EMPIRICAL STUDY OF RELATION BETWEEN VARIOUS FACTORS OF ONLINE PORTAL AND TRAVEL AGENCIES' PURCHASE DECISION ON BUSINESS TO BUSINESS (B2B) ONLINE TRAVEL PORTALS IN THAILAND

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Abstract

Understanding customers' behavioral intention has always been a critical issue in the B2B Online Travel Portal business in the tourism industry. Every B2B Online Travel Portal aims to be the leader in the market. As the online booking in the tourism industry is competitive, B2B Online Travel Portal needs to understand their customer's perception to better serve their needs. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify the relation between Various Factors of Online Portal and Travel Agencies' Purchase Decision on B2B Online Travel Portals in Thailand and to find the most significant factor that affects travel agencies purchase decision. In this research, the independent variables are website design quality, information quality, system quality, customer satisfaction, customer trust, word of mouth (WOM), price perception, ease of use, the service quality. Purchase decision represents the dependent variable. There are nine hypotheses in this study. The collection period was within three weeks period between 26 June-13July 2018. A total of 270 respondents were chosen as the accurate target population, consisting of travel agencies' reservations staffs, travel agencies' manager and travel agencies' management who had an experience using B2B Travel Portals in Thailand, based on two screening questions. The statistical program analyzed all of the data. Pearson Correlation Coefficient Test was utilized to test the relationship between each variable. Based on research findings regarding hypotheses testing, the entire null hypotheses (Ho) were rejected. All alternative hypotheses have significant relationship with Purchase Decision. The highest factors affecting relationship is customer satisfaction with(Correlation Value= 0.588), followed by consumer trust (0.572), service quality (0.528), word of mouth (0.515), ease of use (0.507), price perception (0.505), system quality (0.443), information quality (0.402) and lastly website design quality (0.368) has less relationship with Purchase Decision. From the findings of this research, the researcher hopes that the results will useful for B2B Online Travel Portal companies.

Keywords: Website Design Quality, Information Quality, Word of Mouth (WOM), Price Perception.

Introduction

A huge impact on the tourism industry was the evolution of information technology. The extension internet created game-changers in many conditions both in harmful and useful ways to travel agencies in the e-commerce era. As a result, in the 21st century, many travel agencies has been seen a significant adjustment to remain solvent and relevant. One of the biggest impacts on travel agencies has been the rise of the Online Travel Agents (OTAs).

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Customers who want to book a trip do not need to go to the travel agencies anymore because they can book through Online Travel Agents (OTAs) likes Booking.com or Expedia and book an entire trip on their own. Customers are allowed to book tickets and accommodations directly from commercial websites when accommodations and airlines and have also cut off products offer to travel agencies. This has created an unwanted situation for travel companies, which previously was an essential intermediary between the customer and the service they need. Thus, the future of traditional intermediaries or travel agencies is unstable so that survival will become a key challenge. When the market demands increase, it also drives the competition to increase, and it has given rise to new technologies and online businesses especially in Business to Business (B2B) Online Travel Portals for travel agencies solutions. Likewise, customers' demand and purchase behavior have also changed from day to day. Customers have more options such as variety of suppliers. Reservation tools like booking engines for customers are easy to access and are travel experts. The system allows people to book and compare prices, such as trivago.com, through the online interface. Booking tools reduce the cost of travel by reducing call volume and allowing travelers to control their purchasing process.

With all that on offer, the major challenges that travel agencies face are to find the right product, make product customization and development to meet the needs of customers. Therefore, travel agencies' competition and survival will become a challenge in the ASEAN Economics Community (AEC) era. Although the trend of Business to Business (B2B) Online Travel Portals is not new, the evolution of technology has indeed changed. Features, products, and branding have a more digital approach which has replaced traditional method that has low opportunity to connect with customers. Travel agencies managers, leaders and travel consultants become key role players in decision-making. B2B Online Travel Portals become a solution for travel agencies to purchase online travel products for their customers. However, there are several concerns which travel agencies have to deal with, such as, how to determine which B2B Online Travel Portals are right for travel agencies, and which portals should travel agencies consider to use and what is the relationship of travel agencies purchase decision to B2B Online Travel Portal?

Theory of Variables

- **Web Site Design Quality**

An excellent design on e-commerce website will enhance customer trust (Lowry et al., 2008) customer satisfaction (Law and Bai, 2008) and purchasing product encouragement by their commercial website (Kuan et al., 2008; Schmidt et al., 2007).

