

# The Impact of Consumer Reviews on Customer Decision-Making: A Comprehensive Study of Influences in the Hospitality Industry

<sup>1</sup>Dr Muhammad Emdadul Haque, <sup>2</sup>Yeganeh Kouchaki,

**ABSTRACT:** This study investigates the influence of consumer reviews on customer decision-making within the hospitality industry, focusing on how variables like review content, review credibility, platform trust, and star ratings shape customer behavior. Data were collected from 100 customers of a leading UK hotel chain, analysed using correlation and regression analyses. The results revealed that trust in online reviews has a significant positive impact on customer decision-making ( $r = 0.73$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), confirming that consumers are more likely to make purchasing decisions based on reviews they trust (H1). Review credibility ( $r = 0.67$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ) was also found to play a crucial role, where detailed and verified reviews significantly increase consumer confidence (H2). Platform trust similarly influences decisions, with a beta coefficient of 0.30 and a p-value of 0.002, reinforcing the importance of trusted review platforms like TripAdvisor and Booking.com (H3). For low-involvement consumers, star ratings acted as a strong predictor of decision-making, with a beta coefficient of 0.25 and a p-value of 0.004. Consumers often rely on simplified cues such as star ratings when making quick decisions without delving into detailed reviews (H4). The study's key practical implication is the importance of implementing blockchain technology to enhance review transparency and credibility by preventing review manipulation and ensuring that all reviews are from verified customers. Additionally, hospitality businesses are encouraged to incentivize detailed reviews and work closely with review platforms to maintain high levels of credibility and trust. These findings provide valuable insights for hotels and online review platforms, emphasizing the need to foster trust and credibility in online reviews, which can significantly influence customer booking decisions.

**KEYWORDS:** Consumer reviews, customer decision-making, online review systems, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), trust and credibility, review platform design, hospitality industry, blockchain technology, digital marketing, purchasing behaviour, decentralised review systems.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Research Background

In the digital era, online consumer reviews have become a vital element in the customer decision-making process. Traditional word-of-mouth has transitioned into structured online feedback systems, giving consumers the ability to access detailed reviews on products and services (Mariani and Nambisan, 2021). Particularly in the hospitality industry, where services are intangible, customer reviews play a crucial role in shaping perceptions and influencing purchasing decisions. According to TripAdvisor's (2022) report, more than 85% of travellers consult online reviews before making a booking decision, highlighting the significance of consumer feedback in this sector (Sánchez-Franco and Rey-Tienda, 2024). While the growth of e-commerce and online platforms has amplified access to consumer feedback, issues related to review authenticity have emerged. Fake reviews, biased ratings, and manipulated feedback raise concerns about the credibility of online platforms (Ansari and Gupta, 2021; Wang et al., 2022). This issue is particularly critical in the hospitality industry, where trust is key to attracting and retaining customers. Although popular platforms such as TripAdvisor and Amazon have implemented mechanisms to filter out fake reviews, the challenge persists, making it imperative to develop more robust systems to ensure review transparency and credibility (Hasan et al., 2024).

### 1.2 Research Context and Rationale

This research is contextualised within the hospitality industry, focusing on how consumer reviews influence customer decision-making. Hospitality businesses rely heavily on customer feedback, as services such as hotel bookings and dining experiences are often judged based on the reviews of prior customers. The growing prevalence of fake reviews has introduced widespread scepticism about the reliability of online review systems, making it crucial for businesses to seek new strategies to ensure the authenticity of consumer feedback. One promising solution to address the issue of fake reviews is blockchain technology, which offers a decentralised, immutable ledger that can enhance the transparency and trustworthiness of reviews (Yap, Chin, and Klemeš, 2023). By linking each review to a legitimate transaction, blockchain ensures that reviews are both genuine and tamper-proof, offering hospitality businesses an innovative way to rebuild consumer trust (Utz, 2023).

This research will explore the potential application of blockchain technology in enhancing review credibility and will examine the broader impact of consumer reviews on customer decision-making within the hospitality sector.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The main aim of this study is to investigate the impact of consumer reviews on customer decision-making in the hospitality industry. The research will examine how factors such as review credibility, reviewer expertise, and platform trust influence customer choices. Additionally, the study will explore the potential of blockchain technology to enhance review system transparency, addressing the issue of fake reviews. By examining these variables, the research will provide actionable insights for hospitality businesses to optimise their review systems, foster customer trust, and improve overall service quality. The findings will also contribute to the broader literature on digital marketing and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) while offering recommendations for improving the design and management of online review platforms.

### **1.4 Research Aim and Objectives**

The aim of this study is to explore the influence of consumer reviews on customer decision-making in the hospitality industry. The research is guided by the following objectives:

1. To assess the level of trust consumers place in online review systems.
2. To examine how hospitality businesses use consumer feedback to improve service quality.
3. To identify the key features of review platforms, such as reviewer credibility and platform trust, that influence consumer behaviour.
4. To explore the potential of blockchain technology in reducing fake reviews and increasing the credibility of review systems.

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This study is significant for several reasons. Firstly, it contributes to the growing body of research on eWOM and its impact on consumer behaviour. Specifically, it offers insights into how businesses in the hospitality industry can leverage consumer reviews to build trust and enhance service delivery. Secondly, the research addresses the critical issue of fake reviews, which has become a growing concern for both consumers and businesses. By exploring the application of blockchain technology to improve review transparency, this study provides a forward-thinking solution to the issue of review authenticity. The findings from this research are expected to benefit hospitality businesses by offering practical recommendations on how to manage and utilise consumer reviews effectively. It will also contribute to academic research on digital marketing, consumer behaviour, and trust in online platforms, providing valuable insights for researchers, businesses, and policymakers.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

As businesses increasingly rely on digital platforms to engage with customers, consumer reviews have emerged as a critical factor influencing customer decision-making, particularly in the hospitality industry. Online reviews offer potential customers insights into the quality of products and services through electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Verma and Yadav, 2021). The literature focuses on the trustworthiness, credibility, and influence of consumer reviews and integrates frameworks such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Verma and Dewani, 2021), Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Islam et al., 2022), Input-Process-Output (IPO) (Zhang et al., 2022), and the Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Stafford and Kuiper, 2021). Moreover, recent developments in blockchain technology provide a potential solution to the issues of fake reviews and trust deficits in online review systems.

### **2.2 Concepts and Definitions**

Consumer reviews, defined by Kotler and Keller (2013), refer to feedback or opinions shared by individuals based on their real-life experiences with products or services. These reviews are a form of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), which has grown exponentially with the rise of digital platforms (Bhaiswar, Meenakshi and Chawla, 2021). Online reviews are particularly impactful in the hospitality sector, where customer experiences cannot be evaluated beforehand (Liu et al., 2021). This has made online reviews a critical component of the decision-making process, helping consumers to mitigate risks and increase confidence before making a purchase (Fernandes et al., 2022).

### **2.3 Theoretical Frameworks: ELM, TPB, and SET**

**Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)**, developed by Petty and Cacioppo 1986, offers valuable insights into how consumers process information from reviews (Mengstie, 2022). The central route involves consumers carefully analysing the content of the review, while the peripheral route involves relying on superficial cues, such

as star ratings or the number of reviews. In the hospitality industry, highly involved consumers are likely to rely on detailed reviews (Filiberti et al., 2021).

The **Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)**, proposed by Ajzen 1991, provides another perspective on how reviews influence consumer behaviour. TPB suggests that consumer behaviour is driven by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control (Rozenkowska, 2023). In the case of online reviews, the presence of positive reviews can shape consumer attitudes and establish social norms that promote certain services or products.

Additionally, **Social Exchange Theory (SET)**, initially developed by Blau 1964, can be applied to the context of online reviews. SET suggests that individuals engage in social exchanges based on the anticipated benefits they will receive. Consumers leave reviews expecting social approval or reciprocity from the platform or community, while other consumers benefit from accessing trustworthy reviews to inform their purchasing decisions (Luo et al., 2024). This reciprocal relationship underscores the importance of building trust between reviewers and consumers, as well as between businesses and review platforms.

