

Online Travel Purchasing Behaviour Among Tourists: Determinants, Digital Trust, Platform Performance Gaps and Booking Satisfaction in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India

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ABSTRACT

The growth of online travel platforms has changed how tourists search, compare and purchase travel-related services. This study examines online travel purchasing behaviour among tourists in Coimbatore, India, with a focused scope covering tour packages, travel tickets, accommodation support, local transportation, visa/passport assistance and related travel services purchased or initiated through digital platforms. The study adopts a descriptive cross-sectional design and uses data from 184 respondents selected through convenience sampling from an estimated population of 350 tourists/customers. The analysis examines determinants of online purchasing behaviour, digital trust, platform performance gaps and booking satisfaction. Descriptive results show high brand/platform familiarity and strong payment-security confidence, but also substantial booking difficulty and poor perceived platform performance. Pearson correlation indicates that age is not significantly related to the importance assigned to secure payment options ($r = -0.066$, $p = 0.376$). Simple regression shows that gender does not significantly predict booking satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.021$, $p = 0.052$). Chi-square analysis indicates a significant association between age group and booking satisfaction ($\chi^2 = 37.609$, $df = 16$, $p = 0.002$; Cramer's $V = 0.226$), though the result is interpreted cautiously because several expected cell counts are below five. The study concludes that online travel purchasing is shaped by a combination of usability, digital trust, price transparency, peer influence and perceived service quality. The findings highlight the need for mobile-first website development, transparent booking processes, verified reviews, stronger refund/cancellation communication and user-experience improvements for small and medium travel agencies.

Keywords: online travel purchasing behaviour; tourists; digital trust; platform performance gap; booking satisfaction; Technology Acceptance Model; Coimbatore; OTA; tourism marketing

INTRODUCTION

Tourism purchasing has become increasingly digital. Tourists now use online platforms to compare destinations, evaluate packages, read reviews, verify prices, check refund conditions and initiate bookings. Online travel purchasing in this study is defined as the purchase or booking of travel-related services through digital interfaces, including travel-agency social media pages, online travel agencies, websites, mobile applications and messaging-enabled booking channels. The study focuses specifically on travel-related purchases such as tour packages, tickets, accommodation support, local transportation and allied travel services; it does not examine unrelated online shopping by tourists.

The study context is a small-to-medium travel agency (SMTA) operating in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu. The agency has a visible social-media presence but does not have a fully functional dedicated booking website. This creates an important platform performance gap: customers may know and trust the agency, yet still face difficulty completing travel purchases through a seamless digital interface.

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) provides the core theoretical foundation. According to TAM, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use influence technology adoption. In travel booking, these constructs correspond to information clarity, ease of search, booking convenience, mobile responsiveness, payment security and reliable confirmation. In addition to TAM, digital trust, perceived risk, service quality, price transparency and electronic word-of-mouth are important in online travel purchasing.

The objectives of the study are: (i) to define and examine online travel purchasing behaviour among tourists in the selected context; (ii) to identify determinants such as ease of booking, user reviews, price offers, brand trust, security and peer recommendations; (iii) to examine platform performance gaps between tourist expectations and actual experience; (iv) to test selected associations involving age, gender and booking satisfaction; and (v) to provide practical recommendations for improving digital travel-purchase platforms.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Technology Acceptance and Online Travel Platform Adoption

Davis (1989) introduced the Technology Acceptance Model, explaining technology adoption through perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. In the online travel context, perceived usefulness refers to the platform's ability to simplify search, comparison and booking, while perceived ease of use reflects interface simplicity, navigation quality and reduced transaction effort. Li, Zhu, Lin and Kim (2024), in a meta-analysis of TAM-based hospitality and tourism studies, confirmed that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are consistent predictors of intention to use mobile and web-based travel technologies. These findings support the present study's use of TAM for analysing booking difficulty and platform dissatisfaction.

Digital Trust, Perceived Risk and Security

Digital trust is central to online travel purchasing because tourists often make advance payments for services that will be consumed later and sometimes in unfamiliar destinations. Hien, Vo, Ngan and Ghi (2024) used the valence framework to show that perceived benefits increase, while perceived risks reduce, intention to use online travel agencies. Talwar, Dhir, Kaur and Mantymaki (2020) showed that security concerns and information value influence OTA purchase intention. Christin and Nugraha (2022) found that trust mediates the relationship between online reviews, price and hotel booking intention. These studies justify treating payment security, review authenticity, transparency and platform reliability as components of digital trust.

EWOM, Social Media and Peer Influence

Electronic word-of-mouth and social media influence tourist decision-making before, during and after travel. Azhar, Husain, Hamid and Rahman (2023) demonstrated that social media marketing positively influences online travel purchase behaviour and that brand trust and loyalty mediate the relationship. Fotis (2015) showed that social-media content such as reviews, photographs and shared experiences influences holiday travel decisions. In the present study, peer recommendation and reviews are treated as important determinants of online travel purchasing because tourists frequently rely on trusted social cues before making booking decisions.

