

Factors Affecting Visitors Attitude Towards use of Social Networking Sites in Hotel Selection: Special Reference to Temple City Bhubaneswar

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ABSTRACT

This study delves into the impact of different social networking sites on travellers' attitude towards selection of hotel in Bhubaneswar. It is crucial to analyse how individual travellers utilise social networking sites while making hotel choices. The objective of the present study is to investigate whether factors such as consumer Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Ease of Use, Perceived Risk and Trustworthiness have any influence on travellers' attitude towards use of social media for selection of hotel in Bhubaneswar. An exploratory research design using quantitative data was used to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the findings. The study also used convenience sampling to distribute self-administered survey questionnaires to travellers in Bhubaneswar. Smart PLS software was applied for data analysis (155 respondents) by analysing the data collected. The findings conclude that Perceived Usefulness and Trustworthiness that had positive impact on travellers' attitudes towards use of social media for selection of hotel in Bhubaneswar.

Keywords: Social networking sites, Attitude, Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Ease of Use, Perceived Risk, Trustworthiness, Hotel selection.

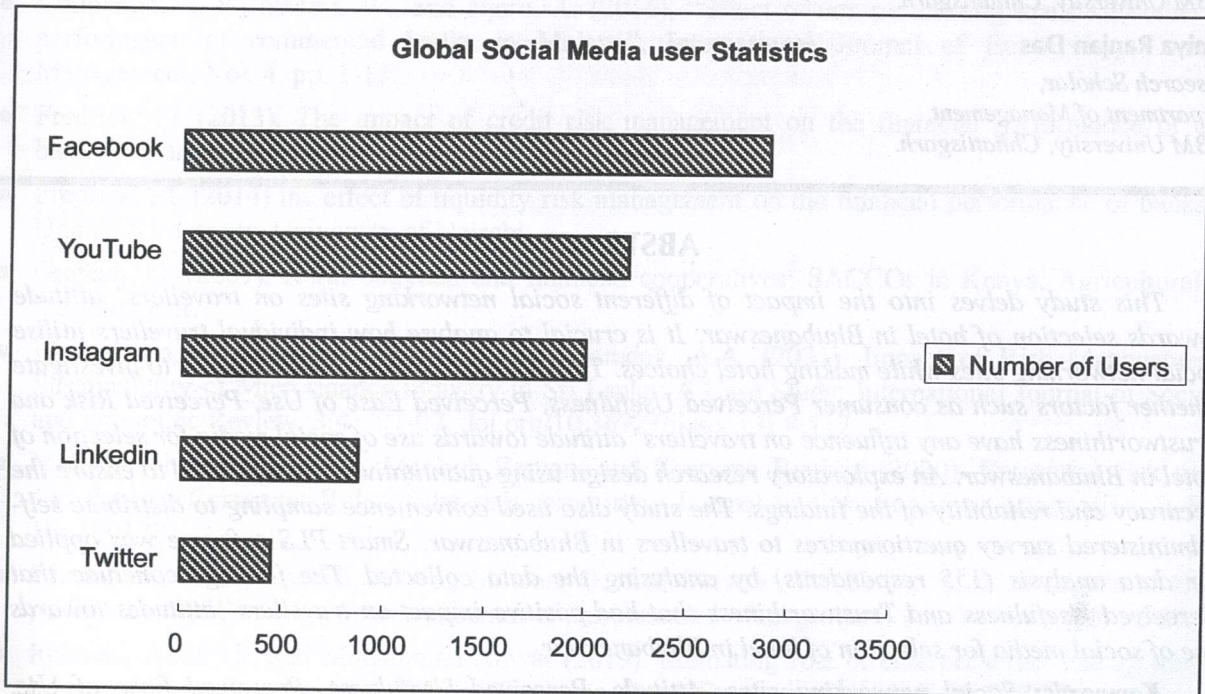
INTRODUCTION

In the last few decades, the remarkable growth of the Internet and the World Wide Web has been driven by two major forces: Online search engines and social media channels. A pivotal moment in 2008 marked the ascension of these trends, where social networking sites and blogs surpassed other online activities, becoming the top destinations for two-thirds of Internet users. This shift marked a significant change in how people engaged with the Internet, favouring personalised and interactive experiences. Users began spending more time on social networks than search engines, drawn by the allure of tailored interactions and community engagement (Sivasangari et al., 2018).

