



MSc Marketing: Dissertation 2019

How online reviews influence tourism destination choice: An analysis
of the Irish market

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment for a MSc in Marketing

Submitted to the National College of Ireland August 2019

Abstract

Word of mouth (WOM), is one of the theories to still hold importance in the present world. The theory has been noticed, observed and applied in various industries by numerous academic researchers. Even though WOM has undergone change due to technology and the inception of the internet, the principle meaning has still remained the same. Word of mouth has shifted from traditional to electronic word of mouth or e-WOM. Furthermore, the meaning of the theory remains the same but the platform through which it is passed is different with e-WOM being shared electronically with the help of the internet. One of the main methods through which e-WOM is passed is through online reviews. The tourism sector is a great avenue to conduct research on e-WOM and online review solely due to the intangible products offered in the sector making it difficult to evaluate prior to consumption. Hence, the main purpose of the research project is to investigate the influence of online reviews on tourism destination choice with regards to the Irish market.

In order to gain further understanding, a conceptual framework was used called the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) and was adopted to find out the intention of the tourists to travel to Ireland. The three antecedents (attitudes towards visiting the destination, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control), were employed to find out the intention to travel to Ireland.

The research methodology used for the research was descriptive, quantitative research through web survey provided the researcher with measurable and quantifiable data. Finally, the researcher found online reviews and antecedents of TPB to have a positive and a direct impact on the intention to travel to Ireland.

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Acknowledgements

The dissertation would not have been completed without the assistance, guidance and participation of a number of people involved. First and foremost I would like to thank my parents Chandran and Prabha for their everlasting support and motivation not only during the dissertation but also throughout my entire life.

Secondly, I would like to thank my supervisor Mr David Hurley for all his support, motivation and advice during the stages of the dissertation, helping me feel more confident about the task in hand.

Thirdly, I would like to thank Mr Keith Brittle for his support and advice regarding referencing and on how to get the best information for the dissertation.

Finally, I would like to thank all the participant in the web survey who spent their precious time completing it.

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1 Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction to topic

In recent years, marketing techniques such as advertising and other paid advertising methods showed prominence in influencing consumers purchase behaviour towards a product or service. However, in the current scenario, the trends have changed with consumers wanting more to be offered in a personalised setting and hence, a term called word of mouth (WOM) which has been present since the beginning of time has finally emerged and have made brands rethink their respective marketing strategies to approach consumers.

WOM refers to the communication that occurs between consumers with regards to a product or a service wherein, the sources are regarded as independent of commercial influence (Zarrad and Debabi, 2015). Furthermore, the advancement of technology and the emergence of the internet has led to the development of WOM to now e-WOM.

Electronic WOM can be defined as “any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the internet (Hennig-Thurau *et.al.*, 2004, p. 39). The main benefit of e-WOM is that it allows consumers to be in charge of the brand message and allows recommendations which prove to be a greater influence in terms of purchase behaviour (Chahal, 2012). E-WOM can be accessed through various mode such as blog, videos, but the most important mode of e-WOM is through online reviews. Online platform such as TripAdvisor and Yelp accommodates millions of online reviews based on various industries.

The research project aims to find out the influence that online reviews possess on the destination choice of tourists. There has been a drastic change in the literature with respect to e-WOM and online review with their application being applied to various industries. Online reviews serve two main purposes. It serves as a recommendation tool which influences consumers purchase behaviour. Furthermore, online reviews influence product sales. However, Zhu and Zhang (2010), believes that the influence of online reviews on sales is dependent on the product or service in question. The industry chosen to find out the influence of online reviews is tourism. The impact of e-WOM and especially online reviews is high in the tourism industry mainly due to the fact that tourism is a service which is intangible and cannot be assessed prior to the consumption, this thereby, increases the risk, as a result, consumers are more inclined to seek

the influence of interpersonal communication in other words e-WOM (Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012; Zarrad and Debabi, 2015).

The dissertation aims to add to the existing pool of literature surrounding the area. Furthermore, findings from previous researches (secondary research), allows to compare and contrast the results obtained through primary research. Even though literature in the specific area i.e. the impact of online reviews on destination choice have been scarce, it has been, however, well backed up with a solid framework. Nevertheless, there still exist a gap in literature and the lack of research in the area largely constituted in the framing of the research aim and as well the subsequent research objectives.

The study is descriptive in nature, with the help of web surveys through www.surveymonkey.com allows the researcher to provide legit, systematic information regarding the phenomenon in question. Finally, the deductive approach assists in explaining the variables in the research project pertaining to online reviews and destination choice.

1.2 Justification for research

The significance with respect to the influence and reach that e-WOM through online reviews provide makes it an interesting avenue to investigate. Furthermore, there has been a shift in marketing strategies, wherein marketers are beginning to make use of e-WOM as a tool for communicating with the consumers.

The travel and tourism industry has changed significantly over the past decade with Statista (2018), agreeing on the fact by stating that the industry has a contribution to global economy of above 7.6 trillion U.S. dollars. Furthermore, the statistics show the highest population of international tourist arrivals are in Europe (Lock, 2018). In addition, concerning to the Irish tourism market there has been a steady increase in revenue reaching 8.8 billion euros in 2017 (Luty, 2018). Therefore, making the Irish market a perfect setting and avenue to fulfil the purpose of this dissertation. Moreover, the statistics above provide the importance of tourism in the Irish economy and hence, it is important to find out the tourist behaviours and understand the factors that influence their travel decisions. The dissertation aims to find out the influence of online review have on tourist behaviours in selecting a destination and the framework that will be used is the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) by Ajzen (1991). The purpose of TPB is to understand an individual's intention that drives them to perform a behaviour. The antecedents of TPB are namely attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control, these antecedents hence, assist in predicting behavioural intentions. Previous researches by the following (Jordan *et.al.*, 2017; Al Ziadat,

2015; Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012; Shen, Schuttemeyer and Braun, 2009), have all shown a positive relation of TPB towards behavioural intentions in the travel and tourism industry.

The dissertation seeks to provide emphasis on the influence of online reviews with regards to the tourist choice of destination. The existence of literature in this particular field has been limited. The following research was based on the influence of e-WOM towards tourist destination choice (Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012; Al Ziadat, 2015; Fakharyan *et.al.*, 2012). The only difference between the above-mentioned researches were the countries that were researched on, with different countries being used to prove the influence between the variables (e-WOM and TPB). Therefore, this research project aims to understand the influence of online reviews on the destination choice with regards to the Irish market.

1.3 Research aims and objectives

The research objectives for the purpose of this dissertation is derived from the TPB and is adopted from the research conducted by (Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012). The research objective will be broken down into two main sections. Firstly, the objective will be to show the influence of online reviews on tourists destination choice. Secondly, antecedents of the TPB will be used as divisions which will have subsequent research objectives.

1.3.1 To investigate the impact of online reviews on tourist destination choice

1.3.2 Attitudes towards destination

- To investigate the impact of online reviews on attitudes towards visiting Ireland.
- To identify the attitudes of tourists towards visiting Ireland and its impact on the intention to travel.

1.3.3 Subjective norms

- To investigate the impact of e-WOM on subjective norms.
- To determine the impact of subjective norms on the intention to travel.

1.3.4 Perceived behavioural control

- To investigate the impact of online reviews on perceived behavioural control.
- To determine the impact of perceived behavioural control on the intention to travel.

1.3.5 Behavioural intention

- To investigate the impact of online reviews on the intention to travel.

1.4 Research question

The primary research question constitutes the following: “How online reviews influence tourism destination choice: An analysis of the Irish market ?”. The dissertation will aim to provide insights with regards to the influence that online reviews through e-WOM can have on the travel decisions and the intention to travel.

1.5 Scope and Limitations

The dissertation aims at finding out the influence of e-WOM through online review have on tourists with respect to the decision regarding travel destination choice. Furthermore, it also aims to find out the attitudinal changes the tourist may have by viewing online reviews with respect to intention to travel to a particular destination. Nevertheless, the dissertation also poses certain limitations as well. Sampling techniques used was identified as a limitation as the population of a sample depicted in the analysis was bigger compared to the other existing sample. Moreover, certain questions were added to the questionnaire in order to provide better clarity to the research project. Finally, the lack of open-ended questioned restricted the researcher to gather more in-depth information about tourists behaviours.

1.6 Dissertation structure

The structure is a crucial element in making a research project clear-cut and direct. A proper structure will enable a researcher to present the literature, analysis and results in an efficient manner. The structure of

the dissertation is as follows. Chapter two will consist of literature review, where existing literature pertaining to theories such as WOM, e-WOM, online reviews and antecedents of TPB will be discussed. In addition, the connection of the above-mentioned terms to tourism will be also discussed. Chapter three will present the research methodology, elements such as research approach, research philosophy, data collection, sampling, ethics, limitations will be discussed and the justifications will be provided for all sections. Chapter four will include the data analysis wherein, the findings of the research will be discussed along with the charts. Chapter five will consist of discussion, wherein, findings will be compared to the results obtained from secondary research. Finally, chapter six will include a conclusion and a future recommendation section.

2 Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Word of mouth (WOM)

2.1.1 Introduction to WOM

WOM is a phenomena which has around since the early ages of human beings and since, then the phenomenon has had a drastic transition from being termed as traditional WOM to now electronic WOM (e-WOM). The main reason for the transition has come down due to the innovations undergone in the technology sector which has broadened the reach of social connectivity (Whitler, 2014), therefore, making it a less complicated and effortless affair to review and to understand an individual's views on a product/service. Most importantly, it must be understood that WOM plays a significant role in consumer behaviour mainly due to information being credible and reliable as it is passed on by fellow members. Furthermore, Bronner and Hoog (2014), affirms that WOM has had a change in consumers behaviour by enhancing an individual's information seeking capabilities and this, therefore, has resulted in the information provided by the suppliers being less of an influencing factor to the consumers.

WOM as per literature can be defined as “all informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods or services or their sellers” (Westbrook, 1987, pp.261). Furthermore, WOM can be oral and as well can be personal communication, it can be positive as well as negative and also can be about a product or service or brand. On the contrary, the most important element of WOM is that it is non-commercial in nature. WOM includes sharing of personal experiences and opinions to friends, colleagues which is thereby, transferred through the written word (Sun *et al.*, 2006), face to face, text messages, phone conversations and also via the internet. Online WOM which is going to be discussed in the latter stages can be sourced through online review sites, social media and finally, blogs (Berger and Iyengar, 2013).

Research has been conducted by authors previously which discusses the various forms of WOM, the respective mediums and moreover, which of these types have a greater influence on the consumer behaviour (Ishida, Slevitch and Siamionava, 2016; Berger and Iyengar, 2013). In addition, mediums play a significant role in distributing WOM. Research conducted by Chen (2011), showed personality traits to be a factor in distributing WOM. The results of the research suggested that extroverts are more likely to share their respective experiences than introverts.

2.1.2 Introduction to Traditional WOM

Due to the change in technology and most importantly the introduction of the internet has seen a drastic shift from traditional WOM marketing which is mainly based on face-to-face communication to electronic word of mouth (e-WOM). However, the shift has not completely catapulted traditional WOM out of

existence. Traditional WOM can be defined as the “personal communication between people who are not commercial entities” (Ishida, Slevitch and Siamionava, 2016, p.2). According to Lang and Hyde (2013), it is believed that 90% of WOM arises through offline channels and this therefore, provides concrete evidence on its importance. Furthermore, the findings of the research conducted by Hu and Ha (2015), shows that traditional WOM was the source used by the sample (college students) for the purpose of online shopping. It can be concluded that traditional WOM is still relevant. Under traditional WOM, information is transferred through personal or non-commercial channels (Ishida, Slevitch and Siamionava, 2016). Finally, Meuter, McCabe and Curran (2013), conclude that traditional WOM through face-to-face communication is said to be more influential than e-WOM. However, Meuter, McCabe and Curran (2013), emphasizes that e-WOM is still crucial to promote awareness. Therefore, by critically examining the views provided by different researchers, it can be formulated that both traditional and e-WOM are crucial with respect to the way at which it is used.

2.1.3 Positive WOM and Negative WOM

The two main classifications of WOM can be termed as positive word of mouth (PWOM) and negative word of mouth (NWOM). PWOM refers to the product related information conveyed to the customers or an individual who is satisfied with the product or service (Nyilasy, 2006). PWOM includes factors such as recommendations made to others, interpersonal discussions and so on (Audrain-Pontevia and Kimmel, 2008). On the other hand, NWOM can be defined as the “interpersonal communication among consumers concerning a marketing organization or product which denigrates the object of the communication” (Audrain-Pontevia and Kimmel, 2008, p.126).

Studies conducted by various researchers signifies that individuals generate positive or negative experiences based on the following factors: satisfaction/dissatisfaction (Anderson, 1998), (Richins, 1983), trust (Ranaweera and Prabhu, 2003), commitment (Brown *et al.*, 2005) and service quality (Harrison-Walker, 2001). Moreover, various opinions have come to light with regards to the power of PWOM and NWOM. The studies conducted by TARP (1981); Sundaram *et al.* (1998), indicate that NWOM were received by a wider population than PWOM. Moreover, if the firm does recognize the negative experiences on time then the customers are twice as more likely to circulate NWOM. Moreover Fiske (1980), emphasize that negative information is perceived as being informative due to its rareness. Researchers Lo (2012); Solomon *et al.* (2016), agree that customers are more likely to share experiences that are negative or unhappy than positive experiences. On the contrary Nyilasi (2006), believe that NWOM and PWOM are thought to be the one and the same, the only difference being the distinct endpoints.

2.2 Electronic word of mouth (e-WOM)

2.2.1 Introduction to e-WOM

Throughout the years, the internet has advanced into a platform which allows individuals with the power to transfer information relating to a wide range of topics. Furthermore, through this platform consumers regardless of their consumption stature are given the opportunity to provide consumption related advice by employing e-WOM (Hennig-Thurau *et.al.*, 2004). Online or e-WOM can be defined as “any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the internet (Hennig-Thurau *et.al.*, 2004, p. 39). Moreover, e-WOM can emerge through numerous ways such as emails, blogs, chat rooms, social networks (Facebook, Twitter), consumer opinion platforms (Yelp) and so on (Lis and Neßler, 2014). In addition, Ishida, Slevitch and Siamionava (2016), believe that e-WOM can be further differentiated on the basis of commercial and personal e-WOM. Receiving e-mails of individuals with a personal connection is similar to traditional WOM. Moreover, most commonly used e-WOM is through consumer opinion platform and the platforms are said to be impersonal in nature.

2.2.2 Importance of e-WOM

For the purpose of this research, understanding e-WOM is crucial as it serves as a sole method through which online reviews are passed and hence, it is necessary to discuss the importance of e-WOM. Electronic WOM as compared to the traditional WOM serve to be easily measurable mainly due to the fact that it can be easily quantified along with the advantage of recording as well as observing (Baber *et.al.*, 2016). Furthermore, in the case of an organization, e-WOM mediums such as online reviews help to bring about a sense of control because the marketers are given the upper hand to make decisions regarding whether to allow the reviews to be displayed or not, provide a format which would thereby, assist in guiding the customers to write the opinions in the way that marketers desire, this, therefore, provides the opportunity to marketers to carry out marketing strategies more efficiently (Park and Kim 2008). However, complete control by an organization on the reviews can also bare a negative effect. According to Doh and Hwang (2009), negative messages can be used to inculcate credibility as well a positive attitude. Normally, consumers may judge the credibility of the website if they find it hard to discover negative reviews. Smith, Menon and Sivakumar (2005), affirm that the success of online review sites has proved the increase in communication between customer’s online and as well have become an influencing factor in terms of product choice and product search. According to Park and Kim (2008), through e-WOM consumers in the early market can obtain additional product information whereas

consumers in the mainstream market can avail user oriented information. On the contrary, e-WOM like any other theory do possess drawbacks. Furner, Zinko and Zhu (2016), explains that it is difficult to evaluate the degree to which the needs and priorities of the reviewer matches with the that of the customers, this is mainly due to the lack of existing relationship with the reviewer in the e-WOM environment. Furthermore, there exist a likelihood of spams or fake reviews which would therefore, mislead the customers into buying the wrong product (Patil and Bagade, 2012).

