THE INFLUENCE OF QUALITATIVE FACTORS ON USEFULNESS OF ONLINE TRAVEL REVIEWS: THE MODERATING EFFECT OF QUANTITATIVE FACTORS

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ABSTRACT

OnlineTravel Reviews (OTRs) are growing significantly with many e-tailers and online marketers. Tourists post their experiences online regarding the consumed tourism products, which assist future travelers in their travel decisions. For the tourism services providers, reviews create businesses' value by providing a platform for marketing their services. However, numerous platforms offer thousands of OTRs, creating confusion among the readers to select the more appropriate and useful reviews. Such circumstances create a necessity for online service providers to identify the features that create useful reviews. The usefulness feature of OTRs can be quantitative or qualitative. This study attempts to investigate the influence of Qualitative factors of OTRs on the review usefulness and explore the moderate effect of Quantitative factors on the usefulness. 1176 OTRs about hotels and restaurants were collected from a reputed review site. Smart PLS-SEM 3 was used to analyze the data. The results found a positive influence of Qualitative factors of a review on its usefulness and revealed this effect stronger for higher Quantitative factors. This study contributes to theory by offering an empirical investigation of factors influencing online reviews' usefulness. Suggestions are provided to re-frame and re-design a review to create more useful and trustworthy reviews.

 Keywords: Online Travel Review, Usefulness, Qualitative Factor, Quantitative Factor, Tourism

1. INTRODUCTION

The internet users are growing with the increasing number of e-tailers with various products and services on several websites (Cao, Duan, &Gan, 2011). Companies utilize social networks to expand the business, enhance market size, productivity, and competitive advantage and build customer relations (Kim, Lee, & Lee, 2013). Tourists also share their opinions about the consumed products online and create Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM). eWOM is of great importance for the service providers (Lee, 2017); these attract new tourists with a competitive advantage, provide travelerswith high-value information and retain old users (Loureiro&Kastenholz, 2011). Online reviews are also termed as eWOM (Caoet al., 2011). These reviews assist the marketers in quantifying the unstructured data in the form of feedback and act as a medium for promoting products and services online (Gensler, V¨olckner, Egger, Fischbach, &Schoder, 2015). The service and experience-based intangible tourism products cannot be tried before buying. There is no option of returning these ifthe quality is lower than the expectations (Racherla&Friske, 2012; Ye, Law, &Gu, 2009). Further, the quality of such products cannot be estimated to be exact (Lockie, Waiguny, &Grabner-Kräuter, 2015). For the new user, it is not easy to reach the person who has used the product and can give feedback (Lockieet al., 2015).

In such conditions, Online Travel Reviews (OTRs) are of great importance (Racherla&Friske, 2012; Ye et al., 2009) as these provide the same valuable information they seek (Lockie et al., 2015). Nevertheless, the enormous amounts of available reviews on the products create confusion among the consumers as the reviewers may have different opinions about the same products (Cao et al., 2011). Even it is not possible to read the thousands of reviews. Selecting the best suitable product among various products with limited time and information is hard for travelers (Liu & Park, 2015). Such circumstances create a necessity for identifying the useful travel review among these abandoned reviews (Cao et al., 2011).

The reviews with useful votes show that these are different from the rest of the OTRs without useful votes (Godes&Mayzlin, 2004; Park, Lee, & Han, 2007) and also cannot be utilized equally (Willemsen, Neijens, Bronner, and de Ridder, 2011). Various websites providing online reviews give this option to the readers to vote the review 'helpful' or 'useful.' Such an option assists the users in identifying effective reviews. The readers of

these OTRs decide whether to consider a helpful review or note. If they could make a positive opinion about the review, they can rate it helpful.

Consequently, a helpful review is likely to be useful in their decision-making. It is beneficial for the consumers and enhances the reputation of e-retailers' e-commerce websites (Cao et al., 2011). It becomes crucial for online tourism marketers, Destination Marketing Organizations, and service providers to understand the factors that generate useful votes for OTRs. The usefulness feature can be quantitative or qualitative, and the previous studies have disclosed mixed findings while investigating the factors that affect the usefulness of the OTRs. There is a need to examine the effect of qualitative factors on usefulness in detail (Srivastava&Kalro, 2019).

