Customer Behaviour towards Online Travel Agency (OTA) Services in the Hotel Industry: A Case Study in Doha, Qatar

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Abstract

This research investigates customer behaviour towards online travel agency (OTA) services in the hotel industry using a quantitative design and correlation research method with 139 tourists in Doha, Qatar. 95% response rate is collected and analysed using SPSS software. The results show that service quality, perceived value, and brand loyalty significantly affect customer satisfaction, while customer expectation does not. However, the study finds that customer satisfaction significantly influences customer behaviour toward OTA services in the hotel industry. The study provides practical insights for hotel managers and OTA services to enhance customer experiences by identifying the key factors that drive customer behaviour. Moreover, it contributes to the existing literature on customer behaviour towards OTA services in the hotel industry by identifying the crucial factors that influence customer behaviour.

Keywords: customer behaviour, online travel agent

1. Introduction

The internet has become indispensable in daily life, and in the travel sector, it serves as the main source of travel information (Kourtesopoulou et al., 2020). OTA platforms have transformed the travel business by offering customised services that allow travellers to explore, organise, and reserve a wide range of travel options (Huang & Cai, 2020). Customers' trust in OTA platforms is contingent upon various aspects, including website design, security measures, and customer service. These factors play a crucial role in shaping customers' view of the platform's ability to effectively cater to their requirements and achieve their expectations (Ramkissoon et al., 2020).

In addition, the pricing tactics implemented by OTA platforms have a considerable impact on how consumers perceive the quality of service, the value they receive, and their level of satisfaction. These factors also influence their decision to purchase a vacation package or book a hotel room using OTA platforms (Yu et al., 2020). Al-Sulaiti and Bigne (2020) conducted a study which reveals that Qatar has made remarkable advancements in the growth of its tourism sector since the early 2000s. The government has made substantial investments in enhancing the infrastructure and amenities for tourists. The survey moreover asserts that Qatar's tourism sector is projected to persistently expand and broaden, leading to an increased reliance on OTA platforms for accessing travel-related information and services. Furthermore, the research discovered that customer decision-making in the tourism sector is impacted by a range of elements, including the characteristics of travel agencies, the quality of services provided, and the pricing, all of which can ultimately decide their purchase behaviour. Hence, OTA platforms should consider these elements in order to augment client pleasure and loyalty in the burgeoning destination of Qatar.

According to the World Travel Awards website, GoMosafer has been named the winner of Qatar's leading online travel agency for the year 2021. The remaining contenders consist of Acon Holidays, Aven Travel, and Victoria Travels. The website does not contain any specific information about the services offered by any agency. In order to comprehend the services provided by the aforementioned agencies, one must conduct a comprehensive examination by visiting the websites of each organisation. Each of these organisations offers a variety of services to their customers, although the majority of them primarily specialise in trip planning or tour package services.

The services mostly rely on a traditional brick-and-mortar travel agency rather than an online travel agency. Therefore, utilising all the online travel agencies stated on the World Travel Awards website may divert the research's attention from an online platform to a physical agency. The utilisation of online travel agencies in the hotel business has been steadily rising due to the widespread accessibility of the internet and the convenience it offers to consumers. Various OTA brands would provide somewhat distinct services and offerings in order to entice clients from the same market segment.

Although many consumers are familiar with using OTA, it is not possible for online platforms to meet the expectations of every individual consumer. The lack of previous research on OTA platforms in Qatar is a problem in performing a thorough study on the subject. Lack of

resources can hinder the improvement of the study outcome. Nevertheless, this study acts as the initial stage for future enquiries, adding to the progress of understanding on OTA platforms in Qatar. This study employs a quantitative research methodology to evaluate and comprehend the factors that contribute to people's satisfaction with online travel agent sites. This study aims to enhance its comprehension of customers' decision-making and buy attention when utilising OTA by comprehending the various aspects that influence their behaviour towards OTA. It can enhance the capabilities of the OTA platform and the hotel industry to deliver superior services to their customers. Given the various brands of over-the-air products available in the market, individuals often have a tendency to select one or a few that they prefer above others for usage. While some consumers prioritise the functionality of OTA in meeting their needs, the majority of frequent OTA users carefully examine the features to guarantee they receive the highest quality offerings and services whenever available. Individuals are inclined to select a platform that is more user-friendly, as it enables them to comprehend the platform's features and necessary information more simply, thereby optimising their usage experience.

