Search and Compare Drives Satisfaction: Virtues of Online Ticketing for Air Travelers

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ABSTRACT

The ability to easily search and then compare items is an advantage that online platforms have over brick-and-mortar formats. In such an intensely competitive airline market, this paper investigates if this exploration experience satisfies the traveler during air ticket booking by applying the stimulus organism response model. An empirical study is used to test the proposed model by applying the structural equation modeling and interaction effects. The model describes the extent by which traveler repurchase intention is influenced by four important factors – search and compare assortment satisfaction, social influence, and overall satisfaction. The paper extends the satisfaction to online repatronage intention and customer loyalty. This empirical study also establishes that the relationships are moderated due to civil status and ticketing number of platforms used by the customers.

KEYWORDS

Customer Loyalty, ORI, Overall Satisfaction, Search and Compare Assortment Satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

Air traveler retention has attracted considerable attention, partly because it is a means for gaining competitive advantage. Online ticketing is popular among air travelers because of convenience. The web is a rich source of information which helps the traveler to search (Hodkinson & Kiel, 2003) and evident in online ticket booking. Information search is integral to on-line decision-making (Hodkinson & Kiel, 2003). Studies establish that online retailers profit from a customer only when a customer shops over four times from the same portal (Mainspring and Bain & Company, 2000). Therefore, overall satisfaction is important in maintaining long term online buyer seller relationship (Szymanski & Hise, 2000). Despite its importance, limited attempts have been made to understand customer loyalty and investigate its antecedents and their interrelationships for online ticket booking. This study investigates if search and compare are the antecedents of satisfaction for online air ticketing services by applying the stimulus organism response model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Traditional travel agency channels need more staff, whereas online ticketing is cost effective for airlines. With majority of airline revenues being generated through checked baggage, onboard food, premium seat selection, and extra legroom the airlines get an opportunity to adopt bundling tactics, product-suggestion analytics, and dynamic pricing to create customized recommendations for its passengers (Boin, Coleman, Delfassy, & Palombo, 2017). An online website can provide product lists with links so that consumers can search and compare interesting products by simply scrolling and clicking (Liang & Shiau, 2018).

Search and compare (SC) a cognitive process is based on comparative and normative theories and acts as stimuli to the traveler. SC is also an indicator of flight demand (Curley, Dichter, Krishnan,

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Riedel, & Saxon, 2020). It has the potential to replace the traditional way of incentivizing the customer. Comparative theory (Dervin, 1991) talks about well-defined preferences that obey certain axioms of rational behaviors while normative theory is based on expected utility paradigm, where customers learn through deliberation on choices (Habermas, 2006). Searching and comparing different objects on a website is a transactional process. A service is a search good, if information is enough to gauge quality (Fernando, Sivakumaran, & Suganthi, 2018). Air ticket is a search good where the intention to purchase online is high for search goods (Chiang & Dholakia, 2003). Searching, comparing and selecting services are a satisfying experience. This study investigates if this experience is transactional or cumulative by nature. If transactional, then the satisfaction would be at an assortment level, if cumulative then, it would be an overall stage. In either case, satisfaction would be classified as an organism. Further, this research studies the response of satisfaction as online repatronage intention and their customer loyalty. A retail study in India found that satisfaction leads to repatronage intention and customer loyalty (Atulkar & Kesari, 2017), where repeat purchase increases the margin (Sirdeshmukh, Singh, & Sabol, 2002). However the link between loyalty and repatronage has not been investigated. This gap has been addressed in this study. An objective of online ticketing platforms has been to enhance loyalty. The satisfaction loyalty relationship is strongly affected in the presence of moderators (Baron & Kenny, 1986) and is moderated by age (Homburg & Giering, 2001), perceived risk (Tuu, Olsen, & Linh, 2011) and spending habits of customers. In travel literature, age plays an important role in determining the utility of several hypothesis. This study checks the effect of age, gender, civil status and number of online platforms used on the hypothesized relationships. This study additionally fills a gap in the literature on the moderating effect and provides practical rules of thumb to find the moderating effect.

