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The Impact of Online Reviews on Consumer Behavior in The Online Buying Process

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ABSTRACT

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The principle aim of the thesis was to shed light on the extent to which online reviews exerted an impact on customer behavior in the consumer purchasing process. Furthermore, this research was conducted with a view to delivering its readers with a practical case, Airbnb, emphasizing the influence of online customer reviews initiated on customers' attitudes and responses.

To examine the degree to which the online reviews affected, the purchasing decision made on the analysis of primary and secondary data collection was implemented. Two hundred sixty-four responses from anonymous survey participants were collected and analyzed by virtue of the SPSS program to elicit information on their attitudes and behaviors towards the utilization of online reviews in the buying process on the Airbnb case and in general. The structural study was established based on the prime concepts, including online reviews, customer behavior, the online buying process, and the notable impacts of negative and positive reviews on potential and existing consumers. In addition, the study highlights the correlation between gender and the utilization of online reviews.

An in-depth analysis indicated that online reviews affected to two significant stages of the customer's buying process, namely, the information search and post-purchase. Online reviews have a significant impact on the customer buying decision, notably on risk reduction and the increase in trustworthiness.

Online reviews, consumer behavior, buying process, Airbnb

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1 INTRODUCTION

First of all, the beginning chapter reveals the background of the subject studied and the primary objectives examined during the whole study process. The research questions, as well as the structure of the thesis, are introduced respectively to deliver an overview concerning online consumer reviews on customer behaviors in the online purchasing process. In a specific case, the impact of online reviews of Airbnb community on customers will also be analyzed in detail.

1.1 Background

When it comes to customer purchasing behavior, the primary problem of consumer behavior is selection, which leads to a result (Taylor 1974). The risk or uncertainty occurs in every choice that the customer is not familiar with on the threshold of the buying process and this could produce some levels of damages. One of the methods to prevent the high level of risk is to search for a product and service-related information from online public reviews. Since reading the previous consumer reviews, the customer can get to know the possible consequences before taking the step to the buying decision. In addition, although both negative and positive reviews exert an influence on customers, it is believed that it is likely to have more significant impact when comparing negative and positive reviews on customer behaviours. In this study, I would like to analyze and evaluate these effects of negative and positive reviews. Also, in terms of businesses, Chaffey and Smith (2017) advise businesses to take into account the buying process that customers follow while online, which enhances business productivity, and the customer's attraction as well. Therefore, the study's purpose is to identify the degree to which online customer reviews have an impact on the customer behavior. Nevertheless, various researchers have conducted the study addressing online reviews as a critical source in the buying decision in general without reflecting on the impact of online public reviews thorough five steps of the buying process to clarify in which stage consumers embark on viewing the online reviews and to what extent they are under influence in these stages. (Kotler &Armstrong, 2006) Understanding of the

significance of online reviews and online buying process towards customers and businesses motivates me to investigate at stages users utilize the public reviews as well as how these public reviews influence on customer behavior. Moreover, to put the theoretical literature into practice, I will demonstrate Airbnb's community in the Finnish market as a specific instance to emphasize the impact of online reviews on the tourism and accommodation industry.

1.2 Research problems

There are three primary objectives in this research:

- To identify the steps in the purchasing process where customers utilize online reviews for satisfying their purpose.
- To examine the use of online customer reviews on the online purchasing process.
- To determine elements in online reviews as well as to what extent online reviews affect consumer buying behaviors.
- To analyse the effect of online reviews on customer behaviors in the case of Airbnb.

Online reviews have recently become more and more familiar with consumers, and hence is considered to be one of the most effective sources of information. An online review is a form of electronic word-of-mouth communication that can transmit positive and negative messages to the majority of potential and loyal customers as quickly as possible. With the assist of online reviews, customers can avoid the particular uncertainty existing in the products or services by utilizing useful evaluations from former consumers. Moreover, businesses should be highly aware of the essential role of online reviews influencing customer behavior, notably in each stage of the buying process so that they can better manage various company situations and handle the possible risk triggered by the negative reviews.

1.3 Research questions

The secondary data is utilized to give in-depth clarification of these research questions as follows. The literature comprising books, articles, journals, etc. in terms of the topic in the theoretical study is taken advantage of as a secondary source. Since the objective of the research is to examine the issue, several main questions are listed to reach the study of the purpose. When it comes to the result of the study, the thesis will satisfy the readers to discover answers to these following questions:

1. In which steps in the buying process do customers use online reviews? In which way do they use these steps in the buying process on Airbnb?
2. Do negative reviews have a greater impact than positive reviews?
3. Do risk avoidance and trustworthy elements in online reviews affect consumer behavior in buying decisions?
4. Are there any influences of customer reviews on customer behaviors on Airbnb?

1.4 Structure of the thesis

The initial chapter begins with the background of the research before taking a closer approach to the study problems and purposes needed to clarify in a thorough dissertation. Besides, four primary inquiries required to answer for identifying the final findings are raised.

The three following chapters respectively refer to the theoretical review comprising E-WOM in the form of online reviews, customer behavior, and the impact of online reviews on consumer behavior and the buying process. The first subsection of the literature review initiates with the understanding of online reviews in general. Also, it continues to explain customer behavior and stresses the purchasing behavior in the e-commerce context. The final section the theoritical study provides in-depth demonstrations of the influences of online reviews on consumer behavior in the buying process.

The fourth chapter represents a comprehensive point of view on accommodation booking sites in the world. In particular, Airbnb in the Finnish market is taken as a specific study case in the context of analyzing the impact of online public reviews on consumer behaviors in the customer buying process.

The fifth chapter concern methodology. The sub-sections comprise of research strategy, study approach, survey form, and sample. Next, it gives the empirical findings analyzed based on the survey data. The content involves the online survey results to satisfy four primary questions in the thesis. The sixth part is the conclusion, which states the key findings prior to the discussion of research challenges, limits, and recommendations. In addition, the last chapter includes acknowledgment and a list of references, and the appendices at the end of the report.

The last sub-chapter part will conclude the findings summarized from the analysis and the author's point of view. Additionally, the validity and reliability will be presented together, limitations and recommendation, acknowledgment and reference.

2 E-WOM IN THE FORM OF ONLINE REVIEWS

In regard to marketing communications, besides planned marketing communication and action, unplanned communication is considered to be one of the most efficient methods that draws the appeal from the vast wide range of customers in the competitive market. The unplanned marketing communication consists of word-of-mouth, media coverage, interpersonal communication and government research (Karaosmanoglu & Melewar 2006). In particular, the influence of electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM) seems to be significant to users since it supplies an enormously trustful source of information which numerous consumers commonly take advantage to seek out product and service- related information through individual experience from previous users with the service providers. The more customers' emotional perspective towards company image, the more favorable is the customers perceive the company's offerings. The unplanned communication comprising two sides, namely, positive and negative aspects both directly exerts on an impact on business reputation due to limited control. Therefore, businesses should be aware of the unplanned marketing communication and implement appropriate marketing strategies at the right time, notably utilizing electronic word-of-mouth, to prevent severe damages from potential risks as well as to improve business reputation by virtue of positive messages in E-WOM.

2.1 Electronic Word-of-mouth

In the era of technology advancement, the traditional communication evolves into dynamic and effective interaction employing electronic word-of-mouth among customers to exchange knowledge concerning the purchase information (Lee, Park & Han 2008). This transformation from traditionally verbal language into the interactions while online has been commonly seen, for instance, comments on online brand discussion sites, consumer reviews sites, and social network pages. Electronic Word-of-mouth is explained by Hennig Thurau et al. (2004) as a statement illustrating the negative and positive sides of the product or service expressed by earlier users, which is visible for all of customers once online. It is

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perceived as an effective and efficient method of communication that facilitates sharing the experiences and perspectives and, on the reverse, attaining the knowledge from other former customers. Moreover, customers perceive an ease of use and efficiency in obtaining information compared to the traditional word-of-mouth, hence the electronic word-of-mouth information is acknowledged as a more significant source than word-of-mouth information (Chatterjee 2001). Specifically, Amalia et al.'s (2019) finding indicates the huge influence of electronic word-of-mouth on travelers' attitudes in the hospitality industry. A majority of customers become rely on social media sites; thus, traveling organizations might harness the power of spreading a positive message to travelers aimed to improve the customer traveling intentions. The positive message in the online consumer reviews is one of the elements affecting potential customers in deciding to reach the buying decision or not. Therefore, it has clearly shown the significance of positive and negative information in electronic word-of-mouth channels.

2.2 Customer-to-customer interactions in review environments

In the modern world, the demand for information exchange is dramatically increasing, and customer-to-customer interaction is perceived as more than chatting conversation among private individuals, it is demonstrated as interactive relationship in which customers can intervene in exchanging the product-related information and knowledge of service to generate the solution to buy products or services smartly as well as detect necessary information among diverse sources. Moreover, this interaction appears when customers share their perspectives and assessments about their product experience, make a comparison with other alternatives to others. (Magnusson, Matthing, Kristensson, Edvardsson &Gustafsson 2006, 86-87) Customers not only express their opinions to others through verbal language but also show interaction on the Internet with the assist of a virtual network in the advancement of social media. Dahl (2015) argues that in review environments, where users might not know each other while exchanging the opinions in the review post. He divides the review environments into groups of low

levels of familiarity since these anonymous participants are not expected to have further discussion except information concerning the review posts.

On the other hand, the online brand community has been acknowledged to become the ideal place for businesses to transmit the product-related information, including pictures, price to a majority of consumers. Moreover, companies are enabled to generate a platform or a forum where customers participate in sharing their perspectives about products and services under the form of comments in public in the online brand community. Brodie et al. (2011) illustrate customer engagement as a psychological state that exists in the dynamic environment that there is an interaction between customers and agents to produce the co-creative experiences. The level of customer participation in the brand community determines how achievement companies attain, such as sales development. (Bijmolt et al. 2010) Based on customer involvement in the online community, businesses could acquire the point of view of the customer as well as investigate customer behaviors, thus resulting in co-creative experiences and the decline in the level of product or service's potential risk.

2.3 The concept of online customer reviews

The consistently considerable growth in e-commerce leads to the frequent use of online reviews for attaining the trustworthy information thanks to the previous online shopper's evaluations. (Safi & Yu 2017) Online reviews, one of the popular communication genres classified in the electronic word-of-mouth, are illustrated as the shoppers' perspectives, opinions, and assessments concerning the products and services after experiencing these qualities and conditions in the form of text reviews or rating valence via the Internet. Sen and Lerman (2007) assume that when it comes to online reviews, the information and evaluations from former customers mainly communicating by computers are widely spread once other internet users are supposed to seek for types of product or service-related information.

