The Influence of TikTok Micro-Influencers on Hotel Selection in Ireland

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MSc in Marketing

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Abstract

This study examines how TikTok micro-influencers affect hotel booking intentions among Zennials (Gen Z and Millennials) in Ireland. While social media reshapes hospitality marketing, TikTok stands out for influencing younger audiences through short-form, authentic content. Micro-influencers, admired for their niche knowledge and relatability are growing in popularity among hotels, however, little research has explored their impact on TikTok, or the whole consumer journey. This research utilised a qualitative, interpretivist methodology, comprising semi-structured interviews with Zennial TikTok users who follow travel micro-influencers.

Using the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), the study assessed how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control allow for booking intentions to be formed. Findings show that content which was visually engaging and emotionally resonant, increased trust, while peer validation, and visibility due to an algorithm provided social pressures and made decision making easier. This research focuses on TikTok, Zennials, and hospitality in Ireland, as well as extending the TPB to a platform specific area of research, providing implications and recommendations for hotel marketers. Furthermore, this research discusses the important role of authenticity, emotional engagement, and interactivity as determinant factor of consumer behaviour in digital hospitality marketing.

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First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to God for giving me the strength, health, and resilience to get through this journey. I am truly thankful for His guidance and for surrounding me with such supportive and loving people throughout this process.

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1. Introduction To The Subject Area and Thesis

1.1 Background to The Study

Irish hotel industry plays a vital role in overall Irish economy, it is one of the main sources of jobs, major contributor to GDP and is a fundamental drive of the country's tourism output. Since the severe disruptions posed by COVID-19, the hotel sector has begun to recover quickly and, according to (Fáilte Ireland, 2024), reached national room occupancy levels of 90.5% in August 2024. This recovery is built on consistent periods of increasing demand, strong international visitor numbers which increase 6.7% from the previous year in 2024, notable events and transactions, and particularly high hotel performance in Dublin where occupancy rates have stabilized above 80% for two years (Schwartz, 2025).

This upward trend aligns with the changing attitudes among the young generations, generation Z and millennials, who represent a growing share of the travel market and are causing demand for hotel offerings which align with their values, such as digital connection, and authenticity in brand storytelling (Seyfi et al., 2024). This digital-first perspective nurtured and shaped by apps like TikTok, where visually stimulating peer-generated images and videos transformed the discovery, comparison, and booking process so much that 71% European TikTok users had already booked holidays following an app recommendation, with Gen Z preferring to use short-form videos as an initial source of inspiration and reference (Quaedvlieg, 2024).

This trend is associated with the rise of micro-influencers, as authentic and relatable content delivers the same level of trust perceived through personal recommendations allowing the relevant brand to effectively tap into niche audiences with a high degree of relevancy (Kumar, 2024). Micro-influencers can be useful in hotel marketing, it can be used to set the communication apart from the marketing promotional message. Furthermore, micro-influencers can also promote hospitality brand experience to the young audience in an extremely competitive digital space (Peres & Silva, 2027). Although there is plenty of literature discussing the topic of influencer marketing, there are still considerable gaps in the literature.

1.2 Gaps in The Literature

1.2.1 Underexplored Platform-Specific Dynamics of TikTok in Hospitality Research

Although influencer marketing and the broader role of social media in tourism have attracted substantial academic attention, the literature still reveals a number of significant omissions that this thesis aims to address. One of the most prominent is the lack of platform-specific research on TikTok within the hospitality sector. While numerous studies explore the influence of social media on consumer behaviour, many take a cross-platform approach or focus predominantly on more established channels such as Instagram, YouTube, or Facebook.

This generalised treatment overlooks the unique affordances of TikTok's ecosystem namely, its algorithmically driven "For You" feed that prioritises recommendations tailored to individual user preferences, its role as a major hub for micro-influencers who leverage authentic, niche-focused content to foster deep audience engagement, and its participatory culture built on trends, challenges, and user-generated remixes. These features create an environment where even small creators can achieve significant reach, with micro-influencers often outperforming larger accounts in engagement due to their relatability and trustworthiness. As Stargazer (2024) notes, TikTok's design not only facilitates the discovery of diverse creators but also enables brands to connect with highly targeted audiences more effectively than on older social media platforms, fundamentally altering how content is discovered, consumed, and acted upon.

1.2.2 Underrepresentation of Micro-Influencers in Hospitality Research

While influencer marketing research frequently focusing on macro-influencers or celebrity endorsers, comparatively little peer-reviewed work has evaluated the distinct role of micro-influencers in shaping the hotel decision-making journey. Much of the existing scholarship assumes that audience size directly correlates with marketing impact, thereby prioritising reach over the depth of engagement.

This overlooks the evidence suggesting that micro-influencers typically defined as having between 10,000 and 100,000 followers often achieve higher levels of perceived authenticity, foster stronger community ties, and establish niche trust with their audiences. In hospitality contexts, where decisions are experiential and often based on perceived quality and trust, these qualities can significantly influence consumer choice.

Research by Peres and Silva (2021) demonstrates that micro-influencers can drive not only awareness but also booking intent by offering personalised, relatable, and credible recommendations that resonate with targeted traveller segments. However, despite their growing prominence in industry practice, micro-influencers remain underrepresented in tourism and hospitality scholarship, leaving a gap in understanding how their content strategies, audience relationships, and perceived trustworthiness interact to influence traveller behaviour.

1.3 Research Justification and Rationale

The importance of this study is that it combines several timely yet under-explored areas. Ireland's accommodation industry is experiencing a strong post-COVID recovery (with national room occupancy levels peaking in 2024). This creates a situation where digital platforms such as TikTok can have a substantial impact on the flow of bookings, though the intricacies of how TikTok micro-influencers inspire and convert bookings within the Irish market remain foggy. Performance reports by Fáilte Ireland confirming recovery of the sector underscore the importance of investigating contemporary (including digitally driven) demand fostering recovery and addressing industry policy needs (Fáilte Ireland, 2024).

From a theoretical point of view, exploring the micro-influencer and TikTok interface through the lens of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) allows us to extend the theory's scope to emotionally charged, parasocial digital interactions (a gap we noted in the literature review). From the practical side, guidance is needed by the hospitality industry on whether and how marketing resources should be spent on micro-influencer marketing on TikTok. Overarching survey data indicates TikTok is a major inspirational channel for travel, with over 70% of European users reporting a likelihood to travel or be inspired to travel as a result of TikTok content (Fenwick Elliott, 2024). If the partnership is authentic and the barriers to actual bookings are minimized, the potential for real conversion is substantial.

1.4 Overall Aim of The Study

Given the research gaps, this study makes several key contributions. It extends the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) to a contemporary, platform-specific context by examining how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control influence decision-making on TikTok. Addressing the scarcity of empirical research on micro-influencers within the Irish hospitality sector, this study enriches the fields of marketing, tourism, and communication.

Focusing on Zennial consumers, a culturally and economically significant demographic in Ireland, it offers valuable insights into their behaviours, which will shape future hospitality marketing strategies. The core aim is to investigate how TikTok micro-influencers impact hotel booking intentions among Irish Zennials, specifically exploring the interaction of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control.

1.5 Research Question

To achieve this aim, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do TikTok micro-influencers shape users' attitudes toward hotels in Ireland?

2. What role do perceived social norms play in influencing hotel selection after exposure to TikTok content?

3. How do TikTok micro-influencers impact users' perceived ease or difficulty of booking featured hotels?

4. How do attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control combine to influence booking intentions?

5. How do TikTok-influenced booking intentions translate into actual booking behaviour?

1.6 Research Method for The Study

The research employs a qualitative, interpretivist, inductive paradigm, with semi-structured interviews conducted with zennial TikTok users in Ireland who follow travel-related micro-influencers, to allow an in-depth understanding with rich descriptions based on the context-specific.

The scope of the research is deliberately limited to TikTok as the platform being investigated, hotels in Ireland as the context of hospitality, and zennial consumers as the target audience. This research approach allows for the researcher's exploration of the meanings that the participants place on their experiences, with meanings that are made through social interaction and are contingent on historical and cultural contexts (Creswell, 2014).

The researchers have an interest in the perspectives of the participant in relation to their real-world environment, acknowledging that this research design encourage in-depth exploration of the scope and typology of complex motivations, beliefs, and behavioural determinants (Creswell, 2014). In this research case, hotel selection among the Zennials in Ireland.

1.7 Overview and Structure of The Research

This dissertation consists of five chapters;

Chapter 1 is the introduction to the study and setting out the aims of the research, as well as background, gaps in the literature, research questions, scope, and the structure of the study.

Chapter 2 is a review of the literature relevant to the Irish hotel industry, Zennials (Millennials and Gen Z), digital marketing revolution, the rise of TikTok platform, micro-influencer marketing strategy, and lastly The Theory of Planned Behaviour as a concept.

Chapter 3 is the research methodology, where I will outline my philosophically and theoretically stance, research design, sampling, data collection method, and data analysis approach.

Chapter 4 is where I outline and discuss the thematic findings from the interviews, linking back to the research questions and the literature.

Finally, Chapter 5 gives a short summary of the main findings, a discussion on the implications for the hospitality industry, and suggestions for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Overview of Ireland's Hotel Industry

The hotel industry is an important sector of the Irish economy and competition drives a focus on digitisation the industry now more than ever; particularly to digitalise and streamline the operational environment and enhance guest experience (Dervan, 2022). Therefore, while the pandemic has greatly impacted the Irish hospitality sector, this renewed focus on innovation is invaluable. In terms of impact, the sector declined by 60% in revenue in 2020 only, while occupancy and hotel revenue has plummeted, with hotels in Dublin seeing a 72% drop in revenue per available room (RevPAR) (ITIC, 2021).

Rising from a devastating pandemic, the latest performance figures show a strong recovery for the Irish hotel market. Room occupancy was 90.5% nationally in August 2024, which is the highest levels we saw since March 2020 with an increase of 0.7% compared to August last year and an increase of 4.4% since July. This sees all 17 counties included in this report seeing their first occupancy of over 80% since before the pandemic. Large-scale events, such as concerts, exhibitions and sporting events, have also aided demand, especially in Dublin. There are also significant increases in domestic and international travel, from domestic leisure travel to international business travel. This supports the notion that the industry is strong, flexible and resilient to the ongoing challenges facing (Fáilte Ireland, 2024).

Post COVID-19 recovery is linked to shifts in consumer trends for travel, particularly among younger travellers using social media for trip inspirations. In Ireland, 53% of 18–24-year-olds use TikTok to plan trips, increasing from 39% the previous year, indicating the influence of short-form video is ever-growing. For hotels, this creates opportunities for engagement among younger audiences through authentic, visual content! Hotels can showcase unique experiences, whatever is behind the lens and sustainability stories, in order to differentiate themselves in an increasingly competitive tourism industry. With leisure travel remaining the primary travel motivator and the demand in the market remaining high, we need to make sure our digital strategies align with the behaviours of the younger audience where necessary.(Hospitality Ireland, 2024).

