necessary in this study in order to allow for statistical testing of hypothesis.

The targeted population were customers of guesthouses from Gauteng who had read online guesthouse reviews in the past 6 months. In order to ensure informed consent, only respondents who were aged 18 years and above were allowed to participate in the study. A non-probability quota sampling method was used to select respondents for this study. Quota sampling entails sub-dividing a population based on some characteristics and then selecting members of the different groups based on their willingness to respond and their availability. Gender was used

in this study to sub-divide the population. A self-administered structured questionnaire was used to collect data. A major benefit of self-administered questionnaires is that respondents are comfortable enough to provide honest answers as they are not influenced by the interviewer (Hair et al., 2013). Fieldworkers in this study were on standby during data collection to respond to any questions respondents may have had.

Constructs of interest were measured using scales adapted from literature so as to enhance validity. Information quality was specifically measured using items adapted from Dong et al., (2014) as well as Zhou et al., (2010); satisfaction with review sites was measured using items adapted from Lin (2008) and Kim et al., (2010). Behavioural intentions were measured using items adapted from Zheng et al., (2013). A seven-point Likert scale anchored on 1 = ‘very strongly disagree’ and 7 = ‘very strongly agree’ was used to measure the item statements. By the end of the data collection period a total of 306 usable responses were received. Of these 40.7 percent were male while 59.3 percent were female. 68.4 percent of the respondents belonged to the generation Y age group i.e. they were born between 1981 and 2000. 26.1 percent were of generation X age group i.e. they were born between 1965 and 1980 while 2.6 percent belonged to the baby boomers age group i.e. they were born before 1965.

The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS), version 24, was used to analyse the data collected. Cronbach alpha coefficients were used to test the scales for reliability before the main analysis. As stated by Field et al, (2013) an alpha coefficient equal to or greater than 0.7 indicates a high level of reliability. The results as presented in table 1 below show that all the constructs were highly reliability. To test the hypothesis posited in the study, regression analysis was used. In order to decide whether to reject or accept a hypothesis a 95% confidence interval was relied upon.

**Table 1 - Constructs and items**

<b>Construct and Items</b>	<b>Cronbach alpha</b>	<b>Factor Loading</b>
<b>Information Quality</b> IQ1 - The reviews available on this site provide relevant information about guesthouses IQ2 - In general, the reviews available on this site provide comprehensive information about guesthouses IQ3 - Guesthouse reviews available on this site are often current	0.757	0.799  0.863  0.804
<b>Satisfaction with review site</b> SAT1 - I am satisfied with using this site when selecting a guesthouse SAT2 - This site meets my needs when selecting a guest house SAT3 - This site is ideal when selecting a guest house	0.952	0.907  0.933  0.897

<b>Behavioral Intention</b>		
BI1 - I will continue to use this site when selecting a guesthouse	0.963	0.910
BI2 - I intend to keep on using this site when selecting a guesthouse		0.947
BI3 - I plan to use this site when selecting a guest house in future		0.939

## RESULTS

Table 2 presents findings from the descriptive analysis of the constructs. The results show that respondents had positive perceptions about the quality of information found on the guesthouse review sites. The overall mean value for information quality was found to be 4.73. It is however important to note that while respondents agreed that the level of information quality was good, their level of agreement was not very high. . In terms of satisfaction with review site, the results in table 2 show that it had a mean value of 5.03 while behavioural intention had a mean value of 5.17 indicating moderate levels of agreement.

**Table 2: Descriptives - Constructs**

<b>Construct and Items</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
<b>Information Quality</b>			
IQ1 - The reviews available on this site provide relevant information about guesthouses	304	4.95	1.192
IQ2 - In general, the reviews available on this site provide comprehensive information about guesthouses	306	4.74	1.279
IQ3 - Guesthouse reviews available on this site are often current	302	4.49	1.437
<b>Satisfaction with review site</b>			
SAT1 - I am satisfied with using this site when selecting a guesthouse	302	5.10	1.369
SAT2 - This site meets my needs when selecting a guest house	301	5.01	1.390
SAT3 - This site is ideal when selecting a guest house	303	4.99	1.369
<b>Behavioral Intention</b>			
BI1 - I will continue to use this site when selecting a guesthouse	303	5.17	1.419
BI2 - I intend to keep on using this site when selecting a guesthouse	303	5.14	1.402
BI3 - I plan to use this site when selecting a guest house in future	303	5.20	1.407

Table 3 presents the findings on the regression analysis conducted to test the influence of perceived information quality on satisfaction with review site. The study shows that perceived information quality had significant influence on user satisfaction with the review site ( $p = .000$ ;  $\beta = .607$ ). Accordingly, hypotheses H1, is hereby accepted.

