

E-LOYALTY FOR INDIAN ONLINE TOURISM INDUSTRY: AN ASSESSMENT OF LINEAR AND QUADRATIC RELATIONSHIP OF PREDICTORS AND E-LOYALTY

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Abstract *Vibrant and dynamic era of economic development in India is witness for continuous and aggressive growth in major sectors of public as well as private undertakings. Current travel and tourism industry of India is growing at very fast phase. As per the information shared by WTTC (World Travel & Tourism Council) in its report (2017), the travel and tourism industry of India had generated INR 14.1 trillion in 2016, an increase of 6.7% growth from previous year. As we know the Indian travel market is continuously growing, a proper understanding of consumer behaviour towards loyalty in online situation will definitely help the travel related companies to capture more market opportunities in order to increase their market share in this competitive era. Community may be considered as association of human beings where common interest is shared among each other subject to predefined social norms by group members (Andrew, 2002). Virtual community enables an individual to connect and share their views with others, at global level, even if they are not physically meeting with each others. Smart phones have made possible for an individual to connect with their circle of friend, family, colleagues and workmen at anytime and anywhere. This close-up the distance between the two and hence an easy share of information and views regarding a product and services. Virtual community has two relevant features i.e. Reciprocity and Interactivity (Anderson & Mittal 2000). So, Reciprocity and Interactivity may be selected as two most preferred predictors of customer satisfaction especially for Indian Tourism communities. Current study tries to develop a conceptual model of e-loyalty especially for Indian tourism industry where quadratic association of predictors of e-loyalty has established along with linear relationship. 387 tourism websites were taken as sample to collect primary data and model is validated with the help of Structural equation modelling.*

Keywords: *e-Loyalty, Online, Tourism Industry, Linear, Quadratic, Predictors*

INTRODUCTION

Vibrant and dynamic era of economic development in India is witness for continuous and aggressive growth in major sectors of public as well as private undertakings. Current travel and tourism industry of India is growing at very fast phase. As per the information shared by WTTC (World Travel & Tourism Council) in its report (2017), the travel and tourism industry of India had generated INR 14.1 trillion in 2016, an increase of 6.7% growth from previous year. As we know the Indian travel market is continuously growing, a proper understanding of consumer behaviour towards loyalty in online situation will definitely help the travel related companies to capture more market opportunities in order to increase their market share in this competitive era.

Loyalty of customers towards a particular product brand, services or company can be only possible if a customer is frequent buyers of that product or services. Loyalty is all about faith of a customer on quality, prices and durability of purchased products along with repeated behaviour of repurchasing explicit by customer (Dick & Basu 1994). Previous research on consumer loyalty at virtual platform reveals that research on this domain is supported by others disciplines like psychology, sociology and marketing. For example, websites various dimensions like content, graphics etc and marketing tactics are the core success elements of any online business (Korgaonkar & O' Leary 2008). Pricing policies, CRM practices, websites design are the significant elements of customer satisfaction with online suppliers of products (Luo et al. 2012). (Sprenge et al, 1996) Importance

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of satisfaction among customers is vital element for repurchasing behaviour and loyalty of customers becomes significant parameter considered by marketing professionals while formulating various offers for retained or loyal customers.

Although various marketing experts and researchers of academics world tried to find out the psychological ascendants of customer loyalty in previous research, still this context require in depth understanding for better clarity of customer loyalty (Agustin, C. & Singh, J. 2005). Xueyan Yang, Xiaoni Zhang, (2017) Linear association of determinants for customer loyalty are not significantly able to demonstrate the relationship in effective manner. Further (Clara Agustin and Jagdip Singh, 2005) argued that straight linear relationship of loyalty with customer satisfaction require curvilinear investigation among indentified constructs of customer loyalty.

Even with those facts, different studies on customer loyalty dimensions are leading towards scarcity in terms of available literature. There were one another research conducted on loyalty and its factors by Vlachos (2013), which indicates that the study of customer loyalty is difficult and some more studies were made that, investigated the different effects of loyalty, some researchers were called for the examination of relations and quadratic variables in order to improve the understanding of studies.