2.2.3 e-WOM and tourism

The rise in competition in almost every sector of the tourism industry has made it difficult for tourism service providers to develop strategies to acquire and keep hold of existing customers. According to Loncaric, Ribaric and Farkas (2016), before choosing a tourist destination individuals are more inclined to spend a considerable amount of time researching and collecting information which would back up their decision and as a result one of the major sources of information comes in the form of past experiences of fellow tourist in other words known as online reviews. In addition, as travel products are regarded as being high risk and high involvement purchase, travelers therefore, place faith on opinions of fellow friends or peers prior to a decision, (Liang *et.al.*, 2013). Recent researches have illustrated the influence of e-WOM in tourism. Tham, Croy and Mair (2013), explored the essence of WOM with respect to online tourism website and came to a conclusion that e-WOM is distinctive to traditional WOM in terms of factors such as information seeking behaviour, content management, message retention and so on. Furthermore, from the study conducted on travel behaviour and destination selection of international students in Western Australia by Shanka, All-Knight and Pope (2002), showed that the source of information was derived as a result of WOM communication. Moreover, a more recent study by Albarq (2013), reveals that e-WOM has a significant impact on the attitudes as well as travel intentions of tourists. Finally, a survey conducted by Nielsen (2015), indicate that 66% of the respondents showed trust in online opinions than compared to owned online channels. To conclude, by critically examining the above researches, it can be said whatever were the reasons to measure e-WOM, all showed a positive relation with respect to tourism.

2.3 Online reviews

2.3.1 Introduction to online reviews

Online review websites such as TripAdvisor, Yelp and so on have proven to be an integral platform wherein, consumers are given the opportunity to provide their own personal experiences about a product or service. In the year 2015, 95 million reviews were available at Yelp and had an average monthly user

visits of 86 million and as a result these platforms can be coined to be credible and an influencing factor in terms of consumer attitudes and purchase behaviours (Lee and Ro, 2016). The study conducted by HubSpot (2015), showed that 90% of consumers scan through online reviews before logging into the business website. Furthermore, 7 out of 10 consumers rate online reviews as being an influencing factor towards conducting a purchase decision. Online reviews play a notable role in developing and influencing perceptions regarding a product or service (Jensen *et.al.*, 2013). Furthermore, online reviews are considered to be one of the main sources of e-WOM. Moreover, in terms of e-commerce online reviews allow consumers to evaluate (perceived usefulness) and compare (perceived decision quality) with other alternatives prior to making a purchase decisions (Zhao, Stylianou and Zheng, 2018).

2.3.2 Online reviews and tourism

2.3.2.1 Importance of online reviews as e-WOM

The importance of WOM, e-WOM and presently online reviews in terms of consumers and businesses are being mentioned both in the earlier and the latter stages of the literature, this is done mainly to ground the theory further and to provide a critical understanding towards the nature of importance. According to the study conducted by Hubspot (2015), star rating is an efficient measure in terms of e-WOM, the results showed that an overall increase of one rating, as a result, can lead to an increase of revenue which is around 5-10%. In addition, the study also reveals that customers are more likely to spend 30% more on businesses that have excellent reviews. However, it is of high importance that the businesses view negative reviews that may arise and it is crucial that the business rectifies them at the earliest. It is believed that 95% of customers who have left negative reviews regarding the product or service will be more inclined to return to use once the issues have been resolved. According to Filieri and McLeay (2013), online reviews can be considered as the electronic version of traditional WOM and mostly it is considered to be a model which influences the consumers understanding on the quality and performance of a product or service online (Filieri, 2015). Nevertheless, in terms of the tourism industry online reviews consists of comments published by travelers with respect to the tourism products they experience.

2.3.2.2 Effect of online reviews on tourism

The survey conducted among 2,000 US adults showed that 79% to 87% readers of online reviews had an influence over purchase decision with regards to travel and tourism services. Jalilvand and Heidari (2017), believed that tourist engagement through discussion in online communities and online reviews can help

amplify the quality and as well help in circulating favorable image regarding the destination. Pantano and Di Pietro (2013), affirm that tourism sectors are being compelled to rethink strategies in order to respond to the market trends, this is mainly due to the emergence of feedback and review platforms (Ekiz, Khoo-Lattimoer and Memarzadeh, 2012). As tourism products are complex and diverse, this has therefore put the consumers in an information dilemma and hence, the consumers are more inclined to search for information in a virtual environment setting through reviews and opinions so as to avoid any future risks (Pantano and Di Pietro, 2013). According to Yoo and Gertzel (2011), consumer-generated content in the way of collaborations between peers, generating reviews play a significant role with reference to travel decision making. Leung *et.al.* (2013), points out that online reviews are regarded as the major source of e-WOM when considering the tourism field and most importantly, the reviews laid down by the potential/actual tourists influence the three phases (pre-trip, during-trip and post-trip) of tourists travel planning. Moreover, in company-related terms online reviews are beneficial as it makes it easier to understand the travel behaviour and opinions of the tourist and therefore, help to bring about competitive advantage (Simeon *et.al.*,2017). Furthermore, tourists are more involved in the process of posting an online review mainly because they feel that conveying and sharing the respective experiences amount to be an important phase. In addition, Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan (2008), indicates that participant who is more likely to post their opinions are those who have either had a favorable or an unfavorable experience.

2.3.3 Characteristics of online reviews

Characteristics of online views chosen are namely: review valence, recent reviews and volume. The reasons for selecting the mentioned characteristics is mainly due to the fact that it contains the ability to change consumer perception and also its ability to alter sales as well.

2.3.3.1 Review Valence

Valence is regarded as one of the most crucial attributes with relation to consumer generated information. In theory, it can be said that positive comments give rise to high purchase intention and positive attitudes whereas, negative comments give rise to low purchase intention and negative attitudes (Zablocki, Schlegelmilch and Houston, 2018). Nevertheless, neutral valence also has an influence on product sales. Study conducted by Tang *et.al* (2014), shows that neutral valence helps bring out curiosity among consumers with respect to the product attributes and usage experiences. Nevertheless, it is still dependent on whether the statements are either mixed or indifferent. According to Ketelaar *et.al.* (2015), review valence can be seen either in the form of numerical rating i.e. 5-star recommendations or in the way of

textual content. Moreover, it is believed to indicate product quality and as well as assist in informing consumer purchase decisions. Various studies have been conducted portraying the impact of review valence. Vermuelen and Seegers (2009), stated in the study that review valence had a significant impact on the awareness and the attitudes with respect to the hotel industry. In addition, Yang, Sarathy and Walsh, (2016) also confirm from the research conducted that review valence had an influence on perceived risk and attitudes of online shoppers. Utz, Kerkhof and van den bos (2012), affirms that review valence had a strong effect on the perceived trustworthiness and as well was proven to be more important than store reputation. To conclude, it can be noted that review valence is an influencing factor towards purchase behaviour. Moreover, with reference to the above mentioned literature an inference can be drawn to the fact that negative information prevents consumers from purchasing products or services, whereas, positive information stimulates the consumers in making purchases. However, negative reviews can also lead to sales growth. According to Ghose and Ipeiritis (cited in Yang *et.al.*, 2016), emphasizes that negative reviews can also encourage sales growth if the reviewers can clearly describe the pros and cons of the product or service in question and must also provide adequate information to assist the view point. Finally, there have been other studies that have found that review valence to have no effect. One such study by Duan, Gu and Whinston, (2008), found that review valence does not associate with regards to movie sales which comes to show that more research needs to be conducted on the matter.

2.3.3.2 Recent reviews

The second characteristic which manipulates the online review is recent reviews. It refers to the timeline at which the review was posted. There exist an assumption regarding the credibility and usefulness of outdated reviews with regards to influencing consumer decision but it is still unclear, the nature of the review posting time and its influence in the consumer decision making process. Research by Pan and Zhang (2011), pointed out that age of the review has a positive association with respect to the helpfulness of the review, which means that consumers are inclined to consider outdated reviews to be more helpful. Unlike traditional WOM, online reviews have the advantage of not having a recall i.e. the information is available and can be easily accessed and therefore, it can be said that the role of outdated information is more crucial in the case of online WOM (Jin, Hu and He, 2014). Study conducted by Gretzel and Yoo (2008), indicates that consumers avail the service of online travel review sites to mainly collect information which is up to date, detailed and reliable. Furthermore, time can play a huge role in how a consumer interprets or perceive a review. Study conducted by Jin *et.al.*, (2014), indicated that consumers who undertake in conducting near-future purchase decisions are more affected by outdated reviews. To conclude, there exists a gap in the literature regarding the effect of outdated and recent reviews, therefore, the actual effect the two (outdated and recent reviews) can have is still in conjecture.

2.3.3.3 Volume

The final characteristic which manipulates the online reviews is volume. Volume can be defined as the number of online comments or ratings concerning a product or brand, which reflect the amount of information open to consumers (Floyd *et.al.*, 2014; Yang, Sarathy and Lee, 2016). (Zablocki, Schlegelmilch and Houston (2018), believes that consumers are more influenced by products or brands which possess a high volume of online reviews this is mainly due to the fact that an opinion which is shared by a large population signifies the perceived accuracy of that opinion. According to Duan *et.al.* (2008), volume has a greater significance regarding movie sales and moreover, they emphasize that there exist a positive relationship between volume of WOM and product sales. However, Chintagunta, Gopinath and Venkataraman (2010), questions the research of (Duan *et.al.*, 2008), by stating that volume of reviews is regarded to be a crucial driver with regards to box office performance than valence. Nevertheless, the study by Khare, Labrecque and Asare (2011), propose that volume is an extrinsic, high scope cue and in terms of consumer decision making, high volume. WOM is more diagnostic than low volume WOM. Kostyra *et.al.* (2016), confirms from the research that volume can be treated as a moderator for valence, increase in volume brings out a positive effect of high valence on the basis of consumers choice. Yang, Sarathy and Lee, (2016), believes that review volume can help foster purchase intentions when combined with review balance i.e. the ratio of positive and negative reviews. The research indicates that a higher review volume will result in purchase intentions while the review balance in positive and vice versa. Moreover, the volume of product reviews shows a positive relation with regards to increasing consumer awareness about a product or service (Godes and Mayzlin, 2004). Finally, Mudambi and Schuff (2010), believe that quantity of reviews can assist in decreasing the uncertainty arising in the consumers' minds regarding the quality of the product or service and also enables the consumers to picture themselves buying and consuming the respective product or service.

2.4 Attitudes

2.4.1 Theory of planned behaviour (TPB)

Theory of planned behaviour serves as an extension of the theory of reasoned action (TRA). Furthermore, with regards to TRA, TPB is aimed at looking into an individual's intention to conduct a given behaviour. As per Ajzen (1991), intentions are thought to express the motivational factors that affect a certain behaviour. Furthermore, it also serves as an indication regarding the degree towards which an individual is willing to try, plan and to perform the behaviour. Ajzen model has been applied to various studies that are based on social sciences and the areas include ethical behaviour, smoking behaviour and so on

(Jailvand and Samiei, 2012). However, there exists literature that investigates Ajzen model with respect to the tourism and hospitality industry (Martin, Ramamonjiarivelo and Martin, 2011; Yuzhanin and Fisher, 2016; Jordan *et.al.*, 2017). The antecedents of TPB include attitude towards a behaviour, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control.

2.4.2 Attitudes

The first antecedent in TPB model is attitudes. Attitudes serve to provide an evaluative summary about an item. Furthermore, attitudes are permanent, well balanced, it has been known to influence and foresee behaviour thereby, making it a significant psychological construct (Fakharayan *et.al*, 2012). Attitudes can be defined as “the degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of the behaviour in question” (Ajzen,1991, p.188). The degree of positive or negative attitudes towards the performance of behaviour may vary from person to person. Positive attitudes with regards to behaviour will lead to positive intention to partake in that behaviour, and negative attitude with regards to a behaviour will lead to a negative intention to partake in that behaviour (Ajzen,1991). (Jordan *et.al.*, 2017; Stylos *et.al.*, 2016), believes that attitudes towards a tourism destination are generally formulated through the set of attributes with regards to the destination. The set of attributes include emotions such as excitement, fear and so on. The study conducted by Al Ziadat (2015), indicated that tourists attitude regarding visiting and re-visiting the destination has a crucial effect on the intentions of the tourists to revisit the destination. Likewise, Hsu and Huang (2012), pointed out that attitudes had a direct and a positive influence on intentions. However, as compared to other antecedents of TPB, the effect of attitude on intentions was only marginal. Furthermore, Fakharayan *et.al* (2012), states that e-WOM had a crucial impact on tourists attitude towards a destination and therefore, impacting travel intentions. Similarly, Zarrad and Debabi (2015), confirms that e-WOM effect future travel intentions and also provides emphasis on the importance of user generated reviews on the performance of business. To conclude, as mentioned in the literature WOM is also found to play a prominent role in influencing attitudes and intentions. (Zablocki *et.al.*, 2018; Lee and Ro, 2016; Albarq, 2013; Fakharayan *et.al* 2012, Zarrad and Debabi, 2015). In the contrary, there exist literature that shows attitude to have no connections with intentions to travel (Sparks and Pan, 2009; Lam and Hsu, 2004). Hence, by critically analyzing the above literature, it can be said that the results with respect to the attitudes towards a destination depends on the destination chosen for the research. In addition, each country is distinct with its own culture and ethnicity and hence, resulting in different notions to the point mentioned. Moreover, the researchers used different destinations to apply the theory and hence, resulting in different results. For instance, Lam and Hsu (2004), conducted a research on Chinese tourist in Hong Kong whereas, Jalilvand and Samiei (2012), conducted the study with respect to Iran.

2.4.3 Subjective norms

The second antecedent of the TPB model is subjective norms. It can be defined as “the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behaviour by the individual” (Ajzen, 1991, p.188). In other words, it is an individual’s perception of what other individuals think should be significant for the individual to engage in the behaviour (Martin *et.al.*, 2011). One of the elements of subjective norms is normative beliefs, it is concerned with “the likelihood that important referent individuals or groups approve or disapprove by performing a given behaviour” (Ajzen, 1991, p.195). Furthermore, peer influence serves as a major determinant of subjective norm (Hung, Ku and Chang, 2003). Peer influence can be in the form of WOM passed through friends, colleagues, from external influences such as opinions, online reviews and so on. Research conducted by Zhou (2011), indicates the role that subjective norms play on influencing participation intention. In terms of tourism, Yen, Hung and Liu (2014), highlight the importance of subjective norms by stating that subjective norms evaluates the seriousness individuals attach to endorsements, reference groups and how the individuals are willing to abide by the rules, shared beliefs and so on. Furthermore, Yamada and Fu (2012), believe that imparting the consequences in performing the behaviour is more encouraging for individuals to conform to the behaviour. In addition, from the research conducted by Yamada and Fu (2012), it can be understood that individuals who are exposed to disapprovals by peer groups, tend to show negative intentions to engage in the behaviour. Research conducted by (Hsu and Huang, 2012; Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012; Martin *et.al.*, 2011; Sparks and Pan, 2009; Jordan *et.al.*, 2017), with the help of their respective studies state subjective norms to have a significant, positive and a direct impact on intentions. On the contrary, the study conducted by Hsu (2013) on the behavioural intention of sports tourist indicated the insignificance of subjective norms on behavioural intentions. Furthermore, research by Shen, Schuttmeyer and Braun (2009), showed a lack of impact of subjective norms on travel intentions.

2.4.4 Perceived behavioural control

The third antecedent of the TPB model is perceived behavioural control. According to Ajzen (1991, p.188), it can be defined as “the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour”. The perception of control over a behaviour can be on the basis of diverse variables dependent on the behaviour in question. Jordan *et.al.* (2017), provides an example on perceived behavioural control. For example, an individuals perceived control over purchasing a product at the store will more or less involve the following variables such as, the financial capabilities or resources to conduct the purchase, the time to visit the store and finally, having to find a way to reach the destination Jordan *et.al.* (2017). Perceived behavioural control can be divided into two: first, control belief, which associates with the sense of self-availability of skills,

opportunities and resources and second, perceived facilitation, which correlates with an individual's evaluation regarding the importance of those skills, opportunities and resources for the purpose of attaining the desired outcomes. Furthermore, with regards to tourism Jalivand and Samiei (2012), believed that perceived behavioural control relates to the perception of the tourist regarding the satisfaction of the destination, the opportunities to travel to the respective destination and finally, the individuals confidence and ability to travel to the destination. Researches based on tourism have proved the influence of perceived behavioural control on intentions to travel to a tourist destination. Study by Lam and Hsu (2004), indicated the influence of perceived behavioural control on tourism destination. Furthermore, (Sparks and Pan, 2009), believe that resources such as time, money is seen as a significant construct in predicting intentions to visit a tourist destination.