**Table 3: Regression Analysis – Information quality and satisfaction with review site**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the estimate		
1	.602*	.602	.601	.85729		
Model	Independent variable	Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Standard Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.530	.276		5.542	.000
	Information quality	.741	.057	.607	13.037	.000

Dependent variable: Satisfaction with review site

Presented in table 4 are findings on the influence of perceived information quality and satisfaction on continued use intentions. According to the results, perceived information quality was found to have significant influence on continued use intentions ( $p = .000$ ;  $\beta = .485$ ). The results also show that satisfaction with a review site had significant influence on continued use intentions ( $p = .000$ ;  $\beta = 0.776$ ). Based on these results, hypotheses H2 and H3 are hereby accepted.

**Table 4: Regression Analysis –Information quality, satisfaction with review site and Continued use intentions**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the estimate		
1	.485	.235	.232	1.19816		
2	.776	.602	.601	.85729		
Model	Independent variable	Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Standard Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.231	.316		7.064	.000
	Information quality	.618	.065	.485	9.519	.000

2	(Constant)	1.148	.196		5.844	.000
	Satisfaction with site	.800	.038	.776	21.211	.000

Dependent variable: Continued site use intentions

## DISCUSSIONS AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings in this study show that there is a strong relationship between perceived quality of information of online reviews and users' satisfaction with review sites as well as with the intention for continued use of review site. Users perceived information on guesthouse review sites to be of relatively reasonable quality for making guest house selection decisions. This influenced users' satisfaction with the review sites. It also had positive influence on users' intentions to continue making use of the review sites when selecting a guest house. The findings are consistent with those by Apostolou et al., (2017) as well Koo et al., (2014) who also found that online information quality determined customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions respectively. The finding in this study are of significant managerial implications.

Firstly, it is important for managers of guesthouses to note that before users book or enquire about their establishment, there is high chance that they will have gone through information search about them by reading online reviews of past customers. Customers do this in order to find out what other customers are saying about their experience with the service provider. The perceived quality of information available influences the customer's satisfaction with the review site. The study shows that customers will continue to make use of an online review site that provides them with quality information. It is thus in the manager's interest to ensure that reviews available on online review sites relating to their establishments are comprehensive, timely and relevant to facilitating decision making. Managers can contribute to ensuring this by encouraging their customers to post their reviews on online review sites.

Managers of guesthouses need to acknowledge the fact that much as a business they may strive towards providing customers with quality experiences in their service delivery, experiences may be perceived differently by different customers. It is therefore important to pay attention to customers who may not be satisfied before they go and post negative reviews about their establishment.

The findings in this study also have implications on managers of customer review sites. These managers need to find ways of stimulating information sharing on their sites so that users can find their sites to be reliable sources of information when choosing a guesthouse. Posters of information need to be encouraged to provide detailed feedback on establishments under review.

## CONCLUSION

The study aimed to uncover the influence of perceived information quality and user satisfaction and intention to continue the use of online review websites. The findings show that perceived quality information exerts positive influence on the levels of customer satisfaction, which in



turn exerts positive influence on customers' behavioural intentions to reuse review websites. While the findings have important managerial implications, it is important to acknowledge that the study is not without limitations. One limitation of this study is that it was limited to respondents in Gauteng. Another limitation relates to use of non-probability sampling method to draw respondents. This limits the extent to which the findings can be generalized to a wider population. It is recommended that future studies consider testing the conceptual model on a population drawn from a wider geographical area and that use of probability sampling methods be considered.

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