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Looking into the
Influence of E-
servicescape Conceptual
Model in Bangladeshi
online travel industry and
understanding the
customer influence in
building trust among
customers

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Abstract

The influence of the classic e-servicescape conceptual model in the context of "Flight expert", the first fully functional OTA in Bangladesh has been scarcely explored in existing e-servicescape literature. In addition to this, social factors in e-servicescape conceptual model are another thing that is less studied in social science. The objective of this study was to look into the influence of the standard e-servicescape conceptual model, together with the inclusion of social aspects, within the specific context of Flight Expert in Bangladesh. This objective was accomplished through the formulation of one specific research questions.

In order to explore the research question, semi-structured interviews were taken from the direct customer of Flight expert to understand the context in detail. Afterwards, similarities and common links were explored to find the connection between e-servicescape conceptual model and the first Bangladeshi OTA, Flight expert. Other than that, this research tried to explore the same model with an added social factor of customer influence which includes CRS and e-WOM and tried to find if it has any influence on the targeted sample. The outcomes of this qualitative research reveals that the results of the research are strongly supported by the primary assumption.

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Looking into the Influence of E-servicescape Conceptual Model in Bangladeshi online travel industry and understanding the customer influence in building trust among customers

1 Introduction:

1.1 Background:

Servicescape has a big role to play in the service industry. “Servicescape” is one of the most popular terms in service industries. The term physical environment which means the physical setting of a service was first proposed by Baker (1987), and is presented in align with the consumers in terms with ambient, design and social factors. In contrast to this viewpoint, Bitner (1992) introduced the concept of "Servicescape," which pertains to the environmental factors such as surrounding conditions, design, logos, symbols, and artifacts. Surprisingly, at this time the offline physical settings was discussed a lot but at the same time the online background was ignored (Koernig 2003). Similar to the concept of servicescape within the realm of physical service providers, the online servicescape holds significant importance within the digital service business. Various companies develop digital platforms such as websites, mobile applications, and social media platforms in order to achieve their digital objectives.

Just like other service industry, tourism sector started offering their services through online platforms. We have witnessed the development of travel agencies throughout the years, and there are now several types of travel firms. Travel agencies range from conventional travel agencies to specialized agencies, medical travel agencies, and now online businesses(Mokoena 2023). When the online business industry emerged, it had become a very strong marketing medium for different companies as more and more customers started buying products and service online such as tourisms, staycations and air tickets, (e-marketer, 2015). internet travel agencies, also known as third-party booking sites, are the primary driving force behind this new economic climate, which has seen a progressive shift away from traditional booking channels and toward internet distributions in the tourist industry(Maia, Lunardi et al. 2022).

1.2 Emergence of Online Tourism industry:

The history of online travel industry is not new. The online travel industry was born from the convergence of technological advancements and changes in consumer behavior. In the 1960s, airlines initiated the development of computer reservation systems (CRS), including the SABRE system of American Airlines. These systems increased efficiency in inventory management and booking operations (Copeland and McKenney 1988). In the 1990s, the internet underwent a commercialization process, which led to the establishment of online travel agencies (OTAs) such as Priceline (established in 1997) and Expedia (established in 1996). These were the pioneers of a whole new trillion-dollar industry. These platforms have revolutionized the travel industry by providing consumers with direct access to the purchase of flights, hotels, and rental vehicles, eliminating the necessity for traditional travel agents (Law, Leung et al. 2004). Online travel is well established in industrialized nations and developing nations are not far behind. The e-market is currently modest but has enormous promise in developing nations like Brazil (Maia, Lunardi et al. 2022). Traveltech companies are really popular around the globe. For example, in China, there multiple “online travel agencies” like “Ctrip.com”, “Qunar.com” who allow their customers to reserve their hotel rooms online (Huang, Li et al. 2017). However, findings from research done in developed economies may not necessarily apply to those in emerging ones (Maia, Lunardi et al. 2022).

1.3 The initial phase of online travel agencies (OTA) in the world:

Travelweb, founded in 1994, was the first online travel agency (OTA) and was developed by a collaboration of well-known hotel brands like Hilton, Hyatt, Marriott, and Sheraton. Prior to this, the entire travel business depended on conventional brick and mortar travel agents. Travelweb was the first to introduce the idea of direct online bookings, which allowed consumers to make hotel room reservations directly through the internet (Eom 2005). In the early 1990s, the travel industry was predominantly controlled by conventional travel agencies and direct reservations made with airlines and hotels. With the advent of the internet, a profound transformation occurred in every aspect of society. The advent of the internet revolutionized the process of trip planning and booking, fundamentally altering the way services were advertised and purchased. The advent of Travelweb marked a substantial transition towards digitalization in the travel industry. The

emergence of the internet has allowed customers to easily obtain travel information and make service reservations from the comfort of their own homes, thereby expanding the client base. The emergence of internet booking has reduced the need for physical travel agencies, leading to lower operational costs for service providers and perhaps offering more cost-effective travel options for customers. The internet had a substantial impact in this case and completely altered the scenario. In the early 1990s, the internet had a restricted infrastructure and user familiarity, resulting in challenges with website functionality and user experience. In addition, the newness of online transactions and the significant concerns around data security and privacy served as deterrents for some consumers, dissuading them from making online bookings. In the early 2000s, the rise of meta-search engines such as Kayak (founded in 2004) and aggregator sites enhanced the customer experience by allowing them to compare multiple online travel agencies (OTAs). The introduction of mobile technology brought about a significant transformation in the sector, improving the ease of access and comfort in travel planning and booking (Buhalis and Law 2008).

1.4 The trust issues with online platforms in third world countries:

The adoption of e-commerce in a number of third-world countries is significantly impeded by trust issues with online platforms. These challenges are frequently the result of a combination of socio-economic, infrastructural, and cultural factors that contribute to consumer skepticism. The adoption of online platforms in third-world countries is significantly influenced by trust. A substantial number of consumers in developing regions are still hesitant to engage in e-commerce due to a variety of trust-related concerns, despite the rapid expansion of internet penetration.

The dread of online fraud and cybercrime is a significant concern, particularly in regions with insufficient cybersecurity infrastructures. Consumers in third-world countries frequently express concern regarding the security of their financial and confidential information, which hinders the completion of online transactions. The inadequate enforcement of data protection laws further exacerbates this lack of trust, leaving consumers susceptible to fraudulent schemes and identity theft (Beldad, De Jong et al. 2010). Additionally, there are substantial reservations regarding the product's authenticity and quality. Consumers in developing countries have developed a

widespread sense of skepticism as a result of the frequent appearance of counterfeit or substandard products on e-commerce platforms. As a result of the absence of stringent regulatory oversight, consumers frequently develop a lack of confidence in the quality of the products they purchase online, which results in a preference for traditional, in-person purchasing experiences (Sharma, Aakash et al. 2019). Furthermore, the trust deficit is further exacerbated by logistical challenges, including unreliable delivery services and deficient return policies. Consumer confidence in online platforms is undermined by infrastructure deficiencies in a number of third-world countries, resulting in product damage, delays, and missing shipments. In addition, consumers are discouraged from participating in e-commerce due to the complexity of resolving issues, which is further exacerbated by ambiguous return policies and inadequate customer service. Trust issues are also influenced by cultural factors. The cultural predilection for tangible exchanges and face-to-face interactions in a multitude of developing regions impedes their trust in online transactions. Consumers frequently prefer traditional purchasing methods because they allow them to interact directly with merchants and physically inspect products (Gefen, Karahanna et al. 2003).

The online travel sector emerged at a later stage in poorer countries. As a third world country, the emergence of online travel agencies (OTAs) in Bangladesh is a relatively recent phenomenon, reflecting broader worldwide trends of digitalization and shifts in customer preferences. The main factors driving this transformation are the growing prevalence of internet usage, the broad acceptance of smartphones, and the escalating demand for efficient transportation alternatives. Due to the swift growth of internet access, particularly in urban regions, the tourism industry was well-positioned for a digital revolution (Rahman 2018). However, the customers still find it difficult to jump on to this global bandwagon of purchasing online frequently. Not only in the travel industry but also in other industries, customer still feel skeptical about this new online culture because of multiple reasons.

1.5 Problematization:

The rapid growth of the online travel industry has completely transformed how consumers plan and book their travel arrangements. While online platforms offer convenience and accessibility, the intangible nature of e-services poses significant challenges in terms of consumer perception of risk and trust. (Kim, Chung et al. 2011). By impersonating legitimate travel services, a number of dishonest tourism companies prey on unaware consumers by operating “legitimate websites” and offer travel confirmations and itineraries, only for a gullible customer to discover at the airport or the location that it was all a dream(Mokoena 2023).

The e-commerce industry in the third world country is quite different from the rest of the world. For example, the e-commerce industry in Bangladesh is really different from the other parts of the world. Bangladeshi customers have massive trust issues in purchasing online. Digital shopping can be extremely frightening, and many customers are hesitant to divulge personal information because they don't trust the digital exchange of goods and services(Mokoena 2023). In the recent past, Bangladeshi people faced a big amount of harassment in the digital service industry. In 2020, there was a new e-commerce platform named “Evaly” came into the business in Bangladesh. Evaly grew by taking money from customers in exchange for a promise to deliver products at a later time that was continually postponed, keeping hundreds of thousands of customers waiting while hundreds of sellers who sold products to the platform on credit were left without the money they were owed (The Business Standard 2021). Evaly provided customers a variety of profitable bargains, with “cash back” incentives that can reach 100% to 150%. One can receive the identical amount or even more if he or she purchases things worth Tk 100.

This Bangladeshi e-commerce company thus lured thousands of customers with these absolutely amazing bargains. Some are even profitable, but the majority are still waiting for the big money (Prothom Alo English 2020). Rhetoric about altering people's lives and the online shopping landscape – the entire thing as was to be expected, fell apart as soon as a central bank examination in June of this year found that Evaly owed over Tk500 crore (almost half a billion USD) to clients and vendors and that the company had not outlined any plan to pay those debts (The Business Standard 2021). As a result, the Bangladeshi people started having more trust issues with this online purchase that was there already.

In contrast to that, still having the trust issues out there, globally the online purchase is increasing rapidly in the last five years and Customer review system and e-WOM (Electronic word of mouth) has a big role to play behind building trust among general customers. eWOM, an abbreviation for electronic word-of-mouth, refers to both positive and negative words made by potential, existing, or past consumers about a product or company. The internet is used to distribute these messages to a diverse audience of individuals and organizations(Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner et al. 2004). Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) exerts a significant impact on customer behavior within the online travel industry around the world due to its wide-ranging dissemination and perceived trustworthiness. According to a study conducted by Litvin, Goldsmith et al. (2008), good electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has the ability to enhance the reputation of travel services and destinations, reduce perceived risks, and instill confidence in potential clients. Furthermore, customer reviews are a specific form of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) that provide detailed feedback about a consumer's experience with a service or product. Online travel businesses heavily rely on reviews as a vital source of information for potential buyers (Park, Lee et al. 2007). Accumulating a substantial quantity of positive ratings might mitigate the perceived uncertainties associated with purchasing intangible services, such as making travel reservations. The reason for this is that favorable assessments offer social proof and reduce uncertainty(Filieri 2015).

The digital environment in which service interactions occur is the focus of the e-servicescape conceptual model, which is derived from the conventional servicescape concept (Hopkins, Grove et al. 2009). This model actually discusses the factors that foster trust among online consumers, thereby encouraging them to make online purchases. The e-servicescape encompasses a variety of elements within the online travel sector, including the social component, website design, functionality, and information quality(Harris and Goode 2010). Consumer perceptions, decision-making processes, and ultimately their trust and willingness to make a purchase are significantly influenced by the digital environment.

However, the traditional e-servicescape conceptual model ignores these two already discussed social factors, e-WOM and “Customer Reviews” which plays a big role in building trust and eventually creates the purchase intention among customers. Apart from the traditional model, these social factors can be really crucial in developing countries like Bangladesh where customers have massive trust issues towards online platforms.

1.6 Aim of the research:

The aim of this research is evaluating if e-servicescape conceptual model is enough in building trust among customers or there are other social factors like customer influence that play a significant role too, in the context of Bangladeshi online travel industry:

Classic e-servicescape conceptual model which was proposed by Harris and Goode (2010), was hardly explored in e-servicescape study and more specifically in the context OTA. The e-servicescape conceptual model has three factors that influences the purchase intention of a customer by building trust. Aesthetic appeal of the website, layout and functionality of the platform and financial security, these are the three things that build trust among customers and leads them to purchase something from an online platform eventually

In terms of information exchange and e-commerce, the internet has altered the way that the tourism business looks. Travel-related products make up the largest category of goods and services purchased online(Mokoena 2023). Social media has altered the promotion landscape in the travel and tourism sector. Today, the majority of consumers base their travel decisions on social media shares and reviews, making online customer service an essential component of developing a positive brand reputation (Talukder and Bhuiyan 2020). However, the scenario of the travel industry is not same everywhere.

On that note, the online travel industry in Bangladesh has been very confusing and shaky in terms of business perspective. When internet started reaching doorsteps in the late 2000, social media boomed in every corner of Bangladesh. As a result, within a few years, different travel related Facebook pages and groups started coming into business in different social media platforms. This changed a lot of things in the travel industry of Bangladesh. People started noticing new travel locations within the country which they were not aware of before. In addition, individuals now have access to many international destinations, their travel itineraries, financial allocations, and other pertinent travel-related details through their cellphones. This travel information was so accessible in different digital platforms that within a few years, these online travel groups and companies became more popular than the traditional brick and mortar travel agencies with traditional physical shops somewhere in Bangladesh. This very new situation was the beginning of a new industry in Bangladesh, the “Online travel industry”. However, things did not stay happy

and sound as many online customers started getting scammed through these unregistered, unorganized and unofficial travel companies. As a matter of fact, after the honeymoon period of this newly grown online travel platforms, people started having trust issues on these online travel companies and doubts on paying them in advance or by any means other than cash. sadly, travel agency fraud incidents keep popping up, ruining consumers' experiences and eventually the reputation of the business. The fraudulent transaction has been one of the major drawbacks, especially with OTAs(Mokoena 2023).