Mudambi and Schuff (2010) define online customer reviews as a type of electronic word-of-mouth interaction which reveals the user-created contents visible on the

organization or third-party websites. A majority of online consumers seek product information before determining to buy aimed at avoiding the uncertainty. In particular, the young who lacks experience are willing to be supported by the online community for collecting the product and service- related information from former customers' reviews. Another study conducted by Service Excellence Research Group (eMarketer 2008) revealed the tendency of online consumers to trust in online reviews from other former customers was higher than their reliance on professional reviews. The reviews from earlier customers are perceived as an accurate source, as they provide not only in-depth information regarding products and services but also both negative and positive sides based on recent experiences. The online reviews play a role in reducing the high level of perceived uncertainty prior to the stage of decision (Nan, Ling &Jie 2008).

Opinion Research Corporation's study (2008) reports the online reviews have made a drastic impact on customer buying intention (eMarketer). These online reviews are acknowledged to be a critical role in offering the knowledge of purchase information posted by former customers. Amazon, an e-commerce company, has cut off expenditure on traditional sources of information, including magazines and televisions recognizes, instead business has concentrated on the essential role of E-WOM in the form of customer reviews since the reliance in the opinions of earlier consumers are evaluated higher than any traditional information sources. As a consequence, online reviews could satisfy the customer demand for obtaining useful and trustworthy information and recommendation from previous customers before sonsumers decide to purchase any products or services.

3   CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

In terms of customer buying behavior, Taylor (1974) states that the problem existing in customers' choices will lead naturally into a particular consequence. The appearance of risks in any product or service is inevitable during the customer buying process. However, to reduce the severe damages due to potential threats, online public reviews are acknowledged to have become one of the efficient methods that the enormous number of Internet users have utilized aiming at raising their product awareness. Several researchers emphasize the impact of C2C reviews on consumer behavior, and it is described in the consumer behavioral model which called Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR model), which was implemented and developed by Mehrabian and Russell in 1974. This model represents the internal and external elements exerting influence on consumer's psychology by stimuli, resulting directly affect customer behavior. In the context of this study, the incentives are online public reviews consisting of review ratings and comments posted by customers in online communities. (Figure 1)
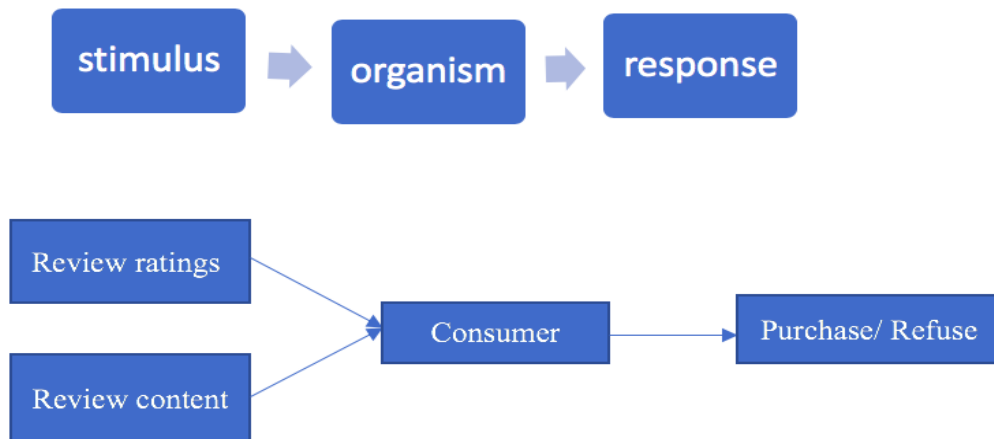
Figure 1: Model of customer behavior

3.1 Online consumer behavior

Online buying behavior is defined as the process in which shoppers gain access to the Internet, surf, purchase, and make a transaction with a seller and continue to repeat the whole process (Sahney, Gosh & Shrivastava, 2013). Rao & Hymavathi (2018) add that the Internet is utilized as a channel of information that shoppers use to seek and purchase a product or service in their leisure time to delight themselves. Through virtual communities and telecommunication devices, customers can browse and exchange product information as quick and efficient as possible.

Moreover, the huge advantage of online buying behavior is convenience since purchasing on the Internet saves sum of money and time compared to traditional consumer buying. (Laudon & Traver 2019, 386-387) Furthermore, consumers can select and filter from a wide range of alternative choices with different prices rapidly on the Internet, for instance, through reviews and rating systems on offer, so time is saved and the possibility of purchasing the satisfying product and service increases.

The world has been on the cusp of e-commerce expansion over recent years, and customers have gradually got used to purchasing items via the Internet. Lingling and Xuesong (2014) argue that consumers have more choices than in the past because of the evolution of e-commerce worldwide. Online shopping has, therefore, become one of the familiar and favored customer activities. It is demonstrated by the total massive figure of world e-commerce sales, 2019 experienced the substantial growth accounting for $3.535 trillion and the figure is even forecasted to dramatically increase in the coming years which will possibly reach $6.5 trillion in 2023 (eMarketer, 2019). A noticeable development has been seen in Finland recently. According to the Finnish e-commerce report (2017) reported by Paytrail, Finnish spending on online shopping in the travel segment constituted 47 percent, which was the largest expenditure with 4 billion euros. It could be illustrated that travel, including accommodation, is the group that Finnish mostly spend their money on when purchasing online.

3.2 Buying decision process

Getting to know customer reactions in each stage in the buyer purchasing process has played a prominent part in any business, especially in the hospitality industry. Cross (1999) emphasizes the importance of understanding the consumer decision process that both current and potential consumers pass through whenever they purchase in their daily lives. Cross points out the marketers can take advantage of the awareness of customer reactions in every phase of the decision process to enhance their product and service quality. The deep understanding of customer reaction and their respond in the whole decision process, therefore, assists businesses in generating enormous annual sales.

Cross (1999) and Kotler and Armstrong (2006) divide the consumer decision process into five primary steps while Frambach, Roest, and Krishnan (2007) demonstrate the buyer purchasing process based on only three foremost phases, including pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase. First, on the threshold of the decision-making stage, the customer begins to seek out the product information by means of a variety of online and offline sources. Thanks to the effective browsing function as well as the wide range of product and service information on the Internet, customers do not have difficulties in searching information, evaluating different options with various prices, and making comparisons with other alternatives. Secondly, all the necessary information in regard to the product is sufficient for customers to comparing among other options and continuing to determine whether to purchase an item or not. In the second stage, a payment will be made between a client and a business if they choose to buy something. Lastly, customers assess the quality of the purchased item and decide whether to keep the purchase or not in the post-purchase phase.

Figure 2: Customer buying process

Notably, the most commonly used model is Kotler and Armstrong's model (2006), which is a solid foundation for analysing throughout this study. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2006), the consumer decision process comprises of crucial five stages, namely, need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior. In particular, customers are not required to experience all five phases or go through each stage of the process, respectively. The initial stage of the purchasing decision-making process is problem recognition. The customer demands generated through either internal or external stimuli are recognized during the first phase. An internal incentive is generally regarded as basic requirements comprising thirst, hunger, sleepiness, and sex. Meanwhile, an external stimulus is outside elements that influence human thoughts and behaviors, for instance, advertising, promotions, or newspapers.

Kotler and Armstrong (2006) outline that in the stage of information search, the party initially seeks product information through a wide range of trusted information sources after defining the prospect of their needs in the starting phase. Previous research conducts that groups of personal, experiential, and public sources are the most essential information sources. Additionally, the commercial source founded in advertising; web sites have played a critical role in carrying on an information function. The third stage of evaluation of alternatives allow customers to reveal their beliefs and attitudes towards offerings based on information gathered in the previous steps.

After accomplishing the process of evaluating other choices, customers decide to make a purchase. In this phase, there is an existing factor affecting consumer buying intention is the attitudes of others (Kotler, 2006). It could be explained in the e-commerce context that positive and negative reviews in the online community influence the final making-decision intention whether clients decide to buy or reject it. If the earlier clients post positive reviews and recommendations about a product on the Internet, the prospect of transmitting positive messages to other customers will impact purchase intentions. Finally, in the last stage of post-purchase behavior, the consumers assess a degree of satisfaction after experiencing the product usage. The consequence of repeat purchase is determined by to what extent the products and services delight customers as well as satisfy their expectations.

4 IMPACT OF ONLINE REVIEWS ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR AND THE BUYING PROCESS

4.1 Effect of online reviews to the online buying process

Kotler and Armstrong's (2006) model is also widely applied in the online consumer buying process through its five stages. The online purchasing process embarks on recognizing the unfulfilled problem before taking an approach to the stage of product-related information search. Hvass and Munar (2012) emphasize that online source plays a critical part in the online information search. Thanks to the simple and efficient accessibility to the Internet, there are numerous users gathering product information to resolve their problem with the assistance of the web in the stage of information search. In addition, online reviews and recommendations categorized in the public source are acknowledged to be one of the most trust-worthy sources for potential visitors (Jalilvand, Ebrahimi & Samiei 2013).

Chaffey and Smith (2017) describe during the phase of evaluation and decision in the online buying process, in-depth information concerning price, facilities, product picture, and consumer reviews and ratings are demonstrated in the site content of e-retailers supporting the online purchasing process prior to the decision process. (Chaffey and Smith 2017, p.192-193) The stage of decision occurs when the customers finish to filter and select from multiple choices online. At the end of the stage, the post-purchase refers to customer reaction after trying the product and service experience, whether a re-purchase is made while online or not. Additionally, customers can post online reviews revealing the product and service quality at this phase after they experience and perceive the product quality completely.

4.2 Positive versus negative online reviews

When it comes to the information in the electronic word-of-mouth, there is the existence of negative and positive information flows. The positive information has been found in the online recommendation reviews, while the warning reviews containing negative information to prevent potential customers from repeating

earlier customer's negative experiences. The purpose of the customers' involvement in electronic word-of-mouth is to reduce the possibility of risk as low as possible prior to deciding to purchase any products and services by means of the accessibility via the Internet. It supports Wu's (2008) finding that eWOM has affected the customers' evaluation concerning products and services.

The study reported by Wu (2008) indicates C2C interaction has a vast impact on the customer's evaluation of product and service, relying on whether the interaction or messages given in the online community is positive or negative. If the positive interaction occurs as popularly as possible in the brand community, it will boost the high evaluation of potential customers towards products or services. Furthermore, Senecal& Nantel add that positive reviews conveying trustworthy content have an impact on the customer decision process. Otherwise, negative interaction from C2C communication could initiate a negative influence on customer satisfaction. As a consequence, the negative messages posted by consumers might reduce the company image as well as customer's reliability about these advertisements previously promoted by businesses.