Community may be considered as association of human beings where common interest is shared among each other subject to predefined social norms by group members (Andrew, 2002). virtual community that enables an individual to connect and share their views with others, at global level, even if they are not physically meeting with each others. Smart phones have made possible for an individual to connect with their circle of friend, family, colleagues and workmen at anytime and anywhere. This close-up the distance between the two and hence an easy share of information and views regarding a product and services. Virtual community has two relevant features i.e. *Reciprocity* and *Interactivity* (Anderson & Mittal 2000). So, Reciprocity and Interactivity may be selected as two most preferred predictors of customer satisfaction especially for Indian Tourism communities. There are certain objectives that can be stated in order to support present studies which are discussed below:

- Assessment the quadratic association between visitor's satisfaction and loyalty among travellers for tourism.
- Assessment the quadratic association between interactivity, reciprocity & loyalty among travellers for tourism.
- Comparison of Linear model with quadratic model for loyalty especially for tourism industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mathwicket, (2008) had stated that the "theory of Social Capital "provides some relevant concepts for the study of customer behaviour. Since the social capital is an indefinable concept but it serves as the basis for workings with in a community. Social capital theory facilitates the social group members to collectively execute the work for active and prompt results. Reciprocity is the major high cultured norm for social capital theory which helps the group members to mutually cooperate each other for overall benefit of social group.

VISITOR'S SATISFACTION & RECIPROCITY

Reciprocity is the main element of Social Capital theory which describes the mechanism where mutual dependence of group members cultivates the cooperation among each other.

According to Gachter; (2000) Reciprocity is that condition where people are willing to help others for this they sacrifice their own comfort. Under the general norms of Reciprocity, services to others are provided by the members of community at own cost and those members believe that they will get there favour in future.

The positive side of Reciprocity is necessary for a community in order to support their growth, for example, by developing the social networks. Lots of travel related websites (*e.g. Make my trip and Yatra.com*) mostly depend on reviews written by customers on review column of site so that when potential visitors on the website read that content opinions of people can be visible to them related to products and services. (Cheung et al, 2013) Reciprocity may be considered as an important concept because when the reciprocity is up to the expectations of customers then they will be satisfied, so we can say that Reciprocity is the attributes of satisfactions which create following hypothesis:

H1: There is a positive effect of Reciprocity on visitor's satisfaction in Tourism related websites.

VISITOR'S SATISFACTION AND SOCIAL INTERACTION

The social capital theory consists of structural dimension which includes social interaction ties. (Chiu et al., 2006) These social interaction ties mainly perform several functions like measurement of strength related to relationships among the group members, the quantity of time spend collectively by community members and the frequency of communication between virtual community members. The

proper interactivity among the members will indicate a good relationship between the members of the community. Due to this, members will be satisfied with the community. Basically, different online travel sites that are accessed by the customers will provide some useful information related to travel. Mutual sharing of thoughts on virtual communities provides clues to the visitors of websites about product and services information during the information search phase of their purchase process. A regular interaction among the members will create a strong bond between members and it will increase the satisfaction level which will result in the increase of member loyalty. Now we can propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Social interaction of website visitors has a positive effect on the satisfaction of visitors for tourism-related websites.

e-LOYALTY AND VISITOR'S SATISFACTION

Wider knowledge domain of customer loyalty has been broadly studied in different fields like Marketing and social science. Kuehn (1962) has suggested that a repeated purchasing behaviour is known as Loyalty, but Engel and Blackwell (1982) had referred loyalty as an encouraging attitude. Consumer loyalty plays a vital role in the profitability of E-Retailers.

