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The Effect of Online Reviews on Hotel Booking Intention

أثر التعليقات الالكترونية على قرار الحجز في الفندق

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Abstract	Keywords
Reviews and recommendation posted in the internet are considered as an important source of information. In view of this, the main purpose of this research is to investigate the effect of online reviews dimension, mainly credibility, expertise and timeliness, on hotel booking intention. A sample of Algerian Facebook users in Facebook groups (related to tourism) was targeted through an online questionnaire to collect data. Based upon our findings, we found that the source credibility and source expertise are significantly and positively correlated to hotel booking intention, whereas timeliness is weakly correlated and no significance. We also found that both credibility and expertise have positive impacts on travelers' booking intention for hotels, meanwhile the timeliness of the message has found to have no significant impact.	Online Reviews; Hotel Booking Intention; Online Reviews Dimensions.
الملخص	الكلمات المفتاحية
لقد أصبح من المسلم به في الاطارين النظري والتطبيقي أن التوصيات والتعليقات المنشورة على مواقع الانترنيت ذات الصلة بالخدمات السياحية وخدمات الضيافة أصبحت تحوز على أهمية كبيرة للسياح، وذلك باعتبارها أحد أهم مصادر جمع البيانات، فضمن هذا الاطار تسعى الدراسة الحالية تسليط الضوء على أثر التعليقات الموجودة على الانترنيت على قرار الحجز في الفندق، من خلال التطرق لتأثير بعد مصداقية المصدر، الخبرة وتوقيت نشر المعلومة وحداثتها لأجل هذا الغرض، تستهدف الدراسة الحالية عينة من مستخدمي الأنترنيت من خلال استبيان الكتروني تم توزيعه في مجموعات الفيسبوك ذات التوجه السياحي. وتأسيساً مما تم التوصل إليه من نتائج، فقد أشارت الدراسة إلى وجود أثر ذو دلالة إحصائية لبعد المصداقية والخبرة على قرار الحجز في الفندق، في حين أن بعد حداثة المعلومات أو توقيت نشرها لم يكن بتلك الأهمية بنسبة لعينة الدراسة، بحيث لم يكن لها تأثير معنوي على قرار الحجز في الفندق محل التقييم.	التعليقات الالكترونية؛ قرار الحجز في الفندق؛ أبعاد التعليقات الالكترونية.

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1. Introduction:

The current business environment is tremendously witnessing marketing and an advertising clutter. Therefore, personal and unbiased source of information plays a key role in consumers' decision-making journey. Hence, consumers are searching for credible electronic word of mouth information from popular web sites and recommendation from other reference groups (Wu & Wang 2010). In this vein, Different academics and practitioners agreed on the fact that the advent of the Internet has amplified the effects that the online reviews and information has on consumers (Mirza & Almana 2013), where more and more studies have found that consumers tend to be more interested in products discussed on blogs and web forums than they are in those marketed in traditional ways (Mao-Yuan Pai et al, 2013), for example, it has been stated that Two-thirds of WOM's impact on business is from offline WOM, one-third from online (WOMMA, 2014), Perhaps even more important, it's estimated that more than half of all U.S. retail sales were either transacted directly online or influenced by internet research. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2017, P 515)

In tourism and hospitality industry, requesting online information has a significant importance for destination choice or purchasing tourism and travel-related services. Where the reviews and evidence gathered from internet before reduce significantly the cost of information search and plays a prominent role in filling the knowledge gap (Hung & Li (2007) In a parallel context, the online reviews posted about hotel services are considered to be of a great importance for travelers, where it has been proven that reading positive reviews can have a stronger effect on hotel's booking intentions (Wen-Chin Tsao *et al* 2015).

Travel and hospitality related services in Algeria have witnessed a drastic increase in demand recently, namely tourist circulation and hotel booking demand (locally or abroad). In this vein, the current paper aims a better understanding of the effect of online reviews, or what's deemed as electronic word of mouth, on the hotel's booking intention. Additionally, this paper hopefully will shed the lights on the different concepts and dimensions of online reviews posted in the internet and their impact on the tourist' intention to book for a hotel service.