This study aims to investigate the elements and influences that contribute to a deeper understanding of consumers' behaviour when utilising OTA services. In addition, it could assist the researchers in determining the key aspects that contribute to favourable client behaviour by analysing prior research sources and conducting a survey to gather primary data. The greater the quality and incentives provided to consumers, the more likely they will choose to use OTA in the future. This research has the potential to enhance OTA services and products, hence improving the experience for consumers. Additionally, it could assist the tourist and hotel business in gaining insights into consumer behaviour and decision-making processes. This study seeks to address the research objective of investigating two proposed research models and comprehending the factors that influence service quality, perceived value, customer satisfaction, customer expectation, and brand loyalty in relation to customer behaviour towards online travel agent services in the hotel industry. Additionally, it aims to analyse the OTA platform utilised by tourists.

2. Literature Review

According to Mellinas (2019), OTA was the first to offer online sales and make significant investments in technology, marketing, and online and offline promotion. Initially, OTAs' primary concentration was on airlines. However, due to low revenues and an airline industry crisis, OTAs have shifted their focus to other tourism services, such as hotel bookings (Deyá-Tortella, et al., 2022). According to Wang & Law, (2023), the increased number of internet users benefits many business owners who use online capabilities. The internet brings up a world of possibilities and increases the competitiveness of OTAs. Travel agencies offer online services for purchasing airline tickets and hotel rooms through web and app-based applications (Kourtesopoulou et al., 2019; Xiang et al., 2015; Ye et al., 2016). Online travel companies meet a variety of travel demands by allowing clients to research, plan, and book flights, hotels, transportation, and other travel services (Kourtesopoulou et al., 2019).

OTAs were created to extend hotel distribution channels and provide business opportunities (Lv et al., 2020), thereby playing an important role in the distribution of tourist products and

facilitating the access of prospective clients from all over the world (Park et al., 2019). The hotel provides information for the OTAs' websites, and the OTAs attract customers to hotels (Chang et al., 2019). Customer behaviour towards OTAs is a key factor pushing the hotel industry's globalisation. The growing popularity of OTAs, as well as increased competition, has sparked academic research into customer behaviour. According to Pinto and Castro (2019), understanding the elements that influence a customer's choice of location, lodging, and services can help to improve service and meet the needs of current tourists. Customer expectations, service quality, perceived value, customer satisfaction, and brand loyalty are all internal factors that influence consumer behaviour (Khawaja et al., 2021). Consumers who want to buy hotel products and services are frequently influenced not only by the product itself, but also by the design of the websites, content, attitudes, and contentment of other tourists (Pinto & Castro, 2019). Customers can choose a hotel based on its location, brand, amenities, service quality, pricing, loyalty program, and reviews from prior visitors, among other things. Consumers' choices are influenced by various factors, including the tourist's characteristics and incentives (Pinto & Castro, 2019).

Customer expectations are consumers' goals or demands, such as what they believe a service provider should rather than give (Ali et al., 2021). The consumer expectation variable predicts the company's future success and has a positive relationship with perceived value (Bambang Winarko & Husna, 2020). As a result, it is acceptable to assume that the efficiency of online hotel reviews influences travellers' expectations when booking hotels (Wee et al., 2018). In the OTA sector, consumer expectations have a substantial impact on perceived value, and brand loyalty is heavily influenced by business image (Bambang Winarko & Husna, 2020). Ren et al. (2016) identified four consumer expectation indicators that have a significant impact on customer satisfaction: tactile and sensory experience, personnel aspect, aesthetic impression, and location. As online reviews become an important source for travellers evaluating the quality of hospitality services, only hoteliers that employ online reviews will be able to grab the attention of travellers who seek information through the digital channel (Wee et al., 2018). Negative comments that are more common and frequent indicate that a product or service is of poor quality, whereas positive remarks may indicate high, average, or low quality (Nam et al., 2020). According to Bueno et al., 2019, consumers can use previous experiences to evaluate product information, service quality, liabilities, and warranty information (Shen, 2018).