Hence, the need of officially registered and government approved and monitored online travel agencies are getting higher every day. Utilizing a travel agency offers uniform travel arrangements and a form of "security services" (Gustafson 2012). This kind of convenience is made possible by the internet and takes the form of having access to all travel-related products in a single location. This makes travel agencies even more appealing to customers who shop online for travel-related goods and services because they provide convenience and access to flexible pricing(Wu and Chang 2005). However, even though there are new authentic platforms in the market, Bangladeshi customers still feel skeptical about spending money online as they already have a bitter experience trying to purchase travel related products of service in digital platforms.

This research will try to inspect the purchase experience of customers in the online travel industry scene in Bangladesh. The people in Bangladesh still finds it really difficult to trust an OTA and pay online to any vendors or service providers whether that's clothing, groceries or other sophisticated platforms like OTA's. The factors in e-servicescape conceptual model (appearance, functionality and financial security) might not be enough to convince the Bangladeshi customers in many cases. This research aims to find out if there are other factors along with the three existing ones that helps customers believe in online purchase in terms of OTA and if these factors can be an extended part of e-servicescape conceptual model.

1.7 Research Question:

Without any doubt the main inspiration of physical setting in a service environment was established by Harris and Goode (2010). According to (Prasetyo, Purwandari et al. 2017), *“E-servicescape consists of three main dimension, aesthetic appeal/ambient, layout/functionality/interactivity and financial security”*

The researcher is going to work with this conceptual model of e-servicescape and check if this model is enough to build trust among Bangladeshi customers, as well as the importance of other social factors that plays a significant role to the customers of online travel agencies in Bangladesh. The model Harris and Goode (2010) came up with was consisted of three main factors, (1) The appearance (2) The functionality (3) Perceived security, with nine more subfactors and what the researcher is trying to do is along with these existing main factors, bringing another factor to the scenario in the name of “Customer influence” which includes social factors like customer reviews and e-wom.

In order to get a clear understanding, the researcher will extend the model a bit more and try to add the “customer influence” part which includes electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) and customer reviews in the context of Bangladeshi online travel industry. Therefore, the research questions to be explored is the following:

- 1. How does the standard e-servicescape conceptual model, along with customer influence variables like e-WOM and Customer review system, affect the formation of trust among clients of online travel companies in Bangladesh??**

1.8 Study Object:

In order to determine the primary objective of the research question, the researcher selected “Flight Expert,” the first completely operational online travel agency in Bangladesh, as the study object. The flight expert's voyage commenced in 2016 when the parent company, "Makkah Group," which has been conducting business in Bangladesh for over three decades, established this sister company (IDLC Monthly business review 2018). Mr. Salman Bin Rashid Shah Sayeem, the CEO and founder of this company, recognized the significant opportunity presented by the expanding travel market in Bangladesh and developed a technology-based travel solution known as "Flight Expert." This solution was partially influenced by other established market giants, such as "Cheapoair" and "Expedia" (Ria 2019). The company maintains a team of 150 members in both its Dhaka and Chittagong offices, and it collaborates with over 500 airline companies and 900,000 hotels on a global scale (Rahman 2018). Thousands of customers can search for hotels, motels, dormitories, and other types of staycations in any location around the world through this OTA. Furthermore, clients have the ability to search for flights to hundreds of destinations from the comfort of their own homes.

In this research, the researcher is going to dig deeper into the mind of the direct customers of Flight expert and try to find out the reasons what made them trusting a digital platform in Bangladesh and if there are any social factors that made this happen.

2 Literature review:

2.1 From servicescape to e-servicescape:

The concept servicescape was first introduced by (Bitner 1992) and emboldened a lot of scholars to research more on this to scrutiny different mediating variables in different sectors. In service industry, material environment is really crucial as service can be both manufactured and used simultaneously in a scenario which can work as the packaging of a service which leads to only physical evidence (Mari and Poggesi 2013). Servicescape is supposed to be the learning of service design powered by environmental dimension as space and its usefulness, signs, symbols, tools and the related personnel who condescend in the service related environment (CORTES-NAVAS and ROJAS-BERRIO 2018). In most of the cases people tend to live their whole life mostly indoors which has a great impact on their daily traits, abilities and performance (Lee and Kim 2014). As one of the most important human needs, indoor facilities should offer people proper physical conditions and allow people to do things comfortably (Lee and Kim 2014). Therefore, based on this indoor facility preferences, there is an opportunity to detail this approach, for example, satisfaction and how long people want to stay in a certain place and how it influences them to spend (CORTES-NAVAS and ROJAS-BERRIO 2018). The influence of environments people are surrounded by, has been analyzed by different researcher from different fields like architecture, landscape architecture and environmental psychology (Lee and Kim 2014). In different business models whether its business to business or business to consumers, customer satisfaction is considered as the standard for long term functionality and generating more profit (Yunita, Shihab et al. 2022). According to Kotler (2016), client satisfaction is a person's perception of happiness or disappointments resulting from the anticipation of a product or service's performance in line with expectation, means if the performance matches the expectation, then the product or service is declared satisfying, and on the other hand if it does not match the expectation then it is dissatisfying. Many research has been done on the topic of the connection between the attributes of surrounding environment and satisfaction of the service providers (Lee and Kim 2014). The word servicescape also known as "atmospheric" referred by (Bitner 1992) shows us different

dimensions of the physical ambience that has influence on consumer satisfaction in service offering business like restaurants.

The main differentiating factor between servicescape and e-servicescape is that in the regular servicescape setting, there is the chance of feeling the tangibility of a product which is missing in the e-servicescape scenario. According to (Russell and Miriam 2004), e-servicescape is not just confined to buying some products online while visiting websites but also the values are identified as accessibility of products increase instantly along with time saving and less risk of dissatisfaction with the improvement of informative framework for digital customers in comparison with physical servicescape. Harris and Goode explained the “e-servicescape” as meteorological surroundings in the digital space when service encounter happens between service producers and their consumers. All the literatures from service marketing establishes an organization’s service ambience as “servicescape” (Bitner 1992), the accumulation of physical elements that serve an organization to its respected customers. The studies on e-servicescape setting that has appeared, displayed customer’s emotions, approach and tendency (Kuo, Huang et al. 2019). The elaboration of e-servicescape is understood as the natural advancement of taking the idea of physical servicescape and assimilating them into digital service environment (Sreejesh and Abhilash 2017). The digital service setting of a service producer has been defined by different scholars with different terminologies. For example, this has been described as, “online physical environment” (Fiore and Jin 2003), “cybermarketscapes” (Alladi 1998), “online atmospherics (Eroglu, Machleit et al. 2001), “on-line store atmospheric cues” (Davis, Wang et al. 2008), “aesthetics or atmospherics of the website” (Chang and Chen 2008), and the latest is “e-servicescape” (Harris and Goode 2010). The e-servicescape is the evolving version of the traditional servicescape. Service providers are now coming with different digital platforms to cover maximum number of customers through websites, mobile applications and social medias. It was intended to bring better impact and allow consumers to have a better customer service involvement (Kuo, Huang et al. 2019). E-servicescape is coming under light and getting more importance gradually in the service industry as this has direct co-relation between the providers and the consumers. An e-servicescape is made of three different sub-aspects and those are the aesthetic appeal, the design and performance and finally the monetary transactional safety (Wu, Quyen et al. 2017). The aesthetic appeal mainly describes the

online scenario for a user and how they translate the online surroundings to be whether its engaging and interesting. To elaborate this a bit more, if we take an example from travel and tourism industry, aesthetic appeal illustrates how a website expedites happy and comfortable online surroundings for the consumers in the context of their needs about their travel related inquiries (Leung, Bai et al.)

2.2 Evolution of online platforms:

The emergence of online platforms has had a profound impact on worldwide trade and interpersonal communication. In the beginning, online platforms mostly functioned as centers for information, with early examples such as Yahoo! and Google offering search and email services (Leiner, Cerf et al. 2009). The emergence of Web 2.0 in the early 2000s brought about a notable change, allowing users to create and share information, leading to the popularity of social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube ((Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). Online marketplaces like Amazon and Alibaba have transformed the retail industry by providing extensive product choices, user-friendly shopping experiences, and worldwide reach, fundamentally changing how consumers behave and what they expect (Zygiaris 2022). Same thing happened for travel agencies too. As suppliers eliminate the need for intermediaries through a process known as disintermediation, there is already competition between traditional and online travel agencies (Mokoena 2023). Disintermediation is the idea that travel service providers, such as airlines and tour operators, don't use travel agencies and let customers make direct arrangements with them (Mokoena 2023). The first online travel agencies (OTA) appeared at the turn of the century and have grown significantly over the last two decades as a key component of the travel industry's distribution network. They were also the first to make sales online and made significant investments in technology, marketing, and offline and online (GARCÍA, DOS ANJOS et al.). To accommodate growing demand, the decision makers from the hospitality industries depend more on internet (Law and Chen, 2012). A few handfuls of development have more significant impact how business is happening around the world than internet (Internet world Stats 2007). As internet has become a part and parcel of people's daily activities, different companies aim to establish a one-of-a-kind relationship with their users not just in the physical setting but also in the digital environment (Webber, 1999). there are two different s-commerce models. The first model consists

of social networking services (SNSs) like Facebook and Twitter that have improved their business features to assist people in shopping while communicating with one another; the second model consists of conventional e-commerce websites like Amazon, Walmart, and Booking.com that have improved social features (such as spaces for entering recommendations, comments, and the presence of rating systems) that assist people in socializing while shopping (Maia, Lunardi et al. 2022). Digital shopping environment has been proved as one of the most important spaces in terms of the connection between service provider and customers (Demangoet and Broderick, 2010). E-commerce has become one of the most effective ways of handling business nowadays. If we take the example of US e-commerce market from the late 90's, only a handful of customers (12%) were using online platforms to buy something from retailers, however the number increased to 39% in the very next year (Josien 2010), which shows the growth of online purchasing even in the early stage of e-commerce around the world. The internet has become a fundamental origin of information for the large number of growing online customers (Hopkins, Grove et al. 2009). According to Bitner (2001, 377), "The internet is just 'one big service'...the tools, concepts and strategies in the field of service marketing and management have direct application in an internet or e-commerce world". What internet brought in the service industry is that consumers have more options to choose from different websites nowadays.

2.2.1 Websites:

Academic study on consumer behavior using digital platforms, for instance, has seen increased interest due to the rapid global expansion of OTAs, their growing popularity, and strong market competition. Expedia, a Microsoft product, launched in the United States in 1996, and Priceline, a European company, in 1997, were the first OTAs to enter the market (GARCÍA, DOS ANJOS et al.). There is a potential market for OTA's in Bangladesh as well. Bangladesh has a huge potential for tourists because of its natural and anticipated destination, and tourism marketing is a technique to convert potential tourists into actual tourists and in addition to that, it is a huge market for potential tourists who want to travel the world. It is also the safest way to increase demand and promote tourism enterprises (Talukder and Bhuiyan 2020). If we look at the global picture, in the early 2000, different types of websites, specially sites related to tourism bloomed drastically as a

significant distribution system for hotel reservation (Huang, Li et al. 2017). This is a really insightful observation as in a lot of cases, websites are the only connection option for customers with a service provider (Hopkins, Grove et al. 2009). Effective websites combine entertaining content with information and It has been demonstrated that the entertainment setting, as defined by the website's appearance and aesthetic focus, influences users' feelings related to their online purchasing experience (Hopkins, Grove et al. 2009). E-servicescape in service offering companies, for example, hotels and resorts, is very significant as websites offer consumers a first and diversified digital opportunity to look at their desired property beforehand (Lee and Kim 2014). The websites speed up the process of cooperation which reflect important service attributes of intangibility, inseparability and perishability (Zeithmal and Bitner, 2000). There is an exchange between these partners, where the hotel provides information to OTAs websites and OTAS attracts customers to hotels. OTAs were created to expand the distribution channels of hotels and increase business opportunities, and they have since played a crucial role in the distribution of tourism products(GARCÍA, DOS ANJOS et al.) The audible and visual features in digital platforms are thought to be important and when it is different in consumer's computer hardware it generally cancels out possible effects, thus in an digital scenario, websites and graphics of online pages establish an inescapable and strong force (Harris and Goode 2010). Necessarily, the limelight has been on a few contrasting thing: scientific appraisal on general content and hypertext construction of a web page(Palmer and Griffith 1998; Perry and Bodkin 2000), customer interface aspect (Bauer and Scharl 2000); Hausman and Siekpe 2008), customer judgement of website characteristics (Eroglu, Machleit and Davis 2001, 2003; Holloway and Beatty 2008; Olsina et al. 1999; Rosen and Purinton 2004), and correlating entailing surroundings to its traditional counterpart (Kim et al. 2002; Phau and Poon 2000).