This study investigates the effect of Qualitative factors of OTRs on the review usefulness and further examines the moderating effect of Quantitative Factors on this relationship. This study also provides managerial implications to generate more useful reviews for online tourism marketers and service providers.

After the extended literature based on the OTRs'Usefulness, the quantitative and qualitative factors of OTRs are discussed. The next part explains the research methodology, leading to results and discussion. This study is concluded along with further directions for future research after highlighting the managerial implications for online marketers and service providers.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Quantitative Factors of OTRs and Usefulness

The effect of reviewers' factors such as reviewers' identity (Lee, Hu, & Lu, 2018; Liu, & Park, 2015), reputation (Srivastava&Kalro, 2019; Lee, 2018; Liu, & Park, 2015), and expertise (Srivastava&Kalro, 2019; Liu, & Park 2015; Willemsen et al. 2011), on review usefulness, have been inspected by researchers. Further, the quantitative factors of review content are also investigated in a few studies. Still, there is a need to explore the effect of these factors on review usefulness rather than using these as proxy variables. The reviews quantitative features such as elaborateness, rating, and presence of images play a substantial role in making OTRs more effective (Srivastava&Kalro, 2019). The numbers of words used in the review and the numbers of images posted alongside the review text are

essential for readers. Elaborateness (Park &Nicolau, 2015) and the text complexity (Zhou, & Yang, 2019) are investigated in studies using the number of words in reviews. Researchers used the number of sentences/words in review text/ sentence to explain the review's length (Srivastava&Kalro, 2019; Singh et al., 2017). Korfiatis, Rodr´ıguez, and Sicilia (2012) examined the total number of review words. The review length depicts the depth of information in the content (Mudambi&Schuff, 2010), explaining its extensiveness (Singh et al., 2017). The extensiveness of review information is expressed through review elaborateness (Shelat& Egger, 2002). The review depth and elaborateness are also used interchangeably (Park &Nicolau, 2015). In previous studies (Srivastava&Kalro, 2019, Lee et al., 2018), the effects of the number of words sentences on review helpfulness were found effective.

Alongside the review content, reviewers prefer to upload images of the products they consumed. The readers can see the pictures of hotels, restaurants, food, beverage, attractions, and images of the physical environment posted by numerous reviewers. The presence of images with the review text enhances its significance. In a study by Geometry Global (2017), about 80% of the respondents found eWOM having the presence of images more effective in decision making. The images are more influential for users (Srivastava&Kalro, 2019) as these provide additional cues to readers about the products.

The reviewers create eWOM, post images online, and rate the consumed product or services based on their experiences. The number of stars assigned by the reviewers to tourism products is termed star rating votes (Srivastava&Kalro, 2019). These are the numeric summary statistics or overall ratings presented in a five-point star assessment of the consumed product (Willemsen et al., 2011). Higher the allocated star higher will be the satisfaction or positive attitude of reviewers about the products.

Based on the literature, it can be hypothesized as

H1: There is a direct and significant effect of the Quantitative Factor on the Usefulness of OTRs.

2.2 Qualitative factors of OTRs and Usefulness

Few studies (Srivastava&Kalro, 2019; Park &Nicolau, 2015)have investigated the qualitative features of OTRs. At the same time, these featureshelp understand customers' perspectives and play an extensive role in acknowledging the attitude of service providers. It

is not easy to inspect the unstructured online data in both ways, mechanically or manually, considering the subjective information (Ganu, Elhadad& Marian, 2009). Inquiry into qualitative factors is essential (Korfiatis et al., 2012).

The information embedded in the reviews indicates its comprehensiveness. The comprehensiveness of a review is reflected through the measure of how complete and detailed the content is (Cheung, Lee, &Rabjohn, 2008). The number of aspects covered in a review regarding the products and services measures the review completeness (Liu & Hu, 2021; Srivastava&Kalro, 2019). The reviews covering details about the dining experience elaborate the different aspects in the form of cuisine, staff, chef, services, dining area, menu, location, and price. In contrast, a review explaining a stay experience at an accommodation unit describes the room, location, price, ambiance, staff, location, food. Higher the illustrated features higher will be the completeness of review (Srivastava&Kalro, 2019). The information completeness in the review makes it more advantageous to potential travelers.

