

What is the relevance of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) in the travel industry and its effect on consumer behaviour when reading online hotel guest reviews?

MSc in Marketing

Rebekah Lavelle
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Abstract

Electronic word of mouth communication (eWOM) and the emergence of web 2.0 tools have influenced search and consumption behaviour when considering a purchase of a product or service. The increase in social media platforms such as facebook and travel review websites such as TripAdvisor now allow consumers to share their opinions, views, add media, and converse with other consumers online. Previous literature assessed in this research paper has focused on varied approaches in trying to decipher what factors drive decision and influence in consumers when reading online guest reviews ranging from review valence (positive vs. negative review content), numerical factors such as review score/rank and credibility of the reviewer and/or website. Specific in-review and in-profile content however has not been thoroughly investigated to the extent of how each factor rates among one another and as to what content is most important or noticed first e.g. *What is the first piece of content or what part of the review profile is viewed by the consumer first? What in-review content is most important to the reader of the review?* This study investigates these factors and the relevance of electronic word of mouth eWOM in the travel industry. Further to this, the effect of hotel management responses to online reviews are evaluated. Credibility of the reviewer is also assessed from a grammatical and demographical perspective, due to the limited research in this area. Finally, participants of this study were also asked to rate their trust in online reviews versus personal recommendations to challenge current literature trends in that eWOM is as equally as trustworthy as personal recommendations. The primary data was obtained with the distribution of an online questionnaire which was completed by 256 respondents. The research highlights several in-review and in-profile factors that play an important role in the consumer decision-making process and in the credibility assessment of online reviews. A key limitation of this research was that respondents are predominantly female. The researcher aimed to have a fifty-fifty split on male and female consumers but given limited access to additional male respondents in the sample set this was not possible.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Declaration	ii
Submission of Thesis to Norma Smurfit Library	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Table of Contents	v
List of Tables	vi
List of Figures	vii
List of Acronyms and Key Terms	viii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1. Introduction	1
1.2. Research Question and Objectives	1
1.3. Research Question	1
1.4. Secondary Research Objectives	1
1.5. Background to the Study	2
1.6. Impact of Research	2
1.7. Research Methodology	3
1.8 Overview of Chapters	4
1.8.1 Chapter Two: Literature Review	4
1.8.2 Chapter Three: Research Methodology	4
1.8.3 Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis	4
1.8.4 Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations	4
1.9. Personal Rational	4
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	5
2.1 Introduction	5
2.1.2. Word of Mouth (WOM)	5
2.1.3. Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) & Web 2.0	6
2.1.4. Key differences in WOM & eWOM	7
2.1.5. eWOM Travel Industry	7
2.2. Consumer Decision Making Process	8
2.2.1. The Pre-purchase Stage	10
2.2.2. The Service Encounter Stage	11
2.2.3. Post Encounter Stage	11
2.3. Influence Online Hotel Reviews have on the Consumer Decision Making Process. ..	12
2.3.1. Impact of Review Presentation	14
2.3.2. Impact of Hotel Engagement	15
2.3.3. Impact of Poor Grammar in Guest Reviews and Management Responses	16
2.3.4. Search and Consumption Behaviour according to Gender	17
2.3.5. Posting Behaviour of Users	17
2.3.6. Reviewer Credibility	18
2.3.7. Trust in Online Reviews versus Personal Recommendations	20

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	22
3.1. Introduction.....	22
3.2. Research Design, Approach and Philosophy	23
3.2.1. Research Design.....	23
3.2.2. Research Philosophy	23
3.2.3. Research Approach	24
3.3. Secondary Data Collection	24
3.4. Primary Data Collection	25
3.5. Data Collection	26
3.6. Sampling	26
3.6.1. Targeted Population of Questionnaire	27
3.6.2. Sampling Frame	27
3.6.3. Sampling Techniques.....	27
3.6.4. Size of Sample	27
3.7. Analysis of Data.....	27
3.8. Ethics.....	28
3.9. Advantages of Online Questionnaire	28
3.9.1. Limitations of Online Questionnaire.....	29
3.9.2. Conclusion	30
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS	31
4.1. Introduction.....	31
4.2. General Findings.....	31
4.3. Online Questionnaire.....	40
4.4.1. Objective One: Understand the influence that online hotel guest reviews have in the consumer decision-making process when booking hotels online.	45
4.4.2 Objective Two: To examine what specific in-review factors of guest reviews are most important to the consumer and what specific content do they consume first on the hotel review profile.	48
4.4.3. Objective Three: To understand the influence of hotel management responses within a review on the consumer and whether this has any effect on the consumer's decision.	57
4.4.4. Objective Four: To examine if grammatical error in guest reviews and management responses impact a consumer's decision.....	59
4.4.5. Objective Five: To examine if consumers only post when it has been an exceptionally positive or negative experience.....	61
4.4.6. Objective Six: To examine how male and females compare when consuming and posting hotel review content.	62
4.4.7. Objective Seven: To examine the credibility of the reviewer, what influence does the reviewers age and number of previous reviews have on review credibility.	64
4.4.8. Objective Eight: To examine if consumer's trust online or personal recommendations more.	67
4.5 Additional Findings	69
4.6. Summary of Findings	69
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	73
5.1 Conclusions.....	73

5.2. Significance of the Study	74
5.3. Limitations of the Research	75
5.4. Future Research	75
References	76
Appendices	87

List of Tables

Table 1. - The Three-Stage Model of Service Consumption (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011).....	10
Table 2. - Secondary Key Search Items.	24
Table 3. - Malhotra's five steps guide for research sampling (2006).	26
Table 4. - guidelines and strategies followed for questionnaire.....	29
Table 5. - Key findings of sample, comparative to literature.....	40
Table 6. - representation of factors of importance to respondents when reading a hotel guest review.....	49
Table 7. - representation of important factors to respondents when selecting a hotel based on its guest reviews.....	50

List of Figures

Figure 1. - Buyer Decision Making Process (Kotler and Armstrong, 2012).	9
Figure 2. Representation of respondents age	41
Figure 3. Representation of respondents gender	42
Figure 4. - representation of respondent's country of residence.....	43
Figure 5. - representation of respondent's employee status	44
Figure 6. - representation of respondents search activity in the last 12 months.	45
Figure 7. - representation of how often respondents read online reviews to determine if a hotel is good or bad.	46
Figure 8. - representation of how many reviews respondents read before they can trust a hotel.	47
Figure 9. - example of TripAdvisor's Rating Summary.....	50
Figure 10. - representation of the first thing respondents do or observe when they visit a hotel's profile on a travel review website.....	51
Figure 11. - example of the 'in-profile' content of a hotel review profile.	53
Figure 12. - example of the 'in-profile' content of a hotel review profile cont.	54
Figure 13. - representation of the minimum review score rating a hotel must have before consideration by respondents.	55
Figure 14. - representation of the how recent a review needs to be to impact a respondent's decision.	56
Figure 15. - representation of respondent's preference when asked if they had to choose two different hotels of the same standard and guest review rating, the only difference was one hotel had consistent management responses to positive guest reviews.	57
Figure 16. - representation of respondent's preference when asked if they had to choose two different hotels of the same standard and guest review rating, the only difference was one hotel had consistent management responses to negative guest reviews.	58
Figure 17. - representation of respondent's preference when asked if a guest's grammar and spelling affected their trust in an online review.	59
Figure 18. - representation of respondent's preference when asked if hotel management's grammar and spelling affected their trust in an online review.....	60
Figure 19. - representation of respondent's posting behaviour.	61
Figure 20. - representation of respondent's selection when asked if the number of online reviews that a guest has previously posted affects their trust in a hotel.....	64
Figure 21. - representation of respondent's selection when asked how many previous online hotel reviews must a guest have posted before they would trust a current hotel review.	65
Figure 22. - representation of respondent's selection when asked would a guest's age affect your trust in their online hotel review.	66
Figure 23. - representation of respondent's selection when asked how trustworthy personal recommendations when choosing a hotel.	67
Figure 24. - representation of respondent's selection when asked how trustworthy online recommendations when choosing a hotel.	68
Figure 25. - Infographic of sample findings.	72

List of Acronyms and Key Terms

The following key acronyms and terms are used in this thesis and may be useful to the reader.

Word-of-Mouth (WOM)

Word of mouth will be referred to as WOM.

WOM is oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, concerning a brand, product, or a service.

Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM)

Electronic word of mouth will be referred to as eWOM.

eWOM refers to non-verbal word of mouth communication online.

eWOM communication can be created in the form on forums, boards, consumer review sites, video reviews, blogs and social networks.

Travel Review Website or Review Website

A review website is simply a website that enables consumers to review their product or service through electronic word of mouth. This study focuses on reviews published on travel related websites such as TripAdvisor, Booking.com etc.

Guest Reviews or Hotel Guest Reviews

A review or guest review, is user generated content published on a website about one's product or service experience. Reviews are usually written by individuals after or during a service experience and can be positive, negative or neutral in sentiment. Reviews can be found on websites that offer products and services for various different providers (such TripAdvisor, Booking.com, Amazon).

The Reviewer

The reviewer is the generator or creator of the review content. In this study's case it is most often a previous guest of a hotel.

In-review Content

Content that is included within an individual review. This includes descriptive content about a product or service experience.

Review Profile or Hotel Review Profile

A review profile, is the profile of the business or hotel on a review website. Average review score, number of reviews, and helpfulness score are all examples of a review profile attribute.

In-profile Content

Content that is included or part of a (hotel) review profile. Average review score, total number of reviews, media and hotel management responses are all examples of in-profile content.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

The introductory chapter provides an overview of the research project undertaken by the researcher and outlines the research questions and objectives. The chapter outlines the research purpose and introduces the topic of Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM). Further to this, this chapter outlines the research methodology, design of the study and content outline of each chapter.

1.2. Research Question and Objectives

The aim of this research is to investigate the subject of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) in the form of online hotel reviews and to understand what specific in-review and in-profile factors influence consumer behaviour and credibility assessments for consumers booking hotels.

1.3. Research Question

What is the relevance of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) in the travel industry and its effect on consumer behaviour when reading online hotel guest reviews?

1.4. Secondary Research Objectives

The main objectives of this research are as follows:

- 1) To understand the influence online hotel guest reviews have in the customer decision-making process consumers book hotels online.
- 2) To examine what in-review factors are most important to the consumer and what specific content they consume first. (In-profile)
- 3) To understand the influence of hotel management responses within a review on the consumer and whether this has any effect on the consumer's decision.
- 4) To examine if grammatical error in guest reviews and management responses impact a consumer's decision.
- 5) To examine if consumers only post only when it has been an exceptionally positive or negative experience.
- 6) To examine how male and female compare when consuming and posting hotel review content.

- 7) To examine how male and female compare when consuming and posting hotel review content
- 8) To examine the credibility of the reviewer, what influence does the reviewers age and volume of previous reviews have on review credibility.

1.5. Background to the Study

The development of Web 2.0 tools such as review websites, blogs, and social networking sites have led to impactful changes in the traditional forms of word of mouth and in the way consumers communicate with one another and evaluate products and services. Due to the vast amounts of easily accessible information online, it has led to consumers actively searching for information and consequently being influenced by consumer opinions and recommendations (Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan, 2008).

As these tools continue to develop, social media sites, specifically review websites are considered one of the main online forums for eWOM. The travel and tourism industry particular is one of the fastest growing industries worldwide with the internet now acting as a prime communication and distribution channel for travelers and suppliers of travel services and products (Ye, Law and Gu, 2009).

This researcher aims to collect information on factors that influence the consumer decision making process when reading online hotel reviews and further investigate credibility and trust factors in reviewer content. The main area of focus for this research is the how consumers rate and consume specific in-review and in-profile content.

1.6. Impact of Research

WOM and more specifically, eWOM, has been widely researched and is now an important topic in all industries due to evidence of impact on business performance. As the researcher has outlined previously, literature assessed in this research paper has focused on varied approaches in trying to decipher what factors drive decision and influence in consumers when reading online guest reviews ranging from review valence (positive vs. negative review content), numerical factors such as review score/rank and credibility of the reviewer and/or website.

The aim of this research is to gain an understanding as to the credibility of eWOM in the travel industry and understand how consumers rate and consume specific in-review and in-profile content. The researcher aims to investigate the gaps in the marketing literature by developing an understanding of key influence factors not thoroughly investigated in past research.

1.7. Research Methodology

The researcher commenced research on the subject of eWOM by collecting secondary data from academic journals and books from the Norma Smurfit Library. Further sources of information on this topic were explored online to include global marketing research data, Eurostat reports, reputation management provider data, and related credible sites.

Once a thorough level of data was collected from various credible sources, the researcher conducted an analysis to decide if there were further areas of investigation or examination. To help the researcher with this process, a literature review was gathered to contextualise the topic of eWOM, and more specifically online hotel reviews.

The literature review gave the researcher a thorough comprehension into the area of eWOM, this allowed the researcher to form a suitable research question and set of objectives. Further to this it allowed the researcher to decide on the strategy for design to obtain the primary data required. The researcher chose to use an online questionnaire to investigate the relevance eWOM in the travel industry and the effect online reviews have on consumer behaviour.

1.8 Overview of Chapters

1.8.1 Chapter Two: Literature Review

Chapter two presents an examination of the previous literature on the credibility of eWOM. The chapter opens with the introduction of WOM and the evolution to eWOM. identifying the motive and characteristics. The remainder of the chapter discusses the evolution of social media and travel websites with an insight into specific in-review and in-profile factors driving consumer behaviour and credibility.

1.8.2 Chapter Three: Research Methodology

Chapter three presents an outline of the research design, strategy, and philosophy selected, and further outlining the rationale. How the primary data is collected, and the reasons why the selected method is used are detailed. Further to this, the sampling frame and research process is established.

1.8.3 Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis

Chapter four presents the findings and analysis of the online questionnaire by answering the research question and objectives. Further to this each of the eight research objectives findings are compared to the past research. The researcher also illustrates the findings in the form of an infographic and summary table to give further clarity to the data findings.

1.8.4 Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

Chapter five presents the limitations of the research and gives suggested recommendations for further study.

1.9. Personal Rational

The researcher has a strong interest in eWOM and the evolution of consumer communication through user-generated sites. The emergence of meta-search and comparison websites in the hotel industry has spurred on the increase of online reviews and so the researcher is interested in learning further about key factors within reviews and hotel review profiles that influence and drive decision in consumers.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The following chapter comprises a review of the research collected by previous academics on the researchers chosen subject matter. The literature review will begin by providing a detailed description of WOM communication and its evolution to eWOM highlighting their differences and relevance in the travel industry. Secondly, this chapter looks at the traditional decision making process model and its adaptation to service related products leading into how online reviews have impacted these processes. Finally, this chapter will examine the current research surrounding the varied approaches and tested combinations by researchers in trying to decipher what factors drive decision and influence in consumers when reading online. The researcher addresses several critical factors that have not been addressed thoroughly throughout past research, particularly in the travel and tourism sector and the reasons why they are needed to be examined further. These factors include the impact of review format and presentation, service provider engagement, grammatical standard, reviewer demographic, reviewer credibility and trust in personal versus online recommendations.

2.1.2. Word of Mouth (WOM)

Word of Mouth communications and its importance in influencing customer decision making has been widely researched since the early 1960's. Word of mouth is a naturally occurring phenomenon of consumer behaviour (Nyilasi, 2006) and can be defined as, 'Oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, concerning a brand, product, or a service' (Arndt, 1967). The American Word of Mouth Marketing Association put this more simply as "the act of consumers providing information to other consumers" (WOM 101, 2007).

This form of communication is perceived by consumers as highly credible and trusted since it is generated from the consumer, whom has previously purchased the product, and not the service or product provider, making this communication more reliable than communication in the form of advertising or from the company. (Arndt, 1967; Woodside and Delozier, 1976; Silverman, 2011)

Nyilasi (2006) states that the definition of word of mouth consists of three essential parts. Firstly, it is an interpersonal communication, setting it apart from advertising and third party influences. Furthermore, its basis is language meaning that non-verbal communication, although it may accompany it, is not a valid form of word of mouth. Secondly that word of mouth in the context of marketing related activity is commercial. The message is about commercial entities, products, product categories, brands and marketers or advertising. Thirdly, although word of mouth communication is commercial, the generator of this content, in which case, the consumer, is generally not commercially motivated. The consumer, does not generate content because of incentives from a company or service provider but rather they are generating content on their own accord for their own satisfaction and is unbiased.

