APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL

In order for research to result in benefit and minimise risk of harm, it must be conducted ethically.

The University follows the OECD Frascati manual definition of **research activity**: "creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications". As such this covers activities undertaken by members of staff, postgraduate research students, and both taught postgraduate and undergraduate students working on dissertations/projects.

The individual undertaking the research activity is known as the "principal researcher".

This formmust be completed and approved prior to undertaking any research activity.

SECTION A: About You (Principal Researcher)

1	Full Name:	Candan Kumar Kumawat
2	Student Number:	2428345
3	Email address:	2428345@student.uwtsd.ac.uk
4	Programme of Study:	MBA International Business
5	Supervisor:	Shahrukh Irfan

SECTION B: Internal and External Ethical Guidance Materials

	Please list the core ethical guidance documents that have been referred to during the completion of this form (including any discipline-specific codes of research ethics, location-specific codes of research ethics, and also any specific ethical guidance relating to the proposed methodology). Please tick to confirm that your research proposal adheres to these codes and guidelines. You may add rows to this table if needed.	
1	**UWTSD Research Ethics & Integrity Code of Practice**	☑
2	**UWTSD Research Data Management Policy**	☑
3		☑
4		☑

SECTION C: Details of Research Activity

1	Indicative title:	The Influence of Online Customer Reviews on Purchase Decisions: A Study of Amazon Customers in the United Kingdom		
2	Proposed start date:	March 2026	Proposed end date:	July 2026
	Introduction to the Research (maximum 300 words in each section) **Ensure that you write for a <u>Non-Specialist Audience</u>when outlining your response to the three points below:** • *Purpose of Research Activity* • *Proposed Research Question*			

	• *Aims of Research Activity* • *Objectives of Research Activity* Demonstrate, briefly, how **Existing Research** has informed the proposed activity and explain • *What the research activity will add to the body of knowledge* • *How it addresses an area of importance.*
3	**Purpose of Research Activity** The purpose of this research is to investigate how online customer reviews influence the purchase decisions of Amazon customers in the United Kingdom. Online reviews have become one of the most important sources of information for consumers shopping online, yet their influence varies depending on factors such as review valence, authenticity, and star ratings. This study aims to provide empirical evidence on the role of reviews in consumer decision-making specifically within the Amazon UK context, where concerns around fake reviews and trust are increasingly relevant. The findings will offer practical insights for businesses seeking to improve their review management strategies and will contribute to the academic literature on consumer behaviour in digital marketplaces. (this box should expand as you type)
4	**Research Question** How do online customer reviews influence the purchase decisions of Amazon customers in the United Kingdom? (this box should expand as you type)
5	**Aims of Research Activity** Number your aims and link them to your objectives Aim 1: To investigate the overall influence of online customer reviews on purchase decisions among Amazon UK customers (linked to Objectives 1 and 2). Aim 2: To examine consumer trust in Amazon reviews and evaluate the effect of star ratings on purchase intention (linked to Objectives 3 and 4). (this box should expand as you type)
6	**Objectives of Research Activity** 1. To analyse the importance of online reviews in customers' purchasing decisions. 2. To examine how positive and negative reviews influence customer behaviour. 3. To evaluate the level of trust customers place in Amazon product reviews. 4. To determine whether review ratings affect purchase intention. (this box should expand as you type)
	Proposed data collection methods (maximum 600 words) Provide a brief summary of all the methods that **may** be used in the research activity to collect data, making it clear what specific techniques may be used. If methods other than those listed in this section are deemed appropriate later, additional ethical approval for those methods will be needed. You do not need to justify the methods here but should instead describe how you intend to collect the data necessary for you to complete your project.
7	This should describe how you intend to collect data. It should not include a discussion of the theoretical basis for your data collection methods. Please note, that if you intend to collect any audio/video recordings of interviews with participants then these will be classified as Personal Data under GDPR/DPA2018. If you intend to use these then note this in section H. Data will be collected through an anonymous online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The survey will be shared with adults in the United Kingdom who have purchased at least one product on Amazon within the past six months. The survey link will be distributed through UK-based online communities and social media platforms. The questionnaire will consist of closed-ended Likert scale questions (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) covering four themes: the importance of online reviews in purchase decisions, the influence of positive and negative reviews, trust in Amazon reviews, and the effect of star ratings on purchase intention. Basic demographic questions (age, gender, frequency of Amazon use) will also be included. No audio or video recordings will be made. A target of 150–200 responses is anticipated. Data will be analysed using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis in Microsoft Excel or SPSS.