- **Information Quality**

Information Quality determines the communication technical level, efficiency and effectiveness (Shannon and Weaver, 1949). One of the well-known slogan is "Content is king" and data quality also gathers e-Commerce content issues (Huizingh, 2000). The commercial website should target potential clients and identify customer needs and be monitored regularly (Clyde, 2000).

- **System Quality**

In e-commerce context, system quality refers to applications, flexibility, reliability and system responsiveness (De Lone and McLean, 2003). Based on Halawi and McCarthy's (2007) findings, there is a positive correlation between system quality and satisfaction of users towards intention to use the system.

- **Customer Satisfaction**

Customer satisfaction refers to customer's evaluation of products or services according to their expectations (Oliver, 1980). E-satisfaction was defined as "the satisfaction of customers about their experience with the company prior to purchase experience with an e-commerce company" in the e-commerce environment (Anderson and Srinivasan, 2003).

- **Customer Trust**

Trust has been defined in various forms by different literature. Long-term reliability was described as concerning distribution or trust character in the psychology context, whilst in education sociology, it was defined as trusting institution, and trust regularly refers to confidence, and trusts in social psychology (McKnight and Chervany, 2002).

- **Word of Mouth (WOM)**

Word-of-Mouth (WOM) are influential sources that are delivered by consumers. WOM influences people's behavior as a consumer by changing or confirming opinions, raising awareness, and also build an interest in buying a product/brand (Risselada et al., 2014; Moreover, according to Van den Bulte and Wuyts, 2009) it accelerates purchases or acceptance

- **Price Perception**

Price perceptions play an important role in determining buyer satisfaction and the willingness to return in terms of the uncertain performance, (Jarvenpaa and Todd, 1997; Liu and Arnett, 2000).

- **Ease of Use**

Ease of use can be determined from the recognition of a person on the use of technology to be without effort. (Davis, 1989; Davis, 1993). When purchasing of goods and services are more easily done with simple technology, consumers are likely to use more technology (Venkatesh, 2000).

- **Service Quality**

One of the key factors for quality of service is determining failure or success of e-commerce (Yang, 2001). Parasuraman et al. (1985) agreed with this idea who also defined the quality of service as the "Comparison between customer expectations and perceived service" (Parasuraman et al., 1988) develops the definition of a dedicated service company as a result of comparing the performance of the company to customer's expectation, which is about how companies within the industry should perform. By the definition, this has created a tool to assess multidimensional service quality called SERVQUAL.

- **Purchase Decision**

Consumers decide which product or brand to buy in the buying decision. When consumers are shown a pattern of preference among the brands in the choices during evaluation stage, consumers may be willing to buy the most desired brand (Kotler, 2000). There are two factors that could be intervene between purchase decision and purchase intention (Sheth et. al., 1999), shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Factors intervene between the purchase decision and purchase intention
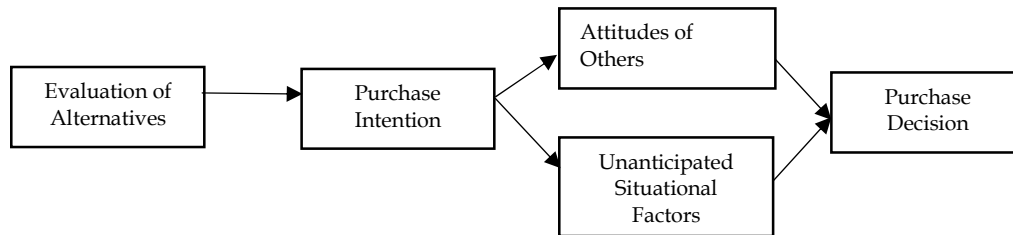

(Kotler, P.,2000)

Related Review Literature

- **The relationship of The Quality of Web Site Design and Purchase Decision**

     In general, Hausman and Siekpe (2009) stated that with regards to website design, research shows that the more media provides a real-world environment, the more it contributes to user engagement. Lee and Lin (2005) have also found that positive effect on overall customer satisfaction and perceived quality of service come from website design.

- **The relationship of Information Quality, System Quality and Purchase Decision**

     Consumers' perceptions about information quality are essential for social commerce when they do quality management (Ellahi and Bokhari, 2013). According to Lin (2007) the two-dimensional website quality cares System quality and Information quality.