In the era of digital transformation, traditional Word of Mouth has been amplified online in the form of forums, boards, consumer review sites, video reviews, blogs, social networks, resulting to a mass of easy to access, user-generated content.

2.1.3. Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) & Web 2.0

eWOM communication is described as any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, and former customers about a product or a company via the Internet (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Since the evolution of Web 2.0 in the early 2000's, although there is no specific definition, can be referred to as a set of technologies for web design and execution which has brought about great changes to the Internet and born of concept from John Battelle and Tim O'Reilly (What is Web 2.0, 2005). Most websites users visit today are no longer static and operate on a simple display of information, but are now more dynamic, allowing users to contribute and engage with content instead of just passively reading the content. Consumers now look to use Web 2.0 tools to exchange product information (Cheung, Lee and Rabjohn, 2008).

In short, a Web 2.0 site enables users to communicate with one another as content creators in a virtual community. Web 2.0 tools include and but are not limited to wikis, blogs, web applications, social networking sites such as facebook, and review and comparison websites such as TripAdvisor. It has been argued that consumers that are attained via eWOM are seen to add

more long-term value compared to consumers attained via traditional marketing channels (Cheung, Lee and Rabjohn, 2008; Trusov, Bucklin and Pauwels, 2009).

2.1.4. Key differences in WOM & eWOM

eWOM is language based like WOM, but may not necessarily be direct or oral due to users generating their opinions and thoughts through electronic means. eWOM has longevity and can be consumed by many users online over a long period of time, unlike WOM, in which case vanishes immediately due to lack of written or recorded history. eWOM can also be seen to have better use for readers and users as it is easily accessed during any point of the consumer decision making process or information search process (Ward and Ostrom, 2003).

WOM from a marketing aspect is limited to brands, products or services (Nyilasi, 2006), however eWOM communication can also include content related to an organisation, destination, etc. (Buttle, 1998). Unlike WOM, eWOM generators of content can be incentivised for publishing content or reviewing a product or service (Buttle, 1998). This can create a lack of credibility in the creator of this content.

Further to this, eWOM communicators are individuals who have little or no prior relationship with the reader or consumer of the content. (Xia and Bechwati, 2008; Schindler and Bickart, 2005). In summary, eWOM is more influential than traditional WOM due to its speed, convenience, one-to-many reach, and its absence of face-to-face human pressure. (Sun et al., 2006)

2.1.5. eWOM Travel Industry

Social messaging will account for 2.5 billion global users by 2018 with more than the 2 billion general social media users (SkiftX, 2017).

In the past, consumers mainly searched and consumed content from commercial sources to form an opinion about their desired travel destination (Beerli and Martín, 2004). The internet now acts as a prime communication and distribution channel for travelers and suppliers of travel services and products (Law, Leung and Wong, 2004).

Consumers are now able to access vast amounts of information immediately, gaining knowledge and information from various sources to make their minds up about a travel destination or hotel choice. Thus, the information search stage of the consumer decision making process has become

more complex and extensive. As the researcher has pointed out previously the development of Web 2.0 tools has led to increased amounts of information online with contributions and multi-way discussions between travelers.

Buhalis (1998) points out that consumers have become more confident and sophisticated in using a vast number of online tools to arrange for their trips ranging from online travel agencies (e.g. Booking.com), to search engines (e.g. Google), to comparison sites (e.g. Trivago) and social networking and web 2.0 portals such as Tripadvisor.

Information Search is an important part of the purchasing decision process and was revolutionised because of the Internet. (Buhalis, 1998). Xiang and Gretzel (2010) recognised two megatrends which have impacted eWOM in the travel industry, the first being the increasing number of consumers using the internet as a source for travel information, and the second, which ties in with the topic of this thesis, the growing popularity of online review websites.

As web 2.0 tools continue to grow, social media sites, specifically review websites are considered one of the main online forums for WOM. It's now even more imperative for hotels to understand the information elements of reviews, with research showing that eWOM affects the development of customer relationships and sales performance (Sparks and Browning, 2011). Swanson and Hsu (2009) found that most consumers will discuss their travel and tourism based service encounters and that consumers are increasing their use of search engines to source travel information (Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan, 2008). Ye, Law and Gu (2009) further claim that three quarters of consumers source online reviews when planning their trips and so warrants a study into the impact of online reviews on hotel performance.

To further understand the impact of online reviews on consumer behaviour and the various factors that affect their decisions, we first examine the traditional consumer making process and the evolution of this process for service related businesses.

2.2. Consumer Decision Making Process

Marketers have long followed the traditional decision-making process to understand the consumer journey. This process consists of five stages; need recognition, information search,

evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase evaluation (Kotler and Armstrong, 2012).



Figure 1. - Buyer Decision Making Process (Kotler and Armstrong, 2012).

Hotels are treated as a service, intangible in nature, and unlike a tangible product, hotel services are unable to be evaluated or tested before a purchase. Kotler and Armstrong (2012) define a service as an action or an activity which can be offered by a party to another party, which is basically intangible and cannot affect any ownership.

Lovelock and Wirtz (2011) further developed these stages with a new process consisting of a three-stage model specifically for services; the pre-purchase stage, the service encounter stage and the post-encounter stage.

	Key Concepts
1. Pre-purchase Stage Awareness of Need Information search <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify needs • Explore solutions • Identify alternative service products and suppliers Evaluation of alternatives (solutions and suppliers) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review supplier information (e.g., advertising, brochures, websites etc.) • Review information from third parties (e.g., published reviews, ratings, comments on web, blogs, complaints to public agencies, satisfaction ratings, awards) • Discuss options with service personnel • Get advice and feedback from third party advisors, other customers Make decision on service purchase and often make reservations	<i>Need arousal</i> <i>Evoked set</i> <i>Search, experience, and credence attributes</i> <i>Perceived risk</i> <i>Formation of expectation</i> - desired service level - predicted service level - adequate service level - zone of tolerance
2. Service Encounter Stage Request service from chosen supplier or initiate self-service (payment may be upfront or billed later) Service delivery by personnel or self-service	<i>Moments of truth</i> <i>Service encounters</i> <i>Service system</i> <i>Role and script theories</i> <i>Theater as metaphor</i>
3. Post-encounter Stage Evaluation of service performance	<i>Confirmation/disconfirmation of expectations</i> <i>Dissatisfaction, satisfaction and delight</i>
Future intentions	<i>Repurchase</i> <i>Word-of mouth</i>

Table 1. - The Three-Stage Model of Service Consumption (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011).

2.2.1. The Pre-purchase Stage

In the pre-purchase stage of booking a hotel the consumer will generally have an arousal trigger such as exposure to an advertisement to prompt an information search and evaluate alternatives before making a purchase decision. Research has shown there is a higher level of perceived risk associated with buying a service than a product (Gilliam and Wilson, 2009). As there is a higher level of risk associated with the purchase of services, consumer information search in turn is more extensive compared to tangible products. (Alba and Hutchinson 2000; Mattila and Wirtz 2002). Consumers searching for services such as hotels, do not limit their search to a singular source of information but from multiple sources to compare the service offering, gain reassurance or confirmation from a cost perspective, and reduce their risk (Konus, Verhoef and Neslin, 2008).

2.2.2. The Service Encounter Stage

Bitner and Wang (2014), define a service encounter as any discrete interaction between the customer and the service provider relevant to a core service offering, including the interaction involving provision of the core service offering itself.

The term service encounter can now be described as all technology-based encounters along with encounters that occur in person, on the phone, via email, and even within organisations (Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler, 2013).

Consumers that engage with service brands such as hotels, display behaviours that go well beyond the act of the purchase. Consumers continue their service encounter with the company by spreading positive word of mouth, giving recommendations, assisting with other potential consumer's questions, blogging, posting reviews and even engaging in legal action (van Doorn et al., 2010).

2.2.3. Post Encounter Stage

The final stage of service consumption process is the post-encounter stage and includes consumers' behavioural and attitudinal responses to the received service experience.

This is a key stage for hotels due to the rise of online review platforms and the evident impact it has on business performance (Brady and Robertson, 2001). How eWOM impacts hotel performance has been high on the research agenda in recent years and the understanding of exactly what factors drive consumers in their decisions is not only of interest but imperative to the success of a hotel's performance. The evolution on reputation management tools and software providers such as *ReviewPro*, *Revinat* and *Trust You* have enabled hotels to have a deeper understanding as to what these factors may be and how it's affecting their business.

2.3. Influence Online Hotel Reviews have on the Consumer Decision Making Process

Online reviews are incredibly influential in the hotel industry due to the nature of inseparability between service production and consumption and the importance of the customer experience.

In services, the production and consumption of a service can occur at the same time. For example, a hotel waiter is a part of the food and beverage service delivered to a guest. The food and beverages are delivered to and consumed by the guest simultaneously. The guest must come to the hotel where this service exists and experience the service and consume the food at the same time. People, or in this case, the staff of the hotel, are key in hotel service delivery, thus, a hotel is known as much for its food as for the service provided by its staff. Therefore, it is not possible to separate the supply or production of the service from its consumption.

Services can be therefore harder to evaluate prior to purchase without physically experiencing the offering compared to that of tangible products can often be tested, touched, seen and felt in advance of purchase. This is one of the many reasons consumers heavily rely on eWOM in the form of online reviews to gain an understanding of the expected levels of service quality.

Many consumers read online reviews from various sources before making online travel arrangements but the impact on the consumer decision making process is still an area, particularly within the tourism sector, that needs to be investigated further (Seegers and Vermeulen, 2009).

Yoo and Gretzel (2008) study on use of word of mouth in travel planning concluded that travel reviews created and posted by other travelers are perceived by readers to be more current, informative, and dependable compared to information provided by travel service providers. There have been varied approaches and tested combinations by researchers in trying to decipher what factors drive decision and influence in consumers when reading online guest reviews ranging from review valence (positive vs. negative), numerical factors such as review score/rank and credibility of the reviewer and review websites.

Review valence (positive vs. negative) is one of the key influence factors across past research. Online review valence is defined as the measure of positive and negative reviews. According to the past research the effect of online review valence is classified into two types: positive reviews and negative reviews (Duan, Gu and Whinston, 2008).

Ye, Law and Gu (2010) conducted a study to identify the impact of online word of mouth on sales in tourism and hotel industries in which suggested that the higher the review volume the higher the hotel's ratings and online hotel bookings. The results also indicated that the variance in the valence of rating scores across reviews did not significantly influence the number of online bookings. Seegers and Vermeulen (2009) tested three key elements in online hotel reviews; review valence, reviewer expertise, and consumer familiarity finding that valence of traveler reviews has significant impact on traveler attitudes and perceptions. They also concluded that the effect of review exposure increased awareness among consumers, regardless of whether they were positive or negative. Further to this, Sen and Lerman (2007) conducted an examination into negative consumer reviews on the web and found that the review valence influenced consumer behaviour but it was dependable on whether it was a hedonic or a utilitarian kind of product with readers exhibiting a negativity preference for utilitarian product reviews only.

Other research has also found a correlation between review score or rank and revenue. Anderson (2012) from Cornell University Center for Hospitality Research found that the revenue per available room at hotels can be improved (1.4%) per each positive percentage point on the global review index score. Anderson amalgamated data from three research partners (ReviewPro, STR, and Travelocity), and two other data providers (comScore and TripAdvisor) in a first attempt at determining ROI for social-media efforts. Further to this, Luca (2016) from Harvard Business School concluded that a one-star increase in the rating of an independent restaurant on Yelp drove revenue between 5-9%.

Zhang et al (2009) exploratory study of travelers use of online reviews and recommendations identified three heuristics consumers use when reading online reviews and recommendations. Firstly, that consumers were influenced by any numerical value associated with the service and the higher the numerical score or ranking the better they perceived the service, the single-criterion-stopping rule. Secondly, that consumers only trusted a traveler or guest review if it was posted on a credible and known website, the credibility heuristic. Thirdly, that consumers visited multiple websites to gain a consensus of the service before deciding, the consensus heuristic.

Motivation behind why and when consumers are most likely to post a review online has also been explored in previous research. Many authors found that consumers were more likely to review a product or service when they were dissatisfied. (Richins, 1983; Morris, 1988; Hart, Heskett and Sasser, 1990; Tax, Brown, and Chandrashekaren, 1998).

However more recent studies show that consumers they're equally likely to write a review regardless of the experience, with a preference consumers tend to write reviews to help others make better buying decisions, helping inform or warn other customers about the quality of the good or service (LifeLearn, Inc., 2016). This is discussed in more detail as a key factor for further examination.

There are several critical factors, although covered lightly in past research need to be thoroughly assessed, particularly in the travel and tourism sector. These factors include the impact of review format and presentation, service provider engagement, grammatical standard, reviewer demographic, reviewer credibility and trust in personal versus online recommendations. We examine the current research in these areas below and why these factors are of importance.

2.3.1. Impact of Review Presentation

Today, a consumer's research of a potential hotel or travel destination is met with a wealth of often conflicting information (Sen and Lerman, 2007). Their perceptions, intentions, and decisions heavily depend on the review content presented and other factors the researcher has already discussed such as valence and source credibility. Research shows that most users read less than seven reviews before coming to a decision. Users are showing evidence of increasingly trusting online reviews, but they are reading a lot less or have very little time to consume (Anderson, 2012). This makes it even more important to understand as to what makes an impactful review and needs to be explored further.

Sparks and Browning (2011) conducted a study testing four independent variables; framing, (what comes first, positive or negative reviews) valence (positive vs. negative reviews) ratings, and target (the service or core).

The results suggested that content posted related to a hotel's core services are more likely to bring positive service quality attributions. It also concluded that negative content presented

earlier in the hotel's review profile influenced consumer choice. They also found that accreditations had influence on the perception of corporate social responsibility and if a review was structured in a positive manner along with numerical rating details, it increased both booking intentions and consumer trust.

Zhang et al (2009) had similar findings in their heuristic approach with numerical rating, symbolic recommendations (use of thumbs up, emoji) and consensus as variables in their study. Previous research has not however thoroughly explored what specific in-review factors are most important to the consumer and what specific content they consume first on a hotel review profile. Since previous researchers have focused on measuring the quantitative elements of online reviews (Duan et al., 2008) or emotions expressed in the review text (Yin, Bond and Zhang, 2014) the researcher thought it would be useful to examine how consumers rate specific in-review content and how they consume this content.

2.3.2. Impact of Hotel Engagement

Previous research in the area of hotel engagement with reviewers has proven positive in most cases. Hotel engagement can be defined as interaction between the reviewer and the hotel service provider, usually in the form of a response to an online review. PhoCusWright conducted a study on behalf of Tripadvisor on two thousand eight hundred hotel guests in which 84% of consumers agreed that an appropriate management response to a bad review improved their perception of a hotel (Ir.tripadvisor.com, 2012).

A PwC online reputation report (Online reputations - Why hotel reviews matter and how hotels respond, 2015) further supported these findings, identifying a trend for higher response rates as hotels understand and are starting to embrace online reviews as an opportunity for constructive exchange. PwC even went as far as recommending hotels to not only observe and respond to them, quickly and truthfully, but to also improve on the causes of the negative reviews. The effect on business performance also correlates with management responses, Chen and Xie (2008) conducted a study to try and understand the way a company should interact with consumer reviews to increase profits. Findings of the study suggested that the response of the company should change according to the type of product and the kind of information presented.

Contrary to these findings, Mauri and Minazzi's (2013) study examined the impact of guest reviews on the customer purchase process, expectations and impact of the presence of a hotel manager responses to guest reviews. Although they found a positive link between both hotel purchasing intention and expectations of the customers and valence of the review, surprisingly the presence of a hotel managers response to either a positive or negative review had a negative impact on purchasing intentions. The sample perceived the hotel's reply a form of advertising and weighting low credibility.