The air ticket sector under study was a growth industry in India, poised for great heights before the lockdown. SC is a vital dimension for online ticketing in the backdrop of social influence. A customer presumably remains loyal towards ecommerce (Fang, Shao, & Wen, 2016). Another purpose of this study is to investigate the path direction for the variables assortment satisfaction, overall satisfaction, online repatronage intention, and customer loyalty. We find this particularly interesting because no such studies have been conducted for determining the path direction of variables in the context of online air ticket purchase. In this study, SC facilities of different airline ticketing platforms and the satisfaction between single and multiple platform users are studied.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: following a brief presentation of the assortment satisfaction, overall satisfaction and customer loyalty, the research hypotheses are developed and the research methodology is detailed. The analysis of the collected data and the testing of the hypotheses are complemented by a discussion of the main results. The article ends with the main findings, implications and limitations of this study, and also includes suggestions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Background

Stimulus organism response (SOR) model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) has been applied to a number of online studies. According to Eroglu, Machleit, & Davis (2001), all audible and visible cues are stimulus in online platforms. According to this exemplar, various environmental stimuli induce emotions which in turn influence approach-avoidance behaviors (Ha & Im, 2012). Stimulus are external environmental cues (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), organisms are internal feelings (Bagozzi, 1986) describing the response (Manthiou, Ayadi, Lee, Chiang, & Tang, 2017) which are the final outcomes (Moon, et al., 2017). Therefore, stimuli (S) are SC and social influence that affect the internal states (O) of satisfaction differently, which then induce approach behavior of purchase intent or loyalty (R).

Search and Compare

It is a tool which is extensively used in the medical field for improving interventions (Daumit, et al., 2001), and by websites (Ortiz-Cordova & Jansen, 2016) to form patterns and as reservation protocol in high speed optical networks (Markovic, Duboyan, & Dado, 2011). SC function is a part of information search behaviour (Hodkinson & Kiel, 2003) so as to toggle between choices (Jovanovic & Rob, 1990). It is based on dead end detection (Steinmetz & Hoffmann, 2017). Consumers follow a threshold rule, and consequently those items searched earlier gain a competitive advantage whenever their display frequency exceeds this threshold, allowing online platforms to sell to consumers who would otherwise have purchased from later shown items (Fishman & Dmitry, 2017).

Search and compare (Zhang, 2008) enables ontological product evaluation (Leukel & Sugumaran, 2009) and taxonomy (Polini, 2012) to select one service like online tickets (Bongomin, Ntayi, Munene, & Nabeta, 2016) or private labels (Thanasuta, 2015). In absence of sufficient information to allow for complete evaluation, comparing and selecting is an appropriate methodology for evaluation (Daumit, et al., 2001) and extensively used in video coding (AlQaralleh & Abu-Sharkh, 2016). This process improves the evaluation choice. One may compare and select with different assumptions (Bradley, Cressie, & Shi, 2015) and rank choice (Caporin & Lisi, 2011). In absence of product categories, consumers cannot compare and select (Solka, Jackson, & Lee, 2011). Search and compare is more suited for online as compared to offline air tickets (Solka, Jackson, & Lee, 2011).

Information search is a powerful internet tool which has been used for commercial transactions (Dutta & Das, 2017). Web layout act as a SC tool for retail consumers (Wilson, 2013), customers resort to software to find and compare such retailers who sell their product/service in different languages (Huang & Tsai, 2011); willingness to pay is determined by SC (Gupta & Cakanyildirim, 2016). Searching and comparing based on case based reasoning (Kolodner, 1993) is a zero cost in an online environment (Kumar, Lang, & Peng, 2005) used by patients to choose the best plastic surgeon (PR Newswire, 2012); hotel lodging prices (Piccoli, O'Connor, Capaccioli, & Alvarez, 2003); health insurance policy (Anonymous, 2011) and etc. Image, communication and attractiveness characteristics help in searching and comparing (Kim, Oh, Yang, & Kim, 2010).