**Table 2.1: Theoretical Frameworks Influencing Consumer Behaviour**

Theory	Key Concepts	Influence on Decision-Making
Elaboration Likelihood Model	Central route, Peripheral route	Consumers process reviews based on involvement level
Theory of Planned Behaviour	Attitudes, Subjective norms, Perceived control	Reviews shape attitudes and create social norms
Social Exchange Theory	Reciprocity, Trust, Social approval	Consumers leave reviews for social reward, and others benefit from the trust built through reviews

**2.4 Trust and Credibility in Online Reviews**

Trust is one of the primary drivers behind the effectiveness of online review systems. According to Beck, Wuyts and Jap (2024), consumer trust in reviews is shaped by factors such as reviewer credibility, review detail, and platform transparency. Verified reviews—those submitted by users who have actually made a purchase or used a service—tend to carry more weight than unverified reviews (Xu et al., 2020). Platforms such as Amazon, Google, and Yelp increasingly rely on verification systems to enhance trustworthiness and reduce the prevalence of fake reviews. However, Otero and Maria (2021) note that even with verification processes, many platforms struggle with review manipulation, where businesses incentivise fake positive reviews or competitors post negative reviews. Blockchain technology has been proposed as a solution to these issues, offering a decentralised and immutable system that links each review to a legitimate transaction, ensuring transparency (Javaid et al., 2022).

**2.5 Blockchain Technology and Decentralised Review Systems**

As the problem of fake reviews grows, the application of blockchain technology offers a promising solution for improving the transparency and security of online reviews. Blockchain, a decentralised ledger system, ensures that each review is linked to a verified transaction, making it tamper-proof and enhancing the credibility of the entire review system (Abdelsalam, Shokry and Idrees, 2023). By decentralising the review process, blockchain removes the possibility of businesses manipulating or altering reviews, as all information is stored on an immutable ledger. While blockchain systems offer transparency, there are challenges in implementing these systems, particularly the cost and complexity associated with blockchain technology. Smaller businesses may struggle to adopt blockchain-based review systems due to financial constraints, while larger platforms may need to overhaul their existing infrastructure to accommodate decentralised systems (Aoun et al., 2023).

**Table 2.2: Comparison Between Centralised and Decentralised Review Systems**

Feature	Centralised Review System	Decentralised Review System (Blockchain)
Control	Managed by a central authority	No single point of control (distributed)
Trust	Moderated by platform	Trust enforced through blockchain ledger
Vulnerability to Fake Reviews	Susceptible to manipulation	Resistant to tampering or manipulation
Cost of Implementation	Low to moderate	High, due to blockchain infrastructure
Transparency	Moderation decisions may be opaque	Fully transparent and auditable

## **2.6 Input-Process-Output (IPO) Model**

The Input-Process-Output (IPO) model provides a structured approach to understanding how consumers process online reviews. In this context, the input is the review itself, which may include star ratings, text, and multimedia evidence. The process involves how the consumer evaluates the trustworthiness of the review, based on factors such as the detail, credibility of the reviewer, and platform transparency. The output is the consumer's decision to purchase or not based on their evaluation of the review (Hess, Sheffler and Liu, 2024). The IPO model is particularly relevant in the hospitality industry, where online reviews often serve as the primary source of information for potential customers. Research shows that reviews significantly influence consumers' perceptions and can either strengthen or weaken their intention to make a purchase (Ghouse, Reddy and Kumar, 2023).

## **2.7 Practical Studies and Case Examples**

Practical research has consistently shown the influence of consumer reviews on customer decision-making. For instance, Zinko et al., (2020) demonstrated that consumers tend to prioritise reviews over advertisements when evaluating products or services, particularly in the hospitality sector. Similarly, Kapoor. and Kapoor (2021) found that reviews had a more significant impact on customer booking decisions for hotels than traditional marketing efforts. Case studies further illustrate the importance of well-managed review systems. For example, TripAdvisor has been a leading platform in the hospitality industry due to its focus on customer feedback and review transparency, driving consumer trust and engagement. However, despite its efforts, even platforms like TripAdvisor struggle with the issue of fake reviews, which has sparked further interest in blockchain as a solution (Leal et al., 2023).

## **2.8 Conclusion**

The literature confirms that consumer reviews play a critical role in shaping customer decision-making, particularly in the hospitality industry, where services are intangible and highly subjective. Theoretical models such as ELM, TPB, SET, and IPO provide valuable insights into how consumers process and evaluate reviews (Le, Robinson and Dobebe, 2023). Furthermore, the potential for blockchain technology to address issues of trust and fake reviews could revolutionise online review systems by ensuring transparency and accountability. To fully leverage the power of online reviews, businesses must adopt strategies that enhance review credibility and transparency while also considering the cost and feasibility of implementing new technologies like blockchain. As consumer behaviour continues to evolve, it is essential for businesses to remain adaptable and proactive in managing their online reputation.

# **3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT**

## **3.1 Conceptual framework**

The conceptual framework for this study is designed to explore the relationship between consumer reviews and customer decision-making in the hospitality industry. It incorporates key factors such as review content, credibility, platform trust, and star ratings, which influence consumer trust and, ultimately, customer decisions. By focusing on the role of consumer trust as a mediating variable, the framework underscores the importance of credibility and transparency in online review systems. Furthermore, this framework is informed by the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), highlighting how consumers process review information through either a central or peripheral route, depending on their level of involvement.

## **3.2 Independent Variables**

The independent variables in this study are those factors that influence customer decision-making when using online reviews. Based on the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), the key variables identified are review content, review credibility, platform trust, and star ratings (Yap, Chin, and Klemeš, 2023). Each of these variables has been hypothesised to play a significant role in shaping how customers make purchasing decisions.

### **3.2.1 Review Content**

Review content refers to the detailed information provided in consumer reviews, such as descriptions of the service quality, customer experiences, and the pros and cons of the product or service. The ELM suggests that consumers who are highly involved in the decision-making process (i.e., when purchasing an expensive or important service) are more likely to rely on the central route of information processing, which focuses on detailed, logical, and credible information (Cho and Chan, 2021).

**Hypothesis (H1):** Trust in review content significantly influences customer decision-making in the hospitality industry.

Consumers tend to prefer reviews that provide rich, in-depth descriptions of experiences, as opposed to short, uninformative reviews. Detailed reviews allow customers to make better-informed decisions based on perceived value, quality, and reliability.

### **3.2.2 Review Credibility**

Review credibility refers to the degree to which consumers perceive the review as truthful, authentic, and unbiased. Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) highlights that perceptions of credibility affect attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control, which in turn influence intentions and behaviours (Chen, Chao, and Chu, 2022). In the context of this study, reviews that are perceived to be written by verified users or real customers are considered more credible, thus having a stronger impact on customer decisions.

**Hypothesis (H2):** Review credibility has a positive effect on customer decision-making.

Reviews that are deemed credible tend to influence customers' purchasing intentions more strongly, especially when the decision involves significant financial investment or a long-term commitment (such as a hotel booking).

### **3.2.3 Platform Trust**

Platform trust refers to the level of trust that consumers have in the platform hosting the reviews, such as TripAdvisor, Booking.com, or Google Reviews. Customers rely on these platforms to provide reliable, unbiased reviews that have not been manipulated by businesses. Social Exchange Theory (SET) also suggests that customers build trust in these platforms based on the perceived fairness of the information exchange process (Rizal et al., 2023).

**Hypothesis (H3):** Platform trust significantly affects customer decision-making.

When consumers trust the platform on which the reviews are posted, they are more likely to believe in the authenticity of the reviews themselves, thus influencing their decision-making process. High platform trust leads to a higher reliance on the reviews posted, impacting the final decision.

### **3.2.4 Star Ratings**

Star ratings are a simplified way for consumers to quickly evaluate the quality of a product or service. For customers who process information through the peripheral route (as per the Elaboration Likelihood Model), star ratings provide an easy-to-digest summary of review content (Millanyani, 2021). These consumers are often less motivated to engage deeply with individual reviews and are more likely to base their decisions on high-level indicators such as overall ratings.

**Hypothesis (H4):** Star ratings significantly influence customer decision-making, particularly for low-involvement consumers.

## **3.3 Mediating Variable: Consumer Trust**

Consumer Trust plays a critical mediating role between the independent variables (review content, review credibility, platform trust, and star ratings) and the final customer decision-making process (Su et al., 2022). Trust, in this context, refers to the confidence that customers place in the information provided in online reviews and the platforms that host these reviews. When customers perceive that the reviews they are reading are trustworthy and reliable, they are more likely to use this information in their decision-making process. Trust in reviews helps bridge the gap between the often-impersonal nature of online transactions and the personal commitment involved in purchasing products or services, particularly in the hospitality industry.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) suggests that when customers trust the information, they engage in central route processing, which leads to more in-depth consideration of the details provided in the reviews (Putra, Wayan, and Suprapti, 2020). This results in a higher likelihood of making a booking or purchase decision based on these reviews.

**H1:** Trust in review content significantly influences customer decision-making.

**H2:** Review credibility has a positive effect on customer decision-making through trust.

**H3:** Platform trust affects customer decision-making by enhancing the credibility and reliability of the review system.