2.4.5 Behavioural intentions

As per the TPB model behavioural intention is crucial and central to the model. Behavioural intention refers to an individual's intention to perform a given behaviour. Ajzen and Fishbein (cited in Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012), believed, that perceived behavioural control combined with behavioural intention can be directly used to predict the actual behaviour. Furthermore, Ajzen (1991), postulate that intentions represent the motivational factor which affects the behaviour. Stronger the intention to take part in the behaviour, more likely should be the performance. However, Ajzen, (1991), suggests that behavioural intention can find expression only when the individual can determine at will to perform or not to perform the behaviour. Finally, it serves as a mediator in the relationship between behaviours and other factors such as, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control and attitude. Behavioural intention in terms of tourism is the readiness of a tourist to conduct certain behaviour (Al Ziadat, 2015). Moreover, it can be noted, more positive the intention more likely will be the likelihood for the tourists to travel (Yuzhanin and Fisher, 2016).

3 Chapter three: Research methodology

3.1 Methodology introduction

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016, p.5), defines research as “a process that people undertake in a systematic way to find out things, thereby, increasing their knowledge”. The aim of the study was to understand the influence of online reviews on the tourist destination choice. This chapter mainly focuses on providing information that is utmost important for the progression of the project. The areas that will

be covered in this chapter will include research philosophy, methodology, approach, strategy, data collection method and sample selection.

3.2 Proposed research methodology

To attain the goal of the research project i.e. “the influence of online reviews on the destination choice of tourists”, the research methodology will be adopting the ‘Research Onion’ laid down by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016). Research onion serves as a critical guideline with regards to approaching this research project.

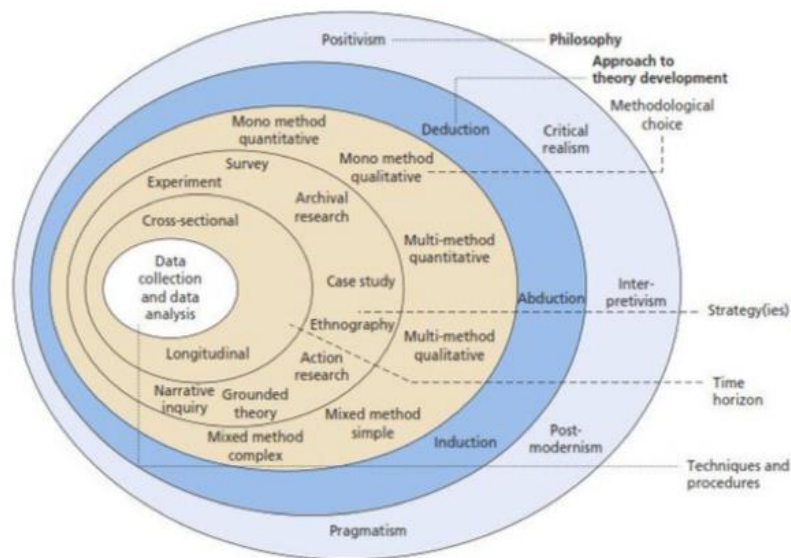


Figure 1 The research onion (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016, p.124)

From the figure above, the research onion is divided or is broken down into six layers. Elements such as research philosophy and approaches are situated in the outer layers of the onion. The middle layers of the research onion consists of research strategies, time horizons and research choices. Finally, element’s such as data collection, analysis represents the final layer of the research onion.

3.2.1 Research philosophy

On the basis of the figure above, it is understood that the first layer of research onion represents research philosophy. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016, p.124), research philosophy “refers to a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge”. Saunders et.al. (2016), believe that assumptions are vital as it helps in shaping the understanding of the research question, the usage of

methodologies and finally, the interpretation of findings. Research methodology can be divided into three types of research assumptions namely: epistemology, axiology and ontology.

3.2.1.1. Epistemology

Epistemology relates to assumption regarding knowledge, what comprises of legitimate and genuine knowledge and how the knowledge can be conveyed (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016).

3.2.1.2. Axiology

Axiology refers to the “role of values and ethics within the research process” (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016, p.128). It includes questions relating to how the researchers themselves deal with values and values of their respective participants. Therefore, the researcher also becomes part of the research project, thereby, adding more subjectivity to the project.

3.2.1.3. Ontology

Ontology refers to the “assumptions about the nature of reality” (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016, p.127). Even though ontology is termed to be abstract, it paves a way through which a researcher can learn and view their respective research objects.

For the purpose of this project, the research philosophy to be chosen will be epistemology. This is mainly because the knowledge regarding online reviews, different elements of the theory of planned behaviour and how these elements shape tourism destination choice will be based on tourists knowledge with reference to their perception and experience.

Saunders *et.al.* (2016), lays down five philosophies in business and management namely: positivism, pragmatism, postmodernism, interpretivism and critical realism. For this research project, the philosophy of positivism will be adopted.

Positivism originates in the natural sciences, it is based on the assumption that social reality is singular, objective and it is not affected by the act of investigating it (Collis and Hussey, 2014). Furthermore, “the research involves a deductive process with a view to providing explanatory theories to understand social phenomena” (Collis and Hussey, 2014, p.43). In addition, positivist research includes the use of existing theories in other researches to develop a hypothesis (Saunders *et.al.*, 2016). However, positivism is also subject to criticisms. Collis and Hussey, (2014), believe that positivism due to its highly structured

research design forces constraints on results. Moreover, under positivism individuals cannot be acknowledged without examining a respective perception on activities. The final justification for selecting positivism is because the research uses existing theories to arrive at a hypothesis. Respondents perception regarding online review and how it influences them is crucial.

3.2.2 Research approach

After research philosophy, the next layer of the research onion deals with the research approach. There exist three approaches laid down by Saunders *et.al.* (2016) namely: deductive, inductive and abductive.

3.2.2.1. Deduction

The deductive approach is used when the research begins with the theory which emerges through reading and reviewing various academic literature and by making use of those theories to develop research strategies to thereby, test the theory in question is termed as deductive approach (Saunders *et.al.*, 2016). Furthermore, Collis and Hussey (2014), adds by defining deductive approach by stating that, it is a study wherein a conceptual and theoretical structure is established, then analyzed by empirical observation. Moreover, in terms of generalizability deductive approach makes a transition from general to specific (Saunders *et.al.*, 2016).

3.2.2.2. Induction

The inductive approach is used when research begins with the collection of data to investigate a phenomenon and then a theory, mainly in the form of a conceptual framework is generated (Saunders *et.al.*, 2016). In addition, inductive approach consists of a smaller sample. Finally, in terms of generalization, inductive approach makes a transition from specific to general.

3.2.2.3 Abduction

According to Saunders *et.al.* (2016, p.145), under abduction approach, data collection is used to explore a phenomenon, identify themes and patterns, locate these in a conceptual framework and test these through subsequent data collection and so forth. Furthermore, abductive research aims at introducing a new theory or modifying or making changes to existing theory (Saunders *et.al.*, 2016).

For the purpose of this research project, a **deductive approach** was selected. Deductive approach aims at analyzing relationships with all variables. Information can be accessed through various pieces of literatures. In this case information, regarding online reviews, its impact on destination choice and theory of planned behaviour. Furthermore, deductive approach, provides the opportunity to measure concepts quantitatively and quantitative method was the desired research strategy for this project. Despite the time constraints, deductive approach helps to generalize findings to a great extent.

In addition, Saunders *et.al.* (2016), proposes three natures of research namely: exploratory, explanatory and descriptive studies.

- Exploratory: It is primarily used to evaluate the different insights that emerge from general business problems (Bajpai, 2019). Furthermore, the research procedure is generally unstructured, qualitative and also provides plenty of freedom to the researcher to understand the problem (Bajpai, 2019).
- Descriptive: The main purpose of descriptive research is to acquire a precise profile of individuals, situations, events and so on (Saunders *et.al.*, 2016). Moreover, the research procedure is structured and are pre-planned i.e. the hypotheses for the research is already generated before carrying out descriptive research (Bajpai, 2019).
- Explanatory: The aim of an exploratory study is to determine the casual relationship between variables (Saunders *et.al.*, 2016). In addition, to explain the relationship between variables, the researcher must study a situation or a problem (Saunders *et.al.*, 2016).

For the purpose of this research project, **descriptive research** was used. With the help of descriptive research, the researcher will be able to get a precise picture with regards to online reviews and its influence on tourists destination choice. Furthermore, descriptive research provides an accurate description regarding the demographics and characteristics of the population, which in this case are the tourists who view online reviews. Moreover, through descriptive research, the perception (Bajpai, 2019) of tourists regarding the significance of online reviews on tourism decisions can be easily understood.

3.2.3 Research strategy

The fourth layer of the research onion consists of the research strategy. Strategy in a general context can be defined as a plan of action necessary to reach a goal. Research strategy, on the other hand, can be defined as “a plan of how researcher will go about answering her or his research question” (Saunders *et.al.*, 2016, p.177). Choosing the appropriate research strategy is important and it must be made sure that the research question is to be formulated in a way that acts as a guiding factor with regards to selecting a

research strategy. Furthermore, research strategy serves as a methodological link between the research philosophy, data collection methods and the respective data analysis (Saunders *et.al.*, 2016). The different research strategies are experiment, survey, case study, ethnography, action research, grounded theory, narrative inquiry and archival and documentary research.

The research strategy that was adopted for the dissertation was the use of **surveys**. Surveys were used for the purpose of collecting quantitative data which is to be further used for descriptive research. The use of surveys hosts a lot of benefits. Surveys in the form of questionnaire is an economical strategy as it allows the collection of standardized data from a handful of the population (Saunders *et.al.*, 2016).

3.2.4 Research choice

Saunders *et.al.* (2016), states that there exist two methodological approaches for research choice namely: mono method and multiple methods. The research choice to be selected for the purpose of the dissertation was that of a **mono method**, the quantitative study. Collis and Hussy (2014), claims that positivism is correlated with quantitative methods of analysis which is again based on analysis of data through statistical methods.

For the purpose of this research project, the method used was a **quantitative study** with the help of questionnaires/surveys. Quantitative methods employed in the form of questionnaires/surveys helped in targeting the right demographic (tourists) and also helped the researcher to gain further knowledge with respect to the perception of tourists and the influence of online review have on influencing their respective travel decisions.

3.2.5 Time horizon

Time horizon represents the second last layer of the research onion. Time horizon is differentiated into two namely: cross-sectional and longitudinal. Saunders *et.al.* (2016), relates cross-sectional as a ‘snapshot’, whereas longitudinal is described as a ‘diary’. Collis and Hussy (2014, p.63) define cross-sectional study as “a methodology used to investigate variables or a group of subjects in different contexts over the same period of time”.

For the purpose of the research project **cross-sectional study** was used. Collis and Hussey (2014), claims that cross-sectional study focuses on individuals, which is similar to the research which was undertaken. The research showed emphasis on tourists and their influence on travel destination choice. Furthermore,

time constraints with relation to the collection of data and also the lack of opportunity to make changes to the data further resulted in selecting cross-section data. Finally, the time period (8.5 weeks) assigned for the final completion of the dissertation indicated time constraint as well.

3.2.6 Secondary data collection

Secondary data refers to the type of data which has been previously recorded and collected by other researchers and other organization during the course of their businesses (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Secondary data hosts its set of advantages and drawbacks. According to Adams, Raeside and Khan (2014), secondary data, assist in providing large representatives of the sample population. Moreover, secondary data is good for analyzing longitudinal data and examining trends. Furthermore, Bryman and Bell (2015), suggests that the databases that are used for secondary data are especially high quality. However, the drawbacks for secondary data collection are as follows. Bryman and Bell (2015), believes that there exists a lack of familiarity with the data as they are not collected by the researcher themselves. In addition, as the data is collected by other researchers, there will be chances wherein, one or few variables may be missing for the current research (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

The research mainly consisted of academic journals in the field being discussed. The academic journals were procured from online databases such as EBSCOhost, ProQuest, Emerald insights and so on. Furthermore, literature was also taken from conference proceedings and other resources by the way of library facilities offered by National College of Ireland.

3.2.7 Quantitative primary data collection

Quantitative research strategy highlights on quantification in the areas of research relating to data collection and analysis of data, it further involves a deductive approach with relation to theory and research, wherein, the emphasis is stressed on testing theories (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Quantitative data collection mainly includes two methods, interviews or questionnaires (Collis and Hussey, 2014). The data collection method selected for the purpose of the research project was questionnaires/surveys. Questionnaires according to Collis and Hussey (2014, p.205), can be defined as “a method for collecting primary data in which a sample of respondents are asked a list of carefully structured questions chosen after considerable testing, with a view to eliciting reliable responses”. Furthermore, the design of the questionnaires differs due to various influencing factors such as sample size, method of delivery, characteristics of respondents and collection method (Saunders *et.al.*, 2016). Therefore, the technique of

collecting questionnaires can be classified into two namely, self-completed (internet questionnaire, postal questionnaire and delivery and collection questionnaire) and interviewer-completed (telephone questionnaire and face to face questionnaire) (Bryman and Bell, 2015). The main significance in employing questionnaires are because it helps to bring amount of data from a population which in this case tourists for a low cost. Moreover, some of the benefits and drawbacks of questionnaires are as follows:

Questionnaires possess the following benefits Bryman and Bell (2015)

- Cost-efficient: When the concerning factor for a research project is the number of population of the target audience, the use of questionnaires can aid the researcher as it allows to gather data from a large population in an efficient manner.
- Convenience: Questionnaires are more convenient to respondents because it provides the freedom to the respondents to answer at their free time and is also restricted to geographical boundaries.
- Quick to administer: Questionnaires can be sent out through many ways such as post, online being some options. This, therefore allows large quantities to be sent out at a time. However, one point to be kept in mind is that all the questionnaires are not guaranteed to be returned at the same time, depending on the type of questionnaires some may even take weeks.

Questionnaires possess the following drawbacks Bryman and Bell (2015); Quinlan *et.al.* (2019)

- Difficulty in asking other types of questions: The researcher is mostly restricted to asking more of close questions rather than open questions because respondents do not feel comfortable writing a lot and hence, restricts the dissemination of information.
- Lack of response: Most of the instances questionnaires are subjected to low responses as respondents may either be not interested to participate in the project or may find the topic not worthy of their time.
- Response bias: It occurs when the respondent answers the questions with a certain angle. Individuals may represent the truth intentionally or unintentionally, thereby causing response bias.

For the purpose of the research project, the type of questionnaire used was **self-completed, web-based questionnaires** with the help of www.surveymonkey.com. Web-based questionnaires consist of

advantages and disadvantages. The major advantages of web-based questionnaires are as follows. The chances that the information provided by the respondent are contaminated or distorted are very low (Saunders *et.al.*, 2016). Moreover, through web-based questionnaires, the sample size can be made larger as the questionnaires can be geographically dispersed (Saunders *et.al.*, 2016). However, there exist a disadvantage in relation to the use of web-based questionnaires. The lack in the involvement of an interviewer, as a result, may deem the data as less credible/reliable.

The type of questions used for the research project included **closed-ended questions**. Close-ended questions provides the opportunity to the researcher to include a number of different answers out of which the respondents can choose on what they feel is right. According to Collis and Hussey (2014), closed-ended questions are convenient and simple and it is easy to evaluate the data because the span of probable answers are limited and can be coded in advance. Closed-ended questions can be divided into the following: list questions, category questions, ranking questions, rating questions, quantity questions and matrix questions. From the different closed-ended questions mentioned above, some of them were employed for the purpose of this research.