SECTION D: Scope of Research Activity

	Will the research activity include:	**YES**	**NO**
1	Use of a questionnaire or similar research instrument?	☐x	
2	Use of interviews?	☐	☑
3	Use of focus groups?	☐	☑
4	Use of participant diaries?	☐	☑
5	Use of video or audio recording?	☐	☑
6	Use of computer-generated log files?	☐	☑
7	Participant observation with their knowledge?	☐	☑
8	Participant observation without their knowledge?	☐	☑
9	Access to personal or confidential information without the participants' specific consent?	☐	☑
10	Administration of any questions, test stimuli, presentation that may be experienced as physically, mentally or emotionally harmful / offensive?	☐	☑
11	Performance of any acts which may cause embarrassment or affect self-esteem?	☐	☑
12	Investigation of participants involved in illegal activities?	☐	☑
13	Use of procedures that involve deception?	☐	☑
14	Administration of any substance, agent or placebo?	☐	☑
15	Working with live vertebrate animals?	☐	☑
16	Procedures that may have a negative impact on the environment?	☐	☑
17	Other primary data collection methods. Please indicate the type of data collection method(s) below.		
	Details of any other primary data collection method: (this box should expand as you type)	☐	☑

If you have ticked NO to every question then the research activity is (ethically) low risk and you may skip section E and continue to section F.

If YES to any question, then no research activity should be undertaken until full ethical approval has been obtained.

SECTION E: Intended Participants

	Who are the intended participants:	**YES**	**NO**
1	Students or staff at the University?	☐	☑
2	Adults (over the age of 18 and competent to give consent)?	☐	☑
3	Vulnerable adults?	☐	☑
4	Children and Young People under the age of 18?(Consent from Parent, Carer or Guardian will be required)	☐	☑
5	Prisoners?	☐	☑
6	Young offenders?	☐	☑
7	Those who could be considered to have a particularly dependent relationship with	☐	☑

	the investigator or a gatekeeper?		
8	People engaged in illegal activities?	☐	☑
9	Others. Please indicate the participants below, and specifically any group who may be unable to give consent.		☐x
	Details of any other participant groups: Complete this only if your participants cannot give consent. This includes animals (this box should expand as you type)		

	Participant numbers and source Provide an estimate of the expected number of participants. How will you identify participants and how will they be recruited?				
10	How many participants are expected?	Ballpark figures are fine but make sure that you explain how you will identify and contact your participants. Approximately 150–200 participants are expected. Participants will be identified through UK-based online communities, Amazon customer forums, and social media platforms (Facebook groups, Reddit UK). The survey link will be shared publicly with a short description of the study. Only adults (18+) who have shopped on Amazon UK in the past six months will be asked to participate. Participation will be entirely voluntary and no personal identifiers will be collected. *(this box should expand as you type)*			
11	Who will the participants be?	Adults aged 18 and over who are resident in the United Kingdom and who have made at least one purchase on Amazon UK within the past six months. All participants will be members of the general public, capable of giving voluntary informed consent. No vulnerable groups or minors will be included.	12	How will you identify the participants?	*(this box should expand as you type)*

	Information for participants:	**YES**	**NO**	**N/A**
13	Will you describe the main research procedures to participants in advance, so that they are informed about what to expect?	☑	☐	☐

14	Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?	☑	☐	☐
15	Will you obtain written consent for participation?	☑	☐	☐
16	Will you explain to participants that refusal to participate in the research will not affect their treatment or education (if relevant)?	☑	☐	☐
17	If the research is observational, will you ask participants for their consent to being observed?	☑	☐	☐
18	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason?	☑	☐	☐
19	With questionnaires, will you give participants the option of omitting questions they do not want to answer?	☑	☐	☐
20	Will you tell participants that their data will be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, it will not be identifiable as theirs?	☑	☐	☐
21	Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation, in a way appropriate to the type of research undertaken?	☑	☐	☐
22	If NOto any of above questions, please give an explanation			
	You should be able to tick YES for all of these questions. If not, then explain why not in this box. *(this box should expand as you type)*			

