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Avoiding uncertain buying intentions: Does WebQual matter?

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A B S T R A C T

The purpose of this research is to examine the effect of Web Quality (WebQual) on travelers' online behavioral intentions through examining the mediating role of travelers' perceived trust in the context of travel agencies in Jordan. Based on the extant literature, a conceptual model was developed. Data was collected through a questionnaire survey which was administered to a convenient sample of 300 participants. Structural equation modeling SEM with smart PLS 3 was implemented as an analytical methodology to process data. The results suggest that WebQual factors are significant in predicting travelers' behavioral intentions. Moreover, the results demonstrate that perceived trust has a significant impact on travelers' behavioral intentions and a partial mediation was also found for travelers' perceived trust on the relationship between WebQual and travelers' behavioral intentions. Discussion, conclusions, research limitations and areas for future research are all provided.

1. Introduction

In the era of globalization and technological advancements, companies all over the world are facing colossal challenges to survive and cope with the continuous changes in the business environment (Nusairat et al., 2021). Companies have to rethink their strategies and revisit their plans. The fierce competition entails that companies thrive to deliver high quality products and services. In the service industry, customer satisfaction is significantly influenced by quality improvement (Grace et al., 2021). In today's online business environment, to be able to satisfy customers and compete, service providers are required to offer good quality services through good quality websites that are easy to use, secure and convenient (Chaerudin & Syafarudin, 2021). WebQul refers to the comfort, usability, beauty, and convenience of a website (Loiacono, 2000; Loiacono et al., 2002, 2007; Susanto et al., 2019).

WebQual is a useful tool that can be used to assess the quality of a website based on the users' perception. Within the extant literature, there are many dimensions that could be used to enhance the quality of a website and to enrich users' online experience. Indeed, this research, four WebQual dimensions are examined naming; Information Quality, Interactivity, Ease of Use, and Visual Appeal (Loiacono, 2000; Barnes & Vidgen, 2000; Abdul Aziz et al., 2011; Gao, 2013; Lin et al., 2014; Dapas et al., 2019; Almajali et al., 2021). This research aims to assess the impact of these dimensions on users' perceived trust, thereby, their behavioral intentions in the context of travel agencies in Jordan (Aladwani & Palvia, 2002; Ahn et al., 2007).

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Travel and tourism is a key industry in Jordan that contributes directly to the national income. This sector accounts for 19% of GDP, 8.8% of the total investment, and 5.1% of the total employment in 2016 (Koburtay et al., 2018; Eid et al., 2020). Further, the number of Jordanian traveling abroad for the purpose of tourism in 2018 and 2019 was 1,501,000 and 1,537,338, respectively, with an increase of 2.4%. Additionally, according to The Jordan Society of Tourism and Travel Agents, the number of international visitors entering Jordan in 2019 through Queen Alia International Airport, Aqaba airport, and Amman airport was 2,436,884. According to the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, the monthly tourism receipts from Jordanian residing abroad, Gulf, Arab, and Foreign Countries had increased with a percentage of 4.9, 3.0, 9.6, and 25.2 respectively in 2019. These facts emphasize the significance of the travel and tourism sector in Jordan suggesting a potential opportunity for the advancement of the national economy if managed well. However, this sector is highly competitive and easily affected by surrounding conditions or any turbulence. Thus, to remain competitive, travel agencies must investigate which factors might influence consumers' behavioral intentions. Measuring the quality of a website's user experience is useful in diagnosing interactional problems, and in coming up with a benchmark that indicates which design or features to enhance.