1.1. Research questions
- Is there a significant relationship between online reviews dimensions and hotel booking intention?
- Is there a significant effect of online reviews dimensions on hotel booking intention?

1.2. Research hypothesis
H1: there is a significant relationship between online reviews dimensions and hotel booking intention:
   H1-1: there is a significant relationship between credibility of the source and hotel booking intention
   H1-2: there is a significant relationship between expertise of the source and hotel booking intention

H₁₋₃: there is a significant relationship between timeliness and hotel booking intention

**H2: there is a significant effect of online reviews dimensions on hotel booking intention:**

    H2-1: there is a significant effect of credibility of the source on hotel booking intention

    H2-2: there is a significant effect of expertise on hotel booking intention

    H2-2: there is a significant effect of timeliness on hotel booking intention

1.3. Conceptual model

Figure 01: Proposed research model
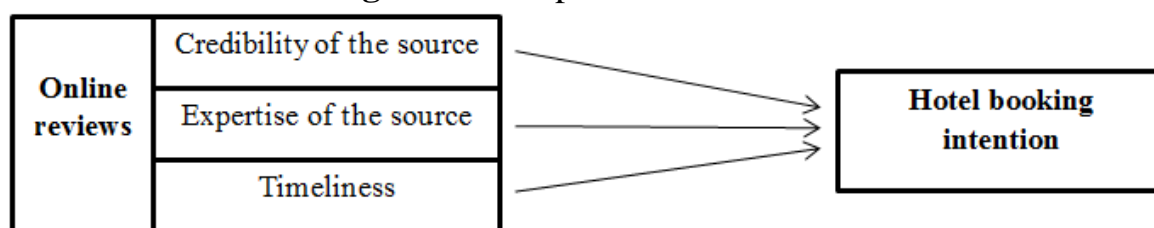
Source: adapted from researcher.

2. Literature review:

2.1. Online reviews

Unarguably, the snowballing use of internet has provided consumers with new venues for searching products and services-related information, sharing thoughts and more importantly interacting with known or unknown individuals. In this vein, consumers can post their reviews in diverse settings such as weblogs, retail websites, review websites, discussion forums, bulletin board systems, newsgroup and social networking sites (Cheung and Lee, 2012). Different literature highlighted an extended understanding on the topic of online reviews. Hennig-thurau *et al* (2004) defined this later as "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". Additionally, online reviews are viewed as evaluation information about products' different aspects. Therefore, consumers can infer the quality of goods according to the reviews and experience, to reduce personal time and the perceived risk. (Zan Mo, Yan-Fei Li, Peng Fan, 2015). Unlike the face-to-face interaction, online reviews provide individuals with multiple options. First, it allows access to a much larger number of individuals (Subramani & Rajagopalan, 2003), where the two-way dissemination of information between acquaintances has been extended to multiple-way exchange among strangers across cyberspace (Hung & Li, 2007). Second, this later enables participants to connect synchronously and asynchronously, where they have the possibility of reading and comparing archived reviews of the products and services they are interested in. (Cheung *et al*, 2009.). However, one of the problems that can arise in this context is the credibility of the source and the novelty of information, where it's likely to reflect misinformation or does not represent the current reality.