According to Park et al., (2019), perceived value can influence travellers' hotel booking intents and final decisions. Customers may perceive high-quality services when they receive better service for the same amount of money, time, and effort (Bambang Winarko & Husna, 2020). It implies that when a consumer receives a higher value for goods and services, they will be more satisfied. From the consumer's perspective, simply because a service is of excellent quality does not always mean that the user is content with it. This explains how perceived value influences the relationship between quality and satisfaction (Fernandes, 2017). Customer satisfaction is crucial to ensuring customer loyalty and business success (Komalasari & Budiman, 2018). Several studies have found that online consumer satisfaction stems from a post-purchase evaluation of a specific online product or service (Kourtesopoulou et al., 2019; Oni et al., 2016; Da Silva & Alwi, 2008). Research suggests that online service quality can

impact consumer satisfaction (Oni, et al., 2016). When brand loyalty grows, customers tend to spend more on their favoured brand and become less susceptible to market shifts (Shen, 2018). Customers are delighted when they are satisfied with specific items and services that satisfy their expectations. According to Muharam et al. (2021), e-service quality, cost, and brand all have a significant impact on customer loyalty. Thus, the organisation recognises that creating a great brand image can boost client loyalty and commercial profit. Customers will develop a certain level of loyalty if they appreciate the appearance of the OTA website (Zhu et al., 2022; Kourtesopoulou et al., 2019).

3. Method

The study employed a quantitative research methodology to examine customers' behaviour towards online travel agency (OTA) services. The unit of study is persons in Doha, Qatar, who utilise OTA services. The population sample focuses on Qatari travellers who used OTA services to book hotels. Utilising OTA services is the best way to collect trustworthy data from respondents. A non-probability sampling method, namely the convenience sampling technique, was used to pick respondents who are conveniently located near Doha, Qatar. G-Power 3.1 software was used to calculate sample size using t-tests and linear multiple regression with a fixed model and single regression coefficient. This survey requires a total sample size of 74 participants, using a one-tailed test and a 95% significant level set for five predictors.

A pilot test was done in Doha, Qatar, using convenience sampling, with the researchers approaching tourists who volunteered to take part in the survey. The data was collected utilising an online questionnaire and distributed via a Quick Response (QR) code to individuals who have utilised OTA services in Qatar. Initially, 145 respondents were reached, but only 139 gave responses that were used for data analysis. The data was collected throughout two months, from November to December 2022. The results of the data collection were then used for analysis and discussion in this study.

4. Results

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The descriptive analysis in Table 1 showed that among the 139 respondents, 68.3% or 95 respondents were female, while 31.7% or 44 respondents were male. The highest percentage of respondents, at 25.9%, was between the ages of 18 to 24, followed by 23.7% from the ages of 15 to 34 and 35 to 44. The age group of 45 to 54 years old contributed 17.3% or 24 respondents, while those aged 55 and above accounted for 9.4% or 13 respondents. In terms of education, the highest percentage of respondents, at 39.6%, held a degree, followed by those with a diploma at 24.5% and a master's degree at 17.3%. A small percentage of respondents, 12.2%, held a certificate and a Ph.D. 6.5%. As for employment status, the largest group was employed at 49.6% or 69 respondents, followed by the unemployed at 29.5% or 41 respondents. The self-employed group contributed 10.8% or 15 respondents, while students and retirees each accounted for 5% or 7 respondents. With regards to OTA usage frequency, 51.1% of respondents chose to use OTA once to three times a year for making hotel reservations, followed by those who used OTA three to six times, at 29.5%. A