Buttle (1998) and Stern (1994) studies had similar findings in which the study found that a hotel manager's response can be considered not credible because it's not independent but related to the company and that a response can be perceived as advertising if a response is not personalised.

Due to the contrast in conclusions on the effectiveness of the presence of management responses, the researcher thought it would be useful to explore this further to understand if the presence of a management response has any weight in the consumer decision making positively, negatively or not at all.

2.3.3. Impact of Poor Grammar in Guest Reviews and Management Responses

Although there is vast research in the area of online word of mouth, there is little known about the impact of grammatical errors or mistakes within review content and the effects on potential consumers when choosing a hotel.

Polpinij and Ghose (2008) findings suggest that reviews that are written well have a more positive effect on consumers, than reviews with grammatical error. Schindler and Bickart (2012) echoed these findings concluding that grammatical errors or mistakes made within online reviews have an adverse impact on consumers, making them less valuable. These studies however have focused on product related reviews on items such as books, automobiles and audio visual equipment rather than services. The researcher therefore felt it was important to explore if grammatical error within guest reviews affected the consumers trust in the reviewer.

Furthermore, given the trend in hotel management response rates, the researcher thought it would be useful to also assess if grammatical error within a hotel management response affects trust in the hotel services.

2.3.4. Search and Consumption Behaviour according to Gender

Research in the area of social identity have touched on how important demographical attributes have in influencing other evaluations about a person (Li et al., 2013).

Social Identity Theory (SIT) is a theory suggesting that individuals define their identity according to specific social groups and that these identifications work to protect and strengthen self-identity (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Demographical attributes can include but are not limited to gender, age, education level, occupation, religion, and location. The researcher however has decided to examine research in behaviour when searching and consuming online reviews according to ‘gender’ as most studies have been previously conducted with gender as a total unit, both male and female.

Gender differences have been found in online travel information search phase (Kim, Lehto and Morrison, 2007) with results showing that women are more likely to engage in word of mouth behaviour, and more likely influenced by recommendations. Laroche et al (2000) found that females search in a more comprehensive manner when acquiring information, whereas males appeared to limit their search to a smaller subset of information behaving in a more task orientated manner. Although there have been many studies surrounding male and female search and consumption behaviour online in general (Hart et al., 2007; Hansen and Møller Jensen, 2009; Hasan, 2010). Search and consumption differences in male and female have not been thoroughly evaluated in relation to the consumption of online hotel reviews, therefore the researcher felt it was important to compare male and female search and consumption behaviour in the hotel services environment.

2.3.5. Posting Behaviour of Users

Services can tend to be subjective in nature due difference in individual tastes and preferences (Racherla and Friske, 2013). Typically, experience goods attract reviews from consumers on opposite extremes, either loving or hating them without an in between. (Ghose and Ipeiritis, 2011). Trip Expert (2014) support these findings claiming that reviews tend to be written by people who have had either an exceptionally good or bad experience with the ‘median’ customer that has had an average experience underrepresented. More recently, eLearning Technology

company LifeLearn (2016) claim that only (23%) of customers post negative reviews out of vengeance with (70%) of these individuals whom complain, expecting to receive a response.

Contrary to this, a Street Fight poll conducted by third party opinion site Toluna of 1,000 U.S. respondents, found that 19.1% of respondents are more likely to write a review after a poor experience, and 16.8% after a pleasant one. Another 42.5% said they're equally likely to write a review regardless of the experience with 21.6% percent said they're not likely to write a review at all (Duprey, 2012). LifeLearn's (2016) report also found that consumers tend to write reviews to help others make better buying decisions, helping inform or warn other customers about the quality of the good or service.

Hotel services however can be differentiated horizontally (Candela & Figini, 2012). Consumers with different needs and interests can rate attributes of hotel services, such as the offering of complimentary services such as Wi-Fi, proximity to the town centre, room comfort, in different ways (Becerra, Santaló, and Silva, 2013). Thus, affecting an individual's posting behaviour. Current research has not been able to thoroughly understand if consumers prefer to only post positive, negative or neutral reviews, particularly in the hotel industry.

2.3.6. Reviewer Credibility

Travel review websites do very little to qualify most reviewer profiles, allowing users to simply create a profile using a pseudo name, email address and avatar image, requiring very little official information such as full name, profile photo and date of birth.

Individuals also then have free reign and freedom of speech on posting reviews without even to have availed of a service. They also do not need their reviews to be verified by the review platform before they are published leaving the service provider exposed to unwanted and false information posted about their services. From the consumer perspective, uninformative, biased or even false information makes it the search for credible reviews more time consuming and challenging.

Lee, Law and Murphy (2011) developed a quantitative method to understand to assess the credibility of the reviewer by using an average Review Helpful Rating (RHR). The formula takes the total number of helpful votes on a review from consumers and divides this number into their

total number of reviews posted by the reviewer to give them a credibility scoring. This method however is limited to Tripadvisor as not all travel or review websites have helpful rating tool. Further to this, this method favors reviewers with a low number of reviews and high helpfulness scoring, resulting in a high credibility score. Wang et al. (2016) further developed this method by assessing the reviewer's expertise and trustworthiness together. This method of assessment based the credibility ranking on the number of reviews posted by the reviewer, the total number of helpful votes received by the consumers, and the addition the number of destinations in which a reviewer has posted reviews.

Previous studies have assessed credibility from three perspectives; source credibility, message credibility and medium credibility (Metzger et al., 2003; Pornpitakpan, 2004; Rieh et al., 2014). In tourism, the source, is the reviewer whom writes or constructs the review, the message is the review content itself and the medium is the review platform or website the reviews are presented e.g. TripAdvisor. Previous research has concluded that that credibility assessment of sources and messages are fundamentally interlinked. Considering this insight, this study focuses on measuring the source credibility, the reviewer.

Although reviewer credibility has been ranked from a quantitative perspective using various methods combining helpful votes and total number of reviews, the full impact on the consumer has yet to be explored further in terms of the number of reviewer's previous reviews posted, and the ideal number of reviews a reviewer needs before a review they are deemed 'credible' as a contributor.

Further to this, most reviewer profile display information on travel sites such as TripAdvisor display the reviewer's username, photo, past contributions, location, and cities visited. This certainly gives some background to the reviewer and indeed are important attributes for credibility, however age is not mentioned on most profiles. Age is an important factor in credibility, in that we, know certain age groups are more active than others with eWOM. There has been significant research in buying behaviour differences in age groups. A 2012 report carried US insights company 'Bazaarvoice' details that 84% of millennials will not complete a purchase without user generated content with 39% of millennials not willing to complete a hotel

conversion without reading user generated content. (Talking to Strangers: Millennials Trust People over Brands, 2012)

Millennials are defined as those born between 1982 and 2004 (Howe, Strauss and Matson, 2000).

Further research shows that older online shoppers search for significantly fewer products than their younger counterparts but they purchase just as much as younger consumers (Sorce, Perotti and Widrick, 2005). Although we understand information search behaviour types according to age category from previous research it is not known if the visibility of a reviewers age on their review profile has any influence over an individual's trust in their online review, so the researcher thought it would be interesting to explore if this has any impact on the credibility of the reviewer.

2.3.7. Trust in Online Reviews versus Personal Recommendations

Search Engine Optimisation provider BrightLocal (2016) reported that consumers trust online reviews more than ever with (84%) saying they trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations. Recommendation software company ModernComment (2015) support this finding reporting that (72%) consumers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations made by friends and family, also finding that (88%) of consumers rank online reviews in second place only to price (93%) as the most important factor considered by consumers looking for accommodation.

Other sources emphasise the importance and influence of online reviews, Travel news site Thooz (2013) posted an infographic showing a significant 95% of consumers find that travelers reviews are trustworthy with 78% admitting that they help them feel more confident about their travel decisions. Further to this 53% of consumers said they would not book a hotel that doesn't have any reviews.

In contrast, a YouGov (2014) report found that nearly two thirds 64% of consumers had a suspicion that some individuals write online reviews without having purchased a product or service with consumers (68%) believing that rival businesses posted negative feedback about their competitors' products and services.

More significantly 80% thought businesses wrote positive online reviews about themselves. (Gammon, 2014).

Furthermore Onelocal.com' consumer trust survey revealed that online reviews ranked in second place as the most trustworthy source of information, with friend and family recommendations placing first (The Importance of Online Reviews, 2015).

Given there has been evident conflicting findings in online recommendations versus personal recommendations, the researcher thought that the weight of personal versus online recommendations to consumers' needs to be explored further.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

The methodology chapter details the methods used to gather information in order to answer the researcher's aim of the study and objectives. The research design and approach along with the primary and secondary data collection methods are established. Further to this, detail of the targeted sample, the research instrument and ethical consideration measures are outlined.

The primary aim of this research study was to explore the relevance of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) in the travel industry and its effect on consumer behaviour when reading online hotel guest reviews.

The study was guided by the following objectives:

- 1) To understand the influence that online hotel guest reviews have in the customer decision-making process when booking hotels online.
- 2) To examine what in-review factors are most important to the consumer and what specific content they consume first. (In-profile)
- 3) To understand the influence of hotel management responses within a review on the consumer and whether this has any effect on the consumer's decision.
- 4) To examine if grammatical error in guest reviews and management responses impact a consumer's decision.
- 5) To examine if consumers only post only when it has been an exceptionally positive or negative experience.
- 6) To examine how male and female compare when consuming and posting hotel review content.
- 7) To examine how male and female compare when consuming and posting hotel review content.
- 8) To examine the credibility of the reviewer, what influence does the reviewers age and volume of previous reviews have on review credibility.

3.2. Research Design, Approach and Philosophy

Research is the process of collecting, analysing, and interpreting data in order to understand a phenomenon (Leedy and Ormrod, 2001).

3.2.1. Research Design

A research design is a plan or framework the researcher can use for this study to analyse and collect data (Iacobucci and Churchill, 2010).

There are three types of research design for the researcher to consider; descriptive, explanatory, and exploratory. Descriptive research is applicable for this study, as the researcher intends to better define existing theory held by previous researchers as to the effect hotel reviews have on the consumer decision making process. Exploratory research is also relevant as the researcher intends on discovering new data that has yet to be uncovered by previous researchers. The research is conducted via a quantitative research design, using an online questionnaire to obtain these insights.

3.2.2. Research Philosophy

The researcher has chosen an interpretivism research philosophy. Interpretivism is defined as the ability to understanding the difference between humans in our role as social actors (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012).

Interpretive research is concerned with the meanings that people assign to norms, rules, and values that control their communications. It is a research philosophy that also has an understanding for the complexities in different people in that they behave in very different ways and cannot be seen simply as a collective, thus scientific methods are not appropriate.

The researcher believes that interpretivism philosophy is ideal for this study as it involves an understanding of how consumers behave and act with the presence of online reviews on travel review websites. Further to this, an interpretivism philosophy also suits this study as the researcher's key objective is to get a better understanding as to what specific factors are most influential to consumers when reading online hotel reviews.

3.2.3. Research Approach

An inductive approach has been selected for this research. The researcher has chosen this approach as the researcher aims to explore the current secondary data available along with obtaining new data on areas of research not thoroughly investigated. This should allow the researcher to test different theories along with unexplored areas of research to develop objectives from the analysis. Answering the research questions and objectives in an inductive approach is more appropriate to the researcher as it not only allows the testing of existing theory but additional areas of research.

3.3. Secondary Data Collection

Secondary data analysis is analysis of data that was collected by someone else for another primary purpose (Johnston, 2014).

The literature review in chapter three identifies research related to the relevance of WOM and eWOM of in the travel industry and its effect on consumer behaviour when reading online hotel guest reviews. The secondary sources examined consist of academic journal articles, global marketing research data, Eurostat reports, reputation management provider data, internet sites, and books.

Key Search Terms
Traditional word of mouth
Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) in the hotel industry
Online reputation management for hotels
Online hotel reviews
Virtual communities
Impact of guest reviews on hotels and consumers

Table 2. - Secondary Key Search Items.

The researcher utilised the Norma Smurfit Library, NCI Ireland and the ‘NCI Discovery Service’ to find suitable books and journals. The university library assisted in gaining an understanding of existing research carried out on the subject of eWOM and hotel guest reviews.

3.4. Primary Data Collection

To investigate the relevance of online guest reviews in the hotel industry and its impact on consumer behaviour, the primary data research method is quantitative research. Quantitative research comprises the collection of data so that information can be quantified and subjected to statistical treatment to support or refute alternate knowledge claims (Creswell, 2003).

Carr (1994) states that quantitative findings are probable to be generalised to a whole population or a sub-population because it requires the larger randomly selected sample set, thus a larger sample can provide a more trust-worthy and thorough result.

Further to this, quantitative research is said to obtain more accurate information because it can be easily replicated, and, unlike qualitative data, can be analysed using sophisticated statistical techniques (Frechtling Westat, 2002).

The researcher chose an online questionnaire to collect the primary data. This research instrument was chosen as it enabled the researcher to administer and evaluate a large amount of information over a short period of time. Further to this, it allowed for more flexibility with the sample size incorporating consumers from various geographical locations. The researcher also thought it was a better method of data collection to compare results to previous research also carried out using qualitative research in the form of surveys and questionnaires.

The questionnaire was compiled by the researcher using survey software 'SurveyMonkey' and consists of thirty questions, divided in three sections. In the first section, the researcher informed the participants of the purpose of the questionnaire and how their data will be obtained. Section two of the questionnaire consisted of the thirty questions the researcher aims to have answered by the participant. A range of question and response formats were used in this research covering the investigated areas of hotel guest review consumption and generation. These included multiple choice, multiple check-box selection, dropdown selection, and rate scaling response formats. Finally, section three featured a debriefing page thanking the participant for their time and the researcher's contact details should they have any queries or questions in relation to the research.

3.5. Data Collection

As detailed previously, data was collected through a quantitative method. There are four types of data collection involved in quantitative data; Quantitative Surveys, Interviews, Quantitative Observation and Experiments. The type of the quantitative data collection chosen was in the form of a Quantitative Questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of thirty questions, the first four questions of the questionnaire aim was to get an understanding of the participant demographic. Questions five through to thirty aim was to get an understanding of how users consume and generate reviews, and what factors influence and drive their decisions when choosing a hotel.

The researcher provided a definition for any ambiguous terms in the questions presented. There was also a progression bar located at the end of the questionnaire to inform the participant on their progress. The respondent also has the option to exit the questionnaire at any time by simply closing the questionnaire window.

The questionnaire was reformatted several times questions according to feedback and so as to ensure that the researchers objectives were met. Multiple testing was conducted on the questionnaire three days before it was distributed. Testing subjects included the researcher's colleagues, the researcher's college supervisor, friends and family.

3.6. Sampling

The researcher chose to follow a popular sampling method from Malhotra (2006) research guide to assist with the research sampling decisions.

Step 1: Define the Population	Consumers over the age of 18 who use online reviews to determine their hotel selection.
Step 2: Establish the Sampling Frame	A convenience sample frame.
Step 3: Select the Sampling Technique	Non-probability sampling.
Step 4: Determine the Sample Size	250 valid responses, aiming to have fifty-fifty split of male/female participants.
Step 5: Execute the Sampling Process.	Distribution via email or weblink.

Table 3. - Malhotra's five steps guide for research sampling (2006).

3.6.1. Targeted Population of Questionnaire

The targeted population sample is made up of male and female consumers over the age of 18 years. The sample chosen utilise the internet frequently to read online reviews for hotels to help in their decision-making process. The questionnaire is distributed on the 10th of July 2017, in which participants will have seven days to access the given questionnaire link. The survey is distributed online and is not restricted to a geographical location.

3.6.2. Sampling Frame

A convenience sampling frame was chosen by the researcher in order to retrieve as many responses as possible and to have adequate data to make conclusions on the findings.

3.6.3. Sampling Techniques

Non-probability sampling was chosen by the researcher. Further to this, snowball and self-selection sampling was utilised to assist the researcher amplify the collection of data. The snowball sampling method enables participants to share the questionnaire with family or friends or anyone that may be interested in taking part. Self-selection enables participants the option to take part in the questionnaire.

