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MBA INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

Topic:

**Impact of Online Guest Reviews on Booking Decisions
in the Hotel Industry**

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of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Business Administration (MBA)
in International Business

Submitted by:

Tarek Aziz Emon

Student ID: 2430620

Supervisor: Dr Amir Homayounfard

University of Wales Trinity St David - London Campus

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Declaration



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Abstract

The emergence of online travel agencies, digital platforms, and review websites has revolutionised the way people now look for hotels and assess their value. Because hotel services are intangible and are not yet fully evaluated before they are consumed, customers are increasingly turning to online reviews, ratings and guest comments to reduce uncertainties and inform their booking decisions.

The research will seek to evaluate the impact of the online reviews on the bookings of the hotels, and the different characteristics of the online reviews will be analysed to check the impact on the buying decision of the potential customers, such as ratings, volume of the online reviews, sentiment, recency, credibility, and review detail. Signalling Theory is utilised in guiding the research, which helps to explain how external information signals are used to eliminate the information asymmetry between the service provider and customers. In this case, opinions obtained from the Internet are utilised as information regarding the quality of each hotel, the reliability of its services, and the satisfaction of its clients.

A multiple case study approach was used in this study, which is a qualitative secondary study. In the dissertation, 5 organisation and platform cases were analysed, namely Marriott International, Hilton Hotels & Resorts, Accor, Tripadvisor and Booking.com. Data was gathered from peer-reviewed academic papers, company reports, information available on the internet from credible sources and more. This analysis included both within-case synthesis and cross-case synthesis in order to locate repetitions of patterns within hotel brands and/or across hotel review platforms.

The results indicate that online guest reviews have significantly affected the guests' willingness to book the hotel, as they affect their trust, perceived service quality, and perceived booking risk. Confidence builds as a result of review ratings and positive sentiment; reviews' volume and freshness boost social proof and perceived relevance. Specific and believable reviews are more convincing than general or stale reviews. Conclusions reveal that managerial reaction to negative reviews can minimise reputational harm and convey accountability. Furthermore, review sites like TripAdvisor

and Booking.com become relevant because they confirm reviews, make ratings and hotel information more relevant and comparable.

The study is also a contribution to the theory by proposing a refinement of the relationship existing between review characteristics, trust and booking decisions. It posits that trust is one of the important mediating factors, and emphasises the influence of platform verification and managerial reaction as one of the important moderators. In practice, the dissertation suggests that the hotels use the online review as a strategic performance tool, that they act professionally upon customer comments in the reviews, that they motivate sincere and recent feedback, and that they additionally use information from reviews to improve their service. In general, the research findings suggest that while reviews on online platforms may simply be a mechanism for providing guests with feedback on their experiences, they also serve as valuable insights for how customers develop trust, the hotel's brand and reputation, and how the hotel's performance compares with that of its competitors in the digital era.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Digital technologies and the internet have largely changed the nature of the hospitality industry because of the increased rate of their development. In the past, travellers used to depend on travel agencies, brochures and word of mouth to choose accommodation. The advent of the internet, travel agencies and review sites has, however, altered the consumer search and assessment of hotels (Sumali et al., 2024). Online travel agencies and online review websites, including TripAdvisor, Booking.com and Expedia websites, present travellers with high amounts of user-generated ratings, reviews, and photographs that influence hotel selection (Guo, 2025).

Online reviews are generally regarded as a type of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), which is a type of informal communication of consumers with each other about a product or service using electronic means (Sparks and Browning, 2011). Within the hospitality industry, these reviews enable past customers to provide comments on the quality of the hospitality accommodation facilities, hotel location, cleanliness, facilities, and value for money (Guo, 2025). This type of information enables potential customers with the insights that are usually seen as more genuine compared to the marketing messages that are created by the hotels themselves (De Pelsmacker et al., 2018).

The increased power of online reviews has brought a great shift to consumer behaviour in tourism and hospitality (Yang and Nie, 2025). Travellers are becoming more and more inclined to use peer reviews when choosing destinations and accommodations. Research shows that a significant percentage of travellers go online and read reviews as a precursor to booking (Mauri et al., 2013). Indicatively, studies indicate that roughly 95% of travellers consult reviews prior to booking accommodation, and nearly 93% of them indicate that the reviews do influence their choices (Adams, 2025). On the same note, reports indicate that 81% of travellers regularly read hotel reviews before committing to a reservation, therefore emphasising the role that online feedback plays in influencing consumer behaviour (Newport, 2019).

Due to the growing use of online platforms to conduct travel planning, the effects of online guest reviews on hotel bookings are a topic of relevant research. This paper aims to explore the effect of online guest reviews on consumer behaviour in the hotel segment and the impact of the features of reviews on the booking intentions of travellers.

1.2 Research Rationale

1.2.1 Theoretical justifications

The growing significance of online platforms in the hospitality sector has led to online guest reviews as a very significant source of information for travellers. Earlier marketing strategies used by hotels have concentrated more on advertisements, brand name, and referrals by travel agencies (Guo, 2025). But due to the emergence of user-generated content, the service providers have changed to the consumers. Thousands of online reviews are available to the traveller, and this factor determines the quality and reliability of the hotel (Guo, 2025).

A number of studies point out that online reviews have a strong influence on consumer buying decisions in the tourism industry. The studies have proven that travellers commonly utilise the reviews found online to compare hotels and book trips (Sparks and Browning, 2011). The reviews are an informative source of information concerning the experiences of the customers, as potential guests can decide on the quality of service ahead of the booking (Viglia et al., 2016). Therefore, more bookings may be received by hotels that have better ratings and favourable reviews.

The other relevant problem is the trust of consumers in online reviews. Although online reviews are also an important source of information to many travellers, issues of fake reviews or manipulated reviews have also gained more and more traction over the past years (Newport, 2019). Indicatively, this has seen the review platforms eliminate millions of fraudulent reviews every year in a bid to preserve the credibility of their websites. These issues indicate the need to investigate visitor ratings of online testimonial reviews during booking.

Regardless of the increasing significance of online reviews, the picture still requires the enhancement of knowledge about the impact that certain elements of reviews have on

booking behaviour (Viglia et al., 2016). Most of the literature has concentrated mainly on the total rating of hotels and less on other key review features like review credibility, review volume, sentiment and trustworthiness (Sparks and Browning, 2011). Such factors might affect the perceptions of consumers in various ways and thus should be investigated further.

1.2.2 Practical Justifications

As a manager, it is necessary to know how travellers use online reviews to make decisions on bookings since hospitality marketing strategies have incorporated online reputation management as a central point (Liu, 2024). To retain a favourable brand image and enhance the quality of provided services, hotels pay more attention to the feedback provided by customers and do react to reviews (Liu, 2024). It has been researched that the hotels that react actively to the online reviews have higher chances to receive more reservation requests and enhance their online reputation.

Online reviews are also important in alleviating information asymmetry between the customers and the hotels (Liu, 2024). The services offered by the hospitality industry are intangible and may not be tested in advance; hence, customers are usually left guessing about the quality of the service. User-generated reviews can eliminate this uncertainty by giving actual experiences of past guests (Liu, 2024). Therefore, online reviews provide a credible source of information that can be used by travellers to compare different hotels. And managers can track and respond to reviews to communicate true information, and work on feedback to get better reviews and ratings to increase their brand image and bookings.

Moreover, online reviews may have a strong impact on the performance of hotels and their reputation. Good reviews and more ratings will enhance the visibility of a hotel online and help it get more bookings and income (Viglia et al., 2016). On the other hand, bad comments can make potential clients not find it necessary to book a hotel. The past study indicates that travellers tend to choose hotels that have a higher rating, and are even ready to pay more money in hotels that have better online images and reputation (Viglia et al., 2016). Hence, internet reviews are a very important factor of reputation management and marketing in the hotel sector.

Thus, this paper will examine the role of online guest reviews when it comes to hotel booking. Considering the perspective and behaviour of a consumer concerning online reviews, the research attempts to come up with insights that can benefit the field of academic knowledge as well as the business of making and deciding in the hospitality sector.

1.3 Research Contribution and Motivation

This study expands the existing literature on consumer behavior, marketing of hospitality, and electronic word-of-mouth communication. With the digital platforms gaining more and more impact on tourism and hospitality markets, it is more critical to comprehend the role of online reviews in consumer decision-making. This paper aims at revealing travellers' perception and their effect on hotel booking decisions in relation to online guest reviews.

Academically, the research reports on the existing literature on the topic of digital consumer behaviour within the hospitality industry. Although the influence of online reviews and their effects on consumer behaviour have been studied in the past, with the fast-growing online platforms and technological advancements in the travel sector, the topic needs to be explored further. The study will serve the purpose of giving current information on the use of online reviews by travellers in accommodation choice.

The research topic also provides practical implications for managers and marketers of a hotel. The issue of online reputation has turned out to be an important competitive element of the hospitality sector. Hotels that have good reviews on online platforms have higher chances of drawing customers and getting the highest guest numbers. Knowing which online review factors lead to booking of a hotel, the hotel managers will be able to come up with a better strategy to handle the customer reviews and provide services to a higher standard.

Additionally, the study gives a recommendation on how hospitality businesses can be guided on online reputation management. Customer reviews, responding to negative reviews, and encouraging satisfied guests to leave a review are some of the most effective ways of increasing trust and better visibility of the hotel on booking websites.

Therefore, the result of this study can be used by hospitality organisations to enhance their promotional tactics and customer relationship management activities.

Another reason why this research is being carried out is the growing impact of digital technologies on consumer behaviour. Since the online information sources remain a continuous source of information used by travellers in planning their trips, learning about the place of online reviews in making a booking decision is crucial to both researchers and industry players.

1.4 Research Aim, Objectives and Questions

Research Aim: This research aims to examine the impact of online guest reviews on booking decisions in the hotel industry.

Research objectives:

- To assess the role of online reviews in influencing hotel booking decisions.
- To analyse how different online review characteristics like review volume, review recency, ratings, etc., influence customer decisions.

Research Questions:

1. How do online hotel reviews affect the booking decisions of guests?
2. How do different online review characteristics influence customer perceptions?

1.5 Dissertation Structure

This dissertation is divided into six chapters, which cover various issues on the research topic.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The chapter gives a summary of the research topic and the context of the research. It presents the background of research, rationale, contribution of the research work, research aim, and objectives, and dissertation structure.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The chapter is a review of the current academic literature connected with online guest reviews, electronic word of mouth communication, consumer trust and hotel booking behaviour. The chapter also discusses appropriate theoretical frameworks and establishes gaps in the research that highlight the importance of undertaking the current study.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology.

In this chapter, the methodology applied in the study is clarified. It addresses the philosophy of research, design, data collection procedures and sampling followed in the research. The chapter also presents the data analysis methods and the ethical issues that were incorporated during the research process.

Chapter 4: Findings

In this chapter, the analysis of the data obtained during the research will be given. The results are presented concerning the objectives of the research and the literature. The results are interpreted by thematic analysis and cross-case analysis, and identify major trends concerning the effects of online reviews on the booking choice.

Chapter 5: Discussion and analysis.

This chapter discusses the findings of data analysis in relation to previous research findings and research questions.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

A conclusion chapter is the final chapter, and it contains the summaries of the most important findings of the research, and their implications for the theory and practice. The chapter also contains the recommendations of what should be done by the hotel managers and the management of the online reviews and customer involvement. Lastly, the research indicates the limitations of the study and outlines the future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Digital technologies have revolutionised the hotel and tourism sector in many ways. Internet sources have emerged as among the leading providers of information for travellers during trip planning and selecting accommodation in recent years. People are making more and more use of online travel agencies and hotel review services (like TripAdvisor or Booking.com) to learn more about the quality of a hotel, the level of service it provides, or how guests have experienced their stay before they book a room. This has led to online guest reviews making a significant impact on consumer behaviour in the hospitality industry.

Online reviews are considered electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), as is the case with other forms through which consumers can share their experiences and opinions about a product or service via digital mediums. Unlike traditional marketing communication generated by companies, online reviews are created by customers and are often perceived as more credible and trustworthy sources of information. This means that people pay attention to the online review to reduce the uncertainty of selecting their hotel; you can only truly appreciate a service like hospitality after you use it.