The emergence of social media platforms and blogs altered the landscape of Internet utilisation, marking a fundamental shift in online behaviour. Platforms like Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter became integral to daily life, shaping global communication, information sharing, and social interaction (Garg and Kumar

2021). Concurrently, the evolution of web technologies in the hospitality sector underwent a substantial transformation from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0. Initially, websites served as static sources of information, offering one-way communication (Khan et al., 2021). However, the rise of Web 2.0 emphasised the need for collaborative platforms and interactive engagement. Hotel businesses recognised the value of connecting with customers through various social media channels, allowing for multidirectional communication and a deeper understanding of customer preferences.

This shift to Web 2.0 empowered hotels to embed their social media links on websites, fostering seamless access for customers and enabling active interaction. In the Indian hospitality sector, social media and Web 2.0 became integral to information systems, product marketing, consumer behaviour analysis, and tourism literature. Social media's role in influencing consumer behaviour, from search to booking accommodation, became increasingly pivotal across industries, especially in the hotel sector (Gupta 2019). It allowed businesses to showcase their services, influencing potential travellers and reinforcing trust in the quality and uniqueness of their offerings. The integration of social media with customer relationship management (CRM) strategies enabled hotels to actively engage with customers, positioning them at the core of the value creation process (Garrido-Moreno et al. 2018). Recent statistics underline the unparalleled influence of social media, with 4.62 billion active users globally as of January 2022. On an average, people spent 147 minutes daily on social media, underscoring the extensive impact and engagement these platforms command (brandwatch.com, 2023).



(Garrido-Moreno & Lockett, 2016) emphasised that integrating social media (SM) tools into hotel operations enables better customer engagement, enhances brand image, and adds a modern touch. For many consumers, social networking sites serve as a trusted information source, primarily due to content shared by acquaintances or known individuals (Fotis et al., 2012). Research by (Kim et al., 2015) highlighted the critical role of social media in spreading information through electronic word of mouth (eWOM) based on user-generated content. This surge in social media adoption has significantly reshaped interactions and engagement within the hotel industry (Leung & Baloglu, 2015), particularly with the thriving presence of Social Network sites (Kim & Chae, 2018). The prevailing belief among businesses is that social media holds a pivotal role in modern commerce. Within India's hotel and tourism industry, the widespread use of Social Networking Sites (SNS) has become integral in attracting users. Consequently, understanding how travellers utilise SNS when choosing a hotel has become essential. This prompts a research inquiry into why business establishments, especially hotels, must grasp the factors influencing travellers' SNS usage during hotel selection. Some empirical studies have gauged user attitudes towards social media in the context of hotel selection, yet further investigation is required to reinforce existing insights.

This research paper aims to delve into the influential factors shaping customers' attitudes regarding SNS usage in hotel selection. The study seeks to explore the impact of Perceived Ease of Use (PEU), Perceived Usefulness (PU), Perceived Risk (PR), and Trustworthiness (TR) on the attitude towards the use of social media (ATUSM) in hotel selection by the traveller.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The surge in social media's popularity is fuelled by widespread high-speed Internet availability. Defined as "a group of Internet-based applications rooted in Web 2.0 principles allowing the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p. 61), it's preferred by 90% of Internet users. Globally, there are 4.2 billion active social media users who spend an average of 2.25 hours daily, accounting for 15% of their total daily time (Statista, 2022). Consequently, businesses widely regard social media as an invaluable asset. Leveraging social media analytics, companies harness and process data to drive effective business decisions. These platforms offer an economical means for both small and large businesses to expand their market reach and promote their products and services (Kurniawan et al., 2021). As outlined by Jones (2009), social media platforms within the tourism sector encompass various categories, including social networks and microblogging sites.