3.6.4. Size of Sample

The size of the sample is the ideal number of completed questionnaires a researcher wants when the questionnaire is finished. As there can tend to be error or faulty submissions by participants, the researcher objective is to collect a minimum of 250 questionnaires so that the researcher has a broad collection of participants and comparable data.

3.7. Analysis of Data

The researcher will extract any incomplete or invalid questionnaires. The questionnaires that remain will be examined to answer the researchers aims and objectives. The aim of the researcher is to collect reliable and consistent data providing a valid and thorough representation of the sample.

3.8. Ethics

The researcher is careful to ensure that ethical considerations are made in respect of the distribution and collection of data with the online questionnaire. The participants in the study will not be harmed physically or emotionally. The researcher is transparent with all information and the reasoning as to why the questionnaire is being carried out by the participants. There is no level of risk, discomfort, stress or embarrassment to participants posed by the questionnaire. As the method for data collection was via online questionnaire, it allowed for complete anonymity, which maximises comfort in participants. There was also no time limit to the questionnaire and so participants did not have pressure or stress in completing with a time frame as result.

Participants were informed that they can exist the questionnaire at any point. The participants were also informed that they will remain anonymous throughout the study, and the information they provide for the questions will be processed as a collective.

3.9. Advantages of Online Questionnaire

Online questionnaires are one of the most convenient and efficient ways of collecting primary data. Furthermore, online questionnaires can access difficult population samples due to their ease of distribution, and can be created in various style formats (Burns and Bush, 2010).

Comparing this to a qualitative research method approach, the researcher does not need to hire surveyors to ask the desired sample the questions, or outsource the work to a market research company. Questionnaires can also be easily displayed and distributed via email, websites, social networks and can be filtered according to source. Many survey or questionnaire softwares are free providing standardised questionnaire templates and are adapted to various device types, which is desirable for participants 'on the go' with limited time.

The researcher has also taken practicality into account, in that you can decide on the types of questions asked including the format (Multiple choice, open ended etc.), making the questionnaire extremely targeted and enabling the researcher to address the specific research objectives and aims. Results are often viewable in real time, allowing the researcher to monitor the progress and results of the questionnaire and receive the collective result quickly.

The scalability is also an important factor in that the researcher could distribute the questionnaire anywhere in the world, so long as the participant has access to the internet.

Finally, given that questionnaires are quantitative in nature it allowed ease of analysis of results. The researcher availed of a cost-effective plan to gain access to additional tools on the survey software to analyse and compare the results. Furthermore, it allowed the researcher to create helpful charts and visualisations, giving the reader of the data, a clearer picture of the data presented.

3.9.1. Limitations of Online Questionnaire

Researchers hope for conscientious responses, unfortunately some participants will not fully read the question asked or the potential answers. Emotions or body language cannot be assessed via an online questionnaire which can often assist with validity of a participant's response. The researcher however tried to combat this limitation with a Likert Scale, this was used in several questions allowing for strength and assertion in responses rather than multiple choice.

Bias can also be a limitation in any form of research, participants may be motivated to participate based on the subject of the questionnaire or because they have a genuine interest in the topic, this can lead to inaccuracies in data and cause disparity in respondents.

To reduce possible error or shortcomings, the following guidelines and strategies were implemented:

1)	Ensure clear formatting, language and instruction to the questionnaire.
2)	Check for content that may promote bias.
3)	Test questionnaire on various device types and obtain feedback from test participants on any necessary changes or additions for clarity.
4)	Add definitions/explanations to questions that may be ambiguous.
5)	Add mandatory questions to ensure key questions are not skipped.
6)	Add Likert Scales to questions allowing for strength and assertion in responses.

Table 4. - guidelines and strategies followed for questionnaire.

3.9.2. Conclusion

This chapter outlined the design and methodology approach the researcher has chosen to adopt. In order to achieve the researcher objectives and aims a precise research design was chosen, namely to understand how users consume online hotel reviews and the factors influencing their decisions when choosing a hotel. The researcher chose to take an interpretive approach. The researcher will use an explanatory inductive approach in designing the research method. The sampling method chosen was non-probability sampling with self-selection and snowball sampling types. Finally, the researcher has chosen a quantitative data approach in which an Online Questionnaire was chosen as the method of collection.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1. Introduction

To get the results of the primary and secondary objectives this chapter will provide an analysis of the primary data collected. The data collected from the online questionnaire will be analysed to see if there is a similarity between the findings and the theories identified by past authors in the literature review.

Further to this, the researcher will compare the primary data results with the secondary data identified in the literature review. The chapter will provide a conclusion on each research objective and any recommendations. The remainder of the chapter will provide the research limitations and any areas for future research.

4.2. General Findings

The key findings of this research are outlined in Table 5.

Table 5. details the key findings from the primary data collected along with the secondary objectives supported with the literature identified in the literature review. This section outlines a summary of the results of this study.

Objectives	Key Findings	Literature
1) Understand the influence that online hotel guest reviews have in the customer decision-making process when booking hotels online.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 32.81% of respondents suggest they have used the internet 6-10 times in the past 12 months to search for a hotel.• 76.95% of respondents suggest they read online hotel reviews to determine whether a hotel is good or bad.• 48.83% of respondents prefer to use mobile devices when	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Users are showing evidence of increasingly trusting online reviews, but they are reading a lot less or have very little time to consume (Anderson, 2012).Ye, Law and Gu (2009) claim that three quarters of consumers source online reviews when planning their trips.• As there is a higher level of risk

	<p>reading reviews.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 66.02% of respondents suggest they visit 2-3 review websites before making a decision about a hotel. • 33.59% of respondents suggest they read 7-10 reviews before they can trust a hotel followed closely by 32.42% of respondents suggesting they read 4-6 before trusting a hotel. • 66.01% of respondents suggest TripAdvisor is the most influential review website. 	<p>associated with the purchase of services, consumer information search in turn is more extensive compared to tangible products. (Alba and Hutchinson 2000; Mattila and Wirtz 2002).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumers searching for services such as hotels, do not limit their search to a singular source of information but from multiple sources to compare the service offering, gain reassurance or confirmation from a cost perspective, and reduce their risk (Konus, Verhoef and Neslin, 2008). • Mobile devices are considered among researcher as a new form of media that help consumers on their travels by providing them with information about different services (Lin et al., 2013)
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<p>2) To examine what specific in-review factors of guest reviews are most important to the consumer and what specific content do they consume first on hotel review profile.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 76.14% of respondents rated cleanliness as a very important factor when reading a review content, followed location (57.25%) and sleep quality (56.86%). • 45.70% of respondents suggest the number of positive reviews is a very important factor when selecting a hotel, followed by media (42.97%) and overall guest rating (43.36%). • 44.14% of respondents suggest they read the most recent reviews that are displayed on a profile first followed by the overall guest review score (30.86%). • 64.45% of respondents suggest that the minimum review score rating a hotel must have on their review profile is 4/5 to be considered. • 30.08% of respondents suggest that a review must be no older 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content posted related to a hotel's core services are more likely to bring positive service quality attributions. (Sparks and Browning, 2011) • 73% of consumers think that reviews older than 3 months are no longer relevant. (Brightlocal, 2016)
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	than 1 month old to impact their decisions.	
3) To understand the influence of hotel management responses within a review on the consumer and whether this has any effect on the consumer's decision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When respondents were asked if they had to decide between two different hotels of the exact same standard and guest review rating, the only difference was that one hotel had consistent management responses to positive reviews, 89.07% of respondents chose the hotel with management responses. • When respondents were asked if they had to decide between two different hotels of the exact same standard and guest review rating, the only difference was that one hotel had consistent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PhoCusWright found 84% of users agreed that an appropriate management response to a bad review improved their perception of a hotel. (Ir.tripadvisor.com, 2012). • Chen and Xie (2008) found that the response of the company should change according to the type of product and the kind of information. • Mauri and Minazzi's (2013) found a positive link between both hotel purchasing intention and expectations of the customers and valence of the review, however the presence of a hotel managers'

	<p>management responses to negative reviews, 94.53% of respondents chose the hotel with management responses.</p>	<p>response to either a positive or negative review had a negative impact on purchasing intentions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buttle (1998) and Stern (1994) found that hotel manager reply can be considered not credible because it's not independent but related to the company.
<p>4) To examine if grammatical error in guest reviews and management responses impact a consumer's decision.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 44.92% of respondents suggest that bad grammar or spelling in a guest review would affect their trust in an online review. • 77.22% of respondents suggest that bad grammar or spelling in a hotel management would affect their trust in the review response. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Polpinij and Ghose (2008) found that well written reviews have a more positive effect on consumers, than reviews with mistakes. • Schindler and Bickart (2012) concluding that grammatical errors or mistakes made in online reviews have a negative impact on consumers, making them less valuable.

<p>5) To examine if consumers only post when it has been an exceptionally positive or negative experience?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 60.55% of respondents suggest they post reviews about both positive and negative experiences. • 15.23% suggest that they post reviews only when they have a positive experience with 11.72% posting only when they have had negative experience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typically, experience goods attract reviews from consumers on opposite extremes, either loving or hating them without an in between (Ghose and Ipeirotis, 2011). • Trip Expert (2014) found that reviews tend to be written by people who have had either an exceptionally good or bad experience with the ‘median’ customer that has had an average experience underrepresented. • LifeLearn (2016) claim that only 23% of customers post negative reviews out of vengeance with 70% of people who complain, hoping to receive a response. They also reported that 90% of customers write reviews to help others make better buying decisions, helping inform or warn other customers about the quality of the good or service. • A Street Fight poll (2012) found that 19.1% of respondents are more likely to write a review after a poor experience, and 16.8%
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		<p>after a pleasant one. Another 42.5 percent said they're equally likely to write a review regardless of the experience with 21.6 percent said they're not likely to write a review at all.</p>
<p>6) To examine how male and female respondents compare when consuming and posting hotel review content</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both male and female respondents suggest that they read online reviews occasionally to determine whether a hotel is bad or good. (76% versus 77%) • 78.16% of female respondents have posted a review following a hotel stay versus 66.16% of male respondents. • 23.46% of male respondents posted a review when they have had a negative experience versus just 6.32% of female respondents. • 79.01% of male respondents suggest that 4/5 is the minimum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender differences have been found in online travel information search (Kim, Lehto & Morrison, 2007) with results showing that women are more likely to engage in WOM behaviour, and more likely influenced by recommendations. • Laroche et al. (2000), found that females search in a more comprehensive manner when acquiring information, whereas males appeared to limit their search to a smaller subset of information behaving in a more task orientated manner.

	<p>review score rating a hotel must have in the case that 5 is the highest and 1 is the lowest versus 58.05% of female respondents.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 32.18% of females respondents suggest that reviews must be no more than 1 month old to impact their decisions versus 25.93% of male respondents. • 35.8% of male respondents suggest that they read 4-6 reviews before they would trust a hotel versus 31.03% female respondents. 	
<p>7) To examine the credibility of the reviewer, what influence does the reviewers age and volume of previous reviews have on review credibility.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When participants were asked 'How many previous online hotel reviews must a guest have posted before you would trust their current hotel review?', 32.16% suggest that none were required followed by 30.59% of respondents selecting 4-10. • When participants were asked 'Would the guest's age affect their trust in their online hotel review?' 48.44% of respondents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lee, Law and Murphy (2011) developed a quantitative method to understand to assess the credibility of the reviewer by using an average Review Helpful Rating (RHR). • Previous studies have assessed credibility from three perspectives; source credibility, message credibility and medium credibility (Metzger et al., 2003;

	suggested 'no', whilst 22.68% suggested 'yes' and 28.91% suggested 'occasionally'.	Pornpitakpan, 2004; Rieh et al., 2014).
8) To examine if consumer's trust online or personal recommendations more.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When participants were asked 'How trustworthy personal recommendations are when choosing a hotel?', 54.64% of respondents suggest they completely trust personal recommendations. • When participants were asked 'How trustworthy online recommendations are when choosing a hotel?' 87.11% of respondents suggest the sometime trust online recommendations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 84% of consumers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations. (Bright Local, 2016) • 72% of consumers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations made by friends and family. Online reviews rank second only to price as the most important factor considered by travelers looking for accommodations. (ModernComment, 2015) • Onelocal.com' consumer trust survey revealed that online reviews ranked in second place as the most trustworthy source of information, with friend and family recommendations placing first (The Importance of Online Reviews, 2015).

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 95% of travelers say that reviews are trustworthy helping them feel more confident about their travel decisions with 53% not booking a hotel that doesn't have any reviews. (Tnooz, 2013)
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Table 5. - Key findings of sample, comparative to literature.

4.3. Online Questionnaire

The researcher created the questionnaire using survey software provider surveymonkey.com and administered it online, email and social media networks Facebook and LinkedIn. Self-selection and snowball sampling were the sampling types used in this research. To attain a profile of the sample of consumers used in the research, the first four questions of the questionnaire were used to find out general information about the respondents such as age, gender and employment status. The questionnaire was completed by 256 consumers and after the data was analysed the researcher was left with 256 responses. All respondents were valid due to multiple testing in advance of the distribution of the survey and because of the researcher ensuring that all key questions were mandatory in answering should the consumer choose to take the survey.

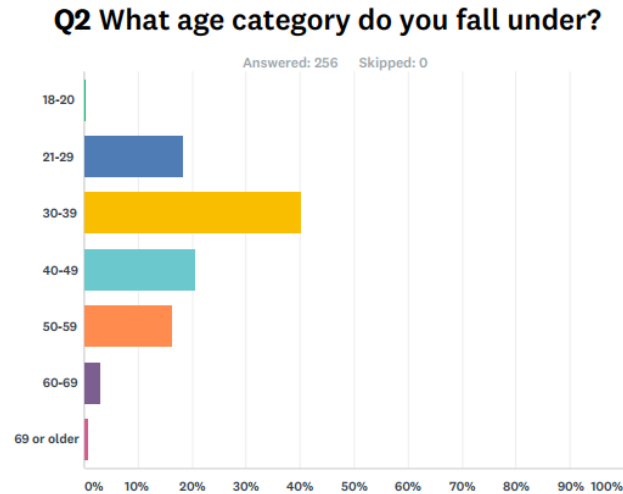


Figure 2. Representation of respondents age

Figure 3. illustrates the ages of the participants among seven specific age categories; 18-20-year-olds, 21-29-year-olds, 30-39-year-olds, 40-49-year olds, 50-59-year-olds, 60-69-year-olds and 69 plus. The questionnaire was answered by a high number of consumers in the 30-39-year-old category followed by the 40-49-year-old category. This result was expected by the researcher as the questionnaire was distributed to consumers online, via email and on LinkedIn and Facebook where most of the researcher's contacts and industry acquaintances consumers are of similar age category. (30-39-year-old category)

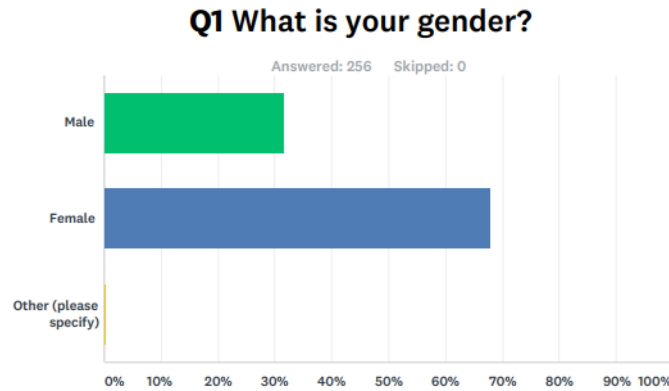


Figure 3. Representation of respondents gender

Figure 4. illustrates the number of males, females or other whom responded to the questionnaire. The respondents are 67.97% female, 31.64% Male and 0.39% other. The researcher aimed to have a fifty-fifty split on male and female consumers but given limited access to additional male respondents in the sample set this was not possible. The total number of respondents that was set out (250) was over achieved however.