The literature has mentioned that in order to maintain the consumer loyalty, customer satisfaction may be considered as a significant contributor for the assessment of psychological mechanisms adopted during purchase decisions by customers. Richard and Zhang (2012) had stated that in the travel industry, most of the impact on customer loyalty is created by the corporate image of the tourism agency. Moreover, the literature contains different studies that observe the relationship between loyalty and satisfaction. Some researchers have examined a curvilinear relationship and others have located that it can be related in both linear and non-linear manners. This study has concluded that a relationship between e-Loyalty and satisfaction is positive; it may not be linear, so an attempt has been made by the researchers to understand whether only a linear relationship of e-loyalty and satisfaction is more significant or quadratic (non-linear relationship) of satisfaction and e-loyalty is more robust for generalization of conceptual model development.

H3: There is a positive linear as well as a quadratic effect of visitor's satisfaction level and e-Loyalty for tourism-related websites.

e-LOYALTY AND RECIPROCITY

(Wu et al. 2008) Mostly the customer's conscious tendency is measured by the customer's personal Reciprocity so that

they can engage in equally beneficial relationships with different companies. Reciprocity may be referred to as the foundation on which a relationship can be built. (Dorsch & Carlson, 1995). For maintaining a better customer-retailer relationship, the norms of Reciprocity play an important role as compensations for mutual benefited relations. So Reciprocity may be considered as the key which can maintain the relationship. Positive as well as linear relationship among purchase intention and reciprocity has been established in previous research (Wu et al., 2008). This study has concluded that a relationship between E-Loyalty and reciprocity is positive; it may not be linear, so an attempt has been made by the present study to understand whether only a linear relationship of e-loyalty and reciprocity is more significant or quadratic (non-linear relationship) of satisfaction and e-loyalty is more robust for generalization of conceptual model development.

H4: There is a positive linear as well as a quadratic effect of reciprocity and e-Loyalty for tourism-related websites.

e-LOYALTY AND INTERACTIVITY

(Zinkhan & Song, 2008; Varadarajan, 2005) Virtual Community is significantly governed by the interactivity where users of virtual communities feel some sense of belongingness for each other. It has been found in the previous research that understanding about interactivity varies for different researchers. For example, few researchers argued that interactivity is all about usability and technical perspective whereas few proposed that interactivity is a two-way communication process where electronic devices and people are involved in communication at virtual communities (Song & Zinkhan, 2008). Proper interaction of individuals among each other helps them to develop a healthy relationship. They will enjoy on this virtual platform and also showed interest to stay with group members. On the other hand, some researchers (Wang, 2013) proposed that social interactivity creates distraction on the mind set and people become internet addicts. Finally, in the present study an attempt has been made to assume the positive association of social interactivity with loyalty for online tourism websites as Labrecque (2014) and Song & Zinkhan (2008) also concluded that social integration and interaction has a positive relationship of attitude towards websites, loyalty and repurchase intention of customer.

H5: Interactivity among visitors of the tourism industry is positively related to e-Loyalty for tourism-related websites.

Interactivity Effect: Catalyst for Reciprocity, Interactivity, Visitor's Satisfaction on E-Loyalty

As mentioned above that reciprocity, interactivity, visitor's satisfaction is directly related to e-loyalty and these all

constructs are positively related with each other. Furthermore, independent and individual effect of reciprocity, visitor’s satisfaction and interactivity on loyalty was evaluated in the previous research but there is a prospective to investigate the interaction effects (in the form of quadratic effect). There is probability that variation of effect of visitor’s satisfaction on loyalty may varies as intensity of reciprocity and interactivity changes.

It has been found that in previous studies that experience of the customer on e commerce platform in the form of customer satisfaction is one of the significant elements for investigating influence of interaction effect of reciprocity, visitor’s satisfaction on e-Loyalty.