Sen and Lerman (2007) argued the consumer buying behavior of positive against the negative information in online reviews should have been a focal issue that less researchers made a strong emphasis on discovering. According to the studies on consumer buying intention, it is obviously revealed that customers obtaining the product reviews perceive the positive information's value lower than the value provided by negative reviews. The majority of researchers claim that the negative side in the social environment is smaller than the large number of positive aspects. Therefore, the appearance of harmful elements will draw attention from a wide range of people. When it was applicable to the context of buying behavior, the negative reviews were likely to make a wider effect on the customer buying intention in comparison with positive product/service reviews (Weinberger and Dillon 1980). In regard to the customer behavior, consumers tend to evaluate the negative information to be more considerably than favorable information product/

service reviews in their consumer online buying process, notably in the stage of decision-making (Sen and Lerman 2007).

4.3 Impact of online reviews on consumer behavior

Rao & Hymavathi (2018) studied and displayed two elements influencing online customer purchasing behavior in the proliferation of e-commerce, including trust and risk. Both play a critical role in affecting the customer involvement in shopping online, which have a prospect to enhance the frequency of online purchasing activity. Customers might face five genres of risks concerning time, economical, psychological, social, or functional type (Solomon, Marshall, etc. 2013). These risks could be addressed by collecting the proper information in the trust-worthy sources of information before customers approach the buying decision stage. The product and service- related information could be attained through various webs and channels, taking E-WOM in the form of online customer reviews as a notable instance that is a highly recommended source to erode the possible risks as well as enhance their trustworthiness in product or service considered to buy.

4.3.1The increase in trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of the online consumer reviews is explained that to the extend clients faithfully trust the online reviews are inferred by consumption experience (Pan& Chiou 2011). According to the Godin's (2001) research, potential customers give more reliance in the online consumer reviews which are written by unknown consumers consuming these products and services precedingly than marketing messages implemented by businesses. Another study concludes that the reviews made by previous shoppers are reliable compared to advertisements delivering the positive image for their own company. These studies strongly emphasize the role of the trustworthiness in the online reviews towards the consumers' attitude and buying decision. This factor seems to become essential in contributing to customer buying intention, and attitudes as well. Especially the positive and negative messages, perspective and information in online reviews may affect the consumer

buying behavioral response and it is likely to result in buying decision or rejection in purchase.

4.3.2 Risk reduction

Consumers have seemed not to be bound for the precision of their choices in buying decision as a result of lack of customers' cognition and anticipation (Qi, Lin etc. 2017). It causes consumers to become afraid of unpleasant consequences due to the negative sides from selected products or services they are likely to desire to own. This state is defined as a perceived risk by Cunningham (1967), which might occur if a product or a service is evaluated as costly and complicated to thoroughly understand before deciding to the final buying decision (Solomo etc. 2013). Based on the Bickart and Schindler's (2001) study, among varied sources of information, online reviews are considered to have become a crucial element that significantly influences on customer buying decision, and they therefore stimulate the way consumers perceive threats. Moreover, Lee and Cheung (2008) argue that when customers read the positive and negative reviews simultaneously, they will pay more attention to negative reviews compared to positive ones as it improves customers' perceived risk (Richard, Laroche & Nepomuceno 2013). It is stated that customers attaining the negative reviews will postpone purchasing products or services until they recognize the persuasive positive reviews which encourages them to make a purchase. The utilization of online consumer reviews erodes the level of damage stemmed from uncertainty in the consumers' buying behaviour. Consumers are becoming aware of risks existing in products and services alerted by previous consumers by inferring product-generated information, opinions as well as experiences. Consequently, it might deliver information as properly as possible aimed at reducing the threats concerning time, economical, psychological, social, or functional factors to consumers.

5 TRAVEL AND TOURISM ACCOMMODATION

Hospitality seemed to have become one of the largest industries throughout the world (Stringam & Partlow 2015), as traveling is categorized as a favorite activity in individual leisure time. Thus, the travel and tourism accommodations have significantly grown. According to the research conducted by Airbnb, there were the increasing numbers of travelers, which reached 68% in growth from 2016 to 2017.(Airbnb 2018) Additionally, the rapid growth of technology advancement has led to the appearance of active booking websites for lodging and experience to satisfy customer demand. Stringam and Partlow (2015) state that advanced technology assists businesses in approaching the proper target customer and marketplace efficiently and effectively. Thereby, the majority of travelers have become familiar with the booking sites to support their accommodation during the upcoming trips in place of inquiring travel agencies to arrange accommodation for fee. In the booking sites, customers are allowed to choose an appropriate room with decent price and complete the booking with only one click. There is a wide range of home-sharing websites in the hotel booking sites such as Airbnb, Booking.com, Agoda, and TripAdvisor, which is one of these widely prevalent accommodations booking sites. In particular, the study will mainly concentrate on investigating Airbnb business in Finland to analyze insight aspects concerning online reviews and customer behavior in this marketplace. Based on the analysis regarding accommodation service on Airbnb, the study will take a closer look at the online community, C2C interaction, and electronic word-of-mouth using online reviews.

5.1 Airbnb- online home-sharing service in Finland

Airbnb was established in the USA in 2008. (Airbnb 2019) It is one of the most well-known e-commerce platforms all over the world that allows customers to book their hotel accommodations for lodging. The business has officially launched two services into the marketplace, including Accommodation and Experiences. The critical operation of the online home-sharing service is implemented and supported by employing customer-to-customer programs. Instead of looking at a hotel as a traditional method, Airbnb functions as a useful platform connecting between a

local person who offers short-term accommodation for a guest that seeks to rent a living space. This business concept is perceived as an efficient solution to take advantage of vacant and spare rooms for earning extra money. Airbnb community features an online community on the accommodation service, which is entirely free of charge for users. Concerning the online community, Airbnb is responsible for listing lodge and processing payments playing a role as an intermediary. Besides, the host and guest communicate and accept the deals by assist of the Airbnb platform to complete the sale.

This study focuses solely on the accommodation service across the globe provided by Airbnb, notably the customer decision process, online reviews on this service on Airbnb, a modern and effective web service. In Finland, millennials will be the group of target customers for this business concept since the group of young travelers is regarded as active to experience the local as well as this group constituted 23% in the number of travelers across the world. (UNWTO 2015) A global report conducted by UNWTO reveals the popular travel tendency of millennials is directly contracting the local businesses, which assists them in taking a closer approach with local culture and residents. Taking Airbnb as a specific study case, it is one of the most well-known business satisfying the customer needs of accommodating travelers by the local hosts. Recent statistics conducted by Airbnb illustrates their vast marketplace with 7 million accommodations located in 100,000 big cities, in the countryside and in 191 countries across the globe. (Airbnb 2019) Regarding the Finland market, sharing economy service has come widely well-known in recent years, particular in Rovaniemi. Yle News (2017) reported that Finland saw an exponential rise to 150 percent in this sector; Airbnb has a massive contribution to the development in the home-sharing service. 2016 experienced the dramatic growth from 5,000 stays in 2015 up to 12,000 homes on Airbnb after a year. (Yle news 2017) In conclusion, Finland is perceived as a highly potential market for sharing economy industry, especially online home-sharing service on Airbnb.

5.1.1 Online customer reviews on Airbnb

Both the guests and the hosts leave reviews in the Airbnb community within 14 days after checkout, and these reviews are visible for any users in the community to read. The text reviews enable guests to write down up to 1000 words (Figure 3). The start ratings are given for reviewing in addition to text reviews, and former guests can evaluate based on the whole experience, cleanliness, accuracy, value, communication, check-in process, location, and amenities (Figure 4). The satisfied customers can rate the reviews as four and five stars, once one to three stars will be given by the dissatisfied travelers. Both types of reviews are available in the listing page, which makes it easy and convenient to check and to read the reviews for potential customers prior to deciding to book accommodation on Airbnb. These two different categorizes of review are separated in the Airbnb community as shown:

Reviews

★4.82 | 365 reviews

Cleanliness	4.9	Accuracy	4.9
Communication	4.9	Location	4.9
Check-in	4.9	Value	4.7

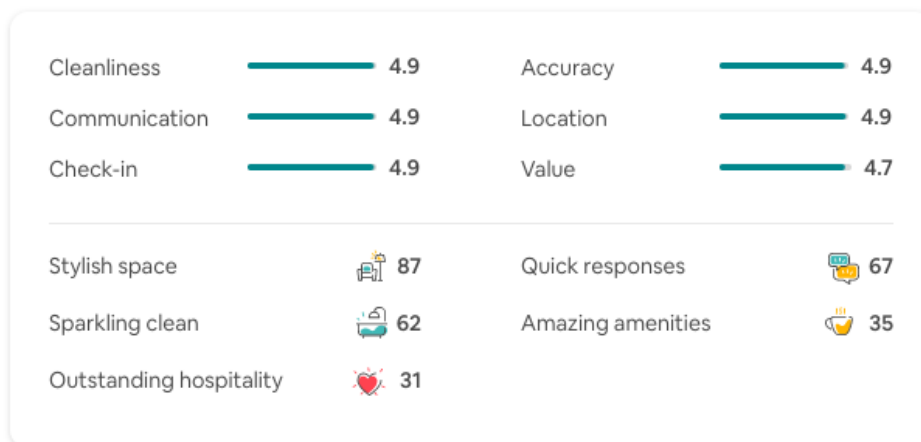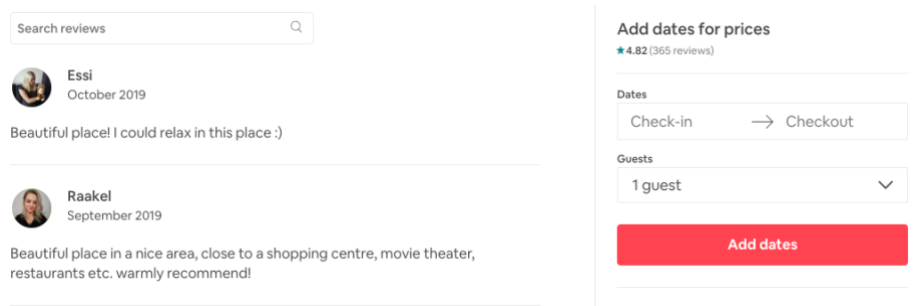| Stylish space	87	Quick responses	67
Sparkling clean	62	Amazing amenities	35
Outstanding hospitality	31		

Figure 3: Text reviews on Airbnb

Figure 4: Review ratings on Airbnb

5.1.2 Transparency of online reviews on Airbnb

Airbnb takes the transparent accountability into consideration seriously and prevents bias in each review; thus, Airbnb prohibits from erasing host and travelers' reviews except for violating their content policy. Airbnb will consider and assess the review contents in case travelers or hosts delete any reviews available on the online page. Also, the former guests can correct their reviews until the hosts respond to these reviews. The policies, as well as regulations, are implemented the same way in Finland. Moreover, to promote transparency and trustworthiness in the rating system, the policies established concerning review contents have seemed to be strictly disciplined. The reviewers infringing the procedures will be deprived of their rights to access the Airbnb account immediately in case they violate these policies in regard to reviews on the Airbnb community. Firstly, the reviews must be written by the exact earlier guest who had a particular experience at the accommodation. Secondly, Airbnb prohibits the actions in terms of leaving accomplishment reviews for obtaining extra money, or payment from the hosts. Airbnb has established the rules relating to reviews to enhance transparency and build trust among potential and loyal customers in the online community.

