

## **Trust in the Tourism and Hospitality Industries: A Stakeholder Perspective**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Trust is important in both inter-organizational and inter-personal relationships, making it a hot research topic in various areas. Scholars from the tourism and hospitality industries showed interests in it since the 1990s. As a complex concept, trust has been studied from divergent perspectives like employees, customers, and product/service suppliers, reflecting multiple stakeholders involved. Given varying interests and stances of different stakeholders in the tourism and hospitality context, it is necessary to examine trust-related literature in a cohesive and systematic manner. Such efforts would contribute to the knowledge dissemination, proving researchers and practitioners a comprehensive angle to examine lines of enquiries of trust. The current study reviewed extant trust research and attempted to find out influencing factors for relevant stakeholders to form trust, findings of which offer managerial and academic implications. Furthermore, some promising future research directions of trust were proposed.

**Keywords:** Trust; tourism and hospitality; review; stakeholder theory.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The past decades have witnessed a directional change in both marketing theory and practice. The turn is toward relationship marketing, a concept often presented as “a new paradigm” (Fyall et al., 2003), resulting from “globalization, increasing competition and advances in information and communication technology” (Özgener & İraz, 2006, p. 1356) and reorientation of the economy toward a focus on services and technology (Kim et al., 2001). Trust, as the key concept in relationship marketing also have been receiving increasing interests.

Trust exists in “all relationship exchanges” (Morgan & Hunt 1994, p. 24) and it has been widely studied in various contexts like psychology (Rotter 1967), sociology (Barber 1983), marketing (Moorman et al., 1992), and marketing of services (Berry and Parasuraman 1991). Despite enormous studies relating to this topic, there still has no generally accepted definition. Furthermore, this concept has always been used in an incompatible manner (Nunkoo et al. 2012), resulting from its complex nature which hinders unified definition and conceptualization (Simpson 2007). However, there is unanimity among scholars regarding the beneficial outcomes

of trust, which encompasses behavioral outcomes such as cooperation behavior and cooperative intentions between buyers and suppliers (Andaleeb 1995; Anderson and Narus 1990), and cognitive benefits such as consumer commitment (Morgan and Hunt 1994).

Introducing the topic of trust into the tourism and hospitality industries is a recent phenomenon. However, the integration faces some challenges. First, trust formation is complex, which leads to debates concerning its conceptual typology. These debates include issues like whether trust formation is a dynamic process or it remains static throughout the duration of any particular relationships (McKnight et al. 1998). Second, tourism and hospitality research per se is a diverse and fragmented field in which no single agency or business can control and deliver a comprehensive portfolio of products (Wang 2008). Third, it is generally recognized that the tourism and hospitality research borrows a great number of ideas from other established fields of enquiry. It also applies to the case of trust research, and researchers tend to borrow views that fit the type of research they do which leads to narrowed conceptualizations of trust (McKnight and Chervany 2002).

As suggested by Payne et al. (2005), a “relationship is a state of being connected” (p. 856). Morgan and Hunt (1994) suggested that there are four types of partnerships relating to a focal company, namely, supplier partnerships, lateral partnerships, internal partnerships, and buyer partnerships. This typology is in line with the stakeholder dyads which were suggested by Sautter and Leisen (1999) in tourism development, including the “government-resident dyad, the government-tourism business dyad, the resident-tourist dyad, the tourist-business dyad, and the business-resident dyad” (p. 318). For management to be effective, continuous attention should be paid to the genuine interests of all appropriate stakeholders (Donaldson and Preston 1995). Therefore, this study proposes as stakeholder theory with reference to a focal firm could be used to sort out the discrete trust-related literature in the tourism and hospitality industries.

To make such evaluation more comparable and systematic, this study explores the formation mechanism of trust from perspectives of its importance and influencing factors across different stakeholders. This study structures as follows: first, a preliminary review of the literature reveals that the majority of studies tend to conceptualize trust as a key variable in their theoretical modeling. The second section evaluates the role of trust in these models. The third section comparatively examines existing studies, aiming to identify any points of difference. The results of this comparative analysis indicate the possibility of creating an all-inclusive conceptual typology of trust for the tourism and hospitality industries.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **The State of Trust in the Tourism and Hospitality**