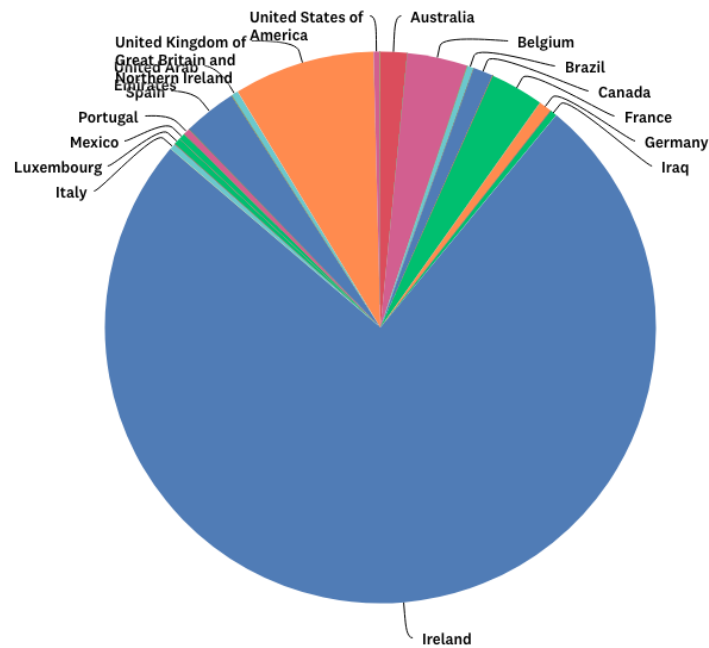


Figure 4. - representation of respondent's country of residence

Figure 5. illustrates the countries of residence of the respondents of the questionnaire. Seventy-five per cent of respondents are from Ireland, 8.2% are from the United States of America, 3.54% from Australia and the remainder in other locations such as Brazil, Spain, United Kingdom and France. The most dominant country of residence expected by the researcher was Ireland as the questionnaire was distributed to consumers that mostly live in Ireland.

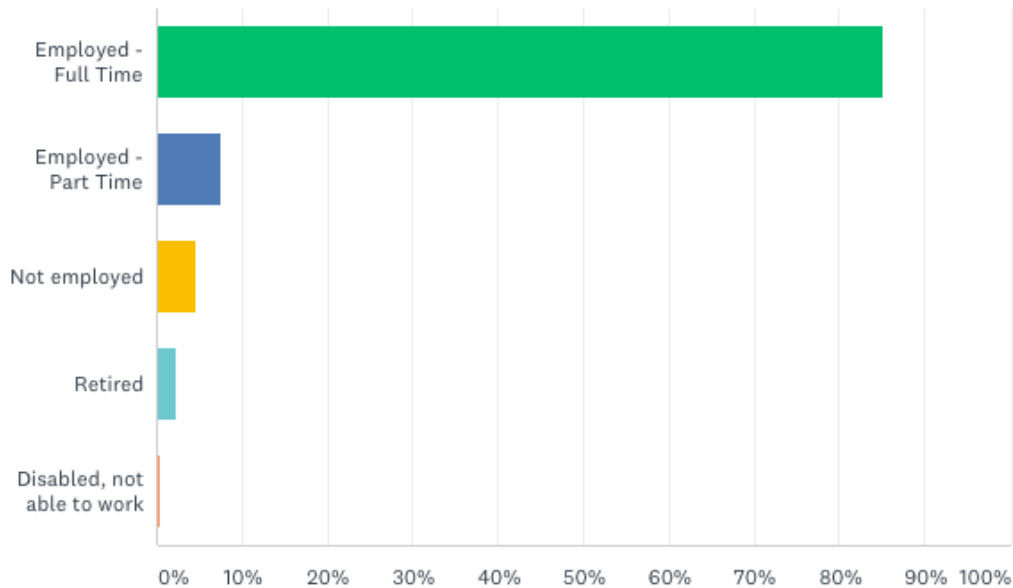


Figure 5. - representation of respondent's employee status

Figure 6. illustrates the employment status of the respondents of the respondents of the questionnaire among five specific employment statuses; 'Employed Full Time', 'Employed Part Time', 'Not Employed', 'Retired', and 'Disabled, not able to work'.

Eighty-five per cent of respondents are employed full time, 7.45% are employed part time, 4.7% are not employed and 2.35% retired. This result was somewhat expected by the researcher given the distribution of the questionnaire was via online business platforms such as LinkedIn, which is a social network pre-dominantly of working professionals.

4.4.1. Objective One: Understand the influence that online hotel guest reviews have in the consumer decision-making process when booking hotels online.

The researcher included several questions in the questionnaire to see if online hotel guest reviews have an impact on individual's decision-making process. Question five of the questionnaire asks how many times has the consumer used the internet to search for a hotel in the last 12 months.

Thirty two percent of respondents suggested they have used the internet six to ten times in the past 12 months to search for a hotel, followed by 22.66% of respondents suggesting they use the internet once a month to search for a hotel. Most respondents (76.95%) suggest they read online hotel reviews to determine whether a hotel is good or bad.

How many times have you used the internet to search for a hotel in the last 12 months?

Answered: 256 Skipped: 0

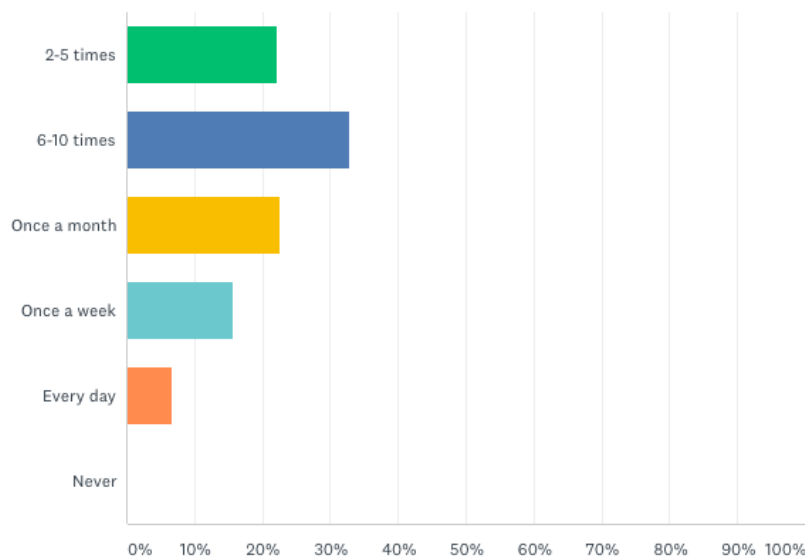
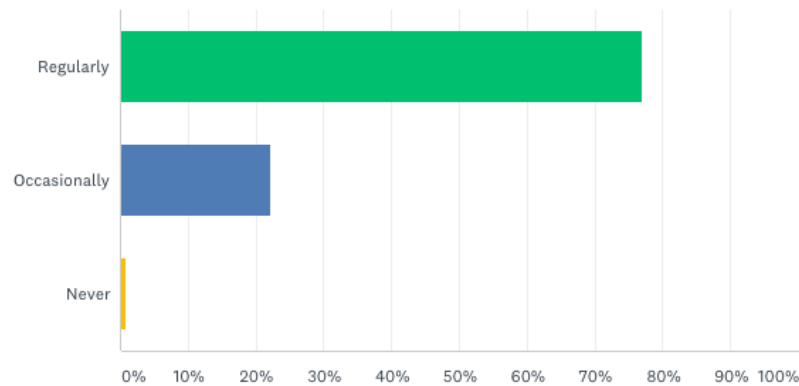


Figure 6. - representation of respondents search activity in the last 12 months.

How often do you read online reviews to determine whether a hotel is good or bad?

Answered: 256 Skipped: 0



***Figure 7.** - representation of how often respondents read online reviews to determine if a hotel is good or bad.*

Thirty-three per cent of respondents suggest they read seven to ten reviews before they can trust a hotel followed closely by 32.42% of respondents suggesting they read between four and six reviews before trusting a hotel.

How many online hotel reviews do you read on average before you feel you can trust a hotel?

Answered: 256 Skipped: 0

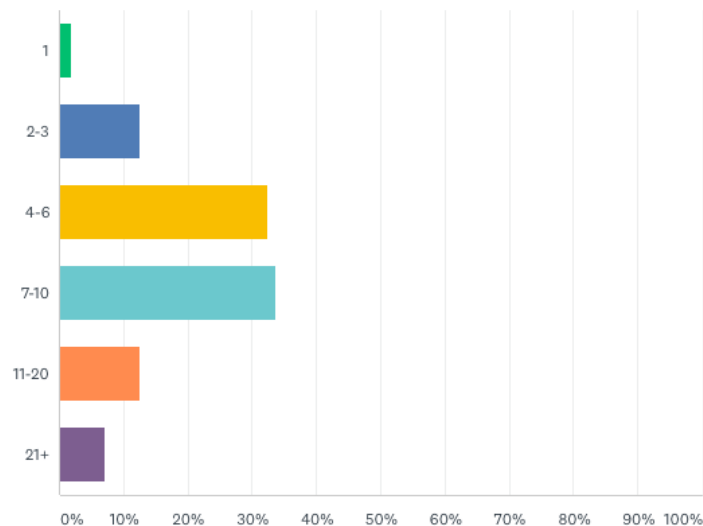


Figure 8. - representation of how many reviews respondents read before they can trust a hotel.

Furthermore, sixty-six per cent of respondents suggested they visit between two and three review websites before they can trust a hotel with 66.01% of respondents suggesting TripAdvisor is the most influential review website.

The results of this sample show similar findings with the literature identified in chapter two from TripAdvisor and PhoCusWright in terms of the number of websites and review sites consumer's in that consumers read an average of six and seven reviews before booking a hotel with TripAdvisor being the most influential review website across all studies. Konus, Verhoef and Neslin (2008) also support the importance of the information search stage and evaluations of alternatives stage of the decision-making process for individuals.

Respondents of the questionnaire also prefer to consume online hotel reviews on mobile (48.83%) over Desktop (36.72%) and Tablet devices (14.45%). This result is similar to that of Schmallegger and Carson (2008) findings, in that mobile is considered among researchers as a new form of media that help consumers in their travel decisions by providing them with information about different service offerings.

The findings from this sample highlight the importance of online reviews in the consumer decision-making process as they aid and guide consumers before making a final decision about a hotel. Furthermore, the findings outline that respondents from this sample read under ten reviews before trusting a hotel and predominantly consume hotel reviews on mobile. This highlights the important role online reviews have in influencing consumer purchase behaviour and that hotels need to ensure that they understand that few reviews (Ten or less) can have a big impact on whether a consumer trusts a hotel. Ensuring that the platforms in which the consumers read these reviews are ‘mobile ready’ or ‘responsive’ are also highlighted in this sample due to the fact they opt to read reviews on mobile devices.

4.4.2 Objective Two: To examine what specific in-review factors of guest reviews are most important to the consumer and what specific content do they consume first on the hotel review profile.

To understand what specific in-review of a guest review are most important to the consumer, and what information they consume first on the hotel review profile, the researcher asked the participant to rate specific factors such as sleep quality, room comfort, customer service, minimum score rating, and review recency on a scale from ‘not important’, ‘mildly important’, ‘important’ and ‘very important’.

Further to this, the participant was asked what specific information they consume first when visiting a hotel review profile and when selecting a hotel based on its guest reviews, to rate specific factors in terms of importance. These questions are evident on the questionnaire in questions 20, 21, 22 and 28.

	NOT IMPORTANT	MILDLY IMPORTANT	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Cleanliness	0.39% 1	1.56% 4	21.88% 56	76.17% 195	256	3.74
Customer service	0.00% 0	5.10% 13	39.22% 100	55.69% 142	255	3.51
Food and beverage offering	3.52% 9	21.48% 55	42.97% 110	32.03% 82	256	3.04
Check-in / Check-out process	5.10% 13	30.59% 78	45.49% 116	18.82% 48	255	2.78
Atmosphere / entertainment	3.52% 9	24.61% 63	48.83% 125	23.05% 59	256	2.91
Sleep quality	0.00% 0	3.92% 10	39.22% 100	56.86% 145	255	3.53
Room comfort	0.39% 1	3.52% 9	40.63% 104	55.47% 142	256	3.51
Location	0.39% 1	5.88% 15	36.47% 93	57.25% 146	255	3.51
Wellness facilities	20.39% 52	39.22% 100	27.84% 71	12.55% 32	255	2.33
Family facilities	44.31% 113	21.96% 56	18.82% 48	14.90% 38	255	2.04

Table 6. - representation of factors of importance to respondents when reading a hotel guest review.

The findings of this sample revealed that 76.14% of respondents rated ‘cleanliness’ as a ‘very important’ factor when reading review content, followed ‘location’ (57.25%) and ‘sleep quality’ (56.86%). The theme of previous research in this area from Sparks and Browning (2011) suggested that content posted related to a hotel’s core services are more likely to bring positive service quality attributions, however these exact services were not identified.

The researcher chose these specific factors; Location, Sleep Quality, Rooms, Service, and Cleanliness amongst others as the world’s largest travel site TripAdvisor, uses these indicators to give an overall summary of the previous guest ratings.

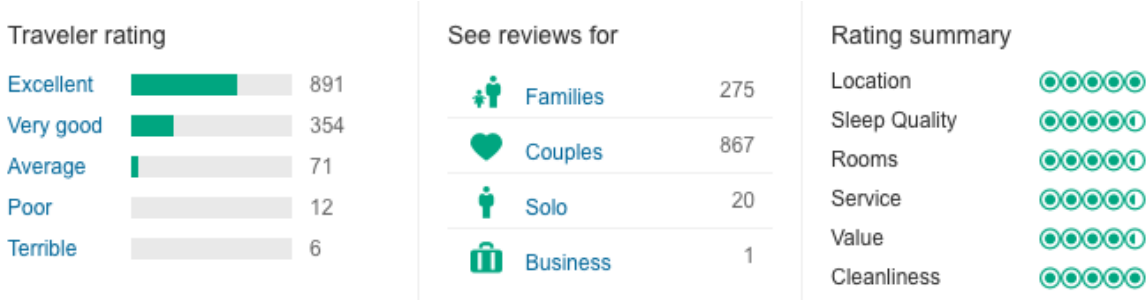


Figure 9. - example of TripAdvisor's Rating Summary

The researcher chose not to use 'value' as a factor as perceptions of price positively influence perceptions of quality of the service, and influence perceptions of value, thus is not relevant for this objective. The findings of this sample highlight that respondents rate cleanliness, sleep quality and location over all other given factors when reading a review.

	NOT IMPORTANT	MILDLY IMPORTANT	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Number of positive reviews	2.34% 6	7.03% 18	44.92% 115	45.70% 117	256	3.34
Number of negative reviews	2.34% 6	15.63% 40	42.97% 110	39.06% 100	256	3.19
Overall number of reviews	11.33% 29	25.00% 64	42.97% 110	20.70% 53	256	2.73
Media (Photos and Videos)	4.30% 11	19.14% 49	33.59% 86	42.97% 110	256	3.15
Overall guest review rating (e.g. score out of 5)	0.39% 1	7.42% 19	48.83% 125	43.36% 111	256	3.35
Hotel management responses	10.55% 27	33.20% 85	39.06% 100	17.19% 44	256	2.63

Table 7. - representation of important factors to respondents when selecting a hotel based on its guest reviews.

The researcher also chose to ask the participants of the questionnaire to understand what 'in-profile' factors are important to them by asking them to rate specific factors such as number of positive reviews, number of negative reviews, overall number of reviews, media, overall guest review rating and hotel management responses.

Forty-five per cent of respondents in this sample suggest the ‘number of positive reviews’ are a ‘very important’ factor when selecting a hotel, followed by media (42.97%) and ‘overall guest review rating’ (43.36%). The importance of positive online reviews is supported in previous research examined from BrightLocal Consumer Review Surveys (2015, 2016) and Ye, Law et al (2010) suggesting that the higher the review number, the higher the hotel’s ratings and online hotel bookings.