Nevertheless, the reviews can also explain experience or viewpoint regarding the product, a direct recommendation, or advice by highlighting evaluative key points (Zhao, Wang, Guo, & Law, 2015). Further, a review can contain more complex and factual elements, but the detailed reviews are more attentive and counted as more valuable (Zhao et al., 2015).

The message's comprehensiveness, timeliness, accuracy, and relevancy are elements of the argument quality of the message (Cheung et al., 2008; Cheung &Thadani, 2012; Cheung, Luo, Sia, & Chen, 2009). Argument quality was defined by Bhattacherjeeand Sanford (2006) as the "*persuasive strength of arguments embedded in an informational message*." The number of arguments present in the review reveals its density. The argument density and diversity positively correlate with review usefulness (Willemsen et al., 2011). Willemsen e.t al. (2011) found differences in the quality dimensions between products and services. Researchers have either adopted an experimental approach to investigate this variable or have asked broad questions regarding the reviews. There is still a need to investigate the argument quality effect on usefulness more effectively.

Additionally, the style features of a review explain how the review is written and explain the expressional characteristics of the reviewers (Lockieet al., 2015). The reviewers

follow different elements to write their opinion online. The narrative messages are experiential and present a storytelling perspective, while the fact-stating elements are detected through factual reviews (Lockieet al., 2015). Further, factual elements are structured to the point and focus on aspects such as comparison with other services, products, and marketers, the visit's conclusion, and the presentation structure (Lockieet al., 2015). Researchers have found mixed results regarding the effect of style features on the usefulness of the reviews (Lee & Koo, 2012). Kim and Gupta (2012) found that a review being narrative in style expressing emotional aspects are more impactful in enhancing the effectiveness of the online review rather than the reviews explaining facts. Papathanassis and Knolle (2011), in their study, found that the reviews focusing on facts, being thematic in structure and precise are preferable by readers.

The reviews' content is significant in OTRs, but the presentation of the online message is also an essential factor for the readers. The paragraph structure of the text, capital letters, spelling and grammar errors, emojis, and images highlight the presentation of reviews (Lockieet al., 2015). The qualitative features of review content enhance the understanding of readers about the product and make them confident regarding their travel decisions.

H2: There is a direct and significant effect of the Qualitative Factor on the Usefulness of OTRs.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is an effort to examine the consequences of Qualitative factors of OTRS on the review of usefulness and explore the moderating effect of Quantitative Factors on this relationship. For this, secondary data in the form of online travel reviews were collected from TripAdvisor.com, which is also the most comprehensive travel platform globally (TripAdvisor, 2019). A total of 1,176 OTRs were collected from TripAdvisor.com written by tourists about the hotels and restaurants in Himachal Pradesh (HP). The reviews were written by experienced tourists who had consumed the services at restaurants and hotels during their visits to Himachal Pradesh. The OTRs having at least a single "Useful vote" were collected for this study. Also, the authors excluded the irrelevant, repeated OTRs and reviews without text.