2. Theoretical foundation and hypothesis development

WebQual is a useful tool that enables practitioners and researchers to measure the quality of a website according to consumers' perceptions and their likelihood to revisit the website. The term WebQual has evolved over years starting from WebQual 1.0 to WebQual 4.0 to include many dimensions namely information quality, interactivity, ease of use, and visual appeal. As for information quality, the extant literature suggests that websites' valuable information can stimulate, retain, and attract customers. Websites must provide accurate, reliable, up-to-date and sufficient information including price, description, supplementary services and available offers in addition to the ease of understanding the information and the appropriateness of the presentation of the information (Gao, 2013; Dapas et al., 2019). Moreover, interactivity refers to *"technological attributes of mediated environments that enable reciprocal communication or information exchange, which afford interaction between communication technology and users, or between users through technology"* (Bucy & Tao, 2007, p. 647). Websites must provide interactive functions for consumers such as search boxes, on/off options, and customizable panels; these features help users to personalize or customize the provided information and create a unique experience (Sundar et al., 2015; Zhang & Sundar, 2019; Hammouri & Abu-Shanab, 2020). The extant literature suggests that there is a positive relationship between website interactivity and user enjoyment, attitudes, and behavioral intentions (Yang & Shen, 2018).

Ease of use also known as usability quality relates to the level of simplicity that enables consumers to complete their transactions easily with little or no effort (Kian et al., 2017; Hammouri et al., 2021). It also relates to the number of features and attributes of a website that enable consumers to use the website in an easy way that is free of distress (Rodrigues et al., 2016). Websites must include features that enable consumers to easily navigate, learn and search. Consumers who feel comfortable and not distressed while browsing and searching a website are believed to be more satisfied and have an intention to complete a transaction (Nusairat et al., 2021a). Finally, visual appeal relates to the aesthetics and graphical look of a website that entice consumers and encourage positive behaviors including online browsing and online transactions and lead to a positive experience. It refers to the extent to which consumers believe that the website is pleasing to their eyes and stimulate their desire to navigate it (Varela, et al., 2013). Visually appealing websites can create a pleasing experience through which consumers can enjoy browsing and searching for product or service information and thus have an intention to complete a transaction (Zheng et al., 2019; Wong & Haque, 2021). Therefore, we construct the following hypothesis:

H_1: *There is a significant positive effect of WebQual dimensions on travelers' behavioral intentions*.

Moreover, it is strongly believed that trust is a major factor that influences online behavioral intention. Consumers might not complete a transaction either because of lack of trust or perceived risk (Cho & Sagynov, 2015). Trust in a website is an important antecedent of an online shopping or transaction, it can help consumers to overcome vulnerabilities in an online shopping experience (Savila et al., 2019; Tran & Strutton, 2020). Perceived trust is a crucial factor in building and sustaining long-term relationships, which can boost brand love and online loyalty (Wong & Haque, 2021). Many scholars argue that well-established and good quality websites would positively impact consumers' trust and buying intention (Chang, et al., 2014; Bufquin et al., 2020; Amin et al., 2021). Therefore, we hypothesize:

H_2: *There is a significant positive effect of WebQual dimensions on travelers' perceived trust.*

Buying intention is commonly used to forecast consumers real buying behaviors (Ariffin et al., 2018). It indicates consumers' preparedness to buy and buy-back a product or service online (Mohseni et al., 2018). In this research context, it relates to travelers' preparedness to book a hotel room, a flight ticket, a holiday package or other related services. Unsurprisingly, travelers are more willing to use and book through a well-structured and well-administered website that will satisfy their needs and requirements. Indeed, a poor-quality website would lead to distrust, dissatisfaction, and frustration (Wong et al., 2020). Further, the extant literature has proved that travelers will visit and book from a website that is perceived as reliable, dependable and trustworthy (Abubakar et al., 2017; Wang & Law, 2019). Therefore, we construct the following hypotheses:

H_3: *There is a significant positive effect of travelers' perceived trust on their behavioral intentions.*

H_4: *The relationship between WebQual and travelers' behavioral intentions is mediated by travelers' perceived trust.*