As a result of the growing impact of online reviews, the phenomenon has captured the attention of the researchers and practitioners within hospitality and tourism management. Prior research indicates that service quality, hotel reputation and value-for-money perceptions are positively shaped by online reviews and therefore can affect the consumers' booking intentions. High ratings and positive reviews can encourage consumers to return to the hotels; low ratings and negative reviews can cause consumers to steer clear of the hotels and affect its reputation. Lastly, the chapter describes the gap in the existing literature and proposes a conceptual model for the study.

2.2 Thematic Overview of Literature

2.2.1 Concept of electronic word of mouth (eWOM)

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is the communication about products, services or brands that is generated by consumers and available on digital channels or online forums

(Abd-Elaziz et al., 2015). According to Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), eWOM can be defined as any positive or negative statement made by customers about a company or product that is available to a wide audience through the internet. eWOM differs from traditional word-of-mouth communication, which takes place in the presence of one another between people, as it happens much faster in an eWOM network and spreads across the entire globe (Abd-Elaziz et al., 2015). A study by Litvin et al. (2008) suggests that eWOM actually tends to be seen as more reliable than company-generated word of mouth advertising. Consequently, consumer views and expectations of the level of service received at hotels are influenced by online reviews.

With the development of online review services, social media, and online travel agencies, the reach and impact of eWOM in the hospitality sector have grown significantly (De Pelsmacker et al., 2018). A traveller will be able to view large quantities of user-generated data covering the value of service provided, the facilities available and the location and other comments the guests might have made about the hotel and services received. The accessibility has changed the consumer's behaviour with respect to searching and assessing the hospitality services. Many travellers now turn to online reviews as one of their main sources of information in the travelling decision making process (De Pelsmacker et al., 2018).

2.2.2 Significance of eWOM in the hospitality and tourism sector

Electronic word-of-mouth is now one of the most important aspects of marketing communication in the tourism and hospitality sector. Due to the intangibility of hospitality services, people experiencing unique hospitality services cannot assess the level of service quality provided before deciding to make a booking in the hospitality services (Abd-Elaziz et al., 2015). This is why previous guests' reviews are often important for travellers to minimise uncertainty and perceived risk. De Pelsmacker et al. (2018) state that online reviews give us detailed information about different parts of the hotel services, such as cleanliness, the behaviour of the staff, amenities, and value for money.

A number of studies emphasise the role of eWOM in consumers' actions in the tourism industry. The study by Ye, Law and Gu 2009 showed that the word-of-mouth of hotel online reviews can actually have a measurable effect on the sales of hotel rooms,

suggesting that positive hotel online reviews might directly result in a rise in demand for hotel accommodation. Also, Vermeulen and Seegers (2009) propose that viewing online hotel reviews raises awareness and boosts hotel attitudes of consumers and thereby potentially has a positive impact on their booking intentions.

Moreover, there are online reviews which are included within the development of a hotel's online reputation. Positive online feedback and a good reputation can boost consumer confidence and increase bookings (Elwalda and Lu, 2016). On the other hand, bad reviews can make the reputation of hotel be tarnished and make visitors not choose the hotel. Negative reviews can ruin the reputation of a hotel and make visitors decline to stay. Consequently, hotels have become more sensitive to, and have turned to carrying out a monitoring and management of what their guests are saying during a review process to enhance the reputation of their brand (Elwalda and Lu, 2016).

2.2.3 Role of Online Review Platforms

Electronic word-of-mouth communication in the hospitality sector is an important process that is enhanced by online travel companies and review websites. TripAdvisor, Booking.com, and Expedia are examples of websites that enable tourists to post reviews and rate hotels on quality scales, as well as write comments (Rita et al., 2022). These sites will pull in a lot of reviews, allowing customers to see reviews and rates for various hotels.

Tuominen (2011) posits that many of these platforms have a correlation between the ability for hotels to be visible and the number of reviews, as well as the rating received from those reviews. In the general context, it is possible to say that the more ratings (also the volume of them), the more reliable and more trustworthy a hotel is perceived by a prospective guest (Tuominen, 2011). This, in turn, not only affects consumer purchasing behaviour but it additionally affects the hotel business competitor landscape.

Overall, eWOM has emerged as a powerful tool for information, as it has proven to have a considerable impact on consumers' perceptions and booking decisions in the hotel industry (Rita et al., 2022; Tuominen, 2011). Hence, it is crucial to investigate the influence of such online feedback on consumer decision-making processes and to

understand the mechanisms of this influence for both academic studies and in hospitality management.

2.2.4 Customer trust in online reviews

The element of trust is also critical in influencing consumer behaviour in online buying, more so in the hospitality sector, where the services involved cannot be felt before the customer makes a purchase (Chua and Banerjee, 2013). As customers search the internet in search of accommodation, customer reviews and ratings of hotels tend to influence their choice of where to stay, as customers may use this to determine the quality of the services offered (Sparks and Browning, 2011). The usefulness of the online reviews as a source of information, however, is greatly determined by the amount of trust that consumers have on the same. When the online reviews are deemed convincing and valid by the travellers, there are high chances of them integrating them in their decision-making (Sparks and Browning, 2011).

Trust in online reviews is the degree to which consumers think that the information on the online reviews given by other consumers is truthful, precise and useful. As Filieri (2016) suggests, trust does depend on the online reviews based on a number of factors, such as credibility of the review, expertise level of the reviewer and the reliability of the review site. As far as hotel booking choices are concerned, a consumer is more likely to trust reviews that seem genuine and can be detailed with respect to the experiences that the guests have had (Nilashi et al., 2018).

According to Abd-Elaziz et al. (2015), review credibility is one of the factors that determine the level of trust in online reviews. Credibility is considered the perceived reliability and truthfulness of the provided information in a review. The comments that contain certain information regarding the facilities and the quality of the services, and the feedback of the guests, tend to be viewed as more dependable and trustworthy than brief or insincere remarks (Abd-Elaziz et al., 2015). According to Filieri and McLeay (2014), more thorough and informative reviews made the consumer perceive this as useful and become more likely to affect the booking choice.

The other theme with a strong impact on trust is the expertise of the reviewer. Consumers tend to consider the experience and background of the reviewer in the interpretation of online reviews (Vermeulen and Seegers, 2009). The reviews left by travellers who seem to be learned or have experience in staying in hotels are usually regarded as credible. According to Cheung and Thadani (2012), perceived awareness of the reviewers may enhance the persuasiveness of online recommendations and affect consumer intentions to purchase.

The brand of the review site is also a major factor that can influence consumer trust. Established online travel websites like TripAdvisor and Booking.com tend to be viewed as a more credible source of information since there is a verification mechanism and a policy of moderation of reviews in order to limit cases of fake customer reviews (Abd-Elaziz et al., 2015). Considering the reviews appearing on reputable sites, therefore, increases likely trust in the reviews by consumers.

All in all, the issue of trust in online reviews is a very important element in the consumer interpretation and application of online information to the decision of hotel booking (Abd-Elaziz et al., 2015). As long as travellers view online reviews as credible, detailed and authentic, they tend to give them more credibility when making the decision-making process. Thus, the determinants of trust in online reviews are the capacity to understand how such reviews affect the booking behaviour in the hospitality industry.

2.2.5 Online Review Characteristics that Influence Booking Decisions

Online reviews differ, with some having different content, format, and informational value. There are a few peculiarities of online reviews that may determine the way in which consumers handle review information and take it into account during the booking processes. According to the previous studies, there are several important features of online that influence consumer perception and behaviour, including: review ratings, review volume, review sentiment, review recency, as well as review quality. These features should be used as information clues, as they assist travellers in judging hotel services and decrease uncertainty in the process of making a reservation.

2.2.5.1 Review Ratings

One of the most apparent and influential components of online review systems is review ratings (Gavilan et al., 2018). There are numerous online travel sites in which the customer can rate the hotels based on a number-based or a number of stars rating. These ratings give a brief picture of the customer satisfaction and allow the customers to easily compare the different hotels (Gavilan et al., 2018).

It has been indicated that an improved rating of the reviews makes the chances of a guest booking in the hotel very high. It was discovered that hotel review ratings can improve to increase the level of room sales and accommodation demand (Ye, Law and Gu, 2009). On the same note, Anderson (2012) notes that hotels that are rated better online are able to record a higher occupancy rate and even sell at a premium because of the perceived quality. Consequently, review ratings are meaningful cues which do affect consumer perception and booking intentions.

2.2.5.2 Review Volume

Review volume is defined as the total number of reviews that a certain hotel has. A high count of reviews tends to make the perceived information more reliable since it is not based on a limited sample, as it is on the experience of many customers (Blal and Sturman, 2014). Considering that the number of reviews might be large, consumers can believe that the information given in it is closer to the overall picture of the quality of services.

According to previous research, one of the potential impacts of review volume may be the generation of trust and decision-making by consumers. Vermeulen and Seegers (2009) indicated that the more reviews there are, the more interest the hotel is likely to receive and be more acceptable during the booking process. More reviews will also decrease the perceived risk due to the availability of different types of guest experiences.

2.2.5.3 Review Sentiment

Review sentiment is the general tone or emotional thoughts of a review that can be positive, negative or neutral (Abd-Elaziz et al., 2015). Sentiment is a major factor in determining the consumer perception of the hotel quality and consumer satisfaction. Good feedback reflects good things about the hotel, including quality services,

comfortable accommodation and good location, and it may persuade would-be customers to reserve in the establishment (Abd-Elaziz et al., 2015).

Negative reviews, on the other hand, usually focus on service failures or poor experiences. The studies show that they may be more influential than positive reviews on the decision-making of consumers since negative reviews demonstrate the dangers of using the service. As stated by Sparks and Browning (2011), consumers should critically consider negative feedback in evaluating hotel choices since it will give constructive information on the possible problems.

2.2.5.4 Review Recency:

Review recency can be described as the date of the posting of a review on a platform. Consumers tend to base their decisions on the recent reviews since they are seen as driving the relevance of the current aspect of quality and performance of the hotel (Blal and Sturman, 2014). Reviews that are old can be said to be less relevant, especially when the hotel has changed in terms of management and even renovation or service standards.

Reviews are recent, and this means that they present the latest information that assists the consumer in judging the present position of the hotel services. Consequently, the customers of the travel business tend to give more weight to the latest reviews in order to make their booking choices.

2.2.5.5 Review Quality and Detail:

Consumer perceptions can also be based on the quality and level of detail provided in a review. In high-quality reviews, detailed accounts of the experience staying at the place, including data on the quality of the rooms, the behaviour of the staff, the quality of the food, and all the general performance of the service, are usually described (Blal and Sturman, 2014). These reviews can give a great understanding that can guide potential guests to make conscious choices.

According to Filieri (2015), detailed reviews are viewed as more useful and more reliable as they contain more details than short or insignificant remarks. Informative reviews

enable consumers to be more realistic when assessing the hotel towards satisfying their tastes and expectations.

To conclude, online review features are very important in consumer perceptions and the choice of which hotel to stay at. The ratings of reviews, volume, sentiment, recency and quality are relevant pieces of information that enable travellers to rate the quality of the hotels and minimise uncertainty. The determination of the influence of online guest reviews on hotel booking intentions requires the knowledge of how the characteristics of these reviews influence the general consumer behaviour (Blal and Sturman, 2014).

2.2.6 The Effect of Web Reviews on Hotel Reservations

Reviews left by the online guests have become a significant determinant in the decision-making of the consumers within the hospitality sector (Blal and Sturman, 2014; Abd-Elaziz et al., 2015; Gavilan et al., 2018). Travellers do not look too far as they increasingly depend on online reviews and ratings to assess accommodation alternatives. Online reviews are one of the most effective ways to be informed of the quality of the services, facilities, and customer experiences, and thus allow future guests to determine how well a particular hotel suits their choice of a hotel to make a reservation (Gavilan et al., 2018). Therefore, online reviews have a tremendous effect on consumer perception, booking habits and performance of a hotel generally.

The impact that online reviews have on consumer booking intentions is among the most critical impacts of online reviews. Booking intention is the possibility that a customer will choose a given hotel after taking into consideration the information at their disposal. The positive reviews posted online may promote the image of a hotel and persuade the potential client to form an idea about this place as an option when organising a trip. Vermeulen and Seegers (2009) established that exposure to online hotel reviews has a major impact that enhances consumer awareness and attitude toward the hotel, which may result in higher booking intentions. On the same note, positive customer reviews tend to boost the trust in the services offered by the hotels in terms of quality and dependability.