How People Feel about using Social Media to Choose a Hotel

(Schiffman and Kanuk, 2010) define attitude as a learned inclination to react positively or negatively towards a product, brand, service, or information. In the context of hotels, customer attitudes are significantly influenced by factors like online reviews and social media engagement. Positive online reviews play a crucial role in shaping these attitudes, fostering better relationships between customers and hotels (Yu et al., 2023). Previous studies reinforce the impact of positive online reviews on customer attitudes and their relationships with businesses. Social media interactions, particularly comments and activities, also contribute to altering customer attitudes. The perception of trustworthiness in other visitors' reviews further influences these attitudes, emphasising the importance of understanding the impact of online reviews and social media. For hotels, social media serves as a vital tool for enhancing customer loyalty, satisfaction, and brand awareness (Widarmanti & Ramantoko, 2020). This underlines the significance of comprehending the influence of online reviews and social media on customer attitudes to maintain and improve customer relationships. With most hotel bookings made online, potential guests heavily rely on online information and customer comments to evaluate a hotel's quality. Direct communication via social media platforms can significantly shape a positive perception of the hotel. Several studies indicate that customer-posted online reviews can positively impact other customers' attitudes towards a hotel, influencing their choices and purchase intentions. Managing and actively engaging with customer reviews online becomes crucial for hotels to shape customer attitudes towards their brand. Trust in online reviews significantly affects how customers choose hotels, making it imperative for hotels to proactively manage and assess these reviews. Attitude, as per Teo & Noyes (2011), encapsulates individuals' positive or negative feelings towards an action or object. Customers' spontaneous mental evaluations drive online purchases (Pavlou & Fygenson, 2006). In the context of Malaysia, (Hua et al., 2017) highlight the positive correlation between attitude towards using social media for travel destination selection and visitors' intention to visit the destination. Previous research, like that of Leung & Baloglu (2015), underscores the positive marketing impact of social media on guests' attitudes and booking intentions in the hotel industry through integrated Facebook marketing models.

Perceived Usefulness (PU)

The perceived usefulness significantly influences customers' attitudes and intentions to purchase hotels, recognised as a key factor driving such intentions (Goh, 2015). Customers derive benefits from online reviews, impacting their perceptions of both utilitarian and hedonic values associated with a hotel (Wang & Zhang, 2015). When customers believe that a hotel room reservation will be satisfying and beneficial after reading online reviews, it positively shapes their attitude and intention to book.

Social networking sites (SNS) provide customers with a wealth of reviews and opinions on various hotel aspects, influencing their perceptions, attitudes, and booking intentions. Perceived usefulness (PU), in the context of information technology, is rooted in users' belief that a tool enhances their work efficacy (Davis et al., 1989). PU

predicts the intention to use technology based on the idea that intentions prompt behaviours, regardless of the emotional outcome (Castaneda et al., 2009).

For social media sites, PU refers to users' confidence in the platform's ability to capture desired information, share enriching content, and aid in decision-making (Lin, 2007). Previous research has linked PU of social media to users' attitudes and behaviours regarding utilising social media reviews (Davis et al., 1989). In the context of tourism, PU of social media positively influences attitudes towards using it to select destinations (Hua et al., 2017). The connection between perceived usefulness and attitudes is a well-established aspect in the field of information systems and technology applications, as outlined in previous studies (Cheung & Vogel, 2013; Melendez et al., 2013). Hence the Hypothesis posit:

H1: PU will significantly influence the attitude towards the use of social networking sites in terms of hotel selection.