	Information for participants:	**YES**	**NO**	**N/A**
24	Will participants be paid?	☐	☑	☐
25	Is specialist electrical or other equipment to be used with participants?	☐	☑	☐
26	Are there any financial or other interests to the investigator or University arising from this study?	☐	☑	☐
27	Will the research activity involve deliberately misleading participants in any way, or the partial or full concealment of the specific study aims?	☐	☑	☐
28	If YESto any question, please provide full details			
	You should be able to tick NO for most of these questions. For any cases that you have ticked YES then provide details in this box. If you are using cameras/voice recorders to record interviews, then please state thatin this box. *(this box should expand as you type)*			

SECTION F: Anticipated Risks

	Outline any anticipated risksthat may adversely affect any of the participants, the researchers and/or the University, and the steps that will be taken to address them.	
1	**Risks to participants** For example: sector-specific health & safety, emotional distress, financial disclosure, physical harm, transfer of personal data, sensitive organisational information. If you have identified in section D that there are no participants, then enter N/A and go skip to question 3.	
	Risk to participants: There are always risks. Do not write N/A unless you have no participants. The risk to participants is minimal. The survey involves no sensitive, distressing, or personal topics. Participants may experience a minor time inconvenience in completing the questionnaire (approximately 5–10 minutes). There is a very low risk of discomfort as questions relate only to online shopping behaviour and review experiences. *(this box should expand as you type)*	*How you will mitigate the risk to participants:* Participation will be entirely voluntary and anonymous. A clear information statement will be displayed at the start of the survey explaining the study purpose and confirming that participants may withdraw at any time without consequence. No personal identifiers will be collected. Participants may skip any question they do not wish to answer. *(this box should expand as you type)*
2	If research activity may include sensitive, embarrassing or upsetting topics (e.g. sexual activity,	

	drug use) or issues likely to disclose information requiring further action (e.g. criminal activity), give details of the procedures to deal with these issues, including any support/advice (e.g. helpline numbers) to be offered to participants. Note that where applicable, consent procedures should make it clear that if something potentially or actually illegal is discovered in the course of a project, it may need to be disclosed to the proper authorities	
	(this box should expand as you type)	
3	**Risks to the investigator** For example: personal health &safety, physical harm, emotional distress, risk of accusation of harm/impropriety, conflict of interest	
	Risk to the investigator: There are always risks. Do not write NA. The research is conducted entirely online via an anonymous survey, posing minimal personal risk to the investigator. There is a low risk of reputational harm if the study is not conducted to a high academic standard. The investigator may also experience time pressure in managing data collection and analysis within the project timeline.	*How you will mitigate the risk to the investigator:* The investigator will follow UWTSD ethical guidelines throughout. Regular supervision meetings with the academic supervisor will be held to ensure the study is conducted appropriately. The online nature of data collection eliminates any physical risk. Academic integrity will be maintained by accurately reporting findings. *(this box should expand as you type)*
4	**University/institutional risks** For example: adverse publicity, financial loss, data protection	
	Risk to the University: There are always risks. Do not write NA. There is a low reputational risk to the University if the research is conducted without proper ethical approval or if participant data is mishandled in breach of GDPR and UWTSD Research Data Management Policy.	*How you will mitigate the risk to the University:* Ethical approval will be obtained prior to commencing data collection. All data will be collected, stored, and disposed of in accordance with UWTSD Research Data Management Policy and GDPR. The study will be supervised by an academic supervisor throughout. No personal data will be retained beyond the study period. *(this box should expand as you type)*
5	**Environmental risks** For example: accidental spillage of pollutants, damage to local ecosystems	
	Risk to the environment: The environmental risk of this research is minimal. The study is conducted entirely online, generating no physical waste, no travel, and no resource consumption beyond standard computer use. There is no laboratory work, fieldwork, or use of physical materials. *(this box should expand as you type)*	*How you will mitigate the risk to environment:* No mitigation is required. The research is conducted entirely digitally and produces no environmental impact. Printing will be avoided wherever possible and all documents will be stored electronically. *(this box should expand as you type)*

SECTION G: Feedback, Consent and Confidentiality

If you have identified in section D that there are no participants, then enter skip this section and continue to section H.