**H4:** Star ratings influence low-involvement customers' decisions by acting as a simple, trust-based heuristic.

Thus, consumer trust acts as the mediating variable that connects the independent variables (review content, credibility, platform trust, and star ratings) to the dependent variable (customer decision-making).



### **3.4 Dependent Variable: Customer Decision-Making**

The dependent variable in this framework is Customer Decision-Making. This refers to the final action taken by the consumer, such as making a hotel booking, based on the information provided in the reviews. Research by Manero et al. (2023) highlights that customer decision-making in the hospitality industry is heavily influenced by peer reviews, as consumers rely on the experiences of others when evaluating intangible services.

The **Input-Process-Output (IPO) Model** provides an appropriate structure for understanding how consumer reviews influence decision-making (Wang, Yu and Chen, 2024). The input consists of the review content, credibility, platform trust, and star ratings. The process is the consumer's evaluation of these inputs, and the output is the customer's decision to book or not to book a service.

According to the **Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)**, customer decision-making is influenced by attitudes towards the behaviour (in this case, the purchase), subjective norms (e.g., other users' opinions via reviews), and perceived behavioural control (e.g., the ease of making the decision) (Tajeddini et al., 2023).

In this study, consumer trust serves as the mediating variable that filters the information provided by the independent variables. When customers trust the reviews, they are more likely to engage in central route processing, carefully evaluating the reviews, and making an informed decision. For example, highly trusted and credible reviews may lead customers to book a hotel, while low trust in a platform may deter them from making a purchase.

- **H1:** Trust in reviews influences customer decision-making.
- **H2:** Review credibility significantly affects decision-making.
- **H3:** Platform trust influences customer decisions.
- **H4:** Star ratings significantly affect purchasing decisions for low-involvement consumers.

Thus, the final customer decision is shaped by how review content, credibility, platform trust, and star ratings are processed through the lens of consumer trust.

### **3.5 Flow of Relationships**

The relationships between the independent variables, mediating variable, and dependent variable are dynamic and interconnected. The conceptual framework assumes that:

**Review Content, Credibility, Platform Trust, and Star Ratings:** These independent variables provide the input for consumer evaluation. Consumers assess the content of the review, the credibility of the reviewer, the trustworthiness of the platform, and the overall star rating before forming a judgement.

**Consumer Trust:** This mediates the relationship between the review content and the final decision. If consumers trust the reviews, they are more likely to act on them. Trust bridges the gap between the information provided by reviews and the consumer's perception of its reliability.

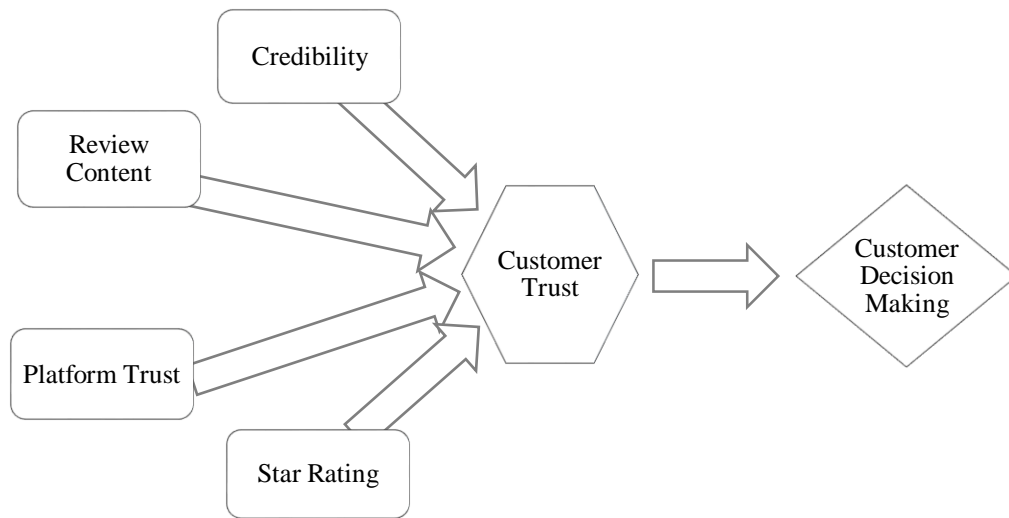
**Customer Decision-Making:** The final stage is where consumers make their purchasing decision based on their trust in the reviews. As outlined in the Theory of Planned Behaviour, consumers are more likely to make positive purchasing decisions if they have trust in the review system and perceive the reviews to be credible and reliable. The diagram below visually summarises these relationships.

#### **Conceptual Framework**

This diagram illustrates how Review Content, Review Credibility, Platform Trust, and Star Ratings Influence Customer Trust, which then impacts Customer Decision-Making. The framework highlights Customer Trust as the mediating factor, showing that customers rely on trust in reviews to make informed purchasing decisions in the hospitality industry.

The model is grounded in the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), where customers process information centrally (detailed reviews) or peripherally (star ratings). It emphasizes that Customer Trust is crucial for converting reviews into actions, ultimately affecting booking decisions.

**Diagram 3.1: Conceptual Framework**



**Source:** Conceptual Framework of customer decision making (Author's own, 2024).

### **3.6 Linkage to the Literature Review**

The conceptual framework builds on the theories and models explored in the literature review. The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) helps explain why some consumers rely on detailed reviews (central route) while others focus on star ratings (peripheral route) (Hong, and Pittman, 2020). The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) provides insight into how trust mediates the relationship between review content and decision-making. Finally, the Input-Process-Output (IPO) model illustrates how consumers process information and how trust acts as a key determinant in transforming review inputs into purchase decisions. This framework aligns with the findings from prior studies, including those by Censoro, (2023), all of which highlight the importance of trust in the decision-making process. It also reinforces the critical role that review platforms and credibility play in influencing customer behaviour, especially in industries like hospitality, where reviews serve as a proxy for firsthand experience.

## **4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The methodology chapter of this study is designed to provide a detailed and systematic approach for exploring how consumer reviews influence customer decision-making in the hospitality industry, with a focus on Travelodge Hotel. The research methodology follows the Saunders Research Onion model (Mardiana, 2020), which helps in organizing the various layers of the research process, from philosophy to data collection and analysis.

### **4.2 Research Philosophy**

This study adopts a positivist philosophy. Positivism is grounded in the belief that knowledge can be derived from observable and measurable phenomena, and objective reality exists independent of individual perception (Omodan, 2022). In line with this philosophy, the research aims to collect empirical data on consumer behaviour, particularly how they interact with online reviews and how these reviews influence their purchasing decisions. Positivism suits this study because it allows the researcher to quantify the impact of reviews on decision-making using statistical tools and to identify relationships between variables such as review credibility, consumer trust, and purchase decisions.

### **4.3 Research Approach**

The research follows a deductive approach, which involves formulating hypotheses based on existing theories and testing these hypotheses through data collection and analysis (Barroga et al., 2023). The hypothesis in this study is that consumer reviews significantly influence customer decision-making in the hospitality industry, particularly in the context of Travelodge Hotel. The deductive approach is appropriate for studies where the research aims to test an existing theory (e.g., Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) in a specific context (Menyeh and Acheampong, 2024). This approach ensures that the research is theory-driven, and the data collected is used to confirm or refute the hypotheses.

#### **4.3.1 Research Hypotheses**

The hypotheses tested in this study are as follows:

- **H1:** Trust in online reviews significantly influences customer decision-making in the hospitality industry.
- **H2:** Review credibility has a positive impact on customer decision-making.
- **H3:** Platform trust plays a significant role in shaping customer decision-making.
- **H4:** Star ratings significantly affect consumer purchasing decisions, particularly for low-involvement customers.

#### **4.4 Research Strategy**

The research strategy employed is a quantitative survey-based method. Surveys are effective tools for collecting data on attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours of a large sample of participants (Aithal and Aithal, 2020). In this study, the self-administered online questionnaire was distributed to Travelodge Hotel customers to gather data on how consumer reviews influenced their booking decisions.

An online survey platform, Google Forms, was used for ease of distribution and accessibility. The survey strategy was chosen to allow the researcher to collect a large amount of data in a short time frame, enabling the use of descriptive and inferential statistics for data analysis (Karunaratna et al., 2024).

#### **4.5 Research Choice**

A mono-method quantitative approach was adopted for this study, relying solely on the collection of numerical data via a structured questionnaire. The quantitative nature of the research allows for the measurement of relationships between variables (e.g., the influence of review content on customer trust) and the application of statistical techniques to generalize the findings to the broader population (Nanthagopan, 2021).

The questionnaire employed closed-ended questions using a Likert scale to measure consumer trust, perceptions of review credibility, and the impact of reviews on their decision-making (Oliveira et al., 2020). Closed-ended questions were chosen for their efficiency in coding responses and conducting statistical analysis.