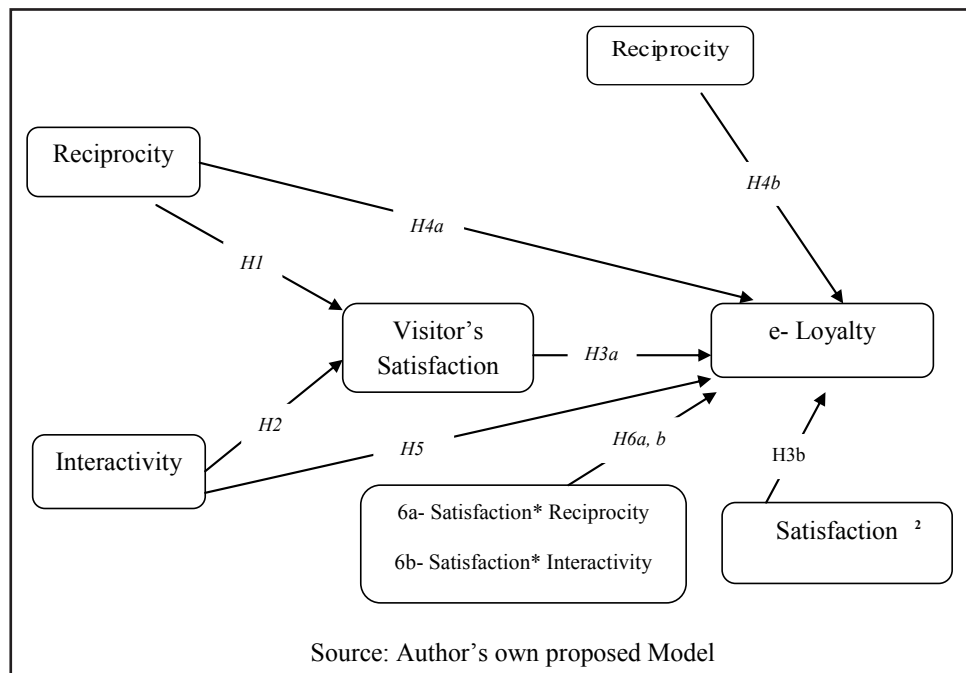
Reciprocity is acting as catalyst for investigating the influence of visitor’s satisfaction and e loyalty. Basically consumer may expect to earn some useful benefits from the platform provided by E-Commerce through Reciprocity. Hence as the reciprocity will increase, there will be straight affect on e Loyalty along with this the interaction effect of visitor’s satisfaction and e-Loyalty. In same manner, interactivity

is also acting as catalyst for investigating the influence of visitor’s satisfaction and e-Loyalty. Interaction among users of websites for tourism facilitates the contributor for posting positive comments and reviews by offering various coupons as token of appreciation by companies so people get motivated to increases the interaction. Therefore, as interaction increases, there will be straight affect on e Loyalty along with this the interaction effect of interactivity and e-Loyalty.

So hypothesis can be developed as under:

H6(a): Interaction effect of reciprocity and visitor’s satisfaction on e loyalty towards tourism related websites is positive but variation exists between satisfaction and e loyalty under changing effect of reciprocity.

H6(b): Interaction effect of interactivity and visitor’s satisfaction on e-Loyalty towards tourism related websites is positive but variation exists between satisfaction and e-Loyalty under changing effect of interactivity. All these hypothesis are compiled in a model that is shown in



Source: Author's own proposed Model

Fig. 1: Conceptual Research Model

METHODOLOGY

In order to build up a reliable and valid model for e loyalty for tourism industry in straight as well as quadratic direction, an empirical study was used. To develop the model required methodology was drafted by taking into considerations the

guidelines suggested by Churchill (1979), Gerbing and Anderson (1988) and O’Leary-Kelly and Vokurka (1998). An exploratory qualitative data collection attempt via interview method and asking open ended questions to various experts of Tourism industry websites by random sampling approach so that hidden information as their thought process can be

understood in an effective manner. Each interview composed of 30-40 minutes each was made to get an idea about hidden insights about e loyalty. After this structured questionnaire was drafted in which all the identified constructs literature review was taken into consideration. To carry out the desired objective of research, online survey was conducted in North India (persons who are at least user of one tourism industry websites) so that reliable data can be collected. Two thousand approximately e-mails invitations were circulated to users (as national sample) purchased from one

of the independent research company. Out of this proposed sample 387 respondents participated to give their responses on the questionnaire representing 19.35% response rate. After collecting the data from respondents, the collected data is used by applying SPSS.22 and AMOS Software’s per requirements. Demographic profile of respondents is presented in Table 1. The various constructs derived from previous studies are used in this study. Before applying Structural equation modelling, confirmatory factor analysis was used to validate the measurements.