- **The relationship between Customer Satisfaction and Purchase Decision**

     Increased product offerings have significantly boosted customer satisfaction. Besides, there are positive correlation between resale opportunities and customer satisfaction (Koivumaki et al., 2000).

- **The relationship between Customer Trust and Purchase Decision**

     Jacobs (1997); Bélanger et al. (2002) and Muysken (1998) found that the main factors that influence prospective customers are the trust and experience of the first buyer on the specified website.

- **The relationship of Word of Mouth (WOM) and Purchase Decision**

     Lake (2009) considered oral quotes as a significant success for organizations and also adding that psychologically, we as consumers do not rely very well on advertising, but we believe in people talking about the goods.

- **The relationship of Price Perception and Purchase Decision**

     Price is best determined by the buyer, including the cost of moving and emotional costs (Kenesei, 2003). However, Mirabi et al. (2015) said that consumer satisfaction is also strongly influenced by direct price perceptions and indirect costs.

- **The relationship of Ease of use and Purchase Decision**

     It is becoming more complex when web-based technology is increasing the structure of the site. According to Van der Heijden (2004) ease of use is a hedonic-oriented factor. In terms of online shopping, perceived ease of use is recognized by customers as the ability to interact with their e-commerce site more easily.

- **The relationship of Service Quality and Purchase Decision**

     Sweeney et al. (1997) had studied the influence of quality retail services on the perceived value and intention to purchase product in retail stores. The researcher found that a sales person's knowledge had a significant impact on the perceived quality of the product and value. It was also found that the perception of service quality has a strong and positive influence on intention to purchase.

Previous Study

Karimi (2013) studied "a purchase decision-making process model of online consumers and its influential factor a cross-sector analysis". The results reveal that the process influenced both individual and market-level. The individual-level analysis shows that the synthesized model has increased in descriptive power. Purchasing decision has been highly complex with large number of iterations. For Market-level, banking websites are preliminarily for visiting and using online banking services.

Wen (2009) studied "a purchase decision-making process model of online consumers and its influential factor a cross-sector analysis". The result found that the factors, which are antecedents to customers online purchase intention, included three domains, consumer attitude perception, consumer trust on web-designed and consumer satisfaction have a direct relationship toward customer intention and online travel purchasing decisions of customers.

Firdausy and Idawati (2017) studied "Effects of Service Quality, Price and Promotion on Customers' Purchase Decision of Traveloka Online Airline Tickets in Jakarta, Indonesia". The result reveals that service quality and airline ticket price have positive and significant effects on purchase decision made by the Traveloka's customers.

Prediction

- **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework explores the relationship between each variable in logical form. The researcher reformed the conceptual framework based on four major research models to modify the conceptual framework for this study.

The First theoretical model the researcher used to build the conceptual framework is from the study "Factors Affecting the Online Travel Buying Decision" which was developed by Wen (2009). The purpose of which is to know the consequence of customer's attitude, quality of website design, system and service quality, information, customer satisfaction, and consumer trust on purchase intention. The results showed that there is a strong support for the websites design where most of the customers were concerned with three dimensions, which are information quality, service quality, and system quality.

**Figure 2: A conceptual research framework of
"Factors affecting the online travel buying decision".**

Source: (Wen,2012)

The Second theoretical model used by the researcher to construct the conceptual framework is the entitled "Website Quality and Consumer Online Purchase Intention of Air Ticket" which was developed by Fahzi, Sam and Tahir (2009). The study aims to investigate how airline service providers reduce their operating cost. The study revealed that the usability, website design, information quality, trust, and empathy have positive relationship towards online purchase intention. The research reinforces the need to improve the quality of websites, trust, and empathy in order to increase online purchase intention.

Figure 3: A conceptual research framework of
"Website Quality and Consumer Online Purchase Intention of Air Ticket".
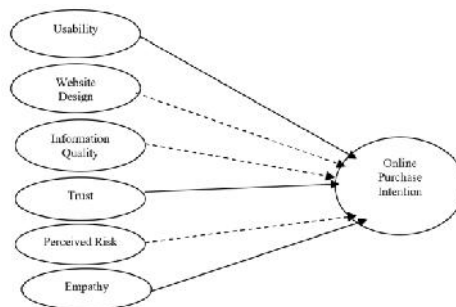
Source:(Fahzi, Sam and Tahir, 2009)

The third theoretical model which the researcher used to build the conceptual framework is "Adoption of travel e-shopping in the UK." This research aimed to examine consumers' adoption of internet shopping in the of UK travel services and to identify the internet shopper's profile and their previous shopping experiences for travel services. The study revealed that previous technology acceptance and disseminated research, and the significant works based on the TAM, could serve as a consumer foundation research for the adoption of Internet-related activities. Moreover, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the structure that was found in this research, largely corresponds to the general characteristics of the past technology acceptance model research.