small number of respondents used OTA six to ten times a year at 12.2% and more than ten times at 7.2%. The most popular OTA platform among the respondents was Booking.com, chosen by 77.7% or 108 respondents, followed by Agoda at 13.7% or 19 respondents. Hotel.com was chosen by 4.3% or 6 respondents, while TripAdvisor was selected by 2.9% or 4 respondents. These results indicated that the total contribution of the OTA platforms chosen by the respondents for making hotel reservations was 100%.

4.2 Descriptive Analysis

4.2.1 Descriptive Analysis for Customer Expectation

The first independent variable analysed in this study was customer expectation. The results of the analysis, as shown in Table 1, reveal that the mean score distribution for the items in this category ranges from 4.00 to 4.31, implying that the respondents had a neutral attitude towards customer expectation.

Table 1. Mean Score for Customer Expectation

Num.	Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
CE1	I have a high expectation from OTA services	139	4.31	0.721
CE2	I am expecting that OTA services would provide me with options for my travel planning	139	4.29	0.725
CE3	OTA services meet my expectation	139	4.00	0.712

Note. Likert Scale (1: Strongly Disagree, 2: Disagree, 3: Neutral, 4: Agree, 5: Strongly Agree).

4.2.2 Descriptive Analysis for Service Quality

The results of the analysis of the second independent variable, service quality, are presented in Table 2. The findings indicate that the mean score for each of the items ranges from 4.22 to 4.13, suggesting that the respondents generally agreed and strongly agreed that the quality of service was a significant factor in determining their behaviour as customers.

Table 2. Mean Score for Service Quality

Num.	Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
SQ1	OTA provides useful services	139	4.22	0.702
SQ2	The OTA booking process is easier rather than the hotel website	139	4.13	0.833
SQ3	OTA provides a user-friendly experience for me	139	4.22	0.740

Note. Likert Scale (1: Strongly Disagree, 2: Disagree, 3: Neutral, 4: Agree, 5: Strongly Agree).

4.2.3 Descriptive Analysis for Perceived Value

The results of the descriptive analysis for the third independent variable, perceived value, are presented in Table 3. The findings suggest that the respondents had a positive perception of the value provided by OTA services, as the mean scores range from 4.17 to 4.30. This indicates that the respondents generally agreed and strongly agreed with the items related to perceived value.

Table 3. Mean Score for Perceived Value

Num.	Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
PV1	I am able to get better OTA services for a reasonable price	139	4.29	0.737
PV2	Using OTA services saves my money, time, and energy spent on searching for product and services information	139	4.30	0.748
PV3	I believe that the performance of OTA services is attractive	139	4.17	0.655

Note. Likert Scale (1: Strongly Disagree, 2: Disagree, 3: Neutral, 4: Agree, 5: Strongly Agree).

4.2.4 Descriptive Analysis for Customer Satisfaction

The fourth independent variable in this study, customer satisfaction, was analysed and the results are presented in Table 4. The findings indicate that the mean score for the items under this variable ranges from 4.13 to 4.19, suggesting that the respondents agreed with the idea that customer satisfaction plays a crucial role in shaping their behaviour towards OTA services.

Table 4. Mean Score for Customer Satisfaction

Num.	Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
CS1	I feel that using OTA services was the perfect option for me	139	4.13	0.700
CS2	I feel that using OTA services is a pleasant experience	139	4.15	0.691
CS3	I am satisfied with the overall services of OTA	139	4.19	0.701

Note. Likert Scale (1: Strongly Disagree, 2: Disagree, 3: Neutral, 4: Agree, 5: Strongly Agree).

