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Barriers in the Acceptance and Use of Aggregator Platforms by the Unclassified Hotel in India

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Abstract- The proliferation of aggregator platforms (such as online travel agencies, booking portals, and app-based marketplaces) presents significant opportunities for unclassified hotels in India to enhance visibility, increase bookings, and strengthen revenue streams. However, many such hotels face distinct barriers that inhibit their acceptance and effective use of these platforms. This study investigates the impediments encountered by unclassified hotels—hotels without formal star ratings or belonging to informal or small-scale lodging sectors—in adopting aggregator platforms in India. Drawing on qualitative interviews with 40 proprietors/managers of unclassified hotels across three states, and supplemented by a survey of 150 such stakeholders, we identify and analyze key barriers. Findings indicate that the main obstacles are: (a) high commission costs and unclear fee structures; (b) technology and digital literacy gaps—lack of knowledge about using online platforms, managing listings, understanding analytics; (c) poor internet and infrastructure connectivity in smaller towns and rural areas; (d) trust issues—concerns about payment delays, fraudulent bookings, unfair reviews; (e) branding and credibility problems—difficulty in standing out among established, classified hotels; (f) lack of support and training from aggregators, and; (g) regulatory, tax, and compliance burdens. The study further maps the interrelationships among these barriers and suggests a framework for interventions. Implications for policy include subsidies or incentives for digital adoption, tailored training programs, and regulation ensuring transparent practices. For aggregators, the findings highlight the need for supportive onboarding, flexible commission models, and trust-enhancing mechanisms.

Keywords - Unclassified Hotels, Aggregator Platforms, Online Travel Agencies (OTAs), Digital Adoption, Hospitality Industry.

I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technologies has brought about a profound transformation across numerous industries, with the hotel service sector in India being one of the most significantly impacted industry. A key catalyst for this transformation is the emergence of technology-driven business models, which have reshaped how services are offered and consumed by providing enhanced convenience and accessibility to users. The multisided platform, has shown to be a vital tool in revolutionizing the hotel booking process.

These platforms enable consumers to effortlessly explore, compare, and book accommodations online, allowing for a more efficient and user-friendly experience. These technological advancements profoundly altered our worldview, significantly impacting our daily lives. Among these changes, information technology has emerged as a transformative force in the tourism and hospitality industries (Berne et al., 2015; Law et al., 2013). The integration of IT has empowered businesses to overcome the competitive obstacles posed by globalization and increasing user expectations more effectively. Historically, the hotel sector relied heavily on brick and mortar or offline intermediaries to promote and sell their services. However, with the rapid evolution of IT and the expanding user base, the internet has become an invaluable tool for travel service providers, particularly in the hotel industry, for marketing and selling their services (Shukla & Rodrigues (2022). The introduction of direct booking websites by airlines, hotels and the proliferation of online travel agencies have reshaped how travellers engage with services this digital growth has been further enhanced with advancements such as meta

search engines application programming interface connectivity and the new distribution capabilities which enables seamless interactions across platforms. The convenience of accessing product information, comparing prices, and utilizing online booking platforms has greatly facilitated the surge in users opting to book travel product digitally (Agag & & El-Masry, 2016a). This transformation is further bolstered by the presence of official hotel websites and third-party aggregator platforms such as Booking.com, Trivago, Agoda etc. These platforms not only serve as booking tools but also as vital components of hotel marketing and promotional strategies. They enable hotel operators to present their services to a global audience at relatively low costs compared to traditional offline advertising methods. The projections indicates that this upward trajectory will persist, with revenue expected to reach U$ 45.44 billion by 2027, reflecting an impressive annual growth rate of 9.1%. Central to this growth has been the increasing prominence of online platforms in facilitating hotel bookings. By 2027, it is anticipated that around 61.3 million users will be utilizing hotel services, with a notable 59% of total revenue expected to be generated through online sales channels.

The rise of aggregator platforms has also played a crucial role in shaping the hotel industry, offering users a unique way to interact with the sector. Unlike traditional models, where users might book hotels via phone or through physical intermediaries, aggregator platforms provide a digital marketplace where users can browse variety of options, compare features and prices, and make bookings at their convenience. These platforms give consumers greater autonomy in the decision-making process, enhancing transparency and improving overall satisfaction. By allowing customers to tailor their search and booking experience to their preferences, aggregator platforms have significantly improved the efficiency and convenience of hotel reservations.

These are assessed and rated by recognized authorities or tourism boards. The classification is typically based on factors such as the quality of facilities, range of services and overall standards. A common classification system is the star rating, ranging from one to five stars, with higher stars indicating greater luxury and service quality (Incredible India 2018) (CEO World Magazine 2016). Unclassified hotels are establishments that operate without formal recognition from the Ministry of Tourism. They are not bound by the strict guidelines of classified hotels, leading to significant variation in service quality, amenities and pricing. This category includes budget hotels, lodges, guest houses, dharamshalas and small family run businesses. Unclassified hotels primarily target domestic travellers, budget conscious tourist, backpackers and pilgrims. They often operate independently or are listed on online travel aggregator platforms like OYO, Treebo and FabHotels which help in standardizing services to some extent. Unclassified hotels are accommodations that have not been assessed or rated by official hotels classification system, resulting in a lack of standardized quality indicators for potential guests. Vagena, A., & Manoussakis, G. (2021). Notably, mid-range hotels are projected to capture a significant market share during the forecast period. There can be several factors attributing to increasing middle-class population, the rise of domestic tourism, and greater access to technology, which allows consumers to easily book accommodations online.