2.2.2 Mobile application:

The prediction for mobile e-commerce in 2021 was about to raise nearly three-quarters (72%) of e-commerce revenues from 2017, which is around \$3.5 trillion, and Retail e-commerce revenues exceeded \$2 trillion in the year 2017, an increase of 23% over the previous year (Yeo, Moh et al. 2021). Mobile marketing is viewed as a good answer for the digital age in the current marketing climate. The app interface is comparatively simple to navigate through, and customers quickly

pick it up and expect to utilize it (Kuo, Huang et al. 2019). Online research indicates that there are around 17.5 billion smartphone users worldwide and that smartphone penetration is at a record high (eMarketer, 2014). Nearly 50% of the potential worldwide market was increased in 2017 (eMarketer, 2016). Recognizing consumer perceptions and willingness to embrace m-shopping is essential despite the rapid and extensive development of mobile technologies and apps. As a result, numerous scholars and professionals in the marketing field have concentrated primarily on e-commerce features and customer purchasing intention to predict the likelihood of technology adoption (Yeo, Moh et al. 2021). New platforms for services and goods have been created by technological advancements, and these platforms provide many advantages to businesses who are eager to market and sell their services. As a result, it will have a substantial impact on the growth of internet users, which in turn will have an impact on the development of e-commerce and mobile shopping (Yeo, Moh et al. 2021). In terms of any online shopping experience, Today's manufacturing industry nearly exclusively uses modern technology to replace inefficient traditional marketing methods. For instance, mobile apps offer a successful means for businesses involved in the tourism industry to forge lasting relationships with their clients (Kuo, Huang et al. 2019). Mobile marketing tools are used by travel industry managers to create marketing plans for providers as well as to help consumers identify and comprehend more about travel-related information, goods, and services (Kuo, Huang et al. 2019).

2.3 E-servicescape conceptual model:

The concept of e-servicescape extends the traditional servicescape model to include the digital realm. The servicescape idea, initially developed by Bitner (1992), focuses on the tangible surroundings in which a service is delivered. It emphasizes elements such as environmental circumstances, spatial arrangement, and practicality. The e-servicescape concept was developed by researchers who sought to adapt the principles of online commerce to the digital realm.

The term "e-servicescape" refers to the overall layout and atmosphere of the online environment, for example, websites and mobile applications, which influences how consumers perceive, experience, and behave on the platform. The virtual experience comprises various elements that extend the notion of physical servicescape into the digital domain. This concept has evolved from primarily focusing on visual beauty to including a variety of other sensory and interactive elements (Harris and Goode 2010).

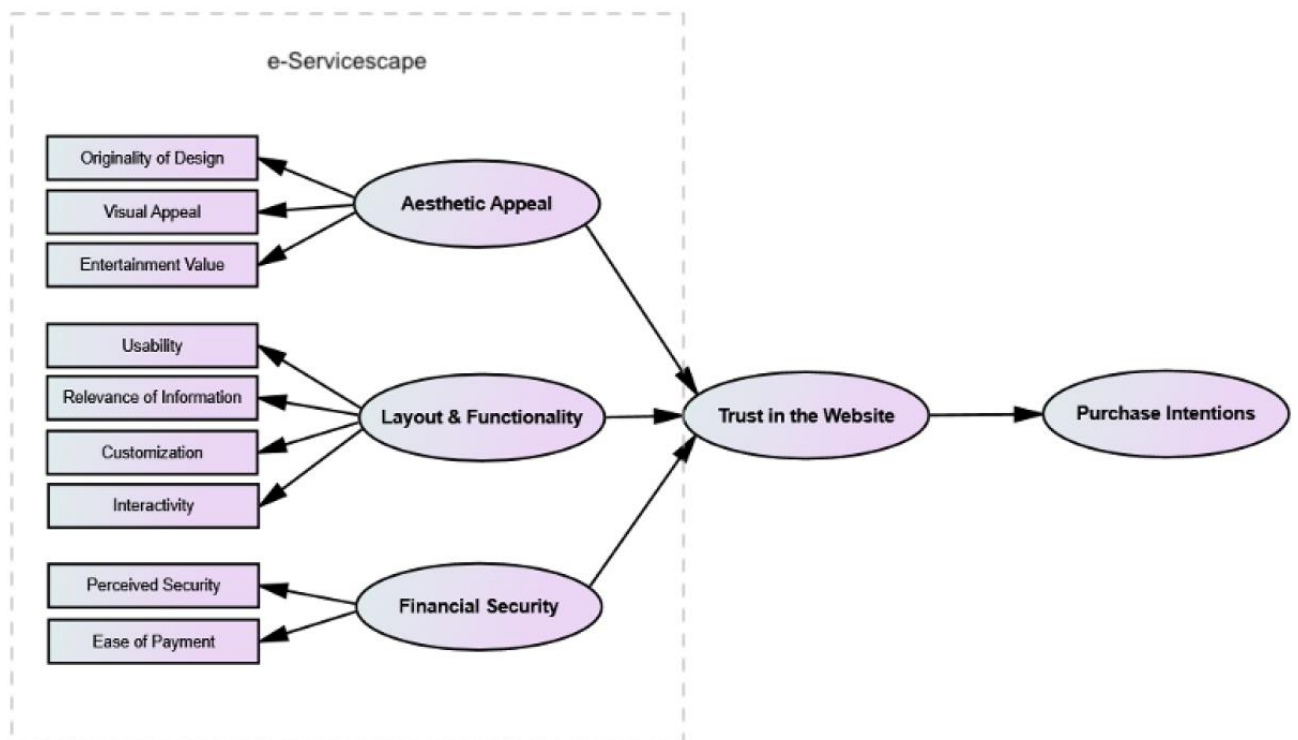
The e-servicescape conceptual model consists of several crucial components that collectively influence the digital environment:

1. **Aesthetic Appeal:** This term encompasses the entire visual design, color scheme, and layout of the online platform. The user's initial impression is affected and their decision to stay on the site may be influenced (Cyr, Head et al. 2006).
2. **Design and operational features:** Functionality refers to the degree of user-friendliness and intuitive layout of a digital platform. Enhancing usability to its highest level enhances consumer satisfaction and has the capacity to cultivate increased trust (Flavián, Guinalú et al. 2006). Furthermore, an online platform must possess the qualities of being both responsive and participatory. Interactivity pertains to the level at which users can actively participate with a website, including features like chatbots, customer service chats, and the ability to customize product views (Manganari, Siomkos et al. 2009).
3. **Financial security:** Security involves multiple facets, including the protection of data, the assurance of secure transactions, and the implementation of privacy legislation. The establishment of trust with online clients is strongly dependent on the perception of security (Gefen, Karahanna et al. 2003).

Information Quality pertains to the level of accuracy, relevance, and comprehensiveness of the information provided on the digital platform. The presence of accurate and dependable information has the capacity to reduce uncertainty and bolster assurance (Kim and Niehm 2009).

The model tries to explain that all of these elements create trust among online customers which eventually make them purchase something from online.

Figure 1: Classic e-servicescape conceptual model



2.4 Social factors in e-servicescape:

2.4.1 Customer review system and e-WOM:

Apart from what is already mentioned in the classic e-servicescape conceptual model, there are other factors that build trust among online customers. Electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) and customer evaluations have emerged as crucial factors influencing purchasing behavior and fostering trust in online commerce in the digital era. e-WOM, also known as electronic word-of-mouth, is the act of customers expressing their thoughts, comments, and experiences using online platforms such as social media, forums, and review sites. This is in contrast to conventional word-of-mouth. Customer reviews, a specific form of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), have a crucial impact on online retail by providing potential buyers with important knowledge derived from the experiences of past customers. E-WOM, short for electronic word-of-mouth, refers to the informal communication that is directed at customers through internet-based technologies, specifically regarding the usage or characteristics of particular items and services (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner et al. 2004). It includes several formats, such as product reviews, ratings, comments on blogs, and discussions on forums. Customer reviews are appraisals of products or services that are generated by users and posted on e-commerce sites. Typically, these reviews comprise of both numerical ratings and written accounts detailing individuals' experiences. Scams on the internet are not exclusive to the tourism industry. Travel fraud affects a number of financial institutions, companies like airlines and travel agencies, and consumer(Levi 1998). In the online travel industry, purchase intention is heavily related to trust and building a trustworthiness environment is connected with e-WOM and customer review systems. Almost every transaction involves an element of trust, particularly the decision-making process for purchases made in virtual settings (Hajli 2014). The number of online reviewers in the context of online retailing may be seen as a sign of "audiences" or "other customers" as social elements of the online servicescape, and their actions in the form of review content may influence an online shopper's emotional response prior to making a purchase decision. When making travel plans, consumers look for in-depth information on potential destinations and lodging options. Thanks to the advent of OTAs, users are now able to get nearly all of this information quickly and easily(Maia, Lunardi et al. 2022). The motivating factor, the sign of a person's willingness to try, and the degree to which they exert effort to engage in a certain conduct are all determined by their intention (Christin and Nugraha

2023). Social media is used by s-commerce to advertise transactions in a community of people who exchange their experiences with online shopping, including friends, family, acquaintances, and complete strangers, information regarding products and services, In particular, thus, organizations in the tourist and hospitality sectors have benefited from the extensive use of social media in determining what online consumers find most important when arranging their holiday (Maia, Lunardi et al. 2022).

E-WOM is the classic word-of-mouth (WOM) behavior that has been modified for use with electronic media. It enables people to spread information in one-to-many ratios and also differs from WOM in that it is more convenient and asynchronous (Tran and Strutton 2020). Tourists frequently discuss their trip experiences on OTAs, influencing others and giving those looking for information (GARCÍA, DOS ANJOS et al.) Online retailers adopted new Internet technologies to enhance and improve customers' online experiences on their online platforms in order to alleviate the drawbacks of online purchasing. For instance, according to Tran and Strutton (2016), providing online customer reviews (OCRs) potentially eliminate these drawbacks and aid online shoppers in making decisions. However, customer reviews give people crucial information to guide their online purchasing decisions, and occasionally they can persuade people to shop online rather than through more conventional channels(Tran and Strutton 2020).

Online customer reviews (OCRs) had an impact on online customers' purchasing intentions, but they have not yet been conceptualized as a type of social interaction within the framework of the online servicescape or e-servicescape(Tran and Strutton 2016). The development of modern technologies on smartphones and other devices, allowed online businesses to welcome live information interchange with consumers rather than just executing online transactions to mitigate this problem in the modern age of digital buying (Ye, Lau et al. 2018). Trust entails susceptibility and ambiguity toward a single party and is a view, attitude, or anticipation that implies reliance on other parties(Christin and Nugraha 2023). Customers are more inclined to purchase products and services digitally from well-known brands than from unorganized businesses, including the hospitality industry (Maia, Lunardi et al. 2022). Different scholars have already shown the relationship between physical environment and online satisfaction (Szymanski and Hise 2000);

(Ballantine 2005)), faith (Papadopoulou, Andreou et al. 2001), later buying habits (Menon and Kahn 2002), enjoyment (Eroglu, Machleit et al. 2003), trust and intention to purchase (Harris and Goode 2010), and trust and word of mouth (WOM) (Tran and Strutton 2016). Information, influence, and control are three factors that affect trust; when information is reliable, trust is more likely to increase (Christin and Nugraha 2023). One of the most important aspects for doing tourism-related business online is trust because it lowers the uncertainty associated with online consumption and encourages the buyer's propensity (Maia, Lunardi et al. 2022).

2.5 How other customer's influence (social factors like E-WOM and customer reviews) increases the trust among the online customers:

Electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM) and customer reviews establish confidence among online customers through various mechanisms.

An inherent challenge in internet purchasing is the asymmetrical dissemination of information between sellers and buyers. Electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM) and customer evaluations are essential in addressing this imbalance by providing authentic, peer-generated viewpoints. As a result, they improve the clarity and openness of product information (Park, Lee et al. 2007). By providing a high level of openness, potential customers are able to make educated assessments, thereby increasing their trust in the online platform and its products or services. The veracity and dependability of reviews shared by fellow consumers are often seen as superior to the information provided by sellers, as vendors may have a vested interest in portraying their products in a favorable manner (Cheung, Lee et al. 2008). The credibility of customer reviews is enhanced when they include both positive and negative aspects, which in turn increases trust and confidence. Social proof and validation are the occurrences when people try to mimic the actions of others, especially when they are uncertain about what the correct course of action is. Positive evaluations and high ratings function as social proof, offering assurance to prospective consumers regarding the excellence and reliability of the product (Filiari 2015). Trust can be significantly strengthened by the approval acquired from other users. Platforms that support user participation, such as allowing users to leave comments on reviews or endorse helpful recommendations, promote a feeling of community. Interacting with others' evaluations might increase the perceived credibility

of the assessments, since it demonstrates that the content has been recognized as useful and relevant by other individuals (Moran and Muzellec 2017).

Having a greater quantity of evaluations often increases trust, as it suggests that the product is popular and has been purchased by a substantial number of individuals (Dellarocas 2003). Moreover, the polarity of evaluations, whether they are predominantly positive or negative, has an impact on the degree of trust. Positive evaluations have the potential to enhance confidence, but, a mixture of positive and negative reviews is generally perceived as more authentic and reliable (Mudambi and Schuff 2010).

Evaluating the caliber and informative nature of reviews is of utmost importance, as it directly affects their worth. The level of specificity and the quantity of valuable data offered are crucial elements to take into account. Comprehensive and detailed reviews have a stronger persuasive effect and provide potential consumers with a more complete understanding of the product's advantages and disadvantages (Xu 2014).

The credibility of a reviewer, which is determined by factors such as their expertise, track record of reviews, and profile, can also impact the trustworthiness of the review. Generally, persons who have been confirmed as consumers or reviewers and have a history of offering valuable input are considered to be more trustworthy (Senecal and Nantel 2004).