Assortment Satisfaction

Classes, fringe benefit options and flight timings are the online ticket assortments. Assortment perceptions and buyer behavior build assortment satisfaction (Sloot, Fok, & Verhoef, 2006). Assortment satisfaction happens due to options, structure, attractiveness and pricing of the tickets (Chernev, 2006). For assortment, the composition is more important than the ticket options (Grosso, Castaldo, & Grewal, 2018). It is based on expectations arising out of future ticketing predictions, from general beliefs to specific itinerary of the ticket (Oliver, 1996). Assortment satisfaction is inversely proportional to ticket choice overload (Diehl & Poynor, 2010) and varies directly due to parity in price of limited tickets. SC satisfies a customer's perception of airline ticket assortment in online booking (Atulkar & Kesari, 2017). Thus it is hypothesized that

H₁: SC positively influences assortment satisfaction in online purchase scenario

Overall Satisfaction

It expresses users' impact in terms of feelings about prior online purchase (Bonsón, Escobar, & Ratkai, 2014) or an experience of purchase from an online retailer (Fazal-e-Hasan, Ahmadi, Mortimer, & Grimmer, 2018). Overall satisfaction (OS) is relational, and is the degree of overall pleasure or contentment felt by the customer, resulting from the ability of the service to fulfill the customer's desires, expectations and needs in relation to the service (Hellier, Geursen, Carr, & Rickard, 2003) and is generally defined as a positive affective state resulting from a global evaluation of performance based on past purchasing and consumption experience (Anderson & Fornell, 1994; Lam, Shankar,

Erramilli, & Murthy, 2004). Online customer satisfaction has often been used to measure e-business success (McKinney, Yoon, & Zahedi, 2002). Individual satisfaction which is idiosyncratic (Ueltschy, Laroche, Eggert, & Bindl, 2007) is an important factor in continued use intention (Bonsón, Escobar, & Ratkai, 2014; Cheung & Lee, 2009; Schaefer & Schamari, 2016). Following which, it can be stated

H₂: SC positively influences OS in online air ticket purchase

H₃: Assortment satisfaction positively influences OS in online air ticket purchase

Online Repatronage Intention

It is the individual's judgment about buying again a designated service from the same company, taking into accounts his or her current situation and likely circumstances (Hellier, Geursen, Carr, & Rickard, 2003) and refers to the subjective probability that an individual will continue to purchase services from the online platform in the future (Chiu, Chang, Cheng, & Fang, 2009). Satisfaction is a well established antecedent of ORI (Hellier, Geursen, Carr, & Rickard, 2003; Tarofder, Nikhashemi, Azam, Selvantharan, & Haque, 2016; Shin, Thai, Grewal, & Kim, 2017). Thus it is proposed that

H₄: Overall satisfaction positively influences online repatronage intention in online air ticket purchase

Customer Loyalty

Oliver (1997, 1999) claims that customers follow an attitudinal process to develop loyalty, which can be summarized as a cognitive-affective-conative-action framework (four-stage loyalty). Developing and maintaining customer loyalty is important particularly in the online sector because loyalty results in increased profits through repeat patronage, less price sensitivity, and positive word-of-mouth (Kaur & Mahajan, 2011). Studies on supermarket consumers in Turkey (Kitapci, Dortyol, Yaman, & Gulmez, 2013) and life insurance customers in Taiwan (Yu & Tseng, 2016) have considered repurchase intention as a proxy of customer loyalty. Customer loyalty is the degree to which the customer has exhibited, over recent years, repeat purchase behaviour of a particular company service; and the significance of that expenditure in terms of the customer's total outlay on that particular type of service (Hellier, Geursen, Carr, & Rickard, 2003). Thus it is hypothesized that

H₅: ORI influences customer loyalty for online air ticket purchase

Social Influence

It is user's perception about the importance of online purchase as influenced by others (Bonsón, Escobar, & Ratkai, 2014) and can be used to explain group and collective behavior (Katz, 1959). These are based on the social influence theory of how individuals are influenced by presence and behaviour of others (Latane, 1981) and expectations from significant others (Cheung & Lee, 2009). Social influence is rapidly transmitted through various channels, creating the potential to affect millions of customers (Book, Tanford, Montgomery, & Love, 2018). A bias creeps in because of social influence (Germar, Schlemmer, Krug, Voss, & Mojzisch, 2014) which effects human behavior. Preference for online shopping vis a vis offline shopping is prejudiced by social influence (Faqih, 2016). Hence,

H₆: Social influence positively influences SC in online air ticket purchase

H₇: Social influence positively influences AS in online air ticket purchase

H₈: Social influence positively influences OS in online air ticket purchase

Civil Status

Married and unmarried people think differently (Waite, 1995). This research studies the moderating effect of civil status on each of the hypothesized relationships of the model.