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6 METHODOLOGY

6.1 Choices of Methodology

Two main types of methods are used in the study, the quantitative and the qualitative approaches. Each method has its own characteristics appropriate for different purposes in the research. Firstly, the qualitative approach is used to satisfy the inquiries relating to examine the issue's traits, determine what it is as well as to give an explanation of meanings. In other words, Patton (2001) argues the qualitative research enables researchers to investigate in-depth issues in the determined and certain case in which researchers are not trying to handle the situation of their intention. Therefore, it produces the variety of knowledge and explodes detailed information compared to the general consequences from quantitative research conducts. Secondly, the method of quantitative method assists in taking the measurements of quantities, exposing the relations, and revealing the frequency of the mentioned phenomenon. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998), in the quantitative method, graphs and charts are commonly used to describe the findings as well as demonstrate the scenario by figure, variables, and populations. Winter (2000) claims that the researchers applying the quantitative method split the studied issue into pieces of measurable or popular groups that could be flexible to apply for any case or scenario. Notably, by virtue of standardized measures, numerous opinions could be categorized into the restricted figure of responses. In this study, author's objective is to investigate the opinions given in the numerous responses regarding online consumer reviews, and the consumer's frequency in employing the online reviews in their lives as well as the connections between negative and positive online reviews with customer behaviors, correlations between trustworthiness and risk reduction of online reviews and customer behaviors as well. The study attempts to explain what degree consumers' attitudes and buying intentions are affected by the utilization of online consumer reviews in the buying process by the means of the number of respondents' perspectives. Therefore, the quantitative method is selected as the most appropriate method of study to support the conduct of the research.

6.2 Research Strategy

To implement the study strategy, Yin (2009) stated that researchers could take advantage of a survey, case company, experiment, history, and archival analysis. Thus, it was determined to survey to elicit information from respondents' opinions for producing the final results based on analyzing data in the empirical study. After defining the degree on which online reviews influence customers' buying behavior in general, the aim is to study how online reviews in a specific industry affect customers' attitudes and behaviors. The survey includes focal questions in the study case of Airbnb. This case is applied in this research to give specific and transparent information in terms of the utilization of online consumer reviews in the travel and accommodation industry to the readers.

The survey is conducted by E-lomake, in the form of a questionnaire (Appendix 1). The questions are established based on the literature results in accordance with previous research inquiries. The questionnaire intends to elicit information regarding behavior customers towards the use of online reviews. It has three main parts dividing into basic information on respondents, the customers' behavioral responses regarding the use of online reviews in the online buying process and the utilization of online reviews in the case company of Airbnb. The first section of the survey concentrated on investigating the demography, age, gender, and nationality. In terms of part two, the theoretical findings and given previous focal research questions functioned as a base for developing the questionnaire. The structure in the survey is built based on multiple choices, on frequency, Likert scale, and closed questions. The survey elicited information and answers from 264 participants; the questionnaire was transferred to participants via email and social media platforms.

6.3 Collection of primary and secondary data

Data collection is consisting two essential sources of data that the majority of researchers take use of collecting information during the conduct of their studies or projects, namely, primary and secondary data sources. Primary data is explained as the data are directedly extracted from original sources under a wide range of

techniques including surveys, interviews, observation, and experiments. On the contrary, a secondary data source is defined as the data previously collected and gathered by former researchers. This technique is considered as less time-consuming and costly in comparison to the primary data collection (Salkind 2010).

In this research, it was decided to apply both the primary and the secondary data collection. In terms of the primary data, the information was obtained from questionnaire survey. The survey structure concluded 19 focal inquiries in diverse types of questions consisting of multiple choices, on frequency, closed questions, and Likert scale. In addition, the second data collection utilized literature concerning the concentrated topic to support the main ideas. The information was extracted by virtue of literature, for examples, books, articles. journals, etc. Moreover, an Airbnb website and reliable news were consulted and taken as trusted references in the section of the Airbnb case. These websites were chosen to consult the business information as Airbnb officially publishes a wide range of trustworthy and latest data as well as figures, which can support the accomplishment of the research.

6.4 Theoretical framework

The theoretical section starts with the in-depth introductions concerning three primary sub-sections and the company case, Airbnb. First and foremost, the essential role of unplanned communication marketing is emphasized, especially electronic word-of-mouth in businesses and customers behaviors. After the introduction of marketing communications by means of E-WOM, it comes to the interaction of customers in the review environment once online. Furthermore, the online reviews being well-known as one of the forms of E-WOM are mentioned in the initial theoretical study. In the second section, the research continues to demonstrate the customer behaviors and responses in e-commerce through each main stage of the customer buying process. Thirdly, the focal issue is on the findings in terms of the impact of negative and positive online reviews on customer behavior in the buying process. Specifically, two main elements concluding uncertainty and trustworthiness are the focal characteristics required to be analyzed in the empirical

section. Lastly, the specific case introduces the company and the online reviews on Airbnb.

The empirical study is constructed based on the structure of the theoretical study to ensure the logical factors in the research. The first sub-chapter begins with the general information about the respondents as well as the number of participants joining the questionnaire survey. The following section analyzes in which stages of the purchase process the online reviews affect customers. In the third section, the impact of online reviews on behavioral responses is studied through two characteristics of uncertainty and trustworthiness as well as the role of negative and positive messages of online reviews towards the customer behaviors. Notably, the finding illustrates the correlation between the gender with the respondent's use of online reviews. In the final section, it reveals the analysis of the utilization of online reviews on Airbnb and identifies the importance of online reviews on Airbnb's customers.

7 EMPIRICAL STUDY

7.1 Data collection

The study is an online survey in the form of a questionnaire aimed at investigating customer behavior regarding online reviews on social media. The survey is classified into three primary parts consisting general information relating respondents, consumer behaviour in the use of online reviews in the buying process and the third part solely emphasizes analysing the impact of the online reviews on customer behaviour in a specific case, Airbnb, a booking site. Finally, it highlights the correlation between gender and online reviews. There were 264 answers from respondents in the survey (Figure 5).

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Respondent	264	1	4	2,16	,639
Response	264				

Figure 5: Respondents

7.1.1 Basic information regarding respondents

The 264 participants are classified by gender, age, nationality, whereby separating the customer group based on geography, and whether they are recently living in Finland or outside Finland.

Firstly, of the 264 respondents, 65.53% account for females willing to join this survey, while the sample size of male is 34.47% of the respondents participating in answering the survey. It reveals that this research appears to be more attractive to women than men. (Figure 6)
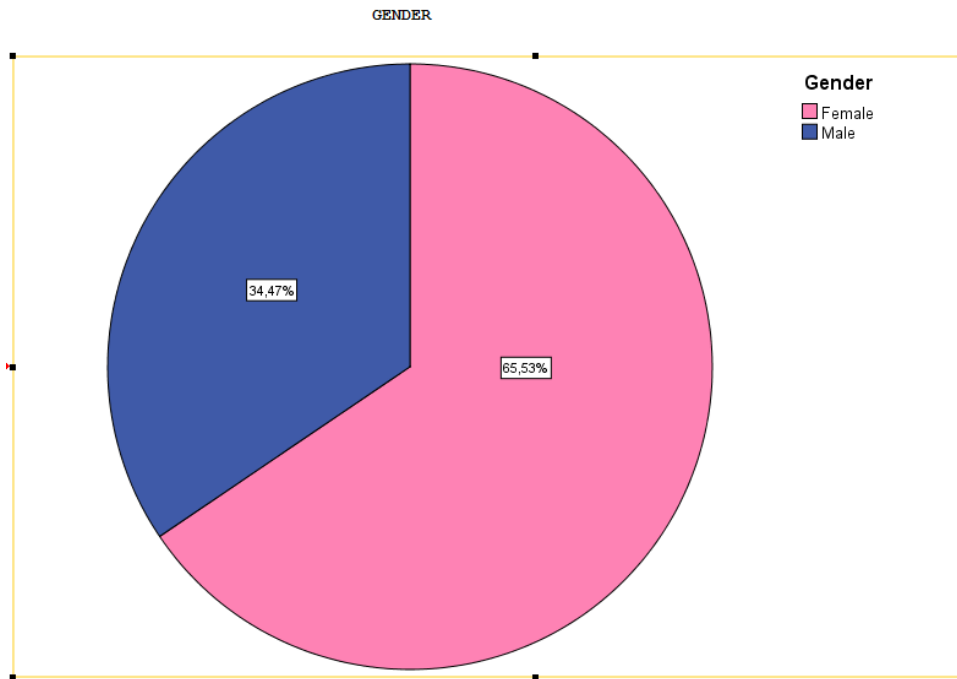
Figure 6: Respondents by gender