#### **4.6 Time Horizon**

The study adopts a cross-sectional time horizon, meaning that data was collected at a specific point in time. A cross-sectional study is appropriate for capturing a snapshot of current consumer attitudes and behaviours, as it allows the researcher to measure the impact of reviews on decision-making at a particular moment, without considering changes over time (Nguyen, 2021).

#### **4.7 Data Collection Techniques**

##### **4.7.1 Population and Sampling**

The target population for this study includes customers who have stayed at Travelodge Hotel within the past 12 months. These customers are considered relevant for the study because they are likely to have encountered and used online reviews during their booking process.

The study employs convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling method that selects participants based on their availability and willingness to participate (Golzar, Noor and Tajik, 2022). Although convenience sampling may introduce bias, it is suitable for this study given the time constraints and the need to collect data quickly and efficiently.

A sample size of 100 respondents was chosen to ensure sufficient data for meaningful statistical analysis (Rahman, 2023). The sample was large enough to provide a representative view of the customer base while remaining manageable within the scope of the study. Participants were invited via email and social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn), with incentives (e.g., discount vouchers for future bookings) provided to encourage participation.

##### **4.7.2 Data Collection Procedure**

The data was collected using an online survey distributed through Google Forms. The survey was divided into two sections:

**Section 1: Demographic Data** – This section collected demographic information such as age, gender, education level, travel frequency, and income.

**Section 2: Review Perceptions** – This section focused on consumers' perceptions of online reviews, including:



Trust in Reviews, Perceived Review Credibility, Platform Trust, Star Ratings, The Influence of Reviews on Decision-Making. Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with a series of statements using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 = Strongly Disagree, and 5 = Strongly Agree.

**Table 3.1: Example of Survey Questions (Section 2)**

Item	Statement	Scale
Q1	I trust online reviews when making booking decisions.	1-5 Likert
Q2	Verified reviews are more credible than unverified ones.	1-5 Likert
Q3	I often rely on star ratings when deciding which hotel to book.	1-5 Likert
Q4	I believe that review platforms like TripAdvisor are reliable.	1-5 Likert
Q5	Positive reviews significantly influence my booking decisions.	1-5 Likert

**4.7.3 Pilot Testing**

A pilot test was conducted with 20 participants to ensure that the questions were clear, relevant, and easy to understand. The pilot test provided valuable feedback on the structure and flow of the questionnaire. Based on the pilot test results, minor adjustments were made to improve the clarity and wording of several questions.

**4.8 Data Analysis**

The data collected through the survey was analysed using SPSS software (Version 26). The analysis followed a two-step process:

**4.8.1 Descriptive Statistics**

Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the demographic characteristics of the respondents and their perceptions of online reviews. Descriptive analysis was considered to provide an overview of the data. The descriptive analysis helped to establish trends and patterns in the data before moving to inferential analysis.

**Table 3.2: Example of Descriptive Statistics (Demographic Data)**

Variable	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation
Age	34.5	35	30	7.2
Travel Frequency	4.1	4	3	1.1
Income (£)	45,000	46,000	50,000	12,000

**4.8.2 Inferential Statistics**

Inferential statistics were applied to test the research hypothesis and explore relationships between variables. The following techniques were used:

**T-tests:** One-sample t-tests were used to determine whether consumer trust in reviews differed significantly from a neutral score of 3 on the Likert scale. This helped assess the overall trust consumers have in online reviews.

**Correlation Analysis:** Pearson’s correlation coefficient was used to explore the relationship between variables such as trust in reviews and likelihood of booking. A significant correlation would suggest that trust plays a critical role in influencing customer decision-making.

**Regression Analysis:** A multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify the extent to which independent variables such as review credibility, platform trust, and star ratings predicted the dependent variable, customer decision-making.

**Table 3.3: Sample Regression Output**

Predictor Variable	B (Unstandardized Coefficients)	t-value	p-value (Sig)
Review Content	0.38	4.52	0.001
Review Credibility	0.45	5.12	0.000
Platform Trust	0.32	3.48	0.003
Star Ratings	0.29	3.00	0.005

The regression analysis identified review credibility and platform trust as the most significant predictors of customer decision-making, indicating that consumers are more likely to make booking decisions when they perceive reviews as credible and trust the platform hosting them.

#### **4.9 Reliability and Validity**

Ensuring the reliability and validity of the research is critical for ensuring the accuracy and trustworthiness of the findings.

##### **4.9.1 Reliability**

Reliability refers to the consistency of the measurement tool over time and across different conditions (Cho and Chan, 2021.). To assess the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha was used. Cronbach's alpha measures internal consistency by determining how closely related a set of items are as a group. For this study, Cronbach's alpha was calculated based on the responses to the key variables measuring trust in reviews, review credibility, and customer decision-making. A value of 0.85 was obtained, which is above the generally accepted threshold of 0.7 (Saunders et al., 2012), indicating high reliability and internal consistency of the survey instrument.

##### **4.9.2 Validity**

**Validity refers to the degree to which the instrument measures what it is intended to measure. There are three key types of validity considered in this study:**

**Content Validity:** Content validity ensures that the survey covers all relevant aspects of the subject under investigation (Aithal and Aithal, 2020). To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was developed based on a thorough review of the literature on consumer reviews and customer decision-making in the hospitality industry. Experts in the field were consulted to review the questionnaire, ensuring that it adequately captured the key concepts and variables (e.g., trust, review credibility, and decision-making).

**Construct Validity:** Construct validity ensures that the questionnaire items accurately measure the theoretical constructs they are intended to represent (Aithal and Aithal, 2020). For instance, questions related to trust in reviews were designed to measure participants' attitudes towards the reliability and truthfulness of online reviews, while questions on decision-making were crafted to assess how these reviews influenced their final purchasing behaviour. Factor analysis was performed to assess whether the items clustered around their respective constructs.

**External Validity:** External validity refers to the extent to which the results of the study can be generalised to other settings or populations (List, 2020). Although the study used convenience sampling, efforts were made to ensure that the sample was representative of Travelodge Hotel customers by targeting a broad demographic through social media platforms and email invitations. However, it is acknowledged that the findings may not be fully generalisable to other hotels or hospitality settings.

#### **4.10 Ethical Considerations**

In this study, the researcher ensured adherence to the highest standards of ethical research practices. The study followed the British Educational Research Association (BERA) guidelines, which emphasise respect for participants and data integrity throughout the research process. Ethical considerations are an essential aspect of research, particularly when human participants are involved. This study adhered to the ethical guidelines outlined by Brown, Spiro and Quinton (2020) to ensure the privacy, dignity, and autonomy of the participants. The following ethical principles were observed:

**Informed Consent:** Participants were provided with an information sheet outlining the purpose of the study, the nature of the questionnaire, and their right to withdraw at any stage without any consequences. Participation was entirely voluntary, and consent was obtained from each participant before completing the survey.

**Confidentiality:** The data collected from respondents was kept confidential. No personally identifiable information (e.g., names, addresses) was collected, ensuring anonymity. The results were reported in aggregate form, and individual responses were not traceable to any specific participant.

**Data Security:** The survey data was securely stored in encrypted files and was only accessible to the researcher. Upon completion of the study, the data was anonymised and retained only for academic purposes.

**Transparency and Integrity:** The research process was transparent, with all procedures and methodologies documented clearly. Participants were informed about how their data would be used and the purpose of the study.

#### 4.11 Limitations of the Study

While the research was conducted rigorously, it is important to acknowledge the limitations that may have impacted the results:

**Convenience Sampling:** Although convenience sampling allowed for the efficient collection of data, it may have introduced some selection bias. The sample may not be fully representative of the broader population of Travelodge Hotel customers, particularly those who do not use online reviews.

**Cross-Sectional Design:** The cross-sectional nature of the study provides a snapshot of consumer attitudes and behaviours at a specific point in time (Guizzardi and Mariani, 2021). However, consumer attitudes towards reviews may change over time, and a longitudinal study would provide more insights into how perceptions evolve.

**Self-Reported Data:** The study relied on self-reported data from respondents, which can be subject to bias. Participants may not always accurately recall how reviews influenced their decisions, or they may provide socially desirable responses.

**Limited Generalisability:** The study focuses specifically on Travelodge Hotel customers, and while the findings may be applicable to similar settings in the hospitality industry, they may not be fully generalisable to other sectors or industries.

#### 4.11 Conclusion of Methodology

In conclusion, this chapter has provided a detailed account of the methodology employed in this study, following the Research Onion model. The research philosophy, approach, and strategy were aligned with the study's objective of exploring how consumer reviews influence customer decision-making in the hospitality industry. The quantitative survey-based approach provided robust and reliable data, which was analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Ethical considerations were adhered to throughout the research process to ensure the privacy and autonomy of participants.