The questionnaire for the research project consists of a total of twenty four questions which discusses the variables (demographics, online reviews, attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control and intentions). The questionnaire consists of three parts (online reviews, TPB and demographics). The questionnaire was adopted from the study conducted by Jalilvand and Samiei (2012). A six-point Likert scale (1-extremely satisfied, 2-very satisfied, 3-somewhat satisfied, 4-somewhat dissatisfied, 5-very-dissatisfied and 6-extremely dissatisfied) was used. The main reason for the use of a six-point Likert scale is to avoid the emergence of neutral answers and to commit the respondents to select either the positive or negative end of the scale. The first section focused on demographic variables and included six variables: gender, age, nationality, education, purpose and number of visits. The second section focused on online reviews and the questionnaire consisted of seven items with reference to online reviews. The third section focused on the antecedents of TPB, attitudes which included two items, subjective norms which included three items, perceived behavioural control which included three items and finally, intention which included three items. Finally, Out of the total of twenty-four questions including the demographics, seventeen questions were rating questions and the rest seven questions being list questions.

3.2.8 Sample

A sample can be defined as “a subgroup or part of a larger population” (Saunders *et.al.*, 2016, p.727). Sampling can be divided into two techniques such as probability sampling and non-probability sampling.

In terms of quantitative research, larger the sample, greater will be the representation of the target population.

The research project used **non-probability sampling** as the sampling technique. The reasons for selecting the sampling technique was the ease of access to the sample population as tourists cannot be only people from other countries, tourists can also include students from other countries coming for the purpose of future studies. Furthermore, the lack of availability of time also had an influence in the selection of the sampling technique. Non-probability sampling can be furthered classified as follows: purposive sampling, quota sampling, convenience sampling and snowball sampling (Quinlan *et.al.*, 2019). The non-probability sampling technique was selected in the way that it was easiest for the researcher to include the respondents and collect data at the quickest, hence, convenience sampling was used (Quinlan *et.al.*, 2019). Furthermore, snowball sampling was also put to use as respondents were briefed to forward the questionnaire to their respective family and friends.

The questionnaires were first, sent through e-mails to the students of National College of Ireland. Furthermore, as mentioned above the respondents were told to pass the questionnaires to family and friends. Links were sent to the respondents via www.surveymonkey.com .

3.2.9 Analysis of quantitative data

According to Saunders *et.al.* (2016, p.496), quantitative data refers to “all such primary and secondary data and can range from simple counts such as frequency of occurrences to more complex data such as test scores, prices or rental costs”. Quantitative data can be divided into two: categorical and numerical data. Categorical data can be defined as data wherein values cannot be considered in numerical terms, nevertheless, it can be organized in the form of sets and ranks (Saunders *et.al.*, 2016). It can be further sub-divided into nominal and ordinal data. A data that is difficult to rank or to categorized numerically is termed nominal data. Each value in nominal data is different and are represented as labels (Quinlan *et.al.*, 2019), whereas ordinal data serves as a more accurate measurement. The majority of the data comprised of ordinal data, wherein respondents were told with the help of a six-point Likert scale to select on either an agreement or disagreement towards a statement (Quinlan *et.al.*, 2019). Nominal data were used to express the demographics of the research. Questions relating to the demographics were expressed in the form of list questions in the questionnaire. The data arrived from the analysis will be represented in the form of bar charts. Finally, the analysis was conducted in order to understand the relationship between the various variables discussed in the research project.

3.2.10 Ethical issues

Saunders et.al. (2019, p.239) defines ethics as “the standards of behaviour that guide your conduct in relation to the rights of those who become the subject of your work, or are affected by it”. Furthermore, ethics are established in order to avoid malpractice and harm (Saunders *et.al.*, 2016).

During the research project, equal attention was given to the ethical code of conduct to ensure smooth completion of the research project. The data collected from the web-based questionnaires were performed as the basis for the research project. Furthermore, total anonymity with regards to the respondent’s names was maintained. In addition, a short description regarding the research project was displayed so that the respondents are well aware of the purpose. Finally, the participants of the research project had the complete freedom to withdraw at any stage.

3.2.11 Limitations to the research

Limitation are shortcomings or influencing factors that the researchers are not in control of and therefore, places restrictions on the research. One of the main limitations experienced during the research project was the lack of time, the time allotted for the completion of the research project was eight and a half weeks. Furthermore, the sample size selected was not enough to represent the population and hence, affected the validity of the findings. Finally, to make further solid ground with regards to the research, few self-made questions was added under the questionnaires to provide more clarity.

4 Chapter 4: Research findings

4.1 Findings of quantitative research

The quantitative research findings were presented by evaluating 127 web-based questionnaires that were completed by the respondents through www.surveymonkey.com. The primary aim of the research project was to find out the influence of online reviews on the tourist destination choice. Therefore, performing quantitative research help satisfy the primary aim as well as the subsequent objectives. Finally, a total of 24 questions were asked to the respondents in order to shed clarity and to answer the subsequent objectives. The question of the survey are structured and presented as follows: Q1-Q6: Demographics of

participants; Q7-Q13: Influence of online reviews on destination choice; Q14-Q15: Attitudes; Q16-Q18: Subjective norms; Q19-Q21: Perceived behavioural control and finally, Q22-Q24: Behavioural intention.

4.2 Demographics of participants

Question 1: Indicate your gender

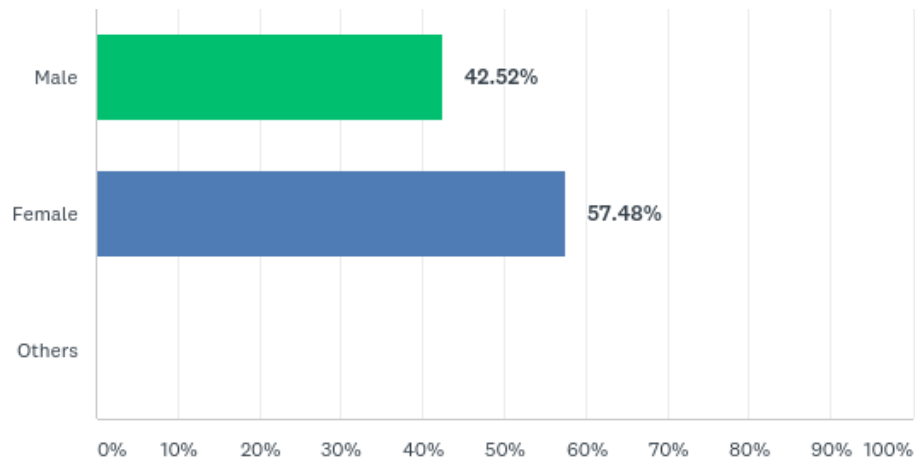


Figure 2 indicate the gender of the participants

Out of the 127 participants who took part in the web-based survey, 73 were females and 54 were males, which, therefore accounted for 57.48% and 42.52% of the population respectively.

4.2.2. Question 2: Indicate your age

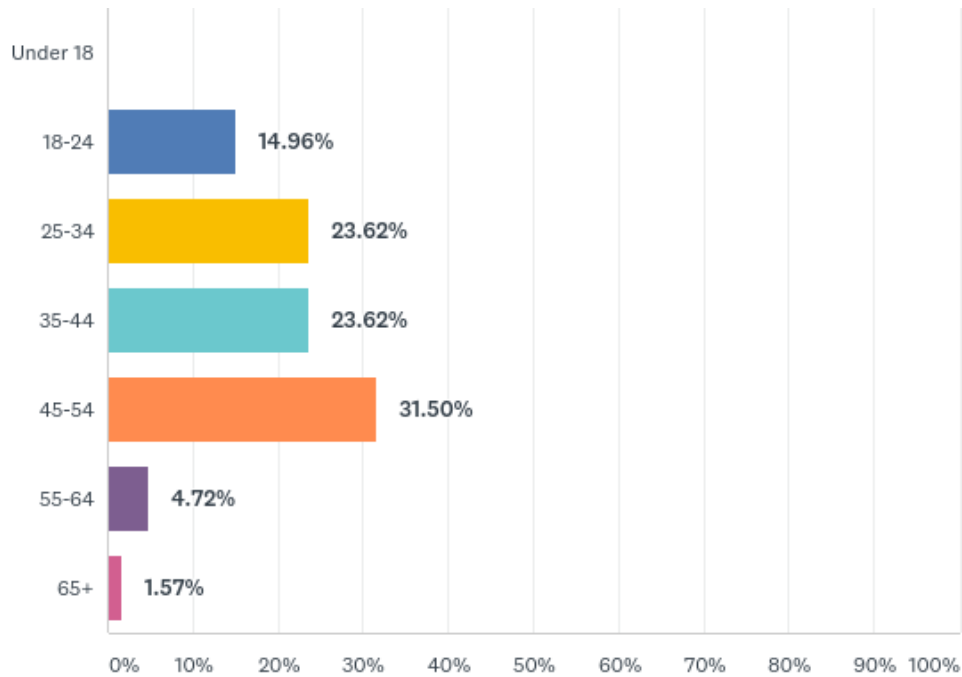


Figure 3 indicates the age of the participants

For the purpose of the research project, the age of the respondents was asked. The bulk of respondents were in the age group of 45-54 (31.50%), the second majority age groups were between 25-34 and 35-44 both consisting of 23.62% of the population. The three age groups all together account for 78% of the population. Furthermore, 14.76% were placed in the age category 18-24, 4.72% in the age category 55-64 and finally, 1.57% in the age category 65 and above.

4.2.3. Question 3: Indicate your nationality

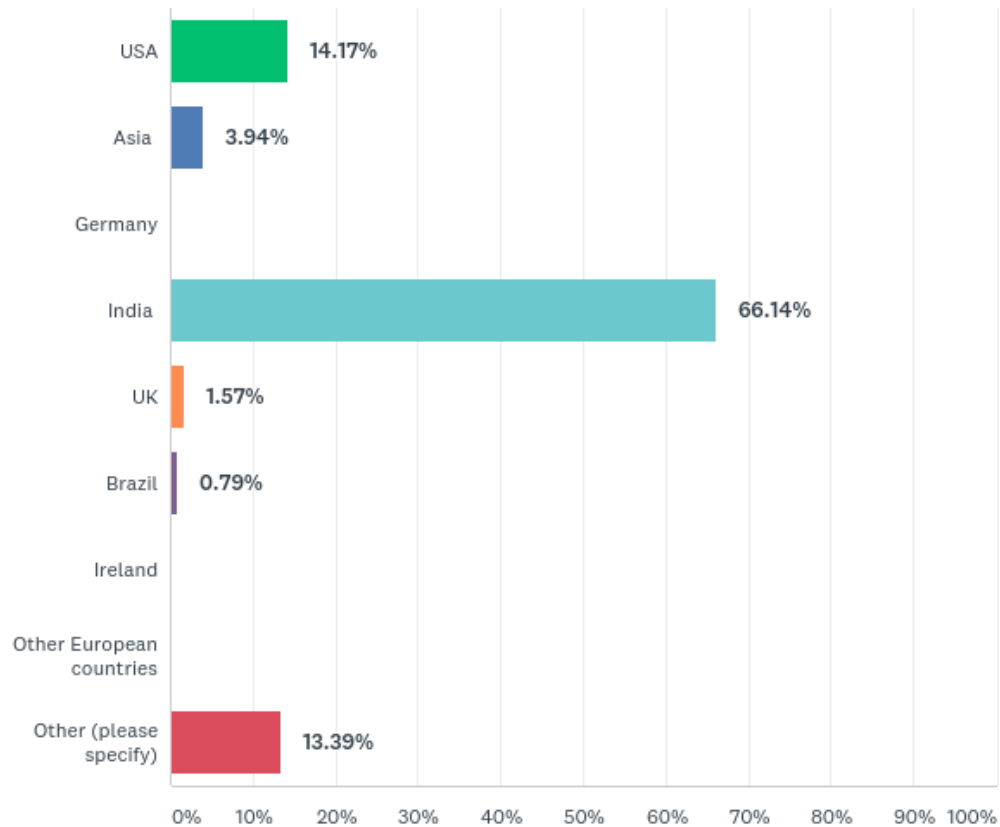


Figure 4 indicates the nationality of the respondents

The questions was aimed at identifying the nationality of the respondents. Out of the total respondents, Indian nationals stood the highest with 66.14%. The reason for the rise in the Indian population was due to the sampling technique used. The nationality that shows the second majority was USA with 14.17%. The survey also showed results from other nationalities with 13.39% nationalities hailing from countries New Zealand, Australia, Thailand and Africa. Finally, results showed responses from nationalities Asia (3.94%), UK (1.57%) and Brazil (0.79%).

4.2.4. Question 4: Please select the level of education completed

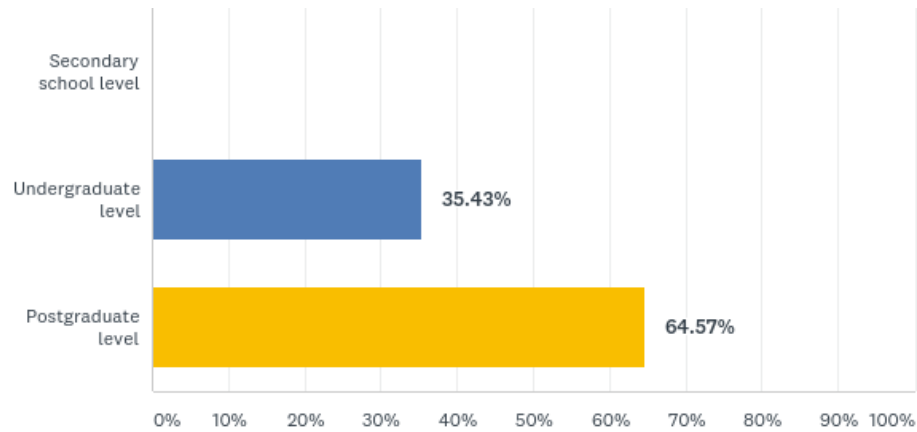


Figure 5 indicates the level of education of respondents

The survey results show that majority of the respondents have completed a postgraduate degree (64.57%). Whereas, respondents who have completed undergraduate studies stand second with 35.43% of the sample population. However, no responses were recorded for the level of education (secondary school level).

4.2.5. Question 5: What is your purpose of visit

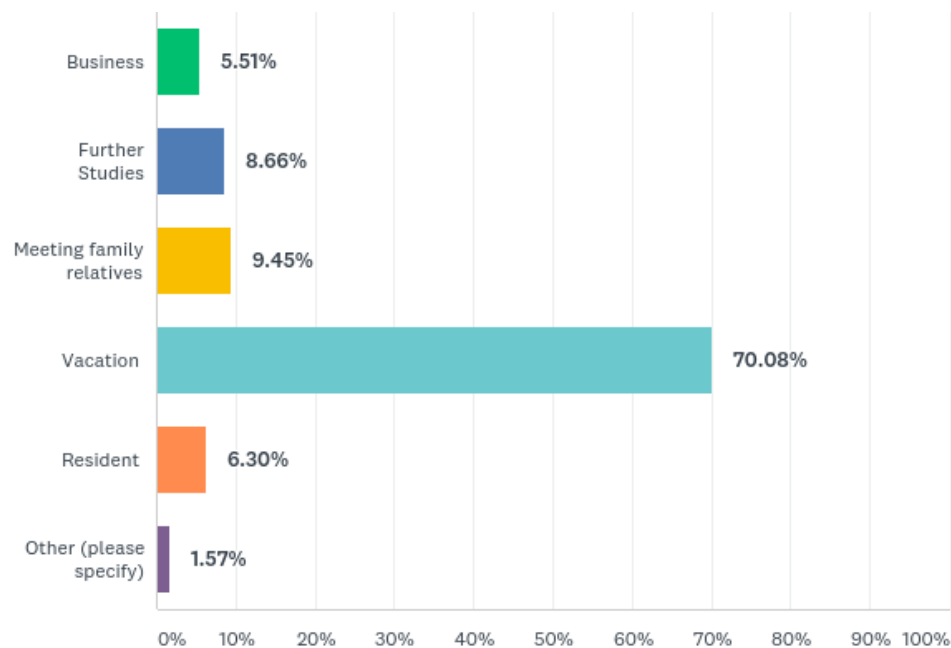


Figure 6 indicates the purpose of visit

According to a report by Tourism Ireland (2018), the source of 54% of the overseas revenue in Ireland came in the form of tourist who visited Ireland vacation. The researcher agrees to the above-mentioned point and indicates that the survey findings found that 70% of the respondent came to visit Ireland for the purpose of vacation with 9.45% to visit relatives and 8.66% for the purposes of studies. However, it should

be noted that individuals coming for further studies is also a great avenue to generate revenue for tourism as the number of foreign nationals coming to study in Ireland are increasing year by year. Moreover, the survey indicates that 5.51%, 6.30%, visited Ireland for business related ventures.