1	**Feedback** What de-briefing and feedback will be provided to participants, how will this be done and when?
	You don't need to email your participants with your final report. A good alternative is to set up an email address that they will be able to contact for further details or results. *(this box should expand as you type)*

2	**Informed consent** Describe the arrangements to inform potential participants, before providing consent, of what is involved in participating. Describe the arrangements for participants to provide full consent before data collection begins. If gaining consent in this way is inappropriate, explain how consent will be obtained and recorded in accordance with prevailing data protection legislation.
	If you are using a paper questionnaire then you should have the participants sign an appropriate consent form. These forms will count as personal data and should be noted as such in section J. If you are using an online questionnaire, then you should have a screen before the questions start that acts as a consent form, informing participants that by clicking on the NEXT button they are providing consent. *(this box should expand as you type)*
3	**Confidentiality / Anonymity** Set out how anonymity of participants and confidentiality will be ensured in any outputs. If anonymity is not being offered, explain why this is the case.
	Do not collect names unless you really need them. Do not name participants or organisations in any research publications (including the thesis) without their explicit permission. Full anonymity will be maintained throughout the study. No names, email addresses, or any other personal identifiers will be collected. Responses will be recorded only in aggregate form. The survey data will be stored securely on a password-protected device accessible only to the researcher. Data will not be shared with any third parties. All raw data will be deleted upon completion and submission of the final dissertation. In any published outputs, results will be reported in aggregate and no individual participant will be identifiable.

SECTION H: Data Protection and Storage

	Does the research activity involve personal data (as defined by the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 "GDPR" and the Data Protection Act 2018 "DPA")?	**YES**	**NO**
1	***"Personal data"****means any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person ('data subject'). An identifiable natural person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of that natural person. Any video or audio recordings of participants is considered to be personal data.*	☐	☑
	If YES, provide adescription of the data and explain why this data needs to be collected:		
2	This includes audio/video data of participants but can also include IP addresses and usernames. Names, addresses and emails also count, as do consent forms. *(this box should expand as you type)*		
	Does it involve special category data (as defined by the GDPR)?	**YES**	**NO**
3	***"Special category data"*** *means sensitive personal data consisting of information as to the data subjects' –* *(a) racial or ethnic origin,* *(b) political opinions,* *(c) religious beliefs or other beliefs of a similar nature,* *(d) membership of a trade union (within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992),* *(e) physical or mental health or condition,* *(f) sexual life,* *(g) genetics,* *(h) biometric data (as used for ID purposes),*	☐	☑
	If YES, provide adescription of the special category data and explain why this data needs to be collected:		
4	What counts as 'sensitive' will differ between cultures. Any information on behaviour that is not in accordance with cultural norms would count as sensitive personal data.		

	(this box should expand as you type)

	Will data from the research activity (collected data, drafts of the thesis, or materials for publication) be stored in any of the following ways?	**YES**	**NO**
5	Manual files (i.e. in paper form)?	☐	☑
6	University computers?	☐	☑
7	Private company computers?	☐	☑
8	Home or other personal computers?	☐	☑
9	Laptop computers/ CDs/ Portable disk-drives/ memory sticks?	☐	☑
10	"Cloud" storage or websites?	☑	☐
11	Other – specify:	☐	☑
12	For all stored data, explain the measures in place to ensure the security of the data collected, data confidentiality, including details of backup procedures, password protection, encryption, anonymisation and pseudonymisation:		
	If possible, save your data on computers that are secure and regularly backed up. Many cloud services only provide GDPR-compliant storage for business customers. An example of suitable text is given below. *All data will be kept in password protected cloud storage on the University Office 365 system which will not be shared. Audio/visual data will be transcribed and would be shown to participants to check accuracy of reporting. Any USB sticks used to store or transfer data will be password protected. All participants will be given a unique identifier to ensureconfidentiality and this list will be kept securely in the password protected folder.* *(this box should expand as you type)*		