2.6 Emergence of OTA in Bangladesh:

Traveltech startups are increasing heavily in Bangladesh, and in terms of “Online Travel Agency” again known as OTA. Since the advent of the Internet, the way people seek for hotels and vacation spots has drastically altered, which has caused OTAs and hotel websites to grow rapidly in recent years (Maia, Lunardi et al. 2022). With only one click, travelers may book hotels through online travel agencies (OTAs), which are digital hubs (Christin and Nugraha 2023). The first fully functional OTA in Bangladesh is “Flight expert”. There are other few big players entered the market after “Flight expert”, who are “Go Zayaan”, “Haltip” and “Amy”. Flight expert is the first fully functional digital travel agency in Bangladesh and they are maintaining operation around the globe from 2016 (Ria 2019). Flight expert runs their business through their website and mobile application. They have social media pages in Facebook and Instagram too.

ShareTrip was the initial prominent player in the Bangladeshi online travel agency (OTA) sector. It commenced its operations in 2014 under the name Travel Booking BD and then changed its branding in 2019. ShareTrip provided an extensive array of services, encompassing flight tickets, hotel bookings, and vacation packages, all conveniently available via an online platform. This groundbreaking initiative signaled a change in the mindset of Bangladeshi customers when it came to making travel arrangements (ShareTrip, 2019). However, the first fully functional OTA in Bangladesh was Flight expert. Flight Expert is an online platform that facilitates the booking of flights and hotels. It allows customers to compare and evaluate various flights and hotels offered by different travel agencies and websites. The platform provides comprehensive information including travel destinations, arrival and departure schedules, and the number of travelers (gozayaan 2024). The current yearly income of the flight expert is approximately \$11.6 million per year. The website is characterized by its simplicity and operates on a business-to-consumer (B2C) basis. All the products available on the website, including as flights and hotels, are accessible to the general public.

GoZayaan, a prominent participant in the industry, was introduced in 2017 and swiftly acquired popularity due to its user-friendly interface for booking flights, hotels, and vacation packages.

GoZayaan prioritized utilizing technology to optimize the user experience by providing services like pricing comparisons, customer reviews, and safe payment alternatives (gozayaan 2024).

The OTA growth in Bangladesh has been massive in the last ten years. There are different reasons for this growth. The proliferation of internet users, which surged to 112 million by 2021, coupled with the extensive utilization of smartphones, has established a strong basis for the expansion of e-commerce and online travel services. The demand for online travel solutions has been fueled by changing consumer tastes, especially among the younger, technologically adept population. These customers prioritize convenience, efficiency, and the capacity to evaluate various alternatives prior to reaching a conclusion (Rahman, 2018). Government Initiatives: The government's endeavors to encourage a digital economy, such as the Digital Bangladesh program, have created a favorable atmosphere for the expansion of online travel agencies (OTAs). The objective of these projects is to improve digital infrastructure and promote the utilization of online services in different industries (Ahmed, 2019).

2.7 Trust issues with Bangladeshi online customers:

Although experiencing significant expansion, the online travel agency (OTA) business in Bangladesh encounters numerous obstacles. Nevertheless, the expansion of online platforms in Bangladesh encounters obstacles such as inadequate infrastructure, difficulties in digital literacy, and apprehensions regarding cybersecurity (Rahman 2023). Notwithstanding these obstacles, the Bangladeshi industry is steadily growing due to a youthful, technologically proficient populace and government regulations that encourage the development of a digital economy (Islam, Haque et al. 2021). Establishing trust with consumers continues to be a major obstacle, as worries about the security of online payments and the dependability of digital services persist (Islam & Rahman, 2016). Although there is widespread internet access nowadays, the level of digital literacy differs, especially in rural regions. Facilitating the efficient utilization of online travel platforms by consumers is crucial for long-term expansion (Kabir, 2020). The market is experiencing a growing level of competition, as both new players and established travel

companies are introducing their own online platforms. This rivalry requires a constant focus on innovation and enhancing the quality of service (Daily Star, 2021).

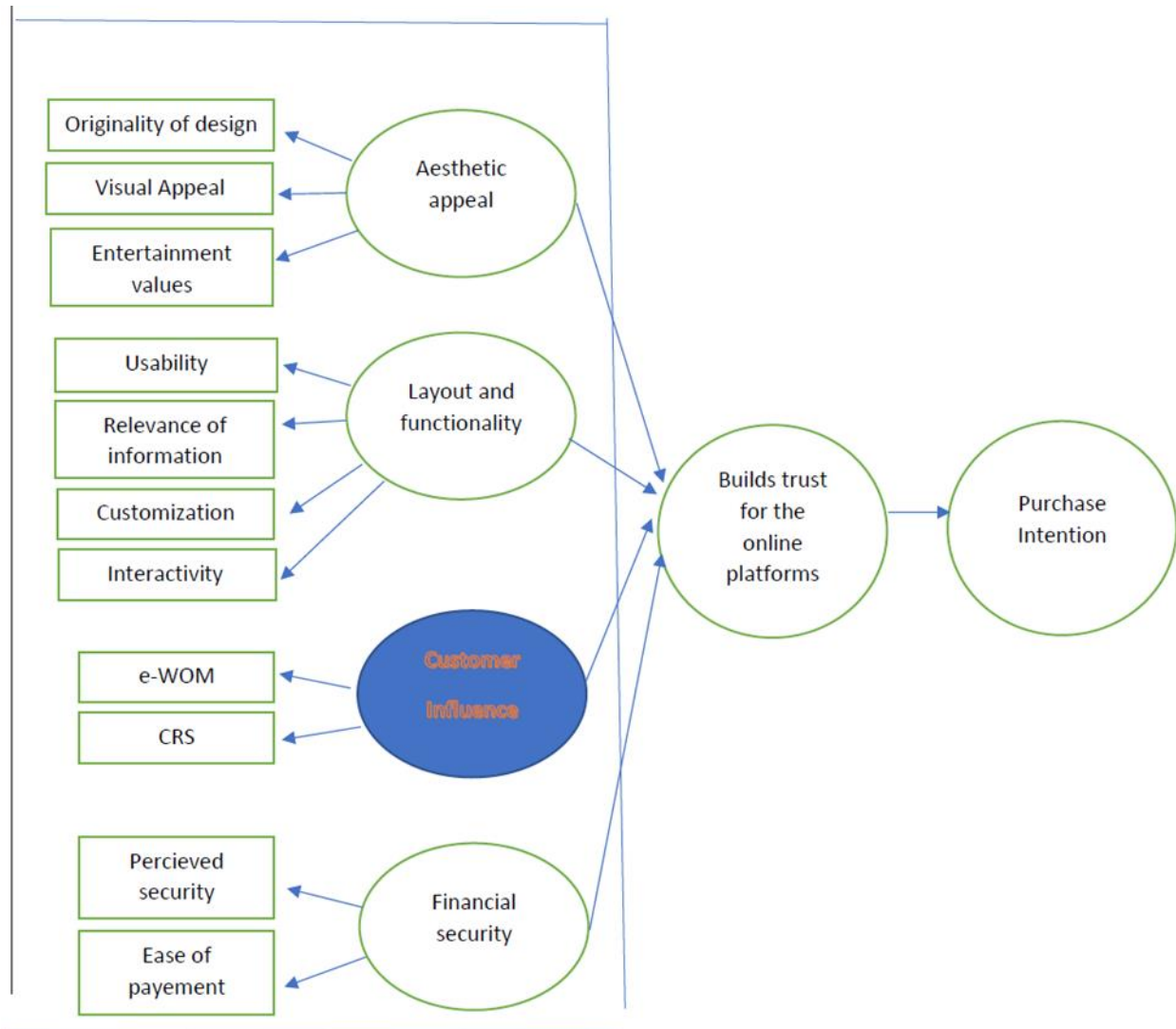
Nevertheless, the outlook for Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) in Bangladesh is promising, given the potential for significant growth resulting from the rising prevalence of digital technologies. In order to achieve sustained success, it is imperative for these platforms to enhance user experience, foster consumer confidence, and leverage data analytics to deliver personalized services. Furthermore, expanding their array of services to include more comprehensive travel solutions, such as travel insurance and visa assistance, will further strengthen their position in the market (Rahman 2023). The tourism industry in Bangladesh has been unable to capitalize on its large customer base of local tourists due to various shortcomings. These include inadequate offerings to tourists, a lack of properly trained travel service providers, and below-average marketing of the tourism sector, and last but not the least, fail to deliver a safe digital environment to the customers. These factors, as identified by Rahman (2018), are the main reasons for the industry's failure to benefit from the local tourist market. However, presently some of these challenges have been alleviated due to the emergence of new tourism service providers in the market.

2.8 Conceptual Framework:

This research paper is going to check the influence of the traditional e-servicescape conceptual model with the already existing factors and with an added factor of “customer influence” on the customers, finding out if these factors have any influence creating trust among customers. Eventually this will help expand the knowledge of e-servicescape conceptual model even more. Flight expert is a Bangladeshi OTA and this paper will try to find if the three traditional factors of the traditional e-servicescape conceptual model is enough to build trust among Bangladeshi customers or the new expanded conceptual model of e-servicescape influence the trust issue of the Bangladeshi online customers of Flight expert as Flight expert operates through a website and social media platforms as well. According to Harris and Goode (2010), e-servicescape is consists of variables that can be found in the virtual setting during the delivery of services. They came up with a figure (See figure 1) where they illustrated three different sub-sectors in the e-servicescape conceptual model, which is the aesthetic appeal, layout and functionality and the financial security. Aesthetic appeal means the appearance and look of the digital platform and on the other hand “layout and functionality” indicates the usability and the interaction between the user and the digital platform. Finally, “financial security” describes user’s sense of safety while using any digital platform in terms of payment and transactions. According to this model, these three sub factors build trust in the website and eventually creates purchase intentions among the customers. Along with these three, Testimonials from genuine consumers are considered more reliable and less influenced than information provided by vendors or marketers(Park, Lee et al. 2007).

This research will try to find out if the e-servicescape of Flight expert works even more in building trust with some added social factors like e-WOM and customer reviews. This paper tries to expand the already existed e-servicescape conceptual model with an added factor which is the “customer influence” and check if it creates more trust among the Bangladeshi customers who already possess a skeptical mind towards online purchase.

Figure 2: Proposed e-servicescape conceptual model



3 Methodology:

This research is a qualitative approach and a case study on Flight expert. To develop the level of experience necessary to use a particular qualitative research method, many qualitative researchers concentrate on just one qualitative research technique (such as a case study, grounded theory, narrative analysis, or discourse analysis(Köhler, Smith et al. 2022)).This study focuses on social actors, specifically OTA users, and their individual opinions of online shopping and the e-service landscape. The researched population is able to express their viewpoint on the issue under investigation through the use of a qualitative technique (Mason 2017). Because the goal of the study is to investigate the opinions of the users on the subject and test it with an existing model, the qualitative approach was deemed appropriate(Mokoena 2023). The origins of qualitative approaches can be found in numerous ontological and epistemological systems. It is considered that social actors continuously create, build, and edit the reality they are a part of rather than that external sources determine and produce it(Bryman 2012). Theorizing, the problematization of fixed or ingrained ways of thinking, questioning of accepted wisdom, exploration of obscure phenomena, samples, or contexts, and collaborative learning and sense-making are just a few of the many goals that qualitative research methods can support when used to the fullest extent(Alvesson and Gabriel 2013). This master's thesis outcomes were examined and delivered via an abductive research methodology. Abduction is thought of as a blend of both induction and deduction. Empirical evidence and the current theory are investigated when using an abductive approach.

The primary target of this research is to find if the e-servicescape conceptual model works in Bangladeshi context and specially in terms of “Flight expert”, the first Bangladeshi online travel agency. Along with this, what are the drivers that convince the Flight expert customers to purchase online through Flight expert. Purposive sampling is suited for a qualitative study because, as stated by(Creswell 2012), study participants are chosen with the hope that they will comprehend the phenomenon under investigation and respond to the research questions. A social interpretivist epistemology is used when discussing epistemology, the process by which knowledge is produced. This suggests that user interactions with the e-service landscape and purchase intention serve as the foundation for understanding the research topic. To get deep into the idea of this research topic,

direct users of Flight expert were taken to conduct the interview so that the actual motives and motivation comes under light. There are different reasons behind why this research is qualitative rather than quantitative. Qualitative research is made for the society (Silverman, 2017), in this situation, the direct users of Flight expert and their perspective and inspiration for online purchasing. The target of this research is not to gather specific quantitative data(Bryman 2012), rather establish a wide picture of the issue by accumulating in-depth knowledge and "highly informative"(Warhurst, Nickson et al. 2000, p.9) data. To determine whether the e-servicescape model goes with the Bangladeshi tourism industry more specially with flight expert and what reasons affect the online purchase intention of their customers. The reasons why only direct users were picked for the interview are:

- Only the direct users can unfold the reason behind their loyalty towards Flight expert
- Loyal users can explain how they have overcome the fear of online purchasing in terms of OTA
- The users can answer questions that are related to the e-servicescape conceptual model.

The problem with qualitative research is that the sample size tends to be small(Sandelowski 1996), Although, the number of people in the list of loyal customer data provided by Flight expert were really big, the sample size was drawn with only 14 most loyal frequent customers of different age, financial status, demography and geography. The researcher first got in touch with Flight Expert to request a list of their long-term customers who are frequent customers. Then, fourteen of them were chosen at random and were emailed to determine their interest in taking part in the study. To ensure that participants are aware of the importance of the study and its purpose, the email contained a consent letter outlining it (See Appendix 3). In the letter, it was stated that participants might withdraw at any moment and were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity. The other five loyal Flight expert customers were found in Facebook when the author published a status where he looked for frequent users of Flight expert in his friend list.