On the other hand, negative comments can make consumers not want to select a given hotel. The response of negative comments on the inappropriateness of the quality of services, the problems with cleanliness or the experiences of guests can give rise to doubts with regard to the trustworthiness of the hotel. Sparks and Browning (2011) propose that consumers take time to consider negative reviews when choosing their hotels, since they could be reflecting on the possible risks of the service. Consequently, they can cause consumer perceptions to change and minimise booking probability even with one or a few highly negative reviews.

Hotels, property reputation and performance are also important in online reviews. Hotels that have always received positive reviews and high ratings will attract more customers and have superior financial performance. According to Ye, Law and Gu (2009), online reviews exert a quantifiable impact on the sales of hotel rooms, thereby showing how positive reviews are applicable in creating a surge in the occupancy of accommodation. Likewise, as Anderson (2012) indicates, hotels which obtain higher online ratings are able to set higher room rates yet still record a high occupancy rate as a result of observed quality value.

One more valuable attribute of online reviews is that they belong to the field of online reputation management. The hotel needs to take an active role in tracking and handling customer reviews on online booking sites in the digital hospitality setting. Most hotels are reacting to customer reviews, especially the negative ones, as a way of showing their dedication to customer care and improvement in service delivery. Reviewing and responding to them can assist hotels in restoring confidence with unsatisfied customers and their image.

Moreover, the online reviews also have an impact on consumer trust and perceived value. When a traveller sees a great mass of positive feedback, he/she will tend to have a better thought about the hotel as credible and faithful. The perception of the consumer decreases uncertainty and enhances the chances that the consumer will book. Due to this, online reviews have emerged as a potent marketing instrument that creates consumer perception and also manipulates competition positioning in the hospitality sector.

In general, the increased values of online reviews provoke the necessity to use the online presence effectively and emphasise the management of digital reputation among hotels. The computations of the impact of online reviews on booking decisions are therefore quite important in academic research as well as hospitality management practice.

2.3 Theoretical Foundations

The online guest review has proven to affect hotel booking, which involves the need to apply information systems and consumer behaviour theoretical perspectives. There are several theories that justify the reasons why consumers use online information and the impacts of such information on consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. The theoretical approach specifically appropriate in the framework of this research is the Signalling Theory. This theory contributes to understanding the manner in which consumers weigh online reviews, form trust in the information and end up making a decision to book in the hospitality industry.

2.3.1 Signalling Theory:

Signalling Theory is a theory that describes the role of information signals in minimising information asymmetry between buyers and sellers. Information asymmetry is a situation that arises when a firm possesses more information on a product or service than others. Consumers usually experience uncertainty in the hospitality industry since they do not have the ability to directly experience the hotel services prior to making a booking. Consequently, the travellers are using numerous signals to assess the quality and reliability of hotels.

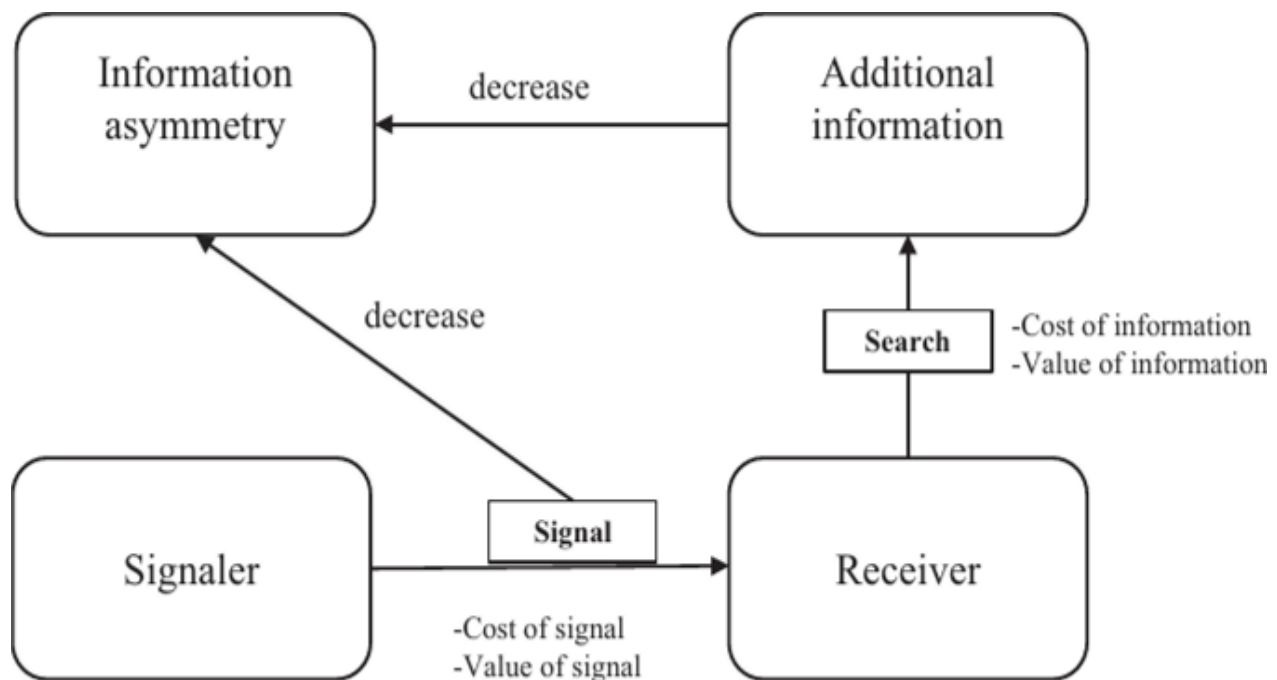


Figure 1: Signalling Theory

Source: (Ebrary, 2024)

Reviews and rating systems are significant indicators presented online which convey details concerning the quality of hotels and customer satisfaction. Star rating, review rating, and customer reviews give future patrons a clue of the general service standards and operation of a given hotel. Every time a hotel has been rated and criticised highly, it is a sign that the hotel offers satisfactory services and experience to the clients.

On the other hand, bad feedback or poor ratings can represent possible issues with the quality of services, hygiene or client satisfaction. These messages can affect the perception of the consumers and lower the chances of staying at a specific hotel. According to Anderson (2012), the demand for hotels and the price that hotels charge can actually rise substantially with an increase in the rating of the reviews and the perceived quality.

The Signalling Theory is especially applicable when it comes to an online setting where the consumer has to use indirect information to assess products and services. Online reviews in the hospitality industry should serve as cues that aid travellers to evaluate the quality of the hotels and minimise the perceived risk in the booking process.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

This paper constructs a theoretical framework that aims to facilitate the understanding of the role of online guest reviews in the decision-making process of hotel reservations. Based on the literature of the problem and the theoretical views, the framework pinpoints the major review features, such as review scores, review quantity, sentiments, and recency, as the main sources of information that influence consumer judgments. These features act as quality and reliability indicators of service and are in line with Signalling Theory, allowing potential clients to minimise decision uncertainty.

Moreover, online review consumer trust is hypothetically conceptualised as a critical mediating variable. Trust is a measure of how consumers view reviews as reliable, genuine, and helpful. The perception of credibility and usefulness of information is a great determinant of the adoption of the information. Likewise, behavioural intentions are determined by the attitude and perceptions formed on the basis of such information.

Based on this, the framework suggests that the elements of review have direct and indirect impacts on booking decisions and is moderated by trust. The booking decision is the dependent variable in this study. This framework offers a theoretical foundation that enables the analysis of the empirical cases and informs the interpretation of findings in later chapters of the work.



Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

Source: (Author)

2.5 Summary table

Author(s) & Year	Theory / Framework	Key Constructs / Themes	Methodology	Key Findings	Limitations / Gaps	Relevance to This Study
Chen and Tabari (2017)	Online reputation management ; service recovery	Negative reviews, managerial responses, hotel reputation, and customer decision-making	Case study of Marriott Hotel Group in Beijing using TripAdvisor reviews and content analysis	Negative reviews can damage a hotel's reputation and influence customer decisions. Staff empathy, reliability and service quality were major sources of complaints. Managerial responses were used to protect the reputation.	Focuses mainly on negative reviews and Marriott hotels in Beijing, limiting generalisability to other hotel markets.	Highly relevant because it is a real hotel-brand case showing how online reviews affect customer perception and booking behaviour.
Sparks and Browning (2011)	Trust theory; information processing	Review valence, trust, review framing, and hotel booking intention	Experimental study with 554 participants using simulated hotel review conditions	Positive reviews increased trust and booking intention, while negative reviews had a strong psychological effect on	Experimental design may not fully reflect real booking behaviour in natural online environments .	Directly relevant because it links online hotel reviews with trust and booking intention.

				consumer decision-making.		
Ye, Law and Gu (2009)	eWOM influence; demand theory	Online ratings, review variance, hotel room sales, and booking behaviour	Quantitative study using Ctrip data from 248 hotels in China	A 10% increase in review ratings was associated with a 4.4% increase in bookings, while higher rating variance reduced sales.	Uses review data from one Chinese platform, which may limit wider market applicability.	Strongly relevant because it provides measurable evidence that online reviews influence actual hotel bookings.
Vermeulen and Seegers (2009)	Consideration of set theory	Review valence, hotel familiarity, reviewer expertise, and consumer consideration.	Experimental study with online participants in the Netherlands	Online reviews increased hotel awareness and consideration. Positive reviews improved attitudes, while negative reviews affected perceptions more strongly for lesser-known hotels.	Uses simulated hotel scenarios rather than real booking transactions.	Relevant because it explains how reviews influence the consideration stage of the booking decision process.

Mauri and Minazzi (2013)	Consumer expectation theory; eWOM	Review valence, hotel response, expectations, and purchase intention	Online experimental survey with three review scenarios	Positive reviews increased expectations and purchase intention, while negative reviews reduced them. Managerial responses did not significantly improve expectations.	Focuses on potential customers and simulated scenarios rather than actual hotel booking data.	Useful because it shows how review tone shapes hotel expectations and intention to book.
Phillips et al. (2017)	Service quality and hotel performance framework	Review sentiment, hotel attributes, occupancy, RevPAR	Empirical analysis of 442 Swiss hotels using TrustYou sentiment data and PLS modelling	Positive review sentiment significantly influenced hotel demand and revenue performance. Rooms, internet quality and building condition were strong drivers of performance.	Focuses on hotel performance rather than individual customer decision-making.	Relevant because it connects online reviews with measurable hotel outcomes such as occupancy and revenue.

Badar Un Nisa (2024)	Consumer behaviour; social proof	Review credibility, authenticity, psychological influence, and hotel selection.	Qualitative study using interviews with hotel managers and customers	Customers rely on detailed and authentic reviews when selecting hotels. Negative reviews discourage bookings, while review volume creates social proof.	The study is broad and not focused on a specific hotel brand or country context.	Relevant because it explains psychological and behavioural mechanisms behind review-based booking decisions.
Elwalda and Lü (2016)	eWOM and online customer review dimensions	Review volume, valence, dispersion, credibility, helpfulness	Conceptual and literature-based exploration of online customer review dimensions	Review characteristics such as volume, valence and credibility influence customer purchase decisions and brand trust.	Not hotel-specific and focuses more broadly on online customer reviews.	Useful for developing the conceptual framework and identifying key review variables.
Liu (2024)	Internet+ and digital transformation	Digital platforms, online booking, big data, AI, tourism technology	Conceptual discussion of Internet+ in tourism and hotel industries	Digital platforms, big data and online booking systems have transformed tourism and	Less directly focused on online reviews and booking intention.	Useful as background evidence showing the wider digital context in which online hotel

				hotel decision- making.		reviews operate.
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2.6 Conclusion

This chapter was a review of the available literature on the effect of online guest reviews on consumer booking decisions in the hospitality sector. It explained the notion of electronic word-of-mouth and its increasing role in the formation of consumer perception and in travel planning behaviour. The use of online reviews by consumers was analysed in terms of such relevant theoretical approaches as the Signalling Theory. Another critical feature of online reviews that was discussed in the chapter is ratings, volume, sentiment, and quality and their influence on booking decisions. Lastly, the chapter pointed out research gaps and offered a conceptual framework on which the current research will be based.