Secondly, the respondents aged from 20 to 26 years old are active in responding to the survey, and this group of millennials makes up the most massive figure with 68.18% of the total group of age. People aged between 27 and 34 years take up 18.18%, which is the second largest group, while there are few respondents aged over 35 years, with 3.79% willing to give the answers. Besides, participants less than 20 years old accountes for 9.85% of the whole group of participants in the survey (Figure 7). It could be stated that the millennials are engrossed in the impact of online reviews on social media.
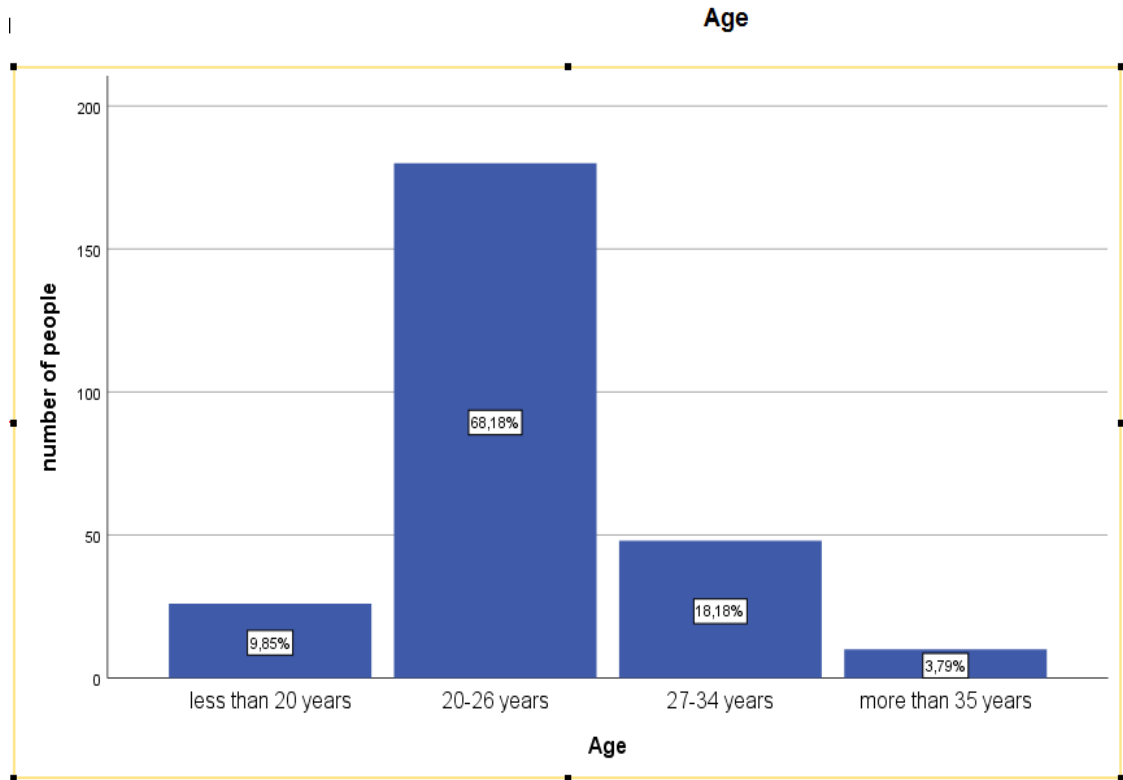
Figure 7: Respondents by age

Thirdly, as can be seen from the Figure 7, people participating in the survey, mainly living and working in Finland, and they constitute the largest proportion of respondents, 72.73%. Meanwhile, 27.27% is the participants residing in other countries (Figure 8). It supports clue that residents in Finland have become aware of the use of online reviews in modern society.
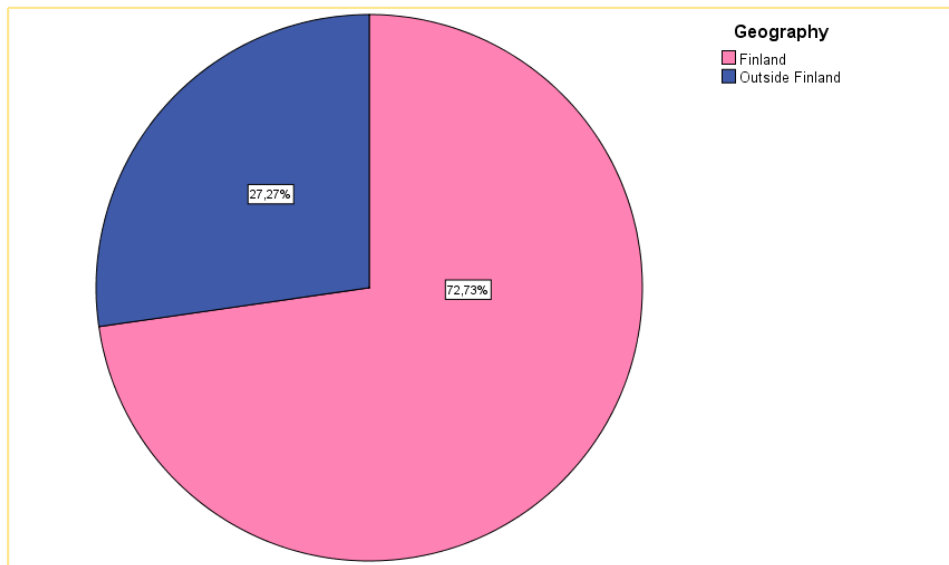
Figure 8: Respondents by geography

Finally, this research gains the attention of a variety of residents across the globe, which is proved through immersion of diverse participants from 26 countries. Nevertheless, the highest number of respondents answering the survey comes from Vietnam and Finland. 165 Vietnamese and 34 Finnish represent the biggest figure of people involved in the study (Figure 9). Korean and Chinese amount to 17 and 8 residents respectively as shown in the Figure 5.

Nationality	Number
Vietnamese	165
Finnish	34
Korean	17
Others	48

Figure 9: Respondents by nationality

7.2 Customer behaviors towards the use of online reviews

7.2.1 The use of online reviews towards customer behaviours

Figure 10 illustrates the results of the conducted survey in which the participants were asked about the most common and favourite sources of information they frequently seek. The majority of the respondents prefer to search for information through customer reviews on the Internet, with over half of participants in the given survey. In particular, 75 respondents choose sole online reviews as their most favourite source of information (Figure 11). Besides, 41.13 percent of respondents account for the number of people having preference in consulting family and friends in obtaining information regarding product and service. On the other hand, there is a minority number of responses revealing participants who utilize the traditional sources, for example, magazines and newspapers for information search (Figure 10).

All in all, online reviews are the most popular selections, and it is clear that numerous customers collect product-related information through online review, whilst traditional sources are no longer one of customers' preference in searching for information. In the future, electronic word-of-mouth is becoming commonly well-known as a result of the active customers' accessibility as their preferred choices in modern life, notably in the form of online reviews.
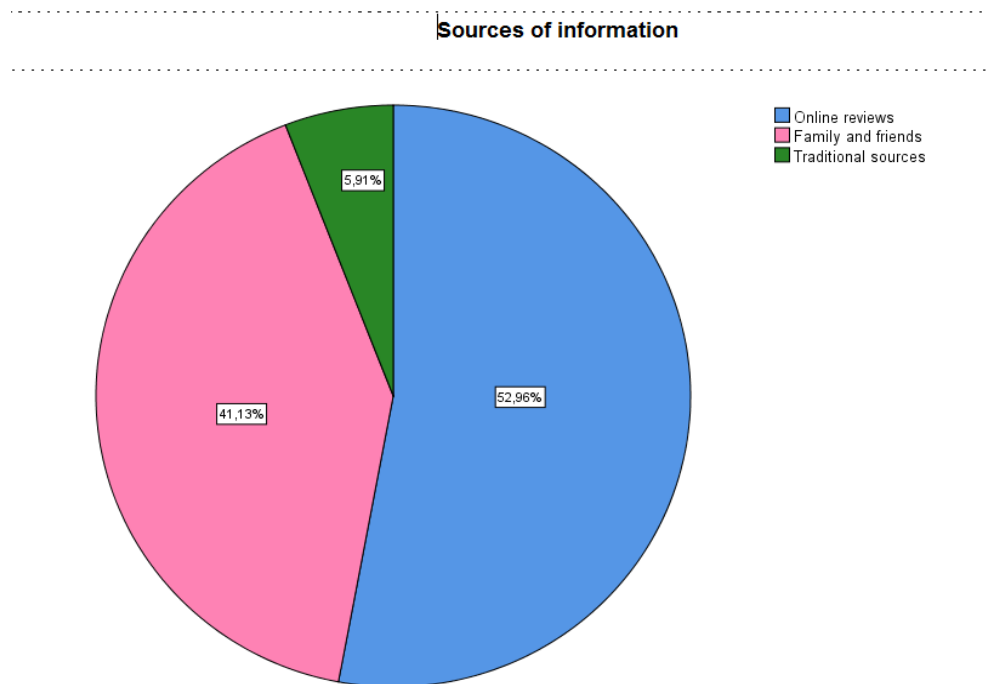
Figure 10: Different sources of information

Respondents select only online reviews

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Selected	75	100,0	100,0	100,0

Figure 11: Respondent selects only option of online reviews

In regards to searching sites shown in Figure 12, the respondents seem to check the reviews on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, etc. 173 participants frequently read the reviews on social media before deciding the following phases of the buying process. There is a similarly enormous number of people, 150 respondents, who choose Google reviews and brand community to read product or service reviews. Additionally, 101 respondents are accustomed to watching video platforms for searching for reviews or recommendations, which is one of the most popular searching sites today. Finally, Internet forums are the respondent's preference when it comes to the favoured review recommendation sites.
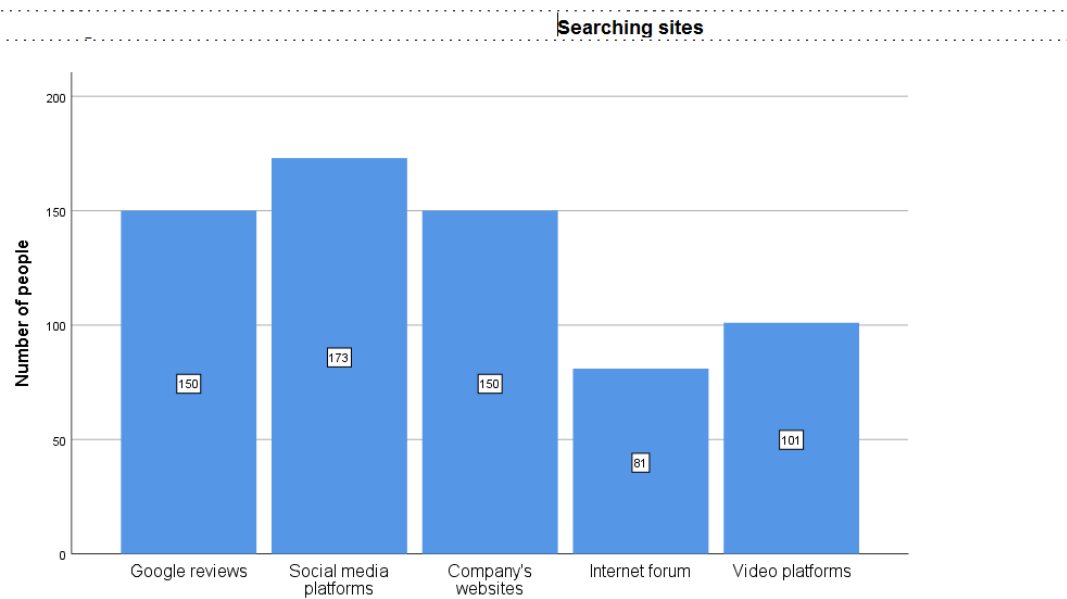
Figure 12: Searching sites

7.2.2 The effect of the online reviews to the online buying process

The pie chart in Figure 13 describes the customer's online buying process, in which the short or long stages rely on choices of different consumers. Nearly half of customers tend to read reviews before comparing alternatives available on the Internet and finally decide to buy products or services based on their wise comparisons. However, 23.11% of the respondents are experiencing thorough stages of the buying process consisting of reading reviews, making comparisons among various categorises of selections, buying, and leaving reviews. The chart reveals 16.67% account for participants going through the three steps of the purchasing process, for instance, after clients read reviews and decline or buy something, they decide to write their experience in the form of online reviews. People are only checking reviews, and reaching the step of buying or refusing products or services amount to 12.50%, with just a relatively 4 percent of variation between this process of two phases and the three preceding stages.