2.2 Zennials

As generational lines blur and change more rapidly than before, a generational category has emerged. Zennial is defined as those born between 1993 and 2005 (Siu, 2023). While the young group who were born after 2005 are closely intact with smartphones and TikTok, millennials passed through an era of iPod Touch, YouTube-to-MP3 converters, and had a somewhat older relationship with various technologies. They are young enough to have not known the world without digital surveillance, but old enough that there was still some adaptation to new platforms (Ward, 2023).

In addition to developing a "hybrid" relationship with technology, Zennials are equally distinguished by their fluid cultural affiliations, which will derive a slight

intergenerational confusion within younger Gen Z. Culturally, Zennials exist within references that feel increasingly decade-specific; while they understand the viral nonsense of the Harlem Shake and planking, they also are unaware of the TikTok-native slang and trends that configure younger Gen Z conversations. This dual-level awareness affords Zennials a unique form of adaptability, Zennials can occupy both generational spaces with concurrent understandings while also retaining their changing, generic values, aesthetics, and lived experience. Their position allows for a balanced and nuanced perspective in an age that frequently assigned particular generational stereotype (Lansom, 2021).

Zennials are in between Millennials and Gen Z, making it necessary to understand how habits differ with each group. Millennials (1980-1997) are in peak earning years, place an emphasis on practicality and financial stability, and many buy used, shop sales, and use digital financial tools. Gen Z (above 1998) has not reached full financial maturity yet, but has high purchase intent and prefers actions fuelled by creative thinking, digital engagement, an emphasis on authenticity and specific, value-based branded experiences. These distinctions mark how dissimilar their respective socio-economic contexts are (NielsenIQ, 2023).

2.3 Evolution of Digital Marketing

The digital marketing transition outlined by Singakarage (2023) is a transition in marketing theory and practice caused by the rapid changes in technology over the last 40 years. The 1980s were the time to embrace the personal computer, and by the late 1990s to early 2000s, the online user had grown from 16 million internet users in 1996 to 600 million in 2002. This technological change has resulted in the adaptation of the traditional marketing mix of product, price, place, and promotion. Since 2004 many have considered the birth of social media and what has been called the "Social Media Age" (Kim et al 2021).

This period marked a transition from static and brand-centric content to dynamic, consumer focused engagement, influenced by social media and influencer marketing. Social media platforms, including YouTube, Instagram and TikTok, allow experimental engagement and interactive formats, especially short-form videos and live streaming, with the opportunities for genuine interaction and eWOM amplification. Alongside the growth of mobile and AI, data-driven targeting and automation has allowed brands to engage on a personal level with mass amounts of marketing at scale. Social media, especially social video has emerged as the leading digital advertising medium, and a central aspect to overall marketing strategy (Abraham, 2014).

Increasing digital advertising spend reflects an increasing significance, as channels such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram continue to grow. In 2017, global spending on social media advertising reached $51.3 billion, which is 55.4% increase compared to 2016, and in 2018, digital advertising made up approximately half of total global advertising spend. In addition, with 39% of mobile advertising spending growing in 2017, this data, for the purposes of this research, outlines the importance of digital marketing and advertising for revenue generation opportunities, and brand

loyalty/brand acquisition cost that increase positive brand image together increasing client satisfaction (Faruk et al., 2021).

2.3.1 Social Media

Social media entails human behaviours of connecting, creating communities, and disseminating information on the Internet (Rhee et al., 2021) and can be defined as internet enabled platforms for user-generated content, interactions, and collaborations (Méndez-Diaz et al., 2022). Social media has evolved from static websites to dynamic ecosystems, further empowering prosumers to create, consume, and influence beyond where they are located (Grover et al., 2022). Engagement, which includes likes, comments, and shares, are metrics to measure, and evaluate, the potential reach of campaign (Mishnick & Wise, 2024). While the definition and benefits of social media are relevant for all sectors, social media and engagement in hospitality specifically encourages the consumer to behave in a manner that signals emotional connection and booking intention.

Gómez-Suárez and Veloso (2024) identified hotel-related social media engagement (likes, comments, shares) as positively associated with brand attachment and brand attachment mediating the relationship between engagement and booking intention. In another study, they noted that posts that included concrete dimensions of customer experience (for example location) elicited greater emotional responses than ambience, or mention of guests influencing the latter's return to the hotel. If hotels were to create messages, or posts that depict experience, these may increase engagement that leads to completing bookings prior to the experience, demonstrating how social media has transformed hotel marketing in the hospitality sector.

2.3.2 The Rise of TikTok Platform

TikTok's rapid rise into the social media environment has introduced a new digital ecosystem with its focus on short-form video and distinctive marketing applications of this video. Green et al. (2022) highlight TikTok's rapid rise, reporting that TikTok achieved over 800 million users worldwide and generated over $1 billion in revenue in 2020 as users shifted to TikTok more extensively during COVID-19 lockdowns. TikTok has capitalized on the niche left by Vine, and with the platform's use of artificial intelligence to help users navigate relevance and professionally curated content, TikTok provides businesses and influencers with a platform that presents unique benefits to brand and build sponsorships while engaging the consumer.

TikTok's authentic, short-form video content, participatory culture with UGC through challenges, duets, and remixed content, and algorithmic-driven culture impact consumer purchasing behaviours, predominantly through younger impulse buyers in hospitality. Immersive visual content seen in hotel tours showcase aspirational and anticipated experiences to help shape preferences, as TikTok shows its immediacy and ability to alter consumer engagement and reaction to marketing (Green et al., 2022).

Zennials which is the combination of Gen Z and millennials utilize TikTok to explore and validate hotels and enjoy its unique visual and engaging short videos that have advantageous first seconds (Nurhafiza et al., 2025). Zennials tend to prefer authentic

sponsored content opposed to inauthentic sponsored content, prefer personalized algorithm-driven experiences, engage with creative User Generated Content (UGC) that utilizes fun formats to show hotel style, facilities, and destinations in relation to travel aspirations and help consumers make informed decisions.

2.4 Social Media Influencers

A social media influencer is considered to be an ordinary individual who maintains a significant number of followers and regularly post original contents about a specific theme on social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. Influencers are not traditional celebrities who achieved fame because of a prior career in entertainment or the domain of public life, but instead, they rise to astonishing status primarily from a grassroots effort where they obtained their followers and ultimately built a personal brand that likely provides them a role in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviours (Lee *et al.*, 2024).

The concept of influencers began in the early 2000s, Kiss and Bichler (2008) recognized the idea of influencers when they observe the transition of people posting recreational contents into professional creators with a more specific target audience. At the same time, social media was progressing, particularly after the arrival of highly interactive and visual social media, especially short video and reels on famous platforms like TikTok and Instagram (Joshi et al., 2023).

Social media influencers are varied in audience size as well as the engagement they receive from the audience, and the role they play with content. Mega influencers have millions of followers, and is maximized for reach and exposure for brand awareness. macro influencers' followers range from 100k to 1 million, they maximize reach while focusing on niche engagement simultaneously. Besides that, micro influencers with followers around 1k to 100k, build trust in their niche communities (Durmus Şenyapar,2024).

Instagram influencers reshape consumer perceptions in the hospitality sector through engaging and authentic content. Bastrygina et al. (2024) emphasize developing authentic, trustful, and original content to engage consumers. Micro and nano influencers offer consumers customization and relatability for bookings. Macro influencers increase brand awareness, while vloggers immerse consumers customers in time, place, and experience (ex. virtual tours of a location). By partnering with credible and relatable social media influencers (SMIs), companies improve brand credibility, customer loyalty, and purchase intentions.

2.4.1 Micro Influencers

The term "micro-influencers" has taken hold as more of a prominent concept in the landscape of influencer marketing, and refers to people with a follower base that usually ranges from 10,000 to 100,000. The micro-influencers leverage their niche knowledge and a true connection with their audience to influence actual audiences. Micro-influencers stem from the rise of influencer marketing, which has origins in the blogosphere of the early 2000s, and a boom in social media in 2010, but represents a

more segmented and trust-based method of advertising. In contrast to macro and mega versions of influencers, micro-influencers build closeness with followers, while giving brands access to active and engaged audiences with minimal fees (Marchán Sanz et al, 2025).

Research by the Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland (ASAI) indicates that 51% of Irish consumers are concerned about transparency in influencer marketing, 57% are annoyed at a large quantity of sponsored content, and, 59% find influencers who act in an inauthentic manner to be off-putting (Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland, 2021). This is evidence that micro-influencers must remain authentic and disclose commercial arrangements. In the hospitality segment of food tourism, genuineness may even outweigh profit (Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland, 2021).

Within travel and hospitality sectors, micro-influencers can influence travel decisions from a more relatable and authentic paradigm than macro or mega influencers. Essentially, they facilitate the marketing of niche destinations, bespoke properties, and unique travel experiences. The personalized content they produce, such as long and detailed reviews of hotels and immersive narratives, resonates with travellers looking for authenticity and trust because they personalize offers beyond traditional mass-market advertising (Huang et al., 2024).

Micro-influencers can have significant effect on consumer hotel decisions. A study examining hotels in Portugal showed that 79% of consumers found the influencers content had a positive impact on the consumer's decision. The reason that User Generated Content (UGC) is relatable and authentic to consumers, the images posted on Instagram or personal narratives on a blog that paints a picture of the experience at the hotel, reduces uncertainty regarding the hotel. Making the influencer's recommendations credible and applicable tools for booking (Peres & Silva, 2021).

2.5 Micro-Influencers Content Strategies on TikTok

Micro-influencers typically maintain 1000 to 100,000 followers, and they focus on creating authentic, short-form videos that showcase local travel experiences, cultural narratives and practical tips. These things are aligned with TikTok's mobile-oriented, visually-driven audience. They leverage on the platform-specific features like trending hashtags, challenges, and interactive formats to attain emotional engagement and parasocial interaction, utilizing destination appeal through authentic and relatable storytelling. Building upon that, TikTok is closely tied with its viral content ecosystem (Uniyal and Pant, 2025).

Micro-influencers on TikTok leverage emotional appeals to help their audience connect with the account and the travel destination, while being natural and entertaining, as TikTok promotes authentic and engaging content. The story narrated around experience that is uniquely local, based on a cultural tradition, or a destination which has never been highlighted before are proven to be more impactful. In turn, the emotional appeal of travel vlogs also motivates a parasocial relationship, where micro-influencers pull their audiences closer to them. Whether they use humour, emotion-

tingling, or compelling visuals, they want to encourage an effective response through content creation that aligns with the community-based and practical nature of TikTok, There is a correlation between emotional impact, engagement, and travel intentions, as every follower is likely to prefer an accessible destination that feels desired (Barta et al., 2023).