4.2.5 Descriptive Analysis for Brand Loyalty

Table 5 displays the results of the descriptive analysis for the final independent variable, brand loyalty. The findings show that the mean score for the items ranges from 4.07 to 4.33, indicating that the respondents agree that brand loyalty has an impact on customer behaviour. The table below summarises this analysis.

Table 5. Mean Score for Brand Loyalty

Num.	Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
BL1	OTA will be my first choice	139	4.07	0.767
BL2	I intend to continue using OTA services	139	4.33	0.641
BL3	I am willing to say positive things about OTA to other people	139	4.26	0.726

Note. Likert Scale (1: Strongly Disagree, 2: Disagree, 3: Neutral, 4: Agree, 5: Strongly Agree).

4.2.6 Descriptive Analysis for Customer Behaviour

Table 6 presents the findings of the analysis conducted on the dependent variable, customer behaviour. The results reveal that the mean score for the dependent variable ranges from 4.17 to 4.35, indicating that the respondents generally agreed with the notion that their behaviour is influenced by the five independent variables studied in this research.

Table 6. Mean Score for Customer Behavior

Num	Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
CD1	I prefer to use OTAs because they provide me with a variety of hotel and room options, making it easier for me to make a decision	139	4.35	0.719
CD2	I prefer using OTA rather than hotel official websites	139	4.17	0.881
CD3	I would suggest OTA to anyone who is planning a trip	139	4.24	0.848

Note. Likert Scale (1: Strongly Disagree, 2: Disagree, 3: Neutral, 4: Agree, 5: Strongly Agree).

Hypotheses Analysis

H1: Service quality of online travel agent platform influence customer satisfaction toward OTA services.

H2: Perceived value of the online travel agent platform influence customer satisfaction toward OTA services.

H3: Customer expectations of online travel agents influence customer satisfaction toward OTA services.

H4: Brand loyalty of online travel agent platform influence customer satisfaction toward OTA services.

H5: Customer satisfaction with online travel agent platform influence customer behavior toward OTA services.
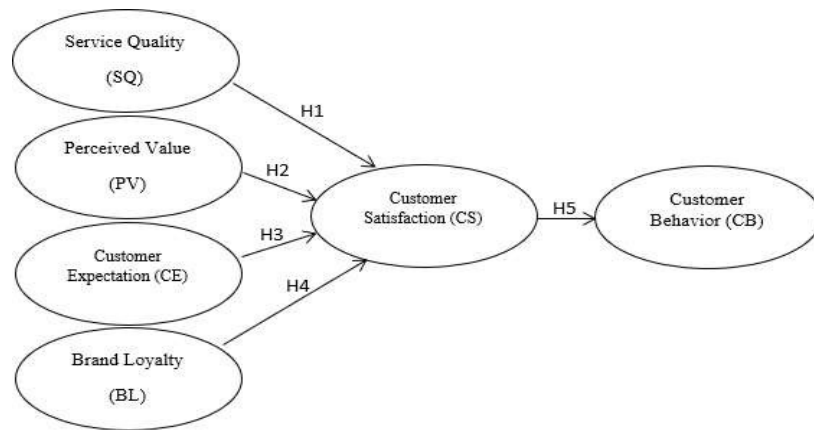
Figure 1. OTA Research Model Framework

4.3 Multicollinearity Test

A multicollinearity test was conducted to examine the relationship among independent variables. To ensure the validity of the output, the study analyzed the tolerance value and VIF (Burns & Bush, 2010). If the VIF value is below 10 and the tolerance value is above 0.1, it indicates that the equation is free from multicollinearity. Multicollinearity tests are utilized to assess the intercorrelation among independent variables in the regression model, particularly for Model 1.

4.3.1 Multicollinearity Test for Model 1

Based on the statistical test done, all tolerance values for service quality (X_1), perceived value (X_2), customer expectation (X_3), and brand loyalty (X_4) are bigger than 0.1 and VIF value for X_1 = 2.526, X_2 = 2.852. X_3 = 2.25 and X_4 = 2.195 which is below 10. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no multicollinearity in the equation of Model 1.