3.1 Research design:

In order to gain a more practical view of the research topic, this research was designed and inspired from a case study approach which permits to gain a more in depth knowledge of a topic from a real world context(Yin 2014). The data was collected from the direct users of Flight expert from their past experience about why they used Flight expert as their OTA.

3.2 Methods of data collection:

All the data collected for this research paper are primary data as the researcher collected these personally. Using a methodical approach to study design, data analysis, and interpretation, a well-conducted qualitative study can throw light on subjects that are interesting to researchers and permit a thorough comprehension of human behavior(Coates, Jordan et al. 2021). The research topic of this paper is heavily dependent on the personal experience of the direct users of flight expert. To gain an in-depth knowledge of personal experience in any social context, interview is a really handy options as it can offer a detail response on a particular topic. One of the main techniques for gathering data in qualitative studies is interviewing, which enables the researcher to access particular participant experiences and expose diverse perspectives on the phenomena under study(Eftenaru 2022). Different Interview technique in any research is heavily influenced by the philosophical approach of the researcher. Positive epistemological commitments, where the emphasis is on producing reliable information that expresses certain facts about the interviewee's reality, are likely to inform the conventional or more structured interview. Due to the social or active nature of the interview, particularly the effect of the interviewer on the interviewee, it is intended to limit any contamination that may arise(Cassell 2015). Apart from the interview, strategies to obtain all the previous literature connected to the conceptual framework are mentioned (See appendix 1)

Qualitative interviews are underpinned by three different sets of ontological and epistemological presumptions: the realist, phenomenological, and social constructionist(Cassell 2015). Cassell (2015) explained this even more and said, In a *realistic interviewing technique*, the interviewer is interested in learning the interviewee's perspective on a specific organizational phenomenon that

is believed to exist independently of the interviewee before comparing what they say with those of other interviewees, whereas, In a *phenomenological approach*, the researcher's reflection on how their own presumptions may affect the data gathered, as well as their exploration of the respondent's point of view is of concern. Finally, the interview is viewed as a co-creation of an argument in *social constructionist theories* rather than an explanation of any real-world phenomena. According to what Cassell (2015) said, this interview followed realist approach as the direct customers of Flight expert has shared their personal experience using flight expert and later their responses were compared and analyzed with other interviewee's responses.

It is usual to categorize interviews based on the degree of structure the interviewer employs to decide how the interview will go based on their previously existing thoughts, the research questions, and the resulting questions in the interview agenda(Cassell 2015). There are three different types of interviews exist in the academic world. The first one is “structured interview” which comes up with a pre-set questions in a pre-set manner which is asked to every single interviewee to keep up the consistency. The second one is “semi-structured” interview, there is expected to be a list of questions and inquiries, but the person conducting the interview may stray from them based on the answers provided by the interviewee. As a result, the interviewer has the chance to inquire further about intriguing problems the interviewee brings up that the interviewer may not have previously thought about. With unstructured interviews, the researcher can go to any direction in aligned with the interviewee's response.

For this research, Semi-structured interviews were selected as the data collection technique because they provided freedom for the researcher to ask questions and for the interviewees to respond to questions, enabling the researcher to acquire insightful data on the people's own perspectives and views(Yin 2014). This research employed a detail qualitative interviewing method. This is a type of conversational interview that excludes the use of a list of prewritten questions. Instead, it employs an interview guide with a list of prepared issues and subjects to discuss(Eftenaru 2022). For example, here the interview guide was made with specially designed open-ended questions for the loyal users of Flight expert to get in depth knowledge on the research topic (See appendix 2).

To design the interview guide, Consideration of the conceptual model introduced in the study topic and conception of personal subjects of interest led to the appearance of pertinent topics of interest. Qualitative interviews can be structured in a variety of ways to produce open-ended data in a specific style, such as those that make use of a repertory grid, cognitive mapping, or crucial incident(Cassell 2015).This research followed the semi-structured, distinctive format with exploratory perspective, means the interviewees generated information on a given topic from their personal experience. As this research followed the abductive approach, which made sure that the e-servicescape conceptual model which is relevant with the research topic was initially utilized to design the interview guide rather than direct concepts regarding the research topic.

3.3 Interview setting and participants:

Research participants were picked using purposive sampling. This is a typical qualitative research characteristic since it focuses on the selection of specific units of analysis in accordance with predetermined criteria, ensuring that the research issue is addressed(Bryman 2012, p.418). As this research topic is completely customer centric, and heavily related to the customers of flight expert, to ease the way of purposive sampling, the researcher personally contacted with the company and requested them to get a list of long-term loyal customers who willingly wanted to sit for a long interview about their online purchase experience along with their experience regarding Flight expert. After listening the purpose of this research which will add valuable insights for the company too, Flight expert provided a list of their most loyal, long-term customers willing to sit for an interview. From that list, fourteen of only those people were picked who had been using Flight expert for at least three years and had a clear understanding of the website. Afterwards, a formal invitation was sent to each one of them to share detail information about the research on Flight expert and asked them to sit for an interview with the researchers.

The interview setting was pretty important as this can influence the mood of the interviewee. To conduct the interviews, the researcher picked a quite coffeeshops with ample lights and comfortable sitting arrangements. This helped setting up the mood to talk about the topic in a more formal manner.

As this thesis topic needs a lot of insights from the customers, fourteen interviews were taken by the researcher and each interview lasted from 35 minutes to 60 minutes. Although there is no specific guideline for how many interviews should be conducted in qualitative research, it is advised to gather as much information as is necessary to provide adequate support for the research questions (Yin 2014)

Interview number	Date	Duration	Age of interviewee	Gender	Position	Name
1	02/05/2023	32:24	26	Female	Freelancer	Abida
2	03/05/2023	41:13	29	Female	Captain in Bangladesh Army	Sarwaf
3	05/05/2023	52:34	32	Male	Manager in a private organization	Yasser
4	08/05/2023	48:22	38	Male	SAVP, Mercantile Bank LTD	Riyad
5	11/05/2023	36:28	31	Female	Brand Manager in a private organization	Sumaiya
6	14/05/2023	38:08	27	Female	Masters' student	Maliha
7	16/05/2023	41:58	32	Female	Senior HR Executive, Energypac, Bangladesh.	Zakia

8	17/05/2023	46:41	25	Male	Gym instructor	Sadat
9	19/05/2023	29:37	28	Female	Housewife	Bristy
10	20/05/2023	58:34	41	Female	Banker	Tanjin
11	22/05/2023	31:21	36	Male	Professor at university	Tanvir
12	26/05/2023	42:44	33	Male	General physician	Arnab
13	2/06/2023	53:11	39	Male	Supply chain manager	Abir
14	4/06/2023	36:58	24	Female	Master's Student	Anika

3.4 Data analysis:

In the abductive research, the data is described in a way which agrees to things that are already researched before and sometimes adds something more. This thesis does the same thing, assuring an existing model and testing if that works in a completely different context. In addition to that, the research will expand the existing model and will also test if the expanded version of the existing model works in this new context.

After the interviews are transcribed the first thing that was done was reading the transcripts multiple times. Different respondents had different tones and understanding of the topic and they had different personal experience which was finely reflected in their interviews. If the transcripts were not read multiple times, these fine differences are hard to notice. As a result, while going through the transcripts, notes were taken frequently just to keep tracks of the different things the respondents said. As this is abductive research, there is always this chance that the existing research might interfere with the newly found aspects and information, which was avoided. While reading the transcriptions, different themes were noticed and got noted down so further analytical process gets easier. First the data was stored in Microsoft Word and then transferred to a software named NVIVO 11. NVIVO basically helped storing qualitative data, sorted them out, categorized them according to researcher's needs and finally, analyzed the trends and patterns of the findings. In the beginning, the data were collected directly to Microsoft word for different interviewees and then loaded into NVIVO.

In the second step, different "Nodes" were created in NVIVO according to the interview transcriptions. "Nodes" is the coding system in NVIVO and different topics and outcomes were labeled under different nodes. The average interview time was 45 minutes which provided a huge amount of data and coding them under different nodes helped finding different topics related to the research.

Finally, to refine the data even more, different sub-nodes were created to understand all the outcomes and patterns. It helped to avoid the repetitions of responses.

3.5 Ethical considerations and limitations of the study:

This master thesis study is written as a case study on Flight expert, the first Bangladeshi online travel agency, based in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The research is conducted in terms with the direct users of Flight experts who have been using this platform to purchase their holidays or flight tickets for at least two years. Data was collected by interviewing loyal customers of flight expert who have been using this platform for quite a long time. However, I, as a researcher, still found some limitations and difficulties to conduct this research.

Firstly, the OTA business is not that old in Bangladesh so Flight expert is relatively a new company in terms of time. As a result, it is not easy to find a big number of loyal customers publicly who are ready to give long interviews for my research purpose. To solve this problem, I had to contact Flight expert personally to provide me this dataset of their most loyal customers who are willing to sit for an interview and offer me their valuable insights on this company and their purchase habit. Because of this, there might be a possibility that the company has some sort of influence on this list of loyal customers they provided and they may have said only good things about this company. However, to remove this problem as much as possible, the researcher has picked random customers from this list who were willing to sit for an interview and to make the process more transparent, the researcher has picked five of the fourteen interviewees outside of this list that is provided by the company. Secondly, from only fourteen interviews, sometimes it's difficult to understand the true customer experience with a company as the number of samples is not that big. Of course, this qualitative research brings out detailed information and findings on particular issues but still a detailed survey with a large number of Flight expert customers would have solved the problem.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the utilization of the current methodology for conducting the study was deemed suitable in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter from the client's standpoint and to obtain profound insights into the viewpoints of the personnel.

4 Presentation and analysis of data:

4.1 The current mindset with e-commerce platforms in Bangladesh:

To open up the interview, participants were asked how frequent they use online platforms. This initially took them to a comfort zone because this is something the new generation is quite used to. Different types of responses were there, some said they do not like it that much still they are bound to use different online platforms a lot, and on the other hand, a lot of them love shopping or purchasing some sort of service online. Globally, e-commerce is increasingly seen as a convenient, efficient, and often preferred method of shopping. This shift is driven by the proliferation of smartphones, improved internet accessibility, and the growing trust in online payment systems (Batada 2020). When asked about what type of digital platforms they use to purchase anything, there were different responses came in the discussion.

“Sometimes I do shop online. When I order food, I mostly do it online. Also, medicine. For other big purchases, I still like going to stores for a number of reasons, one is trust.”
(Riyadh Anwar).

Maliha added *“Any products I need, makeups, foods, female products, I am there online to check in some websites... I mostly check the price; I am not that comfortable buying online because I am not sure about the payment and the quality”*. The absence of secure payment solutions is a crucial factor that adds to the lack of confidence. Although mobile banking services like bKash are becoming increasingly popular, a considerable portion of users are hesitant to use online payment methods due to apprehensions about fraudulent activities and the potential compromise of personal data (Iqbal, Raza et al. 2021). While talking about the using frequency of online platforms and types of online platforms, different respondents came up with different answers. In addition to this, different types of online platforms like food, medicine and cosmetics came into the discussion. Customers value the extensive range of products, low prices, and customized purchasing experiences provided by e-commerce platforms (Verhoef, Kannan et al. 2015). Food related online

platforms are probably the most visited platforms in Bangladesh right now. Just like food, medicine and cosmetics, travel related platforms came into the light too, when Sarwaf said,

“I used to live outside of Dhaka before but my family lived in Dhaka. Hence, I had to commute frequently and the best way to purchase my tickets and booking were online platforms. So far, I have really good experience in using online platforms”

Using online platform for travelling purpose appeared to be common among participants. A few of them mentioned early in their interviews that they love to use online travel agencies because its more convenient. As Riyadh said *“I travel a lot. I always believed travelling is something that motivates me the most. Hence, all the bookings I do is online”*. This was the same in case of Yasser too, as he added

“When I wanted to look for a tour package or something, I try to compare them in between different platforms just to have a clear idea. It gives me a sense of satisfaction that my pricing is right”

However, Whatever the purpose is, almost all the participants are used to visit different online platforms frequently. Several individuals claimed to utilize it on a near-daily basis. Perhaps a few participants were reluctant to extensively utilize it due to trust concerns, but nearly all of them were regular users. Although there may be certain drawbacks, digital platforms have become an essential part of daily life, without which it becomes challenging to function. The emergence of social commerce, which involves the integration of shopping capabilities into social media platforms, has had a significant impact on consumer behavior. It combines social contact with e-commerce, resulting in increased engagement (Huang, Li et al. 2017).

“I don't like online platform that much because of trust issues; however, the situation has changed a lot globally and a lot of things are available in online nowadays so I buy some stuff online. However, I use digital platforms at least twice a month” (Adiba Ahmed)

While Adiba said although she doesn't like it because of the trust issue but she uses online platforms anyway. To some participants online platforms became a part of their life and visiting a

website of their choice has become some sort of recreation on a daily basis.

Tanjin said, *“Mainly I have been using online platforms for almost three years to purchase anything But now it’s not only a trend, it has become a part and parcel of life”*. Maliha added,

“I use it a lot in fact sometimes almost every day for some specific reasons, I am always there in some sort of online platforms. Even if I don’t buy anything, I go and check for offers and sometimes compare prices. This became some sort of recreation in my life nowadays as I like to roam around in different websites”

Just like Maliha, there are a number of people who use online platforms for convenience, However, there are people who still prefers physical shops over online platforms. There are multiple reasons behind it. Sometimes the product quality delivered by online platforms are not up to the mark and the main drawback is that customers cannot confirm it until they receive it physically.