Perceived Ease of Use (PEU)

Perceived ease of use refers to a customer's perception of the extent to which a product or service is easy to use. It has been found to affect both customers' attitudes and their intentions to purchase a hotel room. Customers use online reviews as a reference to help them assess whether a hotel is easy to use, because customers perceive that if a hotel is popular, it is less likely to encounter problems or risks when using that hotel. If a customer believes that a hotel will help him or her solve a problem and reduce the risk of potential problems, he or she will be willing to establish a good relationship with that hotel, and this attitude will become his or her intent to select the hotel. Online reviews are a form of social media and serve as signals to customers who are searching for a hotel and seeking information on hotel quality, prices, and other aspects of the hotel. The signals contained in online reviews affect customer purchase intentions and are directly reflected in perceived ease of use (Nagy & Hajdú, 2021). Hence, we can form the Hypothesis:

H2: PEU will significantly influence the attitude towards the use of social networking sites in terms of hotel selection.

Perceived Risk (PR)

In various studies, perceived risk has been a focus, particularly in understanding its implications in social media usage. It encompasses the potential threats or feelings of insecurity associated with engaging on these platforms. Social media risk, as defined by (Webber, Li, and Szymanski, 2012), calculates the likelihood of a negative event on social media multiplied by the potential impact of that event. While platforms like Facebook, X, and YouTube encourage the sharing of personal information, this act poses tangible risks. Disclosing personal data such as contact numbers or age can lead to concerns like identity theft (Han & Maclaurin, 2002) or unauthorised access to sensitive information, potentially exploited by criminals for fraudulent activities (Immler, 2007). Users on these platforms might face data theft, content tampering, financial losses, reputation damage, and emotional distress. This study aims to identify risk factors related to hotel selection through social media. In pursuit of this objective, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

H3: PR will significantly influence the attitude towards the use of social networking sites in terms of hotel selection.

Trustworthiness

Trust in user-generated content on social media platforms plays a pivotal role in shaping attitudes towards product or service referrals on social networking sites (Elliott and Speck, 2005). As per (Ayeh et al., 2013), a social media user's perceived trust directly impacts their attitude towards using user-generated content for travel behaviours. Similarly, (Ing and Ming, 2018) found that trustworthiness significantly influences consumers' attitudes towards blogger recommendations. Additionally, (Zainal et al., 2017) highlights that trust in the credibility of e-WOM content leads to a positive attitude towards it. Earlier scholars, like (Dutta and Bhat, 2016), have also established the link between trust and attitude using empirical evidence. Therefore, the following hypothesis encapsulates the insights from these discussions:

H4: TR will significantly influence the attitude towards the use of social networking sites in terms of hotel selection.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present research study does an exploratory research design by using quantitative data. This examines the importance of different factors affecting the users' attitude towards use of social media for the selection of hotel in Odisha, India. A convenience sampling technique was used to distribute the paper-based, self-administered survey questionnaires on different hotels in the different cities of Odisha (Bhubaneswar, Puri, Cuttack). Those individuals who use social media sites as a method for hotel selection are the respondents. So as to have a larger and a more representative sample, online surveys were conducted.

QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN AND MEASURES

The survey questions were operationalised based on existing research. The measurement scale perceived usefulness was adopted from the study (Hanifati, 2015) and (Hsu et al., 2013). The 04 items measurement scale for perceived ease of use was adopted from the study of (Shih 2004). The 03 items measurement scale of perceived risk was taken from the study of Featherman and (Pavlou, 2003); (Quintal et al., 2010). The 04 items measurement scale for Trustworthiness was taken from the study of (Ing and Ming, 2018); (Hsu et al., 2013) (Hassanein and Head, 2004). The 05 items measurement scale of Attitudes towards using social networks for hotel selection was taken from the study of (Ing and Ting 2018). All items were assessed using five points Likert Scale.