H_{1-8a}: Civil status moderates each of the proposed relationships

No of Platforms

People may be loyal to one brand or multiple platform brands (Bandyopadhyay & Martell, 2007). This paper investigates the moderating effect of the number of platform brands (one or many) used for online air tickets upon relationships of the proposed model.

H_{1-8b}: Number of brands moderates each of the proposed relationships

Gender

Gender has influenced the thought process in several studies (Svedholm-Häkkinen, M., Ojala, & Lindeman, 2018). Females and males have different motivation dimensions (Kiani, Laroche, & Paulin, 2016). These differences have been created due to their specific roles in families and societies (Mesch, Brown, Moore, & Hayat, 2011). It is also attributable to internalization of gender beliefs consistent with other people's expectations and social norms (Risman, 2004). Information is processed differently due to gender as males rely more on heuristic cues (Papyrina, 2019). Gender differences can be capitalized by brand managers to produce effective promotion for each gender segment (Bae, 2019). The role of this research is also to investigate if gender will confound the proposed relationships.

H_{1-8c}: Gender moderates each of the proposed relationships

Age

Different age groups behave differently (Voss, Bodner, & Rothermund, 2018) and this study checks for the age moderation effects on the relationships.

H_{1-8d}: Age moderates each of the proposed relationships

Based on the above the following model is proposed as shown in Figure 1

Figure 1. *Proposed model*

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A two-step approach, recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), was adopted for the data analysis. The first step involves the analysis of the measurement model while the second step tests the structural relationships among the latent constructs. It would be followed by a multi group moderation using SEM for the age, gender, civil status of the respondents and the number of platforms used by the respondents. The moderating categorical variables will be tested for the interaction effects by the danielsooper statistical interaction calculator. All the focal constructs of the model were measured using having multiple items based on validated scales obtained from the literature resulting in a 23 item questionnaire. 3 item online repatronage intention(Reynolds, Jones, Musgrove, & Gillison, 2012), assortment satisfaction scale(Kenning, Grzeskowiak, Brock, & Ahlert, 2011), overall satisfaction scale(Chang & Chen, 2008), social influence (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000) scales, 4 item customer loyalty(Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996), and 7 item search and compare (Zhang, 2008) scales were used in the study. These items measured responses on 1 to 7 scales where 1 represented strong disagreement while 7 represented strong agreement. A pilot survey was conducted with 30 college students to find for errors in a questionnaire. After a few minor corrections, the questionnaire was finalized for distribution and data collection.

DATA ANALYSIS

A convenience sampling method was employed to collect data. The data was collected during November 2019 to January 2020. Convenient sampling aimed at identifying difficult populations

(Baltar & Brunet, 2012) are acceptable for ticketing related research (Kinard & Hartman, 2013). Additionally, time and monetary constraints warranted the researcher to select the respondents on judgment than chance (Malhotra, 2010; Kumar & Kumar, 2020). Data was collected from 458 respondents located in and around the Indian capital city of New Delhi. Delhi, which has a high business potential (Gupta, Foroudi, & Yen, 2018), was preferred because of its cosmopolitan character comprising people from diverse regions and ethnicity (Sondhi & Chawla, 2017) making it an ideal geographic location for field survey (Gautam & Sharma, 2017). As Delhi attracts individuals from all parts of the country (Joshi & Yadav, 2018) the findings from Delhi area can be generalisable for India (Madan & Yadav, 2018). SPSS and AMOS were used for data analysis. The demographic data is as enclosed in Table 1. 84.8% of the respondents were under the age of 30, with 62.4% being male. 71.6% of the respondents used a single platform for booking. Airline websites were a clear favorite for ticketing.