Perceived authenticity makes TikTok micro-influencers highly effective in promoting travel destinations, as their unpolished, relatable approach builds trust and aligns with the platform's organic, user-generated style. Through personal disclosures, cultural storytelling, and sincere, niche-focused content, they score high in sincerity, trustworthiness, and originality, fostering parasocial relationships and stronger engagement. This authenticity leads to more favourable ad attitudes, higher travel intentions, and cost-effective destination marketing (Verbeet, 2022).

2.6 Theory of Planned Behaviour

An individual's action or actions is called behaviour. Behaviour can include but is not limited to acting, speaking, imagining, and feeling which leads to their response to the stimulus either internal or external (Lazzeri, 2014). Since human actions are not typically spontaneous or random, researchers have been interested in unveiling the mental processes that lead people to act in certain ways. Hence the Theory of Planned Behaviour. It provides a structured model for how intention is formed by attitudes, social norms, and perceived control which affect a deliberate behaviour. Ajzen states that behaviour is not usually spontaneous but is preceded by thought, which he expands on in his Theory of Planned Behaviour (Tornikoski and Maalaoui, 2019).

The Theory of Planned Behaviour evolved from the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), developed by Fishbein and Ajzen. TRA suggested that behaviour is primarily influenced by behavioural intentions that are determined by attitudes and subjective norms. However, Ajzen, I. introduced perceived behavioural control in the Theory of Planned Behaviour to overcome the limitations of TRA and use to measure non-volitional behaviours. TPB is a psychological model that was developed to predict and/or explain human behaviour in specific contexts. TPB adds the new concept of perceived behavioural control to the Theory of Reasoned Action. Perceived behavioural control refers to peoples beliefs about the ease or difficulty of a behaviour to be performed. This is very helpful in accounting for situations when people may intend to act, but are constrained due to external factors (Ajzen, I., 1991).

FIGURE 2.1: SCHEMATIC REPRESENTATION OF THEORY PLANNED BEHAVIOUR
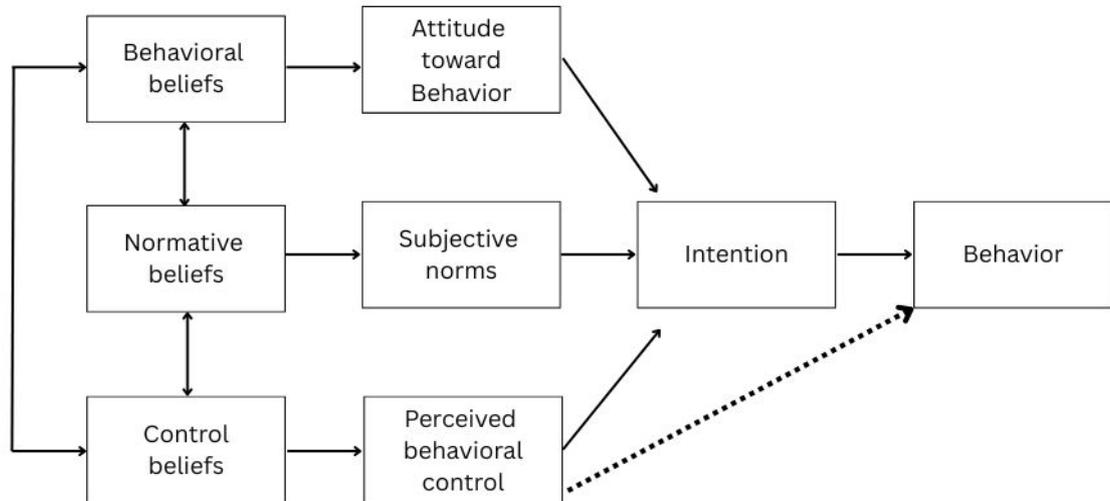
Source: (Prapavessis et al., 2005)

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), as demonstrated in the figure by Prapavessis et al. (2005) specify three predictors of intention: attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control (PBC). Attitude refers to the individual's evaluation of the behaviour, subjective norm refers to the social pressure that the individual perceives, and PBC corresponds to the perceived ability to perform the behaviour. These three factors inform an individual's behavioural intention, which is viewed as the precursor to action. However, since not all actions are completely voluntary, PBC influences behaviour directly. By taking both intention and behaviour into account, TPB can explain the inconsistencies between intention and action.

This model can be utilized effectively in marketing to gain an understanding of consumer behaviour and also to influence consumer behaviour in marketing contexts, especially within influencer marketing. In a recent case study, Singh and Aggarwal (2023) demonstrated how a fashion retailer could promote a sustainable clothing. Using the Theory of Planned Behaviour, influencers could affect consumers' attitudes by stressing the environmental benefits of the product along with the style factor; they could impact subjective norms by promoting peer and celebrity endorsements; and they could impact perceived behavioural control by disseminating information like tips and easy ways to purchase that would all increase the chance of consumers buying the product.

Although TPB is a useful theoretical framework for understanding behaviour, it has been criticized for a lack of predictive utility in digital contexts. Influencer Marketing takes place in situations where emotion, parasocial relationships and immediate social feedback play a role and may limit TPB's rational, intention-based assumptions (Fayyaz et al., 2024). In contrast, more recent research demonstrates TPB continues to provide valuable insights into consumer behaviour as it relates to influencer marketing. For example, Tiwari et al. (2024) studied consumer responses to fashion influencers

and demonstrated a connection between influencer engagement and consumer purchase intentions, indicating that TPB, despite criticisms, can still reliably provide insight into consumer decision-making even in fast-moving, digitally mediated contexts, such as micro-influencer marketing contexts.

2.6.1 Attitude Toward Behaviour and TikTok Influence

The TPB states that attitudes about a behaviour are an important factor in behavioural intentions, which lead to behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). In the TPB, personal attitudes about a behaviour are a key component, which is concepts around the behaviour and overall assessment of the behaviour. Personal attitudes are influenced by a personal evaluation of performing the behaviour, knowledge and beliefs, and positive or negative associations (Simply psychology, 2022). The TPB notes that attitudes take form through several components of learning; personal learning experiences, taught experiences with significant others, cultural influences, and media or educational institutions. This allows for the formation of a readiness to respond to particular objects, in the form of positive or negative evaluations then coalescing into possible behavioural responses (Pardana et al., 2019).

This can also hold true on social media marketing, especially TikTok, where the native format of short-video content shapes consumer attitudes and perceptions toward brand images (Lin et al., 2023). Moreover, the results of the study done by Shah et al. (2026), provides significant evidence that influencer social media content likely shapes people's consumer attitudes in deciding where to travel. The study's focus and location on Gujarat, India highlighted that 60.51% of survey participants had modified travel plans after viewing influencer social media content.

Furthermore, resumed Research by Le et al. (2025) explains how negative social media reviews from influencers on social media such as TikTok, Youtube, and Instagram, especially those that asserted shady practices such as downgrading paid booking rooms without notice would reduce consumers' perceptions of hotel image, trust, and attitudes toward luxury hotels. This study, conducted in Vietnam also illustrated how negative influencer content in social media decreased susceptibility in online reviews on hotel image and trust, which ultimately leads to declining intent to purchase. This study designates influencer uses and context specifically to how consumer attitudes toward luxury brands can be negatively shaped in hospitality.

In contrast, positive reviews produce a significant improvement in consumer perception and booking intention particularly through TikTok's dynamic platform, based on luxury hotel managers' ideas. Chong (2024) explains that through TikTok's creative and visually compelling platform, influencers were able promote luxury hotels in such a way that promoted brand trust and brand appeal. By promoting exclusive experiences through influencer storytelling, influencers evoked emotions and built a community. It is this unique and relatable content that provided positive consumer perceptions while increasing booking intention, which made luxury hotels feel both aspirational and accessible.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) stresses rational evaluation shaping attitudes, however in platforms such as TikTok, where influencer content is based heavily on emotional appeal and aesthetics, it may fall short. Kapoor et al. (2022) found that consumers respond better when the message has attribute-value messages, that is, messages containing rational, objective, content. Especially when sponsorship was explicit. All of this highlights that persuasion, in influencer marketing form, is shaped by message quality and credibility more than it is even TPB's simplified construct of attitude. Patricy and Dewi (2025) argue that in regard to TikTok, attitudes toward behaviour could not be solely due to rational evaluation like TPM argues. Specifically, they show that influencer credibility, emotional appeal, and social media usage strongly influenced attitudes toward behaviour. This creates a case for expanding TPB's conception of attitude to include message credibility and quality in accounting for consumer purchase intentions.

2.6.2 Subjective Norms and Social Pressure on TikTok

Subjective norms, an element of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), denote the social pressures that individuals experience from the reference groups in their lives, such as family, friends or peers, to do or not do the specified behaviour (Al-Swidi et al., 2014). Subjective norms affect behavioural intentions due to the pressures often felt to do what others supported or would consider acceptable behaviour, and therefore define the likelihood of doing the actual behaviour. When individuals believe that their reference group supports or values the action, when they subsequently do the behaviour they create greater intention to act based on social acceptability. The urge for social acceptance is a powerful motivation to act. Social influence does not always happen through ratification, but individuals do internalize group norms (i.e., they want to look like their social space). This internalization of normative pressure demonstrates subjective norms can inform both the attitudes and behaviours (Li et al., 2023).

This aligns with the finding in Liu et al. (2024), who explain that interactivity plays a substantial role in focused attention, a dimension of the flow experience that increases users' engagement with content and their behavioural intentions. The visibility of peer interactions, as in comments indicating shared admiration for a hotel's design aesthetic or simply sharing experiences with booking a hotel in TikTok videos, adds to the social obligation to conform, especially within Generation Z and Millennials, who are the most active users of TikTok and social validation seekers. In this sense, TikTok's interactive components affect the engagement of the user within the environment and produce social pressures that will strongly affect a user's hotel booking intentions.

Nevertheless, the idea of applying subjective norms universally overlooks the more specific effects digital influencers can have in shaping perceptions of social pressure. This is true when recommendations as advice are perceived as personal rather than social norms, making it more difficult to generalize behaviour in environments where influence is enforced (Munnukka et al., 2023). According to a study conducted by Chopra et al. (2020), subjective norms (especially peers), may be overstated, as participants value personal meaning, trust, and inspiration over relationships in the study. This suggests influencers can create some aspect of social validation through their influence on individuals that works regardless of social pressures, people seem to design different types of interaction rather than stay within indicators of norms.

2.6.3 Perceived Behavioural Control and Booking Accessibility

The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) proposed the idea of perceived behavioural control (PBC) to explain behaviours that persons do not have full volitional control over. Unlike actual behavioural control, which is concerned with actual resources and opportunities, PBC is seen as subjective, but it affects intention and behaviour. Therefore, Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC) can be seen as the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour, and it is assumed that PBC reflects prior experience and perceived barriers and constraints (Cheung & Chan, 2000).