Different literature has discussed the topic of online review from three major points of view. First, reviews and product-related information are posted by a group of post-purchase customers. Second, the pre-purchase customers make product judgment. Third, after reading these reviews, consumer can predict the product value and makes a purchase decision based on other's recommendations (Lee and Lee, 2009). In this paper, we will focus on the third stage. Consumers purchase intention can also be influenced by certain characteristic related to the online reviews, such as source credibility, expertise of the reviewer and the recentness of the review. These will be summarized in the following:

2.1.1. Credibility of the source:

Credibility is the *believability* of a source, a message or the media channel that includes the trustworthiness, expertise, source dynamism (charisma) and physical attractiveness as dimensions ((Flanagin & Metzger, 2008). similarly, (Ohanian, 1990) argue that source credibility is a term commonly used to imply a communicator's positive characteristics that affect the receiver's acceptance of a message. This later is believed to have a significant effect on information usefulness and more importantly information adoption (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). In the same vein, (Bataineh, 2015) stated that consumers' perceived credibility plays a key role in their purchase decision journey. Similarly, (Nhon & Thu 2014) found in their study that the consumers' perception of travel-related information credibility affects their preferences and decisions about tourism services

Due to the availability and abundance of information resulted from users interaction in the online environment, the issue of source credibility has become a reason for worry for all information-seekers in this virtual world. Therefore, the topic of source credibility has received an extensive attention from scholars. (Barbules, 2001) indicates that the complexity of the online environment is due to three major factors. First, the speed of growth and the rate of dispersion with which information can circulate within it. The second factor is the problem of the sheer volume of information. Third, and lastly, the internet is considered as a self-sustaining reference system where credibility, of information or a source, depends largely on other details and information. Consumers therefore, need to assess the credibility of online reviews according to a several criteria embodied in characteristics of the recipient, the reviewer and review.

2.1.2. Expertise of the source:

Online reviews provided by experts offer valuable information for consumers and information-seekers (Ziqiong Zhang *et al* (2016)**;** Hilger *et al* (2011)). Stanford *et al* (2002)**,** denotes that the expertise refers to consumers perception about source knowledge that can be viewed as knowledgeable, reputable, or competent. From consumers' point of view, the expertise component considered to be of a great importance due to the possibility of providing accurate and valid information (Hilligoss Rieh, 2008), as well as consumers are more inclined to expertise regarding its objectivity (Jason Zhang *et al*, 2010). The large knowledge base and familiarity of experts enable them to persuade opinion -seekers about

products/services and brands more effectively (Wangenheim & Bayón, 2004). Moreover, the provision of quality information by expert opinion influence consumers purchases decision (Chen Zhen, 2015; Hilger et al (2011).

Opinion-seekers need to identify reviewer expertise to conclude that the information is trustworthy, and therefore judge the credibility of the source (Hilligoss & Rieh, 2008). In the same vein, Cheung *et al* (2009) stated that in most review websites, consumers use reviewer reputation to determine credibility information about the reviewer. Credibility of the website also is judged by the status of the content contributor, where subject-matter experts are considered as a good indicator of a site's credibility and content quality comparing to reviewers with no experience or expertise (Stanford et al. 2002, p07).

2.1.3. Timeliness

The abundance amount of related and significant information encountered by consumers during their information search journey is always associated with a particular time stamp (Zhao *et al*, 2015).Timeliness of the online reviews indicates the degree to which information is up-to-date, or the degree to which the information precisely reflects the current state of the world that it represents (Nelson *et al* (2005). Or it's defined as "the time span between the consumers' purchase of products or services and their release of comment information on the internet" (Wei & Leng (2017). In the same context, Cheung et al (2008) pointed out that timeliness of the review refers to the extent of how current, well-timed, and updated the message is.

 The importance of timeliness stems from the fact that the value of current reviews are perceived differently from the out-of-date reviews (with the same content) (fu xiaorong et al, 2011). Timeliness is considered as critical element for high-quality online reviews. Where timely online reviews may persuade recipients (shasha teng et al 2014; doll, w.j. and torkzadeh, g. (1988)) moreover, consumers perceive a better quality of a product or a service and higher trust if the provided information is well-timed. (wei & leng (2017). timeliness of online reviews was found to have significant influences on consumer trust, which has significantly positive influence on purchase intention. (fu xiaorong et al, 2011; wei & leng (2017)