**Figure 4: A conceptual research framework of "Adoption of travel e-shopping in the UK"**
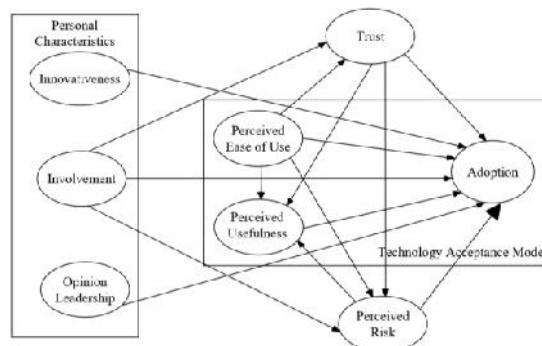
Source: (Kamarulzaman, 2007)

The fourth theoretical model which the researcher used to build the conceptual framework is from the study "Identifying Key Factors Affecting Consumer Purchase Behavior in an Online Shopping Context" which was developed by Park and Kim (2003). They intended to know the consequence of customer's information processing style, shopping patterns, storefront preference, and other related variables, for an insight concerning development in

order to have more attractive, user-friendly, as well as, successful internet stores. The research found that the key factors affected user interface quality; product and service information quality, security perception and site awareness have a significant relationship toward customer's site commitment and purchase decision on online shopping.

Figure 5: A conceptual research framework of

"Identifying key factors affecting consumer purchase behavior in an online shopping context".
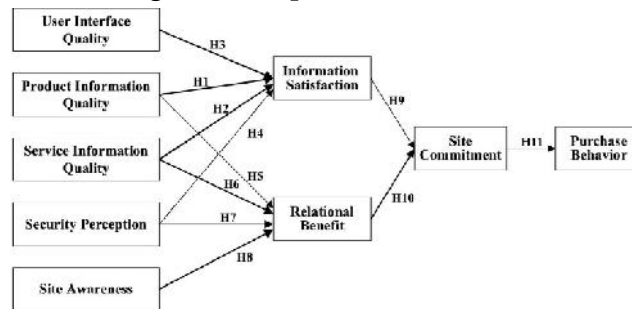
Source: (Park and Kim, 2003)

Conceptual Framework

The researcher intentionally selects the above frameworks by gathering and examining the related variables information to outline the conceptual framework. The researcher applied nine independent variables, which includes: Web Site Design Quality, System Quality, Information Quality, Ease of Use, Price Perception, Service Quality, Consumer Trust, Customer Satisfaction, Word of Mouth (WOM); and Purchase Decision as dependent variable.

Figure 6: The modified conceptual framework of "Empirical Study of Relation between Various Factors of Online Portal and Travel Agencies' Purchase Decision on Business to Business (B2B) Online Travel Portals in Thailand"
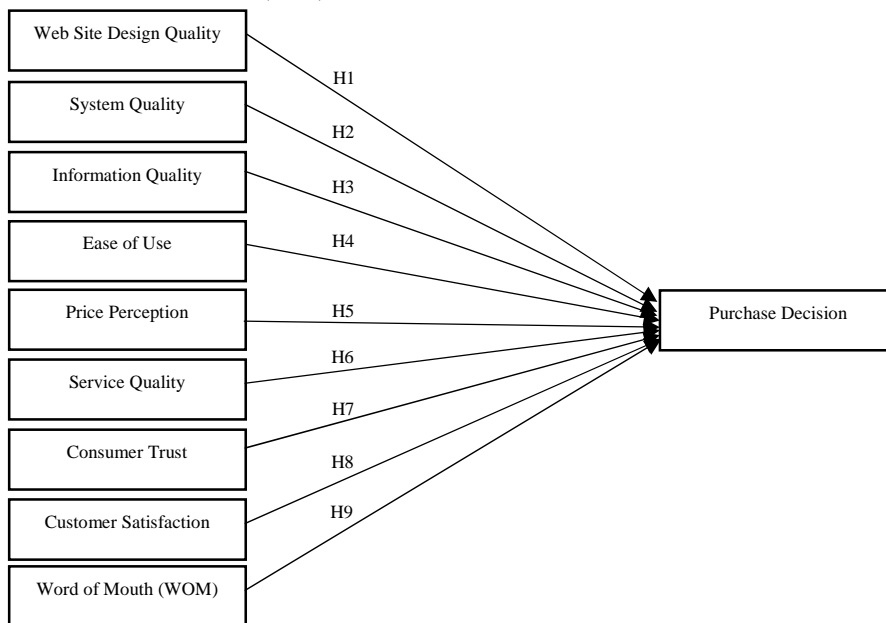
Research Hypothesis