“Sometimes I hate online platforms as I cannot check the product physically. I love to buy clothes but most of the time I buy it online, either the color doesn’t match or the fabric is not what I thought” (Sadat)

There are individuals who do not have an interest in or enthusiasm for internet platforms. Conversely, internet platforms possess certain benefits that conventional shops lack. An online platform provides users with the ability to examine and compare prices online. One significant factor for utilizing internet platforms is the emergence of this comparison. Many interviewees expressed their preference for seeking discounts or offers on their preferred websites, however, they still feel skeptical about the trustworthiness in digital platforms and sometimes look for recommendations online.

“I use online platforms a lot these days. When I talk about buying something, I use some kind of online site every week. Most of the time, I check the prices and compare them. However, I don't always feel safe buying from less well-known sites because I can't easily trust them, in that case, suggestions help” (Abir)

It appears that online platforms, particularly those related to food, have become a regular aspect of life for Bangladeshi clients. A lot of respondents mentioned that they use online platforms a lot, some said they use it occasionally. However, a of them still feel uneasy since they cannot fully trust these platforms. Either because of the security of payment or the quality of the products.

4.2 The perception about online travel platforms in Bangladesh and Flight expert:

This section of the interview tries to find the personal perception about using online travel platforms and specially the topic of this research, flight expert. It appeared that the perception about using online travel platform is initially good. All types of reasons came up in the discussion about using online platforms. Different participants mentioned different aspects of using online travel platforms. The first thing that came to discussion is that these sorts of online platforms are a completely new thing to this generation. People are still getting used to it. Maliha said,

“Previously, I had never anticipated placing my trust in a digital platform and engaging in online purchases. Alternatively, there may be an option to make an online purchase, but I am currently unsure of the method I will use as getting scammed can be easy nowadays”

Internet was not extensively accessible in Bangladesh till the early 2005. The apprehension of falling victim to fraudulent schemes persists. Nevertheless, the primary catalyst for the rise of online platforms in Bangladesh was the mobile service provider businesses, which also significantly contributed to the growth of the tourism industry. Millennials and Gen Z prioritize rapid delivery, product assessments, and hassle-free returns, suggesting their preference for an efficient and reliable purchasing experience (Kruh, Benzimra et al. 2017). In addition, the increasing adoption of mobile payment systems and digital wallets has facilitated the acceptability of e-commerce among younger age groups (Batada 2020). (Batada 2020).

“Mobile service companies in Bangladesh were very important in starting the e-commerce business. People are used to using online sites now that the internet is so easy to get to. The internet can be found anywhere. If I need to quickly find out about flights, trains, or ticket prices, the online platform really comes in handy.” (Riyad Anwar)

Mobile internet changed the whole online business scenario in Bangladesh. Online platforms found to be more convenient than physical shops. While talking about convenience, different issues came to discussion. It was found that online platforms are convenient because it saves time and customers can avoid heavy traffic in Dhaka. But again, convenience related to time is not enough in some cases as people fear about the authenticity of the platform

“Nowadays I love this more than conventional travel agents. The weather in Dhaka is really hot and it’s really convenient for me to sit at home checking prices and buy stuff online, but a lot of the time I have a fear of being scammed in online purchase” (Maliha)

On this note, Riyad added some positive aspects, *“I used to have to go to stores in person, which took a lot of time. These days, we don't have to do that. We used to have a hard time getting transportation tickets during the holidays, but now we can do it online. There are a lot of good things about online sites in our lives.”* On the other hand, internet platforms also offer certain disadvantages. Due to the increasing competition from online businesses, traditional brick and mortar stores are facing significant challenges, resulting in a considerable loss of jobs as online platforms require less personnel to run. In addition, in Bangladesh, certain buyers still prefer to make direct purchases from the seller, as it instills a sense of reliability and confidence in them. There are complaints regarding the cost. There is a belief held by some individuals that the prices of items, tickets, and tour deals on online platforms should be lower due to the reduced need for personnel in operating these enterprises. Traditional brick and mortar stores incur additional costs such as rent, power, and salaries, but online platforms do not. Some individuals express dissatisfaction with their inability to dispute the price of an item online, as they cannot always trust the accuracy. Consequently, they often seek the assistance of another person to verify the price before making an online purchase. The present generation is also more aware of issues such as data privacy and ethical consumption. Research indicates that the perceived lack of robust cybersecurity measures on e-commerce platforms in Bangladesh exacerbates these concerns, causing users to be reluctant to engage in online transactions (Rahman 2023).

The increasing prominence of concerns around the security of personal information and the environmental impact of transactions is impacting individuals' selection of platforms and companies. Anika expressed her feeling on this by saying,

“One thing I don't always like is how much something costs online. ... And you cannot challenge the price anymore as there is no one to bargain... sometimes I call my friends to crosscheck for security purpose.” (Anika)

Consumers in Bangladesh are increasingly adopting online shopping due to factors such as enhanced internet accessibility, the extensive utilization of smartphones, and the convenience provided by e-commerce platforms. However, trust issues continue to exist and provide significant challenges, particularly in relation to the authenticity of items, the security of payments, and the determination of prices. The challenges mentioned present significant barriers to the extensive implementation of e-commerce in Bangladesh (Yasmin, Tasneem et al. 2015). This is due to the fact that consumers in Bangladesh have a preference for the tangible nature and perceived safety of making purchases in physical stores.

4.3 Classic E-servicescape conceptual model with Flight expert:

4.3.1 Appearance and presentation:

When asked what are the things that made the customers chose Flight Expert, they came up with interesting responses. The logo of this company actually has a meaning to the users and has a positive influence on them. Not only that, this logo can be a unique selling point for Flight expert according to them.

“The logo of flight expert is really interesting. I never knew a logo of a company can attract someone or create some sort of unique selling point. As I am a travel enthusiast, I found their logo really catchy and attention seeking. There is a bird in the logo and it gives me a sense of comfort and freedom as birds can fly off to anywhere at any time they want”
(Adiba)

In addition to this, Riyad felt *“their logo has some sort of positivity and looks relaxing”*. On the other hand, a really interesting insight came out when a participant said that sometimes the presentation of Flight expert can be too good to lure the attention of customers and make them do unnecessary purchase. Although it sounded like a complain, however it seemed impressive from the company perspective.

“Sometimes I feel this is not a good thing for me as I am purchasing something that I don’t need just because they presented it in a really good way so kudos to the company. I always believe that to attract more customers, the website has to look really good” (Abir)

It that not only just the appearance, the website has some sort of entertainment value for customers as they feel happy to explore the website. Yasser said,

“Nowadays I use online platform very frequently.... One of the reasons is checking the price up and comparing them. This is a really fun thing to do now that I can compare it to physical shop and online seemed shop just to have a idea about a probable product that I am going to buy”

When the people who were interviewed were asked to explain why they had been using Flight Expert for so long, they gave a lot of interesting answers. In Bangladesh, the visual aesthetics and overall design of an online platform are very important in establishing credibility and influencing the inclination of clients to make purchases. A well-designed e-servicescape can enhance consumer trust and satisfaction by creating a safe, user-friendly, and enjoyable online purchasing environment, as per the model(Hopkins, Grove et al. 2009). In an environment where trust concerns are prevalent, a website that is both visually appealing and facile to navigate is essential for establishing credibility and professionalism. Adiba stated the following regarding this matter:

“..... Really useful information can be found on the page. The websites' layout makes it easy to find what you're looking for, and they give off the vibe of a real, honest business.”

On the same note, Sarwaf added even more,

“.... I use flight expert a lot because Flight Expert always provides the exact flight information that I look for, nothing more, nothing less. Other websites show unnecessary search results and sometimes they aren't even correct. When any new flight info was there, flight expert updated it all the time, however, this is not the only reason I use Flight expert”

Customers feel more comfortable when the website looks good, and when they feel good there is always a better chance of spending money in that website. However, they mentioned that this is just one of the reasons why they use Flight expert,

“The appearance of a website influences me a lot. If the website has a good color theme, then it offers a positive vibe that they are reliable and they are not going to offer bad products. When a website looks good and the products or service are really organized it feels good as a customer. Flashy colorful websites attract me a lot” (Maliha)

The user experience is improved by the inclusion of features such as high-resolution photographs, comprehensive product descriptions, and user-friendly navigation, which fosters a sense of trust in the platform's authenticity. In emerging markets like Bangladesh, where there is frequently a high level of suspicion regarding online purchases, these variables have a significant impact on

consumer trust and intention to make a purchase (Abir, Husain et al. 2020). A website that is meticulously designed establishes credibility, thereby reducing clients' perceived uncertainties and encouraging them to complete their transactions.

When asked if the color theme of a website has any sort of influence on them, they came up with some insightful responses. It appeared that the color theme of any website can draw the attention of a customer. If the customers find the color attractive, they tend to spend more. Apparently, flashy bright colors have big influence on customers in some aspects.

“When I want to buy cosmetics, I want to visit a website that looks good and organized. Normally cosmetics are flashy and colorful. If the websites are not colorful and well organized then it will never attract me.” (Sumaiya)

When asked if these visual cues have any influence on building trust in Flight expert, surprisingly there were mixed responds. It seems that when an online platform is visually good looking it helps to attract customers to the platform as it creates a positivity in their mind. However, there might be other reasons that finally make them spend in an online platform. As Arnab said, *“A visually good website attracts me as a customer, whether I buy something or not, that is a different story”*.

Bristy said a similar thing too,

“When the online platform is good looking, it creates some sort of curiosity in me and makes me visit that platform often. If I like the website, sometimes I buy, sometimes I don't, because sometimes there are other factors too, like reviews and ratings”

Despite the significance of visual content in attracting clients to online platforms, it often fails to generate sales on its own. Research indicates that product descriptions, customer reviews, perceived trustworthiness, and convenience of navigation also significantly influence purchasing decisions (Flavián, Guinalú et al. 2006). Despite the fact that visual elements can attract attention, clients may be hesitant to complete transactions if they do not receive sufficient useful information or have a smooth user experience. Consequently, a comprehensive strategy that integrates both textual and visual cues is necessary to foster consumer trust and encourage purchase behavior.

4.3.2 User friendliness and comfortability:

In the present day, there are hundreds of thousands of online platforms. It is challenging for customers to select a product and commence using it immediately. Consumer trust and purchase intentions are enhanced by websites that are both functionally efficient and aesthetically pleasing (Wakefield, Stocks et al. 2004). Nevertheless, the e-service landscape's influence appears to be somewhat limited in the absence of robust social validation, despite these discoveries. There are various factors why individuals select a particular platform for shopping or obtaining services. The interviewees generated numerous rationales for employing Flight Expert during their investigation. The initial topic of discussion was the "smoothness" of website navigation. A drawback is a website that requires an extended amount of time to display.

“If it takes a long time when I press a button, it does not feel good. Sometimes the internet providers cannot offer good speed and that can be one reason behind it but in overall if a website is not fast enough then it irritates me a lot, so much that I switch to a different website instantly” (Maliha)

Turned out Flight expert came out with a brilliant website which has a really good performance and that adds value to the customers. As Riyad expressed his satisfaction by saying that

“When I used flight expert, The experience was completely different. The website is filled with information yet it did not crash even for once”.

It demonstrated that customers absolutely despise the frequent occurrence of websites failing while utilizing it. Research suggests that the efficacy of an online travel agency (OTA) is significantly contingent upon its ability to deliver a user-friendly, seamless, and personalized user experience. User-friendly design elements, such as plain information presentation, simple navigation, and expedited booking methods, significantly enhance client satisfaction and loyalty (Law, Leung et al. 2004).

When the loading time is less, that adds positivity among customers. Sarwaf said, *“Another really mentionable thing is their website has less loading time, which I really care as a regular customer. The website is simple and does not have complicated features”*. Apparently, the customers have to feel a “good vibe” while visiting any website. It goes for every website or online platforms in general. Even though the color theme is good or the product segmentations is nice, if the positive vibe is missing then it’s a turn off for customers as they always want to feel good while purchasing online.

“If I want to talk about service sector, recently I visited one website of a really big brand. I knew about the company and that they were big but I didn’t feel good about the website. I did not feel the “wow” factor was available in there. It was really demoralizing for me as it changed the perception about the company” (Riyad)

When inquired about their experiences and whether the functionality of Flight Expert influences them, it was discovered that the website's functionality plays a role. Customers are provided with an exceptional website by Flight Expert. While browsing, customers experience a sense of ease and optimism. Similarly, they stated that the website appears well-organized and that they can readily locate the items they are interested in. It appears that consumers are adverse to complex websites and prefer them to be as straightforward and rapid as possible, which facilitates online transactions. At times, even a high-quality website may not suffice.

“Whenever I tried to look for hotels or flights, the search option was easy and the layout was simple to navigate. For me this is really important as I do not like complicated websites where you cannot find the things you want. With flight expert this was not the case. But, for some specific deal, I still try to look for reviews if some other companies providing a better deal” (Adiba)

Yasser agreed to this and further added another insightful issue. According to him, customer always look for an organized website and if they cannot, they even switch to another company’s website immediately. However, in his case, Flight expert turned out good enough for him.

“Flight Expert is very well organized, and the features are very pleasing to the eye. The look as a whole is great. It's not a good sign for me to buy something from a website if it just looks bad.... however, in Bangladesh, sometimes we still do not want to trust an online provider for some other reasons”.