As an important concept in relational exchange, trust functions to transcend transactional exchanges to develop a long-term relationships for continuous benefits (Dwyer and Oh 1987). Greater trust could lead to enhanced cooperation, commitment to long relationships, and ultimately prompt the business performance effectively (Doney and Cannon 1997). Despite the widely-accepted benefits of using trust as a marketing tool, it is not suitable for all industries as there are existed several preconditions. For the establishment of a trusting relationship, there should have something at stake and the trusting parties have to understand risks involved while still being willing to be vulnerable to the party to whom they extend their trust (Keeand Knox

1970; Mayer et al. 1995; Rousseau et al. 1998). This precondition of vulnerability could be found in many settings but thrives in socially distant relationships (McKnight and Chervany 2002), which is the typical situation in the tourism industry. The tourism and hospitality industries, like many other service industries, involve high risks arising from the highly intangible and variable nature of their products (Berry and Parasuraman 1991) and the low expertise of tourists (Zillifroand Morais 2004).

Over the past several decades, the extent of trust-related research in the domain of tourism and hospitality has greatly increased. Crotts et al. (1998) studied the trusting relationship between suppliers and wholesale buyers in the international travel trade. Their study revealed that trust is significantly related to supplier commitment. Zillifro and Morais (2004) examined the formation mechanism of trust in nature-based tourism. Based on agency theory and commitment-trust theory, they found that information investment could generate good communications with customers, which then would lead to increased trust and commitment. Nunkoo and Ramkissoon (2011) developed a community support model, in which trust was integrated as a blocking variable, and which they referred to as “institution trust”. In the following year, Nunkoo and his colleagues specifically studied public trust in tourism institutions. Their study identified three key antecedents of political trust in tourism institutions and concluded that public trust is significantly related to political support for tourism (Nunkoo et al. 2012).

In general, trust-related research in tourism and hospitality is more about interpersonal trust and most studies have been undertaken in hospitality environments such as hotels (e.g. Kim et al. 2009; Lovell 2009) and restaurants (e.g. Oh 2002). Other tourism-related sectors, such as meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE) (e.g. Lee and Back 2008) and nature-based service providers (e.g. Zillifroand Morais 2004) were also examined.

## **STAKEHOLDER THEORY AND TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY**

According to the seminal work of Freeman (1984), stakeholders are “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives” (p. 46). In this respect, any groups or individuals are qualified as stakeholders if they have direct influence on an organization. This would generate a long list of qualifiers like customers, share owners, employees, suppliers, lenders, and society. This broad and all-inclusive point of view has been criticized in that it hinders the efficiency of practitioners (Currie et al. 2009). The present research suggests a more precise identification of stakeholders, which is in accordance with preceding researchers conducting similar studies.

In the tourism and hospitality contexts, previous studies mainly adopted a contextualized approach by putting stakeholder analysis in the background of tourism planning, in particular collaborations among stakeholders in the early planning stages (e.g., Sheehan and Ritchie 2005). These research tends to adopt narrowed conceptual frame works which solely reflect limited stakeholders who have direct economic and/or moral connections with community development. Goeldner and Ritchie (2002) identified four major stakeholders in the tourism industry, namely the residents, the tourists, the business owners, and the local government. Using an unconventionally analytical technique for stakeholder identification, Byrd and Gustke (2007) obtained similar results that supported the four-type structure proposed by Goeldner and Ritchie (2002). In addition to the context of tourism destinations, some others also discussed

trust concept in tourism business entities. This highlights the need for organizations to consider all identified stakeholders (Sautterand Leisen 1999) and optimize the benefits to them and no priority should be given to any single stakeholder group.