Table 1: Demographic Statistic

Variables	Total Number of Respondents		387
	Values	Responses	Percentage
Age	Below 20 yrs.	48	12.40 %
	20-35 yrs.	336	86.82 %
	Above 35 yrs.	3	0.78 %
Education	Intermediate	55	14.21 %
	Graduate	92	23.77 %
	Post graduate	237	61.24 %
	Doctorate	3	0.78 %
Marital status	Married	45	11.63 %
	Unmarried	342	88.37 %
Gender	Male	277	71.58 %
	Female	110	28.42 %
Income	Student	255	65.89 %
	Below 3 lakhs	55	14.21 %
	3- 6 lakhs	57	14.73 %
	6 - 12 lakhs	12	3.10 %
	Above 12 lakhs	8	2.07 %

RESULTS

For establishing the relationship between constructs and final dependent variable e-loyalty for online tourism websites, reliability and correlations of each construct i.e Visitor’s

satisfaction, reciprocity, and interactivity is calculated and showed in table 2. It is found from the table that reliability indices varies from 0.81 to 0.98, which is more than suggested value (0.7) by Robinson et al, 1991), hence, issue related to multi- colinearity is resolved for further analysis of data.

Table 2

Constructs	Reliability	Visitor’s Satisfaction	Reciprocity	Interactivity	e- Loyalty
Visitor’s Satisfaction	0.84	1			
Reciprocity	0.81	0.59	1		
Interactivity	0.98	0.46	0.44	1	
e- Loyalty	0.93	0.62	0.29	0.37	1

Model Fit Measurement and Path Coefficient for Structural Model

For validation of proposed model, an attempt has made to observe various model fit indices. Various model fit indices were calculated and it was found that proposed model was fit as per suggested with acceptable indices range by different researchers. It can found from the indices that Unidimensionality exists in the data. The path coefficients of the constructs are summarized in Table 4 depicts that (→) arrow shows strong relationship among constructs whereas (.....) dotted lines shows relationship is weak and not significant. It was observed from the estimates that reciprocity, interactivity are positively related to visitor’s satisfaction consequently supports hypotheses 1&2. Strength of relationship among reciprocity and interactivity for visitor’s satisfaction revealed that reciprocity has strong influence on visitor’s satisfaction (.46***) followed by interactivity (.024***). However, in order to investigate the impact of quadratic and linear relationship between visitor’s satisfaction for tourism related websites and e-Loyalty when path coefficient were analysed, it was found that linear (0.22***) as well as quadratic (0.11***) domain has positive association for e loyalty hence supports hypotheses 3.

Table 3

Model Fit Analysis		
Fit Statistic	Recommended Fit for Model	Proposed Model
Chi Square/ Degree of Freedom	≤ 3.0	1.866
GFI	≥ .90	0.99
AGFI	≥ .80	0.94
TLI	≥ .90	0.976
CFI	≥ .90	0.975
RMSEA	≤ .08	0.063

Table 4

Constructs	Path	Estimates
Reciprocity	→ Visitor’s Satisfaction	0.46***
Interactivity	→ Visitor’s Satisfaction	0.24***
Reciprocity*Visitor’s Satisfaction	→ e –Loyalty	0.11***
Interactivity*Visitor’s Satisfaction	---- e –Loyalty	0.02***
Reciprocity	→ e –Loyalty	0.29***