Table 1. Demographic Data

Description	Category	Percentage
Income	Less than Rs 30000 pm	18.2
	30-60000 pm	31
	60,000 – 100000	23.7
	100000-150000	9.7
	150000-200000	5.3
	Above 200000	12.2
Marital status	Unmarried	81.4
	Married	18.6
Age	Under 20	35
	20-30	49.2
	30-40	11.2
	40-50	2.8
	Above 50	1.8
Gender	Male	62.4
	Female	37.6
Qualification	School	27.6
	Graduate	45.2
	Post graduate	22.6
	Professional	4.6
No of platforms	Single platform	71.6
	Multiple platforms	28.4
Ticket booking sites	Make my trip	18.90
	Expedia	15.55
	Clear Trip	10.36
	Yatra	10.36
	Airline website	44.82

Table 2. Psychometric Properties

	AVE	CR	R²	Mean
AS	0.6212	0.8298	0.2486	4.3173
CL	0.5487	0.8292	0.1239	4.5699
SC	0.5386	0.8223	0.0488	4.4760
ORI	0.6677	0.8577	0.4031	4.0997
OS	0.5317	0.7681	0.3141	4.0590
SI	0.6322	0.8370	0.0000	3.7591

Measurement Model

Means, composite reliability of the measures are calibrated in Table 2. The composite reliability ranges from 0.77 to 0.86 which is as per the prescribed minimum limit of 0.6 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The measurement model was also assessed by testing the convergent and discriminant validity. Convergent validity is used to determine if all items converge on a single construct. Fornell and Larcker (1981) have suggested that adequately convergent validity measures should contain less than 50 per cent error variance (AVE should be 0.5 or above) as evident in Table 3. AVE values greater than 0.50 suggest highly converging constructs (Mohamed, 2020; Kaushal & Ali, 2019). Whether each latent variable shares more variance with its own measurement variables or with other constructs determines the discriminant validity. Inter correlations between the variables were not higher than 0.8 points and each inter correlation was lower than the square root of the AVE as in Table 3. The diagonal values larger than the other values make all the constructs discriminant.

Table 3. Discriminant and Correlations

	AS	CL	SC	ORI	OS	SI
AS	0.7882					
CL	0.3802	0.7407				
SC	0.3925	0.2830	0.7339			
ORI	0.4181	0.3519	0.2850	0.8171		
OS	0.4435	0.3624	0.3217	0.6349	0.7292	
SI	0.3866	0.2058	0.2209	0.5639	0.4617	0.7951

Structural Model and Fit Statistics

This study used the maximum likelihood estimation SEM method, the most robust method. Suggested cutoffs for chi-square/ degrees of freedom (χ^2/df) should range from < 2 to < 5 (Hu & Bentler, 1995). This model attains a value of 2.321. Use of the NFI, IFI, CFI and RMSEA fit indices are consistent with evaluations by Hu and Bentler (1995). The values achieved are 0.917, 0.931, 0.930 and 0.050 respectively. P close of 0.524 indicates that the badness of model fit ascertained is significant. Comparative fit index (CFI) and increasing fitness index (IFI) be 0.9 or above (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002). Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is acceptable below 0.08 (McDonald & Ho, 2002). Goodness-of-fit index (GFI) and adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI) be 0.8 or above

Figure 2. *Structural Model*

(Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996). Hoelter Index was 235 at 5 percent level of significance and a value above 200 depicts significant sample size.

DISCUSSIONS

All eight hypotheses have been supported by this empirical study. Customer loyalty is predicted by online repatronage intention ($\beta = 0.475$) supporting H_5 . Overall satisfaction is predicted by assortment satisfaction ($\beta = 0.194$), SC ($\beta = 0.111$) and social influence ($\beta = 0.484$) supporting H_3 , H_2 and H_8 respectively. Assortment satisfaction is the outcome of SC ($\beta = 0.503$) and social influence ($\beta = -0.421$) supported by H_1 and H_7 respectively. A higher assortment increases the inability of the consumer (Diehl & Poynor, 2010), can be offset by SC functions. Similarly, online repatronage intention is positively influenced by OS ($\beta = 1.160$) as proven by H_4 . This relationship between OS and online repatronage intention has been cemented by a mobile telecommunication services study across 8 countries (Aksoy, Buoye, Aksoy, Larivière, & Keiningham, 2013), mobile shopping (Natarajan, Balasubramanian, & Kasilingam, 2018) and also in another retailing study (Fanga, Shaoa, & Wen, 2016). H_6 is established as social influence supports SC ($\beta = 0.296$).