Guest review rating also correlates with Zhang et al (2009) single-criterion-stopping rule in that respondents of this sample were influenced by numerical value associated with the service and the higher the numerical score or ranking the better they perceived the service. Media is also supported in previous research (Schmallegger and Carson, 2008) as a key factor in destination choice. The number of negative reviews also rated as ‘important’ with respondents in this sample (30.06%), supporting findings that negative content can have more value to the reader of reviews than positive information. (Sen and Lerman 2007).

The findings highlight the importance of the number of positive and negative reviews, guest review score rating and available media on hotel review profiles for this sample.

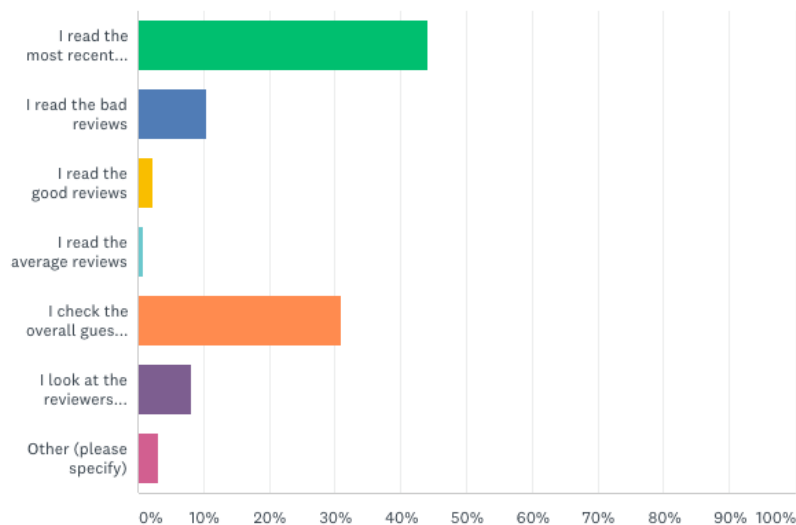


Figure 10. - representation of the first thing respondents do or observe when they visit a hotel's profile on a travel review website.

As the researcher detailed previously in the literature review in chapter two, previous studies have focused on measuring the quantitative elements of online reviews (Duan et al. 2008) or emotions expressed in the review text (Yin et al. 2014) but not what specific content they consume first. Therefore, the researcher asked participants, 'what do they do or observe first when they visit a hotel's profile on a travel review website'. Participants were asked to choose from a set list of specific answers as follows; 'I read the most recent reviews', 'I read the bad reviews', 'I read the good reviews', 'I read the average reviews', 'I check the overall guest review score', 'I look at the reviewer's photos or videos', and 'Other'. These answers were chosen by the researcher as they are the most visible areas of content on leading hotel review profiles. (e.g. TripAdvisor, Booking.com, Expedia).

Forty-four percent of respondents suggest they read the 'most recent reviews that are displayed on a profile first', followed by the 'overall guest review score'(30.86%).

As the researcher does have previous research to compare these findings to in terms of initial content consumption, we can conclude that the respondents in this sample rank 'most recent reviews' and 'overall guest review score' as the first areas of content noticed by respondents on a hotel review profile.

The Westbury

3,951 Reviews

#6 of 151 Hotels in Dublin

Balfe Street, Dublin, Ireland

(01) 679 1122

Hotel website

E-mail hotel


Save

Best prices for your stay

10/9/2017 11/9/2017

1 room 2 adults 0 children


Lock in the lowest price from our partners


 **€313**


View Deal

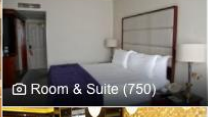
ebookers.com **€313** Expedia.ie **€313**
Westbury Hotel **€313** Booking.com **€313**
Hotels.com **€313** TripAdvisor **€313**
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Prices are provided by our partners, and reflect average night...











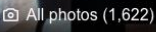


Figure 11. - example of the 'in-profile' content of a hotel review profile.

Reviews (3,951)

[Write a Review](#)

Traveller rating

<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<div><div></div></div>	2767
<input type="checkbox"/> Very good	<div><div></div></div>	682
<input type="checkbox"/> Average	<div><div></div></div>	181
<input type="checkbox"/> Poor	<div><div></div></div>	67
<input type="checkbox"/> Terrible	<div><div></div></div>	40

Traveller type

- ☐ Families
- ☐ Couples
- ☐ Solo
- ☐ Business
- ☐ Friends

Time of year

- ☐ Mar-May
- ☐ Jun-Aug
- ☐ Sep-Nov
- ☐ Dec-Feb

Language

- ☐ All languages
 - ☒ English (3737)
 - ☐ French (58)
 - ☐ German (52)
- [More languages](#)

Show reviews that mention

[All reviews](#)[grafton street](#)[wilde restaurant](#)[marble bar](#)[nespresso machine](#)[turn down service](#)[beautiful hotel](#)[five star hotel](#)[perfect location](#)[lounge area](#)[trinity college](#)[the heart of the city](#)[would highly recommend this hotel](#)[visiting dublin](#)[temple bar](#)[concierge](#)[luxury](#)[doorman](#)

1 - 5 of 3,737 reviews



Andrew K
Milton,
Massachusetts



Reviewed yesterday

Excellent staff and comfortable rooms

We arrived at the hotel only to learn that our room was not ready due to the prior occupant having a family member hospitalized. Hotel manager was extremely apologetic and offered us drinks and food at the hotel lounge. The entire staff was incredibly service... [More](#)

Figure 12. - example of the 'in-profile' content of a hotel review profile cont.

Q21

Customize

Export ▼

When selecting a hotel, what is the minimum review score rating a hotel must have in the case that 5 is the highest and 1 is the lowest?

Answered: 256 Skipped: 0

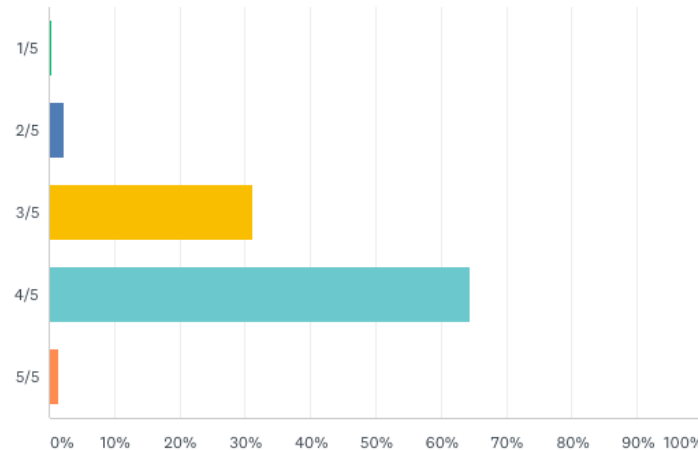


Figure 13. - representation of the minimum review score rating a hotel must have before consideration by respondents.

As numerical rating or score is a theme across previous research, the researcher thought it was beneficial to understand the minimum review score rating a hotel must have for a consumer to consider a hotel. Sixty-four per cent of respondents from this sample suggest that the minimum review score rating a hotel must have on their review profile is four out of five to be considered with only two per cent choosing between a one and two score rating as a minimum. These findings are similar to that of Brightlocal (2015) study in that most consumers will not consider using a business that has a one or two-star rating.

These findings highlight the high expectations of the respondents in this sample, revealing a high percentage of respondents needing a minimum overall review score of four out of five rating before consideration. The rating parameter on review websites can differ in terms of the factors used to determine the overall score. For example, in TripAdvisor's case, it is called a bubble rating with quality, quantity and recency as the three main factors in determining the overall score, making this rating difficult to be consistent. Booking.com, use a scoring from one to ten for various attributes such as Location, Cleanliness, Staff, Comfort, Facilities, Free WiFi and

Value for Money, to give an overall average score, thus it can prove difficult for hotels to keep a consistent scoring across all key travel review websites.

Q22

Customize

Export ▼

How recent does a hotel guest review need to be to impact your decisions?

Answered: 256 Skipped: 0

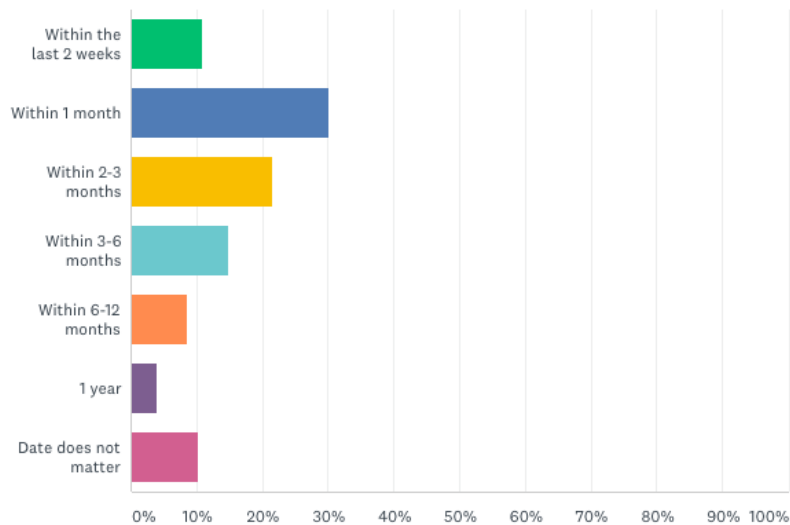


Figure 14. - representation of the how recent a review needs to be to impact a respondent's decision.

To understand how recent a review needs to be to impact a consumer's decision. Participants were asked 'How recent does a hotel guest review need to be to impact your decision?'. Participants have several specific answers to choose from as follows; 'within the last two weeks', 'within one month', 'within two to three months', 'within three to six months', 'within six to twelve months', '1 year' and 'Date does not matter'. Thirty per cent of respondents suggest that a review must be no older than one month old to impact their decisions, followed by 21.48%

choosing within two to three months.

These findings are similar to that of [BrightLocal \(2015, 2016\)](#) surveys with 44% of respondents suggesting a review must be written within one month to be relevant and 73% of respondents suggesting that reviews older than three months are no longer relevant.

4.4.3. Objective Three: To understand the influence of hotel management responses within a review on the consumer and whether this has any effect on the consumer's decision.

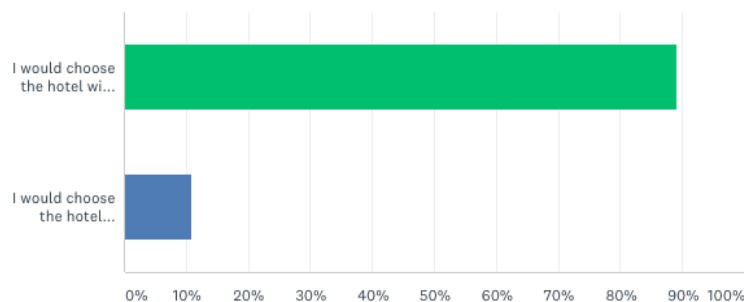
To understand the influence of hotel management responses within a guest review, participants were asked two specific questions in relation to management responses to both positive and negative reviews. So that there were no other factors influencing decision, the participant was told that the only difference between the two hotels was that one had management responses to either positive or negative reviews and one did not. The participant had two specific answer choices; 'I would choose the hotel with the management response to positive/negative reviews' and 'I would choose the hotel without the management responses to positive/negative reviews'. These questions are evident on the questionnaire in questions 18 and 19.

Q18

Customize Export

If you had to decide between two different hotels of the exact same standard and guest review rating, the only difference was that one hotel had consistent management responses to positive reviews. Which one would you choose?

Answered: 256 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
I would choose the hotel with the management responses to positive reviews	89.06%	228
I would choose the hotel without the management responses to positive reviews	10.94%	28
TOTAL		256

Figure 15. - representation of respondent's preference when asked if they had to choose two different hotels of the same standard and guest review rating, the only difference was one hotel had consistent management responses to positive guest reviews.

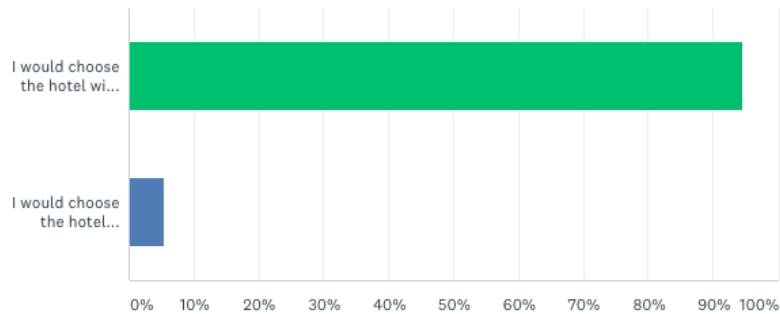
Q19

Customize

Export ▼

If you had to decide between two different hotels of the exact same standard and guest review rating, the only difference was that one hotel had consistent management responses to negative reviews. Which one would you choose?

Answered: 256 Skipped: 0



***Figure 16.-** representation of respondent's preference when asked if they had to choose two different hotels of the same standard and guest review rating, the only difference was one hotel had consistent management responses to negative guest reviews.*

The results highlighted that when respondents were asked if they had to decide between two different hotels of the exact same standard and guest review rating, the only difference was that one hotel had consistent management responses to positive reviews, 89% of respondents chose the hotel with management responses. Further to this, when respondents were asked if they had to decide between two different hotels of the exact same standard and guest review rating, the only difference was that one hotel had consistent management responses to negative reviews, 94.53% of respondents chose the hotel with management responses.

These findings highlight that management responses impact the respondents in their decision-making process, and even more so when hotel management respond and address negative reviews. These findings are similar to that of Tripadvisor and PhocusWright (Ir.tripadvisor.com, 2012) findings in which 84% of users agreed that an appropriate management response to a bad review improved their perception of a hotel and Chen and Xie (2008) findings in that companies should respond to reviews to increase profits. However, these findings do not correlate with Mauri and Minazzi's (2013), Buttle (1998) and Stern's (1994) studies in that the presence of a hotel managers' responses to guest reviews can have a negative impact on purchasing intentions or not considered credible.

4.4.4. Objective Four: To examine if grammatical error in guest reviews and management responses impact a consumer's decision.

To understand if grammatical error in guest reviews and management responses have any impact on the consumer, participants were asked two specific questions in relation to grammatical error in guest reviews and management responses; 'Would a guest's grammar and spelling affect trust in their online hotel review?' and 'Would the hotel management's grammar and spelling affect trust in their review response?'. Participants were given three answer choices; 'Yes' 'No' or 'Sometimes'. These questions are evident on the questionnaire in questions 25 and 26.

Q25

Customize

Export ▼

Would a guest's grammar and spelling affect your trust in their online hotel review?

Answered: 256 Skipped: 0

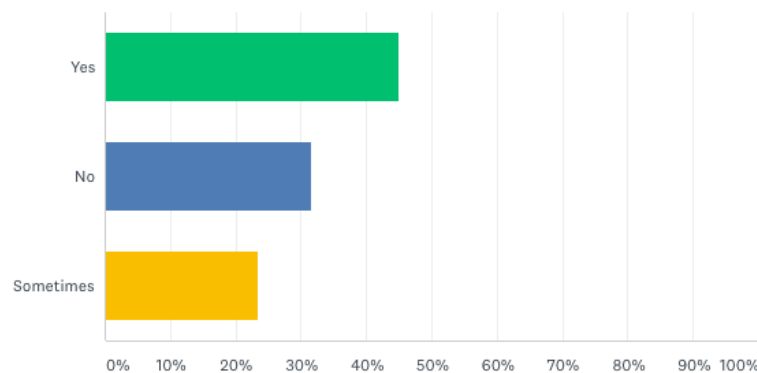


Figure 17. - representation of respondent's preference when asked if a guest's grammar and spelling affected their trust in an online review.

Q26

Customize

Export ▼

Would the hotel management's grammar and spelling affect your trust in their review response?