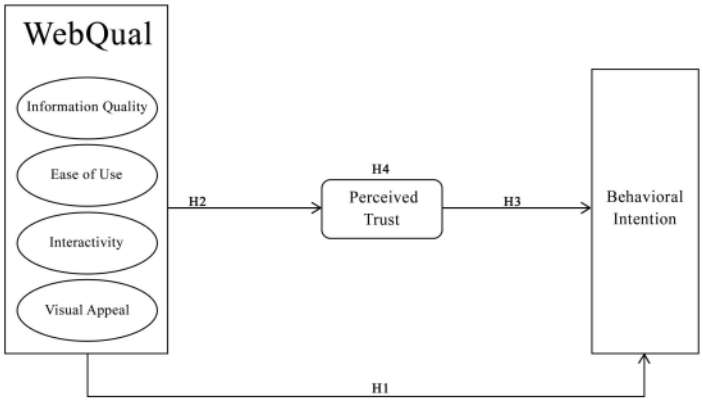

Fig. 1. Research Conceptual Model

3. Methodology

For the purpose of empirically validating the conceptual model and examining the research hypotheses, a self –administered online questionnaire survey was carried out. The research population of this study consists of travelers', who book their tickets from travel agents operating in Jordan over their Websites. A convenient sample of 300 online travel agents' website users was generated, of which 15 incomplete responses were discarded, resulting in 285 valid and complete questionnaires considered for data analysis. Webqual was assessed based on four quality dimensions namely, information quality, ease of use, interactivity, and visual appeal. Such dimensions were measured using previously validated measurements adapted from different previous studies (Sai et al., 2016, Rahayu et al., 2018; Andry et al., 2019; Thinh et al., 2019). Four additional measurement items adapted from Huy et al., (2019) were used to capture travelers' perceived trust. And finally, travelers' behavioral intentions were assessed in terms of travelers' online buying intentions adapted from Nusairat et al. (2021a, 2021b). All measurement items were assessed on a five-point Likert scale. Resulting questionnaire was then translated into Arabic (the primary language of the target research population of this research) using back translation technique (Brislin, 1976). Measurements were further subjected to academic review and scales' reliability test. The measures are deemed valid and reliable with a good Cronbach alpha score, which were as follows; information quality 0.92; ease of use 0,90; interactivity 0.86, visual appeal 0.81, perceived trust 0.85, behavioral intention 0.84. Lastly, the main data analysis was performed using smart PLS 3.3.9. Data analysis procedures and results are shown in the following section.

4. Data Analysis and Results

15 of the 300 returned questionnaires were found to be incomplete and thus excluded. As a result, the total number of usable questionnaires was 285. First, the measurement model was validated, then the model's validity and reliability were evaluated, and finally, the structural model and hypothesis testing results were provided.

4.1 Measurement Model

4.1.1 CFA Model

The six first-order constructs in IQ, EU, IN, VA, PT, and BI, as well as one second-order construct web equal, were measured using 24 items in this study. Furthermore, as shown in Fig. 1, this study used a two-stage approach to analyze the second order construct, as well as confirmatory factor analysis to evaluate the measurement model of the research model.