2.2. Travelers' hotel booking intentions

For consumers engaging in an unfamiliar decision making, searching for recommendations and other's experiences is considered as an important step in their pre-purchase search. More importantly, travel-related information discussed on blogs, social networking sites and travel websites, like tripadvisor.com and booking.com, plays an increasing role in the development of reputation and trusts in a hotel (Sparks & Browning, 2011; Ladhari & Michaud, 2015), travelers' information adoption (Filieri & McLeay, 2013), improving attitudes toward hotels (Vermeulen & Seegers (2009), and consumer's purchase intention (Liu and Ji, 2018). Consistent with this, the empirical findings of a study conducted by Ye et al (2011) that emphasizes the influence of online user-generated reviews on business performance, revealed that online reviews posted by travelers have a significant influence on online sales, where the researchers noted that an increase of a 10% in

online reviews and ratings about hotels can boost online bookings by more than 05%. Within the same context, Ogut and Tas (2012) argue that online reviews improve hotel's booking. Their study concluded that a 1% increase in online reviews increases hotel sales up to 2.68% and 2.62% in Paris and London, respectively.

To fill this research gap, the current research aims at gaining a more comprehensive understanding of impacts from online hotel reviews attributes and source feature (reviewer expertise) upon travelers' booking intentions.

3. Methodology

In order to depict the effect of online reviews on hotel booking intention, the current study targets a sample of Algerian Facebook users in Facebook groups (related to tourism) through an online questionnaire. The sampling method applied in this study was the snowballing sampling technique. According to (Bagheri & Saadati, 2015), Snowball sampling method is one of the most applicable chain referral sampling methodologies that involves asking recruited participants to recommend others.

The main concentration of this study is travelers who had used travel related information gathered from the network to book for a hotel. Therefore, the questionnaire was primarily sent to a convenience sample of individuals from the friends list and some active users in some tourism-related Facebook groups. A total number of 155 respondents completed the questionnaire, 14 of them were excluded due to the inconsistency or because questionnaires were incomplete.

The questionnaire used in this study measured four dimensions: source credibility, source expertise and timeliness as a dependent variables in addition to hotel booking intention as an independent variable. Each dimension contains items measured by using a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1) "strongly disagree" to (5) "strongly agree". All of the measurement constructs of this study were adopted from different previous studies as illustrated in the table (01), some minor wording changes were made to the adopted items in order to fit the current study.

Tab (01) measurement items

dimensions	Number of items	Sources
source credibility	5	(Zhao et al, 2014) (Roobina Ohanian, 1990)
source expertise	4	(Zhao et al, 2014) (Dou et al, 2012)
timeliness	5	Filieri and McLeay (2013) Cheung and Lee, 2012
hotel booking intention	5	(Zhao et al, 2014) and McLeay (2013) Cheung and Lee, 2012

Source: prepared by researchers.

4. Results and Findings
4.1. Correlation Analysis

The following table (Tab 02) presents the relationship between online reviews dimensions embodied in source credibility, source expertise, and timeliness and travelers intention to book for a hotel.

Tab **2: Pearson Correlation test among variables**

		Source credibility	**Source expertise**	**Timeliness**	**Online review**
Hotel booking intention	Pearson correlation	0.633	0.814	0.094	0.727
	Sig.	0.000	0.000	0.134	0.000

Source: prepared by researcher.

According to the results of Pearson correlation test showed in the previous table, it was found that the highest score of correlation coefficient was between source expertise and booking intention which represents 0.814 (81.4%) and reaches a significant correlation below ($p = 0.00 < 0.05$). also the results of Pearson correlation test showed a high score of correlation between source credibility and booking intention which is 0.633 greater than 0.5, and a significant correlation ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$). Concerning the relationship between timeliness of the online review and booking intention, a weak score of correlation coefficient was found(0.094) and with no significance ($p = 0.134 > 0.05$). Giving the aforementioned, the source credibility and source expertise are significantly and positively correlated to hotel booking intention, therefore, (H_{1-2}) and (H_{1-1}) are supported. whereas timeliness is weakly correlated and no significance, which mean the rejection of the hypothesis (H_{13}).