Chapter 3: Research Methodologies

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is aimed at presenting and explaining the research methodology with the intention of examining how online guest reviews can influence the making of booking decisions in the hotel industry. As set out in Chapter 1, the research will focus on investigating the effects of the most important attributes of the review, including ratings, volume, sentiment, quality, and trust, on consumer booking intentions. The objectives guiding the research include an analysis of existing literature, detection and analysis of key influencing factors and synthesis of both qualitative and quantitative research in order to come up with a holistic picture of consumer behaviour.

To fulfil these purposes, the research takes a pragmatic research philosophy, an abductive research approach, and a qualitative secondary multiple case study strategy that is grounded in systematic literature review and narrative synthesis. In this chapter, the research philosophy and approach are discussed in the first part, then the research strategy is discussed, and the research time horizon. It proceeds to describe the methods used to collect and analyse the data, and finally, touches upon the problems of reliability, validity and issues of ethical concern.

3.2 Research Philosophy, Approach and Strategy

3.2.1 Philosophy

This study adopts a pragmatic research philosophy, reflecting a flexible ontological and epistemological position (Saunders et al., 2019). Ontologically, pragmatism recognises that there are two aspects of reality, the objective one, consisting of measurable review ratings and booking consequences, and the subjective one, involving consumer perceptions and trust (Tengli, 2020). Epistemologically, it presupposes that knowledge may be produced in the form of a synthesis of various types of evidence, especially the findings of the secondary data and context-based insights gained in case analysis (Tengli, 2020).

The importance of adopting pragmatism is explained by the quality of the research questions, which aim to know the impact of online guest reviews on the booking choice. These questions demand analytical analysis of observable relationships as well as interpretation of consumer behaviour within a real-life situation. Pragmatism, therefore, offers the right background, and in this case, the study can produce practical and theoretically informed findings based on a multiple case study method (Phair and Warren, 2021).

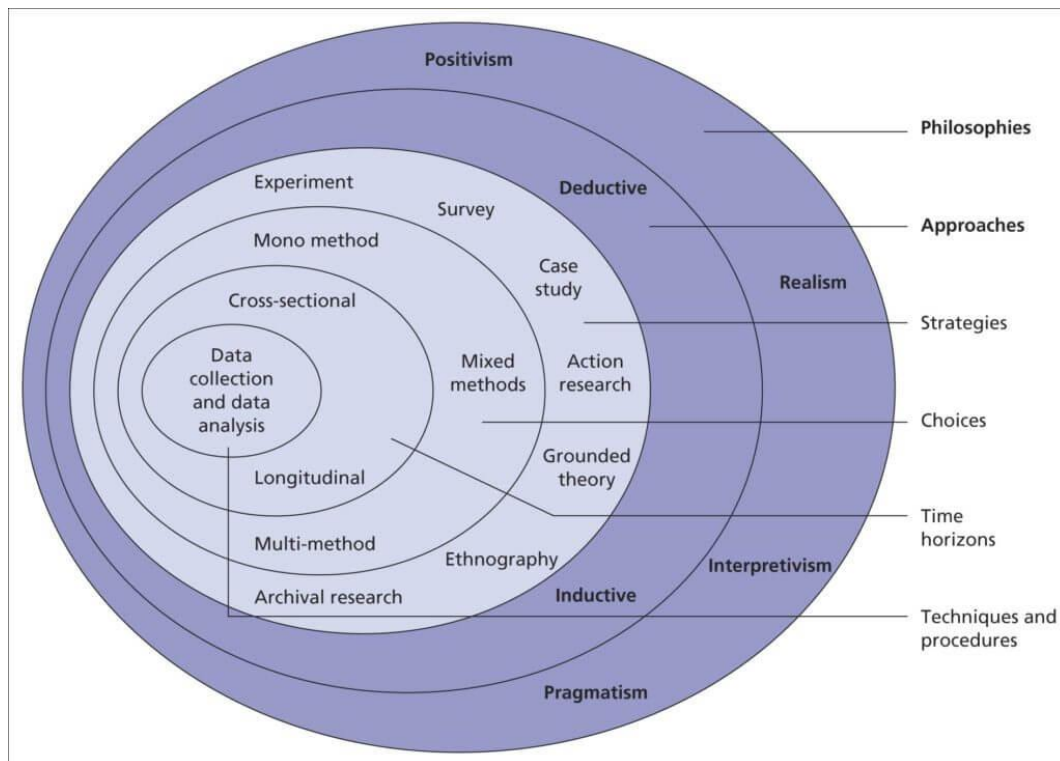


Figure 3: Research Onion

Source: (Saunders et al., 2019)

3.2.2 Research Approach:

This paper follows an abductive research methodology, which integrates deductive and inductive reasoning (Saunders et al., 2019). First, this study is informed by a conceptual framework that is formulated in Chapter 2, which is based on Signalling Theory. This is indicative of a deductive orientation, in which the current theory drives the focus of analysis (Tengli, 2020).

The study then has an inductive exploration of various empirical cases, which involves the data enabling patterns, relationships, and inferences to be realised out of the data (Tengli, 2020). The study is based on a cyclical flow between theory and empirical evidence and allows sharpening the conceptual framework. The rationale behind this method is that it allows gaining a holistic insight into the impact of online customer reviews in the process of making a booking decision, combining theoretical outlook with practical data (Phair and Warren, 2021).

3.2.3 Research Strategy

This paper follows a case study research approach, as developed by Saunders et al. (2019) and Yin (2018). Case study research is an in-depth examination of a phenomenon in its natural world setting, especially when there is no clear-cut delineation of the boundaries between the phenomenon and its setting. The given strategy fits the current study, as it would allow exploring the impact of online guest reviews on the booking decision in the complex and dynamic hospitality industry in detail.

3.3 Justification for the case study methodology

Case study methodology is suitable in this study because the given approach corresponds well with the type of research questions that assume the investigation of how and what impact booking decisions within the framework of online guest reviews (Yin, 2018). Case studies allow the investigation of context-specific, complex phenomena and thus are especially appropriate to study consumer behaviour in the dynamic framework of the hospitality industry (Phair and Warren, 2021).

Case study research has many merits, one of which is that it offers in-depth and narrative insights. It enables the analysis of the key mechanisms and processes and the contingencies by which the characteristics of review and trust impact booking (Tengli, 2020). Moreover, case studies can be used to develop and refine the theories at hand, thus the theoretical bases can be combined with empirical data. The strategy also produces deep, practice-oriented learning, which will prove useful to hospitality managers who aim to enhance their approach to online reputation management and customer interaction strategies (Saunders et al., 2019).

The methodology is further strengthened by the fact that secondary data is used. The detailed information can be found in the secondary sources such as peer-reviewed studies, industry reports, and publicly available datasets, which are also accessed independently (Saunders et al., 2019). This allows real-life situations to be analysed, which would not have been readily available in primary research. Moreover, the use of triangulation over two or more sources strengthens the validity and strength of results (Yin, 2018).

The design is a multiple-case one that substantiates logic and patterns of replication. The similarities and differences can be identified using cross-case comparison, thus improving the generalisation of an analysis. There are, however, constraints where secondary data could be only partially extracted, selectively reported, or not provide details about the processes.

3.4 Case Selection and Sampling Strategy

3.4.1 Sampling Logic

This paper uses a purposive sampling technique, as suggested by Yin (2018). Purposive sampling is where sample selection is done intentionally, depending on whether they are related to the research objectives or not, as opposed to selecting them randomly (Yin, 2018). The main objective is to find those cases that can be restatements rich and meaningful to the phenomenon under study, which in this case are the effects of online guest reviews on booking decisions (Ahmed, 2024).

This practice facilitates the creation and elaboration of theoretical knowledge, via analytical generalisation, demanding not statistical generalisation. In contrast to probability sampling, which is employed in quantitative research to extrapolate results to a larger population group, the current research is aimed at creating knowledge that leads to a theory (Ahmed, 2024). Moreover, purposive sampling enables cross-case comparison, thus the patterns, similarities and differences of the cases across the chosen cases can be identified (Yin, 2018).

3.4.2 Case Selection Criteria

The choice of cases is supported by an assortment of distinctly established and demanding criteria to guarantee relevance, depth, and dependability of the examination.

The first is the relevance. The selected cases have to be dedicated to the hospitality or tourism industry and specifically analyse how online guest reviews impact consumer behaviour and reservations. This guarantees the close correspondence with the research objectives.

Second, there has to be richness of information. Cases must be able to give adequate publicly available data, such as empirical findings, methodology and contextual information, necessary to justify extensive analysis. Shallow or ambiguous studies are not included.

Third, diversity is viewed to improve the insight of analysis. The chosen cases are different in research context, methodology and concentrate on various features of review, e.g. ratings, valence, trust. This variety makes it possible to explore contingencies and variations of cases.

Fourth, currency is ensured through the choice of the studies published from 2010 to 2026. This would guarantee that results are in line with current trends in online platforms and consumer behaviour.

Lastly, credibility is ensured by choosing cases based on peer-reviewed academic journals and credible sources. This is to make sure the data is used in the analysis reliably, valid and academically strong.

3.4.3 Case profiles

Five organisational and platform cases are analysed in this paper: Marriott International, Hilton Hotels & Resorts, Accor, TripAdvisor and Booking.com. The cases were chosen to offer pertinent examples on how guest reviews in the online environment affect customer trust, how guest reviews impact the perception of service quality, how guest reviews affect the management of reputation and hotel booking behaviour.

3.4.4 Justification of case diversity

The presented cases contain an even distribution of diverse cases that make the study more analytical. Although all of them are located in the context of the hospitality industry to remain consistent in terms of literature, they differ in their research focus, methodological tools, and studied variables like ratings, sentiment, and trust. It is this diversity that allows for the finding patterns and contingencies in various circumstances, which increase the strength of the findings. Concurrently, the common industry focus will ensure that there is a level of comparability, hence the study will produce coherent and theoretically based insights based on the objectives of the research.

3.5 Data sources and data collection

3.5.1 Data sources

This paper uses only secondary data sources, which can deliver a strong and trustworthy background to analyse the effect of online guest reviews on booking choices (Saunders et al., 2019). Several types of sources are used to guarantee full coverage and triangulation of the sources.

To begin with, the main data source includes peer-reviewed journal articles, which will provide empirical data on online reviews, consumer behaviour, and booking decisions. These sources are very trustworthy because they are subjected to scholarly scrutiny, but variations in research design and context could restrict direct comparison (Johnson and Sylvia, 2018). Second, journals and magazines in the business sector, e.g., Financial Times and Bloomberg, provide third-party insight into the industry trends and organisational practices. Nonetheless, the degree of analysis can be different, and some elaborate mechanisms are not present (Johnson and Sylvia, 2018). Fourth, industry standards and industry projections, e.g., Statista, offer market studies and analyst reports. Although this kind of data is useful in providing a contextual view, in many cases, it is generic and not oriented to particular situations (Yin, 2018).

Lastly, the impactful publications served as direct sources of organisational strategy and positioning, such as the company websites, press releases and public presentations

(Johnson and Sylvia, 2018). Despite the ease of access of these sources, they can include a self-presentation bias and a promotion motive.

3.5.2 Data Collection Process

Systematic and transparent data collection was undertaken. The identification of the relevant sources was carried out based on academic databases, including Google Scholar and ScienceDirect, by entering such keywords as online guest reviews, decision making in the context of hotel booking and electronic word-of-mouth decision making (Johnson and Sylvia, 2018). The predetermined inclusion criteria were applied to select the relevant studies, their recency and their methodological rigour.

After identification, data in each case were harvested and systematised based on a structured framework, to identify major variables, namely review characteristics, trust, research context and main findings (Yin, 2018). Data was obtained through various sources and hence cross-checked to ascertain precision and uniformity. This structured dataset has made within-and cross-case analysis efficient, and ensured the replication, transparency, and consistency of the research process in line with the aim of the study (Yin, 2018).

3.6 Data analysis approach

3.6.1 Analysis Framework

The interpretation of the data in the research is informed by the conceptual framework created in Chapter 2 that reveals the following primary constructs: review ratings, volume, sentiment, recency, and consumer trust. In keeping with the abductive research method, the discussion is informed and speculative on theory and receptive to the emergent insights as a result of the cases (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012). This will enable the study to narrow down current theoretical knowledge and to bring on board additional patterns in the empirical evidence (Flemming, 2010).