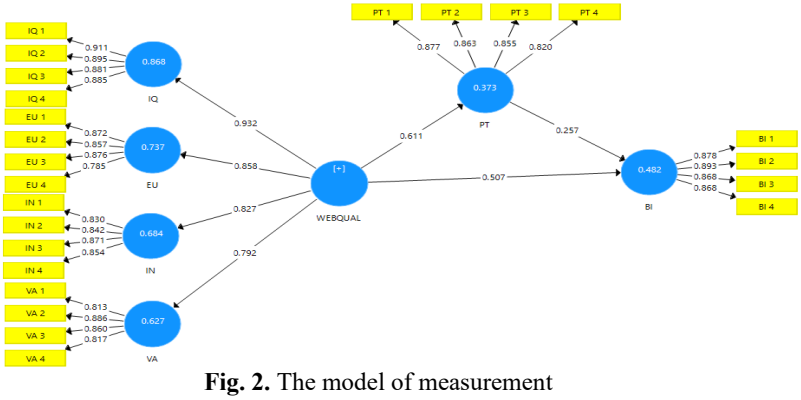

Fig. 2. The model of measurement

4.1.2 Validity of Convergence

Table 1
The Research Model's Convergent Validity Results

Construct	Items	Factor loading	CR	AVE
Information quality (IQ)	IQ 1	0.911	0.935	0.669
	IQ 2	0.895		
	IQ 3	0.881		
	IQ 4	0.885		
Ease of use (EU)	EU 1	0.872	0.959	0.853
	EU 2	0.857		
	EU3	0.876		
	EU 4	0.785		
Interactivity (IN)	IN 1	0.830	0.919	0.790
	IN 2	0.842		
	IN 3	0.871		
	IN 4	0.854		
Perceived trust (PT)	PT 1	0.877	0.910	0.669
	PT 2	0.863		
	PT 3	0. 855		
	PT 4	0.820		
Visual appeal (VA)	VA 1	0.813		
	VA 2	0.866		
	VA 3	0.860		
	VA 4	0.817		
Behavior intention (BI)	BI 1	0.878	0.930	0.690
	BI 2	0.893		
	BI 3	0.868		
	BI 4	0.868		
Second order constructs	OT 5	0.857		
WebQual	IQ	0.932		
	EU	0.858	0.902	0.776
	IN	0.827		
	IN	0.792		

Table 1 shows the results of the confirmatory factor analysis for the measurement models as well as the results of the evaluation of the standardized factor loadings of the model items. As can be seen, the standardized factor loadings were all greater than 0.6, with values ranging from 0.792 to 0.932. Furthermore, the AVE values for all constructs ranged between 0.669 and 0.853, which was higher than Hair et al. (2019) proposed cut-off value of 0.5. Furthermore, the composite reliability values for all constructs ranged between 0.902 and 0.959, which was higher than Hair et al. (2019) recommended value of 0.7.

4.1.3 Validity in discrimination

According to Henseler (2015), HTMT results were ascertained to create the model's discriminant validity.

Table 2
For all constructs, HTMT

	IQ	EU	IN	VA	Webqual	PT	BI
IQ							
EU	0.250						
IN	0.777	0.296					
VA	0.830	0.345	0.788				
Webqual	0.889	0.876	0.652	0.739			
PT	0.714	0.378	0.817	0.654	0540		
BI	0.790	0.299	0.697	0.747	0.661	0.712	

As shown in Table 2, all HTMT values were less than 0.90 and between 0.250 and 0.830. According to Henseler et al. (2015), each latent construct measurement was fully discriminant against the others. Based on the measurement model's convergent and discriminant validity, this study concluded that the measurement scale for evaluating the constructs and their relative items in the CFA model was completely valid and reliable.

4.2 Model of Structure

4.2.1 Constructs' Hypothesized Direct Effects in the Structural Model

Table 3 shows that the R^2 values for PT and BI were 0.482 and 0.373, respectively, indicating that 37.3 percent of PT variations were described by the predictor (WebQual), and 48.2 percent of BI variations were described by their predictors (WebQual).

The R^2 values satisfy the 0.19 cut-off value, as recommended by Chin (1998). The obtained Q^2 value for OPI was 0.257, which is significantly greater than zero. According to Chin (2010), the value is predictive of the model, and the model has an adequate fit level and significant predictive relevance. Furthermore, the VIF values were less than 5, as proposed by Hair et al. (2014), with the following values: 3.467,1.147, and 3.035.