Moderation Due to Number Of Platforms And Civil Status And Their Interaction

The eight relationships of the proposed model were checked for differences due to age, gender, number of platforms and civil status of the respondents. No path moderated due to gender or age,

whereas civil status and number of brands moderate certain path relationships as depicted in Table 5. Subsequently, the moderated relationships were also tested for their interaction effects.

Table 4. Summary Hypothesis

	Path	Standardized Path Coefficient (β)	S.E.	C.R.	p-value
H₁	SC ® AS	.418	.082	6.158	***
H₂	SC ® OS	.128	.054	2.063	.039
H₃	AS ® OS	.268	.052	3.735	***
H₄	OS ® ORI	.972	.102	11.431	***
H₅	ORI ® CL	.482	.062	7.669	***
H₆	SI ® SC	.304	.065	4.583	***
H₇	SI ® AS	.360	.076	5.553	***
H₈	SI ® OS	.571	.063	7.644	***

*** signifies $p < 0.001$

Table 5. Moderation effects

		Civil Status					No of platforms					
	Path	Married		Single			Single Platform		Multiple Platforms			
		Estimate	P	Estimate	P	z-stat	Estimate	P	Estimate	P	z-stat	
H _{1a/b}	SC ® AS	0.274	0.015	0.666	0.000	2.411**	0.448	0.000	0.606	0.000	0.896	
H _{2a/b}	SC ® OS	0.042	0.611	0.142	0.067	0.879	0.143	0.033	0.052	0.522	-0.858	
H _{3a/b}	AS ® OS	0.267	0.006	0.170	0.008	-0.830	0.232	0.000	0.128	0.094	-1.016	
H _{4a/b}	OS ® ORI	1.063	0.000	1.177	0.000	0.647	1.013	0.000	1.580	0.000	2.143**	
H _{5a/b}	ORI ® CL	0.486	0.000	0.451	0.000	-0.273	0.521	0.000	0.364	0.000	-1.251	
H _{6a/b}	SI ® SC	0.310	0.051	0.289	0.000	-0.120	0.292	0.000	0.285	0.010	-0.054	
H _{7a/b}	SI ® AS	0.611	0.000	0.351	0.000	-1.466	0.420	0.000	0.439	0.000	0.116	
H _{8a/b}	SI ® OS	0.519	0.000	0.473	0.000	-0.307	0.511	0.000	0.441	0.000	-0.553	

SC relationship with AS is moderated (z statistics = 2.411) due to the civil status (**H_{1a}**) as shown in Table 5. The influence of SC on AS is stronger for singles than for married couple. Table 5 shows that the OS ORI relationship is moderated (z statistics = 2.143) when customers use one or more than one online platform (**H_{4b}**) for purchase. It is stronger for customers who use multiple platforms than single platform users. In Figure 3, it is noted that for lower SC perception; unmarried people have lower assortment satisfaction. However, this situation is reversed at high SCs level, when unmarried people have a higher level of assortment satisfaction. The F test ($F=26.914$) is significant for the first interaction with moderate explanatory power of R^2 value at 15.10% for SC-AS relationship. The F test ($F=90.368$) for the second interaction is significant, with good explanatory power of R^2 value of

37.39% for OS-ORI relationship. It can be inferred that the later interaction is more powerful than the former.