Decentralised analysis of a case is used to create uniformity and openness. All cases are considered using a standard format and according to Background, Challenge, Solution, and Outcomes. The structure allows conducting the systematic study of the impact that

online reviews have on the booking decision in various circumstances so that the analysis will be comparable and replicable across cases (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012).

3.6.2 Within-Case Analysis

The cases are reviewed separately, where each attempts to construct a wholesome and logical narration of the effect of online guest reviews on booking behaviour. This will entail an elaboration of evidence presented by several secondary sources on every case, such as empirical data, contextual facts and key variables (Lochmiller, 2021).

The analysis is aimed at determining how the characteristics of reviews and the trust work in the particular context. Triangulation is used to increase credibility through the cross-verification or cross-checking of other sources of information, as suggested by Yin (2018). This helps minimise the chances of bias and helps in coming up with conclusions that are backed by congruent evidence. The result is a comprehensive comprehension of all the cases, which underlies further comparative studies.

3.6.3 Cross-Case Analysis

The within-case analysis is followed by cross-case analysis to determine patterns, relationships, and variation among the five cases. This entails analysing and comparing results connected to review features, trust and booking choices in a systematic manner to identify similarities and distinctions (Flemming, 2010).

The cross-case technique allows one to identify the mechanisms and contingencies which lie behind apparent review attribute effects, e.g. which review attributes are relatively important, or the moderating effect of trust on consumer behaviour (Eisenhardt, 2009). Through the evidence synthesis of cases, the research transcends the single observation to come up with wider meanings and theoretical findings. This comparative analysis enhances the solidity of results and helps in generalising the analytical results so that the analysed conclusions are based on more than one case (Eisenhardt, 2009).

3.7 Research Quality and Rigour

Reliability and validity in secondary research are necessary to increase the credibility of research. Reliability is the ability to be consistent and transparent in the research process (Saunders et al., 2019). Reliability in this study is safeguarded by a clearly outlined and reproducible systematic search strategy, which involves the identification of databases, keywords and inclusion criteria (Yin, 2018). The fact that peer-reviewed journal articles are used additionally enhances consistency since these sources are guided by accepted scholarly guidelines (Johnson and Sylvia, 2018).

Validity is the issue of the correctness and suitability of the results. Content validity is met through the choice of the studies, which are directly oriented to the research objectives and concentrate on online guest reviews in the hospitality situation (Johnson and Sylvia, 2018). It is construct valid as the variables used, review ratings, volume, sentiment, trust and booking intention are well established and have been used in the literature. In addition, conclusions drawn from a combination of qualitative and quantitative research are strengthened by triangulation.

However, there are some limitations, including methodology differences in studies or the potential for publication bias, which can affect comparability. Despite these constraints, the research uses robust selection and analysis methods to produce valid and reliable findings (Johnson and Sylvia, 2018).

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles are observed in this study during research. The study relies only on secondary data publicly available for research; the participant confidentiality and informed consent is not an issue because the data are peer-reviewed journal articles and industry publications (Jol and Stommel, 2016). However, there remains the need for accountability over its use and disclosures.

All sources are cited and appropriately attributed so there is no plagiarism and intellectual honesty is maintained. Lastly, the study does not violate the ethical standards of the university, and in cases where it is necessary, it is in compliance with the guidelines of the applicable Research Ethics Committee.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the research methodology that will be used to explore the role of online reviews on hotel bookings. Guided by the Research Onion model, the study employs a pragmatic research philosophy, an abductive approach, and a qualitative secondary multiple case study research design. Data on the relevant academic and industry sources are collected and analysed by a systematic literature review with narrative synthesis. Time horizon, data collection procedures and methods of analysis, reliability, validity and ethics were also discussed in the chapter. On the whole, the selected methodology guarantees the correspondence to the research goals and offers a solid background for the analysis of the existing evidence. The results and discussion based on the literature will be given in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter offers an in-depth look at the study results in five case studies looking at Marriott, Hilton, Accor, TripAdvisor and Booking.com. The case studies were constructed based on secondary data from corporate reports, academic literature, review sites and other publicly accessible sources. The chapter examines the role of customer reviews in the online booking process in terms of customer trust, quality perceptions, visibility and purchase intent. The cases comprise a series of sections, discussing the background, challenge or opportunity, response and results. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the similarities and differences of the presented cases.

4.2 Case 1: Marriott International

4.2.1 Introduction and background

Marriott International is a global hotel company with more than 9700 properties in more than 143 countries (Marriott International, 2025). It has a wide range of brands, including luxury and upper-middle-market segments. In a fiercely competitive hospitality market, Marriott competes with other multinationals, including Hilton Hotels & Resorts and Accor (Global Data, 2025). The rise of online platforms like TripAdvisor and the importance of reviews in influencing consumer booking have become a fundamental aspect of hotel brands' reputation (Sumali et al., 2024).

4.2.2 The Challenge

The challenge for Marriott was how to deal with the rise of online guest reviews, such as TripAdvisor, Booking.com, and their potential negative effects (Bessouh et al., 2024). According to Tabari (2017), a handful of negative reviews could severely damage brand image and the likelihood of making a reservation, especially among prospective new or international customers. Online reviews are a major source of service information during the pre-purchase 'research' stage and ignoring them will cause a negative impact on occupancy and reputation over time (Sparks and Browning, 2011). Therefore, keeping track of and reacting to these online reviews was essential to insure competitiveness and customer loyalty.

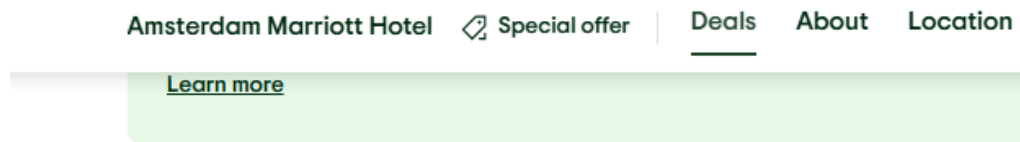
4.2.3 The approach and implementation

To resolve this issue, Marriott devised a clear online reputation management (ORM) strategy for review monitoring and response. Marriott conducted a systematic review of the feedback from TripAdvisor, focusing on complaints, using techniques such as content analysis (Boukhaoua and Habbache, 2024). Based on the analysis, Marriott analysed thousands of reviews across a range of properties to determine the major factors contributing to service failure, such as staff patience and empathy, reliability and tangibles like room comfort and amenities (Tabari, 2017).

Marriott used an active response approach, with managers responding to customer complaints, addressing problems and providing explanations (Bessouh et al., 2024). These explanations often included personal pronouns such as 'we' and 'our' and thank you statements to engage the customer (Boukhaoua and Habbache, 2024). Inside the company, Marriott leveraged this knowledge to enhance employee training in areas such as communications and services, and to streamline processes (Bessouh et al., 2024). This use of customer feedback to improve service enabled the company to better meet customer needs.

4.2.4 Outcomes and results

This approach led to enhanced customer perceptions and loyalty. Results show that dissatisfied customer reviews were responded to by management, which signified management's responsiveness to customers (Bessouh et al., 2024). Resolving issues of staff compassion and service predictability improved customer retention and loyalty (Tabari, 2017). Given the impact of online reviews on booking decisions, enhanced ratings and engagement supported booking numbers and competitiveness. In summary, Marriott effectively used online reviews to improve service quality and handle any issues that might affect bookings.



About

4.3 Very Good
●●●●○ (1,734 reviews)

#87 of 414 hotels in Amsterdam



Travelers' Choice
2025

Figure 4: Amsterdam Marriott Hotel review

Source: (TripAdvisor, 2026)

4.3 Case 2: Hilton Hotel and Resorts

4.3.1 Introduction and Background

Hilton Hotels & Resorts is one of the world's largest hotel chains with over 9200 properties in over 144 countries (Hilton, 2025). With brands like Waldorf Astoria, DoubleTree and Hampton by Hilton, it offers products across market segments (Hilton, 2025). Hilton is a direct competitor with companies such as Marriott International and Accor, in a digital environment where websites like Tripadvisor and Booking.com play a large role in customer choice of hotels through internet review and rating sites (Global Data, 2025).

4.3.2 The challenge

The challenge for Hilton was to handle and respond to a vast number of reviews left by customers that affected customer opinions (Kolesárová et al., 2025) and, ultimately, bookings. With the growing trend of customers using online customer feedback to gauge

the quality of a product, inconsistencies in the delivery of service quality led to conflicting reviews, potentially impacting brand credibility and profitability (Sumali et al., 2024). Hilton risked its reputation from poor reviews, especially those regarding poor services (Dzhabarova, 2024). The challenge lay in translating these reviews into data and facts that could drive better customer experiences and secure a business's competitive advantage in a hyper-transparent ecology.

4.3.3 The approach and implementation

The company implemented an omnichannel strategy for customer reviews and reputation management by integrating the use of online reviews into its customer experience and marketing efforts. The company employed a proprietary system called SALT (Satisfaction and Loyalty Tracking) to solicit and analyze customer feedback from external review sites and other sources (Hilton, 2023). This platform allowed Hilton to detect service quality problems, track customer satisfaction in real-time and respond to reviews, particularly negative ones (Hilton, 2023).

Further, Hilton empowered hotel managers to engage with guests by responding to reviews, especially negative feedback, to showcase social responsibility and accountability (Kolesárová et al., 2025). The hotel chain also provided training for employees to enhance customer service, with a particular focus on real-time responsiveness and personalisation, which were mentioned in reviews (Dzhabarova, 2024). Through data integration of customer feedback and key performance indicators, Hilton made sure the lessons from online reviews were incorporated into both operational and customer experience improvements.

4.3.4 Outcomes and Results

Hilton's strategy led to enhanced customer satisfaction and bookings. Improved responsiveness to online reviews established trust with customers and provided positive feedback for purchasing behaviour (Hilton, 2023). Data-driven service quality enhancement led to greater guest satisfaction and positive online reviews. Given the influence of online reviews on the evaluation decision in a guest's booking process, this enhanced booking performance through higher occupancy and rebooking rates (Hilton,

2023). In all, Hilton effectively used online guest reviews to improve customer experience and also gain a competitive advantage.

4.4 Case 3: Accor

4.4.1 Introduction and background

Accor is a French multinational hospitality corporation with more than 5,500 hotels in over 110 countries. Their brands include Ibis, Novotel and Sofitel, ranging from budget to luxury. Rivalled by Marriott International and Hilton Hotels & Resorts, Accor is operating in a highly digitised space where online reviews play a crucial role when customers book their stays, such as Booking.com and Tripadvisor.

4.4.2 The Challenge

Accor needed to navigate the dynamic online guest reviews of various brands and markets, where customers had different expectations (Fan and Gordon, 2014). The growing use of reviews during the consideration period of the booking process placed at risk the brand's reputation and booking conversions if service quality varied (Sparks and Browning, 2011). Poorer reviews on aspects such as quality of service, cleanliness and response time might lead to lower booking intentions and loyalty (Demirçiftçi and Kızıllırmak, 2016). The challenge was to embed customer feedback into the decision-making process to help improve service quality and maintain trust across its global portfolio.

4.4.3 The approach and implementation

Accor took a data-centric approach to customer feedback and reputation management to overcome this challenge (Le Pham Thao, 2026). Accor began capturing online reviews from multiple sources and incorporating these into its operations systems for real-time analysis (Accor, 2015). As a result of its digital transformation program, Accor used customer relationship management (CRM) systems and analytics to pinpoint issues and opportunities for improvement in service delivery and hotel performance (Demirçiftçi and Kızıllırmak, 2016).

Accor also implemented an active approach to customer feedback, addressing reviews and using them to inform service excellence initiatives. For example, Accor used these reviews to optimise staff training, service performance and customer satisfaction (Accor, 2015). Further, Accor used its loyalty card ALL (Accor Live Limitless) to customise customer experiences by utilising feedback to understand service preferences and build a closer connection with customers (Au and Arghandewal, 2026). This approach to tapping into online reviews enabled Accor to better match services to customer needs and enhance its decision-making, both operational and strategic.