Recent findings indicate that social media, specifically the use of micro-influencer marketing, can potentially increase users' perceived behavioural control (PBC) in tourism decision-making through relatable and trustworthy content. Cahyani (2023) illustrates that Instagram micro-influencers can lower psychological barriers to travel planning through perceived authenticity, credibility, and interaction, ultimately evoking trust and accessibility around a destination, making it seem attainable. The TPB framework indicates that where increases in perceived behavioural controls exist, behavioural intentions can also become stronger when individuals feel more confident in their planning and action capabilities.

Despite these instances of perceived authenticity, Pavlić et al. (2023) explain the authenticity of micro-influencers is an evolving quality and a perception that is subject to self-presentation strategies, commercial collaborations with brands, and audience expectations. Consequently, the trust produced from an influencer's apparent genuineness may not be as stable as expected, especially when it is obvious that the content is used for promotional purposes. In summary, from these points of view, while micro-influencers may act as sufficient catalysts for intention, there are ambiguities that need to be resolved - namely, maintaining perceived authenticity over time to increase sustained perceived behavioural control then perhaps eventually convert into actual travel behaviour.

Empirical studies support the premise that perceived behavioural control plays a role not only in intention formation but also in actual booking behaviour. For example, Wong et al. (2024) explored Malaysian consumers' choice of luxury hotels and found that PBC was the greatest predictor of hotel selection behaviour. This study found that when people think they have the necessary resources and opportunities, such as, money and access to information, they are more likely to book. One way to facilitate higher rates of actual booking is to help consumers perceive more control over the booking process, which, as micro-influencers can do by reducing information asymmetry and familiarity, may help consumers better store information and increase confidence. Therefore, not only do micro-influencers influence intention formation but may facilitate real behavioural outcomes through a greater sense of capability and readiness to act.

2.7 Conclusion

Social media has undergone a dramatic transformation in the last ten years, re-contextualizing digital communication and, subsequently, marketing and consumer interaction (Giray, 2022). This has been particularly realized in the hospitality industry

where the emphasis has become virtual ability to influence whether to book or not. The pertinent literature references the impact of Generation Z (Centennials), who are born into the hyper-connected world, and expect a digital experience that is interactive, customized and credible (Yadav & Rai, 2017). Gen Z' s behavioural traits and activity to connect and also consume creates a challenge for traditional marketing. Their Participatory culture demonstrates these consumers develop a type of socially mediated decision-making epistemology that affords less passive consumption (Regan, 2017).

Influencer marketing, especially via micro-influencers, has emerged as a significant marketing tool against this backdrop. In terms of reach and followers, macro-influencers (influencers with 400,000+ followers) or celebrity influencers are more widely known, but unlike micro-influencers, macro-influencers' viewers tend to have a lesser level of trust and relatability with their chosen influencers (Marchán Sanz et al., 2025), therefore resulting in acknowledged higher engagement and conversion rates (Huang et al., 2024). Within the hospitality and tourism industry, the ideal purchase decision booking a hotel stay, is often experiential, high-involvement and based largely on visual appeal. Micro-influencers, through platforms like TikTok and Instagram, offer potential travellers immersive, personalized content that provides opportunities to inspire but ultimately affects decision-making by reducing uncertainty, increasing perceived value, and facilitating booking confidence (Chong, 2024).

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) provides a strong foundation for understanding the influences of social influence on consumer behaviour. Literature indicates that social media content influences hotel selection through positive storytelling and aspirational imagery (Shah et al., 2026). Social norms are reinforced through engagement metrics, peer-to-peer sharing, and viral topics of discussion and user behaviour that obligate others to conform (Valeza & Soriano, 2024). Influencer content influences perceived behavioural control by streamlining booking, improving perceptions of access to information, and weakening psychological barriers (Wong et al., 2024), which leads to booking intentions, and sometimes the actual bookings.

Even though the TPB constructs have more relevance in relation to the digital hospitality context, research on Zennials is not yet explored in the literature specifically, the investigation of the relationship between intention and behaviour, disjointed studies without empirical research into intention and instant behaviour; and ethical issues regarding over-consumerism and mental health issues surrounding hyper-curated spaces on the internet (Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland, 2021) need more empirical research into booking intentions, long-term behaviours, trustworthiness of platforms, and cross-cultural effectiveness of influencers.

Another under- examined area is the platform-specific impact of TikTok as a growing site of micro- influencer interaction. Despite the literature indicating that TikTok creates strong emotional engagement with users and facilitates community (Barta et al., 2023), little is known about its multi-faceted personalization and its potential role in booking email, specifically how its algorithmic personalization and short-form

storytelling shape hotel booking behaviour. The link between PBC and TikTok engagement may provide a fertile ground for brands trying to reach Centennials at the important decision-making touchpoints (Nurhafiza et al., 2025). Gaining insights and understanding the nuances of TikTok's form of parasocial influence, alongside perceived ease of booking, may be important to appreciating how spontaneous decisions occur after what seemed like casual browsing , not fully researched in TPB.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology that was developed in response to the identified gaps in Chapters 1 and 2. A qualitative approach to the study was used to enlighten the impact of TikTok micro-influencers on hotel booking intentions for consumers in Ireland, as it enabled a rich understanding of user attitudes and behaviours in a meaningful context. The study was informed by an interpretivist paradigm which is appropriate when understanding experiences and subjective meanings (Creswell, 2014). The chosen research design for this study was semi-structured interviews, which explored the influence of TikTok micro-influencers on hotel booking intentions for consumers in Ireland. A semi-structured interview approach empowered flexible and open-ended conversations, which was important to understand how micro-influencer influence may determine consumer trust and decisions (Baker, 2018). The chapter concludes with a discussion on ethical considerations, study limitation and the analytical process.

3.2 Research Aims and Objectives

Research methodology scientifically addresses research problems through systematic steps, analyzing methods, and elucidating their limitations, assumptions, and potential at the boundaries of knowledge (Patel and Patel, 2019). This research study seeks to provide insight into how TikTok micro-influencers' reviews influence hotel booking intentions in Ireland, addressing a largely under-researched area in the context of emerging social media platforms. Building on the premise that micro-influencers foster trust through authentic content, this study explores the impact of TikTok micro-influencers' reviews on hotel booking intentions in Ireland, focusing on centennial consumers.The following research objectives have been set to fulfill this aim. See table 3.2.

TABLE 3.2: RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Research Objective 1	To explore how TikTok micro-influencers shape users' attitudes toward hotels in Ireland
Research Objective 2	To examine the role of perceived social norms in influencing hotel selection after exposure to TikTok content.
Research Objective 3	To investigate how TikTok micro-influencers impact users' perceived ease or difficulty of booking featured hotels.
Research Objective 4	To analyse how the combined influence of attitude, subjective norms, and perceived control leads to an intention to book hotels.
Research Objective 5	To understand how behavioural intention influenced by TikTok content translates into actual hotel booking decisions.

3.3 Research Methodology

For this study, the qualitative research approach will be applied to investigate and explore the influence of TikTok micro-influencers on hotel booking intent from the consumer's perspective in Ireland, using the research onion framework (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015). The research onion is a structured framework that allowed me to align the philosophical stance, data collection methods, and analysis techniques (King, 2018), which is necessary to achieve a holistic investigation of social media influence in hospitality.

The research onion consists of multiple layers that are systematic in guiding the research design process. The outer layer research philosophy expresses beliefs about the creation of knowledge like positivism, interpretivism or pragmatism as well as how these beliefs influence perceive of reality. The next layer is the research approach whether the research problem is being addressed in a deductive approach (testing theories) or inductive approach (data generates theories).

The third layer is methodological choice whether the research is types of qualitative, quantitative, or mixed method. The fourth layer of the research onion is research strategy that uses the methodological choice to define the method for research questions like comparative case studies, cross sectional surveys, or ethnography. Fifth layer in this onion is the time horizon for research which can be either cross-sectional (point-in-time) studies or longitudinal (over-time) studies to continue the research. The last or innermost layer of the research onion is data collection and analysis which states the techniques for data collection and analysis like interviews or statistics. The research onion layers provide reasoning for coherent and robust research design (Gamage, 2025).

FIGURE 3.1: THE RESEARCH ONION
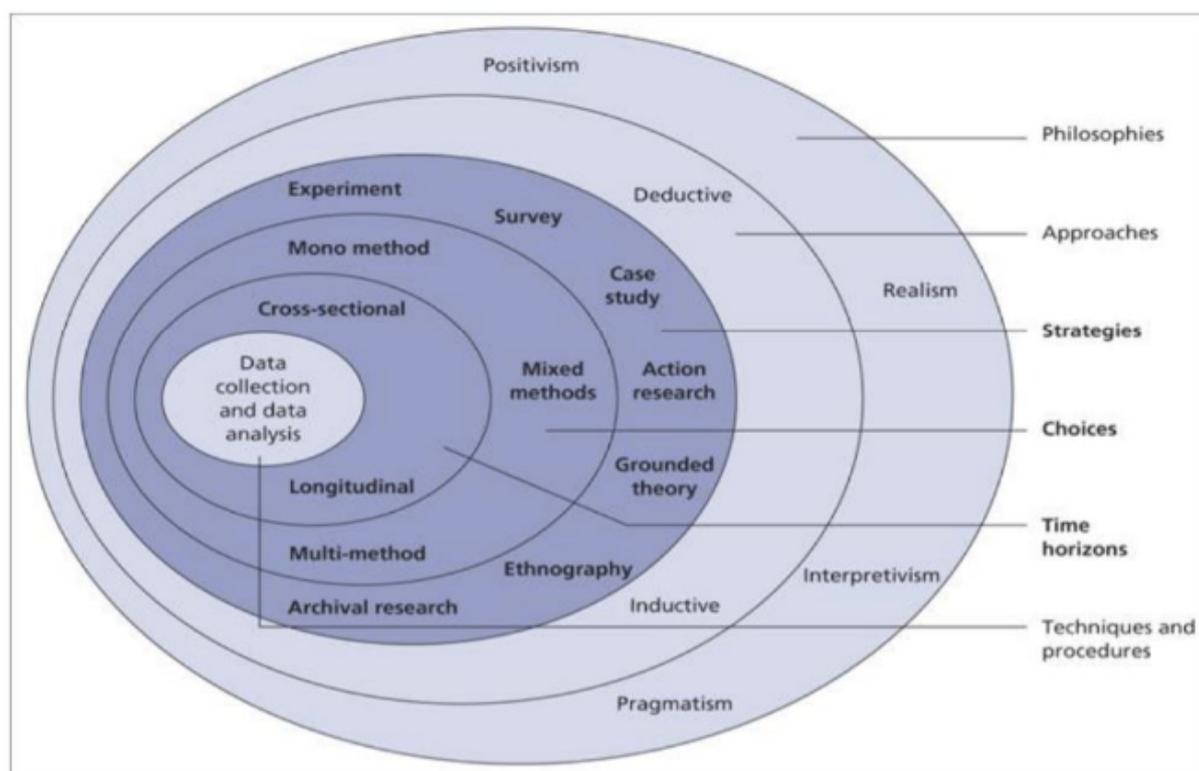
Source: Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2015)

Nevertheless, Melnikovas (2018) articulated that the research onion was developed to organize the fields of business studies and needs adaptation for the unique dilemma of exploring dynamic and non-actualised phenomena, such as consumer behaviour influenced by emerging social media platforms like TikTok. In this case, I use interpretive philosophies and adaptively flexible, exploratory strategies to discover and observe the ever-evolving nature of micro-influencers using in-depth interviews and thematic analysis to explore the complexity and adaptation of micro-influencers.