Multiple Linear Regression Result Model 1

The results of the multiple regression analysis of Model 1 indicate that service quality, perceived value, and brand loyalty significantly influence customer satisfaction toward OTA services in the hotel industry. However, the analysis reveals that customer expectation has an insignificant impact on customer satisfaction. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that hypotheses 1, 2, and 4 are supported while hypothesis 3 is rejected. The resulting equation for Model 1 is presented below:

$$YCS = -0.617 + 0.212X_1* + 0.251X_2* + 0.178X_3* + 0.348X_4 * \qquad (1)$$

Note: *: $p < 0.05$.

YCS = Customer Satisfaction, X_1 = Service Quality, X_2 = Perceived Value, X_3 = Customer Expectation, X_4 = Brand loyalty
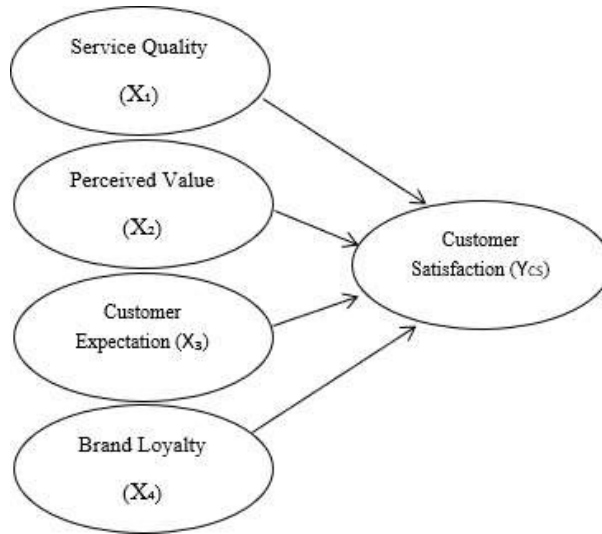
Figure 2. Research Model 1

4.3.2 Simple Linear Regression Model 2

The results of the simple linear regression analysis of Model 2 reveal that customer satisfaction significantly influences customer behavior towards OTA services in the hotel industry. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that hypothesis 5 is supported. The equation for Model 2 is presented below.

$$YCB = 5.088 + 0.602X_5^* \qquad (2)$$

Note: *: $p < 0.05$.

YCB = Customer Behavior, X_l = Customer Satisfaction
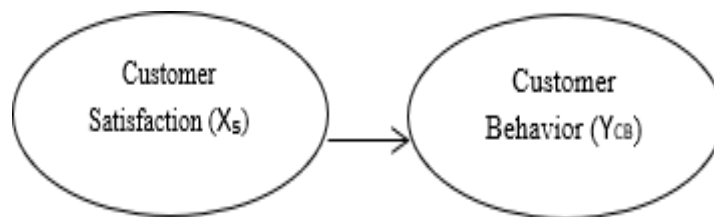
Figure 3. Research Model 2

5. Discussion

The overall statistical calculation reveals that customer satisfaction has the greatest influence on customer behaviour towards online travel agency (OTA) services in the hotel business

(Noor et al., 2020), with a beta coefficient of 0.602 and a p-value less than 0.05. This suggests that as customer satisfaction grows, so does the chance of good customer behaviour towards OTA services in the hotel business. This finding is consistent with prior research indicating the importance of customer satisfaction in affecting customer behaviour in the hospitality business (Lee et al., 2017; Wang & Law, 2023). As a result, hotel operators must focus on increasing customer happiness in order to encourage good client behaviour towards OTA services. Thus, it can be argued that hypothesis 5 is correct.