4.2.6. Question 6: Number of previous visits in Ireland

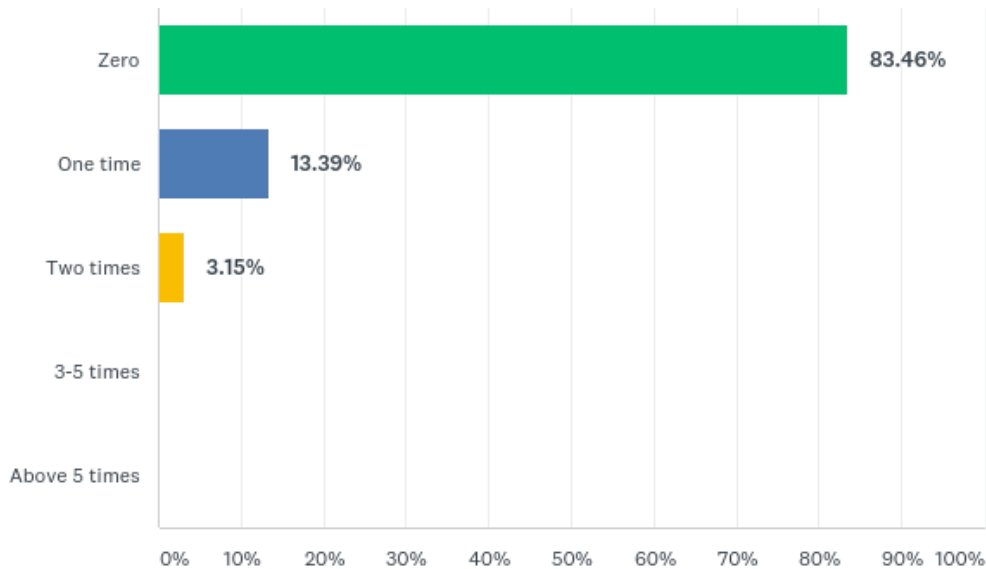


Figure 7 shows the previous visits taken by the respondents to Ireland

The purpose of this question was to understand whether the respondents had made any repeat visits to Ireland. 83.46% indicated that they had not visited Ireland before, whereas, a total of 17% of the participant had visited Ireland before with 13.39% visiting at least once and 3.15% visiting two times. However, there were no responses recorded for the options 3-5 times and above 5 times.

4.3 The Influence of Online Reviews on Destination Choice

Question 7: I frequently read other tourist online reviews to understand what destinations make a good impression

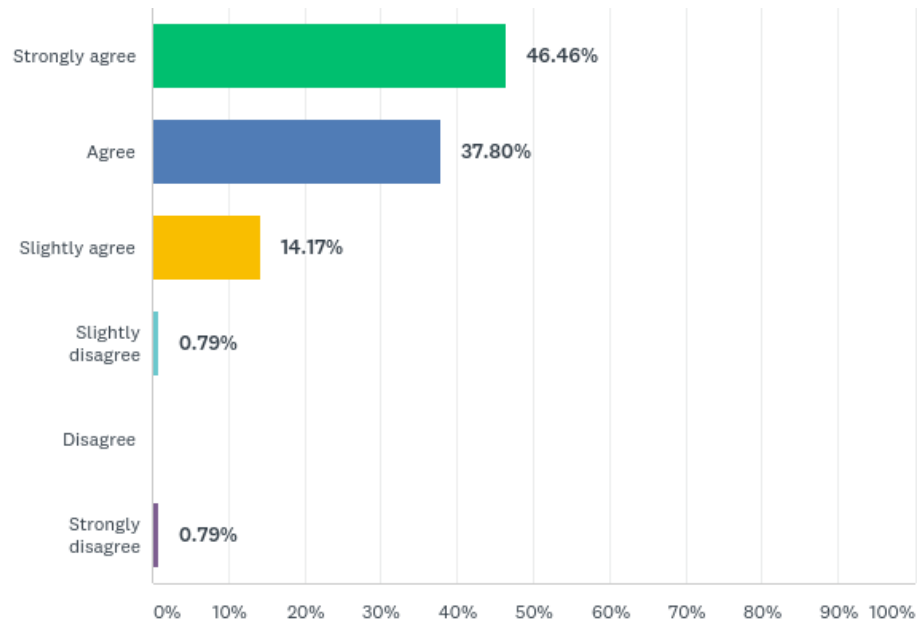


Figure 8 shows the response of respondents who believe that reading online reviews make a good impression among tourist

The questions aim to provide insights on the frequency that tourists use online reviews to find out which destination makes the right impression. The majority of the respondents agree with the statement with a combined 98% agreeing. Contrary to this a small number disagrees with the statement (1.2%).

4.3.1. Question 8: I often read online reviews of other tourists, to make sure that I select the right destination

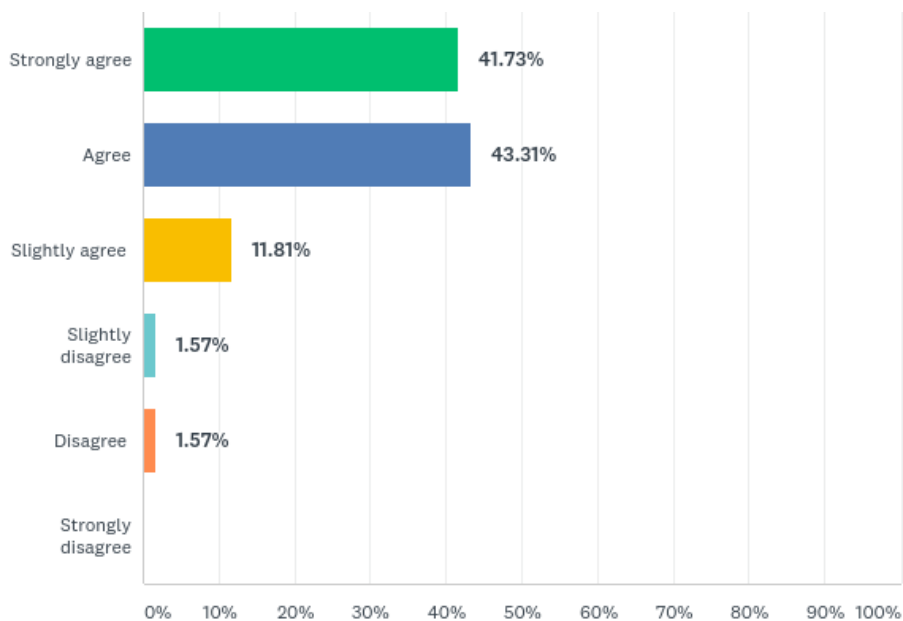


Figure 9 shows the importance of online review in choosing the right destination

The question was intended to identify whether tourist view online reviews to check whether they have made the right destination. 85% of the population strong agree (41.73%) and agree (23.31%) with the above statement. Moreover, 11.81% slightly agree with the statement. However, there exist respondents who have disagreed with the statement as 3.14% of the population slightly disagreed or disagreed. Therefore, this provides an overview with regards to the importance of online reviews.

4.3.2. Question 9: I often seek other tourists online reviews to assist in choosing an attractive destination

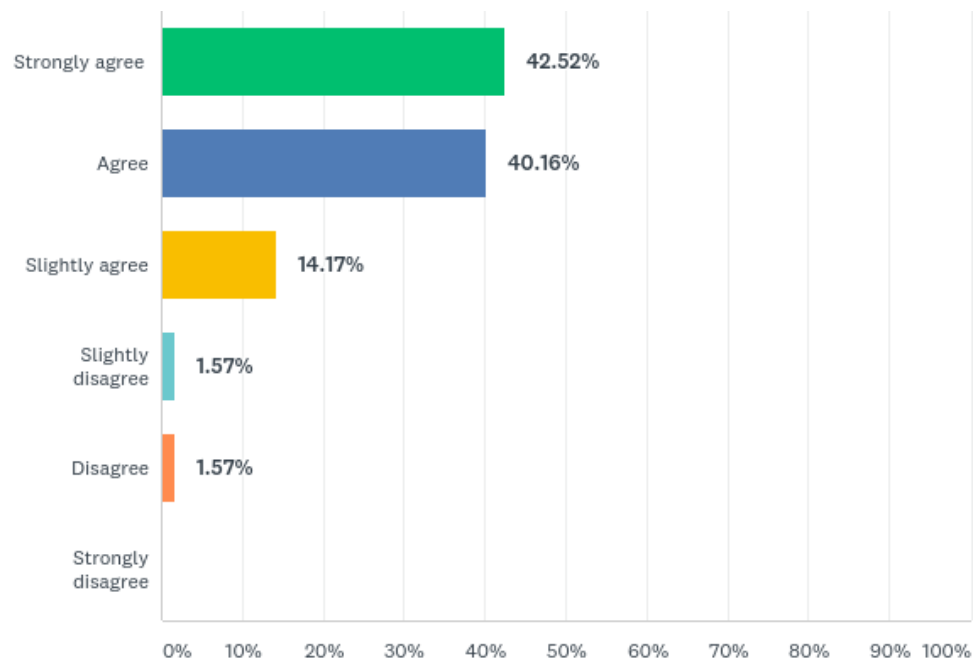


Figure 10 shows the importance of online reviews in choosing a destination

The question aim to address the importance of online reviews in influencing tourists decision making capabilities. 42.52% of the population strongly agree that online reviews is pivotal in assisting them in choosing a destination. A combined 54.33% agree or slightly agree with the statement. However, 3.14% slightly disagreed or disagreed with the statement. The result proves the importance of online reviews in influencing decisions in tourists with regards to the destination.

4.3.3. Question 10: I acquire information frequently from other tourists online reviews prior to travelling to a tourist destination

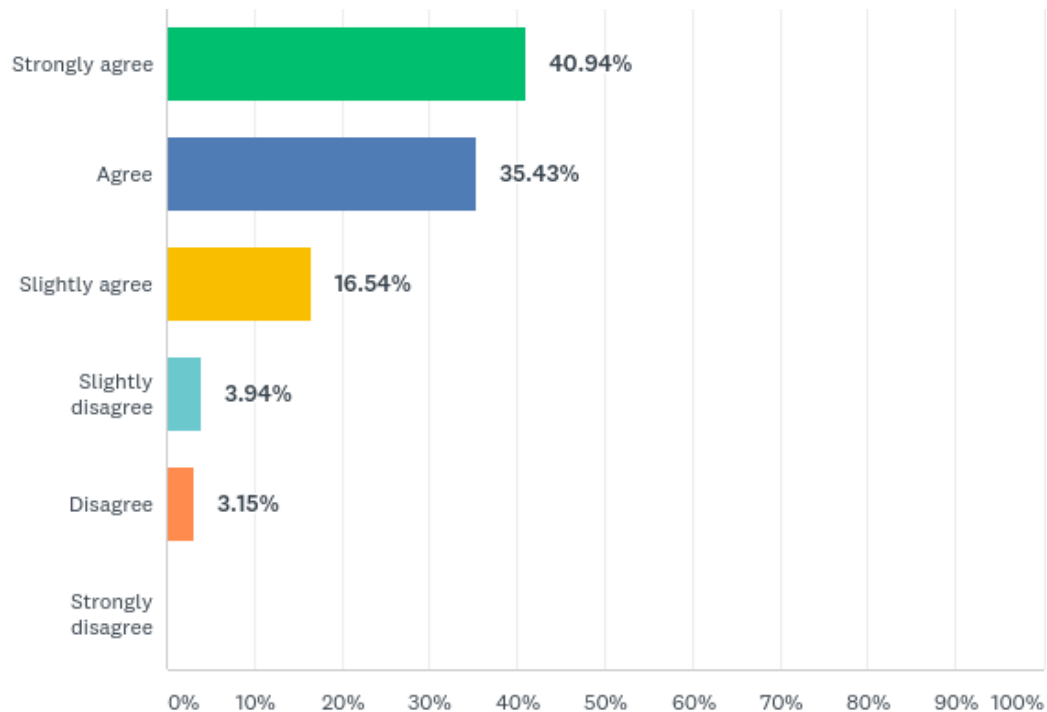


Figure 11 indicates the frequency of tourists who view online reviews prior to travel

The question aim to find out the significance of online reviews as a source of information for tourist prior to travelling to a tourist destination. The majority of the population i.e. 73.37% strongly agree/agree to the fact that online reviews are a source of information that they put to use before travelling to a tourist destination. It is important to understand the attitudes of other tourists with regards to the destination in question. Moreover, it helps the tourists to be better equipped prior to travelling. On the contrary, very few respondents disagreed (3.15%) or slightly disagreed (3.94%) with the statement. In addition, there were no recorded responses that suggest a strong disagreement with the above-mentioned statement.

4.3.4. Question 11: I worry about my decision to travel to a tourist destination if I do not read online travel reviews

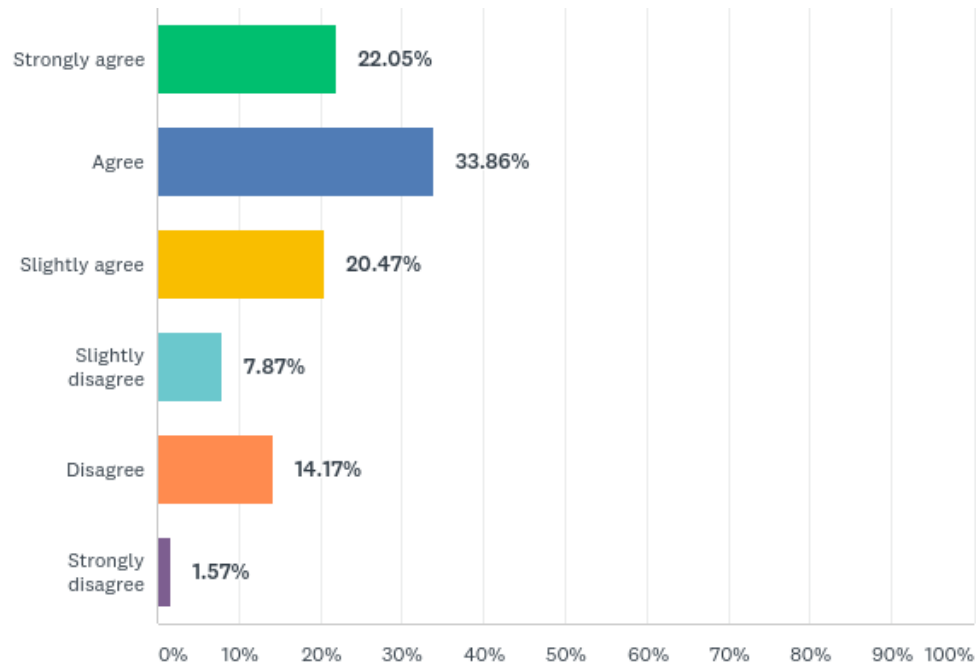


Figure 12 indicates whether tourist worry about the choice of destination without viewing online reviews

The question intends to find out the importance of online reviews in the context of emotion by asking respondents on whether they worry about the decision to travel without viewing online reviews. The majority of the population i.e. 76.38% are in agreement with the statement, with 33.86% strongly agreeing, 22.05% agreeing and 20.47% slightly agreeing. Comparatively, 14.17% disagreed, 7.87% slightly disagreeing and finally, 1.57% strongly disagreeing.