Even with the growing pains, the research onion structure supports my study as it provides a precise structure to bring together my philosophical beliefs, qualitative methodology, and data collection strategies to present a strong investigation of TikTok micro-influencers' impact on hotel booking intentions in Ireland. Its layered structure effectively guides the research process and after necessary adaptations to account for social media's dynamic nature, it will allow a level of complexity to the exploration of consumer behaviour in the hospitality sector.

3.4 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy is a critical part of any study and is grounded in philosophical assumptions about reality and knowledge of humans (Wahane, 2019). When approaching a given study, a researcher may assume three types of assumptions, depending on their stance. The first, epistemological assumptions, are based on optimally objective ways of knowing. Thus, epistemological assumptions illuminate how the researcher may accept a world from which the researcher can discover and share objective knowledge (Dempsey, 2022).

The second, ontological assumptions, shape a researcher's understanding of reality, including existence and attributes of the objects or phenomena under research (Lee et al., 2024). These assumptions will also affect how a researcher defines and sees the world in their work. The third type of assumption explicit to the researcher is axiological assumption. Axiological assumptions are those beliefs about the influence of values and ethics related to the researcher that are taken into consideration when conducting research (Aliyu et al., 2015).

Taken together these types of assumptions will serve as philosophical assumptions in designing, interpreting, and ultimately being the moral compass of a given study. According to Piccione (2018), the outer-most layer of Saunders' Research Onion includes a description of four key research philosophies that connect to the assumptions just outlined. The concepts of positivism relies on the premise that we (humans) can verify the reality in which we live as an independent phenomenon, which we can observe, and that we can be objective in this observation. Its assumptions are that we must believe the social world operates with universal laws, which involves finding out about knowledge in an unbiased, neutral way using methods of inquiry that exclude opinion or interpretation.

There definitely is some limited room for interpretation. Realism, specifically critical realism, states that reality exists in a natural state instead of an interpreted state by a human and knowledge is based and built on reality discovery, even if it is only partially discovered. Interpretivism is the direct opposite of positivism as it views reality as being constructed through the lens of human interaction with their and our derived meanings. Similarly, knowledge is subjective and based on the experience of understanding social experiences and their meanings. Pragmatics, like pragmatism itself, prioritizes the research question, and thus draws from both positivists and interpretivists perspectives for the general study and analysis of data. Pragmatism recognizes that there are many ways to develop our understanding of reality and there are many forms of knowledge.

3.4.1 Epistemological vs Ontological vs Axiological

Building upon the distinctions between philosophical assumptions in research, this research uses an epistemological assumption as the lens through which the research is ultimately grounded. Epistemology is concerned with what knowledge is, and how it came to know (Crotty, 1998), while ontology addresses the nature of reality. This is important in understanding how perceptions that are formed and exchanged through social media impact consumer behaviour.

In line with Murphy (2021), this research assumes that knowledge is generated through human interaction and interpretation, especially in online social contexts like TikTok. Rather than seeking an objective or universal truth, this thesis investigates how knowledge is generated. Specifically, how knowledge about hotel choice is constructed from individual subjective experiences, that have been influenced by social interactions with micro-influencers and their followers.

This study, unlike Bravo et al. (2018) who modelled fixed, observable data, focuses on socially constructed meanings of hotel choices on TikTok. It does not adopt an axiological stance, avoiding alignment with specific ethical or political values, as the aim was to understand participants' interpretations rather than promote change.

3.4.2 Positivism vs Realism vs Interpretivism vs Pragmatism

Saunders' research onion includes four research philosophies: Positivism, Realism, Interpretivism, and Pragmatism. Positivism pursues systematic, objective knowledge through quantitative measures, with no space for tacit or experiential knowledge. Realism also assumes the existence of an objective reality. However, it acknowledges that individuals access that reality as constructed through context and deeper mechanisms. Interpretivism views subjective social and cultural meanings and experiences as more important than objective measures or assessments of consumer behaviour. Pragmatism is concerned with finding useful action-oriented outcomes while using knowledge to influence behaviour, and may thus provide less theoretical depth (Turyahikayo, 2021).

The study takes an interpretivist stance because interpretivism assumes reality is socially constructed and always experienced subjectively (Al-Ababneh, 2020). The study focuses on TikTok micro-influencers, examining how they identify consumer reactions and base their hotel choices in Ireland on those reactions, using a theoretical lens that provides the opportunity to take account of the emotional, and interpretive dimensions of social media that are difficult to quantify using either positivist or realist paradigms.

3.5 Research Approach

Research approach is the second layer of Saunders' research onion that connects philosophical assumptions to data collection and analysis methods. It involves considering a deductive approach (normally a quantitative method) that is testing a theory using existing theories, versus an inductive approach (normally a qualitative method) that provides theories based on data being gathered (Creswell, 2003).

3.5.1 Inductive vs Deductive

The inductive approach to research focuses on generating theory from data, rather than testing existing theories. The inductive approach usually begins with gathering qualitative data through interview, observation or document analysis. The researcher would than analyse the data for patterns, themes or categories, which resulted in forming some generalized conclusions, or theory. This research strategy has a lot of utility in exploratory research where not much is known about the subject area and in doing inductive research, there is a good deal of flexibility to respond to the data. The inductive research approach captures the emergence of insights based on the participants' experiences and perspectives of the research participants. It often resulted in new theoretical understanding based on the social context it sought to study in the first place (Bryman, 2012).

The deductive approach initiates with a hypothesis derived from previously existing theory, and then empirically tests that hypothesis using a linear approach. This approach follows the positivist epistemology tradition. The deductive approach is used mainly in quantitative-based research. Using a deductive approach often involves a more structured approach, such as surveys or experiments, and is designed to test most significantly to prove or disprove theoretical propositions. The deductive approach is typically less flexible, but improves objectivity, replicability and generalisability making it useful for structured studies to test causal relationships or measure theoretical-based variables (Roche, 2021).

The research adopts an inductive approach due to the exploratory nature of the topic and the intention of developing understanding from observed individual experiences as opposed to theory. Inductive reasoning begins with specific observations or phenomena (here, user behaviour interacting with TikTok micro-influencers) and makes way for broader generalizations or emerging patterns. This is conducive to a study in which social and digital behaviours may not have been fully theorized or adequately understood in a localized context (Ireland's hotel market). Wills (2022) refers inductive as the knowledge of individual phenomena that then generates generalizations that have an empirical basis," and thus justifies to the use of inductive approaches when investigating multiple and complex and nuanced user-generated content and their effect on influencing consumer behaviour in a new digital space.

3.6 Research Strategy

The research strategy is important for informing academic research, especially in complicated and unpredictable fields. Hanafizadeh and Shafia (2021) define research strategy as a broad plan that encompasses the overall strategy for investigating a research problem or the specific research design. Research strategy also incorporates how the research design is associated with the aims of the research, the sources of data, and the context being investigated. When developing a research strategy, it is important to consider methodological pathways that shape how data will be collected and interpreted when answering the research questions.

The research onion outlines techniques such as grounded theory (to generate theory from data), case study (to detail contextual analysis), ethnography (to deeply explore

the context of a culture), action research (to collaboratively investigate and consider action), and narrative inquiry (to tell and analyse experiences). Each technique represents one of explanatory, exploratory, or descriptive inquiry, and must situate itself within a coherent philosophical and theoretical framework to allow the researcher to define methodologies for all aspects of data collection and analysis (Melnikovas, 2018).

3.6.1 Research Strategy Justification

A grounded theory is an appropriate method to study TikTok micro-influencer effects on hotel selections in Ireland because it facilitates the emergence of theory from participants' lived reality, which is especially important for understanding a relatively new and evolving digital behaviour. Grounded theory provides an interpretivist, inductive method which emphasizes the understanding of subjective meanings and context that predict consumer decision-making.

While alternative research methods bring valuable insights, they are less appropriate for exploring the multifaceted and emergent nature of social media influence. To begin with, surveys are typically predetermined with points to measure and may miss the nuanced and evolving motivations that are behind consumers' reactions to micro-influencers (Bryman, 2016). Case studies, though useful for deep contextual insights, are less suitable for this research due to their limited ability to generalise findings. As noted by Hammersley et al. (2000), it is a form of oversimplification to assume that one case represents broader patterns, especially in a diverse context, like the influence of social media.

While ethnographic research is full of cultural detail, it is not appropriate for this research, as ethnography requires time and deep engagement with small groups in several spaces. In the digitally mediated and paced, multi-sited, fast-flowing world of social media, it is not feasible to sustain longitudinal engagement from an ethnographic perspective, nor is it easy to define a coherent 'field' to study. Its subjective nature also limits generalisability in this context (Naidoo, 2012). Besides that, narrative inquiry is also less suitable for this study due to its focus on individual stories over generalisable patterns. Its emphasis on temporality, place, and co-constructed meaning limits its ability to capture the fast-moving, large-scale dynamics of social media influence (Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022).

Given these limitations, grounded theory emerges as a more suitable methodology for capturing broader behavioural trends and theory development in the fluid context of social media. While grounded theory can be challenging to utilize in a timely manner, when access to participants is limited, it does often provide conceptual frameworks rather than a fully composed theory, which is impractical to researchers with more practical applications (Timonen, Foley, and Conlon, 2018).

Dayna Sara Baker (2018) found in her study about Irish female Millennials' perceptions of social media influencers in the beauty space, using grounded theory approach and conducted interviews followed by coding that revealed insights on trust, relatability, and engagement factors that are just as important in hospitality. Given that TikTok content is highly experiential, localized, and personal, grounded theory allows for iterative analysis of generated data in order to identify developing patterns that convey actual consumer attitudes about hospitality. Given that grounded theory generates data from which theory can be developed, and the current thesis will sampling travellers influenced by micro-influencers, an approach similar to Baker's can be employed to develop substantive theory based on travellers' behaviours and perceptions, providing a depth of understanding and methodological alignment.