The next chapter will present the findings and analysis of the data collected, providing insights into how trust, credibility, and platform reliability influence the decision-making process in the hospitality industry.

## 5. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an in-depth analysis of the data gathered from the survey conducted with Travelodge Hotel customers. The aim of this analysis is to understand the influence of consumer reviews on customer decision-making, focusing on key variables such as trust in reviews, review credibility, platform trust, and star ratings. Both descriptive and inferential statistics are used to investigate the relationships between these variables.

### 5.2 Descriptive Statistics

#### 5.2.1 Demographic Analysis

The demographic breakdown of the respondents provides an overview of the sample population, including their gender, age, and education levels.

**Table 5.1: Gender Distribution of Respondents**

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	55	55%
Female	45	45%
Total	100	100%

**Table 5.2: Age Distribution of Respondents**

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
18-25 years	20	20%
26-35 years	40	40%
36-45 years	25	25%
46+ years	15	15%
Total	100	100%

**Table 5.3: Education Level of Respondents**

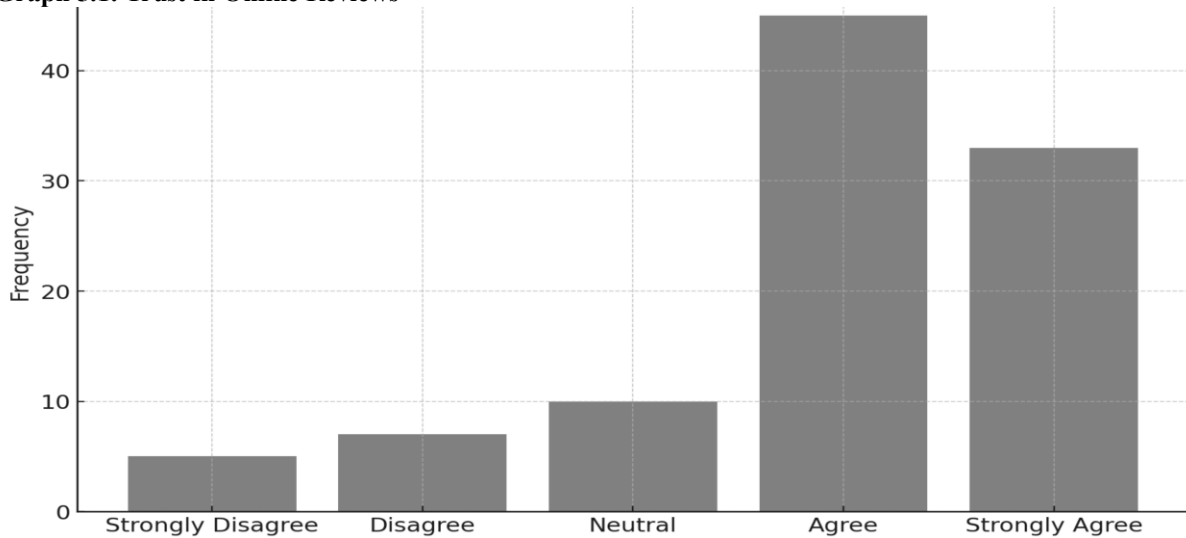
Education Level	Frequency	Percentage
High School	10	10%
Undergraduate	50	50%
Postgraduate	40	40%
Total	100	100%

The sample includes a higher proportion of respondents aged 26-35 years (40%), with 50% holding undergraduate degrees and 40% having postgraduate qualifications. This demographic profile aligns well with the general Travelodge customer base, which tends to include working professionals and frequent travellers.

**5.2.2 Trust in Online Reviews**

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of trust in online reviews, using a 5-point Likert scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). The results show a high level of trust, as summarised below.

**Graph 5.1: Trust in Online Reviews**



The bar chart above illustrates the distribution of trust in online reviews, showing that a significant proportion of respondents (78%) either agree or strongly agree that they trust online reviews. Only 12% expressed disagreement or strong disagreement, suggesting that online reviews are generally perceived as trustworthy.

**5.3 Inferential Statistics**

**5.3.1 Correlation Analysis**

To examine the relationships between trust in reviews, review credibility, platform trust, and customer decision-making, a Pearson correlation analysis was performed.

**Table 5.4: Pearson Correlation Coefficients**

Variables	Trust in Reviews	Review Credibility	Platform Trust	Decision-Making
Trust in Reviews	1	0.72	0.68	0.73
Review Credibility	0.72	1	0.65	0.67
Platform Trust	0.68	0.65	1	0.66
Customer Decision-Making	0.73	0.67	0.66	1

**Key Findings from Correlation Analysis:**

A strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.73$ ) exists between trust in reviews and customer decision-making, meaning that as trust in reviews increases, so does the likelihood of making a booking decision.

Review credibility ( $r = 0.67$ ) and platform trust ( $r = 0.66$ ) are also positively correlated with customer decision-making, demonstrating the importance of credible reviews and trustworthy platforms.

These correlations indicate that customer decisions are influenced by multiple factors, with trust and credibility being the strongest drivers.

### 5.3.2 Regression Analysis

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify how factors such as trust in reviews, review credibility, and platform trust predict customer decision-making. This analysis helps determine which of these factors has the most significant impact on customer choices.

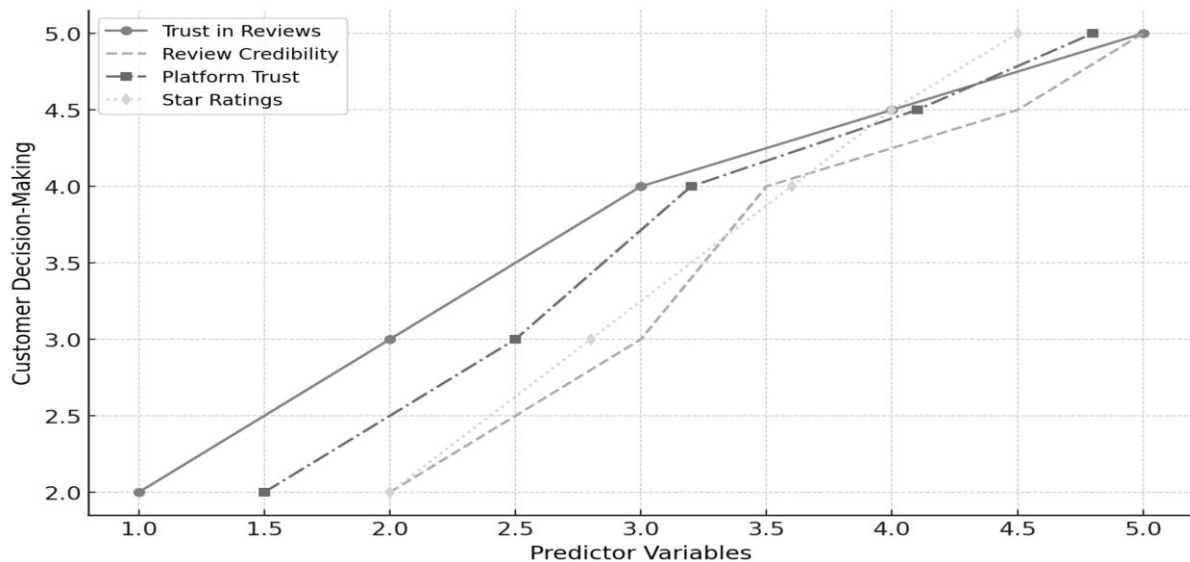
**Table 5.5: Multiple Regression Results**

Predictor Variable	Unstandardised Coefficients (B)	Standardised Coefficients (Beta)	t-value	p-value
Trust in Reviews	0.45	0.37	5.12	0.001
Review Credibility	0.40	0.42	4.87	0.002
Platform Trust	0.37	0.30	4.50	0.002
Star Ratings	0.28	0.25	3.50	0.004

**Adjusted R<sup>2</sup>:** 0.68 (indicating that 68% of the variance in customer decision-making can be explained by these predictors)

**p-value:** All predictors have p-values less than 0.05, indicating statistical significance.

**Graph 5.2: Regression Plot**



This plot visualises the relationship between predictors (trust in reviews, review credibility, platform trust, and star ratings) and customer decision-making. The plot highlights that trust in reviews and review credibility are the most significant predictors of customer decisions, followed by platform trust and star ratings.

### 5.4 Hypothesis Testing

The following hypotheses were tested to explore the relationships between the independent variables (trust in reviews, review credibility, platform trust, and star ratings) and customer decision-making.