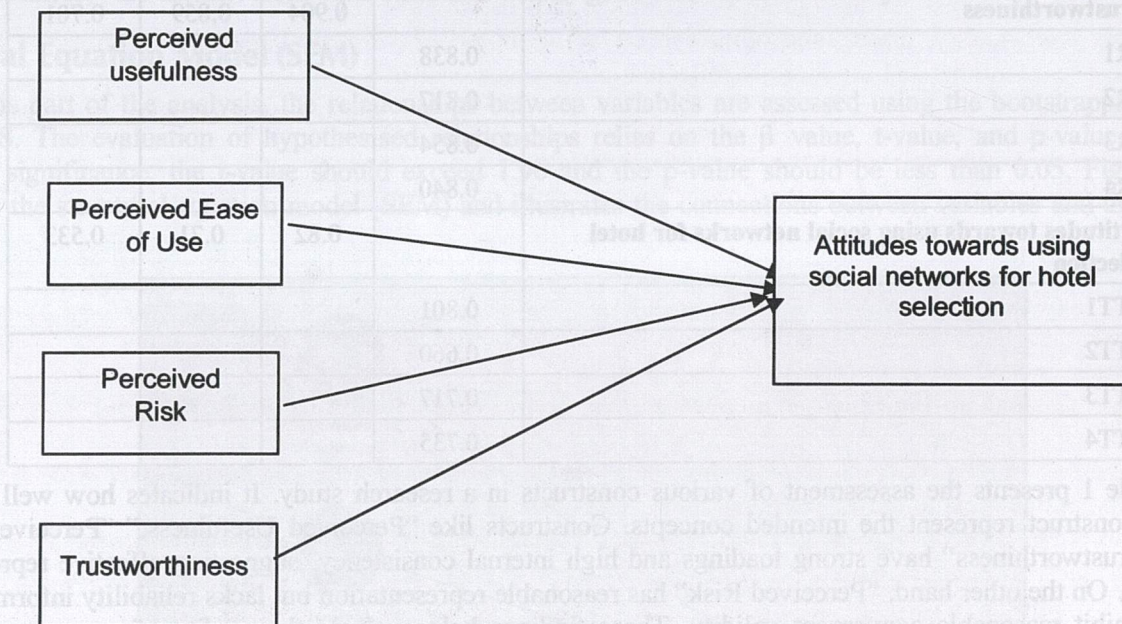


Fig. 2.1: Conceptual Model

DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, data collected was examined using Smart-PLS to assess construct validity and reliability. This was accomplished by employing the PLS algorithm for the measurement assessment model, which involved calculating Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and AVE.

The second phase of the analysis involved assessing the relationships between constructs using the bootstrapping method. In this phase, the structural equation model (SEM) was employed to determine the relationships between constructs, which were evaluated based on the β value, t-value, and p-value (Hair et al, 2013).

Table 1: Convergent Validity and Internal Consistency Reliability

Constructs and Items	Loading	CR	α	AVE
Perceived Usefulness		0.82	0.71	0.533
PU1	0.811			
PU2	0.885			
PU3	0.874			
Perceived Ease of Use		0.883	0.826	0.658
PEU1	0.597			
PEU2	0.873			
PEU3	0.869			
PEU4	0.869			
Perceived Risk		0.844	0.822	0.649
PR1	0.660			
PR2	0.976			
PR3	0.749			
Trustworthiness		0.904	0.859	0.701
TR1	0.838			
TR2	0.817			
TR3	0.854			
TR4	0.840			
Attitudes towards using social networks for hotel selection		0.82	0.71	0.533
ATT1	0.801			
ATT2	0.660			
ATT3	0.717			
ATT4	0.735			

The Table 1 presents the assessment of various constructs in a research study. It indicates how well the items within each construct represent the intended concepts. Constructs like “Perceived Usefulness,” “Perceived Ease of Use,” and “Trustworthiness” have strong loadings and high internal consistency, suggesting effective representation and reliability. On the other hand, “Perceived Risk” has reasonable representation but lacks reliability information. All constructs exhibit reasonable convergent validity. These findings help evaluate the quality of measurement in the study, crucial for research validity and reliability.