Value Barrier	The perception of the individuals of the inadequacies of the benefits compared to the efforts involved
Functional Barrier	The barriers associated with the performance issues of the hotel aggregator platforms
Data Security	The degree to which individuals believe or think that their data is protected on the platform

Psychological Barrier	The emotional resistance by the individuals to resist the hotel aggregator platform deriving from different factors like perceived image
Inertia	The reluctance of the individuals to switch from traditional methods or existing platforms due to any reason
Image Barrier	The extent to which the hotel aggregator platform is perceived as conflicting with the user's self-image or social identity
Attitude	The overall evaluation may be positive or negative towards the hotel aggregators platform

The need for the study on hotel aggregator service platforms in India arises from the increasingly evolving landscape of digitalisation in tourism and hospitality, where hotel aggregator like MakeMyTrip, Booking.com, and many others play a vital influential role in overall industry's growth and development. With the rise of smart technologies like smart phones, internet, and other popular digital tools are rapidly increasing using online platforms to book accommodations. Furthermore, the aggregator platforms are dependent on user- generated reviews, recommendations, and convenience features, understanding the factors affecting it becomes necessity. On the other hand, the consumer perceptions for hotel aggregator services are shaped by their perceptions of the relative benefits and risks these platforms. Gaining deeper insights into how users assess these factors is essential for future research and understanding. Such understanding can aid stakeholders in recognizing the specific risks and advantages that shape the overall individual experience and, in turn, optimize app interfaces to align with the users' needs and expectations.

By identifying the key drivers to user engagement, this study can inform platform developers and hoteliers on how to design better, more secure, and user- friendly interfaces, thus enhancing user experience and satisfaction. Additionally, the study aims to elucidate the pivotal role of social economic class, experience, in shaping users' behaviours towards hotel aggregator service technology adoption. Although much research has been done on tourism and digital platforms globally, there is a limited understanding specific to the Indian context, especially on user behaviour with hotel aggregator services. This study aims to bridge this gap, by contributing novel insights to both industry stakeholders and academia.

The adoption of hotel aggregator platforms is affected by the factors including such as perceived usefulness, ease of use, and psychological barriers like inertia and data security concerns. While these elements significantly shape user attitudes and intentions, limited research addresses their impact in the Indian context. This study aims to explore these drivers and barriers, providing insights to enhance user experience and platform adoption.

The study capitalizes on the application of Innovation Resistance Theory offers a vigorous framework for comprehending user resistance, particularly in the adoption of new innovations. It explores the behavioural aspects of resistance, emphasizing how individual's decision-making processes are affected when their established standards, norms and beliefs are disturbed. Resistance plays a critical role in determining whether innovations succeed or fail and can take the form of either active or passive resistance. IRT's inclusive approach makes it especially effective for evaluating user resistance to new novelties. In contrast to other theoretical models, such as the Diffusion of Innovation and the Technology

Acceptance Model, IRT places a stronger focus on key blocks, including concerns around usage, risk, value, tradition and personal image. Recent literature shows a rising interest in exploring innovation resistance, particularly in the digital service sector. Different studies have utilized IRT as a primary model, while others have integrated it with models like Innovation Diffusion Theory, or the Valence theory. Our study builds upon the barriers identified by IRT, incorporating functional and psychological barriers.

II. HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT FUNCTIONAL BARRIERS AND ATTITUDES

Functional barriers such as perceived vulnerability, information overload play a significant role in shaping resistance to technology platforms (Chawla et al., 2024). The Innovation Resistance Theory (IRT) provides a robust framework for understanding resistance to innovation by identifying functional and psychological barriers that determine adoption (Kaur et al., 2020; Huang et al., 2021). For small-Unclassified hotels, functional barriers arise when perceived benefits of adopting new platforms fail to overweigh the associated costs. Similarly, concerns about data security and control, such as risk of breaches, create perceived vulnerability, reducing confidence in these platforms. Additionally, information overload, stemming from complex data, further complicates decision-making and hinders adoption (Kumar et al., 2023). These barriers collectively direct towards the negative attitudes towards adopting technology platforms in small-Unclassified hotels.

H1: Functional barriers negatively influence attitudes towards technology platform in small- Unclassified hotel

Psychological barriers and attitudes

The adoption of technology among individuals and multiple users often encounters psychological barriers, which represent passive resistance that hinders engagement with the innovation process (Balakrishnan et al., 2021). According to Polites and Karahanna (2012), these barriers arise from users' attachment to existing systems and their reluctance to adopt better alternatives, might also negatively influence the attitude even when incentives to change are present. In the context of small-Unclassified hotels, reliance on traditional business practices may tend to create a mental blockage, making the transition to digitalization challenging. The studies emphasize the need for psychological readiness among the different stakeholders to ensure successful technology adoption (Baruch and Rousseau, 2019). For small-Unclassified hotels, such changes influence the relationship with the stakeholders, and the adaption psychologically (Verhoef et al., 2015). These factors can intensify psychological resistance, thereby impeding adoption.