The nine hypotheses formulated based on the developed conceptual framework:

H_{1o}:   Web Site Design Quality has no significant relationship with Purchase Decision.

H_{1a}:   Web Site Design Quality has a significant relationship with Purchase Decision.

H_{2o}:   System Quality has no significant relationship with Purchase Decision.

H_{2a}:   System Quality has a significant relationship with Purchase Decision.

H_{3o}:   Information Quality has no significant relationship with Purchase Decision.

H_{3a}:   Information Quality has a significant relationship with Purchase Decision.

H_{4o}:   Ease of Use has no significant relationship with Purchase Decision.

H_{4a}:   Ease of Use has a significant relationship with Purchase Decision.

H_{5o}:   Price Perception has no significant relationship with Purchase Decision.

H_{5a}:   Price Perception has a significant relationship with Purchase Decision.

H_{6o}:   Service Quality has no significant relationship with Purchase Decision.

H_{6a}:   Service Quality has a significant relationship with Purchase Decision.

H_{7o}:   Consumer Trust has no significant relationship with Purchase Decision.

H_{7a}:   Consumer Trust has a significant relationship with Purchase Decision.

H_{8o}:   Customer Satisfaction has no significant relationship with Purchase Decision.

H_{8a}:   Customer Satisfaction has a significant relationship with Purchase Decision.

H_{9o}:   Word of Mouth (WOM) has no significant relationship with Purchase Decision.

H_{9a}:   Word of Mouth (WOM) has a significant relationship with Purchase Decision.

Research Methodology

This is a quantitative research and there are two types of analysis appropriate for this study, namely, Cronbach's Alpha, to test the reliability of questionnaire by conducting the pilot test with 40 samples, and the descriptive research method used to gather and analyze the demographics from the target respondents. Zikmund (2003) indicated that descriptive determines the answers to who, what, when, where and how questions.

Target Population

The target population is travel agencies in Thailand. However, the researcher focused only on travel agencies' reservations staffs, managers or management personnel, who had an experienced of using Business to Business (B2B) Online Travel Portals in Thailand only.

Sampling Units

The sampling unit selected for this research are travel agencies in Thailand particularly reservations staffs, managers or management personnel who had an experienced using Business to Business (B2B) Online Travel Portals in Thailand. According to Hair et al. (2007), they defined that sampling units are elements or objects available and selected from the population for research.

Sample Size

Kotler (2000) indicated that the size of the sample is the appropriate number of people who should be surveyed and which can represent the target group. According to the Thai Travel Agents Association, the total travel agents registered and recognized are 826 members (Thai Travel Agents Association, 2018). Thus, the sample size of this study was 265 respondents. However, based on previous studies and in order to reduce the error, the researcher distributed 270 questionnaires for conducting this study.

Sampling Procedure

The researcher applied the non-probability for the sampling procedure, by using the following technique:

Convenience Sampling

The convenience sampling is the procedure used to gather information from elements most convenient for the researcher Sekaran and Bougie (2013). The researcher distributed the questionnaires directly to travel agencies in Thailand for 270 respondents (travel agencies reservations staffs, managers or management personnel) who are free and willing to answer the questionnaires in the form of Google form sent out through line application and email.

Research Instruments and Questionnaire

The questionnaires are separated into 12 parts, there are a total of 53 questions. The first part consists of screening information. Parts 2-11 are the questions for the independent variable and dependent variables where the researcher used the five-point Likert scale as a research technique. On the last part is demographic data. Details of the questionnaire are as the follows:

Screening Question

This part applied a simple-dichotomy (dichotomous) question. According to Zikmund et al. (2013) a simple-dichotomy (dichotomous) question is a question where respondents can be able to choose only one of two options.