Platform Quality, Performance Gaps and Booking Satisfaction

Platform performance refers to the perceived quality of the digital travel-purchase experience, including information completeness, ease of booking, mobile compatibility, response speed, payment security, refund/cancellation clarity and customer support. A platform performance gap occurs when tourist expectations exceed the actual platform experience. Celik Caylak et al. (2024), through sentiment analysis of Booking.com and Expedia reviews, identified ease of booking, reliability, cancellation handling and support as important drivers of online travel satisfaction. Dahiya Singh and Prince (2023) similarly highlighted website quality, security and service support as key dimensions of online travel agency perception. These findings support the present article's focus on platform performance gaps as a distinct analytical dimension.

Demographics and Tourist Segments

Online travel behaviour may vary across tourist segments. Pinto and Castro (2019) identified segments of OTA users and reported that decision-making differs by demographic and behavioural characteristics. Ochoa Siguencia, Marzano and Herman (2018) observed that younger users tend to expect faster and more responsive travel-planning technologies. Arora (2019), in the Indian OTA context, highlighted differences in platform preferences such as price, service variety and quality. These studies justify testing age and gender associations with booking satisfaction, while also cautioning that demographic findings must be interpreted in relation to sample size and segment composition.

Research Gap

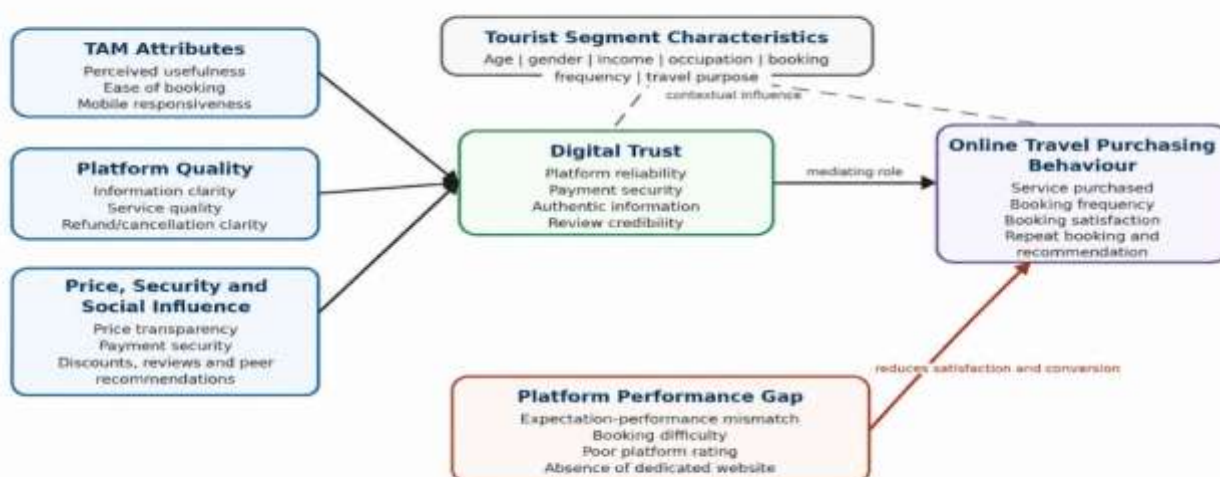
Existing studies provide strong evidence on TAM, digital trust, perceived risk, online reviews and platform quality in OTA usage. However, the specific context of small and medium Indian travel agencies that depend heavily on social media but lack a dedicated booking website remains under-examined. Further, many studies focus on intention rather than observable self-reported behaviour such as booking frequency, services purchased, platform comparison, booking difficulty and recommendation intention. The present study addresses this gap by examining online travel purchasing behaviour among tourists in Coimbatore with attention to determinants, digital trust and platform performance gaps.

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

The conceptual framework was developed in response to the reviewer's suggestion to clarify construct relationships. The framework proposes that TAM attributes, platform quality, price/security factors and social influence shape digital trust. Digital trust, along with platform performance gaps, influences online travel purchasing behaviour and booking satisfaction. Tourist segment characteristics such as age, gender, income, occupation, booking frequency and travel purpose may condition satisfaction patterns. Platform performance gaps are conceptualised as the mismatch between tourist expectations and actual digital platform experience

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for Online Travel Purchasing Behaviour

Determinants, digital trust and platform performance gaps shaping tourist booking behaviour



Study focus: online travel booking/purchasing through digital and social-media platforms among tourists in Coimbatore (N = 184).

Figure 1. Conceptual framework for online travel purchasing behaviour among tourists.