4.4.4 Metrics and Results

Accor achieved positive results in terms of customer satisfaction, online reviews, and booking revenue (Accor, 2015). Improvements in service excellence and responsiveness led to increased positive reviews online, a crucial factor in Booking management. High- and low-valence reviews and their quantity have a positive effect on customer willingness to purchase and expected quality (Mauri and Minazzi, 2013). Through effective use of customer feedback, Accor increased customer loyalty and trust, leading to increased repeat bookings and a competitive advantage. In sum, incorporating online reviews into the decision-making process contributed to better occupancy and long-term brand success.

4.5 Case 4: TripAdvisor

4.5.1 Introduction and Background

TripAdvisor is a global travel website that aims to provide an unbiased, reliable source of reviews and opinions of hotels, restaurants and travel experiences (TripAdvisor, 2019). It is an international platform that is a major part of the online travel industry, allowing guests to compare hotels by rating, reviews and rankings. In a competitive marketplace, TripAdvisor can play an intermediary role in the decision-making process by setting consumer expectations and perpetuating hotel images (TripAdvisor, 2019).

4.5.2 The Challenge

The challenge for TripAdvisor was to ensure trust and relevance in user-contributed reviews, with the potential for increasing content. With the growing consumer dependence

on online reviews to assess hotel quality, the problems of fraudulent reviews, biased reviews, and information overload could have an impact on decision-making and the viability of the company (Mayzlin et al., 2014; Schuckert et al., 2016). It also represented an opportunity to further its position as a resource to influence consumer decisions, through greater transparency, review quality, and producing more structured and reliable information for decision-making (Schuckert et al., 2016).

4.5.3 The approach and implementation

TripAdvisor adopted several technology and platform-based measures to improve the quality of online reviews (Zelenka et al., 2021). TripAdvisor employs sophisticated algorithms and machine learning techniques to identify dubious reviews, thus improving the data quality (Beck et al., 2023). It also implemented tools such as review authentication, traveller rankings, and scorecard information, e.g., cleanliness, service, value, to assist comparisons (Paul and Nikolaev, 2021).

Moreover, TripAdvisor actively engages users through photo sharing, description writing, and rating facilities. It also allows hotel managers to provide feedback and engage in a dialogue with consumers, enhancing information transparency (Zelenka et al., 2021). Through processing and filtering massive amounts of information into digestible bits, TripAdvisor helps with the information asymmetry problem and assists with the evaluation phase of the purchase process (Paul and Nikolaev, 2021).

4.5.4 Outcomes and Results

Through its efforts, TripAdvisor increased trust and efficiency of consumer decision-making, further entrenching its role in hotel booking (Zelenka et al., 2021). Research indicates that online reviews significantly impact customer perceptions and buying decisions (Filiari and McLeay, 2014). TripAdvisor enhanced the quality of reviews and user experience, resulting in greater user trust in its platform for planning trips. This ultimately reinforced its role as a significant generator of hotel awareness and revenue, as when a hotel has high ratings and positive reviews, it increases the likelihood of being booked and has a competitive advantage over other hotels.

4.6 Case 5: Booking.com

4.6.1 Introduction and Background

Booking.com is a global travel platform, part of Booking Holdings Inc. It is a global brand offering accommodation booking for hotels, apartments, resorts and other accommodation options (Booking.com, 2026). According to Booking Holdings, Booking.com is the world's largest brand for online hotel reservations. It competes against Expedia, Airbnb and Tripadvisor, which are platforms where review ratings, guest reviews, and rankings play a significant role in determining hotel stays (Booking.com, 2026).

4.6.2 The Challenge

The challenge for Booking.com was to increase customer confidence in an environment with millions of online reviews and guest ratings for hotels across the world (Zelenka et al., 2021). Because hotel services are intangible and impossible to pre-evaluate, customers rely strongly on authentic reviews, review ratings, images and reviews to alleviate uncertainty (Sparks and Browning, 2011). But if reviews are seen as inaccurate, outdated or manipulated, then customers may swear off the site and its services (Beck et al., 2023). So Booking.com could increase the quality of the booking decision by increasing the credibility of the reviews and increasing the comparability of the review information.

4.6.3 The approach and implementation

Booking.com put in place a review system that utilises verified guest reviews, in which guests are invited to review a hotel after they have stayed there (Zelenka et al., 2021). According to Booking.com partner advice, a guest receives invitations to review the property after check-out, with reply options available within a specific time period, which ensures links to bookings (Rita et al., 2022).

It also offers review scores, review comments and property ratings, allowing guests to rate hotels on various attributes like cleanliness, comfort, location, facilities, staff and value for money (Zelenka et al., 2021). To support accommodation providers,

Booking.com has tools to manage customer reviews, including real-time review history and average review scores.

Further, Booking.com leverages reviews to award high-scoring properties with its Traveller Review Awards. In 2024, this was based on over 309 million guests' verified reviews and awarded 1.48 million partners in 221 countries and territories, showing the use of review data to strengthen service quality, exposure and trust (Booking.com, 2026).

4.6.4 Outcomes and Results

The verified reviews from Booking.com increased customer trust and enhanced decision-making. Positive guest ratings provide assurance and are linked to higher quality perceptions, enabling travellers to pick out reputable hotels and alleviating pre-purchase risk. Booking Holdings also set a new record for annual room nights in 2023, demonstrating the continued success of its hotel booking service. In general, Booking.com shows the impact of trustworthy review platforms, standardised ratings and reviews on consumer trust, hotel visibility and conversion.

4.7 Summary of Cross-case analysis

4.7.1 Recurring triggers across cases

In the five cases, the common trigger was the impacts of online guest reviews on hotel choice and bookings. Marriott, the Hilton and Accor needed to manage reputation for the brand to avoid customer perceptions of reduced quality and confidence in a hotel that might lead to their declining to book. TripAdvisor and Booking.com had a similar problem: to provide quality (useful, accurate and reliable) reviews. Accordingly, the cases demonstrate customer expectations, online transparency and customer competition made online reviews a frontline strategic issue rather than a backroom issue of customer service.

4.7.2 Common Response Patterns

The common response pattern appears to be the utilisation of digital reviews monitoring, customer feedback analysis and management action. Marriott, Hilton and Accor focused on using reviews to determine service shortcomings and to increase service and staff

training, thus improving service and customer experience. TripAdvisor and Booking.com emphasised information management, design of websites, review verification, ratings and information filtering. Across the cases, companies did not implement a single action; instead, technology, customer engagement and service quality improvement to build customer trust and increase loyalty.

4.7.3 Key Differences in the Five Cases

The impact of company type is the biggest difference. Marriott, Hilton and Accor are hotel brands, so they focused on enhancing customer service and eliminating negative reviews. TripAdvisor and Booking.com are Online Travel Agencies (OTA), so their focus was on enhancing the review experience, authenticity and usefulness. This impacted how they influence bookings.

4.7.4 Emerging Link Between Action and Outcomes

The cases show firms perform better when online reviews translate into actions that drive outcomes such as rating improvement, higher customer satisfaction, occupancy, repeat visitors and trust in travel review platforms. This prompted the chapter guidelines to compare the results of the cases and identify patterns across firms.

4.8 Chapter summary

This chapter used five case studies (Marriott, Hilton, Accor, TripAdvisor and Booking.com) to demonstrate the impact of online reviews on hotel bookings. The results suggest that reviews influence hotel booking behaviour via consumer trust, assessment of service quality and pre-purchase risk reduction. Hotels primarily leveraged reviews for service improvements, performance and experience, while online platforms concentrated on distributing reviews legitimately and ranking reviews and hotels. In these cases, reviews and ratings boosted hotel awareness and trust, but also posed risks to the reputation. To conclude, the chapter shows that there is no doubt that online guest reviews, while a feedback tool, also serve as part of the strategies successful implementation of which is essential for competitiveness, customers' retention, and in the hotel business, for booking success. This chapter paves the way for Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion and analysis

5.1 Purpose and positioning

The chapter provides a discussion and interpretation of the findings of the case studies presented in Chapter 4 in the light of the theories, constructs and empirical findings reviewed in Chapter 2. Chapter 4 showed each of the case studies of Marriott, Hilton, Accor, TripAdvisor, and Booking.com, but the aim of the chapter is to go beyond the description and gain deeper analytical insights into how online guest reviews affect the booking decision within the hotel sector. To guide the discussion, the literature on electronic word-of-mouth, online review characteristics, consumer trust, review credibility, and Signalling Theory is identified as the key theoretical perspective for the study.

This chapter is therefore a cross-case synthesis and does not repeat the narratives from the individual cases. To understand the influence of each on customer perceptions and booking behaviour, common patterns across the five cases are compared and contrasted rather than summarising each case individually. Through this, the chapter links the empirical results to the research questions and provides a more nuanced understanding of how online guest reviews can influence guest hotel bookings.

5.2 Analytical framework and logic

This chapter's analysis is directed by the Signalling Theory, which was found in Chapter 2 to be the key theoretical lens for understanding the impact of online guest reviews on hotel bookings. Signalling Theory is an explanation of how information signals can help to overcome uncertainty and information asymmetry between buyer and seller (Ebrary, 2024). Review ratings, number of reviews, sentiment of the review, time of the review, detail of the review, and platform credibility are external factors that can help customers assess hotel quality and alleviate perceived risk, especially in the hotel industry, where customers cannot evaluate the service quality prior to purchase. These review traits serve as trust indicators and affect booking trust and confidence in services and reliability. Thus, based on the conceptual logic discussed in Chapter 2, it is expected that the characteristics of the online review will have an impact on customer perceptions, which will also lead to booking intentions and actual booking decisions (Ye, Law and Gu, 2009; Vermeulen and Seegers, 2009).

A hybrid theme-by-theme organisation with explicit reference to the major constructs from the literature is used. Five themes for discussing online reviews across the cases are presented: online reviews as signals of hotel quality; reducing booking risks through trust and credibility; the impact of review characteristics on customers' perceptions; managerial response and online reputation management; and platform verification and review presentation. This framework enables the results of Marriott, Hilton, Accor, TripAdvisor and Booking.com to be combined in cases, while ensuring it remains clear and aligned with the theoretical framework and research questions.

5.3 Cross-case synthesis

5.3.1 Online reviews as signals of hotel quality

Based on the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, online guest reviews serve as an important information cue in the hotel booking process. Signalling Theory basically suggests that consumers use signals that can be observed to lower information asymmetry when they are unable to judge a service quality prior to purchase (Ebrary, 2024). This is especially apt in the hospitality sector as hotel services are intangible, experiential and uncertain prior to consumption. Past research indicates that ratings and written reviews or customer feedback both contribute to travellers' service quality, cleanliness, location, facilities and value for money assessments prior to a booking decision (Sparks and Browning, 2011; De Pelsmacker, Van Tilburg and Holthof, 2018). The literature also indicates that these signals can be stronger if the reviews have credibility and the platform has a good reputation and customer trust (Filiberti and McLeay, 2014).

This is well reflected in the findings of Chapter 4. In all three companies (Marriott, Hilton and Accor), online reviews were looked upon as not just customer feedback, but also as a barometer of service quality and brand performance. Negative reviews about staff behaviour, cleanliness, reliability and room comfort were seen as indicators of a failure in service, whereas positive reviews bolstered brand values and customer confidence. Review scores and rankings were also offered by TripAdvisor and Booking.com, which gave customers a way of comparing hotels before making a booking based on categories. Booking.com's review categories, such as cleanliness, comfort, location, staff and value for money, illustrate how review information is structured into signals for customer review.

The cross-case evidence thus aligns with the literature because it identified that online reviews decrease uncertainty and affect perception of the hotel quality. The results, however, also contribute to the literature by demonstrating that reviews work bi-directionally. Reviews serve as external quality signals to customers when deciding on a booking. Reviews serve as a hotel organisation's internal diagnostic signal and indicate where they need to improve in their operations. This was especially evident in the case of Marriott, Hilton and Accor, where reviews were leveraged to pinpoint areas of weakness within their services and enhance guests' experiences.

The main thing is that the Internet reviews are not passive comments. They are quality indicators that will affect the customer's booking behaviour and help management make decisions.