- Have you ever used Business to Business (B2B) Online Travel Portal before?
    - Yes (please continue the questionnaire)
    - No (Stop here, thank you for your time)

An answer can be only "Yes" or "No". If the answer is "No", the respondents can stop doing the rest of the questionnaire. If the respondents answer "Yes", the respondents are directed to continue with the questionnaires. Hence, those who answered "Yes" will be qualified respondents for this research.

Variable Questionnaire

The Likert scale is the most commonly used format for responding to closed-ended queries (Weathington et al., 2012). Therefore, from Parts 2-1, 1 the researcher applied a five-point Likert scale with the following the statistical levels:

1 = Strongly disagree   2 = Disagree   3 = Moderate   4 = Agree   5 = Strongly agree

Demographic Personal Information Questions

Personal information about gender, age, income, education, and occupation is to identify the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Pretests

The researcher used 40 sampling size for the pre-test. The stronger the correlations, the higher the reliability is, and the weaker the correlations it becomes unreliable Hair et al. (2003).

Collection of Data and Gather Procedures

Primary data and secondary data are two main sources of data (Polonsky and Waller, 2015). The researcher applied both primary data and secondary data in this study.

The researcher distributed 270 questionnaires directly to travel agencies reservations staffs, managers, as well as management people who are located in Thailand. As of the researcher is the Key Account Manager for these travel agencies, therefore, he has access to the travel agencies' contact and database details, including contact persons, telephone numbers, line application, emails and even acquaintances. Therefore, the primary data used in this

research are the data which were collected and gathered these valued resources and which also ensured that all respondents are qualified before sending out the questionnaire. The researcher created the questionnaire using Google form and distributed through line application and emails to convenience sampling. The collection period was within 3 weeks period between 26th June to 13th July, 2018.

Statistical Treatment of Data

Once the data collection stage is completed, the data is then analyzed using the statistical programming order to do a descriptive analysis and inferential analysis. The program helps the researcher to interpret the result of all problems and hypothesis.

Descriptive Analysis

The researcher used the Descriptive analysis for interpreting data gathered. Zikmund et al. (2013) stated that descriptive analysis helps to convert raw data to describe the basic characteristics, such as distribution, variability, and intermediate trend.

Inferential Analysis

Inferential analysis is a statistical model that is designed to infer or judge based on the sample from the population, Zikmund (2003). Inferential analysis is an instrument to find the relationship between variables (Creswell, 2003). The researcher determines the hypotheses test by using Pearson correlation analysis in this study.

Pearson Correlation Analysis

The researcher uses Pearson Correlation analysis to do 9 hypotheses testing in this study.

The Pearson correlation coefficient rule for hypothesis testing is that the null hypothesis (Ho) is rejected when the P-value (significance of the correlation) is less than the value of the alpha. Or another meaning is that, the Ha is accepted.

Summary of Demographic Factors

The researcher collected data through a questionnaire survey of 270 respondents from travel agencies reservations staffs, managers, and management people who are located in Thailand. The collection period was within a three week period were between 26 June- 13 July 2018, based on two screening questions.

The highest percentage of respondents' gender was 72.2% (195), which is female. The results also showed that 43.0% (116) of respondents are between 36-45 years old, whilst the highest percentage of respondents' monthly income was 43.3% (117), which is between 20,001-40,000 Baht. Most of the respondents at 73.7 % (199) are Bachelor's Degree holders. Regarding the respondents' occupation, the highest percentage was 70.7% (191), which are the private Travel Agencies company employees.

Summary of Demographic Factors Analysis

Demographic Factors		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	195	72.2%
Age	36-45	116	43.0%
Income Level	20,001-40,000	117	43.3%
Education Level	Bachelor's Degree	199	73.7%
Occupation	Private Travel Agencies Company Employee	191	70.7%