3.7 Data Type: Primary vs Secondary

The fourth layer of the research onion consists of selecting between mono, multi or mix method. Mono method only uses one research technique which can be either qualitative or quantitative while a multi-method uses several research methods within the same paradigm. A mixed method combines qualitative and quantitative methods and provides a fuller understanding by overcoming the limitations of either approach. A mixed method adds validity and reliability of research findings by the use of triangulation or complementarity and can be effective for complex real world research problems (Flood and Scott, 2015).

Given the scope and objectives of this study, a mono method qualitative approach has been selected. This approach is particularly well-suited to research that aims to explore subjective experiences, attitudes, and social behaviours in depth. As noted by Swift (2022), qualitative research proven to be effective when the goal is to uncover emerging patterns and respond adaptively to shifting contexts and participant experiences. In the scope of this study, the fluidity and pace of social media (particularly, TikTok and its impact on travel) requires a research design that is adaptable, subjective and reflexive. These characteristics of qualitative research allow for an in-depth examination of consumer culture and the micro-influencers, the nuances of how they shape the way we select hotels.

In establishing the mono-method qualitative approach, it is helpful to differentiate between primary and secondary data. Primary data is collected directly by the researcher via interviews, focus groups, observations, and / or questionnaires, and allowed for immediacy, situational relevance, and detail. Secondary data (e.g: government reports, academic literature, organisational documents) is existing data that can provide context, or comparisons, for a future study. Primary data is always the best option if you are looking for precision and relevance but can be limited when the study requires historical or macro perspectives and resources are unavailable (Ajayi, 2023).

Given the aim of this study to examine how TikTok micro-influencers influence hotel selection in Ireland, primary data was the best approach. The limitless and rapidly changing qualities of social media required participants to be engaged in their own context, in order to have genuine experiences, motivations and meaning. Semi-structured interviews allowed for rich, contextual data to reflect the research

orientation when aligning experiences through real-time data that secondary sources could not provide. This approach also added rigor by retaining qualitative research principles by gathering the experiences of participants.

3.7.1 Data Collection Method: Semi-structured Interview

For qualitative research, interviews fall into two types namely, structured and unstructured. There are also semi-structured interviews which could live in the middle of structured and unstructured interviews. Structured interviews consist of a set of predetermined questions and aim to reduce variability and researcher influence; they are more in line with a neopositivist view of interviews as instruments for data collection (Bryman, 2016).

Unstructured interviews are flexible and conversational, where the participant takes charge of the discussion and has the ability to discuss their world and points of view; unstructured interviews are informed by a romanticist view of interviews as opportunities for depth, subjectivity, and meaning-making (Myers, 2009). Semi-structured interviews fall between structured interviews and unstructured interviews; semi-structured interviews allow researchers to explore specific themes while allowing for emergence. Overall, semi-structured interviews adhere to a perspective of contextually situated, co-constructed events with interview participants as opposed to neutrally collecting data (Qu & Dumay, 2011).

The semi-structured interview method is ideal for this research due to the intricate nature of the research questions and the necessity of examining participants' contexts when reflecting on their experiences and engagement. Ruslin et al. (2022) explain that semi-structured interview methods afford researchers the specific opportunity to gather rich, meaningful data while preserving the ability to alter interview questions in accordance with the orientation of the interview. The semi-structured interview method will help to balance the aims of this study, which is to have a clearly defined thematic framework while being sensitive to participants input.

Semi-structured interviews have a methodological balance because they will allow participants to respond as broadly (but also as focused) as necessary. Conversely, structured interviews tend to limit how participants respond, while unstructured interviews tend to lack direction and focus. Semi-structured interviews provided the best methods to meet the research aims outlined in section 3.2, as they allow for a mixture of approach to reactions while gathering data from a variety of perspectives. The set of interview questions, which will help to capture participants' responses in each of the key areas of the topic while also allowing participants the autonomy to share responses in depth, is included in Appendix 1.

3.7.2 Sample Selection and Rationale

Makwana et al. (2023) state that sample is an important element of research to gain accurate data from a segment of the population that is time and cost efficient and can offer consistent and generalizable results. Secondary data from DataReportal shows that in early 2025 there were approximately 2.16 million TikTok users in Ireland,

within the largest user segment individuals age 18 and over, to illustrate TikTok popularity among young audiences (DataReportal, 2025). Another report provided by Morning Consult shows that 22% of young generations around the age of Gen Z and Millennials had booked a trip after being exposed to influencer contents (LSN Global, 2025).

On the other hand, Peres and Silva (2021) have also shown that micro-influencers are extremely important in the hospitality decision making process, with 79% of Zennials followers claiming that this type of content impacted their decisions regarding hotels because they believe micro-influencers to be authentic and trustworthy in their recommendations. Considering that the hotel sector is a large contributor to the Irish economy, particularly in Dublin as the capital city (Dublin Economic Monitor, 2025), it is essential to research how micro-influencer content is affecting Ireland's predominantly youthful generation consisting of millennials and Gen Z (Central Statistics Office Ireland, 2024), when deciding which hotel to select in particular on under-researched platforms such as TikTok. Therefore, the research will focus on Irish Zennials (Gen Z and Millenials) TikTok users that follow micro-influencers as the sample population.

3.8 Data Analysis Method: Thematic Qualitative Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of transforming raw data into meaningful insights through qualitative or quantitative methods to support conclusions in research (Dibekulu, 2020). Each interview will be audio recorded and transcribed to facilitate qualitative thematic analysis, a method that emphasizes interpreting participants' lived experiences and identifying recurring themes through careful, iterative review of transcripts (Kogen, 2024).

This process is best guided by an inductive approach within the interpretivist paradigm, allowing codes and themes to emerge naturally from the data without reliance on pre-existing theories (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017), and comparing the findings with established literature to support the development of informed interpretations and emerging theoretical insights (King, 2018). Participant responses were systematically grouped into themes using a table format to highlight key and supporting patterns. These identified themes were then aligned with the study's research objectives and interpreted in the context of relevant secondary literature.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

This qualitative study, "The Influence of TikTok Micro-Influencers on Hotel Selection in Ireland", will adhere the ethical guidelines set out by the National College of Ireland for research involving human participants. All participants will be treated with respect and autonomy, ensuring informed consent and providing participants with the right to withdraw without penalty throughout the research study. In addition, we are not posing any serious ethical risk. The study poses minimal ethical risk, involving adult volunteers and no vulnerable populations.

3.9.1 Ethical Approval

Ethical guidelines are important in minimizing the risk in research, it helps to keep respect for participants, protect confidentiality, establish transparency, and establish trust in the research (Mirza et al., 2023). To ensure ethical treatment of all study participants, the author completed and submitted an Ethical Review Application Form to the National College of Ireland, including the outlines that made up the ethical review process.

3.9.2 Establishing Access and Participant Consent

It is critical to gain access to participants and obtain informed consent in order to maintain ethical integrity and dignity of participants (Greaney et al., 2012). As such, prior to the in-depth interviews, an introductory email was sent to all participants detailing the purpose of the study, including their role in it. Participation was completely voluntary, and participants could withdraw from the study at any time. In accordance with ethical standards, the email included an informed consent form. Participants signed the consent form to indicate that they agreed to participate and that they could access the audio recordings, findings, and conclusions. Anonymity was secured by storing all data in a password-protected folder, which will be permanently deleted after the results of the study are published.

3.10 Research Limitations

A research limitation is an unavoidable weakness that is beyond the control of the researcher. Examples of research limitations are related to design, sampling, or time constraints which have implications for the study methods, findings, and conclusions (Theofanidis and Fountouki, 2019). Therefore, this study also has some limitations.

This research investigates the under-examined role of travel TikTok micro-influencers on hotel-booking intentions in Ireland, but it was constrained by cross-sectional, qualitative interviews conducted within one week. Although the interviews provided rich contextual understanding, it does not allow to assess how attitudes or behaviours may change. A longitudinal study collecting data regarding participants' engagement with influencer content over an extended time would have allowed for insight regarding the progression of trust, engagement, and hotel-booking behavioural intentions with potentially stronger causal inferences. Additionally, a longitudinal approach may have allowed patterns to develop that may not have emerged with a one-time data collection point (Laradi et al, 2024)

Secondly, the geographical focus on Ireland and the exclusive attention to TikTok limit the generalisability of findings to other locations or social-media platforms. Third, the use of purposive sampling limited participation to those already using TikTok travel content, consequently precluding divergent consumer perspectives. Lastly, self-reported data introduces the potential for social-desirability bias and, again due to scheduling constraints, a small sample size has also limited the number of perspectives represented.

4. Research Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to analyse and discuss the key findings that emerged from the in-depth interviews carried out for this research. Through examining the thoughts and perspectives of the people who belong to Zennials age group and domiciled in Ireland, several common themes were identified across most participants. Each of these themes will be presented in this section, along with a selection of notable direct quotes from the interviewees, in order to address the research objectives.

4.2 Research Objective 1

Research Objective 1:
To explore how TikTok micro-influencers shape users' attitudes toward hotels in Ireland

Interview Themes:
     1. Content Perception.
     2. Micro-influencer's credibility.

4.2.1 Content Perception

The study of TikTok micro-influencers' influence on users' attitudes toward hotels in Ireland identified important findings regarding content strategy and user perspective. The four participants in the study indicated aesthetic, authentic, and descriptive content positively shaped users' perceptions of hotels. The rationale for their preference for aesthetic, authentic, and detailed or descriptive content was based on their relatability and trustworthiness, which we explain below.

Interviewee A*: "I think seeing visuals of a hotel before you go is really important, because you want somewhere that's nice and modern and clean."*

Interviewee B: *"Somebody who shows everything in detail and describes everything in detail is more likely to be trusted."*

The focus on visuals means that aesthetics play a role in making a first impression when the visitor accesses the website, in that good quality, visually clear and recent imagery should influence the desirability of hotel accommodation and experience. This finding supports previous research that indicates that visually appealing images of hotels greatly influenced engagement and demonstrate positive behavioural responses that highlight visual quality in digital hospitality marketing (Hou and Pan, 2023).

When a micro-influencer puts the time and effort to share the hotel experience in full - including amenities, pricing, and the service - it constructs more credibility. Similarly,

it can be seen that content that has the combination of visual quality and informative quality, together, has a higher perception of credibility and persuasiveness, factors that are relevant when creating a positive attitude towards hotels in Ireland. This is affirmed by Mariano et al. (2021), which confirmed that influencer content perceived as authentic and informative increases trust and influences decision-making when it relates to travel.

4.2.2 Micro-influencer's Credibility

Following participants' answers on their use of social media and content preferences, the conversation shifted to discussion about trust in TikTok micro-influencers related to hotel reviews in Ireland. Many participants indicated a preference for micro-influencers over celebrities or major influencers because they felt they could relate to a micro-influencer, who seemed more genuine.