Answered: 256 Skipped: 0

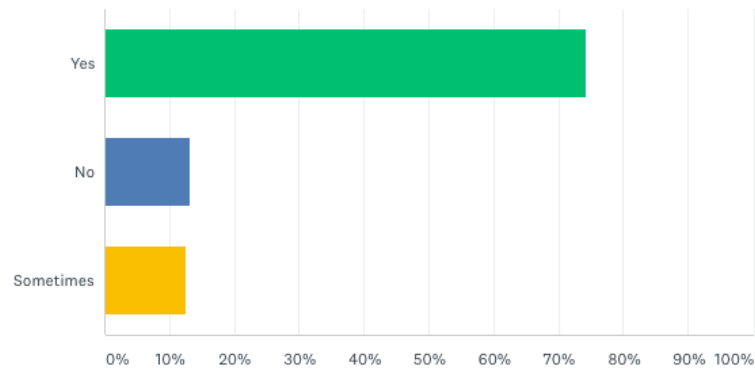


Figure 18. - representation of respondent's preference when asked if hotel management's grammar and spelling affected their trust in an online review.

The results highlight that under half of respondents (44.92%) suggest that bad grammar or spelling in a guest review would affect their trust in an online review whilst 77.22% of respondents suggest that bad grammar or spelling in a hotel management would affect their trust in the review response. These findings conclude that grammatical error in management responses have more impact on the respondents over a guest's grammar.

Previous research in this area somewhat supports the impact of grammatical mistakes in guest reviews. Schindler and Bickart (2012) concluded that grammatical errors or mistakes made in online reviews have a negative impact on consumers, making them less valuable, however as the researcher has stated previously in the literature review the study was not concerning service related reviews nor differentiation between a guest's grammar and management grammar examined so it is difficult to compare it to the researcher's sample.

4.4.5. Objective Five: To examine if consumers only post when it has been an exceptionally positive or negative experience.

To understand if participants only post when they have had an exceptionally positive or negative experience, participants were asked one specific question in relation their posting behaviour; ‘Which of the below best describes your posting behaviour?’ Participants were given four specific answer choices; ‘I post reviews about both positive and negative experiences’ ‘I post reviews when I have had a positive experience’ ‘I post reviews when I have had a negative experience’ and ‘Other’. This question is evident on the questionnaire in question 11.

Q11

Customize

Export ▼

Which of the below best describes your posting behavior?

Answered: 256 Skipped: 0

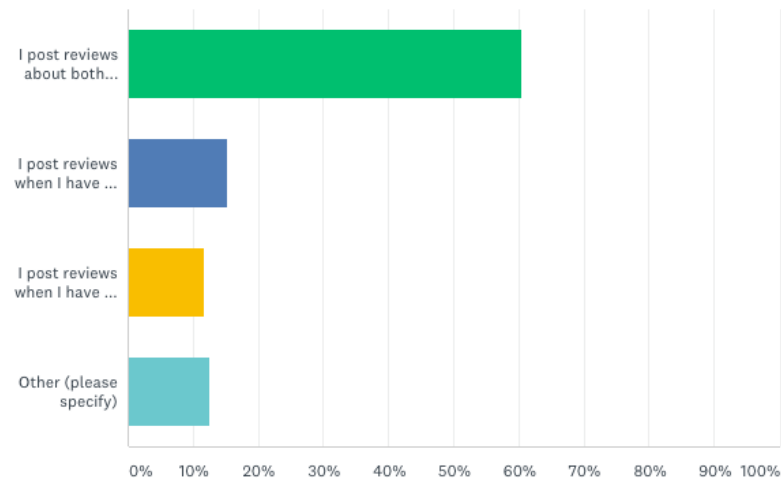


Figure 19. - representation of respondent's posting behaviour.

The results highlight that over half of respondents (60.55%) suggest they post reviews about both positive and negative experiences. Fifteen percent of respondents suggest that they post reviews only when they have a positive experience whilst 11.72% post only when they have had negative experience. Twelve and a half percent of respondents selected “Other”, in which comments such as ‘I usually try to post positive reviews’ ‘If it is exceptionally bad I will post a review’ ‘If it is a mild issue I will usually not bother’ ‘I haven’t yet posted a review but I think I would only do so if experience was particularly bad’.

The findings conclude that most respondents of this sample will post both about positive and negative experiences, however commentary from respondents that selected 'other' are of a negative consensus, suggesting they would post only if they have had negative experience.

These findings differ from previous literature reviewed from Ghose and Ipeirotis, (2011), Trip Expert (2014) concluding most guests normally write about their hotel stay either when they had an extremely good or bad experience. However, Streetfights (2012) poll supports the samples findings concluding that 42.5% of respondents say they're equally likely to write a review regardless of whether it was a positive or negative experience (Duprey, 2012). More recently, LifeLearn (2016) reported that 90% of customers write reviews to help others make better buying decisions, helping inform or warn other customers about the quality of the good or service.

4.4.6. Objective Six: To examine how male and females compare when consuming and posting hotel review content.

To understand how male and females compare when consuming and posting hotel review content. The researcher examined the male and female split on consumption and posting behaviours from the following five questions that were previously examined as an entire gender unit:

1) Have you ever posted an online review following a stay at a hotel? (Question 9)

The findings of this sample revealed that female respondents post more reviews (78.16%) than males (66.16%) following a hotel stay.

2) How many online hotel reviews do you read on average before you feel you can trust a hotel? (Question 12)

The findings of this sample revealed that most male respondents (35.8%) read less reviews before trusting a hotel suggesting that they read between four and six reviews versus 31.03% of females. Most female respondents (35.63%) read between seven and ten reviews before trusting a hotel.

3) **Which of the below best describes your posting behaviour?** (Question 11)

The findings of this sample revealed that most male respondents (23.46%) are more inclined to post negative reviews more than females (6.32%) when they have had a negative experience. Female respondents are more likely to post both positive and negative reviews compared to male respondents. (66.09% versus 48.15%).

4) **When selecting a hotel, what is the minimum review score rating a hotel must have in the case that 5 is the highest and 1 is the lowest?** (Question 21)

The findings of this sample revealed that a higher percentage of males (79.01%) select a minimum review score rating (4/5) compared to 58.05% of females. Thus, male respondents are more likely to require a higher review score rating before selecting a hotel.

5) **How recent does a hotel guest review need to be to impact your decisions?**

The findings of this sample revealed 32.18% of female respondents suggest that reviews must be no more than 1 month old to impact their decisions versus 25.93% of male respondents. Most male respondents 27.16% suggest that reviews must be no more than two to three months old. Thus, female respondents require reviews to be more recent than men for reviews to impact their decisions.

Comparing these findings to previous literature examined in chapter two we can see that this sample's finding correlates with the dominance of female posting behaviour of females is supported by Kim, Lehto & Morrison, (2007) in that females are more likely to engage in WOM behaviour. Further to this, Laroche et al., (2000) study correlates with the researcher's finding that male respondents limit their searching behaviours and behave in a more task-orientated manner, with male respondents consuming less reviews than female respondents before trusting a hotel.

Male and female preference on minimum review score or review recency has not been explored in previous research in the context of travel reviews. The researcher has found that male respondents from this sample are more likely to require a higher review score rating before

selecting a hotel compared to females, with females in this sample requiring reviews to be more recent than males for reviews to impact their decisions.

4.4.7. Objective Seven: To examine the credibility of the reviewer, what influence does the reviewers age and number of previous reviews have on review credibility.

To understand the credibility of the reviewer and what influence the reviewers age and number of previous reviews has on credibility the following three questions were examined:

- 1) Does the number of online reviews that a guest has posted previously affect your trust in their hotel review?**
- 2) How many previous online hotel reviews must a guest have posted before you would trust their current hotel review?**
- 3) Would the guest's age affect your trust in their online hotel review?**

Q23

Customize

Export ▼

Does the number of online reviews that a guest has posted previously affect your trust in their hotel review?

Answered: 256 Skipped: 0

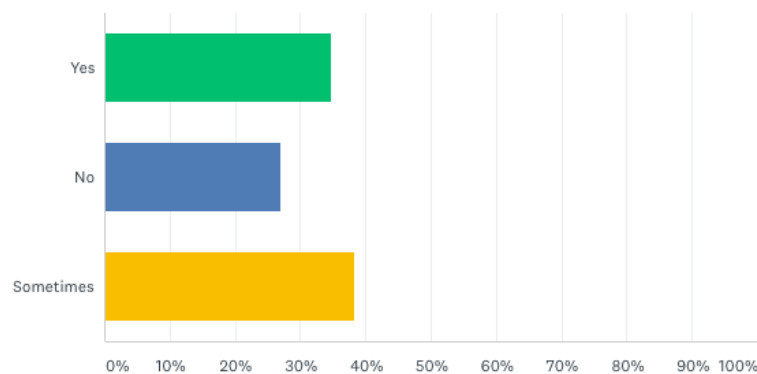


Figure 20. - representation of respondent's selection when asked if the number of online reviews that a guest has previously posted affects their trust in a hotel.

Q24

Customize

Export ▼

How many previous online hotel reviews must a guest have posted before you would trust their current hotel review?

Answered: 255 Skipped: 1

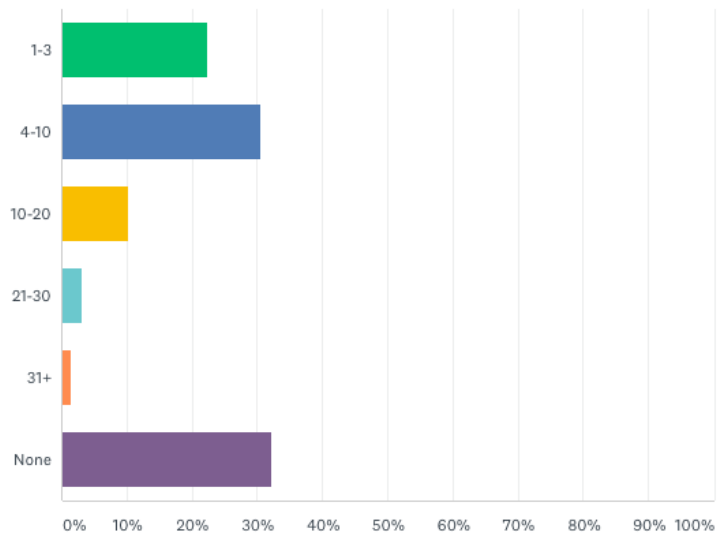


Figure 21. - representation of respondent's selection when asked how many previous online hotel reviews must a guest have posted before they would trust a current hotel review.

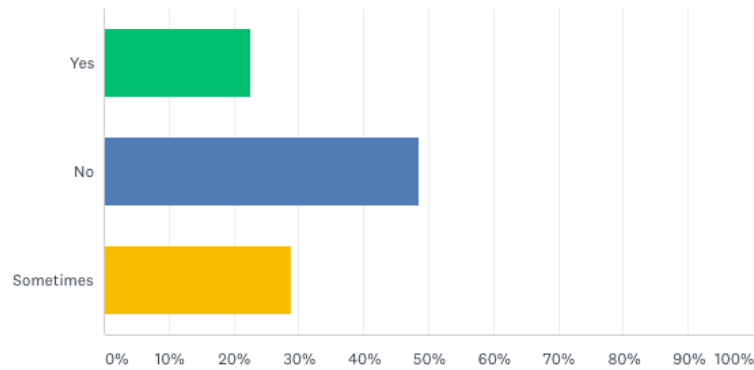
Q27

Customize

Export ▼

Would the guest's age affect your trust in their online hotel review?

Answered: 256 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ Yes	22.66% 58
▼ No	48.44% 124
▼ Sometimes	28.91% 74
TOTAL	256

Figure 22. - representation of respondent's selection when asked would a guest's age affect your trust in their online hotel review.

As examined in the literature review in chapter two, previous research has tried to assess reviewer credibility by taking quantitative approach using various methods Wang et al (2016) and Lee et al (2011). The full impact on the consumer has yet to be explored further in terms of the number of reviewer's previous reviews posted, and the ideal number of reviews a reviewer needs before a review they are deemed 'credible' as a contributor. When participants were asked 'How many previous online hotel reviews must a guest have posted before you can trust their current hotel review?', 32.16% suggest that 'none' were required followed by 30.59% of respondents selecting '4-10'. This finding shows that that most respondents in this sample do not require a certain number of previous reviews before trusting a reviewer's feedback which contrasts with Wang et al (2016) and Lee et al (2011) credibility measurements of ranking higher number of reviews with higher credibility.

Further to this, when participants were asked ‘Would the guest's age affect their trust in their online hotel review?’, 48.44% of respondents suggested ‘no’, whilst suggested 22.68% ‘yes’ and 28.91% suggested ‘occasionally’. These findings suggest the content of the review is more important to this sample over the age profile information. Further this this it does not correlate with the information search behaviours of age groups.

4.4.8. Objective Eight: To examine if consumer’s trust online or personal recommendations more.

To understand if consumer’s trust online or personal recommendations participants were asked two specific questions in relation to online and personal recommendations. The participant had three specific answer choices; ‘Do not trust’, ‘Completely trust’ and ‘Sometimes Trust’. These questions are evident on the questionnaire in questions 29 and 30.

How trustworthy are personal recommendations to you when choosing a hotel? Definition: A personal recommendation is whereby a friend, family member, colleague or acquaintance has recommended a hotel verbally or in written format to you personally about their experience with a hotel.

Answered: 256 Skipped: 0

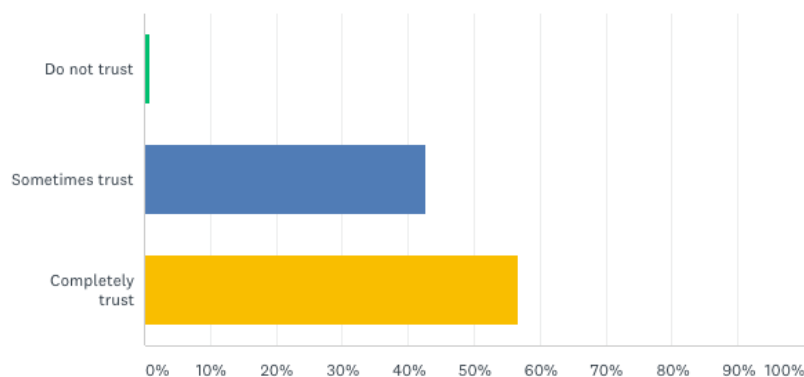


Figure 23. - representation of respondent’s selection when asked how trustworthy personal recommendations when choosing a hotel.

Q30

Customize

Export ▼

How trustworthy are online recommendations to you when choosing a hotel?
Definition: A recommendation given by a user in an online environment is generally unknown to the consumer of the content, unless it is given in an online forum whereby there can be multi-way conversations about an individual topic. Online recommendations or reviews are usually in written and conversational format and are freely accessible to all online users.

Answered: 256 Skipped: 0

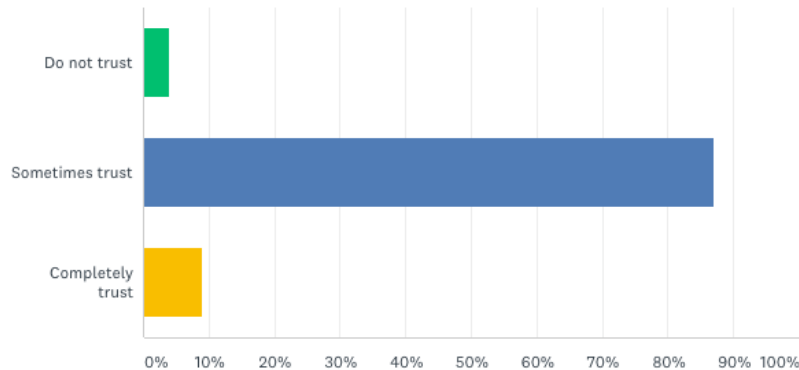


Figure 24. - representation of respondent's selection when asked how trustworthy online recommendations when choosing a hotel.