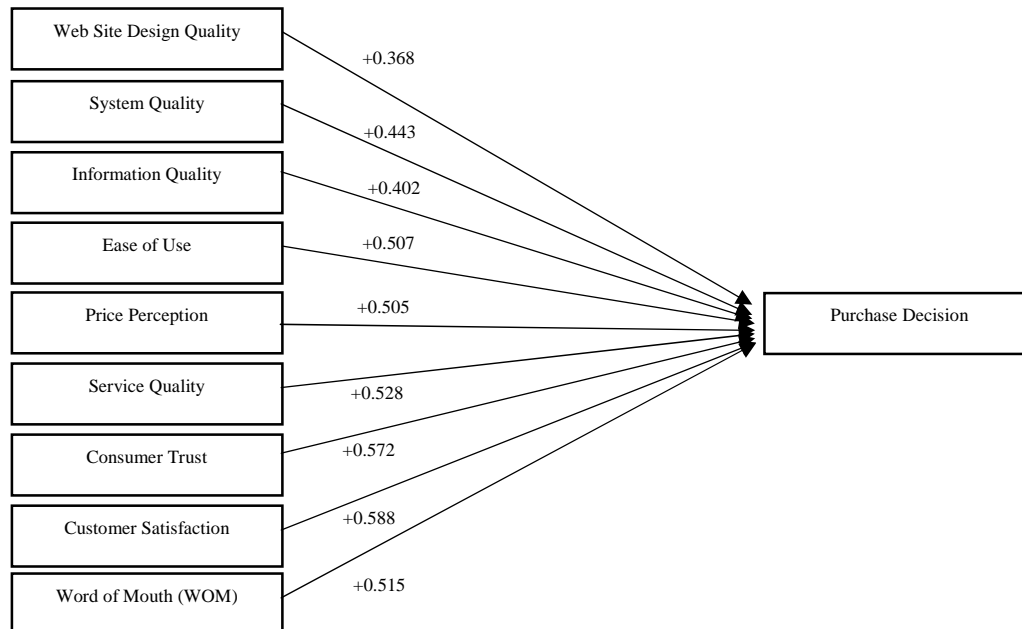**The Results of Hypotheses Testing with Correlation Value**

Figure 7 Shows that all alternative hypotheses has a significant relationship with Purchase Decision. The highest factors affecting relationship is customer satisfaction with(*Correlation Value* = 0.588), followed by consumer trust (0.572), service quality (0.528), word of mouth (0.515), ease of use (0.507), price perception (0.505), system quality (0.443), information quality (0.402) and lastly website design quality (0.368) has less relationship with Purchase Decision.

Discussion and Conclusion

Researcher found from the demographic factors that: most of the travel agencies staff/personnel/managers were female aged between 36-45 years old, and work at private travel agencies company with monthly income between 20,001 and 40,000 baht and most of them had Bachelor's Degree. Thus, Business to Business (B2B) Online Travel Portals may focus on this group of clients to enhance behavioral intention in terms of repurchase decision.

- **Recommendation**

The findings of this study had enriched and explained about B2B Online Travel Portals marketing strategy and the opportunities, by understanding the critical factors affecting travel agencies behavioral intention in terms of the purchase decision. These findings can be of benefit to be used as a framework in order for Business to Business (B2B) Online Travel Portals better understand their customers' behaviors and what are the key factors that drive customers in terms of the purchase decision and can also adapt to their key success factors. Additionally, B2B Online Travel Portals can be applied using the right execution planning and marketing strategy to utmost operating company efficiency as well as help B2B Online Travel Portals company promote their products in the most effective way and this would enable them to reach their target performance and enhance their market share and revenue.

- **Managerial Implications**

In the sense that most of the recommendations are mostly market-oriented, and the result is aligned with customer satisfaction and trust, therefore, improving these two aspects should be prioritized in managerial implications as providing a healthy relationship towards the purchase decision. The business atmosphere requires business people to approach customers intensively. By establishing and developing the talented business unit to be responsible only for key customer accounts will make customer being much more focused than before. Customers will be assisted efficiently and effectively in terms of knowledge and quality of service. Apart from that, when talented business units are formed, employees should be more motivated in the meaningful way of decentralized decision making. When employees or self-motivated business units can do well, customer satisfaction and trust can be pursued as well. Therefore, the purchase decision is likely to be better predictable.

- **Further Study**

Along with the study, these variables should be expanded and focused on the international market and not from the Thai market only because the characteristics of the market might be varied across regions. Therefore, applying this model might be interesting for the researcher to conduct further. Moreover, study towards the top three factors having strong relationship purchase decision, which includes customer satisfaction, customer trust, and service quality in an in-depth and detailed analysis might be considered as the researcher will know how to improve each independent variable to have stronger relationship. Additionally, this model might be applied with other e-commerce businesses platform as most of the industry is now transformed to the e-commerce era already such as retailing, financial, logistics business.

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