5.3.2 Credibility, trust and risk mitigation

Trust was identified as a key concept in Chapter 2, as it concerns the impact of online reviews. Online review information is believed to be adopted by the consumers when it is credible, authentic and useful (Filiari and McLeay, 2014). Trust is particularly crucial in the hotel booking industry as customers risk when they book a hotel they have never stayed at. The literature in electronic word-of-mouth indicates that thorough reviews, trustworthy websites and reviewer credibility enhance consumer confidence and decrease booking uncertainties (Cheung and Thadani, 2012 and Abd-Elaziz et al., 2015). Meanwhile, literature mentions 'boundary conditions' like fake reviews, biased comments and manipulation of the platform, which can undermine consumer trust (Chua and Banerjee, 2013).

The cases in Chapter 4 strongly support that trust and credibility play a role that is fundamental to how reviews impact booking decisions. The verified guest review system directly tackles the credibility issue, as Booking.com only allows for reviews from people who have completed stays. Also, TripAdvisor tries to build trust via the monitoring of the reviews, algorithms and user-generated ratings. In the hotel-brand cases, Marriott, Hilton and Accor employed management responses to ensure they were accountable and that complaints were taken seriously to ease the potential customer's mind. These responses

helped to mitigate the impact of unfavourable reviews because they demonstrated to the public that the organisation was actively working to control service quality.

The results align with the literature and confirm the link between review credibility and trust and booking intention. The cross-case analysis also reveals, however, that there are differences in the way trust is developed in different types of organisations. Responsiveness and service recovery, along with engaging with guest feedback, further cement trust in the eyes of hotel brands. Platforms build trust with users by means of verification, reviewing, filtering, ranking systems and standardised presentation of reviews. It is a distinction that brings nuance to the literature as it demonstrates review credibility is not only a quality of the review itself, but of the institutional system in which the review is offered or reacted to.

The takeaway for now is that trust is a factor that lies between the online reviews and the decision to book. When reviews are seen as genuine, platform-driven, and recognised by the organisation, they have a potent impact on customers.

5.3.3 Review characteristics and customer perceptions

As mentioned in Chapter 2, there are a number of review attributes that matter to customers: rating, volume, sentiment, recency and review quality. Review ratings act as a quick gauge of satisfaction, and review volume represents social proof that numerous customers have stayed at the hotel (Ye, Law and Gu, 2009; Blal and Sturman, 2014). Negative sentiment reviews can affect emotional evaluation, as they appear to carry more weight in service risk (Sparks and Browning, 2011).

The recency factor is important because reviews more recent than the last year probably show the hotel's current condition, and detailed reviews, as per Filieri 2015, are more informative than a one liner. However, these attributes are not necessarily independent in accordance with literature which indicates that the platform/platform consistency could affect the influence of these attributes.

Both Booking.com and TripAdvisor have a system to rate and rank hotels, and make use of review quantities and written reviews. The scores assigned by Booking.com under the categories are an indicator of the significance of the details of reviews for customer

perception. TripAdvisor's ranking and review structure illustrate the impact of reviews, sentiment and visibility on hotel awareness. For the hotel cases, Marriott, Hilton and Accor tracked the tone of reviews to look for common complaints and areas for improvement. Negative comments regarding staff behaviour, cleanliness or bad service were considered as reputational risks and may decrease booking intention. High ratings, positive reviews and high numbers of positive feedback enhanced customer trust and confidence in the reliability of the services.

The findings align with the literature as they also indicate that customer perception and booking behaviour are influenced by the review characteristics (Ladhari and Michaud, 2015). Yet, the cases also indicate that the characteristics of the review are not independent but instead function interdependently. For instance, if a number of recent and detailed reviews exist, the rating will be more convincing. Likewise, a negative review might not have the same impact if it is a minority of reviews, and if the hotel responds professionally. This implies a cumulative and contextual impact of reviews, as opposed to a linear impact (Ladhari and Michaud, 2015).

The interim conclusion is that customers don't just look at one review aspect. The overall review experience and detail in the review have an impact on the booking decision, along with ratings, volume, sentiment and recency.

5.3.4 Online reputation management and managerial response

The second chapter concluded that online reviews have a significant impact on hotel reputation and that hotels need to actively manage customer reviews as part of their digital marketing strategy and service improvement. Online reputation management is relevant as positive reviews can boost visibility, trust and booking intention and negative reviews can affect brand image and decrease customer interest (De Pelsmacker, Van Tilburg and Holthof, 2018; Viglia, Minazzi and Buhalis, 2016). Another factor that could help a service recovery, according to literature, is the managerial response, but it may depend on the quality of the response, the timing and the sincerity (Mauri and Minazzi, 2013).

Chapter 4 results reveal that Marriott, Hilton and Accor used active practices in managing their online reputation. Marriott used customer complaints to pinpoint issues in areas of staff empathy, reliability and tangible service attributes. Hilton's feedback and satisfaction tracking systems were used to follow up on the guest experience and act on any issues. The customer feedback was used for the integration in CRM systems, service training and digital transformation activities of Accor. In all the instances, online reviews were leveraged to safeguard reputation as well as enhance operations and customer experience.

The findings are consistent with the content of previous research and suggest that managerial reactions can help mitigate the damage to reputation and improve trust. They also add to the literature by pointing out that this is not simply a matter of reacting to the reviews to properly manage a reputation. Feedback and self-evaluation through internal systems appeared to be closely associated with the best results observed. This means that an ORM process is most effective when it is integrated into the organisational learning process and not viewed as a superficial communication process.

The interim conclusion is that managerial response is important, and response isn't enough. Reviews only become valuable when hotels use them to make improvements in service, staff development and enhanced customer experience.

5.3.5 Platform design, verification and booking confidence

Additionally, the literature discussed in chapter two highlighted how online review platforms can influence consumers' choices. The presence of platforms like TripAdvisor and Booking.com has enabled electronic word-of-mouth, as they gather, structure and present the opinions of their clients (Rita et al., 2022). They de-clutter the information by providing ratings, rankings, category filters and reviews. The literature also indicates that there are possible limitations: fake reviews, too much information, biased algorithms and unequal visibility among hotels (Mayzlin, Dover and Chevalier, 2014; Schuckert, Liu and Law, 2016).

Chapter 4 evidence indicates that both TripAdvisor and Booking.com are actively involved in the formation of booking confidence. TripAdvisor allows for comparison via its ratings

and rankings as well as traveller-generated content, while Booking.com bolsters credibility with verified guest reviews and uniform scores. It's not just that these platforms present reviews, but they also organise the way in which customers perceive review information. There are ways to enhance visibility, awards and rankings to instil customer confidence and boost the chances of the highly rated ones being chosen.

The results align with the literature as they reinforce the importance of platforms in the impact of online reviews. The cases also complicate the picture in the literature by demonstrating that the design of the platform has an impact on the power of the review. Review becomes more influential if the platforms allow for easy comparison, credibility and relevance for decisions. On the other hand, if the reviews are not current, not verified or hard to understand, they can lose their impact.

The takeaway so far is that the impact of customer-generated content on online reviews is not the only architectural factor. How reviews impact booking decisions is driven by verification, ranking, categorisation and visibility systems.

5.4 Integration into the conceptual framework or propositions

The results largely validate the conceptual model presented in Chapter 2 that suggests trust and perceived service quality are mediators between the characteristics of an online review and customers' perception and booking decision. As per the Signalling Theory, review ratings, review volume, sentiment, recency and review detail served as signals which reduced customers' uncertainty prior to booking (Ebrary, 2024; Sparks and Browning, 2011). TripAdvisor and Booking.com are good examples that structured ratings, verified reviews, and review rankings boost customer trust, while Marriott, Hilton and Accor demonstrate how reviews can impact hotel reputation and service improvements.

But the results indicate that there is some room for improvement in the original model. The trust should be considered as a key mediating variable between review characteristics and booking decisions, since reviews are most likely to impact booking behaviour when they are perceived as credible and authentic (Filiari and McLeay, 2014; Abd-Elaziz et al., 2015). Moreover, the moderating factors of platform verification and

managerial response should be included. Verified review systems can boost the credibility of review information, and hotel replies to negative reviews can limit the damage to the hotel's reputation and restore confidence (Mayzlin, Dover and Chevalier, 2014; Mauri and Minazzi, 2013).

The modified conceptual pathway can thus be expressed as:

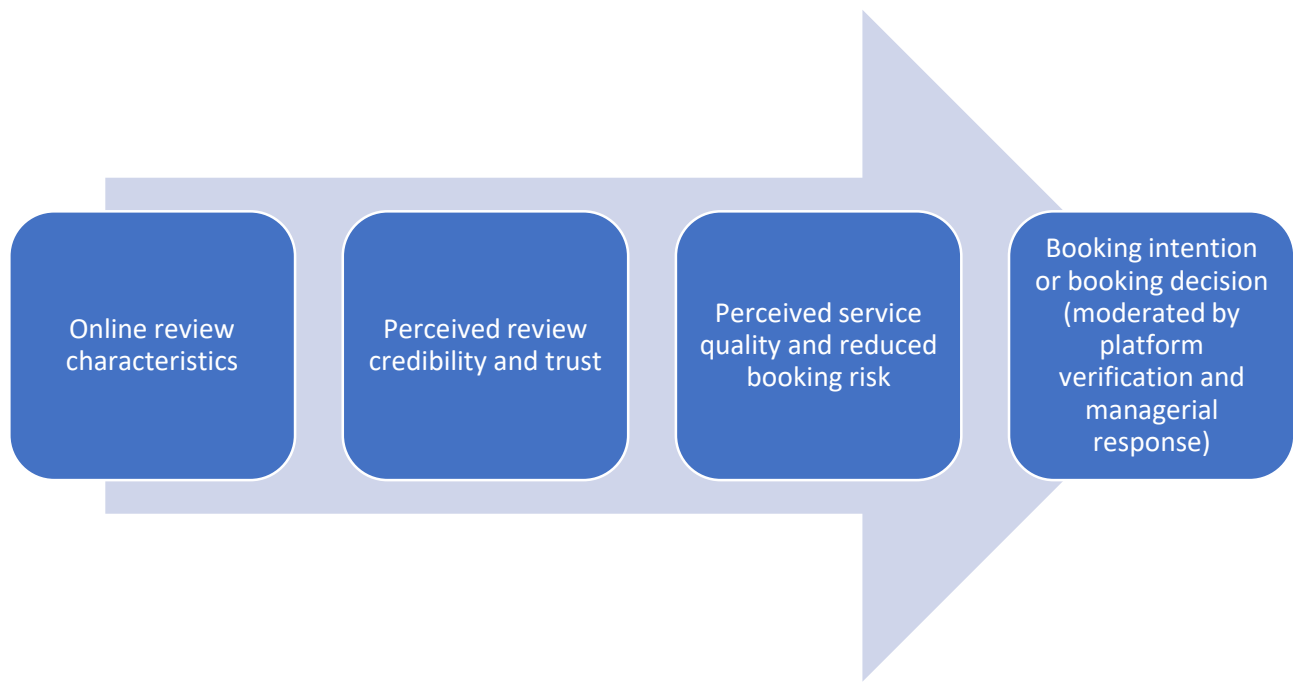


Figure 5: Modified Conceptual Framework

Source: (author)

Hence, it is concluded that online reviews do have an effect on booking. This suggests that the characteristics of the review influence how customers perceive the product, which is also supported. But it depends on the credibility of the review and the reliability of the platform, as well as the hotel's response to the review.

5.5 Robustness considerations

The results suggest that online guest reviews do have an impact on hotel reservations, but this may have other reasons behind it. Reviews might not be the only driving factor for booking behaviour. Purchase triggers may include brand loyalty, promotions, hotel location, seasonality, travel purposes, and price. For instance, a traveller might overlook a hotel, despite a poor rating, if it is inexpensive, it's in a great location, or the customer

is already loyal to that hotel. Hence, it is important to understand that the role of online reviews and the booking decision is influential but not conclusive.

Another impact of the use of secondary data is on the strength of the claims. There may be some evidence of self-presentation bias as information provided on company websites, in press releases and on platforms will tend to focus on strengths and minimise weaknesses (Saunders et al., 2019). Likewise, academic research has a varied context, sample and methodology that may make it difficult to compare cases directly. But with triangulation, similar patterns emerged in the studies of the various hotel brands, online travel companies and previous literature, and this lent credibility. This repeated evidence of the influence of those four factors (rating, credibility, sentiment and managerial response) on customer trust substantiates the robustness of the analysis (Sparks and Browning, 2011; Filieri and McLeay, 2014; Blal and Sturman, 2014). Hence, the results must be interpreted as analytically generalisable and not statistically generalisable.