The findings of this sample revealed that when participants were asked how trustworthy personal recommendations are when choosing a hotel, 54.64% of respondents suggest they 'Completely trust' personal recommendations. This finding correlates with previous literature examined from BrightLocal (2016) and OneLocal (2015) in that consumer's trust recommendations from friends and family as much as online reviews. However, when participants of this sample were asked how trustworthy online recommendations are when choosing a hotel, 87.11% of respondents suggest they 'Sometimes' trust online recommendations revealing significant doubt in their credibility. This finding correlates with YouGov (2014) report finding that nearly two thirds (64%) of consumers had a suspicion that some individuals write online reviews without having purchased a product or service with consumers with 68% believing that rival businesses posted negative feedback about their competitors' products and services.

4.5 Additional Findings

Given the evolution of Web 2.0 tools and the increased use of social media across all industries, the researcher thought it would be useful to ask participants if they use non-travel related social media websites (facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc.) to influence their decisions when evaluating a hotel. The findings from the sample revealed that most respondents (47.84%) do not use non-travel related social media networks to evaluate a hotel with just 26.6% suggesting they do.

However, hotel online reputation companies such as Revinate (2015) and ReviewPro (2014) claim that travel inspiration happens on sites like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, where people are readily sharing their photos, videos and experiences. They further claim that hoteliers need be present across all touchpoints before the guests even know they want to take a holiday. It may be a case whereby respondents don't actively search for a hotel profile on non-travel related social networks but they can be inspired by their connections (friends, family, colleagues) sharing of content about destinations and hotels.

Facebook was rated as the most influential social media network by most respondents (42.22%).

This does not come as a surprise as facebook now has two billion monthly active users making the network the largest social app in terms of logged-in users (Constine, 2017).

The influence of non-travel related social media websites on consumer decision making in the search and evaluations stages is suggested for future research.

4.6. Summary of Findings

In this chapter, a complete set of findings and analysis were presented by the researcher. The chapter began by summarising the general finding in Table 5. Following this, the researcher then presented the findings of each objective from the sample and outlined the literature that related to the findings. By examining the secondary objectives, the researcher got a clear understanding of the the relevance of eWOM in the travel industry and its effect on consumer behaviour when reading online hotel guest reviews, thus answering the primary research question. All eight of the secondary objectives were answered using an online questionnaire.

- 1) Objective one highlighted the influence that online hotel guest reviews have in the consumer decision-making process when booking hotels online. The findings highlighted that most respondents 'Regularly' read online reviews to determine if a hotel is good or

bad, consuming between '7-10' reviews before they can trust a hotel and visiting '2-3' review websites before deciding about a hotel. Most respondents use the internet to search for a hotel '6-10' times per year. TripAdvisor is the most influential review website among respondents with respondents preferring to consume online hotel reviews on mobile, over Desktop and Tablet devices.

- 2) Objective two revealed that most respondents rated 'cleanliness' as a very important factor when reading 'in-review' content, followed 'location' and 'sleep quality'. The factors of the hotel review profile that are rated 'very important' are the 'total number of positive reviews' followed by 'media' and the 'hotel's overall guest review rating'.
- 3) Objective three revealed that management responses impacted respondents in their decision-making process, and even more so when hotel management respond and address negative reviews.
- 4) Objective four revealed that under half of respondents suggest that bad grammar or spelling in a guest review would affect their trust in an online review whilst most respondents suggest that bad grammar or spelling in a hotel management would affect their trust in the review response.
- 5) Objective five revealed that most respondents will post both about positive and negative experiences, however commentary from respondents under the answer option 'other' were of a negative consensus.
- 6) Objective six revealed that most female respondents are more likely to post both positive and negative guest reviews online following a hotel stay, however male respondents are more inclined to post a review after a negative experience. Furthermore, male respondents suggest they read less reviews before deciding on a hotel and require a higher overall review score rating compared to female respondents when selecting a hotel.

- 7) Objective seven assessed reviewer credibility and findings revealed that respondents do not require seeing a significant level of previous reviews before trusting a reviewer's feedback. Further to this, most respondents suggest that a reviewer's age would not affect their trust in a reviewer's review.
- 8) Finally, objective eight revealed that most respondents 'Completely trust' personal recommendations whilst suggesting they 'Sometimes trust' online recommendations revealing doubt in their credibility.

SAMPLE FINDINGS



CONSUMPTION

Most respondents (34%) read between '7-10' reviews before they can trust a hotel, with 66% of respondents visiting '2-3' review websites before deciding on a hotel of choice.



INFLUENCE

TripAdvisor is the most influential review website among respondents with respondents preferring to consume online hotel reviews on mobile, over Desktop and Tablet devices.



IN-REVIEW FACTORS

Most respondents rated 'cleanliness' (76%) as a 'very important' factor when reading 'in-review' content, followed 'location' (57%) and 'sleep quality' (56%).



IN-PROFILE FACTORS

Respondents rated the 'total number of positive reviews' (45%) followed by 'media' (42%) and the 'hotel's overall guest review rating' (43%) as 'very important' factors when reading a hotel review profile.

45% of respondents suggest they read the 'most recent reviews that are displayed on a profile first', followed by the 'overall guest review score' (30.86%).



MANAGEMENT RESPONSES

Most respondents prefer to see online reviews with management responses. Management responses impacted respondents in their decision-making process, and even more so if hotel management responds to negative reviews.



BAD GRAMMAR

Under half of respondents (44%) suggest that bad grammar or spelling in a guest review would affect their trust in an online review whilst most respondents (77%) suggest that bad grammar or spelling in a hotel management would affect their trust in the review response.



MALE V FEMALE

Most female respondents (66%) are likely to post both positive and negative guest reviews online following a hotel stay, however male respondents are more inclined to post a review after a negative experience compared to female respondents (23% v's 6%). Furthermore, male respondents suggest they read less reviews before deciding on a hotel and require a higher overall review score rating compared to female respondents when selecting a hotel.



REVIEWER CREDIBILITY

32% of respondents do not require to see a number of previous reviews before trusting a reviewer's feedback. Further to this, most respondents (48%) suggest that a reviewer's age would not affect their trust in a reviewer's review.



ONLINE V PERSONAL

Most respondents (54%) 'Completely trust' personal recommendations whilst 87% of respondents suggest they 'Sometimes trust' online recommendations revealing doubt in their credibility.

Figure 25. - Infographic of sample findings.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

An examination of the literature in chapter two concludes:

- 1) The internet is a key distribution and communication channel for travelers and suppliers of travel services such as hotels. eWOM communication is perceived by consumers as a highly credible form of communication with research showing that consumers trust it as much as personal recommendations. Although there is an increase in the trust of online reviews, consumers are time poor and so consult just few websites and reviews before making their decisions.
- 2) Consumers no longer need to rely on commercial sources to access information to form an opinion about a product or service due the vast amount of information available online through online review websites and other sources such as search engines, blogs and comparison sites.
- 3) The most popular approaches in understanding the impact of online reviews on the consumer decision making processes have been quantitative in nature taking review valence, motives, numerical factors and credibility into account. Numerical factors play an important role in revenue generation for hotels, with research showing a correlation between review score and revenue. Many studies show consumers are also influenced by the credibility of the median (website, platform) and the review source (reviewer), the evolution of helpful review rating tools on review websites such as TripAdvisor show this.
- 5) The rise of travel review websites creates unlimited possibilities for hotels. It opens a new channel for hotels to connect with potential and current guests directly, more organically, and at scale. Hotels that engage with guest reviews are looked upon more favorably, thus giving opportunity for hotels to drive revenue through positive WOM.
- 6) Research shows that hotel engagement with reviews influences business performance, with suggestions that businesses should alter their messaging according to the information presented,

making it more personal and directed at the reviewer. The evolution of online reputation management tools such as ReviewPro and TrustYou now allow hotels to pinpoint where they need to improve on their services and easily interact with their customers. These are welcome tools for hotels given the abundance of content needing monitoring and action online.

7) Reviewers (creators of review content) make great marketers for hotels, making a hotel's marketing message more personal and relevant. Their content is present throughout the potential customers search process and so this content may be considered highly valuable and unbiased by the reader.

8) It appears that eWOM is not just a trend given its correlation with technology, and for hoteliers that do not embrace the interaction with potential and current customers, they may risk being redundant for consideration. eWOM is more than an opportunity to increase sales but it also has potential to build a hotel's brand, and further to this build valuable relationships with consumers.

5.2. Significance of the Study

The sample examined in this study concludes that most respondents consult online hotel reviews to determine whether a hotel is good or bad before making a purchase decision. Understanding how respondents consume and publish review content online is the key step in assisting marketers with strategies on how to engage with their audience. The key findings conclude that respondents highly value review content such as the number positive reviews, available media and the overall guest review rating of the hotel. Recency is also important for this sample, with most respondents reading a hotel's most recent reviews first when visiting a hotel profile and most respondents only considering reviews no older than one month. Respondents have high expectations of standards with a hotel's review scoring and prefer management responses to reviews. Factors like these raise the importance of monitoring reviews for hotels and engaging with the reviewer, given these reviews are influencing their potential guests. It's not enough for consumers to consult one medium for information or trust in commercial messaging from a hotel. Consumers trust other consumers over commercial messages and they information at their fingertips. Hotel marketers need to reevaluate their strategies to embrace this generation of social

sharers, who by this study were found to be marketers on behalf of hotels through online reviews and sharing of content. The study suggests that understanding the influence factors and type of content consumers engage with on review websites is part of an emerging marketing strategy which is more effective than advertising or branding.

5.3. Limitations of the Research

The research was distributed online via email, through social media websites LinkedIn and facebook, and as a result, the sample of respondents do not represent the population of consumers who read online reviews regularly to influence their decision making. Some research questions were designed with the world's largest travel review website TripAdvisor in mind due to its popularity, and so other factors may be of influence that the researcher has not address

5.4. Future Research

The primary data collected 256 reviews on the questionnaire. To obtain more general results, future researchers could expand the response rate and include inferential statistics to make inferences from our data to more general condition. Further to this, a preference of the researcher was to have an even gender split in the respondents which was not obtained, so this could also be sought in future research. The findings in the study could be used to gain a deeper understanding of what would make a review credible, exploring what tools could travel websites and platforms introduce to help increase the trustworthiness of reviews other than the established helpful review button on TripAdvisor. Moreover, the factors of importance within reviews and hotel review profiles identified in this study could be used in a qualitative study or experimental study to understand if consumers choose the same influence factors through visual representation of a sample review or hotel review profile.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Online Questionnaire

The aim of the research is to examine how users consume and post online hotel reviews and what effect factors such as content, review format and hotel engagement have on user behaviour.

Your participation in this research project is completely voluntary. Completion of the questionnaire will be considered consent. You may decline altogether, or leave any questions blank you don't wish to answer. Your responses will remain confidential and anonymous. Data from this research will be reported only as a collective combined total. No one other than the researchers will know your individual answers to this questionnaire. If you agree to participate in this project, please answer the questions on the questionnaire as best you can. It should take between 5-7 minutes to complete. If you have any questions about this project, feel free to contact me directly at x15019560@student.ncirl.ie

Thank you for your time and consideration.

1. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Other

2. What age category do you fall under?

- 18-20
- 21-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60-69

- 69 or older

3. In what country do you live?

(All countries listed in dropdown)

4. Which of the following categories best describes your employment status? (Check all that apply)

- Employed - Full Time
- Employed - Part Time
- Not employed

5. How many times have you used the internet to search for a hotel in the last 12 months?

- 2-5 times
- 6-10 times
- Once a month
- Once a week
- Every day
- Never

6. How often do you read online reviews to determine whether a hotel is good or bad?

- Regularly
- Occasionally
- Never

7. Which of the following devices would be your preferred choice when reading hotel reviews?

- Mobile
- Tablet

- Desktop

8. What is the first thing you do or observe when you visit a hotel's profile on a travel review website? Definition: A travel review website provides the user with access to user generated reviews of travel-related experiences with hotels, restaurants, attractions and other travel related services. These sites can also include interactive forums, hotel booking facilities, price comparisons and other helpful content. Examples of travel reviews websites: Tripadvisor, Booking.com, Expedia.

- I read the most recent reviews that are displayed
- I read the bad reviews
- I read the good reviews
- I read the average reviews
- I check the overall guest review score
- I look at the reviewers photos or videos
- Other (please specify)

9. Have you ever posted an online review following a stay at a hotel?

- Yes
- No

10. Which travel websites do you usually post on? (Tick all that apply)

- TripAdvisor
- Booking.com
- Expedia
- Hotels.com
- Hotwire
- Orbitz

- Yelp
- Other

11. Which of the below best describes your posting behaviour?

- I post reviews about both positive and negative experiences
- I post reviews when I have had a positive experience
- I post reviews when I have had a negative experience
- Other (please specify)

12. How many online hotel reviews do you read on average before you feel you can trust a hotel?

- 1
- 2-3
- 4-6
- 7-10
- 11-20
- 21+

13. How many travel review websites (e.g. TripAdvisor, Booking.com) do you look at before you make a decision about staying in a hotel?

- 1
- 2-3
- 4-5
- 6+

14. Which travel website is most influential for you when assessing hotel reviews?

- TripAdvisor
- Booking.com
- Expedia
- Hotels.com
- Hotwire
- Orbitz
- Yelp
- Other

15. Do you use other non-travel related social media networks to evaluate a hotel's reputation?

Definition: Non-travel related social media networks are social media networks that are not specific to travel related content. Example: Facebook, Twitter.

- Yes
- No
- Occasionally

16. Which non-travel related social media network/s do you use most often when evaluating a hotel? (Tick all that apply)

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Google Plus
- Instagram
- SnapChat
- YouTube
- None (Please specify)

17. Which non-travel related social media network is most influential for you when evaluating a hotel?

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Google Plus
- Instagram
- SnapChat
- YouTube
- None (Please specify)

18. If you had to decide between two different hotels of the exact same standard and guest review rating, the only difference was that one hotel had consistent management responses to positive reviews. Which one would you choose?

- I would choose the hotel with the management responses to positive reviews
- I would choose the hotel without the management responses to positive reviews

19. If you had to decide between two different hotels of the exact same standard and guest review rating, the only difference was that one hotel had consistent management responses to negative reviews. Which one would you choose?

- I would choose the hotel with the management responses to negative reviews
- I would choose the hotel without the management responses to negative reviews

20. When selecting a hotel based on its guest reviews, please rate the below factors in terms of importance from not important, mildly important, important and very important.

- Number of positive reviews
- Number of negative reviews
- Overall number of reviews
- Media (Photos and Videos)

- Overall guest review rating (e.g. score out of 5)
- Hotel management responses

21. When selecting a hotel, what is the minimum review score rating a hotel must have in the case that 5 is the highest and 1 is the lowest?

- 1/5
- 2/5
- 3/5
- 4/5
- 5/5

22. How recent does a hotel guest review need to be to impact your decisions?

- Within the last 2 weeks
- Within 1 month
- Within 2-3 months
- Within 3-6 months
- Within 6-12 months
- 1 year
- Date does not matter

23. Does the number of online reviews that a guest has posted previously affect your trust in their hotel review?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

24. How many previous online hotel reviews must a guest have posted before you would trust their current hotel review?

- 1-3
- 4-10
- 10-20
- 21-30
- 31+
- None

25. Would a guest's grammar and spelling affect your trust in their online hotel review?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

26. Would the hotel management's grammar and spelling affect your trust in their review response?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

27. Would the guest's age affect your trust in their online hotel review?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

28. Please rate the following factors in terms of importance for you when reading a hotel guest review from not important, mildly important, important and very important.

- Cleanliness
- Customer service
- Food and beverage offering
- Check-in / Check-out process
- Atmosphere / entertainment
- Sleep quality
- Room comfort
- Location
- Wellness facilities
- Family facilities

29. How trustworthy are personal recommendations to you when choosing a hotel? Definition: A personal recommendation is whereby a friend, family member, colleague or acquaintance has recommended a hotel verbally or in written format to you personally about their experience with a hotel.

- Do not trust
- Sometimes trust
- Completely trust

30. How trustworthy are online recommendations to you when choosing a hotel? Definition: A recommendation given by a user in an online environment is generally unknown to the consumer of the content, unless it is given in an online forum whereby there can be multi-way conversations about an individual topic. Online recommendations or reviews are usually in written and conversational format and are freely accessible to all online users.

- Do not trust
- Sometimes trust
- Completely trust