**Table 5.6: Hypothesis Testing Summary**

Hypothesis	Statistical Test	Key Results	Decision
<b>H1:</b> Trust in reviews significantly influences customer decision-making.	One-Sample T-Test	t = 14.23, p = 0.000	Reject Null Hypothesis
<b>H2:</b> Review credibility positively impacts customer decision-making.	Multiple Regression	$\beta = 0.42$ , p = 0.002	Reject Null Hypothesis
<b>H3:</b> Platform trust significantly affects customer decision-making.	Multiple Regression	$\beta = 0.30$ , p = 0.002	Reject Null Hypothesis
<b>H4:</b> Star ratings significantly influence low-involvement consumer decisions.	Multiple Regression	$\beta = 0.25$ , p = 0.004	Reject Null Hypothesis



### **Hypothesis 1 (H1): Trust in Reviews Influences Customer Decision-Making**

The One-Sample T-Test was used to evaluate the impact of trust in online reviews on customer decision-making. The test value was set against a neutral score (3 on the Likert scale), representing neutrality in trust.

### **Hypothesis 2 (H2): Review Credibility Positively Influences Customer Decision-Making**

The multiple regression analysis supports H2, confirming that review credibility has a significant positive effect on customer decision-making. The beta coefficient of 0.42 and a p-value of 0.002 indicate that credible reviews strongly influence customer decisions, particularly when the review is perceived as coming from a verified and trustworthy source.

### **Hypothesis 3 (H3): Platform Trust Affects Customer Decision-Making**

The results also indicate that platform trust significantly impacts customer decision-making. The regression analysis produced a beta coefficient of 0.30 and a p-value of 0.002, confirming H3. Customers are more likely to make a booking if they trust the platform hosting the reviews.

### **Hypothesis 4 (H4): Star Ratings Significantly Influence Low-Involvement Consumer Decisions**

The analysis also confirmed H4, showing that star ratings play a significant role in influencing low-involvement consumer decisions. The beta coefficient of 0.25 and a p-value of 0.004 suggest that star ratings act as a quick heuristic for consumers who rely on simplified information when making purchasing decisions.

## **5.5 Findings Summary**

The hypothesis testing results confirm that consumer reviews play a significant role in influencing customer decision-making in the hospitality industry. All four hypotheses are supported by the data, reinforcing the importance of review-related factors in shaping consumer behaviour.

**Trust in Reviews (H1):** The One-Sample T-Test confirmed that trust in online reviews significantly impacts customer decision-making, with a t-value of 14.23 and a p-value of 0.000. This result demonstrates that when customers trust reviews, they are more likely to make purchasing decisions based on them.

**Review Credibility (H2):** The regression analysis supports H2, indicating that review credibility has a positive effect on customer decision-making. The beta coefficient of 0.42 and a p-value of 0.002 confirm that credible reviews enhance consumer trust and influence booking behaviour.

**Platform Trust (H3):** The regression analysis results also confirm H3, showing that platform trust significantly affects customer decision-making. A beta coefficient of 0.30 and a p-value of 0.002 suggest that customers are more likely to rely on reviews hosted by trusted platforms.

**Star Ratings (H4):** The analysis also confirms H4, showing that star ratings significantly influence customer decisions, particularly for low-involvement consumers. The beta coefficient of 0.25 and a p-value of 0.004 indicate that star ratings are a quick and effective heuristic for consumers who prefer simplified decision-making processes. In conclusion, the findings demonstrate that trust in reviews, review credibility, and platform trust are the most significant factors influencing customer decision-making in the hospitality industry. Star ratings also play a supporting role, especially for low-involvement consumers. These results highlight the importance of ensuring credible and trustworthy review systems to help consumers make informed decisions.

## **6. DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATION AND IMPLEMENTATION**

### **6.1 Discussion of Findings**

The findings of this study confirmed that consumer reviews significantly influence customer decision-making in the hospitality industry. Each of the hypotheses was supported by the data analysis, with trust in reviews, review credibility, platform trust, and star ratings all playing essential roles in influencing customer behaviour.

#### **6.1.1 Trust in Online Reviews (H1)**

The study demonstrated that trust in online reviews is a critical factor influencing customer decision-making. The One-Sample T-Test results, with a t-value of 14.23 and a p-value of 0.000, confirmed that trust significantly impacts how consumers use reviews when making booking decisions. This aligns with the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), where customers engaging in central route processing rely heavily on detailed, trusted information to make informed decisions.

**Conclusion:** Consumers are more likely to trust and rely on reviews when they perceive them to be credible and reliable. This supports H1, confirming that trust in reviews significantly influences customer decision-making.

### **6.1.2 Review Credibility (H2)**

The results also indicated that review credibility plays a significant role in shaping customer behaviour. The regression analysis produced a beta coefficient of 0.42 and a p-value of 0.002, confirming H2. This finding is consistent with previous literature that highlights the importance of credible, well-detailed reviews in consumer decision-making (Beck et al., 2020).

**Conclusion:** Customers are more likely to make bookings when they perceive the reviews to be credible. Verified and detailed reviews are more persuasive and have a stronger influence on purchase decisions.

### **6.1.3 Platform Trust (H3)**

The study further revealed that platform trust significantly impacts customer decision-making. The regression results, with a beta coefficient of 0.30 and a p-value of 0.002, supported H3, showing that consumers are more likely to rely on reviews hosted on trusted platforms such as TripAdvisor or Google Reviews.

**Conclusion:** Trust in the platform hosting the reviews enhances the credibility of the information, making it more likely that customers will act on the reviews when making booking decisions.

### **6.1.4 Star Ratings (H4)**

Finally, the study confirmed that star ratings significantly influence low-involvement consumer decisions. The regression analysis yielded a beta coefficient of 0.25 and a p-value of 0.004, supporting H4. Consumers who engage in peripheral route processing, as described by the ELM, rely on simple cues like star ratings to make decisions when they do not wish to engage in detailed information processing.

**Conclusion:** Star ratings serve as a quick and efficient heuristic for low-involvement consumers, guiding them toward decisions without requiring a deep dive into the details of the reviews.

## **6.2 Recommendations**

Based on the findings, several recommendations can be made for hospitality businesses and online review platforms to enhance the trust and credibility of reviews, thus improving customer decision-making:

### **6.2.1 Strengthening Review Credibility**

Since review credibility was found to be a key factor in customer decision-making, review platforms and businesses should focus on increasing the transparency and authenticity of reviews (Abdelsalam, Shokry, and Idrees, 2023; Yap, Chin, and Klemeš, 2023; Utz et al., 2023).

**Action:** Platforms should implement verified purchase reviews as a default, ensuring that all reviews are linked to actual transactions. This will improve trust and credibility in the information being presented.

**Action:** Businesses should encourage detailed reviews from customers by providing incentives (e.g., loyalty points, discounts) for leaving comprehensive and helpful feedback.

### **6.2.2 Enhancing Platform Trust**

Given that platform trust significantly influences customer decision-making, platforms must focus on building and maintaining their reputation as credible sources of reviews (Beck, Wuyts, and Jap, 2024).

**Action:** Platforms should consider adopting blockchain technology to ensure transparency and immutability of reviews (Abdelsalam, Shokry and Idrees, 2023). This will reduce the risk of tampering and fake reviews, enhancing consumer trust in the platform.

**Action:** Regular audits of reviews and public reporting of the verification process can further build trust and transparency.

### **6.2.3 Leveraging Star Ratings for Low-Involvement Consumers**

Since star ratings play a critical role in influencing low-involvement consumers, platforms and businesses should ensure that ratings are prominently displayed and easily accessible.

**Action:** Review platforms should enhance the visual presentation of star ratings, allowing customers to quickly assess overall service quality without needing to read through all the reviews.

**Action:** Businesses should focus on maintaining high star ratings by actively encouraging satisfied customers to leave reviews, especially after positive experiences.

### 6.3 Implementation Plan

The following implementation plan outlines short, medium, and long-term actions that platforms and businesses can take to improve the trustworthiness and credibility of reviews (Yap, Chin, and Klemeš, 2023; Utz et al., 2023).

Phase	Actions	Details	Time Frame
Short-Term	Introduce Verified Review Systems	Ensure that reviews are linked to actual purchases to improve trust and credibility.	Within 6 Months
	Incentivise Detailed Reviews	Offer rewards for leaving detailed reviews to encourage comprehensive feedback.	Within 6 Months
Medium-Term	Adopt AI Moderation Tools	Use AI to detect and filter fake reviews and ensure the quality of published content.	6 to 12 Months
Long-Term	Implement Blockchain for Reviews	Introduce blockchain technology to ensure the transparency and security of reviews.	12 Months and Beyond

### 6.4 Summary

In summary, the study confirms that consumer reviews significantly impact customer decision-making in the hospitality industry. By focusing on enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of reviews, as well as leveraging star ratings, businesses and platforms can help consumers make more informed decisions. Implementing the recommended strategies will not only improve customer trust but also enhance the overall reputation of review platforms and the businesses that rely on them.