Figure 4. No of platforms interaction

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study has several theoretical implications. The first contribution is the integrated model which clubs SC with assortment satisfaction, OS, online repatronage intention, social influence and customer loyalty. Secondly, a unique finding from this study suggests that online repatronage intention is influenced by OS and not assortment satisfaction directly. Thirdly, this empirical study establishes the moderation effects of using one or multiple platforms and being single or married upon the OS – ORI and SC-AS relationship respectively. Fourthly, this study establishes an interaction between number of platforms used and OS and another interaction between civil status and SC. The moderation and interaction effects would be a major contribution to the existing body of knowledge. Fifthly, the study has empirically validated the SOR model for online air ticket booking by which it better explain the online ticketing behaviors of consumers. It has enriched the SOR model by identifying SC as a stimulus. This stimulus along with social influence activates the organism which is satisfaction of both types and resulting in the customer's response of repurchase of the ticket and staying loyal towards the same ticketing platform. Sixthly, the empirical findings enrich the body of satisfaction literature by adding SC as an antecedent of satisfaction.

SC is more transactional than cumulative, establishing the normative theory that expected benefits are paramount to the customer. It also substantiates the customer value theory, whereby value is attached to the details of the assortment while searching.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

SC is a basic cognitive process of human behavior which is not meant for all type of travelers. When travel restrictions are imposed during pandemics, leisure travelers, for the combination of economic uncertainty and fear of infection create low demand. On the business side, some work trips are replaced with the videoconferences that have become the norm during the pandemic. This empirical research suggests that SC attribute in an online context results in assortment and OS. Next, OS leads to repatronage intention but not directly through assortment satisfaction. For air ticket booking, when travelers are two minded, SC plays an important tool for satisfaction of customers. Platforms should envisage ways to broaden or robust their SC facilities. Lack or slow SC facility would frustrate the consumer and reduce his level of satisfaction. Hence SC facility should be monitored by the airlines as it is an estimate of demand.

SC and assortment satisfaction is a stronger relationship than SC and OS. Through this study, it can be construed that SC builds an assortment satisfaction which then creates an OS for an online purchase. The managerial implication is that assortment satisfaction assumes a superior position than OS. Additionally, SC has a more transactional than cumulative effect. Hence online ticket booking platforms should develop mobile based applications that are instantaneously useful for travelers. These applications can be enhanced with text, graphics, and video presentation of features of a ticket related utility services like web check in, luggage limits, and etc. The design of the website/application should be simple with a visualized map featuring a quick and automatic sorting and classification, for a transactional satisfaction.

SC is transactional in nature and therefore satisfaction (as in AS) is gauged for each transaction differently. Each SC transaction will lead to a different level of assortment satisfaction for the same customer. This means that the online ticketing platform has to detail each ticketing. Airlines will have to provide shorter booking windows—often a week or two—as fewer travelers make plans far in advance. However, the same levels of assortment satisfaction can be achieved if the traveler gets the same information related to each transaction as assortment satisfaction is the consequence of SC. The act of searching and comparing satisfies unmarried people more than the married people. Advertisements should emphasize the SC feature on the platform's application to attract the singles. The air ticket platform's website should pop up with the traveler's similar past purchases. SC- AS is a complex relationship, which is moderated by civil status. SC facilities have a higher impact on unmarried people than married couples. Online ticket platforms can customize their portals based on demographic profile. More options should pop up on each transaction or each visit to the site for the unmarried. More choices shall enhance their transactional satisfaction.

SC is also an evaluative process, which consume travelers' time. This feature does not cost money to the airline, unlike lowering of fares which eats into the financials. SC can be enhanced by online line site linking to product comparison search engines and cross-selling travel products like hotels, transfers, and tours with real time promotions. This SC facility can also be linked to recently launched luxury brands, concert tickets or fine dining. Moreover, it should be a buyer managed website rather than a supplier managed website. The ticketing websites can provide product lists with links so that consumers can view interesting products by simply scrolling and clicking. Additionally, the SC function should be able to raise the probability that passengers will purchase other goods and services from the airline before, during, and after their journey. This can be achieved by building in house analytical tools properties compatible with SC function for predicting advanced forecasting and optimization.

Social influence has a positive effect on search & compare, assortment satisfaction and OS. SI has the maximum effect upon OS, followed by assortment satisfaction. This is a challenge for marketers

as the gratification has an external bearing. Overall scheme of things is a long term cumulative effect, hence in the intervening time, when people share their experiences; peer groups judgment has an influence. Online reviews by travelers shall play an important role in nurturing social influence; since social influence is able to induce a change in perception, hence they should be monitored to avoid any obnoxious trails.