5.6 Practical Synthesis

The cross-case analysis offers a number of practical implications for hotel management and online platforms. First, hotels need to regard online feedback as a performance indicator, not just customer feedback. Reviews may identify common issues with the service in terms of cleanliness, manners of the personnel, facilities and value for money, which helps managers enhance the quality of the service in order to preserve the performance of the bookings. Secondly, hotels should react professionally to negative reviews: visible managerial reactions may limit the negative impact of a review and induce norm-enforcing behaviour from potential guests (Mauri and Minazzi, 2013).

Thirdly, hotel establishments should get their loyal customers to write their reviews in detail in a recent and authentic manner. Positive review volume with respect to review recency enhances the social proof and booking process confidence of customers (Blal and Sturman, 2014). Fourth, review platforms need to further develop authentication mechanisms, fake review detection and clear rating categories, since customer trust largely relies on the credibility of the information provided in the reviews (Filieri and McLeay, 2014; Mayzlin et al., 2014). Lastly, Hotels need to use the feedback from the reviews and include it in staff training, service recovery and customer relationship

management. This is a cycle whereby positive reviews lead to better service, which leads to increased reviews, and increased reviews lead to increased bookings.

5.7 Chapter summary

The findings of Chapter 4 were discussed in this chapter in light of the theories and literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The results indicate that online guest reviews are important in the hotel booking decision process as it affects consumer trust, perceived service quality and perceived booking risk. Results suggest that review ratings, review volume, sentiment, recency and review detail are important signals customers use when assessing the hotels prior to booking (Sparks and Browning, 2011).

The cross-case discussion also demonstrates that there is credibility and context in the influence of the review. Verified review systems, platform reliability and managerial responses enhance the trust in booking from reviews. Examples of how hotel brands utilise reviews for service improvement and reputation management are provided by Marriott, Hilton and Accor, while TripAdvisor and Booking.com illustrate how brands influence consumer decision-making by presenting, ranking and verifying reviews.

The entire chapter establishes that online reviews are not just feedback, but also is influencing the perception, competitiveness and hotel booking outcome. To further enrich the conceptual model, trust was added as the mediating variable, and platform verification and managerial response as the moderating variable. What this means is that the insights have become the basis for the final findings, recommendations and implications of the study.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

The chapter summarises the findings of the study and details its theoretical and managerial implications as well as the limitations and directions for future research. The study was designed to investigate the effect of online guest reviews on hotel bookings. To satisfy this aim, secondary data and a multi-case approach were used, which involved Marriott, Hilton, Accor, TripAdvisor and Booking.com. The findings of the cases were presented in Chapter 4 and synthesised in Chapter 5 using cross-case analysis. This concluding chapter brings all of these perspectives together and illustrates how they can help in hospitality research and practice.

6.2 Summary of key findings

Results of the study indicate that online guest reviews have an impact on hotel bookings by providing a quality signal prior to booking and decreasing purchase uncertainty. The hotel services cannot be completely assessed prior to purchase, so the buyers depend on several parameters such as the review ratings, comments, volume, sentiment and recency to ascertain the service quality and risk of booking. A key mechanism was identified, the credibility of the review, such that when participants felt the review was credible, authentic and useful, it influenced their decision.

The results further indicate that the characteristics of reviews act in concert instead of individually. More recent, detailed reviews with high ratings are more convincing, and vice versa is true of negative reviews and a well-handled hotel response. In all cases, Marriott, Hilton and Accor exhibited the value of using reviews for service improvement and reputation management. Platform verification, ranking systems and structured review categories boost customer confidence and booking behaviour, TripAdvisor and Booking.com revealed.

6.3 Theoretical implications

The findings of this research have several theoretical implications for the relationship between online guest reviews and hotel booking decisions. The primary theoretical contribution is in line with Signalling Theory, which states that consumers can overcome

information asymmetry in cases where the quality of the product/service can't be fully determined at the time of purchase by using observable signals (Ebrary, 2024). Unlike other sectors, customers are unable to assess the quality of rooms, staff behaviour, cleanliness, facilities or service reliability before booking in a hotel. Hence, online guest reviews can be important cues influencing customer assessment of hotel quality and perceived risk. The findings corroborate this theoretical expectation: ratings, review sentiment, the volume, the recency and detailing of reviews all serve as decision-making cues for potential guests.

Firstly, the study validates the applicability of Signalling Theory in a digital hospitality context. Online reviews wield influence on hotel awareness, attitudes and booking intentions, based on previous studies that state that customer-generated information is often seen as more reliable than information controlled by the hotel provider (Vermeulen and Seegers, 2009; Sparks and Browning, 2011). This is corroborated by the cross-case results. For both TripAdvisor and Booking.com, review scores, rankings and verified guest comments assist customers in comparing hotels and setting expectations before booking. Similarly, in the Marriott, Hilton and Accor cases, online reviews influenced perceptions of hotel quality and reputation. This indicates that Internet reviews act as signals to the market and influence customer expectations as well as booking confidence.

Second, the study contributes to the literature by revealing that the impact of online reviews is not just the result of the presence of online reviews, but also the credibility of the reviews. The findings strongly supported the importance of trust identified in Chapter 2 as a key factor in the adoption of online reviews. Reviews are more influential when customers believe that they are authentic, detailed and useful (Filiari and McLeay, 2014; Abd-Elaziz et al., 2015). Platform credibility enhances the signalling effect of reviews, as is the case with Booking.com's verified review system and TripAdvisor's review monitoring system. This implies that trust should not be considered as a second-order factor but as one of the central factors between information about the reviews and booking it. Even if you have a lot of review content, it won't do much if you don't have trust.

Third, the study provides valuable insights about important boundary conditions. When reviews are recent, detailed, consistent and have high review volume, the relationship

between online reviews and booking decisions seems stronger. The result confirms that review features (quality and quantity) affect customer perceptions and hotel performance (Ye, Law and Gu, 2009; Blal and Sturman, 2014). The results also indicate that the influence of reviews might diminish when reviewers' credibility is not immediately apparent, when the reviews are dated or when review systems are unable to filter out fake and/or manipulated reviews. This confirms the argument of Mayzlin, Dover and Chevalier (2014) that consumer trust may be compromised by the manipulation of reviews. So, it depends on the platform governance, information quality and perceived authenticity of the review.

Fourth, this research contributes in the literature by determining the role of managerial response as a moderating factor. Previous studies have identified that online reviews have an impact on consumer expectations and hotel reputation (Mauri and Minazzi, 2013; De Pelsmacker et al., 2018). But as this study reveals, the impact of negative reviews may be mitigated by a professional response and by utilising feedback to improve a hotel's services. A study by the three big global hotel groups (Marriott, Hilton and Accor) shows that when managers respond to reviews with comments, it can act as a sign of accountability, responsiveness and commitment to service quality. This indicates that online reviews do not lead to definite reputational consequences. Rather, their effect might be changed because of the hotel's response and action to customer feedback.

Fifthly, the study offers a process-based improvement of the conceptual model presented in Chapter 2. The original model assumed that the attributes of online reviews can affect customer perceptions and booking. The results confirm this link, but indicate a deeper mechanism: the characteristics of an online review affect the perceived credibility and trustworthiness of that review, which in turn affect perceived service quality and the reduction of booking risk, which ultimately culminates in booking intentions and booking decisions. Two additional moderating variables are also suggested: verification of the platform and managerial response. Platform verification builds trust in the content of the reviews, and managerial response can help build or regain trust when negative reviews come up.

Last but not least, the study advances the literature on electronic word-of-mouth as a way of demonstrating that online reviews constitute not only an interpersonal communication between customers but also a broader digital reputation system. When it comes to reviews, they don't just shape the customer, but hotel operations, service recovery and design of platforms. This can be interpreted as an extension of the traditional understanding of eWOM as a form of communication between consumers, since the review effects are determined by the hotel and the platform as key actors in the information environment (Cheung and Thadani, 2012; De Pelsmacker, Van Tilburg and Holthof, 2018). The findings are therefore most transferable to the service sector, where quality can be hard to assess prior to purchase, online platforms are important in customer choice, and trust has a prominent role in decision-making.

6.4 Managerial Implications

The findings provide some practical applications to hotel managers and to online hotel review sites. The first point is that hotels have to consider online reviews a performance indicator, rather than a customer feedback source. Reviews and ratings offer a first-hand view of how customers perceive the cleanliness, conduct of staff, reliability of service, comfort of the rooms, location and value for money. Therefore, managers should pay attention to review ratings, sentiment analysis, common grievances, and the number of reviews to determine any areas that may be lacking in service. This is significant as reviews serve as quality indicators and affect customer confidence prior to booking (Ebrary, 2024; Sparks and Browning, 2011). Some of the metrics that matter are the average score of reviews, the number of new reviews, how often complaints arise, the sentiment score and changes in booking conversion.

Secondly, hotels need to be professional and quick in responding to negative reviews. A visible response can be an indicator of accountability and caring, and service recovery to the dissatisfied guest and other potential customers who may read the review. This is of great relevance as negative reviews could lead to a decrease in booking intentions, particularly if the negative comments are centred on cleanliness, staff attitude or service failure (Mauri and Minazzi, 2013). To do this, hotels need to have guidelines for responding, designate a responsible manager and establish a response time target.

Review response rate, average review response time, and repeated complaint rate and post-response rating changes are all helpful metrics.

Third, hotels should encourage happy guests to leave their reviews, which are recent, detailed and authentic after leaving the hotel. Recency and detail enhance the usefulness of review information, and the higher number of reviews provides social proof and boosts customer confidence (Blal and Sturman, 2014; Filieri and McLeay, 2014). This can be done via post-stay e-mails, a message in the app, or a gentle reminder from the front desk. But hotels should never push nor be tempting customers to write misleading reviews.

Fourthly, lessons learned from reviews shall be incorporated into staff training and improvements of services. Marriott, Hilton and Accor examples demonstrate how reviews reveal plant issues and help to make improvements to guest experience. Themes should be linked to training, service recovery planning and service department performance appointments. A cycle of enhanced services due to customer input that helps booking more customers which helps enhance services again due to customer input etc. Some of these metrics include guest satisfaction scores, Net Promoter Score, staff training completion, complaint resolution time, and repeat booking rate.

Finally, verification of online reviews, fake review detection and transparent review categories and ranking processes should strengthen the credibility of online reviews. First, reviews are used when users feel they can trust the platform and reviews are authentic (Mayzlin, Dover and Chevalier, 2014). Key factors to consider for platforms are the percentage of verified reviews, the fake-review removal rate, user trust scores, and the booking conversion rate.

6.5 Limitations and directions of future research

There are some concerns regarding the study. Firstly, it is completely based on secondary data such as academic papers, company reports, platform information and publicly available information. While this enabled comparisons of the major hotel brands and review sites, some may have self-presentation or publication bias. Company publications might highlight the positive aspects, while academic research may vary in context,

methodology or measurement. Second, the study is conducted on selected brands of hotels and online platforms, which may not be transferable to the smaller independent hotels, regional markets or emerging tourism destinations. Third, the study lacks primary data, booking data and experimental evidence to establish causality between online reviews and booking.

The limitations of this study can be tackled by future research when primary data from hotel guests, hotel managers, and users of review sites are collected. The conceptual model presented in this study has been refined and may be subject to quantitative testing, which includes the measurement of the impact of variables such as review ratings, volume, sentiment, recency and trust on booking intention. Additional research options include comparing countries, hotel levy and platform variants. Lastly, there is a need for more research to unravel the implications of manipulation of factors like fake reviews, AI-generated reviews, verification schemes, and platform regulation on consumers' trust and booking decisions.

6.6 Closing Statement

These results confirm that these online guest reviews are a strategic element in the booking process of a hotel, where they act as a instrument of building trust, perceived service quality and reduce the perceived risk of booking a hotel. The study adds to the body of knowledge by discussing the effect platform verification has and what does or does not influence with managerial response on the credibility and booking behaviour of the customer's hotel. Therefore, booking confidence can be attained from both review sites and honest hotels if they ensure their reviews are up to date, descriptive, well-maintained and credible. In general, the online review is not just a form of feedback, but it is an extremely competitive yardstick to gauge for an online hotel.

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