To sum up, when it comes to the online buying process, the majority of customers are likely to encounter four phases out of 5 (Kotler& Armstrong, 2006), namely, problem recognition, information search, the evaluation of choices and decision.

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The process inaugurates with problem recognition, and a customer continues to compare the variety of choices based on the information as well as evaluations within customer reviews once online planning whether to purchase or reject products or services.
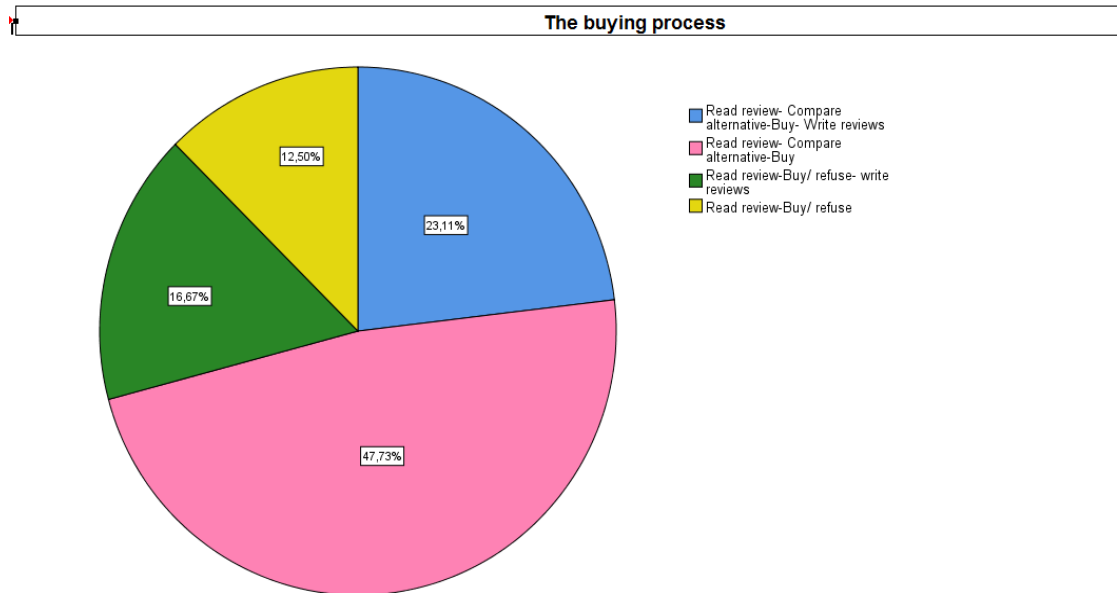

Figure 13: The online buying process

7.2.2.1 The stage of information search:

To investigate the use of online review in details, data is analysed to learn whether respondents check online reviews prior to deciding to purchase products or services. Surprisingly, 261 people, constitute in a majority of the participants who check the online reviews. On the other hand, there are few respondents, only three, not employing reviews on the Internet to seek out information concerning products and services (Figure 14).

Additionally, in terms of frequency of employing the online reviews illustrated in Figure 15, the category of 261 respondents who check online reviews, 39.77 percent regularly access customer reviews via Internet. Also, 36.36% of the participants often utilize online reviews before buying products or services. The proportion of respondents who sometimes check the reviews on the Internet account for 21.21%.

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There is a low percentage of respondents who rarely have accessibility to the internet for customer reviews. In conclusion, it could be seen that the vast proportion of participants shown in Figure 14 tables actively get access to online reviews. It, therefore, might be a shred of evidence that customers tend to frequently employ the online reviews aimed at searching for other opinions before deciding to purchase product or service.

The number of people checking online reviews

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	3	1,1	1,1	1,1
	Yes	261	98,9	98,9	100,0
	Total	264	100,0	100,0	

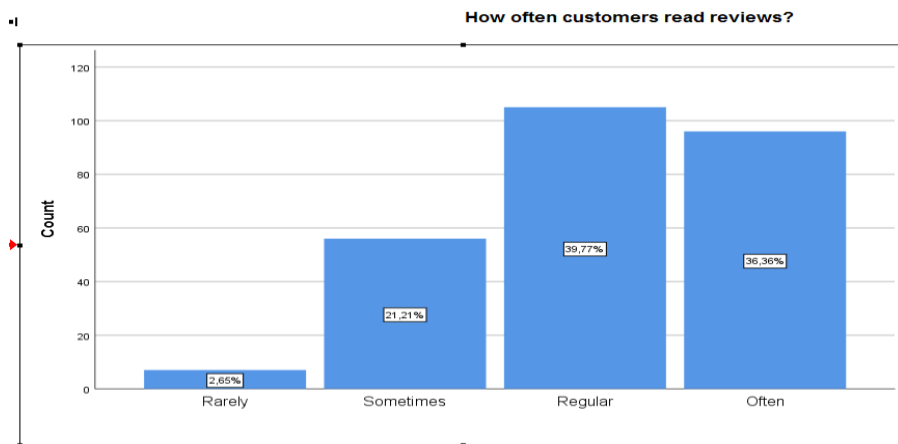Figure 14: Respondents are checking online reviews

Figure 15: The frequency of checking online reviews

7.2.2.2 The stage of post-purchase:

The bar chart in Figure 16 illustrates the number of respondents, 77.27%, willing to leave online reviews after experiencing the products or services. Meanwhile, 22.73% of participants complete their purchase without writing any reviews of their experiences or perspectives (Figure 16). 176 persons in (Figure 17) represent the participants writing positive contents. On the other hand, fewer participants, 28 respondents, vow their voice about the negative experience in the form of reviews (Figure 18). It seems that the number of people willing to leave their positive experience in the reviews is higher than that of participants sharing their negative reviews online.
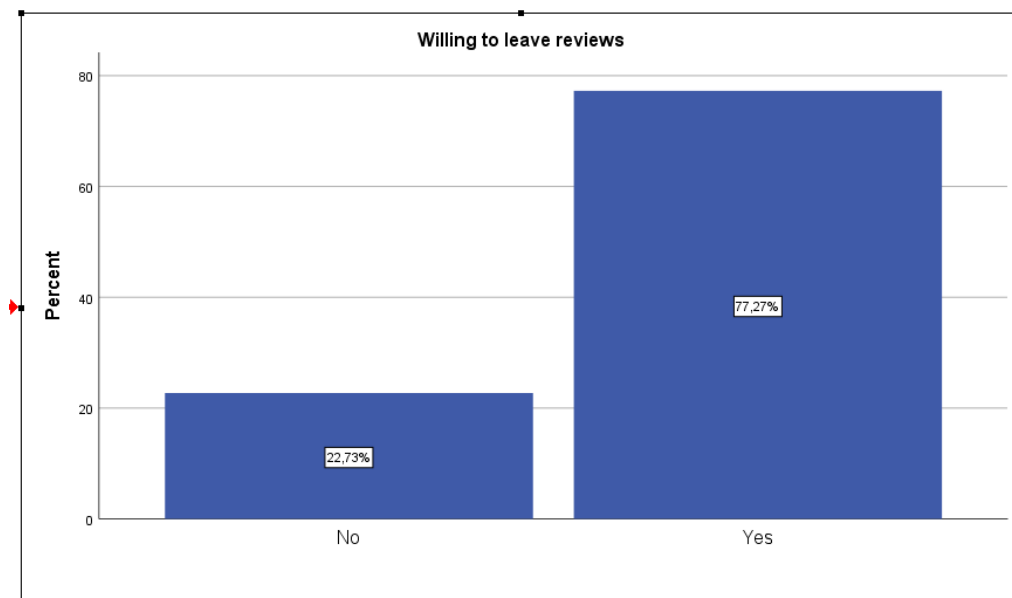

Figure 16: Respondents write the online reviews

Reviewers write the positive reviews

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Selected	176	100,0	100,0	100,0

Figure 17: Respondents write positive reviews

Reviewers write the negative reviews

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Selected	28	100,0	100,0	100,0

Figure 18: Respondents write negative reviews

7.2.3 The factors of online reviews on customer behavior

7.2.3.1 Risk reduction

The following pie chart (Figure 19) illustrates the role of the perceived risk in online customer reviews in the survey. 204 out of 264 respondents find online reviews useful as it may reduce the potential risks in a purchase. 77.27% of the participants admit that risk reduction of online reviews is one of the main reasons motivates them to purchase products and services. On the other hand, nearly a quarter of participants (22.73%) are reluctant to perceive the risk in a purchase before buying products and services by means of consulting the customer reviews on the Internet. It can be concluded that the majority of customers utilize the online reviews about product or service-related information aiming at preventing the high degree to what threats will arise while buying products on the Internet.