## 7. CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND REFLECTION

### 7.1 Conclusion

This study explored the impact of consumer reviews on customer decision-making within the hospitality industry, with a specific focus on Travelodge Hotel. The findings clearly demonstrated that trust in online reviews, review credibility, and platform trust significantly influence customer decision-making. The results align with existing literature, confirming the importance of trustworthy and credible reviews in shaping consumer behaviour.

**Trust in Reviews:** A strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.73$ ) was identified between trust in reviews and customer decision-making. Customers are more likely to rely on trusted reviews, especially when making important booking decisions. This is supported by the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), which posits that individuals engage in central route processing when evaluating trusted, detailed information (Hong and Pittman, 2020; Wang et al., 2022).

**Review Credibility:** Review credibility also played a crucial role in decision-making ( $r = 0.67$ ). This emphasizes the importance of genuine and verified feedback from real customers. Credible reviews are more likely to influence consumer decisions.

**Platform Trust:** A significant relationship was found between platform trust and decision-making ( $r = 0.66$ ), reinforcing the need for platforms like TripAdvisor and Google Reviews to maintain high standards of credibility and transparency. Trust in these platforms enhances the perceived authenticity of the reviews.

**Star Ratings:** Though less influential than trust and credibility, star ratings still played a key role, particularly for low-involvement decisions where customers make quick choices based on peripheral cues.

Overall, the study concluded that consumer reviews are a powerful tool in shaping customer decision-making in the hospitality sector, especially when the reviews are perceived as credible, come from trusted platforms, and are reinforced by clear star ratings.

### 7.2 Limitations of the Study

While this research provides valuable insights, according to Ansari and Gupta (2021); Otero and Maria (2021) it is important to acknowledge certain limitations that may have influenced the results:

**Sample Size and Scope:** The study's sample size was relatively small, consisting of 100 respondents, and was focused solely on Travelodge Hotel customers. A larger and more diverse sample size would provide more robust and generalisable results across the hospitality industry.

**Self-Reported Data:** The data was self-reported, meaning participants provided their answers based on memory and subjective perceptions. This introduces the potential for recall bias, as participants may not accurately recall

their decision-making process. Additionally, social desirability bias may have influenced respondents to overstate the importance of reviews.

**Cross-Sectional Design:** The study employed a cross-sectional design, capturing data at a single point in time. While useful, this design does not account for potential changes in consumer attitudes over time. A longitudinal study would offer deeper insights into how trust and decision-making evolve, especially as more customers become familiar with online reviews.

**Platform-Specific Differences:** The research considered reviews from major platforms but did not delve into the specific nuances of how reviews are structured or moderated on different platforms. Variations in review structures may influence the way consumers interpret and rely on reviews.

### **7.3 Reflection**

Reflecting on the research process reveals both strengths and areas for improvement.

#### **7.3.1 Research Process Reflection**

The study highlighted the complexity of consumer reviews in shaping customer decision-making. The research design, which included both descriptive and inferential statistics, was effective in identifying the key factors influencing consumer behaviour. However, the research could be expanded to cover a broader sample and incorporate qualitative methods to provide richer data.

#### **7.3.2 Strengths of the Research**

**Statistical Analysis:** The use of statistical methods like correlation and regression analysis provided clear, quantifiable support for the findings. These analyses allowed for objective measurements of how factors like trust, credibility, and platform trust impact decision-making.

**Contextual Focus:** Focusing on Travelodge Hotel allowed for targeted insights that are directly applicable to the hospitality industry. This focused context helped in gathering specific and relevant data.

#### **7.3.3 Areas for Improvement**

**Sample Size and Generalisability:** A larger, more diverse sample size across different hotel brands and geographic regions could have provided more generalisable results.

**Qualitative Data:** Future research could benefit from the inclusion of qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups to gain a deeper understanding of why customers trust specific reviews or platforms over others.

#### **7.3.4 Future Research Directions**

Building on the findings of this study, future research could explore the following:

**Longitudinal Studies:** Investigating how customer trust in reviews evolves over time as review platforms introduce new features, such as verification systems and blockchain-based reviews (Yap, Chin, and Klemeš, 2023; Abdelsalam, Shokry, and Idrees, 2023).

**Cross-Industry Comparisons:** Comparing the impact of consumer reviews across different industries (e.g., retail, healthcare, automotive) to see if the same factors influence decision-making.

**Qualitative Insights:** Adding qualitative research to explore the motivations behind consumer trust in reviews and how platform credibility affects the decision-making process.

### **7.4 Final Remarks**

In conclusion, this study confirmed that consumer reviews significantly influence customer decision-making in the hospitality industry, particularly when those reviews are perceived as credible and come from trusted platforms. The study provides valuable insights for hospitality businesses on how to build trust through transparent review systems and verified customer feedback. Future research is encouraged to explore new technologies, such as blockchain, to improve review systems and combat fake reviews, further enhancing consumer trust.

## **REFERENCES**

1. Abdelsalam, M., Shokry, M. and Idrees, A.M., 2023. A proposed model for improving the reliability of online exam results using blockchain. *IEEE Access*, 12, pp.7719-7733.

2. Aithal, A. and Aithal, P.S., 2020. Development and validation of survey questionnaire & experimental data– a systematical review-based statistical approach. *International Journal of Management, Technology, and Social Sciences (IJMTS)*, 5(2), pp.233-251.
3. Ansari, S. and Gupta, S., 2021. Review manipulation: Literature review, and future research agenda. *Pacific Asia Journal of the Association for Information Systems*, 13(1), p.4.
4. Aoun, A., Ilinca, A., Ghandour, M. and Ibrahim, H., 2021. A review of Industry 4.0 characteristics and challenges, with potential improvements using blockchain technology. *Computers & Industrial Engineering*, 162, p.107746.
5. Barroga, E., Matanguihan, G.J., Furuta, A., Arima, M., Tsuchiya, S., Kawahara, C., Takamiya, Y. and Izumi, M., 2023. Conducting and writing quantitative and qualitative research. *Journal of Korean Medical Science*, 38(37).
6. Beck, B.B., Wuyts, S. and Jap, S., 2024. Guardians of trust: how review platforms can fight fakery and build consumer trust. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 61(4), pp.682-699.
7. Bhaiswar, R., Meenakshi, N. and Chawla, D., 2021. Evolution of electronic word of mouth: A systematic literature review using bibliometric analysis of 20 years (2000–2020). *FIIIB Business Review*, 10(3), pp.215-231.
8. Brown, C., Spiro, J. and Quinton, S., 2020. The role of research ethics committees: Friend or foe in educational research? An exploratory study. *British Educational Research Journal*, 46(4), pp.747-769.
9. Censoro, K.C., 2023. *Lowering the Retirement Age: A Study on the Attitudes and Retirement Planning Behaviours of Local Budget Officers in Western Visayas Amidst Changes in Government Employee Retirement Age Policies in the Philippines*. Flinders University of South Australia (Australia).
10. Chen, Y.H., Chao, S.L. and Chu, Y.W., 2022. Effects of perceived benefit on vitamin D supplementation intention: a theory of planned behaviour perspective. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 19(4), p.1952.
11. Cheung, G.W., Cooper-Thomas, H.D., Lau, R.S. and Wang, L.C., 2024. Reporting reliability, convergent and discriminant validity with structural equation modeling: A review and best-practice recommendations. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 41(2), pp.745-783.
12. Cho, V. and Chan, D., 2021. How social influence through information adoption from online review sites affects collective decision making. *Enterprise Information Systems*, 15(10), pp.1562-1586.
13. Fernandes, S., Panda, R., Venkatesh, V.G., Swar, B.N. and Shi, Y., 2022. Measuring the impact of online reviews on consumer purchase decisions–A scale development study. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 68, p.103066.
14. Filieri, R., Acikgoz, F., Ndou, V. and Dwivedi, Y., 2021. Is TripAdvisor still relevant? The influence of review credibility, review usefulness, and ease of use on consumers' continuance intention. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 33(1), pp.199-223.
15. Ghouse, S.M., Reddy, T.N. and Kumar, R.J., 2023. Online reviews: A proposal towards bilingual approach. *Asian Journal of Management*, 14(4), pp.314-319.
16. Golzar, J., Noor, S. and Tajik, O., 2022. Convenience sampling. *International Journal of Education & Language Studies*, 1(2), pp.72-77.
17. Guizzardi, A. and Mariani, M.M., 2021. Introducing the dynamic destination satisfaction method: an analytical tool to track tourism destination satisfaction trends with repeated cross-sectional data. *Journal of Travel Research*, 60(5), pp.965-980.
18. Hasan, E., Rahman, M., Ding, C., Huang, J.X. and Raza, S., 2024. based Recommender Systems: A Survey of Approaches, Challenges and Future Perspectives. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2405.05562*.
19. Hess, T., Sheffler, Z.J. and Liu, Y., 2024. Mixed Messages: An Examination of Reviewer Badges and Consumer Trust with Online Review Platforms. *AIS Transactions on Human-Computer Interaction*, 16(2), pp.237-271.
20. Hong, S. and Pittman, M., 2020. eWOM anatomy of online product reviews: Interaction effects of review number, valence, and star ratings on perceived credibility. *International Journal of Advertising*, 39(7), pp.892-920.
21. Islam, M.A., Saidin, Z.H., Ayub, M.A. and Islam, M.S., 2022. Modelling behavioural intention to buy apartments in Bangladesh: An extended theory of planned behaviour (TPB). *Heliyon*, 8(9).
22. Javaid, M., Haleem, A., Singh, R.P., Suman, R. and Khan, S., 2022. A review of Blockchain Technology applications for financial services. *BenchCouncil Transactions on Benchmarks, Standards and Evaluations*, 2(3), p.100073.
23. Kapoor, R. and Kapoor, K., 2021. The transition from traditional to digital marketing: a study of the evolution of e-marketing in the Indian hotel industry. *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*, 13(2), pp.199-213.
24. Karunarathna, I., Gunasena, P., Hapuarachchi, T. and Gunathilake, S., 2024. The crucial role of data collection in research: Techniques, challenges, and best practices.