Interviewee C: *"They're not too professional. So, I can see the real condition."*

Interviewee D: *" The person actually stayed there and isn't just promoting it."*

These insights reveal how micro-influencers, through honest and personal storytelling, shape users' positive attitudes toward hotels in Ireland. This aligns with Serman and Sims (2023), who show that trustworthiness and reputation are key drivers of credibility in the hospitality sector. This credibility often leads viewers to save content or research featured accommodations, demonstrating the impact of authenticity in influencing hotel-related decisions.

This shows correlation with Peres and Silva (2021) findings that micro-influencer credibility is positively correlated with the perceived usefulness of shared information, which significantly shapes consumer attitudes and intentions toward hotel choices, supporting participants' preference for authentic and relatable reviews over promotional content.

4.3 Research Objective 2

Research Objective 2:

To examine the role of perceived social norms in influencing hotel selection after exposure to TikTok content

Interview Themes:
1. Peer Influence.
2. Engagement Influence.

4.3.1 Peer Influence

The participants expressed how social norms and peer influence influenced their hotel choice behaviour after watching TikTok content. For some, the existence of TikTok content about hotels validated a hotel experience when friends referenced it, which influenced their choice of hotel.

Interviewee E: *"Usually when my friends suggest a video by an influencer, it's because they like the content or they think it's useful, I tend to trust my friends' suggestions more."*

This clearly shows how social networks can enhance the effectiveness of TikTok videos, personal relationships can convince someone to have confidence on booking a hotel.

Interviewee A: *"Yeah, I would. I think if a friend has described it to me as being overall good, I'd definitely consider staying there. So like, there's a few different factors, you know, that would come into account. So like, say, the location and the cost. So if a friend had seen, you know, a TikTok or whoever stayed in there and recommended it, then yeah, I would be more inclined to research that hotel."*

Moreover, that openness is part of a larger social dynamic in which TikTok operates as an app in which individuals experience discovery, as well as serve as a social filter for their decision-making. The content itself may not be persuasive, but collectively voice from peers create an element of credibility that encourages users to think more critically about their engagement. Zhou et al. (2023) shows a correlation in their study indicating that social norms and peer endorsements on TikTok, especially when supported by trusted friends, greatly enhance the perceived credibility of travel content, which subsequently impacts decision-making processes in travel.

4.3.2 Engagement Influence

All participants expressed distinct views on how engagement metrics such as likes, comments, and shares influence their validation of hotel choices, particularly after exposure to TikTok content.

Interviewee A: **"***If a video had more likes, I'd probably be more inclined to click into that hotel or to research that hotel a bit more."*

revealing that while visible popularity may draw attention, decisions are still made from trusted sites based on perceptions. Gómez-Suárez and Veloso (2024) showed that using social media engagement likes, comments, points of share has the beginnings of a reaction; whereas, when they then asked to the comprise of experiential content based on previous experience is upheld as considered real content.

Alternatively, when a participant was asked for their considerations she provided a negative reaction and was inclined to find real comments over superficial metrics. This indicates the Varkaris and Neuhofer (2017) finding when concluded, social media content inspires hotel decisions, yet trust and authenticity are vital for users when determining comment trustworthiness.

Interviewee B: *"Everyone knows that you can buy views and you can buy likes."*

This contrast illuminates when may influence considerations for millennials but ultimately, it requires critical judgement to assure a hotels content is real. This is based on empirical evidence that social media metrics, such as likes and shares, had a direct effect on intentions because it communicated a level of popularity and trust, whereas comments were not significantly related to consumer decisions, illustrating how engagement metrics could facilitate consumer behaviour (Rosli et al., 2024).

4.4 Research Objective 3

Research Objective 3:

To investigate how TikTok micro-influencers impact users' perceived ease or difficulty of booking featured hotels

Interview Themes:
1. Informational Ease.
2. Booking Confidence.

4.4.1 Informational Ease.

Participants highlighted how the presence of booking links or practical information in TikTok content can enhance the ease of hotel reservation.

Interviewee E: *"If they provide a booking link and the procedure becomes easy... then it becomes easier for you to book through that link."*

suggesting that integrated booking features reduce friction in the decision-making process.

Interviewee F: *"Yeah, I think so. If there is an embedded link or any additional information that I should know about the hotel in the content, it would be great."*

This indicates an increase in user expectation of seamless and actionable information that goes beyond inspiration to enable decision-making. This correlates with Fong et al. 's (2024) study that found perceived ease of use increases travel planning self-efficacy; if users perceive information as practical-about booking via TikTok, then they

will be more likely to book the hotel. Provision of booking links, price details, and step by step process on TikTok, turns TikTok from just a discovery platform to a convenient booking resource.

Participants noted this was especially useful when impulsively planning trips or seeing hotels that were hard to source on commercial booking platforms. Thus, informational support in influencer content not only simplifies the booking journey but reinforces trust and convenience, promoting the potential of travel conversion to a guest. These findings have a relationship to Liu et al. 's (2024) study findings, which reported that engaging, informational TikTok tourism videos increased users' focused attention and time distortion experiences - both of which increased their intentions to visit a showcased destination.

4.4.2 Booking Confidence

Participants expressed that micro-influencers' content significantly contributed to their confidence when considering hotel bookings, especially when practical information was presented clearly.

Interviewee A: *"A hotel's price and location are probably the two main things that I'd look at when booking a hotel. And if a micro-influencer had content on TikTok of a hotel that was affordable and central, then I would be more inclined to book it."*

Interviewee D: *"If someone says this was 120 euro a night, including breakfast, and it's only 10 minutes from the Cliffs of Moher, that's so useful."*

Illustrating how practical details were useful to user booking confidence in that it allowed users to picture the experience in a more tangible way. The evidence indicates that micro-influencers often provide important practical details and this decreases the participants perception of barriers as well as makes the booking process easier. Uniyal and Pant (2025) state that trust, relatability and authenticity can be considered key elements when referring to content from micro-influencers especially as they relate to visual platforms like TikTok. The previous evidence may also be positively related to participants use of clear practical details as facilitated by micro-influencers confidence when booking hotels.

4.5 Research Objective 4

Research Objective 4:
To analyze how the combined influence of attitude, subjective norms, and perceived control leads to an intention to book hotels.
Interview Themes: 　　1.　Content Persuasion. 　　2.　Decision Factors.

4.5.1 Content Persuasion

Participants described how TikTok content directly shaped their interest or disinterest in booking a hotel, underscoring the combined effect of attitude, social influence, and perceived control.

Interviewee C: *"That's definitely encouraged me to book that hotel, every time I see a good review of some place or like of some hotel, then I will save it for my next visit."*

suggesting that a positive attitude toward the content, coupled with the ease of access to visual and experiential information, enhances booking intent. This aligns with findings that highlight how engaging and easily accessible content can foster user trust and drive booking intention (Oesterreich et al., 2024).

Interviewee D: *"If someone had issues with cleanliness, rude staff or poor communication, that would put me off, one bad review on TikTok can really change my mind."*

This shows how bad review in the content, even from a single creator, can impact perception and sequentially affect intention to book. This is similar to Wang's (2021) study in which positive and negative TikTok video qualities, especially informativeness, trustworthiness, and novelty, influenced emotional responses and subsequently booking intentions. Together, these findings shed light on the intersection of user attitudes, peers' validations, and controllability regarding the decision-making process through TikTok and how this is influencing participants' hotel booking intentions.

4.5.2 Decision Factors

All participants acknowledged that multiple factors simultaneously influence their intention to book a hotel, including personal preferences, the opinions of others, and the ease of the booking process.

Interviewee B: *"If it's overall nice and it's priced well, then there's no doubt about it, it's a really good deal."*

suggesting that personal preference, particularly regarding value for money plays a leading role in decision-making.

Interviewee F: *"Price and promotion and the navigation on the website matter more than the review."*

Revealing how perceived control through booking convenience significantly impacts final decisions. These insights demonstrate how participants weigh internal preferences alongside external cues and situational ease when forming intentions to book, with no single factor acting in isolation. This correlates with findings that consumer psychology and perceived trust identified as significant predictors of online hotel reservation behaviour work alongside situational convenience and value perceptions to shape booking intentions, showing that decisions result from the combined influence of internal evaluations and external facilitation (Zia et al., 2022).

4.6 Research Objective 5

Research Objective 5:

To understand how behavioural intention influenced by TikTok content translates into actual hotel booking decisions.

Interview Themes:
1. Booking Conversion.
2. Future Booking Intent.

4.6.1 Booking Conversion

Several participants shared differing levels of behavioural response to TikTok hotel content, revealing how exposure translates into booking actions.

Interviewee C: *"Yeah, I think there is a few hotel that I already booked because of the recommendation in TikTok. Osprey Hotel is one of them. So far it meets my expectations."*

Interviewee D: *"I have booked a hotel in Kerry called Parknasilla Resort. So my boyfriend suggested it after seeing it on Gareth Laheen's TikTok, where Gareth showed the stunning views surrounding it. The hotel captured just how peaceful and scenic the place is. The video really stood out for its calm, immersive vibe. And when we arrived, the location looked exactly as it did in the video. It was just as serene and beautiful in real life."*

The TikTok content had showcased the hotel's scenery and tranquillity, and upon arrival, the experience matched the video, indicating that compelling, authentic influencer content can lead to successful bookings when expectations are met. Meanwhile, other participants though have not booked a hotel prior to being exposed to micro-influencer's TikTok content but have intention to book in the future.

This aligns with the findings by Savelyeva (2025) where exposure to TikTok content not only influenced motivation but also translated into concrete booking behaviour, as several individuals reported choosing and booking hotels directly based on TikTok recommendations that matched their initial expectations and knowledge.

Interviewee G: *"Not yet, but I'm pretty much open to the possibility I think."*

This openness to future bookings shows TikTok's persuasive power, even without immediate action. Engaging hotel videos spark interest, with micro-influencer content building trust and familiarity. TikTok thus shapes both travel aspirations and future booking intent.

4.6.2 Future Booking Intent

All interviewees shared insights on how TikTok content about hotels affects their behavioural intention and potential booking actions.

Interviewee G: *"If it really catches my interest or if I'm planning a trip soon, I would normally save it, but otherwise I might just like it as a way of saying cool, but not with any serious intention to book it right away."*

Indicating that while initial engagement is low-commitment, the content remains in consideration for future decisions.

Interviewee B: *"I save things a lot. I have a saved folder wherein I've saved things about Ireland. If in future I'm planning to go somewhere, I would probably go back to that folder."*

Suggesting a more deliberate behaviour in archiving hotel content for future reference and potential booking.

This shows a spectrum of engagement where TikTok content, even if not immediately acted upon, holds persuasive potential in shaping future booking intentions. When TikTok videos are perceived as authentic or aligned with personal travel plans, they tend to serve as informal digital bookmarks influencing later hotel choices. This aligns with Doherty's (2021) findings, which demonstrate that influencers effectively raise awareness and generate interest in hotels, highlighting their vital role in encouraging potential customers to consider these establishments.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion to The Study

This study aimed to explore how TikTok micro-influencers affect hotel booking decisions among Zennials residing in Ireland. Using in-depth qualitative interviews, the research uncovered a number of recurring themes related to content perception, credibility, social norms, perceived control, and booking behaviour.