4.3.5. Question 12: Tourists online travel reviews make me feel confident when I travel to a destination

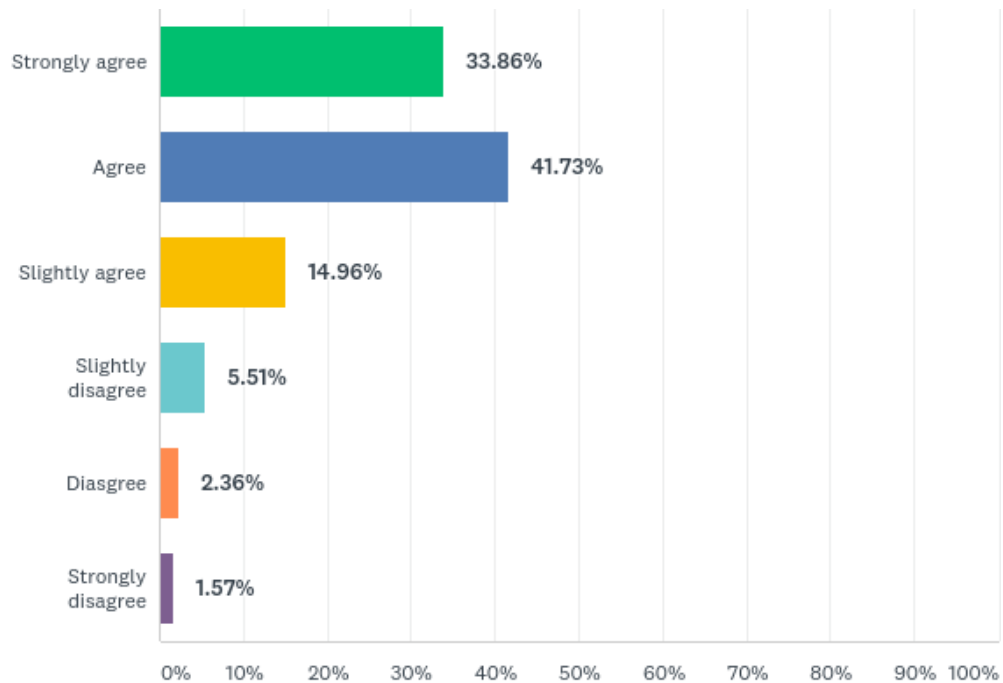


Figure 13 indicates whether tourist feel confident about the choice of destination after viewing online reviews

The question is sought to ascertain the attitudes of the tourists with regards to how online review makes them feel confident when travelling to a destination. 41.73% of the population agree that online reviews have a positive effect in relation to the confidence of a tourist. Moreover, 33.86% strongly agree and 14.96% slightly disagree with the statement. On the contrary, respondents also had disagreements regarding the positive relation of online reviews with the confidence of the tourists as 5.51%, 2.36% and 1.57% indicated slight disagreement, disagreement and strong disagreement respectively.

4.3.6. Question 13: I keep myself up to date with new information by researching online so that I can make the right destination choice

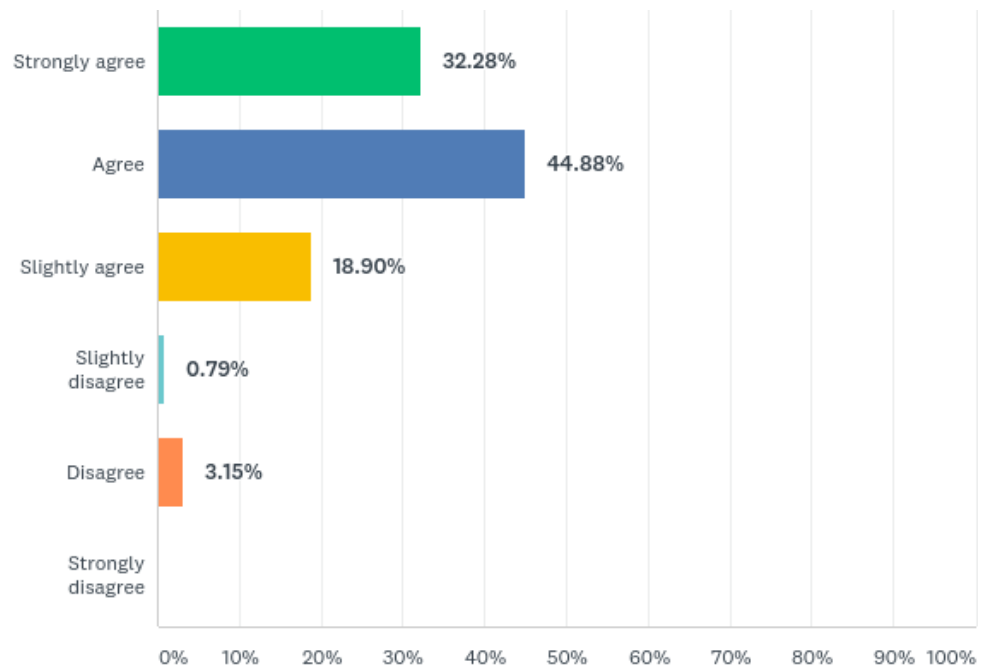


Figure 14 shows whether the respondents are up to date with online reviews when choosing the right destination

When asked regarding whether the respondents were up to date with the latest information regarding tourist destination choice 44.88% of the agreed to the statement with 32.28% agreeing and 18.90% slightly agreeing. However, a total of 4% disagreed with the statement and further with no response being recorded for the option of strongly disagree.

4.4 Attitudes

4.4.1. Question 14: There will be a positive/negative effect on my travel plan due to the comments I read from other tourists about travel in Ireland

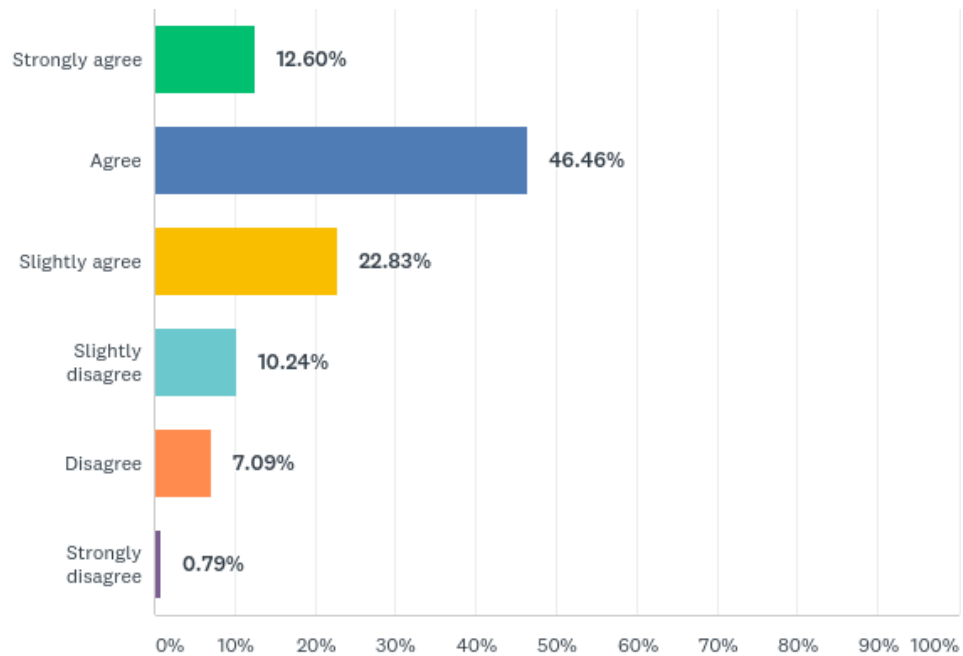


Figure 15 shows the impact of online reviews on the attitudes of tourists

The question is aimed at identifying whether online reviews bring about a positive or negative change in attitudes of tourists with regards to the respective travel plans. 46.46% of the population agree that online reviews will have a positive/negative influence on the travel plans. Moreover, 12.60% and 22.83% of the population strongly agree/slightly agree respectively with the above statement. However, a total of 18.12% of the population shows disagreement with the above statement.

4.4.2. Question 15: Which of these following words would you describe to be your thoughts on Ireland as a tourist destination

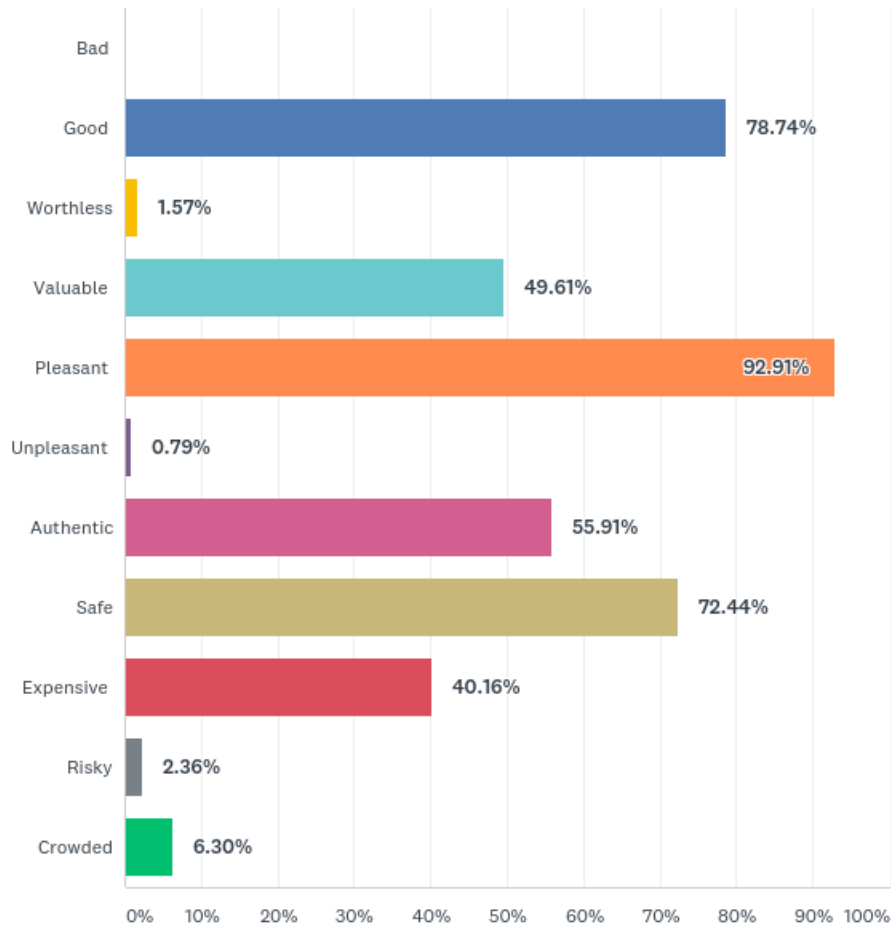


Figure 16 shows the attitudes of tourists with regards to Ireland as a tourist destination

The question was intended to find out the attitudes of tourists about Ireland as a tourist destination. The variables used in the survey were emotions ranging from positive to negative, which were used to find out the intention to travel. (Jordan *et.al.*, 2017; Stylos *et.al.*, 2016), agrees to the fact that attitudes towards a tourist destination emerge from emotions arising with regards to the destination in question. A total of eleven emotions were used to find out the altitudes of tourist with regards to Ireland as a tourist destination. The emotions were namely bad, good, worthless, valuable, pleasant, unpleasant, authentic, safe, expensive, risky and crowded. According to the findings, positive emotions such as pleasant (92.91%), good (78.74%), safe (72.44%), authentic (55.51%) and valuable (49.61%) showed a higher standing to that of negative emotions such as expensive (40.16%), crowded (6.30%), risky (2.36%), worthless (1.57%) and unpleasant (0.79%).

4.5 Subjective norms

4.5.1. Question 16: Most people who are important to me say I have to visit Ireland

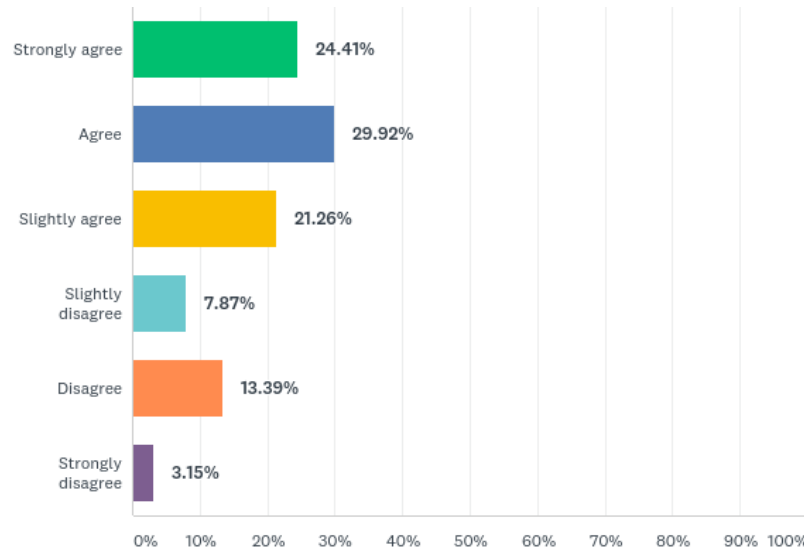


Figure 17 shows the importance of peers on visiting Ireland

The question is aimed at finding whether peer influence has an effect on the travel decisions undertaken by the tourists. The majority of the population that is 29.92% agree that peers in the form of friends and family have indicated to the respondents to visit Ireland. Moreover, 24.41% strongly agree and 21.26% slightly agree with the statement. On the contrary, a total of 24.14% of the population disagree with the statement.

4.5.2. Question 17: People whose opinions I value would prefer me to visit Ireland

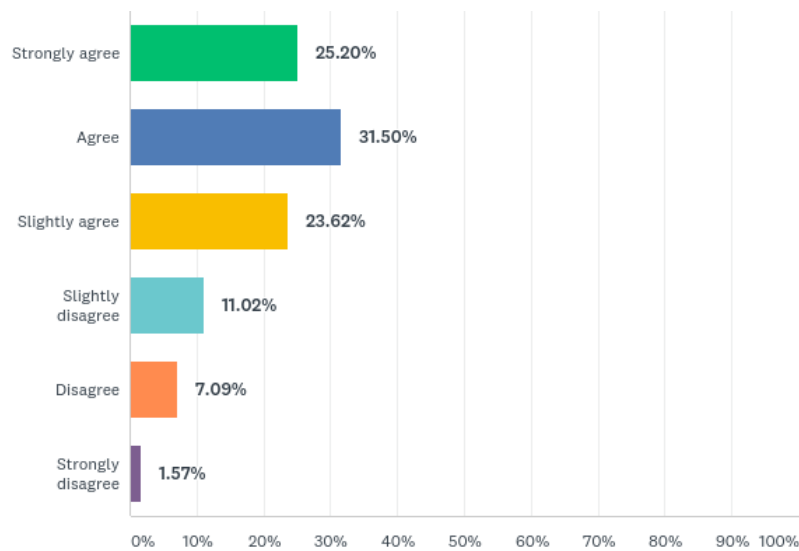


Figure 18 shows the people whose opinions the respondents value would want them to visit Ireland

The question is aimed at identifying whether the tourists are influenced by the opinions provided by their fellow peers. The findings show that 31.50% of the population agree that they are influenced by their fellow peers who's opinions the respondent's value. In addition, the result relates with the meaning of subjective norms. Martin *et.al.* (2011), provides an explanation for the subjective norm. It is an individual's perception of what others perceive should be significant to the individual to engage in the behaviour. The second majority of 25.20% strongly agreed with the above statement with 23.62% slightly agreeing. However, 11.02%, 7.09% and 1.57% of the population showed slight disagreement, disagreement and strong disagreement respectively with the above statement.