The usability and simplicity of an online platform are essential factors in building trust among clients. Customers are more likely to trust their abilities to effectively utilize a website when it possesses a user-friendly interface, intuitive design, and accessible functionality(Malvela 2018). This feature's user-friendly design reduces cognitive work and alleviates the frustration that might arise from complex or poorly designed websites. However, certain clients may not be swayed by a high-quality website alone, since they believe that other social elements also come into play.

4.3.3 Perceived security:

The perception of security has a substantial impact on the desire of Bangladeshi consumers to engage in transactions on online platforms. It is imperative to secure payment systems in order to protect sensitive consumer data, such as credit card information and personal identification, which are frequently targeted by fraudsters(Kim, Chung et al. 2011). The perception of secure payment methods has a direct impact on the confidence and purchasing decisions of customers in a country where there is a significant concern regarding data breaches and cyber fraud. Customers are more likely to engage in online purchasing when they are assured that their personal and financial information is adequately protected. This includes the presence of transparent privacy policies, SSL certificates, and reliable payment channels, all of which assure clients that their data will not be mismanaged. As Riyadh said,

“When I use renown platforms like flight expert, I don't feel uncomfortable anymore. But it happens for other less renown companies, especially when I use cards, I feel a bit uncomfortable sometimes”.

Maliha said the same thing too, *“I am really fine with online payments if the website is known and reliable. If there is a new website, I try to avoid advanced online payment as I don’t have the trust issue on them. If I already know that this is a big company then I am fine with online payment”*

When they were asked if these are the main reasons for using this platform, they had added a bit more to what she had said already. Maliha said,

“This is one of the main reasons, however there are other reasons like customer reviews, which influence me a lot”

Research suggests that consumers' preparedness to conduct transactions on online travel agency (OTA) websites is significantly influenced by their perception of security. If customers perceive any potential hazards associated with the payment process, they are considerably more inclined to rescind their reservations (Yang, Liu et al. 2015). Riyad said a similar thing too,

“A secured website is a blessing but this is not enough to motivate me to purchase something, I still checkup online about a platform or ask my friends about it”

If the online payment system is secured and fast, many customers who feel a bit uncomfortable in paying online would be ready to do it. As Zakia said, *“The payment procedure has to be smooth and fast. If an online provider can make sure of secured payment, then I don’t have any issue using it”*.

The interviewees emphasized the importance of website security. However, certain individuals expressed that despite a website being secure, given Bangladeshi culture, they do not feel at ease unless they receive information about it from a trusted source. Ensuring the security of a website is crucial for protecting client data and building trust. However, it is worth noting that other factors, such as consumer feedback and word-of-mouth, play a considerable role in influencing decision-making (Flavián, Guinalú et al. 2006).

“I am very much comfortable with advanced payment in FE. However, the very first time I use Flight expert, I still remember that I called my best friend to know if this website is secured” (Arnab)

It seems that when Bangladeshi customers find a good online platform they initially pick that as a go to place to get products or service but sometimes they still need a second opinion to finally spend money on it. Even factors like perceived security might not be enough in this case. As Anika said *“It’s true that a secured website helps me to shortlist it as an online shopping tool but culturally I still feel the urge to verify the security by crosschecking it with someone else”*

Openness and confidence are fostered by the dynamic nature of evaluations, which allow prospective consumers to verify the company's comments. This promotes a sense of community and engagement that cannot be attained solely through technological tools, such as security (Floyd, Freling et al. 2014).

4.3.4 Expanded E-servicescape model with Customer influence (Customer reviews and e-wom) and trust building of Flight expert customers:

This section presents the findings concerning the expanded part of existing e-servicescape model. There are two social factors that came out in the discussion, the first one is how online reviews creates trust among different customers of online platforms or more specifically, Flight expert and the second one is how electronic word of mouth or e-WOM builds trust which leads to purchase intention.

The e-servicescape conceptual model has a positive impact in terms of building trust on the customers of Flight expert. The online space where transactions occur is known as the "e-servicescape," and it includes interactive features, website design, functionality, and security (Harris and Goode 2010). However, the three sub-factors in this model, are not enough all the time to build the trust eventually and it was found from some of the interviewees respond that there are other social factors that influence their purchase intention and building trust about the platform other than the three sub-factors that are mentioned in the model.

4.3.4.1 Customer reviews:

To begin, interviewees were questioned about the factors that influenced their initial decision to select Flight expert when they first used it. The responses were varied. It appears that online evaluations are a significant factor in the decision-making process for selecting any online platform. This is particularly true in marketplaces where consumers encounter substantial uncertainty and risk, such as when purchasing expensive or experiential products (Park, Lee et al. 2007). When asked about what influence them to pick Flight expert, Abir mentioned

“It does not matter how good of an online platform a company provides in Bangladesh, sometimes I feel nervous purchasing something online. The first time I bought something from F, I called one of my friends to confirm that they are good”

It appears that a quality online platform alone is not always sufficient to entice a consumer to make a purchase. In situations where buyers are unable to physically inspect the object, they primarily rely on the advice of others when making decisions about what to purchase online. The e-servicescape, which is a controlled environment with an inherent sales orientation, is perceived as less reliable than peer evaluations due to their transparency and genuineness (Cheung, Lee et al. 2008). Yasser added on this topic saying,

“Apart from being a really good company with a good-looking website, Flight expert has a brand image through word of mouth which influence me to buy more from Flight expert”

Research has demonstrated that a well-organized electronic service environment has a positive effect on customer satisfaction and perceived reliability. Nevertheless, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) and customer reviews are influential social elements that considerably contribute to the establishment of trust among Bangladeshi customers in the context of online purchases. In a developing e-commerce market like Bangladesh, where consumers have limited direct exposure to products, they rely heavily on the opinions and experiences of others to inform their purchasing decisions. Positive electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) and authentic customer evaluations function as social evidence, thereby reducing the perceived risk and uncertainty

associated with online purchases. These reviews contribute to the reduction of the trust deficit by providing valuable information regarding the overall purchasing experience, vendor dependability, and product excellence.

Maliha mentioned a similar thing while saying what motivates her to purchase from Flight expert, she said

“I have a very skeptical mind, I do not trust people easily, the website of Flight expert is tempting enough, it shows the quality of a company but in case of OTA I always try to check the current performance by looking at the reviews and Flight expert gets some good reviews in different online groups”

Similarly, secured website attracts customers but it does not assure that the customer will buy from the website. Of course, it brings more traffic to the website but the ultimate purchasing decisions lies in some other factors. Anika said,

“Of course, a secured website is the key for me, if my hard-earned money is not safe in some platform, I will never go for it. In this case I trust Flight expert because their payment gateway feels secure and there are hundreds of quality reviews can be found online which builds the trust in me”

It appeared from the interviews that One reason Bangladeshi customer cannot trust online payment fully is because they do not understand how the online payment works. They are used to pay in cash, and receiving products physically so it is difficult for them to trust completely. However again, customer reviews create more trustworthiness among customers

“People don't understand how the payment system or online payment works, which makes them feel even more lost and unsafe. People who buy things online worry about whether they will get good service after paying for it. Reviews from customers are very helpful in this case.” (Yasser)

In Bangladesh's e-commerce sector, e-WOM and customer reviews are among the most influential factors promoting trust and purchase intention. The research emphasizes that consumers regard evaluations from their peers as more credible than conventional advertising, rendering them essential in the decision-making process. The study also observes that platforms

that conspicuously display and encourage customer reviews tend to foster higher levels of trust, which in turn leads to higher conversion rates. It appears that online evaluations are a significant factor in the decision-making process for selecting any online platform. This is particularly true in marketplaces where consumers encounter substantial uncertainty and risk, such as when purchasing expensive or experiential products (Park, Lee et al. 2007). In terms of the term "reviews," while many individuals do not completely trust them, they still have some degree of influence.

"I check the page reviews or general reviews in google about the company which gives a really nice idea about what I am going to purchase or what I am going to avail. If the reviews are good then I feel a positivity, and I decide to purchase from there. if there are bad reviews then I feel the urge to research a bit more." (Maliha)

In general, consumers are significantly influenced by reviews when selecting an online platform. Customer evaluations serve as a form of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), offering prospective buyers valuable insights derived from the experiences of previous customers. These evaluations have a substantial effect on third-world countries, where customers are more cautious due to the limited consumer protection laws and underdeveloped e-commerce infrastructures (Bashir, Mehboob et al. 2015). It was also determined to be accurate in the context of Flight expert. Customers truly consult online reviews prior to making a purchase. Yasser expressed his feeling on this matter,

"Of course, it influences me a lot. When I see good reviews about flight expert, I feel good about using it even more. When I see people have nice experience on using flight expert, I feel more comfort and want to buy or avail their service even more"

Reviews of other customers turned out important for the users. However, when someone is using a platform for a long time does not care about review much as he already knows about the platform. As Adiba said, *"Sometimes I check the review sections when I buy somethings. Since I am using Flight expert for a really long time and now, I already have so many good personal experiences so I do not have to see reviews anymore"*. Customers consider reviews to be an essential

component of their purchasing experience, as they occasionally wish to compare or verify the items they intend to acquire. It is impossible for customers to possess a comprehensive understanding of the service they intend to utilize. In developing nations, consumers are more likely to trust peer evaluations than marketing communications or platform assurances, according to research (Nisar and Prabhakar 2017).

“Sometimes I check the reviews. It is really important in few cases. For example, Flight expert provides visa solution for different countries and I really wanted to know how the experience was for other people. I checked reviews online and I found out that their performance was really good and I wanted to avail the service too.” (Riyad)

However, the problem with reviews is that no matter how much it helps the customers to gain understanding of their desired products or service, a fake review can turn the whole thing upside down. If there are too many good reviews then customers suspect them not to be true. As Maliha Sadat mentioned *“When I see all the comments or reviews are positive, I suspect that those might not be true”*. Other respondents were vocal on this matter too. There has to be a way to remove this problem which can hamper the purchase experience.

“It is not like I trust everything I see on online platforms. Even though sometimes the reviews can be fabricated. I know a guy who gets paid for putting good comments in favor of a company and it can happen for any company” (Yasser)

It appeared that they seek reviews in various scenarios to gain a clear comprehension of their FE activities when asked. This dependence is the result of a societal tendency to prioritize collective knowledge and the belief that consumer evaluations are more indicative of genuine experiences and less influenced by prejudice. In environments where there is a lack of trust in institutions, such as legal systems or consumer rights organizations, these ratings provide a form of social validation that is critically important.

“Sometimes I check the review sections when I buy somethings. Since I am using Flight expert for a really long time and now I already have so many good personal experiences so I do not have to see reviews anymore. But in the beginning, I used to check their reviews just to make sure that they are good at what they do. I believe reviews really help to build a perception about a company” (Adiba)

In the event that the Flight expert website offers products or services that are experience-based, customers are inclined to consult the reviews to ensure their satisfaction. The absence of well-established brands and less familiar e-commerce platforms in developing nations can exacerbate consumer doubt and mistrust. By offering comprehensive, user-generated content that specifically addresses concerns regarding product legitimacy, seller credibility, and delivery service reliability, customer reviews are instrumental in bridging the trust divide (Huang and Benyoucef 2013). Reviews that include photographs, videos, and subsequent comments are particularly beneficial because they enhance transparency and provide more detailed information.

“Sometimes I check the reviews. It is really important in few cases. For example, Flight expert provides visa solution for different countries and I really wanted to know how the experience was for other people. I checked reviews online and I found out that their performance was really good and I wanted to avail the service too” (Abir)

Additionally, evaluations are frequently relied upon as the primary source of information for a significant number of consumers due to the digital divide and disparities in online literacy. In these scenarios, customer reviews can reduce information asymmetry by providing localized insights and experiences that are consistent with the specific requirements and expectations of consumers in these marketplaces(Sharma and Klein 2024).

4.3.4.2 E-WOM:

Research findings have shown that the influence of social aspects on trust is often more significant than the features of e-servicescape. Research has shown that a positive e-servicescape experience has the potential to enhance consumer satisfaction(Filieri 2015). Nevertheless, the trust built through electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) and customer evaluations has a significant influence on driving purchase behavior. Having a strong brand presence instills confidence in customers when it comes to a website. Many customers believe that their online payment is secure if the company is large. This also occurs for FE. With the rising popularity of FE as a brand, customers in Bangladesh have gained confidence in making online payments.

“When people buy something from online, they think that if I am going to get the proper service or not when I have already paid for this. In this case, a big brand helps a lot. Flight expert has become a big brand now through people’s word of mouth and I have the confidence that there wouldn’t be a problem paying online” (Bristy).

E-word-of-mouth (e-WOM) is any customer review, whether favorable or unfavorable, that is disseminated online to a large audience and organizations(Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner et al. 2004). While reviews have its direct impact on customers, it can be misleading in different cases. In this regard, electronic word of mouth can be really handy to customers.

“Word of mouth works a lot for me. First time I heard about Flight expert was from friend as she already used it before. She came up with really good reviews and I decided to avail their service too. If my friend didn’t tell me about this. I might not have used it” (Bristy)

In addition, the interactive nature of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) fosters ongoing communication and validation between consumers, fostering a sense of community and shared trust that cannot be replicated solely by the electronic servicescape(Gruen, Osmonbekov et al. 2006). In today's digital age, there is a wide array of digital platforms available for customers to explore and evaluate the performance of various companies. Platforms such as Google and various social media platforms provide users with trending lists on a wide range of topics. When there is a significant amount of online discussion surrounding a particular topic, it has the potential to become a trending item. Customers become intrigued when they come across items in these lists.