Overall, this study concludes that TikTok micro-influencers influence hotel booking behaviour through the combined effects of attitude, social validation, and perceived control which are the elements of the Theory of Planned Behaviour which posits that these three constructs are critical to shaping behavioural intention and subsequent action. In the context of hotel marketing, TikTok content when delivered by credible micro-influencers acts not only as inspiration but also as a decision-support tool that facilitates real-world bookings.

These findings offer valuable insights for hospitality marketers seeking to connect with Gen Z and Millennial consumers. By leveraging micro-influencers to produce authentic, aesthetically appealing, and actionable content, hotels can increase both interest and conversion rates in the digital landscape.

5.1.1 Influence of TikTok Micro-Influencers on Hotel Perceptions

TikTok micro-influencers have a substantial effect on users' attitudes toward hotels in Ireland by reimagining content strategies. Respondents consistently stated that authentic, detailed and attractive content engenders trust and respect in users, which positively impacts attitudes toward hotels. When presented with high-quality imagery alongside detailed descriptions of the hotel experience enhanced the micro-influencer's credibility, in turn, encouraging user attitudes to shift.

The study findings make the argument that hotels in Ireland should pursue authentic collaborations with micro-influencers who are willing share authentic, lived experiences, rather than verbatim endorsements. Furthermore, the hotel should encourage influencers to tell personal stories outlining their trajectory from check-in to check-out using authentic language in casual, authentic and unscripted formats to foster a greater emotional tie to the viewer. The hotel, should also be supportive of realistic content that accurately describes the property, highlighting both positives and imperfections as this provides less distance and built transparency fosters trust. As users often save or search accommodations featured in reliable influencer content, hotels can lead towards own utility through trackable elements including discount codes or direct booking.

5.1.2 Impact of Peer Influence and Engagement Metrics on Hotel Selection

Peer influence acted as a primary factor as participants claimed that hotel recommendations from friends that were shared or endorsed and framed around TikTok content, made them more trusting and open to these suggestions. The influencers' claims were often judged through their social connections and could point to the fact that the extent to which TikTok influences is reinforced through social

networks. Rather than solely on the authority of the influencer, users relied on peer validation to determine credibility and relevance.

Engagement influence also informed expectations in a more nuance way. High engagement metrics, or lots of likes or comments piqued users' curiosity, while at the same time users were also aware of the limitations of engagement metrics and that engagement could be bought. Both perspectives demonstrate that users view these two factors more discerningly. Indeed, while popularity metrics may attract users' interest, trust, and ultimately decision-making orientation arises from their sense of social validation through peers and the content itself and perceived authenticity.

5.1.3 Enhancing Booking Ease and Confidence Through Practical TikTok Content

Participants stated that practical features, such as booking links, price details, and directions made TikTok less of a passive consumption option and more of a travel planning tool due to actionable content. Having this information available not only makes it easier to book but also increases the odds that they will follow through with a booking decision, particularly for spontaneous travel or trips done with minimal research. Influencer content that clarifies the destination and logistics allows users to act immediately with more confidence.

Micro-influencers also provide added booking assurance by outlining detail-oriented features that allow users to assess whether the hotel is suitable for them. Spatially relevant location, price, and included amenities enable users to imagine their stay in greater detail. This contextual framing of content gives users a sense of confidence to make a better decision and agree that the hotel is acceptable. Overall, accessible, tangible details combined with visual storytelling foster trust and decrease uncertainty, which ultimately motivates viewers to convert inspiration into action.

5.1.4 Leveraging TikTok to Drive Hotel Booking Intentions through Effective Strategies

The findings suggest that users' intentions to book hotels after engaging with TikTok content are shaped by a combination of their attitudes, perceived social norms, and perceived behavioural control, reflecting the core components of the Theory of Planned Behaviour. Participants emphasized that persuasive TikTok content significantly influences both interest and hesitation toward booking. Positive reviews, engaging visuals, and relatable experiences often create favourable attitudes, increasing the likelihood of users saving or acting on recommendations. In contrast, a single negative review regarding service or cleanliness could strongly deter interest, showing how content can influence intentions both positively and negatively.

In addition to attitude, subjective norms played a reinforcing role. When hotel content is validated through likes, shares, or peer approval, it gains greater credibility, enhancing users' willingness to book. However, participants also placed high importance on perceived control, such as clear pricing, promotional offers, and the simplicity of the booking process, which helped solidify their decision-making. These insights confirm that the intention to book is rarely based on a single factor, rather, it

is an outcome of multiple interacting elements, including personal preferences, social reinforcement, and situational ease.

5.1.5 Leveraging TikTok for Long-Term Hotel Booking Intent and Consumer Engagement

This research reveals that TikTok has a strong effect on user behaviour with respect to bookings at hotels, with numerous participants showing a clear path from engaging with the content to making booking decisions. Authentic and aesthetically pleasing TikTok videos, particularly by owner-controlled micro-influencers, seemed to create a positive perception and trust towards the hotels featured. When the in-destination experience matched what was shown with TikTok videos, users seemed likely to convert intention into action. For example, this was evidenced as participants booked places like the Osprey Hotel and Parknasilla Resort based upon places they came across on TikTok.

Moreover, even if they don't make immediate bookings, TikTok content generates a strong persuasive impact in creating an intention to travel and / or travel aspirations. Participants discussed saving or liking hotel videos in order to leave options open. Participants showed that TikTok can serve as a digital inspiration and planning tool. Videos can act as unofficial bookmarks that may influence decisions made after the fact. Overall, TikTok has the potential to work as an immediate driver of bookings, as well as a contributor to future bookings as part of the planning process, where trust and authenticity are paramount for attributing engagement to bookings.

5.2 Recommendations

5.2.1 Recommendations for Professionals

To engage and convert Zennial travellers in Ireland, hotel marketers ought to place the most focus on collaboration with TikTok micro-influencers who have authenticity, identifiable niche and build a relational connection with their audience. Rather than solely focusing on their followers, marketers ought to be guided by the influencer's ability to build trust and share relatable narratives through their personal experience.

Allow micro-influencers to share genuine experience to enhance trust and perceived authenticity as well as opening a room for improvement while also maintaining the focus on showcasing appealing and distinctive hotel experiences, from unique amenities, to links to local culture ultimately helping prospective guests build positive perceptions of the hotels, which will support stronger intentions to book.

Content should help lower perceived barriers to booking and include easily accessible and clear, practical details, including travel information, and clear calls to action. Hotels have a myriad of opportunities to combine authenticity-driven influencers with marketing, inspiring and actionable content that can bolster consumer confidence and lessen perceived barriers to booking, and ultimately represent a more effective means of converting.

5.2.2 Recommendations for Future Academic Research

Considering the results and scope of the dissertation, several suggestions for further academic exploration that might enhance and broaden the understanding of the subject matter are recommended. Since this study focuses solely on a single platform which is TikTok, future research would benefit from comparing the impact of micro-influencer reviews across multiple major platforms to identify which platform exerts the greatest influence in shaping perceptions and affecting both hotel booking intentions and actual booking behaviour.

Psychological motivators also need to be studied further. Content exposure and intention to book may be mediated by FOMO (fear of missing out), influencer trust, and social proof. Understanding the more social and psychological aspects of the matter may allow an understanding of the factors of the social media content sway consumer decisions.

Finally, further researches may focus on the specific aspects of TikTok videos that exert consumer influence. The impact of audience on decision making could be studied with regard to the video length, editing, music, presence of the influencer, or the influence of the narration. This would help content creators and marketers in the hospitality industry refine their strategies.

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Appendix 1 - Consent Form

National College of Ireland
The college for a learning society

The Influence of TikTok Micro-Influencers on Hotel Selection in Ireland

Consent to take part in research

I.. voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer

any question without any consequences of any kind.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within one week after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

I understand that participation involves taking part in a short interview where I will be asked about my experiences and opinions related to TikTok travel content, especially from micro-influencers, and how this may or may not influence my decisions when choosing hotels in Ireland.

I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.

I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.

I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.

I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about. I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the interviewer dissertation and archived by National College of Ireland.

I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.

- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in the interviewer's private database until 30th of October 2025 .

- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for 30th of October 2025.

- I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.

- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Names, degrees, affiliations and contact details of researchers (and academic supervisors when relevant).
Signature of research participant

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Signature of participant   Date

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

--   ----------------------
Signature of researcher   Date

Appendix 2 - Thematic Question Guide

Theme	Question
Content Perception	What aspects of a micro-influencer's content (tone, style, visuals) make you feel more positively or negatively about a hotel?
Micro-influencer's credibility	Do you trust micro-influencers hotel review more than celebrities or macro-influencers review? Why or why not?
Peer Influence	If your friend recommended a hotel that he/she has seen on a micro-influencer's tiktok content, would you be more encouraged to consider staying in that hotel?
Engagement Influence	What role does engagement (likes, comments, shares) on influencer videos play in validating your hotel choices?
Informational Ease	Would you find it easier to reserve a stay If you come across tiktok post that includes the booking link or practical booking advice for the hotel? Why or why not?
Booking Confidence	Do you think seeing micro-influencers' tiktok content about the hotel's pricing, location, amenities will enhance your confidence to book a hotel? Why or why not?
Content Persuasion	Would it make you interested/lose interest in booking a hotel or even worse you will not stay in a hotel at all If you're exposed to tiktok's content about a hotel? Why or why not?
Decision Factors	What factor matters more to you when choosing a hotel: personal preference, others' opinions, or how convenient it is to book?
Booking Conversion	Have you ever booked a hotel after seeing it on TikTok? If yes, Can you describe that experience?
Future Booking Intent	When you see tiktok content about a hotel do you often save it for your reference or you just click the like button without any intention to book the hotel?

Appendix 3 - Table of Participants

Interviewee	Age	Location	Occupation	Nationality	Interest in Tiktok Hotel Content
A	28	Co.Kerry	Quality Assurance	Irish	Yes, but does not follow a specific influencer
B	27	Co.Dublin	Student	Indian	Yes, but does not follow a specific influencer
C	28	Co.Limmerick	Shop keeper	Brazillian	Yes, but does not follow a specific influencer
D	30	Co.Dublin	Sales	Indonesian	Yes, actively following travel influencers who do review about hotels
E	24	Co.Dublin	Actuarial consultant	Indonesian	Yes, actively following travel influencers who do review about hotels
F	27	Co.Dublin	Student	Cambodian	Yes, actively following travel influencers who do review about hotels
G	23	Co.Dublin	Management Trainee	Indonesian	Yes, actively following travel influencers who do review about hotels