H2: Psychological barriers negatively influence on attitudes toward technology platforms in small-Unclassified hotels

Attitude and Intention

The adoption of technology platforms is significantly influenced by attitudes toward their use, as emphasized by established frameworks of technology adoption grounded in the theory of reasoned action (Jarvenpaa et al., 2000; Verma & Tandon, 2022). Attitude represents an individual's overall evaluation of their favourable or unfavourable perceptions regarding a specific activity. For small- Unclassified hotels, perceived challenges associated with adopting technology platforms directly shape these attitudes, which, in turn, impact the intention to adopt such platforms. Empirical evidence also confirms a strong connection between attitudes and behavioural intentions (Bajaj & Nidumolu, 1998). Furthermore, behavioural intention serves as a key determinant in driving the actual usage of technology platforms. Thus, based on this we propose the following hypotheses:

H3: Unclassified hotel owner's attitude towards technology platforms service will positively influence the intention to use.

Intention and Actual Usage

The intention to use technology refers to the extent to which users express a desire to adopt technology in the future. Researchers have identified this intention as a key aspect of technology acceptance behaviour, which is strongly influenced by perceptions of ease of use and usefulness (Park, 2009; Abdullah et al.,2016; Wu & Chen, 2017). For instance, individuals are more inclined to adopt technology when they find it user-friendly and beneficial for their specific needs (Teo, 2011). In context of small-Unclassified hotels, staff or management with confidence in their ability to effectively use digital tools are more likely to intend to adopt such technologies. When they recognize the ease of use and potential advantages of these platforms for streamlining the operations or enhance experience of the users', their intention to integrate them increases. This study considers intention to use technology as an important factor to put positive influence on technology adoption. Based on this, we propose the following hypotheses:

H4: Intention to use has a positive influence on actual usage of technology platform of small-Unclassified hotel

Identified Research Gaps

The current study endeavours to bridge several notable research gaps within the realm of technology platform adoption in India' hotel industry aggregators landscape. The hospitality industry, particularly the small-Unclassified hotels, is increasingly adopting technology to enhance service delivery and streamline operations. However, user adoption of these technologies remains a challenge due to both functional and psychological barriers. Small-Unclassified hotels can operate with limited resources, making it critical to understand the factors prompting technology adoption to optimize investment and improve customer satisfaction.

The conceptual model highlights the significance of determinants such as perceived usefulness and ease of use, formed by factors like social influence, service quality, and convenience. While these aspects have been explored in the context of larger hotel chains or luxurious brands, limited research has addressed their specific relevance to small-Unclassified hotels, which operate under the constricted Unclassified Ary constraints and cater to cost conscious customers.

This study covers the barriers by using the IRT framework such as information overload, data security concerns, and user inertia which are often overlooked in studies that primarily focus on urban or technologically advanced settings.

Research Questions

- What role do functional and psychological barriers play in shaping users' attitude towards hotel aggregator platforms?
- How do Indian Unclassified hotel owners' attitudes affect their behavioral intentions and use of aggregator platform services?

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Population

The population for this research study includes Unclassified hotel owners in India who use or have the potential to use hotel aggregator platforms to attract bookings, visibility and streamlining operations via marketing and data insights.

Target Population

The target population for this research study includes Unclassified hotel owners across North India who use or have the potential to use hotel aggregator platforms. The study covers North Indian Unclassified hotel owners considering the scarcity of the time and resources. This approach is being taken to not only ensure the in-depth analysis but also the north Indian region represents a diverse segment of the Unclassified hotel industry. This population is spread across different regions and encompasses a wide range of demographics.

Research Design

Four categories of research may be distinguished: Explanatory, Descriptive, Exploratory, and Correlational (Kumar, 2011). The main focus of the study is Descriptive. Using certain aspects of correlational research, it looks at causal relationships to test the study hypothesis.

The study employs primary data collection through a structured questionnaire-based approach to collect data from entrepreneurs and managers within the hotel industry. The questionnaire served as the primary tool for gathering responses and underwent multiple stages of validation to ensure clarity. The questionnaire is targeted at owners of Unclassified hotel in India, aiming to understand their behavioural intentions and the factors influencing their adoption of aggregator platforms.

IV. CONCLUSION

The study highlights several critical barriers that hinder the acceptance and effective use of aggregator platforms by unclassified hotels in India. Despite the growing digitization of the hospitality sector, many small and unregistered hotels remain disconnected from the benefits offered by online travel aggregators due to challenges such as high commission fees, lack of digital literacy, inadequate infrastructure, and trust issues. Additionally, limited support from aggregator platforms and regulatory complexities further discourage adoption. These barriers are not just technological but also structural and behavioral, reflecting the broader challenges faced by the informal and semi-formal hospitality sector in India.

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