Discriminant Validity

According to (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), for discriminant validity to be acceptable, the square root of AVE should be greater than the correlation values within the same column in the table. The PLS algorithm in Smart-PLS is used to determine discriminant validity, and the results are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Discriminant Validity Test

	Attitudes towards using Social Networks for Hotel Selection	Perceived Ease of Use	Perceived Risk	Perceived Usefulness	Trustworthiness
Attitudes towards using social networks for hotel selection	0.73				
Perceived Ease of Use	0.545	0.811			
Perceived Risk	-0.171	0.166	0.806		
Perceived Usefulness	0.555	0.417	-0.128	0.857	
Trustworthiness	0.75	0.477	-0.16	0.458	0.837

The Table 2 presents the discriminant validity assessment, which compares the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct with the correlation values between constructs. The diagonal values (top left to bottom right) represent the square root of AVE for each construct. For acceptable discriminant validity, these diagonal values should be higher than the correlation values in the same column. In this table, the diagonal values are indeed greater than the other correlation values, indicating that the constructs, such as “Attitudes towards using social networks for hotel selection,” “Perceived Ease of Use,” “Perceived Risk,” “Perceived Usefulness,” and “Trustworthiness,” are distinct from each other and exhibit good discriminant validity.

Structural Equation Model (SEM)

In this part of the analysis, the relationships between variables are assessed using the bootstrapping method in Smart-PLS. The evaluation of hypothesised relationships relies on the β value, t-value, and p-value. To establish statistical significance, the t-value should exceed 1.96 and the p-value should be less than 0.05. Fig. 2.2 visually represents the structural equation model (SEM) and illustrates the connections between variables and their associated items.

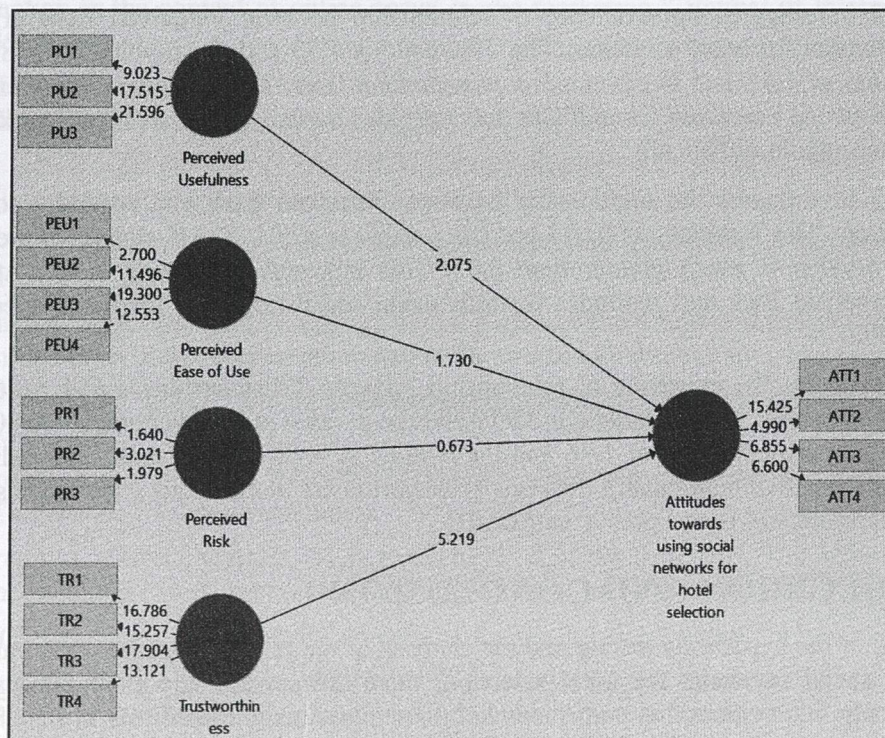


Fig. 2.2: Structural Equation Model

Table 3: Hypothesis Testing (Direct Effect)