Perceived risk

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	60	22,7	22,7	22,7
	Yes	204	77,3	77,3	100,0
	Total	264	100,0	100,0	

Is a risk reduction a main reason to read reviews
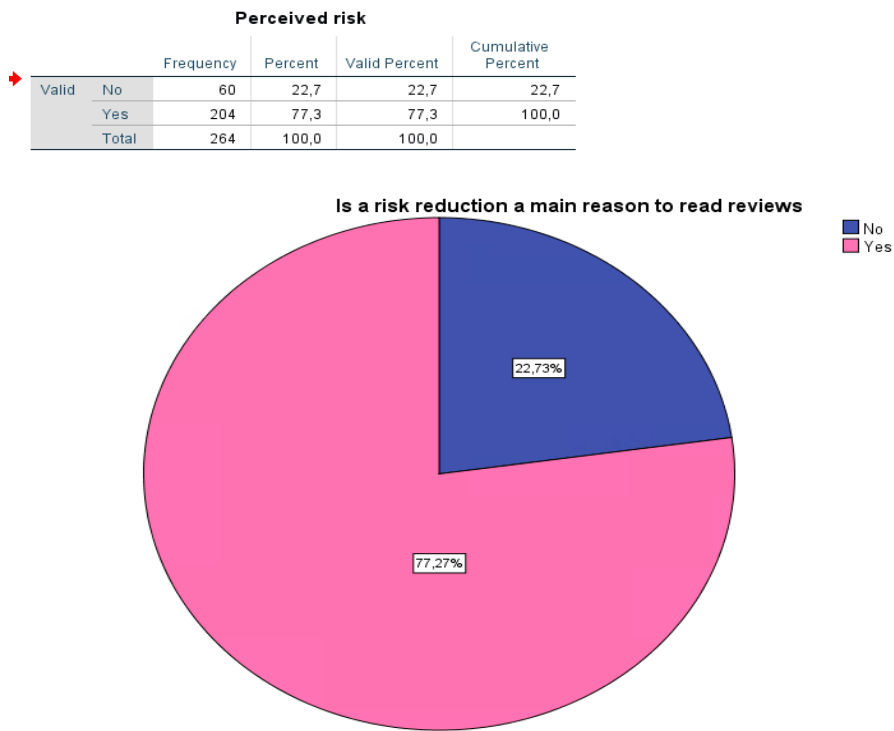
- No
- Yes

22,73%

77,27%

Figure 19: Risk reduction

It is demonstrated in Figure 20) that 157 participants reveal that the positive messages in online reviews lower the level of uncertainty. Especially, 66 people in total completely agree that clients will decide to purchase products and services with assurance when they consult the previous experiences in the form of online positive reviews. 28 people admit that the positive reviews are not extremely useful in lowering the risks before buying decision. On the other hand, fewer participants disagree with the degree to which positive reviews are one of the elements reducing the perceived risks once buying online. To sum up, the majority of respondents admit that they highly value the online reviews in reducing the potential threats existing in their buying decisions.
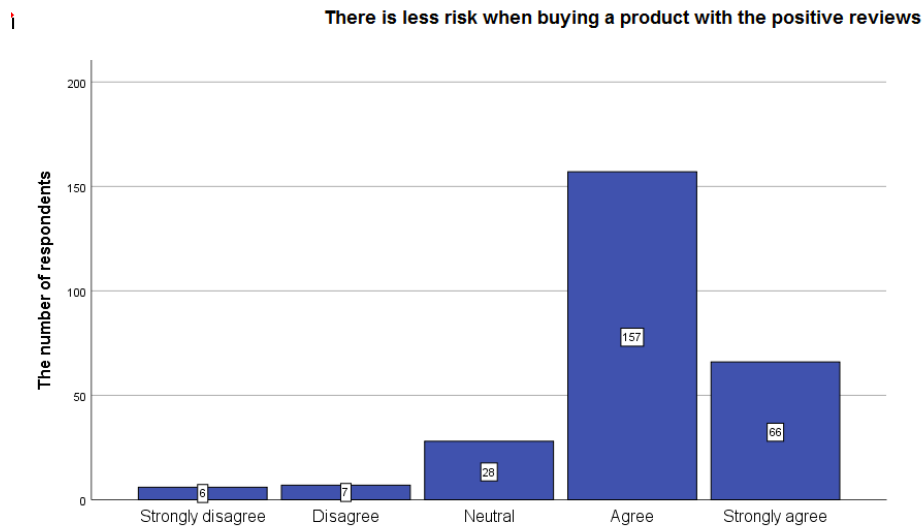
There is less risk when buying a product with the positive reviews

Figure 20: Perceived risk in the scale

7.2.3.2 Trustworthiness

When it comes to the analysis of trustworthiness in the online reviews (Figure 21), 157 out of 264 respondents give their reliance on online reviews. They strongly trust the actual experiences about products and services provided by previous clients. Meanwhile, nearly fifty percent of the participants believe that they do not obtain trustful information by means of online messages shared by other former customers. It can be concluded that the above half of the respondents seem to be trustful in the online customer reviews. Nevertheless, there is an approximately similar number of people consider that trustworthiness in online reviews is not the most critical reason to read the reviews.

Trustworthiness

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	107	40,5	40,5	40,5
	Yes	157	59,5	59,5	100,0
	Total	264	100,0	100,0	

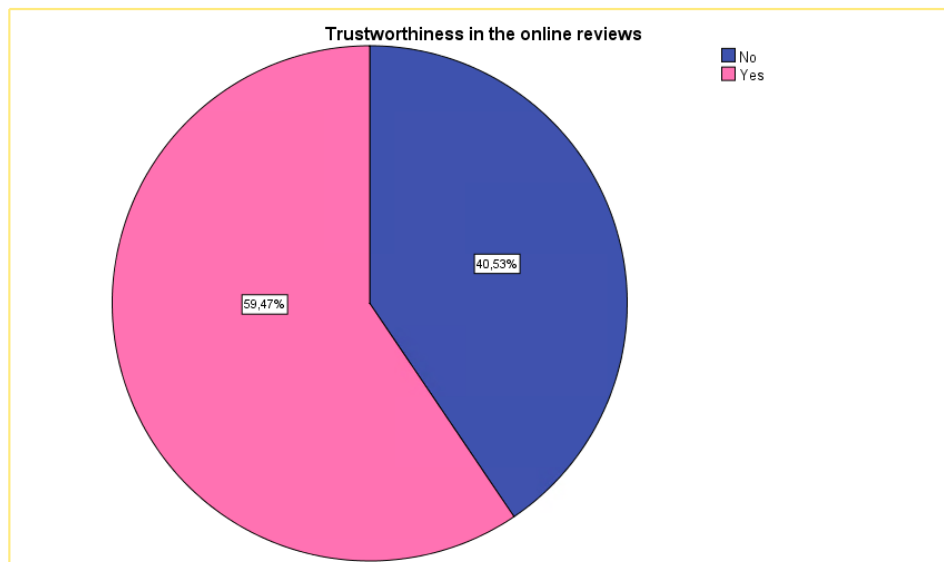**Trustworthiness in the online reviews**

- No
- Yes

40,53%
59,47%

Figure 21: Trustworthiness in the online reviews

7.2.3.3 The negative reviews against the positive reviews

In the survey, the respondents were asked the extent to what negative reviews cause the customers to refuse the purchase and the positive reviews are regared as the reason for the buyers to choose the products and services. The answers are based on the scale from one to five in accordance with strongly disagree to extremely agree. The mean of negative reviews reaches 4.06 while mean shown in the positive reviews is 3.78 (Figure 22). The findings in table 22 illustrate that there are more participants perceiving the negative reviews as an essential determinant to reject products or services than the number of respondents regarding positive messages in reviews. It has proved the evidence that the negative reviews exert a bigger impact on customers' buying decision than positive reviews do.

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Negative reviews

VAR00065

Mean	N	Std. Deviation
4,06	264	,823

Positive reviews

VAR00066

Mean	N	Std. Deviation
3,78	264	,934

Figure 22: Negative against positive messages

7.2.4 The correlation between gender and online reviews

In Figure 23, the Sig. (2-tailed) is 0.017, which illustrates that there is a statistical distinction between gender and uncertainty avoidance. The mean of women is 4.11 while 3.86 represents the mean for men. To sum up, when it comes to the study of risk reduction under respondents' perspectives, female participants tend to express their fear of risks more in each buying decision than the male respondents do.

T-Test

Group Statistics

	VAR00044	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
VAR00062	Male	91	3,86	,797	,084
	Female	173	4,11	,817	,062

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
VAR00062	Equal variances assumed	,151	,698	-2,408	262	,017	-,253	,105	-,459	-,046
	Equal variances not assumed			-2,427	187,194	,016	-,253	,104	-,458	-,047

Figure 23: The correlation between gender and risk avoidance

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Additionally, there exists a statistical difference between the gender and the opinions about the impact of online reviews on the buying decision. The Asymptotic significance (2-sided), at 0.01, illustrates that the majority of female respondents, 156 out of 173 women, agree that the online reviews exert an influence on their buying decision. 17 females confess that the online reviews do not make a dramatic impact on their buying decision while one third male participants, which does not believe in and refuses the influence of online reviews on customers (Figure 24).

VAR00048 * VAR00044 Crosstabulation

Count

		VAR00044		Total
		Male	Female	
VAR00048	No	23	17	40
	Yes	68	156	224
Total		91	173	264

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11,070[a]	1	,001		
Continuity Correction[b]	9,901	1	,002		
Likelihood Ratio	10,528	1	,001		
Fisher's Exact Test				,002	,001
Linear-by-Linear Association	11,028	1	,001		
N of Valid Cases	264				

a. 0 cells (0,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 13,79.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Figure 24: The correlation between gender and online reviews

7.2.5 The effect of online reviews on consumer behaviour on Airbnb- an accommodation booking site.

In the survey, 198 out of 264 participants admit that they have experienced accommodation booking on Airbnb. The proportion of respondents reading the reviews on Airbnb community constitutes above 80 percent (Figure 25), which can be regarded as a high number of users. 88 percent of the participants are willing to share their experiences and perspectives about services on Airbnb community after using the services on Airbnb. Moreover, the users on Airbnb prefer online reviews over other sources of information including traditional source, family and friends and Google sites. Notably, 9 percent of the respondents in the survey seek information from magazines or newspapers while the respondents reading the online reviews on Airbnb account for 76% in total. Therefore, this proves that traditional sources are less popular with customers than electronic word-of-mouth. The main reason why the respondents choose to check online reviews on Airbnb before coming to a decision is risk avoidance. People would like to reduce the risks which might arise in lodging during their vacation. In addition to uncertainty avoidance, participants admit they raise a reliance on online reviews on Airbnb community. Over half of the respondents state the online reviews can be trusted in their view.
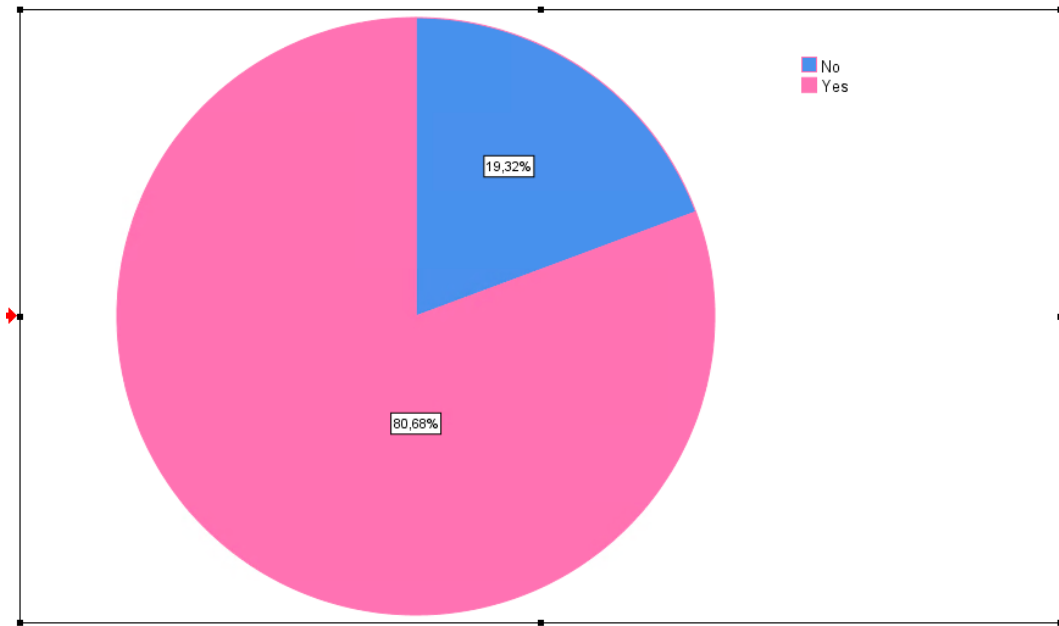
Figure 25: Respondents are willing to read reviews on Airbnb