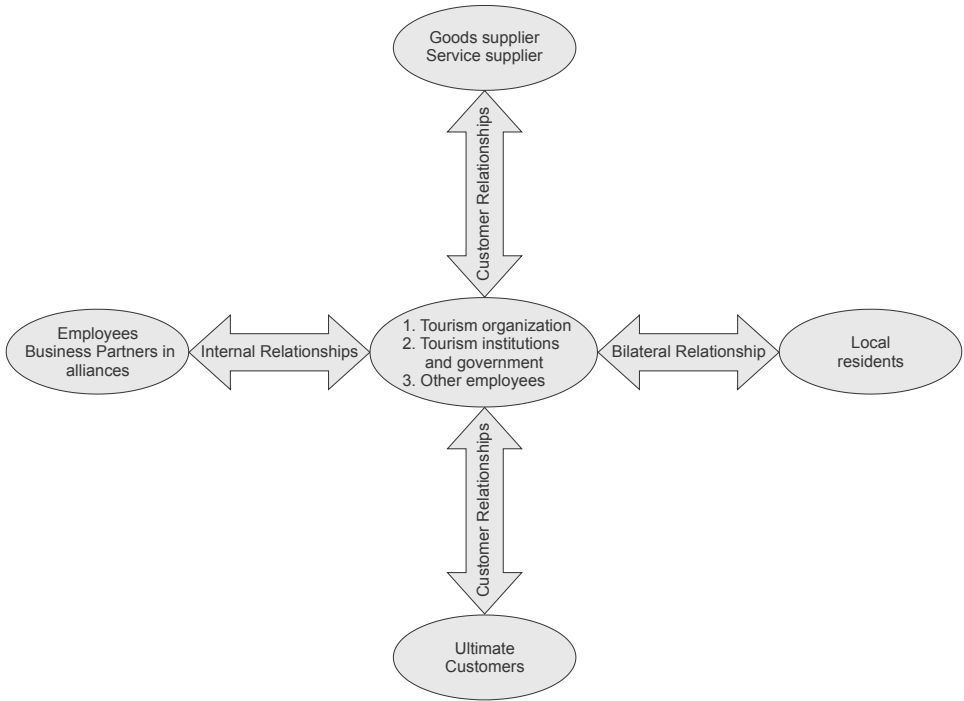
During service delivery, components of the process (functional) and outcome (technical) are distinctive from each other. Process refers to means of service delivery while outcome means the provision of services (Grönroos 1984). Acknowledging differences between these two components, Grönroos (1995) proposed relationship/transaction strategy continuum to manage service businesses. Its transactional aspect focuses on transactional tactics that are more short-term, which could be duplicated by competitors more easily (Bowen and Shoemaker, 1998; Grönroos 1995). In contrast, the relational aspects center on interactivities between organizations and their stakeholders which aims for a long-term connection (Grönroos 1995). Such relationship-based approaches go beyond traditional marketing logics and offer stakeholder researchers a new perspective (Payne et al. 2005).

## **METHODOLOGY**

In April and May 2013, relevant articles were retrieved from EBSCOHost (<http://search.ebscohost.com>) and Science Direct (<http://www.sciencedirect.com/>), two major academic databases that together comprise the most comprehensive databases for tourism and hospitality research journals (Hung and Law 2011). In addition, Google Scholar (<http://scholar.google.com.hk>) was also used for journal searching as it covers multidisciplinary fields (Law and van der Veen 2008; Waters 2007).

Keyword sets for articles searching included trust or tourism, trust or hospitality, trust or hotel, trust or airline, trust or travel agency, and trust or destination. In addition, references in retrieved articles were also utilized to make sure the analysis samples could cover relevant studies as much as possible. This generated a large number of journal articles relevant or irrelevant, which necessitates the screening procedure. Their titles were read and their abstracts further examined. One thing worth noting is all editors' notes and book reviews were omitted from this study so the review source was research articles only. After a careful screening process, 35 published articles were included to examine the research status of the issue of trust in the tourism context.

A content analysis was then conducted to examine these articles individually in terms of key stakeholders. Identification of stakeholders followed Morgan and Hunt (1994) and Lee et al. (2010). Figure 1 shows the four categories of stakeholders and their associated attributes: (1) the partnering involved in relational exchanges between tourism and hospitality businesses and their products/services providers such as the partnership between hotels and travel agents (Medina-Muñoz and García-Falcón 2000; Medina-Muñoz et al. 2002), hotels and their outsourcing companies (Leeman and Reynolds 2012), and tourism supplier and wholesale buyers (Crotts et al. 1998); (2) the lengthy exchange relationship between focal firms (e.g. airlines, hotels, restaurants, MICE, travel agencies) and ultimate customers; (3) the internal relationships in two relational exchanges, namely, between employees (interpersonal) and business partners in tourism alliances (inter-organizational); and (4) the relationship with local community residents during the process of tourism development and tourism planning.



**Fig. 1:** *The relational exchanges among stakeholders*

Adopted from Morgan and Hunt (1994), Sautter and Leisen (1999), and Lee, Riley, and Hampton (2010).