4.2. Regression Analysis

To investigate the influence of online review dimensions represented in credibility of the source, expertise of the source and timeliness of the message on hotel booking intention, a linear regression is conducted to clearly clarify the relationship between online reviews and hotel booking intention. The table 03 illustrates the regression analysis results

Tab03: regression analysis results

		B₀	**Online Review dimensions**			**R²**	**F**
			Credibility (B1)	**Expertise (B2)**	**Timeliness (B3)**		
Hotel booking intention		0.118	0.271	0.690	- 0.014	0.692	102.626
	T calculated		3.564	11.244	- 0.269		
	Sig.		0.001	0.000	0.788		

Source: prepared by researcher based on SPSS outputs.

The results of the analyses illustrated in the table above indicated that the determination coefficient is $R^2 = 0.692$, this implies that 69.2% of the variation of hotel booking intention is explained by the online review and its dimensions, meanwhile the remaining 30.8% variation is explained by other determinants. Besides, the calculated F=102.626 and the (sig =0.000 < 0.05) refers to the significance of the regression model.

Moreover, the regression analysis results showed that the calculated t of credibility is t=3.564 which is greater than tabulated t (0.05, 137; $t_{tab=}$ 1.98), with significance sig=0.001 < 0.05. Therefore, the hypothesis (H2-1) is supported. The calculated t of source expertise t_{cal}=11.244 > t_{tab}= 1.98, and a significance sig=0.000 less than 0.05 indicates that source expertise significantly affects hotel booking intention. Therefore, the hypothesis (H2-2) is supported. The timeliness of the message has found to have no significant impact towards hotel booking intention, this is due to t_{cal} = - 0.269 < t_{tab}=1.98. Hence, the hypothesis (H2-3) is rejected.

To sum up the results of the above regression equations, the first tested dimension of online reviews which is credibility of the source has the greatest influence on the travelers' booking intentions, followed by the expertise of the source. Meanwhile, the timeliness of the message has no significant impact on hotel booking intention. This indicates that focusing on the online reviews credibility and expertise is the most effective way to promote hotel services and to boost sales.

5. Conclusions

The current research discusses the effect of reviews' credibility, expertise and timeliness on travelers' preferences to book for a hotel. Based on the results obtained, and consistent with previous studies like (Sussman & Siegal, 2003; Bataineh, 2015; Nhơn & Thu 2014), we concluded that credibility of the source have a significant influence on travelers' booking intention for hotels. This raises from the fact that information seekers perceive credible reviewers as an important source of information that offer them valuable, useful and high-quality information, therefore they are perceived as a trustworthy source and worth to be believed in order to make their purchase decision. In the same strain , expertise of the source also was found to have a significant effect on the hotel booking intention; this finding also is consistent with previous studies' result such as (Chen Zhen, 2015; Hilger et al 2011; Wangenheim & Bayón, 2004). Where the reviews posted by an expert can provide information seeker with more detailed and precise information about services and hotels. Last but not least, the results obtained showed no significant effect of timeliness of the reviews on hotel booking intention. This result wasn't in alignment with the previous studies discussed above (Fu Xiaorong et al, 2011; Wei & Leng 2017), which have stated that timeliness of online reviews has a very critical influence on consumer trust, which in turn has a significant positive influence on purchase intention. This inconsistency may be explained by the fact that there is a difference in individuals' characteristics.

Particularly, the extent of internet use and familiarity with travel, tourism and hospitality related websites.

Taking into consideration the results of the current study, companies in tourism and hospitality industry in general and hotels in particular, should focus on providing their guests with the best services experience possible in order to encourage the propensity of positive electronic word of mouth. Additionally, it is vital for hotel managers to follow online reviews and analyze guests' reactions to the provided services for the purpose of improving the services in line with the requirements of tourists.

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