The qualitative aspects Review Completeness, Information Diversity, Writing Style, Argument Quality, and Review Presentation of all the 1176 reviews were evaluated by three coders on a five-point Likert scale (Very Low to Very High) based on general identified themes derived from the literature (Liu, & Hu, 2021; Srivastava&Kalro, 2019; Park &Nicolau, 2015; Lockieet al., 2015; Zhao et al., 2015; Korfiatis et al., 2012; Kim & Gupta, 2012; Willemsen et al. 2011). In case of disagreement among the three coders, after a detailed discussion, final decisions were made. The total number of images, words, and ratingswere also checked for further analysis. After data collection and cleaning, the assessment of Smart PLS-SEM results for measurement and structural model was carried out.
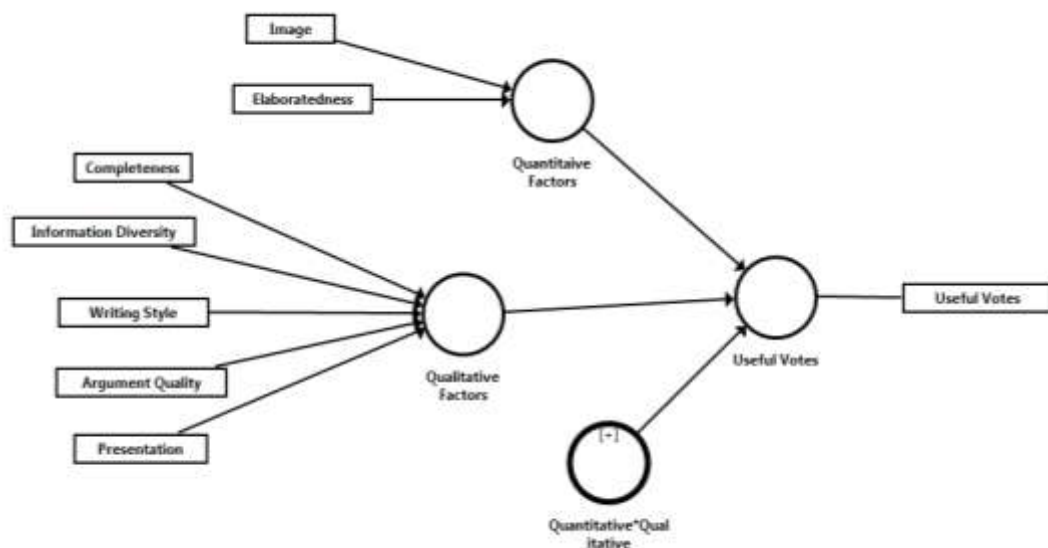
3.1 Construct Measures

Figure 1Conceptual Model

Figure 1 shows the conceptual model of Qualitative and Quantitative Factors of OTRs in the review site and their relationship with the "Useful Vote" received by the review. First of all, the structural model was specified that included a total of three constructs, and the measurement model was specified that included two formative constructs and one single-item construct. A scale to measure the predictive construct was developed based on the definitions provided by previous researchers. Review Completeness, Information Diversity, Writing Style, Argument Quality, and Review Presentation were the formatively measured single-item indicators used to measure the Qualitative Factor construct. For the

measurement of the Quantitative Factor, which was a moderator construct, three items were considered; the number of images posted with a review, the number of review words, and the ratings given by tourists along with their reviews. The authors counted the total number of images posted by the reviewer while writing the review. The software 'Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC)' was used to count the total numbers of words and sentences in a review. Researchers have utilized this software program for extracting information from social media data and OTRs (Agnihotri, & Bhattacharya, 2016; Zhou & Yang, 2019). Lastly, Review usefulness has been investigated as an outcome variable for this study. The OTRs offers vast information to the readers, and they have the option to mark a helpful review on the TripAdvisor site. Thus, if the readers found any review helpful for their travel planning and decision making, they give a "helpful vote" to the review; thus, a review can receive many Useful votes(UV). For this study, the authors counted the total numbers of useful votes received by the review.

Three raters evaluated the OTRs on a five-point Likert scale to measure the qualitative construct indicators. To check the reliability of coding of Qualitative constructs by three raters, Intraclass Coefficient Correlation (ICC) was calculated using SPSS 28 for 'absolute agreement' with two-way-mixed methods by Model 3. Excellent coefficient correlation (ICC.92) was revealed among the raters (Koo & Li, 2016).

The publicly available data in TripAdvisor.com was used for this study. This research does not constitute Human Subjects Research, and the researchers have followed the ethical practices for using social media data (Moreno, Goniu, Moreno, &Diekema, 2013). The final data of 1,176 OTRs was analyzed using Smart PLS-SEM 3. The Outer Model and the Inner model for examining the constructs and path relations were evaluated. In the following section, the results of the data analysis are explained.

4. RESULTS

The following sections disclose the results provided in the Smart PLS-SEM regarding the measurement model structural model, and then the results of the hypothesis testing are elaborated with tables and figures.