	Data Protection		
	Will the research activity involve any of the following activities:	**YES**	**NO**
13	Electronic transfer of data in any form?	☐	☑
14	Sharing of data with others at the University outside of the immediate research team?	☐	☑
15	Sharing of data with other organisations?	☐	☑
16	Export of data outside the UK or importing of data from outside the UK?	☐	☑
17	Use of personal addresses, postcodes, faxes, emails or telephone numbers?	☐	☑
18	Publication of data that might allow identification of individuals?	☐	☑
19	If YESto any question, please provide full details, explaining how this will be conducted in accordance with the GDPR and Data Protection Act (2018) (and/or any international equivalent):		
	This includes data such as drafts of your thesis as well as experimental or survey data. An example of suitable text is given below. *All data will be encrypted and kept in password protected cloud storage on the University Office 365 system whichwill not be shared. Any USB sticks used to store or transfer data will be password protected. All data transfers will be encrypted and password protected. All participants will be given a unique identifier to ensureconfidentiality and this list will be kept securely in the password protected folder. The data will be stored until the completion of the project and then deleted. In*		

	accordance with the DPA2018, participants will have the right to ask to see what data is held relating to them, and this data will be deleted immediately if the participant requests this, in which case the data will not be used in the project. *(this box should expand as you type)*	
20	List all who will have access to the data generated by the research activity:	
	Normally the principal researcher, possibly also the supervisor and, if the project has an industrial partner, a representative of that partner. Possibly also external examiner or second marker? *(this box should expand as you type)*	
21	List who will have control of, and act as custodian(s) for, data generated by the research activity:	
	Usually the principal researcher. *(this box should expand as you type)*	
22	Give details of data storage arrangements, including security measures in place to protect the data, where data will be stored, how long for, and in what form.	
	All data will be encrypted and kept in password protected cloud storage on the University Office 365 system whichwill not be shared. Any USB sticks used to store or transfer data will be password protected, and will be reformatted at the end of the project in order to destroy the data. The data will be stored until the completion of the project and then deleted. *(this box should expand as you type)*	
22	Confirm that you have read the UWTSD guidance on data management (see https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/library/research-data-management/)	☑
23	Confirm that you are aware that you need to keep all data until after your research has completed or the end of your funding	☑

SECTION I: Use of AI tools

Use of generative AI and other AI-based tools There are a number of ethical issues relating to the use of generative AI and other AI-based tools, including data security, output bias, and output errors. In general you should assume that any generative AI or other AI-based tool that you pay to use is more secure and accurate than one which is free to use. Will the research use AI tools to do any of the following:		**YES**	**NO**	**N/A**
1	Capture data?	☐	☑	☐
2	Generate and/or edit text?	☐	☑	☐
3	Generate graphics?	☐	☑	☐
4	Generate video?	☐	☑	☐
5	Generate sound/music?	☐	☑	☐
6	Generate code?	☐	☑	☐
7	Generate synthetic data?	☐	☑	☐
8	Analyse data?	☐	☑	☐
9	Analyse personal or sensitive data?	☐	☑	☐
10	Classify data?	☐	☑	☐
11	Do you intend to use the free version of any AI tools?	☐	☑	☐

If you have answered **YES** to any of questions O1-O11, please provide justification detailing why this is necessary for the research.	
12	State which AI tool or tools you will be using, and where they are based (or store their data – you may need to check their webpages or user agreement for this). If you are planning to use Copilot then say if you're using the UWTSD version of it or the public version. You should also show how you are complying with current UWTSD guidance/policy of the use of AI. *(this box should expand as you type)*

SECTION J: Declaration

	The information which I have provided is correct and complete to the best of my knowledge. I have attempted to identify any risks and issues related to the research activity and acknowledge my obligations and the rights of the participants**.** In submitting this application I hereby confirm that I undertake to ensure that the above named research activity will meet the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice which is published on the website: https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/research/research-ethics/		
1	**Signature of applicant:**	Chandan kumar kumawat	**Date:25-03-26**
2	Supervisor:	Shahrukh Irfan	**Date:** 25/03/26
3	Signature:	Shahrukh	