The study tested the following hypotheses: H1: There is no significant correlation between age and the importance assigned to secure payment options. H2: Gender has no significant effect on satisfaction with the online booking process. H3: There is no significant association between age group and booking satisfaction. The hypotheses are framed in null form because the study uses descriptive and inferential analysis rather than causal modelling.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Scope

The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional research design. The scope was narrowed in line with the review comment: online purchasing in this article refers only to online travel purchasing, including tour packages, tickets, accommodation support, local transportation, passport/visa assistance and other travel-agency services purchased or initiated through digital channels. The study does not cover general online shopping, restaurant booking or non-travel purchases.

Target Population and Sampling

The target population comprised tourists/customers in Coimbatore who had used, considered or interacted with digital channels for travel-related booking and purchase decisions. The estimated population available to the study was 350. A sample of 184 respondents was collected using convenience sampling because tourist respondents were accessible through agency contact points, digital contacts and field locations, while a complete probability-based sampling frame was not available. The sample size satisfies a 95% confidence level with approximately $\pm 5\%$ margin of error for the stated population size, but the non-probability sampling design restricts generalisability.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Respondents were included if they were tourists or travel-service customers aged 18 years or above who had experience with, or interest in, digital travel booking platforms. Respondents who had no exposure to online travel search, social-media travel agencies, OTA platforms or digital booking were excluded. Domestic and repeat users were included; international tourists were not separately analysed due to limited subgroup information in the dataset.

Instrument and Operational Definitions

A structured questionnaire containing 22 items was used. The instrument covered demographic profile, travel service usage, platform expectations, digital trust, purchasing determinants and platform effectiveness. Internal consistency was not reported in the original project data; hence Cronbach's alpha is not claimed. Future studies should validate the instrument using reliability analysis and confirmatory factor analysis.

Construct	Operational meaning in this study
Online travel purchasing behaviour	Service purchased, booking frequency, preferred package type, platform comparison, booking satisfaction and willingness to recommend.
Digital trust	Perceived payment security, reliability of information, transparency, reviews and confidence in platform/agency.
Platform performance gap	Mismatch between expected platform features and actual experience, including booking difficulty, poor platform rating, lack of dedicated website and support dependency.
Determinants of purchase behaviour	Peer recommendations, reviews/testimonials, discounts, social media promotions, brand trust, security and ease of booking.

Statistical Tools

The analysis used descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, simple linear regression and Pearson Chi-square test of independence with Cramer's V as an effect-size measure. Because the study is cross-sectional and

based on self-reported data, findings are interpreted as associations and predictive relationships, not as causal effects. The Chi-square result is interpreted with caution where expected cell counts are small.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Respondent Profile

Variable	Category	n (%)
Age	Below 20	46 (25.0%)
	21-30	54 (29.3%)
	31-40	38 (20.7%)
	41-50	13 (7.1%)
	Above 50	33 (17.9%)
Gender	Male	106 (57.6%)
	Female	78 (42.4%)
Occupation	Business owner	88 (47.8%)
	Working professional	76 (41.3%)
	Student	20 (10.9%)
Monthly income	Below Rs.20,000	86 (46.7%)
	Rs.20,000-Rs.40,000	75 (40.8%)
	Rs.40,001-Rs.60,000	11 (6.0%)
	Above Rs.60,000	12 (6.5%)

The sample is dominated by younger tourists, with 54.3% below 30 years of age. Business owners and working professionals together constitute 89.1% of the sample, while students are comparatively fewer. This composition should be considered while interpreting the findings.

Key Online Travel Purchasing Findings

Variable	Dominant response	Result
Most purchased service	Tour packages	37.0% (68)
Top booking influence	Friend recommendations	44.0% (81)
User reviews/testimonials	Important/Very important	64.7% (119)
Discounts and offers	Important/Very important	67.9% (125)
Brand trust	Important/Very important	52.1% (96)

Secure payment options	Important/Very important	51.7% (95)
Clear refund/cancellation policy	Important/Very important	55.5% (102)
Booking frequency	Frequently, four or more times per year	40.2% (74)
Platform rating	Poor/Very poor	63.6%
Booking difficulties	Yes	85.9% (158)
Payment security perception	Secure	96.7% (178)
Willingness to recommend	Definitely	57.6% (106)

The findings reveal a platform performance paradox: tourists express high trust in payment security and strong familiarity with the agency, yet many report poor platform performance and booking difficulty. This indicates that digital trust alone is insufficient when the platform lacks usability, information depth and seamless booking capability.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship tested	Statistic	Decision
H1	Age and importance of secure payment options	Pearson $r = -0.066$; $p = 0.376$	Not significant; H0 accepted
H2	Gender predicting booking satisfaction	$R^2 = 0.021$; $F = 3.810$; $p = 0.052$	Not significant; H0 accepted
H3	Age group and booking satisfaction	$\chi^2 = 37.609$; $df = 16$; $p = 0.002$; Cramer's $V = 0.226$	Significant small-to-medium association; H0 rejected

Age was not significantly related to secure payment importance, suggesting that payment security is a common requirement across age groups. Gender did not significantly predict booking satisfaction; therefore, platform-improvement strategies should not be gender-specific. Age group was significantly associated with booking satisfaction, with younger respondents reporting greater dissatisfaction. However, the Chi-square result should be interpreted cautiously because several expected cell counts were below five. Future studies should either collapse categories or apply Fisher's Exact test.