Constructs	Path	Estimates
Interactivity	---- e –Loyalty	0.010***
Reciprocity2(Sq.)	→ e –Loyalty	0.21***
Visitor’s Satisfaction2(Sq.)	→ e –Loyalty	0.11***
Visitor’s Satisfaction	→ e –Loyalty	0.22***
Regression Coefficient(visitor’s Satisfaction)	Reciprocity+ Interactivity	0.42
Regression Coefficient(e-Loyalty)	Reciprocity+ Interactivity+ Reciprocity*Visitor’s Satisfaction+ Interactivity*Visitor’s Satisfaction+ Reciprocity2(Sq.)+ Satisfaction2(Sq.)+ Visitor’s Satisfaction	0.23
* p< .05, ** p<.01 , ***p<.001		

Furthermore, in order to investigate the impact of quadratic and linear relationship between reciprocity and e-Loyalty when path coefficient were analysed, it was found that linear (0.29***) as well as quadratic (0.21***) domain has positive association for e loyalty hence supports hypotheses 4. When interactivity among visitors for e-Loyalty was investigated, results (0.010***) reveal that relationship between them is not significant finally hypothesis 5 is supported as per results of path coefficients. From this it can be concluded that excessive interaction of websites visitors on virtual platform creates destruction in the mindset and get got confused results into reluctance from them to book e tickets for visiting tourist’s spots. Similar results were also supported by (Wang, 2013). Finally, as interactivity effect of reciprocity and interactivity via visitor’s satisfaction on e- Loyalty was studied, it was found that there is strong and positive relationship of reciprocity on e-Loyalty (.011***) whereas relationship of interactivity and e-Loyalty is weak and negative (0.02***) results into hypothesis 6(a) is supported whereas hypothesis 6(b) is not supported as per results. Therefore, it is found that path coefficients of all constructs are statically significantly except path of interactivity towards e-loyalty and interactivity effect of (Interactivity*Visitor’s Satisfaction) towards e-loyalty.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Loyalty of customers towards various products and brands in linear pattern is already explained by various researchers like Lee and Hsu, 2013; Anderson, 2011). But non linear pattern of loyalty and its elements is also very interesting to

understand is proposed by researchers like Xueyan Yang & Chad Anderson 2017; Agustin, C. and Singh, J. (2005). So current study made an attempt in same manner to validate the conceptualization of loyalty literature in better manner by considering as specific industry like online tourism in the form of e-loyalty. Linear and Non Linear model of e-Loyalty as proposed shows the significant results for exploration of hidden insights of customer psychology. Regression Coefficient for impact of reciprocity and interactivity for visitor’s satisfaction (0.42) reveals that 42% of the visitor’s satisfaction is explained by these constructs whereas regression coefficient (0.23) for e-loyalty explained 23% of the variance by Reciprocity + Interactivity + Reciprocity*Visitor’s Satisfaction + Interactivity*Visitor’s Satisfaction+ Reciprocity 2(Sq.) + Satisfaction 2(Sq.)+ Visitor’s Satisfaction. The tabulation of same is in Table 4

Table 4

Dependent Construct	Independent Construct	Coefficient	Regression %
Visitor’s Satisfaction (Model I)	Reciprocity	0.46	42%
	Interactivity	0.24	
e-Loyalty (Model II)s	Visitor’s Satisfaction	0.22	0.23
	Visitor’s Satisfaction2(Sq.)	0.11	
	Reciprocity	0.29	
	Reciprocity2(Sq.)	0.21	
	Interactivity	0.01	
	Reciprocity* Visitor’s Satisfaction	0.11	
	Interactivity* Visitor’s Satisfaction	0.02	

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

As Indian Tourism industry strives to capture the attention of domestic as well as International visitors because of the fact that virtual communities like SNS & e-commerce sites have creates a common platform to share their views. So marketing professionals of tourism industry can execute a collective approach to understand the various factors of loyalty so that when they will formulate the various marketing strategies then this current study may facilities them to work effectively. As present study is limited to specific Indian Tourism industry so in future an attempt can be made to generalize the quadratic effect in other industries. Linear and Quadratic relationship of reciprocity. Interactivity and satisfaction, interaction effect on loyalty is based on social

Capital theory is the base for current study but as area of sociology is very vast so in future various other dimensions like culture influence, group cohesiveness etc an also be taken into consideration for understanding determinates of customer loyalty.

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