4.1 Assessment of PLS-SEM results of the Measurement Model

Table 1Results of Formative Measurement

Indicators	Weights	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	Loadings	VIF
Argument Quality ->Qualitative Factors	-0.872*	0.28	3.114	-0.04645*	2.038
Completeness ->Qualitative Factors	0.491**	0.193	2.54	0.451*	1.989
Writing Style ->Qualitative Factors	-0.687*	0.216	3.18	-0.143*	1.631
Image ->Quantitative Factors	0.249	0.239	1.038	0.5*	1.084
Information Diversity ->Qualitative Factors	0.612*	0.226	2.712	0.451*	2.409
Presentation ->Qualitative Factors	0.707*	0.237	2.98	0.445*	1.996
Elaborateness ->Quantitative Factors	0.902*	0.127	7.081	0.971*	1.084

*p<0.01, **p<0.05

In smart PLS-SEM, the outer weights and collinearity is checked along with the constructs' convergent validity for formative measured variables. Table 2 shows the statistical significance of outer weights of the formative indicators of Qualitative factors, where Argument Quality (-0.872, p=<0.001) had the highest weight, and Completeness (0.491, p=>0.001) had the lowest weight among all the indicators. The results show that the Argument Quality and Writing Style negatively correlate to the Qualitative Factor. Further, the elaborateness of reviews in the Quantitative construct was statically significant (0.902,

p<0.001). However, the outer weights of the Image were insignificant, but according to Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, and Ringle (2019), this item was retained in the model due to significant outer loading. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) for all the indicators was below 3, showing no collinearity issue among items (Hair et al., 2019). The value of the single item depicting the meaning of the Qualitative Factor was 0.86, showing the acceptable convergent validity of the formative construct (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2017).
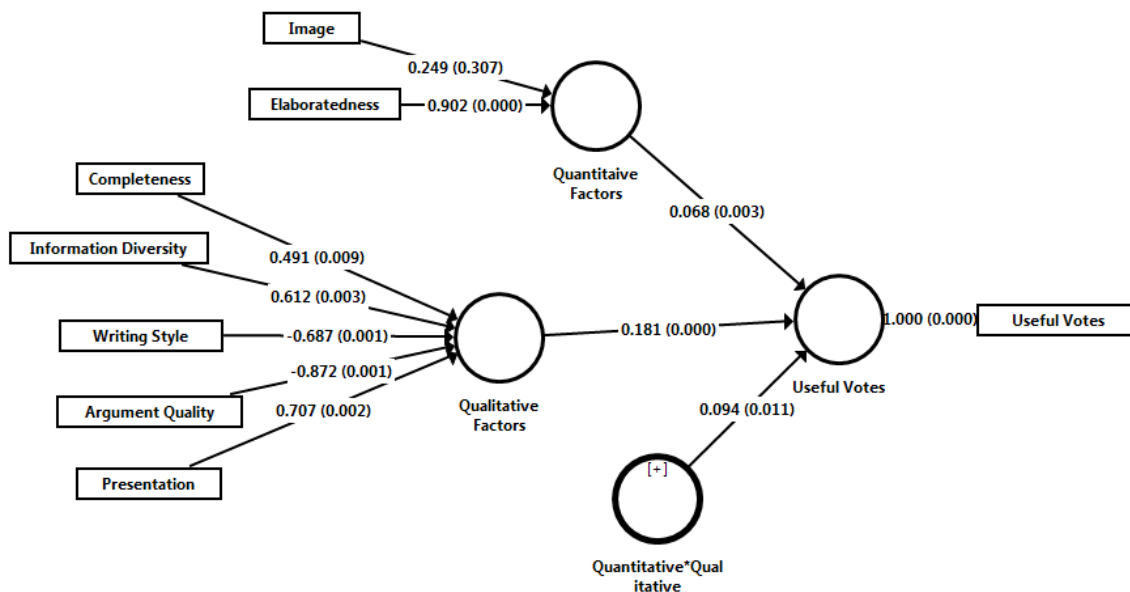

Figure 2: Path Model Results

4.2 Assessment of PLS-SEM results of the Structural Model

Table 2 R Square & Q^2

R^2	R Square	R^2 Adjusted	Q^2
Useful Votes	0.063	0.061	0.051

With the validated measurement model, the structural model was measured to explore the collinearity, effect size, model fit, along with the direct and moderator effects (Hair, Sarstedt, Ringle, & Gudergan, 2018). R^2 values show the total explained variances in

the outcome constructs in the model (Hair et al., 2018). The R^2 value for useful votes is 0.06 (table 4).