**CONSUMERS’ VIEW OF TRUST**

The majority of articles reviewed in this study examined trust from consumers’ perspective. This is not surprising considering the functions of trust in customer relationship management. A comprehensive examination of the literature reveals that trust is an oft-cited word but not a very stable term, as there exists numerous labels and definitions of trust based on a variety of characteristics. Such labels include trust, perceived trust, and brand trust, although they were used explicitly or implicitly to denote similar but subtly distinct concepts. This results in a complex and confusing picture, especially when researchers do not specify the essence of the term used in their individual research. For the purposes of clarity and consistency, the term “trust” is used throughout this study to refer to similar terms discussed in the literature as a whole.

Definitions of trust reviewed suggest that from the customers’ perspective, customer trust result from brand, expected behavior or intention, etc., most of which fall into the category of characteristic-based factors. More specifically, antecedents of consumer trust in a tourism and hospitality organization include information quality communicated between consumers and a nature-based tourism provider (Zillifroand Morais 2004), reputation of sellers (e.g. Loureiro and

González 2008; Macintosh 2002; Oh 2002), perceived value (e.g. Bowen and Shoemaker 1998; Forgas et al. 2010; Macintosh 2002; Oh 2002), and customer satisfaction (e.g. Kim et al. 2009; Mancintosh 2002; Ok et al. 2005). These influencing factors imply a dynamic viewpoint of trust development, as influencing factors evolve from more contextualized factors like the personal experiences with a restaurant or a hotel.

## **RESIDENTS' VIEW OF TRUST**

Tourism industry has gradually taken over extractive industries such as ranching, oil exploration, and timber harvesting for its various economic benefits, which helps in developing many rural communities (Johnson et al. 1994). However, there are some issues in tourism development which cannot be ignored as they may affect lives of the host community and cause costs. Therefore, residents' perceptions become critical in tourism development and social exchange theory is used to examine their attitudes. In addition to power, trust is also a detrimental aspect of social exchange theory and its importance has been advocated in social relations (Stein and Harper 2003).

Nunkoo and Ramkissoon (2011) examined institutional trust in developing a community support model for tourism. They borrowed the concept of "institutional trust" and defined it as "confidence that political institutions would not misuse power" (p. 969), implying object to be trusted is the public institutions. In their study, trust was considered as "a part of political culture" (Nunkoo and Ramkissoon 2011. p. 969), existed long before the formation of residents' attitudes towards other political actors and government outputs. In addition, they also provide the transferable nature of institutional as it can influence trust in other life domains. They concluded that institutional trust is fundamental informing a judgment about the acceptability of tourism planning, then influencing residents' perceived costs and benefits of tourism. Public trust derives from residents' calculations of their gains versus their losses, based on available information from the public sector.

A year later, Nunkoo and his colleagues specifically discussed the formation of political trust. Unlike the previous study, they adopted the term of "political trust," which refers to the "belief that the political system or some of it will produce preferred outcomes even in the absence of constant scrutiny" (Nunkoo et al. 2012, p. 1543). This definition clearly indicates that the trustee is the political system and the trustor is the local resident. It is interesting that trust in tourism institutions was defined differently in these two studies, indicating the need to comprehensively study trust in a more unified manner.

## **INTER-ORGANIZATIONAL TRUST**

From the perspective of consumers and residents, trust is mainly about personal perceptions whereas suppliers and alliance partners are more connecting to inter-organizational relationships. Since the early 1990s, inter-organizational trust has received considerable attention, which has been identified as an essential factor in the relationship quality and functions like a glue to join partners together (Bachmann and Zaheer 2006). In contexts that are characterized by uncertainty, trust operates like a governance mechanism mitigating opportunistic behavior (Doney and Cannon 1997). Particularly, in the tourism and hospitality industries, trust was

examined at the organizational level from perspectives of the service/good suppliers and the alliance partners.

## **SUPPLIERS' VIEW OF TRUST**

The rapidly transforming business environments in the tourism and hospitality industries are forcing entities to seek more creative and flexible means of gaining a competitive edge in the market. Many tourism and hospitality supplier organizations such as hotels and airlines have responded to these challenges by building and maintaining collaborative relationships with organizations in their distribution channels (Buhalis 2000). Several attempts could be spotted in discussing on-going relationships between tourism suppliers and their distributors, and the extent to which the former trust the latter, and involved influencing factors.

Crotts et al. (1998) took the initiative to explore buyer-seller relationships in the travel trade, in which trust was regarded as a critical variable relationship building. They pointed out that time needs to be taken into consideration, implying that trust formation in a seller-buyer relationship is a dynamic process in which its antecedents may change. In addition, past interaction experience provides a useful way to identify potentially trustworthy distributors, providing the basis for the decision to trust or not.