“Another big factor is word of mouth. When you keep seeing a company making the “trending” list and people are talking about it, it automatically builds trust among potential customers. Before even using it, I kept listening about Flight expert a lot. I heard known people using Flight expert and the experience is good. I did the same and I found relevantly better service than other service provider” (Riyad)

E-WOM is directly related to another important factor, branding. Nowadays, Digital Advertising and promotional activity makes it easier for customers to know about a company. When they see the same ad over and over again, they get curious and wants to know more.

“I believe for using any online platforms, Branding and advertisement plays a huge role. If you keep seeing a brand popping up in front of you every now and then, it creates a sense

of trustworthiness. This is super important to reach mass people. Social media, SMS plays a big role too” (Sadat)

Yasser added more on this and said ads and branding can lead to trustworthiness and purchasing from an online platform eventually,

“Advertisement is the key. Big brand image creates big trustworthiness. When I see billboards, and advertising in different platforms, I feel that this is a big brand and I feel more trust towards the company. When I see different deals of Flight expert pops up in my news feed, it feels good as a consumer”

A very thoughtful perception was introduced by Maliha as she mentioned a unique feature of the customers from Bangladesh. She mentioned,

“I believe for Bangladeshi customers who thinks alike me always feels the safety net when they look at the online reviews and hear about a product from someone who they trust because there are usually so many scams online that word of mouth always helps as a buyer”.

Same thing was said by Bristy too,

“...I am quite suspicious about buying products online but before I purchased a flight ticket from Flight Expert for the first time, I made sure that someone from my Facebook friend list, knows about this company and thankfully my own brother was already a customer, so yes word of mouth helped me as a customer of Flight expert”

E-WOM has emerged as an effective approach for attracting customers to online travel agents (OTAs). The extensive and interconnected structure of digital platforms enables electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) to travel promptly and exert a broad influence, in contrast to traditional oral communication. Potential consumers' decision-making processes are significantly influenced by online reviews, ratings, and social media discussions (Litvin, Goldsmith et al. 2008). It appears that e-WOM is a significant factor in the procurement decision-making process in Bangladesh, as consumers feel more secure when they receive a review or recommendation from a familiar individual.

5 Discussion and conclusion:

By conducting semi-structured interviews with the direct long-term customers of Flight Expert, this master thesis determines that the conventional sub-factors identified in the e-servicescape conceptual model have a favorable correlation with Bangladeshi customers. Specifically, these factors contribute to the establishment of trust and ultimately lead to the formation of purchase intention. However, these three variables are insufficient in many instances. This study investigates the impact of an additional component on this model, which enhances trust and hence increases online purchasing behavior. Trust is essential for the success of online businesses in the rapidly growing e-commerce sector in Bangladesh. The rise in online shopping's popularity has resulted in a heightened reliance on social factors, including electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) and consumer reviews. Social cues significantly influence consumer behavior by serving as crucial mechanisms for establishing trust, particularly in domains where consumers still grapple with trust difficulties and mistrust towards online transactions.

The significance of utilizing a travel agency for travel reservations should not be underestimated. Travel agencies have long been seen as essential participants in the tourist distribution channel, serving as intermediaries that facilitate the connection between vendors and buyers. Their continued presence and involvement in this capacity underscore their ongoing significance (Mokoena 2023). OTA has emerged as one of the biggest and promising industry in Bangladesh. Nowadays, people are getting more confident to purchase from online platforms. As an OTA, Flight Expert is quite successful as they are the first fully functional OTA in the Bangladeshi tourism industry. However, things were not like this before as the Bangladeshi customers had trust issues using online platforms in general. Their previous experiences with different online platforms had a big impact behind this.

5.1 Research questions:

- 1. How does the standard e-servicescape conceptual model, along with customer influence variables like e-WOM and Customer review system, affect the formation of trust among clients of online travel companies in Bangladesh??**

The traditional e-servicescape conceptual model is compatible with Flight expert, as indicated by the interview results; however, this is not the case in all instances. The e-servicescape conceptual model comprises three distinct sub-sectors: financial security, layout and functionality, and aesthetic appeal. These three factors attract customers to their online platforms and create trust among some of them, who are willing to spend money on the platform. However, there are other social factors, such as customer reviews, branding, and e-wom, that also contribute to the development of trust among customers. The website's design has the capacity to either strengthen or weaken the relationship between a business and its consumers, and it also functions as a catalyst for establishing a favorable perception of the organization in the customer's mind(Hopkins, Grove et al. 2009). The aesthetic appeal, which is the initial component of the e-servicescape conceptual paradigm, is compatible with Flight expert. The website's design is highly regarded by consumers, and it has a significant and positive impact on them, according to interviews. The positive influence of the Flight expert logo on the purchase intention of one interviewee was specifically mentioned. The respondents perceived the color combination as both attractive and soothing. In relation to numerous aspects of websites, such as content quality and appearance considerations, the impact of visual signals on consumers' perceptions of risk has been documented. Consumer satisfaction, approach/avoidance behaviors, product selection, perceptions of download speed, and consumer recommendations have all been observed to be influenced by a variety of visual signals, such as color, graphics, layout, and design(Armstrong, Kulczynski et al. 2021). Some customers are drawn to Flight expert by these visual cues; however, there are additional factors that are substantial in addition to the visual allure. Customer reviews, e-wom, and branding were the subjects of the conversation.

Flight expert proved to be a relatively stable platform for usability in terms of layout and functionality, which is the second factor in the conventional e-servicescape model. Customers were primarily appreciative of the absence of superfluous advertisements and pop-ups, as the application rarely crashed during use. They were able to access all pertinent information. Nevertheless, the interviewees' responses to the third segment of the e-servicescape conceptual model, which pertains to perceived security, were inconsistent. Customers' satisfaction with their online shopping experiences on e-commerce platforms is significantly influenced by their level of trust in online retailers. concerned about the reliability of the Internet as a platform for undertaking purchasing activities. Previous research has suggested that individuals are hesitant to establish trust in online purchasing (Tran and Strutton 2016). According to the interviews, Bangladeshi consumers continue to experience trust issues when making payments on an online platform. Some respondents stated that the functionality of a website is essential for the brand image and business. However, it may not always guarantee the purchase decision of consumers, as there may be other social factors to assess.

Despite the fact that the e-servicescape conceptual paradigm is compatible with Flight expert, there are additional issues that require attention. Interviews yielded a variety of perspectives when inquired about the factors that motivate them to purchase from Bangladeshi online platforms. Reviews from users were not included in the initial concept and dimension of e-servicescape. However, there has been an increasing reliance on consumer reviews as a determining factor in the purchasing decisions of individuals. This is demonstrated by the fact that a substantial 77% of consumers engage in the practice of checking reviews for electronic products (Tran and Strutton 2016).

The conventional e-servicescape conceptual paradigm, which prioritizes the design, functionality, and security of an online platform, may not be sufficient to establish trust in markets such as Bangladesh, despite the increasing recognition of the significance of social variables such as electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) and customer reviews in the establishment of trust. The e-servicescape model emphasizes that trust is primarily influenced by factors such as the visual appeal, technological capabilities, and simplicity of navigation of a website. Nevertheless, these

factors may not entirely address the fundamental trust-related concerns in Bangladesh, where there is a significant disparity in digital literacy levels and a prevailing sense of doubt among consumers regarding online transactions.

Trust is frequently influenced by cultural context and social impact in countries like Bangladesh, with community norms and collective experiences playing a significant role. Although the e-servicescape paradigm is significant, it fails to adequately account for the significant influence of social validation through electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) and customer reviews (Hajli 2014). In situations where trust in online transactions is still in the process of developing, the perspectives and firsthand experiences of others have a more significant impact on the establishment of confidence than the technological features of an online platform alone. An increase in the number of continuous favorable evaluations fosters confidence by suggesting universal contentment and dependability (Nisar and Prabhakar 2017). The knowledge asymmetry that is prevalent in developing economies is not adequately addressed by the e-servicescape approach. Consumers frequently rely on external social indicators, such as reviews and recommendations, due to their limited access to comprehensive information on items and sellers (Ahmed, Johnson et al. 2004). This is especially relevant in Bangladesh, where the market is overrun with untrustworthy merchants and counterfeit products. Social aspects are essential in bridging the knowledge gap, as they provide an additional level of confidence that cannot be attained by the e-servicescape model individually.

In the context of Bangladesh, the customer review system is of considerable significance. It was discovered during the interviews that, despite the fact that an online platform meets all of the criteria of the e-servicescape conceptual model, some individuals have difficulty trusting the company and making a purchase if they have not heard of it from another source. In comparison to the procurement of tangible products, potential consumers are more inclined to seek additional assurance when purchasing hotel accommodations. This is accomplished by reviewing the experiences and recommendations of other travelers, which are easily accessible on online forums or hotel review websites (Christin and Nugraha 2023).

Interviews revealed that consumers experience a sense of security when they discover favorable reviews about a company, such as Flight expert. Furthermore, reviews provide Flight expert with

additional opportunities and enable them to engage with a greater number of consumers. In addition to the evaluations, they are also aided by e-WOM. In the modern era, individuals have the capacity to transmit messages effectively through a variety of electronic platforms, including instant posts, text messages, emails, conversations, tweets, and other similar methods. This can be accomplished with the simple press of a button. The ongoing pursuance of cost-effective methods by enterprises to engage with prospective customers, such as electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM) over the Internet, is motivating this research study, in addition to the aforementioned consumer trends(Tran and Strutton 2016).They are inclined to have a greater faith in a company when they discover favorable evaluations from a person they know. When Flight expert's customers utilized e-WOM for the first time, they formed the opinion that it facilitated their purchasing decisions.

Overall, this master thesis mainly talks about a Bangladeshi OTA named Flight expert from e-servicescape point of view. First, it tried to find out whether the traditional e-servicescape conceptual model is enough to build trust among the Bangladeshi customers of Flight expert in Bangladeshi context and then it tries to find out whether there are other social factors that plays an important role in building trust among customers. The thesis finds out that the traditional e-servicescape conceptual model works in some cases to build trust among the online users which leads them to purchase online, however it is not enough to attract other customers who have trust issues with a Bangladeshi OTA. In that case, if social factors like customers reviews and e-wom are added to the model (See figure 2), it reaches more customers and create trust among more users.

5.2 Future research opportunities:

The purpose of this master thesis was to find out the influence of e-servicescape conceptual model with a Bangladeshi OTA, Flight expert. In addition to that, the same thing was checked with an added factor of “Customer influence” too. From the interview data, both of the scenarios were found positive and there is direct influence of these in Flight expert as an OTA in Bangladesh. However, there was another issue that kept popping up in the interviews which the researcher understands might have a direct relation with building trust and eventually purchase intention of the customers of Flight expert, and that is “Branding and Advertisement”. Different interviewees brought this in attention along with customer reviews and e-WOM that it creates a trustworthiness for FE while making purchasing decision. Hence, the researcher believes more research should take place on this particular topic to find out if “Branding and advertisement” has any impact behind making purchase decision for Bangladeshi customers while using an OTA like Flight expert.

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7 Appendices

7.1 Appendix 1:

To establish the context, relevant course materials pertaining to the "e-servicescape conceptual model", "online travel agencies" and "trust building in e-servicescape" were thoroughly reviewed and further examined for other sources included in their reference sections. In accordance with the research question and relevant subjects identified in previous literature, the following keywords have been selected as the subsequent phase of this study.

OTA, travel industry, travel agency, tourism, tourism in Bangladesh, online platforms, digital platforms, online scams, online payment, trust and e-servicescape, scams in e-servicescape, OTA in Bangladesh, Flight Expert

The keywords were utilized to retrieve scholarly material from the online databases Google Scholar and LUBsearch, which is the online database provided by Lund University. The search was conducted using keywords in both the title and abstract. The selection criteria included a preference for peer-reviewed literature written in the English language. The rationale for this choice was to ensure the dissemination of reliable scholarly literature and to limit the potential for misinterpretations resulting from inaccurate translations of primary texts. Throughout the composition of this Master thesis, I consistently engaged in the practice of frequently monitoring newly released literature in order to incorporate pertinent and contemporary research findings within the subject.

7.2 Appendix 2: Interview guide

1. Can you briefly introduce yourself?
2. How often do you use online platforms to purchase anything?
3. What is your opinion about digital platforms?
4. Do you have any experience using online travel agency?
5. For how long you are using flight expert?
6. Do you find anything mentionable about flight expert?
7. What are the reasons that makes you purchase from Flight expert?
8. Do you feel comfortable using flight expert?
9. What are the things that you like or dislike while using Flight expert?
10. How is your online payment experience so far?
11. Why did you choose flight expert?
12. How did you get to know about flight expert when you used it for the first time?
13. Do you trust Flight expert?
14. Does Flight expert satisfy you?
15. Are you going to use Flight expert again?
16. What are the drawbacks of Flight expert?
17. Do you have any suggestions for Flight expert?

7.3 Appendix 3: Interview Consent Email and Instruction

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this study. This email explains what the research project is about and what your participation entails.

The purpose of the study is to explore of the e-servicescape conceptual model is applicable for the first OTA in Bangladesh, Flight Expert. It is part of a Master thesis conducted at Lund University and carried out on the example of Flight Expert. To identify your views and perceptions, you are invited to partake in the study by participating in an individual interview. The interviewer Adnan Mahjub is a student at Lund University in Sweden currently pursuing his Master's in Service Management.

If you agree, the interview will be audio recorded. The interviews will last approximately 30-60 minutes. The answers given will only be used for the purpose of this study.

Furthermore, interviews will be made anonymous in order to not allow third parties to identify participants based on your individual responses. You are requested to reply to this email with your consent to ensure that the interviews are carried out in a correct ethical manner.

Thank you for your time and for agreeing to participate in this study.

If you have any questions about the project at any point, feel free to contact.