A satisfied traveler is a repeat traveler. Retaining a satisfied traveler and make her/him talk about the firm's website so as to make them come back is an important strategic imperative. This implies that to create a stronger loyalty, it is important to develop a bond between the traveler and the website. This can be achieved by building more direct relationships with travelers. The online ticket platforms do not have many occasions to meet and greet their travelers especially in person, as compared with other services like healthcare, restaurants, hairdresser, etc. where the providers interact more frequently with their travelers face to face. Hence, this presents a real challenge for online ticket booking managers to give a human touch and find creative ways to interact with their travelers in order to develop their attachment. Connecting with travelers through community clubs and social media like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and Netlog will develop an emotional attachment. True loyalty will not come through promotions or discounts, but through an emotional touch.

The cumulative effect of satisfaction will create the intention to repurchase. If a traveler is unsatisfied on one transaction, the online ticket platform should offset that in the next one. If a traveler feels that the price of one ticket is high, then the online ticket aggregator should apply artificial intelligence for the next ticket, by which he/she should feel that he/she has bargained on price or range. Not at any moment of time, should he/she feel that his/her wisdom has been compromised. OS-ORI is a complex relationship as it moderated by the number of brands, a traveler possess. Customers possessing multiple brands have a higher online repatronage intention, when they are satisfied. Based on their past purchases, grievances of customers who purchase numerous brands should be addressed swiftly, as compared to single brand buyers.

Online repatronage intention leads to customer loyalty. A higher online repatronage intention builds a higher customer loyalty. Repeat purchase is important for customer loyalty. Customer loyalty can be inculcated by changing the traveler's attitude towards the online ticket booking brand. Advertisements with emotional content shall help build customer loyalty. It can also be enhanced by asking the online customers to give a feedback on their purchases in the website. Moreover, whatever is the loyalty program; it should be straight and simple. A social group of regular purchasers shall also create customer loyalty. However, caution has to be adhered. Travelers may encash the bonus points and may not stay loyal. Hence the concept of travel miles loyalty may fade away. The traditional way of calculating loyalty may not hold true for online ticket booking platforms. Tendency to be satisfied increases for unmarried people with better SC features than married people. While advertising, ticket booking platforms should target unmarried people's SC requirement. Managers should keep in mind that multiple platform users are more likely to reuse the platform as compared to single platform users for online ticket booking.

CONCLUSION

This study investigates the importance of SC for experiencing satisfaction by a traveler. Airlines cannot lure travelers' only by cheap tickets but also by furnishing a robust SC ticketing facility. This research has been able to empirically establish that SC transactional satisfies a traveler, providing him with assortment satisfaction. Over a period of time, online air ticketing provides an OS to the traveler who repatronage the online air ticketing and gathers his loyalty. SC relation with AS is moderated by the civil status of the traveler; while OS and ORI association is moderated by the number of ticketing platforms operated by the traveler. Online sale of ticket booking is poised for growth after the lockdown and the implications mentioned in this paper shall benefit the online ticket booking platforms. This study has also applied the theoretical SOR model to explain the relationships.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER STUDIES

In spite of its valuable theoretical and practical implications, this study has some limitations. Risk is always on the top of one's mind during an online transaction. The role of perceived risk as a moderator has not been studied in this paper. Moreover, this study is limited to youth. For air tickets, platforms, design is an important stimulus (Koo & Kim, 2013) which can be added in future research. Studies should be conducted to include other age groups. The data collected was before the lockdown; hence generalizations may not be effective post lockdown till the air travel sector regains full competition. Immediately after the lockdown restrictions are lifted, the sector may not be able meet the demand and SC will not be a stimuli.

Factors that influence SC can be researched in the future. Convenience sampling used to collect data is a major limitation in this study. The non-probability sampling techniques used in this study limited the generalisability of the conclusions of this research to some extent. Hence the findings may not be representative of the society and difficult to generalize for other cultures. The study takes into account only the airline sector so the findings of the study might not be applicable to other industry or sector.

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