The results of Model 1's multiple linear regression analysis show that three variables, service quality, perceived value, and brand loyalty, have a significant influence on customer satisfaction with OTA services in the hotel industry. In contrast, the study shows that consumer expectations have no significant influence on customer satisfaction (ß = 0.178, p-value = 0.08), hence hypothesis 3 is rejected while hypotheses 1, 2, and 4 are accepted. Nonetheless, in this study, the constant coefficient for customer happiness is negative, although the coefficients for the independent variables, service quality, perceived value, customer expectation, and brand loyalty, are positive. These findings indicate that, while customer satisfaction may have a negative baseline, it can be positively influenced by the aforementioned independent variables. Customer happiness is positively related to increased levels of service quality, perceived value, customer expectation, and brand loyalty. However, the negative intercept value reported in this study contradicts the positive intercept values established in previous studies measuring customer satisfaction in the hospitality business (Chang & Chen, 2008; Yang et al., 2013).

The current study's findings show that only one of the two offered models was accepted. Specifically, the investigation found that consumer expectations had no substantial impact on customer satisfaction with OTA services, hence rejecting hypothesis 3. This finding is reinforced by the research of Chang and Chen (2008) and Yang et al. (2013), who found no significant association between consumer expectations and satisfaction in the hospitality business. Prior research by Lee et al. (2017) and Kim et al. (2019) revealed a favourable and substantial relationship between customer expectations and satisfaction, respectively.

To have a better knowledge of the most widely used OTA by travellers in Qatar, some advice and discussion with front-desk staff at Holiday Villa Hotel & Residence Doha in Qatar were sought. The goal is to learn more about the most popular OTA utilised by most guests that visited Qatar as a result of their booking at Holiday Villa Hotel & Residence during the FIFA World Cup 2022. Because the study was conducted during the World Cup, it is critical to understand the tourist who would be the prospective respondent to the research and provide the potential OTA brand preference in the questionnaire form. This is because it can improve the experience of respondents who complete the questionnaire while lowering the possibility of inaccurate data collection in identifying the most popular OTA among travellers in Qatar. Based on hotel staff recommendations, Booking.com, Expedia, TripAdvisor, Hotel.com, and Agoda were picked as options in this study. Additionally, a blank option allows respondents to write their own favourite OTA, which may not be included in the choices.

Thus, the study found the most popular online travel agency platforms among travellers. According to the findings, the majority of tourists, 77.7%, preferred Booking.com, followed by Agoda with 13.7%. Expedia, TripAdvisor, and Hotel.com had substantially lower levels of

choice, with only 1.4%, 2.9%, and 4.3% of tourists choosing them, respectively. These findings indicate that Booking.com and Agoda are the most preferred OTA platforms among tourists attending FIFA World Cup 2022 in Doha, Qatar. Thus, this finding addressed the second research purpose of this study, which was to analyse the OTA platform used by tourists.

6. Conclusion

The results of this study are consistent with previous studies that have shown a positive relationship between service quality, perceived value, customer expectation, and brand loyalty towards customer satisfaction. However, the negative intercept value found in this study differs from previous studies (Chang & Chen, 2008; Yang et al., 2013), which have shown a positive intercept value in measuring customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry. This contrasting result may be due to differences in the sample size, location, and methodology used in this study. Furthermore, this study shows that customer satisfaction has a direct influence on customer behaviour toward online agent (OTA) services in the hotel industry.

All the hypotheses proposed in this study were accepted except for hypothesis 3, which revealed that the influence of customer expectation on satisfaction was not statistically significant. This result may be due to the fact that OTA services are expected to deliver a certain level of quality and value to customers, and meeting these expectations may not necessarily result in higher satisfaction levels. Additionally, other factors such as service quality, perceived value, and brand loyalty may play more significant roles in determining customer satisfaction with OTA services.

The study suggests that further investigation is necessary to determine the underlying causes of the negative intercept value found in assessing customer satisfaction. In addition, it is recommended to shift the focus from the characteristics of choice to the tourism-related customer behaviour process. The researchers propose exploring independent variables that have a stronger influence on customer behaviour towards OTA services in the hotel industry. To make the most of the results of statistical analysis such as ANOVA and scatter plots, future research should aim to utilise these methods effectively.

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