DISCUSSION

The revised analysis addresses the reviewer's concern regarding scope by limiting the interpretation to online travel purchasing rather than broad online purchasing. The study shows that tourists' purchase decisions are influenced by functional, social and trust-based factors. Friend recommendations, reviews, discounts and security perceptions are important, but the most critical managerial issue is the gap between platform trust and platform performance.

The conceptual distinction among digital trust, perceived security, perceived risk, satisfaction and platform performance has also been clarified. Digital trust refers to confidence in the agency/platform and safety of transactions. Platform performance refers to the quality of the actual digital experience. Satisfaction refers to the tourist's evaluation of the booking process. Perceived risk is reflected in concerns about payment, information reliability and refund/cancellation uncertainty. These constructs are related but not identical.

The significant age-satisfaction association indicates that younger tourists may have higher expectations of speed, mobile responsiveness and self-service booking. The non-significant gender result should not be over-interpreted as proof that gender never matters; it only indicates that gender did not significantly explain satisfaction in this sample. Since convenience sampling was used, subgroup findings should be viewed as indicative rather than representative.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop a dedicated mobile-first website with clear tour-package pages, price details, itinerary information, booking forms, payment gateway, cancellation/refund policy and enquiry tracking.
2. Design the platform around TAM principles by improving perceived usefulness through detailed information and improving ease of use through simple navigation and short booking flows.
3. Build digital trust through verified reviews, transparent pricing, secure payment badges, clear refund rules and visible customer-support channels.
4. Use peer influence strategically by creating referral codes, testimonial pages and shareable itinerary links.
5. Improve youth-oriented user experience through fast loading, mobile compatibility, social login, WhatsApp integration and visual itinerary displays.
6. Measure performance gaps periodically by comparing tourist expectations with actual platform experience using matched survey items.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The study has limitations. It is based on convenience sampling from a limited tourist/customer population in Coimbatore; therefore, findings cannot be generalised to all tourists or all travel agencies. The data are cross-sectional and self-reported, so actual platform behaviour may differ from reported behaviour. Domestic and international tourists, first-time and repeat visitors, leisure and business travellers, and high- and low-digital-experience groups were not separately analysed. Reliability testing of the instrument was not reported. The Chi-square test involving age and satisfaction had several small expected cell counts. Future research should use stratified sampling, include actual behavioural indicators such as amount spent and number of platforms used, validate the instrument, compare multiple platforms, and test the proposed conceptual model through SEM or PLS-SEM.

CONCLUSION

This study examined online travel purchasing behaviour among tourists in Coimbatore with specific attention to determinants, digital trust, platform performance gaps and booking satisfaction. The results show that tourists rely on reviews, peer recommendations, discounts, security and brand trust, but also experience significant booking difficulties where digital infrastructure is weak. Payment security appears to be important across age groups, gender does not significantly predict booking satisfaction, and age group is significantly associated with booking satisfaction. The evidence supports a clear managerial conclusion: small and medium travel agencies should move beyond social-media visibility and develop trustworthy, mobile-first, booking-capable digital platforms that reduce performance gaps and strengthen conversion.

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APPENDIX A. AUTHOR RESPONSE TO REVIEWER COMMENTS

Reviewer concern	Modification made
Scope too broad	The title, abstract, introduction and methodology now define the scope as online travel purchasing only; unrelated online shopping is excluded.
Platform performance gaps unclear	A clear operational definition is added and the concept is measured through booking difficulty, poor platform rating, absence of website and support dependency.
Overlap between constructs	Separate definitions are added for digital trust, platform quality, perceived risk, satisfaction and platform performance gap.
Tourist population difficult to define	Target population, inclusion/exclusion criteria and sampling context are clarified.
Sampling bias possible	Convenience sampling is retained but transparently justified and acknowledged as a limitation.
Self-reported behaviour limitation	The limitation section now states that actual behaviour may differ from reported behaviour and recommends objective behavioural indicators.
Need stronger conceptual framework	A revised visual conceptual framework is inserted as Figure 1.
Need actual purchasing behaviour indicators	Booking frequency, service purchased, package preference, platform comparison, booking satisfaction and willingness to recommend are included as behavioural indicators.