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values	Supported
Perceived Ease of Use -> Attitudes towards using social networks for hotel selection	0.22	0.215	0.127	1.73	0.084	No
Perceived Risk -> Attitudes towards using social networks for hotel selection	-0.096	-0.074	0.143	0.673	0.501	No
Perceived Usefulness -> Attitudes towards using social networks for hotel selection	0.206	0.195	0.099	2.075	0.038	Yes
Trustworthiness -> Attitudes towards using social networks for hotel selection	0.535	0.545	0.103	5.219	0	Yes

The Table 3 provides an analysis of the hypotheses testing for the relationships between different independent constructs (Perceived Ease of Use, Perceived Risk, Perceived Usefulness, Trustworthiness) and the dependent construct (Attitudes towards using social networks for hotel selection). The analysis is based on T-statistics and p-values. Here's a breakdown of the results:

The Hypothesis H1 investigates the relationship between Perceived Usefulness and Attitudes towards the use of social networks for hotel selection: The T-statistic is 2.075 and the corresponding p-value is 0.038. The T-statistic exceeds the critical value of 1.96 and the p-value is less than 0.05. This suggests that there is a statistically significant positive relationship between Perceived Usefulness and Attitudes towards using social networks for hotel selection. Thus, H1 is accepted on the basis of statistical grounds.

The Hypothesis H2 investigates the existence of relationship between Perceived Ease of Use and Attitudes towards using social networks for hotel selection: The T-statistic is 1.73 and the p-value is 0.084. The T-statistic is less than the critical value of 1.96 and the p-value is greater than 0.05. This suggests that there is no statistically significant relationship between Perceived Ease of Use and Attitudes towards using social networks for hotel selection. So therefore, H2 is not acceptable statistically.

The Hypothesis H3 investigates the relationship between Perceived Risk and Attitudes towards using social networks for hotel selection: The T-statistic is 0.673 and the p-value is 0.501. The T-statistic is well below the critical value of 1.96 and the p-value is much greater than 0.05. This indicates that there is no statistically significant relationship between Perceived Risk and Attitudes towards using social networks for hotel selection. Hence, H3 is statistically not acceptable.

Hypothesis H4 investigates the existence of relationship between Trustworthiness and Attitudes towards using social networks for hotel selection: The T-statistic is 5.219 and the p-value is 0 (indicating $p < 0.0001$). The T-statistic is well above the acceptable critical value of 1.96 and the p-value is highly significant. This indicates a very strong and statistically significant positive relationship between Trustworthiness and Attitudes towards using social networks for hotel selection. So therefore, H4 is acceptable statistically.

MANAGERIAL DECISION AND CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the hypothesis testing and the analysis of the relationships between various constructs and attitudes towards using social networks for hotel selection, there are several important managerial decisions and conclusions to draw. Firstly, it's evident that perceived usefulness plays a significant role in shaping positive attitudes towards using social networks for hotel selection. This finding suggests that strategies aimed at enhancing the perceived usefulness of these platforms, perhaps by improving their functionality or offering more value to users, can

have a positive impact on user attitudes and engagement. Secondly, trustworthiness emerged as a crucial factor in influencing attitudes towards social networks for hotel selection. This indicates that building and maintaining trust with users is paramount. Managers and organisations should focus on factors that contribute to trust, such as transparency, security, and reliability. On the other hand, perceived ease of use and perceived risk do not appear to have significant impacts on attitudes. While these factors may still play a role in the user experience, the study suggests that they may not be the primary drivers of attitudes.

In conclusion, these findings provide valuable insights for managers and organisations operating in the hospitality and online travel industry. They emphasise the importance of enhancing perceived usefulness and trustworthiness to foster positive user attitudes and in turn, encourage the use of social networks for hotel selection. By focusing on these aspects, businesses can make informed decisions to improve their services and ultimately enhance the overall user experience.

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