According to Cohen's (1992) criteria, the R^2 values indicate the small effect size. Further, Q^2 informed about the predictive accuracy of the specified model. As per Hair et al. (2019), the Q^2 should be higher than zero, stipulating the endogenous construct's predictive relevance.

4.3 Hypothesis testing

After assessing the measurement model, and the structural model, the results for the hypothesis were investigated using a bootstrapping procedure. Further, the result for the moderator effect was evaluated.

Table 3 Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path Coefficient	Original Sample	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	f^2	Hypothesis Results
H1	QualitativeFactors-> Useful votes	0.181*	0.056	3.216	0.03	Supported
H2	QuantitativeFactors -> Useful votes	0.068*	0.023	2.944	0.004	Supported
H3	Qualitative Factors *QuantitativeFactors -> Useful votes	0.094**	0.038	2.445	0.01	Supported

*P<0.01, **P<0.05

The result of the direct effect of the Qualitative Factor on Useful Votes is illustrated in table 3. For testing the purpose, hypothesized Bootstrapping was performed on 3000 bootstrap samples. First, the direct effect of the Qualitative Factor on Useful votes was found positive and significant (β= 0.181, t value= 3.21, H1 supported) with 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals. Also, the effects of Quantitative Factors on Useful votes were found positive and significant (β= 0.068, t value= 2.94, H2 supported). The results of f2 represent the effect size of the constructs. As the table discloses, the effect size of the endogenous and moderator constructs is small (Cohen, 1988).
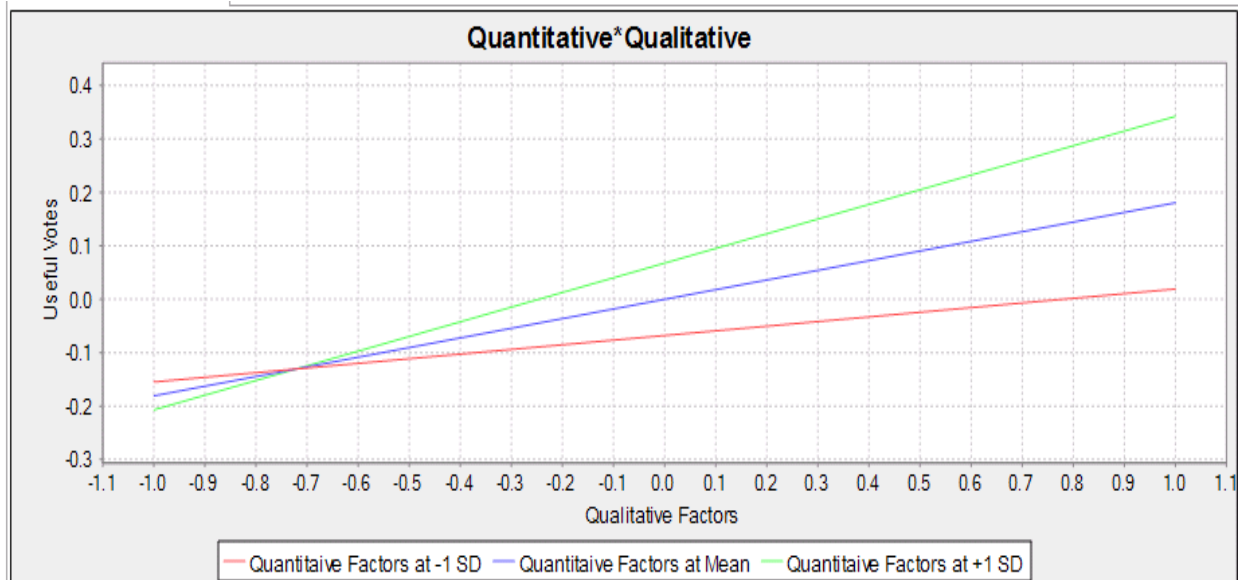
Figure 3 Moderator's Affect

As presented in Figure 3, the line labelled for high Quantitative Factor has a steeper gradient when compared to low Quantitative, indicating that the positive relationship is more potent when Quantitative factors are high. Thus, our hypothesis is supported that the Quantitative Factor positively influences the effect of Qualitative Factors in OTRs on the review Usefulness.