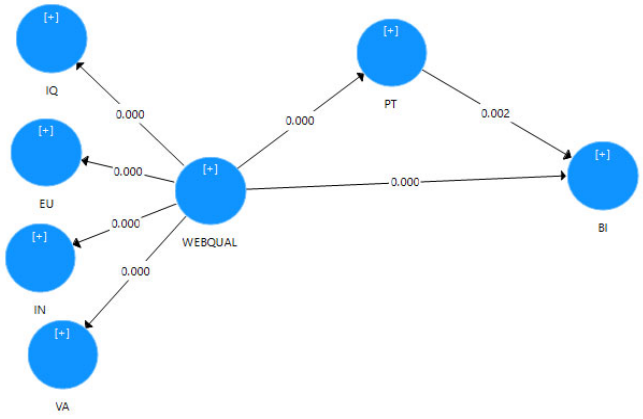

Fig. 3. Structural Model

Table 3
Structural Model with Direct Effects Hypothesis

	Path	St, β	St. d	R^2	Q^2	F^2	VIF	T-value	P-value	Decision
H1	WebQual → BI	0.507	0.087	0.482	0.275	0.051	3.467	5.827	0.000	Accepted
H2	WebQual → PT	0.611	0.096	0.373		0.27	1.224	6.364	0.000	Accepted
H3	PT → BI	0.257	0.045			0.037	3.645	5.711	0.002	Accepted

In BI prediction, the p-values of WebQual and PT were 0.000 and 0.002, respectively. In PT predictive factors, the p-value of WebQual was 0.000. These values demonstrate the possibility of predicting using absolute p-values of 0.01 and 0.05. As a result, the relationships are positive, and hypotheses H1, H2, and H3 were supported.

4.2.2 The constructs' indirect effect

According to the Bootstrapping results in Table 4, there was an indirect effect of WebQual on BI through PT, which was significant at the 0.05 level; = 0.0.356, T-value = 2.870, P-value = 0.000. Meanwhile, the indirect effect of Boot CI Bias Corrected did not straddle a 0 in between, and there is a mediation effect, according to Preacher and Hayes (2004, 2008); LL = 0.040, UL = 0.0133. The mediation effect was statistically significant. Hypothesis H4 was thus supported.

Table 4
Hypotheses Testing Results for Mediation

	PATH SHAPE	St. β	St. d	T values	2.50%	97.50%	p-values	Decision
H4	WebQual → OT → OPI	0.356	0.124	2.870	0.040	0.0133	0.000	Accepted

5. Discussion, Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of this research was to examine the role of WebQual factors on travelers' online behavioral intentions through examining the mediating role of travelers' perceived trust in the context of travel agencies in Jordan. Smart PLS 3.3.9 was used to examine the four proposed research hypotheses. Results indicated that all hypotheses were supported. As for the first hypothesis relating to the effect of WebQual on traveler behavioral intentions, the direct path hypothesis testing results demonstrated that there is significant positive effect of WebQual dimensions on travelers' behavioral intentions. This conforms with the findings of previous empirical studies which revealed similar findings showing that online buying intentions can be significantly predicted by WebQual factors such as ease of use (Cho and Sagynov, 2015; Hermawan, 2022) and visual appeal (Gazal & Rababbah, 2019). Similarly, and consistent with previous empirical findings (e.g., Chang et al., 2014; Jeon et al., 2016; Zia et al., 2022), our research shows the significance of WebQual dimensions in predicting customer perceived trust. Moreover, results suggest a significant positive effect of perceived trust on behavioral intentions. This supports the findings of Cho and Sagynov (2015) and Batbayar et al. (2018) who found that perceived trust has a statically significant effect on buyers' intentions to buy online.

In conclusion, the results presented in this research emphasize the significant role of WebQual factors on travelers' perceived trust and behavioral intentions. It also shows that perceived trust mediates the relationship between WebQual and behavioral intentions of travelers in the context of travel agencies in Jordan. Thus, the results of this research have many imperative practical implications; travel agencies are required to be aware of the significant role of improving the quality of their websites

to better satisfy travelers and thus improve their behavioral intentions. Further, travel agencies must pay more attention to the trustworthiness of their websites as travelers tend to make transactions and book flights and tickets through websites that they trust.

6. Limitations and Future Research Recommendations

This research is not without limitations, for instance the sampling procedure and size might limit the generalizability of the findings. However, this issue could be avoided in future research by recruiting more respondents to generate more reliable results. Moreover, future research could examine the role of emotional appeal on travelers' buying intention. Other mediating variables such as e-satisfaction could be also investigated. Further, the role of demographic factors including; age, gender, and educational level could be examined to understand travelers' intention to use travel agencies' websites.

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