Unlike the study conducted by Crotts et al. (1998) study, Medina-Muñoz et al. (2002) specifically focused on the trust of hotels toward travel agents. In their research, antecedents of trust included the integrity of the travel agent, communication quality, and existing relationship quality.

## **PARTNERS' VIEW OF TRUST**

Another stakeholder in discussing inter-organizational trust are partners in tourism alliances. As some of the most highly integrated industries in the world, the tourism and hospitality industries have undergone some dramatic changes in terms of relationship nature among tourism and hospitality businesses (Pansiri 2008; Yin and Zhao 2006). In response to this trend, collective efforts and collaborations between various organizations at a geographical level have gained considerable attention. Additionally, as most practitioners in the tourism and hospitality industries are micro and small businesses, there is a need for various sectors of the travel industry to form strategic alliances (Peattie and Moutinho 2000).

In strategic alliances and inter-organizational relationships, trust can secure the success of an alliance performance as it can efficiently reduce complications in the relationship (Pansiri 2008). However, the success of tourism alliances are facing several challenges, which mainly caused by a lack of trust and failing to cooperate in alliance strategies (Yin and Zhao 2006).

In tourism and hospitality, developing trust among partners can contribute to the bottom-line success of tourism alliances such as Regional Tourism Alliances (RTAs) (Cullen et al. 2000). Yin and Zhao (2006) posited that trust formation is a dynamic process involving four general stages, namely, previous history, renegotiation, commitment, and execution. Each stage can be affected by different factors. Jackson (2006) regarded the development of regional tourism in western China as a means of fostering regional economic development. In a society incorporating collectivism and notions of *Guanxi*, which the author explains as social relationship/trust and

*Renqing*, development of trust in sustained collaboration is viewed as a tactical strategy. Emsley and Kidon (2007) reported on the relationship between trust and control in international joint ventures.

## **EMPLOYEES' VIEW OF TRUST**

In the literature on management, trust has been considered as a form of organizational control and a transaction cost reduction mechanism which serves as a good predictor of employee satisfaction and reduces uncertainty (Shankar et al. 2002). As such, developing a trustworthy relationship with/among employees is important to organizational success. In tourism and hospitality, companies have attempted to evolve such practices.

Kang et al. (2005) investigated the interpersonal relationships between cockpit and cabin crews, which may affect airline service performance. Based on their research, balanced power and shared values were identified to positively influence trust building where as conflict negatively influences trust. In this study, communication which is generally accepted as a variable intrust development inside an organization was proven to have minimal effects. This contrasts with Lee man and Reynolds (2012), who found that communication combined with benevolence and operational competence are the three main antecedents of trust. Besides research from hotels and airlines, researchers also examined trust in the cruise industry. Testa (2002) discussed leadership dyads in the cruise industry, investigating the trust of shipboard and shore-side manageresses toward their supervisors. Testa (2002) also proved empirically that trust is a culture-dependent variable, which was echoed by Chathoth et al. (2011).

## **DISCUSSIONS**

Different stakeholders may have different views and interpretations of the trustworthiness of a trustee as divergent orientations are involved (See Table 1 for orientations concerning varying stakeholders). From a customer's viewpoint, companies in the tourism and hospitality industries need to be capable and reliable in the provision of services and products. From the employee's perspective, their leaders and colleagues need to be supportive and understanding. For a supplier, the degree of integrity and the extent to which the agent can be trusted to do what is right may be the key requirement for trust. From a partner's perspective, trust means alliance partners are honest and would not make false promises or claims when problems arise. From a local resident's perspective, trust refers to tourism institutions are competitive in tourism development and in demonstrating their effectiveness.

**Table 1:** Stakeholder orientation of trust

<b>Stakeholder</b>	<b>Orientation</b>
Customers	How competent and skillful are the employees in relation to the task? How trustworthy are the service providers, given that customers cannot always experience this service during the purchase decision process?
Employees	Can I trust that the behavior of leaders and colleagues is relevant to my needs and desires? How competent are the managers and colleagues? Do we share the same values?

*Contd...*



Suppliers	Will the agents' decisions be beneficial to me? Will this relationship be harmonious? Do the agents have high integrity?
Residents	Will the elected representatives act in my best interests? Can I trust the government and institutions not to misuse power?
Alliance Partners	Can the alliance partners be counted on to do what is right? Will the partners make false claims or promises? Are the partners honest about problems that have occurred? Will the partners intentionally harm my interests?