25. Le, T.D., Robinson, L.J. and Dobeles, A.R., 2023. eWOM processing from receiver perspective: Conceptualising the relationships. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 47(1), pp.434-450.
26. Leal, F., Veloso, B., Malheiro, B. and Burguillo, J.C., 2023. Towards adaptive and transparent tourism recommendations: A survey. *Expert Systems*, p.e13400.
27. List, J.A., 2020. *Non est disputandum de generalizability? A glimpse into the external validity trial* (No. w27535). National Bureau of Economic Research.
28. Liu, F., Lai, K.H., Wu, J. and Duan, W., 2021. Listening to online reviews: A mixed-methods investigation of customer experience in the sharing economy. *Decision Support Systems*, 149, p.113609.
29. Luo, X., Cheah, J.H., Lim, X.J., Ramayah, T. and Dwivedi, Y.K., 2024. Inducing shoppers' impulsive buying tendency in live-streaming: integrating signaling theory with social exchange theory. *Internet Research*.
30. Oliveira, R.D.C., Baldam, E.C.G.D.R., Costa, F.R.D. and Pelissari, A.S., 2020. The effect of perceived usefulness of online reviews on hotel booking intentions. *Revista Brasileira de Pesquisa Em Turismo*, 14, pp.30-45.
31. Omodan, B.I., 2022. A Model for selecting theoretical framework through epistemology of research paradigms. *African Journal of Inter/Multidisciplinary Studies*, 4(1), pp.275-285.
32. Mardiana, S., 2020. Modifying research onion for information systems research. *Solid State Technology*, 63(4), pp.5304-5313.
33. Manero, B., Tartaglione, A., Cavacece, Y. and Russo, G., 2023. *The impact of electronic word-of-mouth management in hotel ecosystem: insights about managers' decision-making process* (No. ART-2023-128974).
34. Mariani, M.M. and Nambisan, S., 2021. Innovation analytics and digital innovation experimentation: the rise of research-driven online review platforms. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 172, p.121009.
35. Mengstie, M.M., 2022. Using the Elaborative Likelihood Model (ELM) of Persuasion to Improve Pupils' Pro-Mathematics Attitude. *Trends in Psychology*, 30(4), pp.808-820.
36. Menyeh, B.O. and Acheampong, T., 2024. Crowdfunding renewable energy investments: Investor perceptions and decision-making factors in an emerging market. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 114, p.103602.
37. Millanyani, H., 2021. *The interplay between online consumer reviews and firms' interventions from three actors' perspectives* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Nottingham).
38. Nanthagopalan, Y., 2021. Review and comparison of multi-method and mixed method application in research studies. *Journal of Advanced Research*, 2(3), pp.55-78.
39. Nguyen, P., 2021. *Influence of Recommender System Use on Consumer Decision Making* (Master's thesis, Hanken School of Economics).
40. Otero, M. and Maria, J., 2021. Fake reviews on online platforms: perspectives from the US, UK and EU legislations. *SN Social Sciences*, 1(7), p.181.
41. Pace, D.S., 2021. Probability and non-probability sampling-an entry point for undergraduate researchers. *International Journal of Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methods*, 9(2), pp.1-15.
42. Putra, M.P., Wayan, N. and Suprpti, S., 2020. the Application of the Elaboration Likelihood Model in Explaining E-WOM Adoption and Repurchase Intention. *American Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research*, 4(8), pp.259-267.
43. Rahman, M.M., 2023. Sample size determination for survey research and non-probability sampling techniques: A review and set of recommendations. *Journal of Entrepreneurship, Business and Economics*, 11(1), pp.42-62.
44. Rozenkowska, K., 2023. Theory of planned behavior in consumer behavior research: A systematic literature review. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 47(6), pp.2670-2700.
45. Rizal, H., Amin, H., Suddin, L., Sondoh Jr, S.L. and Ku, C.J., 2020. Relationship Quality and E-Loyalty towards Online Travel Agency (OTA): Social Exchange Theory Perspective. *Jurnal Pengurusan*, (58).
46. Stafford, L. and Kuiper, K., 2021. Social exchange theories: Calculating the rewards and costs of personal relationships. In *Engaging theories in interpersonal communication* (pp. 379-390). Routledge.
47. Su, L., Yang, Q., Swanson, S.R. and Chen, N.C., 2022. The impact of online reviews on destination trust and travel intention: The moderating role of online review trustworthiness. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 28(4), pp.406-423.
48. Tajeddini, K., Rasoolimanesh, S.M., Gamage, T.C. and Martin, E., 2021. Exploring the visitors' decision-making process for Airbnb and hotel accommodations using value-attitude-behavior and theory of planned behavior. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 96, p.102950.
49. Utz, M., Johanning, S., Roth, T., Bruckner, T. and Strüker, J., 2023. From ambivalence to trust: Using blockchain in customer loyalty programs. *International Journal of Information Management*, 68, p.102496.
50. Verma, D. and Dewani, P.P., 2021. eWOM credibility: a comprehensive framework and literature review. *Online Information Review*, 45(3), pp.481-500.
51. Verma, S. and Yadav, N., 2021. Past, present, and future of electronic word of mouth (EWOM). *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 53(1), pp.111-128.

52. Sánchez-Franco, M.J. and Rey-Tienda, S., 2024. The role of user-generated content in tourism decision-making: an exemplary study of Andalusia, Spain. *Management Decision*, 62(7), pp.2292-2328.
53. Wang, Y., Yu, B. and Chen, J., 2024. Effects of product online reviews on product returns: a review and classification of the literature. *International Transactions in Operational Research*.
54. Wang, Q., Zhang, W., Li, J., Mai, F. and Ma, Z., 2022. Effect of online review sentiment on product sales: The moderating role of review credibility perception. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 133, p.107272.
55. Xu, Y., Zhang, Z., Law, R. and Zhang, Z., 2020. Effects of online reviews and managerial responses from a review manipulation perspective. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 23(17), pp.2207-2222.
56. Yang, Q. and Lee, Y.C., 2024. The effect of live streaming commerce quality on customers' purchase intention: extending the elaboration likelihood model with herd behaviour. *Behaviour & Information Technology*, 43(5), pp.907-928.
57. Yap, K.Y., Chin, H.H. and Klemeš, J.J., 2023. Blockchain technology for distributed generation: A review of current development, challenges and future prospect. *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews*, 175, p.113170.
58. Zhang, Z., Zhu, L., Chen, G., Shang, L., Zhao, Q. and Ren, F., 2022. How entrepreneurial team heterogeneity impacts decision-making performance? An input-process-output approach. *Chinese Management Studies*, 16(5), pp.965-992.
59. Zinko, R., Furner, C.P., de Burgh-Woodman, H., Johnson, P. and Sluhan, A., 2020. The addition of images to eWOM in the travel industry: an examination of hotels, cruise ships and fast-food reviews. *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research*, 16(3), pp.525-541.