5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study aimed to investigate the influence of Qualitative factors of OTRs on the review usefulness and explore the moderate effect of Quantitative factors on the usefulness. The study found a positive influence of Qualitative factors of a review on its usefulness. The qualitative elements help understand the attitude of service providers and provide the readers with a direction in decision making (Park &Nicolau, 2015). The tourists should be encouraged to consider the qualitative feature of OTRs. The tourists find a review more helpful when the review encompasses diverse information with good presentation and structure. The readers look for complete information in a review to make travel decisions. The review sites can highlight the significant aspects through which the complete information of tourism products can be covered. They can provide guidelines for reviewers to cover these aspects as per the tourism products in the reviews' text.

Further, the measurement model specified that Agreement Quality and Writing Style in a review are negatively associated with the Qualitative factor. Thus, it is concluded that Argument Quality and Writing Style are less desirable by the readers. Fact-based reviews are notpreferred by potential customers (Lockie, Waiguny, &Grabner-Kräuter, 2015). Tourists can be encouraged to avoid factual reviews. Again, the Qualitative Factors of OTRs have been found to positively influence the review's usefulness. The information diversity, completeness,and good presentation style arethe significant predictors ofthe review's usefulness, and readers tend to give such a review a more "Useful vote." The results are similar to Srivastava and Kalro (2019) and Zhao et al. (2015). The reviews contain diversity in information such as product description (Malik &Hussain, 2017), product uses (Weathers, Swain, & Grover, 2015), personal experience, and opinions (Zheng, Zhu, & Lin, 2013; Chen & Tseng, 2011) enhance the usefulness. The users should describe experienced services, elaborate on the product, and give their recommendations and suggestions while posting their opinions online for potential tourists.

This study also examined the moderate influence of Quantitative Factors of a review on the relationship between Qualitative Factors and Review Usefulness. The results indicated a positive association between the number of words and images shared in a review on the Quantitative construct. Further, the study also revealed the effect of Qualitative Factors on Review Usefulness stronger for higher Quantitative. It was found that the positive relationship is indeed stronger when Quantitative is high and low when the Quantitative is lower. Thus, our hypothesis is supported that the Quantitative Factor positively influences the effect of Qualitative Factors in OTRs on the review Usefulness.

The number of images shared by tourists provides cues for understanding the tourist experiences better. The users should be motivated to upload picturesof the experienced tourism products so that the readers can understand the same. Also, the more elaborated reviews offer extensive information to readers by covering all aspects of the services consumed and about the service providers (Srivastava&Kalro, 2019). The tourists must ensure that they are writing and sharing their opinions and experiences of tourism services focusing on the review's qualitative and quantitative factors.

This study contributes to theory by offering an empirical investigation of factors influencing online reviews' usefulness. Suggestions are provided to re-frame and re-design

OTRs guidelines for online tourism marketers to write and recognize more useful and trustworthy reviews.

6. CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has attempted to explore the factors influencing the usefulness of online travel reviews posted by tourists. The results disclosed the positive relationship between the OTRs' helpfulness and their Qualitative & Quantitative factors. Also, the moderating effect of the review elaborateness and images shared in a review positively strengthens the relationship of Qualitative factors on the review's usefulness. The study offers practical implications to tourism service providers to enhance the useful OTRs and provide guidelines to tourists to share their experiences and opinions in the form of useful travel reviews.

However, this study has a few limitations that future researchers can address. Firstly, the OTRs written on a single website were selected for this study; other review sites can be analyzed for future studies. Also, a comparative study can be done for the reviews written on different tourism services and products. Further, this study examined only those reviews which had received useful votes; for future studies, those reviews can also be taken into account which had not received any useful votes.

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