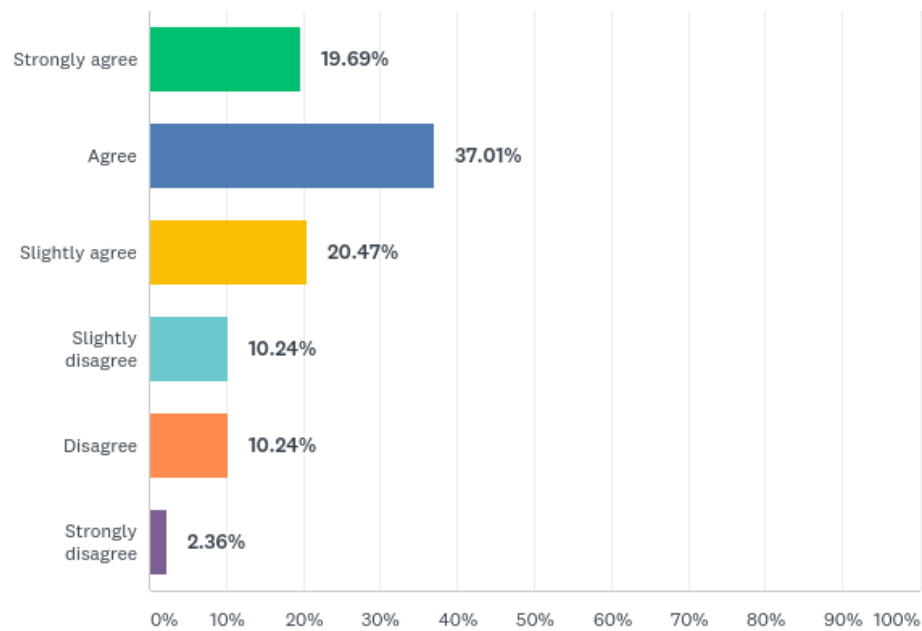


Figure 19 shows whether peers would want the respondents to visit Ireland

The question is intended to find out the influence of peers in the decision-making capabilities of the respondents. 37.01% of the respondents agree that important people in their life would want them to visit Ireland. Furthermore, 20.47% and 19.69% of the population slightly agree/strongly agree respectively with the statement. On the contrary, a total of 22.84% showed disagreement with the statement.

The three questions mentioned above, in general, seek to talk about the influence that peer groups possess in the minds out of the respondents. As explained in the literature peer influence is thought to be a major determinant of subjective norms and as noted by Hung, Ku and Chang (2003), peer influence can arise thorough WOM by the way of friends, family, e-WOM through external sources in the way of opinions and online reviews from credible sources.

4.6 Perceived behavioural control

4.6.1. Question 19: I would be able to travel to Ireland after reading other tourist online comments regarding travel in Ireland

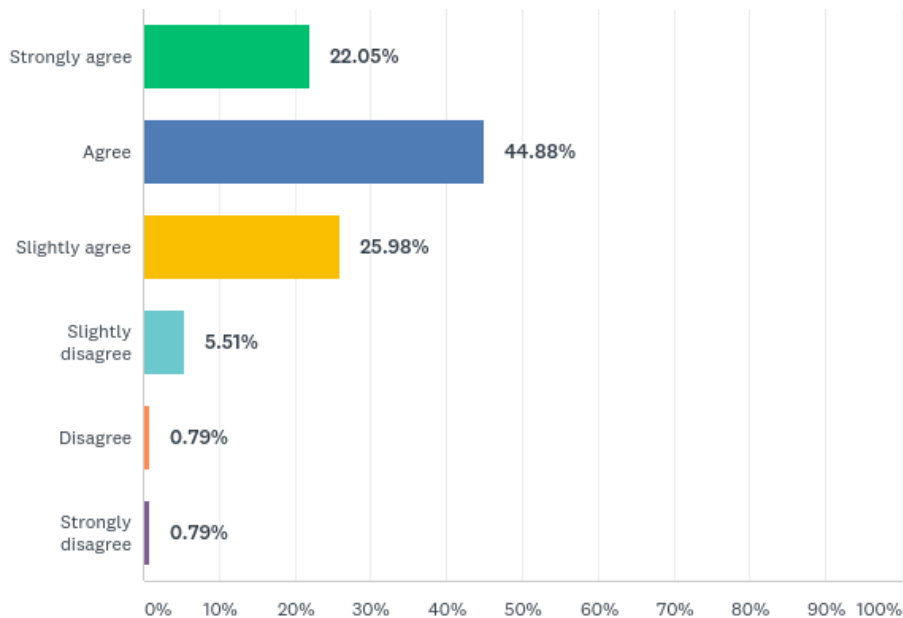


Figure 20 shows the impact of online reviews on the ability of respondents to travel to Ireland

The question is aimed at understanding the influence of online reviews on perceived behavioural control. The majority of the respondents that is, 44.88% agreed by indicating that they would be capable to travel to Ireland after viewing online comments or reviews regarding travel in Ireland. In addition, 25.98% slightly agreed and 22.05% strongly agreed with the statement. However, even though very few numbers indicated disagreement, 5.51% of the respondent showed slight disagreement with the statement and a combined total of 1.58% disagreed/strongly disagreed.

4.6.2. Question 20: I possess the resource, knowledge and ability to visit Ireland

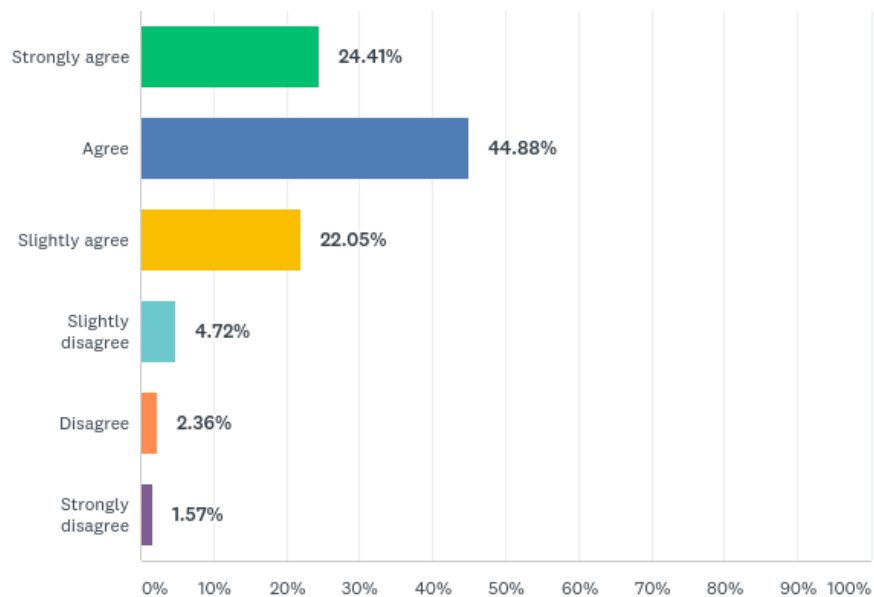


Figure 21 indicates the resources, skill and ability of the respondents to visit Ireland

The question is intended to find out the impact of perceived behavioural control on intention to travel. When asked to the respondents whether they possessed the resources, skill and ability to travel to Ireland. Majority of the respondents that is 44.88% of the respondents agreed with the statement. Furthermore, 24.41% strongly agree with the statement and 22.05% slightly agreeing. On the contrary, a total of 8.65% indicated strong disagreement, disagreement and slight disagreement.

4.6.3. Question 21: It would be simple and effortless to visit Ireland after viewing tourists online comments about travel in Ireland

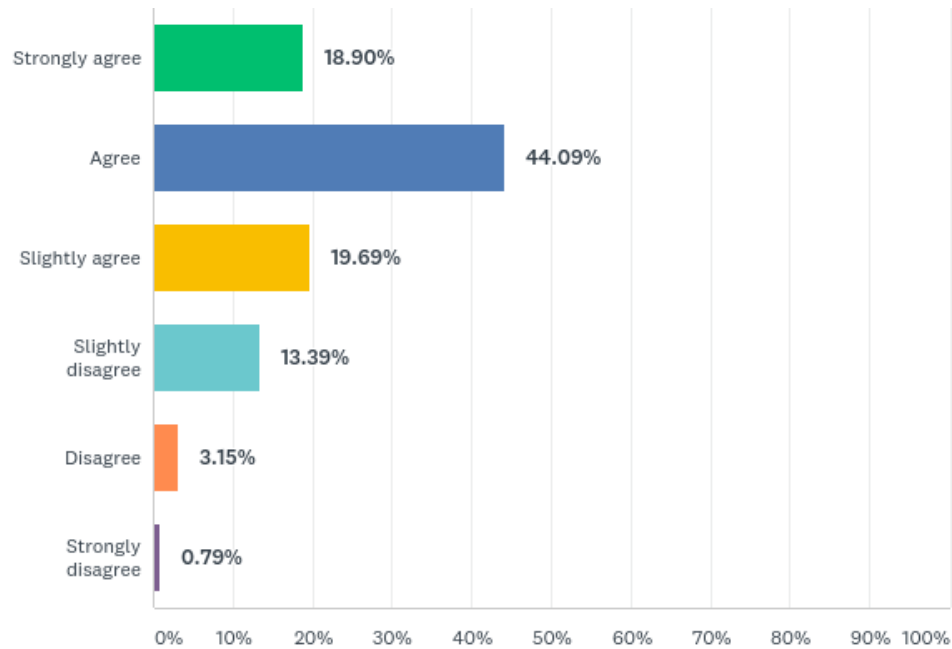


Figure 22 shows the influence of online reviews on perceived behavioural control

The question is aimed at identifying the influence of online reviews on perceived behavioural control by asking the respondents whether online reviews make travel to Ireland simple and effortless. According to the results 44.09% consisted of the majority of respondents who showed agreement with the statement. Moreover, 19.69% slightly agreed and 18.90% strongly agreed with the statement. However, a total of 25.98% of the respondents show disagreement with the statement.

4.7 Behavioural intention

4.7.1. Question 22: I predict I will visit Ireland in the future

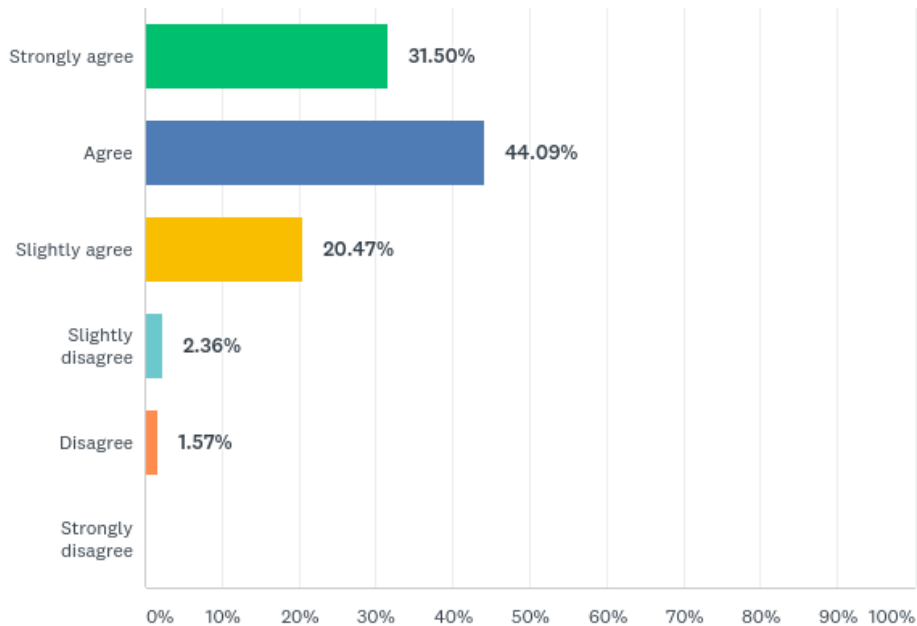


Figure 23 shows the intention of the respondents to visit Ireland in the future

The question was aimed at asking respondents on whether they will be likely to visit Ireland in the future. Out of the total respondents, 44.09% agreed with the statement that is, they predict to visit Ireland in the future. Furthermore, 31.50% and 20.47% strongly agree/slightly agree with the statement. The result comes to show that the majority of respondent display agreement with the statement. However, 2.36% and 1.57% of the respondents have shown slight disagreement/disagreement with the statement. Finally, it is also important to note that there were no responses recorded for the option ‘strongly disagree’.

4.7.2. Question 23: I would visit Ireland than any other destination

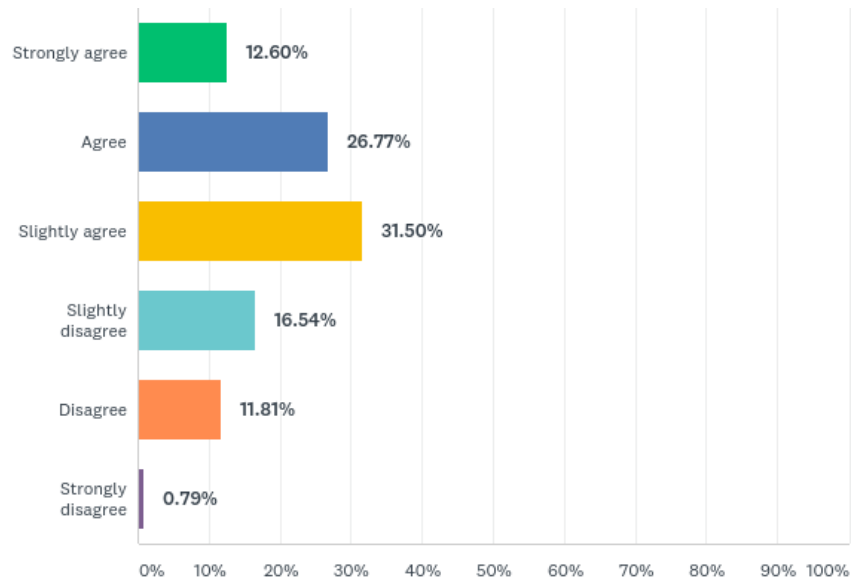


Figure 24 indicates the intention of the respondents to visit Ireland than any other destination

When respondents were asked on whether they would choose Ireland over any other destination, the majority of respondents showed a slight agreement (31.50%). Whereas, 26.77% and 12.60% of the respondents indicated agreement and strong agreement respectively. However, 29.11% of the population had shown disagreement with the statement. Therefore, after analysing the results, it can be derived that the population slightly agrees with the idea of Ireland as their next tourist destination.

4.7.3. Question 24: If everything goes as planned, I will plan to visit Ireland in the future

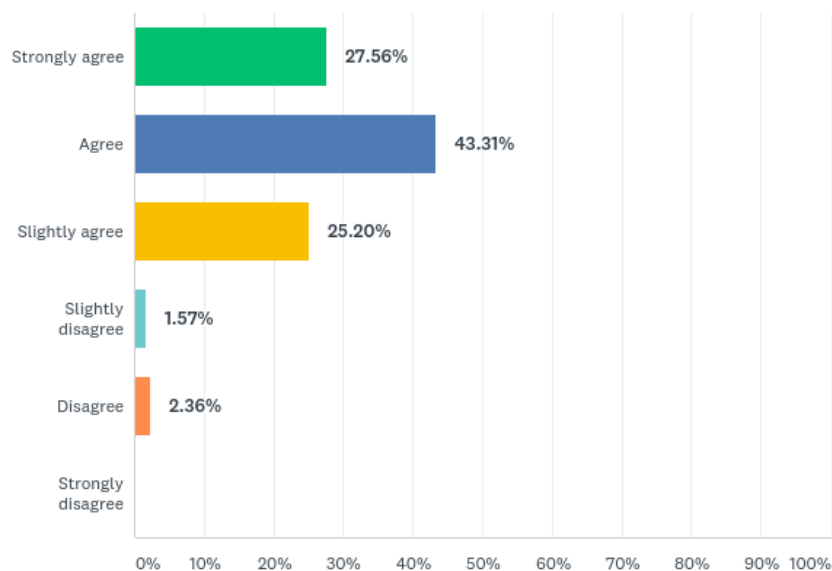


Figure 25 indicates the intention to travel to Ireland if everything goes as planned

The question aims at answering the intention of tourist to visit Ireland in the future. 43.31% of the respondents agree that they will visit Ireland in the future. Moreover, 27.56% and 25.20% of the respondents strongly agree/slightly agree with the statement. However, a total 3.93% of the respondents indicated disagreement with the statement. Finally, it needs to be mentioned that no respondents have strongly disagreed with the statement.