8 CONCLUSIONS

8.1 Main findings

All in all, consumers have recently become accustomed to utilizing the online reviews for searching product-related information over any traditional sources of information before deciding to purchase products and services. The online buying process is comprising two main stages out of four that customers seem to immerse themselves, namely, the information search and the post-purchase. In the stage of information search, consumers tend to regularly check the reviews on the Internet prior to the step of alternative evaluation. To keep the stage consistent in the whole process, former customers, who finish their experience raising their voice in the form of online reviews, are willing to leave the actual perspectives as well as experiences about products and services. Furthermore, the precise reasons why consumers take advantage of online reviews consists of risk reduction and the trustworthiness. Firstly, threats always exist in every purchase choice, and buyers admit that online consumer reviews assist potential consumers in avoiding severe damages. In particular, the negative reviews have a more enormous impact on customers than the positive messages in online reviews and consumers rely more on the negative reviews compared to positive comments. Secondly, online reviews are much more trusted than other marketing materials offered by businesses or different sources of information on the Internet. In terms of correlation between gender and the utilization of online reviews, the results from the survey illustrate the female consumers are likely to read the online reviews before coming to the stage of decision as they would like to limit the extent to which the damages could arise in their selection. Airbnb is a specific case concerning consumers who are willing to utilize the online reviews and write the reviews aimed at supporting the future customer to reach a wise decision in selecting accommodation on holidays. The majority of customers confess that newspapers and magazines or other traditional sources of information are no longer the priority when they are searching for accommodation services. Instead, they collect valuable pieces of advice as well as consult the opinions from previous guests on the Airbnb community. It can be

stated that the online reviews make an enormous contribution to customer decisions and directly exert a drastic influence on the customer buying process. Online reviews are perceived as having become familiar with consumers before they determine to purchase any items today.

8.2 Limitations and recommendation for further research

Although the study concerning the impact of online reviews on customer behaviour in the buying process is accomplished, it contains several limitations. First and foremost, Vietnamese and Finnish contribute the majority of respondents in the survey; therefore, it produces the results revealing similar perspectives due to the limited geographics and nationality. Therefore, the results in this thesis might not demonstrate the findings regarding the influence of online reviews on the global context. Furthermore, one of the study's key inquiries was to detect which factors of online reviews exert an impact on customer behaviour. Since there is a variety of elements of online reviews that could affect consumer's attitudes and responses, it is not possible to include all of the factors. Instead, the scope of this thesis centralizes on two focal factors, namely, the trustworthiness and the uncertainty reduction. Thirdly, the online buying process is demonstrated in various ways and the number of stages in the online purchasing process by a wide range of group of consumers, it is desperate to explain each group of customers in different steps in the buying process with distinct behaviours. In lieu of analysing all of the groups of customers based on the different number of phases, it paid attention to the typical process that the majority of people tend to carry out, which resulted on conducting an in-depth analysis.

In terms of recommendation for further research, the electronic word-of-mouth in the form of online reviews consists of different aspects to be analysed extensively. Future research can identify other elements of the online reviews affecting customers' behavioural responses, for instance, usefulness, low and high involvement, ease of use, etc. Besides, the study solely concentrated on the positive and negative side of the online reviews, the topic could be developed to some extent raising the problems relating to other characteristics of online reviews such as

valence or volume. Further study could emphasize the impact of online reviews on not only Airbnb, which is a representation of the accommodation industry, but also the tourism industry. Several topics of thesis that are suggested to be developed further as follows:

1. The influence of online reviews on low and high involvement products on consumers' buying intentions.
2. The key factors of online reviews affect customers' buying decisions.
3. The impact of online consumer reviews on the tourism industry.

9 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Joppe (2000) interprets reliability as the degree to which the findings have been appropriate and repeated several times in the majority of researches and demonstrate a high level of accuracy. Besides, the study is considered to be reliable if it takes consistency into account. Otherwise, validity is highly acknowledged when the outcomes truly satisfy the previously mentioned study's objective and ensures how trustworthy the study findings are (Joppe 2000). In other words, validity refers to the level of exact measurement compared to the actual situations and scenarios in the globe (Parveen & Showkat 2007).

There are three severe threats to reliability that researchers are commonly facing consisting of observer error, instrumentation, and participant changes. The initial danger occurs when the researchers make multiple mistakes in the measurement process or the failure in the interpretation of the various articles by different researchers. Instrumentation is the other risk to reliability, which is explained as unstable utilization of measurement variables, for example, age, geography, gender, etc. The participant bias illustrates the dishonesty about their answers due to several unexpected reasons. Meanwhile, it is comprising of four perceived threats to validity, namely, implementation, maturation, mortality, and history. The first risk is an implementation, which is defined as individual bias mentioning preferred or distinct method, resulting in different conclusions. Secondly, maturation refers to the results that will be affected by the variation in the subjects or variables such as nationality, geography, or age. Thirdly, mortality is one of the potential risks that directly affect the study's results; this threat is explained as illness or uncompleted answers in the survey. The last risk is concerned about history, which exists when the appearance of an event and the conduct of research coincide.

When it comes to validity and reliability in this thesis, the majority of perceived threats are highly considered to prevent the research from encountering these risks. As a result, it remains reliable and valid in a thorough study. In regard to the quantitative method, a series of questions was designed based on the logical

structure and unadvanced written in the English language to avoid the vague and misunderstanding by the respondents. All answers given by anonymous participants were processed to ensure the respondents provided accurate answers. The purpose was to eliminate the possibility of participants having individual secrets not revealing their actual thoughts of issues raised in the questionnaire. Moreover, the survey was unlimited in time; it enabled the respondents to spend plenty of time choosing the answers as accurately as possible. The questions were designed based on the customers' opinions and the prospect of preferred words leading to certain answers was avoided. The series of questions are published in Appendix 1. Finally, the consistent flow and logical structure in the thesis was followed to avoid the threat of relating to maturation as previously mentioned.

8 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Online survey questions:

I. Basic information of the respondent

*1. I am a   --Select--

*2. My age is   --Select--

*3.What is your nationality?

*4. Have you currently lived in Finland?   --Select--

II. Consumer buying behavior towards the use of online reviews in the buying process

1. What sources of information do you mostly use before buying product/ service? (select one or two options)

☐ Online reviews
☐ Family and friends
☐ Traditional sources (magazines, newspapers,..)

2. Have you ever checked online reviews before buying a high involvement product or service (hotel, restaurant, car…)?   Yes

3. Choose one of them:

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Regular	Often
*How often do you read online reviews before deciding to buy a product/service (hotel, restaurant, car…)?	○	○	○	○	○

4. The main reasons I read the consumers' online reviews are: (at least 1 option)

☐ Risk reduction (price, quality,..)
☐ Time reduction in search
☐ Easy and quick to get trustful information
☐ Other

5. Which sites do you search for reviews? (at least 1 option)

☐ Google reviews
☐ Social media platform (Facebook, Instagram etc)
☐ Reviews on company's website (Airbnb, booking.com)
☐ Internet forum
☐ Video platforms (YouTube)

6. Choose from the scale:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
* 1. I feel that there is less risk when buying a product with positive reviews	○	○	○	○	○
* 2. I try a product/service even though it is evaluated by bad reviews	○	○	○	○	○
* 3. I buy a product/service when it mostly has a lot of good reviews	○	○	○	○	○
* 4. Is online reviews important to your buying decision?	○	○	○	○	○
* 5. Negative review is the reason for you to not buy the product/ service	○	○	○	○	○
* 6. Positive review is the reason for you to buy the product/service	○	○	○	○	○

* 7. Which is the most frequent process that you use online reviews?   --Select--

* 8. Have you ever written an online review?   --Select--

Please notice: If you have not ever written any reviews, you can skip the question number 9 and continue to answer a few following questions.

9. If you have written a review, was the experience mostly positive or negative?   I mostly write positive reviews

III. Consumer behavior on Airbnb-a booking site

* 1. Have you ever booked or intended to book accommodation through hotel booking sites on Airbnb?   --Select--

2. Have you read the reviews from earlier guests on Airbnb community?   Yes

3. What kind of sources do you mostly use to search for information regarding accommodation before traveling? (at least 1 option)

☐ Family and friends
☐ Reviews on hotel booking sites on Airbnb
☐ Google reviews
☐ Traditional sources (newspapers, magazines,..)
☐ Other

4. Choose from the scale

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1. I feel less risk when I check the customer reviews on Airbnb prior to booking	○	○	○	○	○
2. Reviews given on Airbnb page are trustful source	○	○	○	○	○
3. Positive reviews on Airbnb page affect my booking decision	○	○	○	○	○
4. Negative reviews on Airbnb are the reason for me not to book accommodations	○	○	○	○	○

5. The main reasons I read online guest reviews on Airbnb community are: (at least 1 option)

☐ Trustworthy
☐ Convenience (read the reviews and book accommodation at the same page)
☐ I am interested in joining in the community with other members
☐ Other

6. Are you willing to leave a review on Airbnb after your stays?   Yes

*Do you have any comments, questions or suggestions regarding this survey, feel free to send me message!

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