Although trust is a broad concept and involves at least five main stakeholders, it is reasonable to argue that the different types are related to each other. Analysis of the retrieved articles showed that there existed different referents when object of trust was checked, which aligns the aforementioned trusting relationship types with stakeholder theory. Referents appeared in these studies were varying like wholesale buyers (Crotts et al. 1998) and a manager in a restaurant (Gill 2008).

Despite the varied referents, trust always connects to specific characteristics of a referent. Summarizing the above mentioned influencing factors, 18 were generated (see Table 2). These 18 factors were further distilled into four second-order trust formation mechanisms by comparing one type of factor to another. For research rigor, this distillation was initiated by the authors and confirmed through consultation with five PhD students majoring in tourism and hospitality management. All authors worked together with the graduate students to compare and discuss the results when any disagreements occurred. Categories were finalized when agreement was reached. Three such types of trust antecedent were similar to those suggested by Zucker (1986), in which characteristic-based factors are referent-specific and cross-situational as they reflect the specific features of a referent (a party or a person). In addition, characteristic-based factors only pertain to individual persons or organizations. Process-based factors refer to those elements that occurred during the interaction process. The third one is the institution-based factor, meaning that the trust production depends on institutional structures such as third-party certification and relevant laws and regulations in an impersonal environment.

**Table 2:** Influencing factors of trust in tourism and hospitality research

Influencing factors	Trust formation mechanism
1. Competence/ability	Characteristics-based factors
2. Reputation	
3. Integrity	
4. Benevolence	
5. Personality	
6. Power	
7. Justice	
8. Satisfaction	Process-based factors

*Contd...*



integrating stakeholders from perspectives of influencing factors, thereby offering tourism and hospitality organizations distinctive but related insights into how to utilize trust as an external/internal marketing tool.

Based on the aforementioned analysis, it could be concluded that influencing factors vary across involved stakeholders. Characteristic-based factors play a more important role in the formation of consumers' trust. From a community residents' perspective, institution-based factors are as important as characteristic-based factors, whereas in the organizational context, process-based factors tell the story. As for employees' viewpoints, a trusting relationship maybe generated from both characteristic-based factors and process-based factors.

This study also made some interesting findings about the role of time in trust formation. Oh (2002) explained customer satisfaction as "a consumption experience" (p. 282), indicating that time is a key element in trust formation. Loureiro and González (2008) suggested that trust could only be built over a certain period of time and that previous contact is required. However, Lovell (2009) argued that "previous contact within the organization is not required. Familiarity is not a required factor in the notion of trust" (p. 148). After examining the existing research on trust in the tourism and hospitality industries, this study concluded that time is important for trust generation but is not a prerequisite for it. As such, in discussing the formation mechanism of trust, whether they are new customers, new employees, or new partners, it would be reasonable to focus on characteristic-based or institution-based factors. These kinds of factors are less time-sensitive. However, in relation to existing customers, employees, and alliance partners, it would be logically acceptable to assign a higher weight to the timing issue and process-based factors.

There are several unexplored areas of trust in the context of tourism and hospitality that call for academic endeavors. This study found that tourism and hospitality researchers tend to treat the trust as a static concept as majority studies adopted questionnaire-based surveys to explore perceived trust of either employees or customers at the time of being surveyed. This is understandable considering the challenges in collecting chronological data to check whether trust formation is a dynamic process or not. This is justifiable in discussing a trusting relationship with new customers or new employees. However, when it comes to an on going connection it would be more theoretically sound to take into consideration the contact process between the parties. As such, future researchers can use a qualitative research methodology to obtain further findings on the patterns of trusting relationships and interactions. Additionally, connecting trust to other tourism and hospitality constructs like interacting with tourists, reputation, and guarantees or service quality validation requires further investigation.

However, no research is perfect: this study has two main limitations. First, this study aims to propose a conceptual framework of trust when various stakeholders are involved. As such, some compromises are unavoidable. Variables generated in this study are too broad for empirical studies. Second, the emergence of Internet has brought trust research into a new stage. Trust in the offline and online environment have different influencing factors and this would hinder the possibility to reconcile studies in varying context. Internet-related trust studies were excluded from this research. Future research can examine the importance and its formation mechanism in the virtual community.

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