5 Chapter 5: Discussions

The research project was aimed at investigating the influence of online reviews on the tourism destination choice with respect to the Irish market. As mentioned in the early chapters tourism has become one of the major industries in terms of revenue generation for a nation. The rise in technology and the introduction of the internet has helped in amplifying word of mouth to now electronic word of mouth or e-WOM. Furthermore, one of the main methods through which e-WOM is passed is through online reviews and it is important to understand the influence of online reviews as it helps fellow marketers to rethink the marketing strategies and therefore, more emphasis must be provided on e-WOM through online reviews.

The section will aim to discuss the findings and provide a critical view with the help of secondary research conducted in the area. Furthermore, the outline of this section will be based on the objectives.

5.1 Objective 1: To investigate the impact of online reviews on tourist destination choice

The above-mentioned objective sought to ascertain the impact of online reviews with respect to their choice of destination. The questions were mainly based on the frequency of the tourists to view online reviews and the change in attitudes and emotions of the tourist. The findings of the research indicate that online reviews are an important influencing factor in the tourist destination choice.

The findings reveal that the tourists use online reviews frequently for two purposes: Firstly, to gain an understanding of which destination makes a good impression. Secondly, to gather information regarding a tourist destination prior to travelling. In addition, the findings (Q9; Q10), show a strong agreement among the respondents with respect to the two purposes mentioned above. Hence, online reviews play a crucial role in the tourism decision making process and most importantly decisions regarding choice of destination.

The findings also point out that online reviews brings about changes on the emotions and attitudes of tourists. The respondents strongly agreed (Q12), when they said online reviews increased their confidence after viewing online reviews about a tourist destination and also on the contrary agreed (Q11) by stating that they worry about their decision to travel to a destination without viewing online reviews.

However, reading online reviews from time to time is not enough. It is of utmost importance that individuals should be up to date with the reviews. The main reason for it being over the course of time more individuals travel to various destinations and their views and experiences can change to either negative or positive and it is crucial that the tourists are up to date with the reviews. The findings are encouraging (Q13), as the majority of respondents are up to date with the information that they receive through online reviews.

Finally, a study conducted by TripAdvisor (2007), is in line with the results of the primary research conducted. The study brings to attention the importance of online reviews by stating that online reviews increases confidence, reduces the risk/uncertainty and this leads to a simple decision making. Furthermore, the study also indicated that online reviews assisted in choosing and learning about destinations and also helped to provide the tourists with fresh ideas. In terms of academic literature, the findings are in line with the studies conducted by Jalilvand and Samiei (2012); Zarrad and Debabi (2015); Fakharyan *et.al.* (2012), who found a direct and positive impact of online reviews on the destination choice of tourist.

5.2 Objective 2: Attitudes

5.2.1 To investigate the impact of online reviews on attitudes towards visiting Ireland

Respondents in the survey were asked whether online reviews/comments would bring about a positive or negative effect on their travel plans for travel in Ireland. The findings showed that majority of the respondents agreed with the statement (Q14). Therefore, it means that online reviews whether be it positive or negative will influence the attitudes of tourist with regards to travelling to Ireland. Furthermore, questions 11 and 12 relate with the objective by further agreeing that the impact of online reviews have a direct impact on attitudes of tourists.

The findings are in line with the research conducted by Jalilvand and Samiei (2012); Zarrad and Debabi (2015); Fakharyan *et.al.* (2012), stating that online reviews have a direct impact on the attitudes of tourists.

5.2.2 To identify the attitudes of tourists towards visiting Ireland and its impact on the intention to travel

Attitudes can be either positive or negative. The study aimed at understanding the attitude tourist have about Ireland and the impact it can cause with regards to intention to travel. The question consisted of a total of eleven attitudes (Q15). The findings from the primary data indicate that positive attitudes were more than negative attitudes. Studies show different attitudes bring about the intention to travel. Lam and Hsu (cited in Jordan *et.al.*, 2017), mention the importance of positive attitudes on the intention to travel whereas, the study conducted by Jordan *et.al.* (2017), shows that negative attitudes bring about an intention to travel. However, in terms of Ireland, positive attitude will lead to intention to travel as negative attitude did not resonate with the respondents. Finally, by critically analysing the results found out by the

different researchers it can be concluded by mentioning the importance of the region and as well the behaviour of the tourist when dealing with attitudes and intention to travel.

Authors who have done research previously on the matter had come up with different results causing a conflict. Studies exist that has found attitude to be a significant factor in predicting intention to travel (Jalilvand and Samiei 2012; Zarrad and Debabi 2015). However, other studies point out by mentioning that attitudes are not an important factor in predicting intention to travel (Sparks and Pan, 2009; Lam and Hsu, 2004).

5.3 Objective 3: Subjective norms

5.3.1 To investigate the impact of e-WOM on subjective norms

The results from the primary research show that the majority of respondents agree to be influenced by peer groups such as family, friends and also external groups in the way of opinions from credible tourists, reviews and so on. Furthermore, this indicates that peer influence has a big role in shaping the opinions of people with respect to travelling to a destination which in this case is Ireland. The study conducted by TripAdvisor (2007), showed consumer opinions to have an influence in changing the minds of the individuals and moreover, it was also noted in the study that individuals relied upon advice from other people with regards to travel decisions. Therefore, it means that e-WOM supports in developing subjective norms and this thereby, creates an impact. Finally, the primary findings are in line with the secondary research performed in the area. Jalilvand and Samiei (2012), from the research, conducted stated that e-WOM had an impact on the subjective norms.

5.3.2 To determine the impact of subjective norms on the intention to travel

Subjective norms are mainly concerned with whether important individuals or groups agree or disagree by performing the behaviour (Ajzen,1991). The literature provided conveys that an individual when exposed to disapproval by fellow peers or sources such as e-WOM tend to show negative intentions to the behaviour and vice-versa (Yamada and Fu 2012). Therefore, it can be noted that subjective norms impact the intention to travel (Hsu and Huang, 2012; Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012; Martin *et.al.*, 2011; Sparks and Pan, 2009; Jordan *et.al.*, 2017). On the contrary, researchers Hsu (2013); Shen, Schuttmeyer and Braun (2009), indicate that subjective norms do not possess an impact over the intention to travel. Finally, by critically analysing both the argument and the findings from the primary data, subjective norms do make an impact on the intention to travel.

5.4 Objective 4: Perceived behavioural control

5.4.1 To investigate the impact of online reviews on perceived behavioural control

Perceived behavioural control is mainly concerned with an individual's resources, opportunities needed to perform the behaviour. The questions 19 and 21 aimed at finding out whether online reviews could impact and amplify the subjective norms of the respondents with regards to travel in Ireland. The findings indicated that the respondents felt that travel to Ireland will be simple and effortless after viewing online reviews. The result sheds light on the positive impact of online reviews on subjective norms. Furthermore, the findings agree with the secondary research conducted by Jalilvand and Samiei (2012).

5.4.2 To determine the impact of perceived behavioural control on the intention to travel

Question 20 mainly focused on to find out the impact of perceived behavioural control on the intention to travel. Perceived behavioural control means the ability that is the confidence, resources that an individual possess which leads them to perform the given behaviour. The findings showed respondents to have the ability, confidence and resources to travel and this, therefore leads to intention. The questions 19, 20 and 21 asked the respondents on whether they possessed the knowledge, skill and resources needed to visit Ireland to which the majority of respondents agreed to and this thereby, leads to intention to travel. Finally, the primary research agrees with the secondary research with researchers Jalilvand and Samiei (2012); Sparks and Pan (2009); Lam and Hsu (2012), all indicating an impact of perceived behavioural control on the intention to travel.

5.5 Objective 5: Behavioural intention

5.5.1 To investigate the impact of online reviews on the intention to travel.

The question's 22, 23 and 24 asked respondents regarding the intention to travel to Ireland. Majority of the respondents agreed to visit Ireland indicating a positive intention to travel to Ireland.

The three antecedents of the theory of planned behaviour are: subjective norms, attitudes and perceived behavioural control. Under this model the three antecedents together are known to be predictors of behavioural intention. In this research project, the findings obtained from the antecedents of TPB shows to be a predictor of intention to travel to Ireland. In the case of online reviews and TPB, the findings

showed that online reviews had an impact on the three antecedents of TPB (attitude towards visiting destination, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control).

6 Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

The lack of literature with regards to online reviews, the connection it has on the tourist destination choice and the theory of planned behaviour have been a major limitation throughout the research project. However, it has proven to be a boon as it has helped in forming the research project. The research needed to understand the significance of online reviews on tourist and hence, resulted in the use of descriptive quantitative methods as it helps in measuring data and providing insights regarding the matter from a large population. Furthermore, with the help of quantitative data and the limited research present in the area has assisted in providing a foundation for the dissertation.

The internet has immensely helped individuals in the ability to seek, collect and to circulate information regarding products and services. In addition, this has led to individuals having access to information regarding products or services. Most of all the internet has assisted in the introduction of review sites such as Yelp, TripAdvisor and so on have provided the consumers with the platform to voice their opinions and experiences with regards to the products or services. Furthermore, this revolution has led to what now we call electronic word of mouth or e-WOM. The research sought to investigate the influence of online reviews on the destination choice of tourist. Furthermore, the market chosen for the purpose of the research project is the Irish market. The main reason to be focusing on the tourism sector is that Ireland has emerged into a major revenue earning sector for tourism. In 2017, 5.1 million overseas visitors came to visit Ireland (Tourism Ireland, 2018). The research project did not just deal with online reviews and destination choice, a conceptual framework was used to find out tourist intentions to travel to Ireland. The conceptual framework selected was the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) by (Ajzen, 1991). According to Jalilvand and Samiei (2012), TPB provides a valid conceptual explanation regarding the process of decision making by a tourist on the choice of destination. Moreover, the antecedents of the TPB (attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control) were used to explain whether it is a determinant of intention to travel to a tourist destination and the study also aims to find out the impact of online reviews on the antecedent of TPB mentioned above. The findings of the research indicate online reviews to have a direct and a positive impact on subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, attitude towards visiting Ireland and behavioural intentions. Furthermore, the findings from the survey indicate the antecedents of TPB to be a determinant of intention to travel to Ireland. Attitude is considered to be a strong indicator especially with regards to choosing a tourist destination mainly due to the fact that tourism is a service industry it is everchanging and past experience do not hold much validity. The research study confirms that attitudes are a strong determinant for intention to travel to Ireland. Moreover, the study also agrees that subjective norms are a determinant of intention to travel to Ireland as reference groups are a major factor in shaping opinions of individuals leading to either them performing or neglecting the behaviour. The findings indicate that perceived behavioural control has a positive impact on the intention to travel to Ireland and hence, proving to be a determinant of intention to travel. According to the TPB, the three

antecedent all together are predictors of behavioural intentions and the findings agree with the theory as the results showed a positive intention to visit Ireland.

The research project provides explanations on WOM, e-WOM and online reviews and the connections the theories hold with tourism. It is crucial to understand the importance of e-WOM and online reviews as it helps to create a good image of the destination in the minds of the tourist. In addition, with regards to businesses under this sector, e-WOM and online reviews prove to be a better alternative for advertising as well as other marketing strategies and also proves to be cost-efficient too. Therefore, marketers in tourism should understand, learn and develop strategies accordingly.

6.2 Recommendations

6.2.1 Recommendations for practitioners

The section aims at providing recommendation for practitioners or business professionals in the tourism sector. To inculcate an intention to travel, the professionals in the field have to look out for negative e-WOM through negative online reviews, opinions and so on. Furthermore, from the findings, it is understood that negative e-WOM and online reviews do affect the tourists subjective norms and attitudes towards visiting Ireland which thereby, effects intention to travel. The solution can be a prompt reply to the negative reviews by tourist and to also encourage other tourists to voice their opinions and experiences through online reviews. Therefore, this results in a high volume of reviews regarding the destination and hence, resulting in a greater intention to travel.

The second recommendation is to build a virtual community. Virtual community is a platform wherein individuals are given the opportunity to exchange information regarding a matter. In this case, the virtual community will involve tourists sharing their experiences of travel. Few of the greatest examples of virtual communities are namely, TripAdvisor and Yelp both contain a large volume of reviews and user-generated information regarding travel, restaurants, hotels and so on. Moreover, virtual communities can also be a platform for marketing tourism service. However, it should be noted that advertising needs to be kept a minimum in the platform as it might hamper the meaning of a virtual community.

The third recommendation is to make use of influencer marketing through the way of sponsoring to partake in trips will be a huge bonus for the business as influencers possess a high number of followers, it will help the firm in terms of mass reach. Moreover, influencers are credible in the information they provide and mostly this credibility transfers to the business as well. However, the business should be

careful in selecting the influencers as the followers or audience and as well as the influencers should resonate with what the business provides.

6.2.2 Recommendation for future research

The time limitation to conduct the research was a major setback. Qualitative research could also have brought more clarity to the topic. Furthermore, the research could not venture and find out other factors than online reviews that can influence destination choice. The future research could attempt to bring in more nationalities into the survey so that there is more equal representation. Finally, the use of frameworks such as TPB brings about reliability and structure in the research but the results may vary from country to country depending upon factors such as culture, ethnicity and so on.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

How online reviews influence tourism destination choice: An analysis of the Irish market

1. Please indicate your gender

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Others

2. Please choose a category that includes your age

- ☐ Under 18
- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 45-54
- ☐ 55-64
- ☐ 65+

3. What is your nationality

- ☐ USA
- ☐ Asia
- ☐ Germany
- ☐ India
- ☐ Other (please specify)
- ☐ UK
- ☐ Brazil
- ☐ Ireland
- ☐ Other European countries

4. Please, select the level of education completed

- ☐ Secondary school level
- ☐ Undergraduate level
- ☐ Postgraduate level

5. What is your purpose of visit?

- ☐ Business
- ☐ Further Studies
- ☐ Meeting family relatives
- ☐ Other (please specify)
- ☐ Vacation
- ☐ Resident

6. Number of previous visits to Ireland

☐ Zero

☐ 3-5 times

☐ One time

☐ Above 5 times

☐ Two times

* 7. I frequently read other tourist online reviews to understand what destinations make a good impression

☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Slightly agree ☐ Slightly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

* 8. I often read online reviews of other tourists, to make sure that I select the right destination

☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Slightly agree ☐ Slightly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

* 9. I often seek other tourists online reviews to assist in choosing an attractive destination

☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Slightly agree ☐ Slightly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

* 10. I acquire information frequently from other tourists online reviews prior to travelling to a tourist destination

☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Slightly agree ☐ Slightly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

* 11. I worry about my decision to travel to a tourist destination if I do not read online travel reviews

☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Slightly agree ☐ Slightly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

* 12. Tourists online travel reviews make me feel confident when I travel to a destination

☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Slightly agree ☐ Slightly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

* 13. I keep myself up to date with new information by researching online so that I can make the right destination choice

☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Slightly agree ☐ Slightly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

* 14. Which of these following words would you describe to be your thoughts on Ireland as a tourist destination (Kindly select a maximum of **four** options)

☐ Bad ☐ Good ☐ Worthless ☐ Valuable ☐ Pleasant ☐ Unpleasant ☐ Authentic ☐ Safe ☐ Expensive

☐ Risky

☐ Crowded

* 15. There will be a positive/negative effect on my travel plan due to the comments I read from other tourists about travel in Ireland

☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Slightly agree ☐ Slightly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

* 16. Most people who are important to me say I have to visit Ireland

☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Slightly agree ☐ Slightly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

* 17. People whose opinions I value would prefer me to visit Ireland

☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Slightly agree ☐ Slightly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

* 18. People who are important to me would want me to visit Ireland

☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Slightly agree ☐ Slightly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

* 19. I would be able to travel to Ireland after reading other tourist online comments regarding travel in Ireland

☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Slightly agree ☐ Slightly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

* 20. I possess the resource, knowledge and ability to visit Ireland

☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Slightly agree ☐ Slightly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

* 21. It would be simple and effortless to visit Ireland after viewing tourists online comments about travel in Ireland

☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Slightly agree ☐ Slightly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

* 22. I predict I will visit Ireland in the future

☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Slightly agree ☐ Slightly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

* 23. I would visit Ireland than any other destination

☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Slightly agree ☐ Slightly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

* 24. If everything goes as planned, I will plan to visit Ireland in the future

☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Slightly agree ☐ Slightly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree