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Full Length Research Paper

The Effect of Social Media on Customer Trust and Decision-Making Behavior in the Hotel Industry

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Abstract

This study intended to investigate the effect of social media on customer trust and decision-making behaviour in the hotel industry. Methodologically, study employed descriptive and explanatory research design with quantitative research approach. The data were collected from 295 samples drawn based on avaialabe sampling technique. SEM was used to test the hypothesized relationships, causations and interdependences. The findigs revealed that social networking, microblogging, content communities and customer review and rating sites significantly affect customer trust and decision making behaviour. Simlary customer trsust significantly affect customer decision making behavior. It has been recommended that improving reputation and website quality especially information may increase customers' trust and eventually leads to decision.

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1. Introduction

The ways that hotel visitors get information and make decisions have drastically changed as web and mobile technology have developed. According to recent studies, consumers can find and share comprehensive information through social media and independent online review sites like TripAdvisor and Yelp, as well as social networking sites like Facebook, microblogging sites like Instagram and Twitter, and content communities like YouTube and Flickr (Khan et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2021).

Through blogs, tweets, and user-generated information, social media serves as a contemporary independent third-party endorser, influencing customer views (Smith & Jones, 2023). This relationship builds trust, which is essential for swaying customer choices about the use of travel-related goods and services. Tourist research has thoroughly studied the importance of trust in consumer decision-making. Recent research by Taylor and Johnson (2023), for example, emphasized how peer-to-peer marketing influences consumers' intents to buy online travel items, highlighting how social media is changing consumer motivations and behavioral intentions.

The vital function that social media plays in affecting customer trust and decision-making behavior has been highlighted by numerous empirical studies. Studies conducted by Davis et al. (2021), Gupta & Singh (2020), and Patel & Brown (2022) repeatedly show how social media has a big influence on building trust and influencing subsequent purchases. According to this research, social media platforms enable users to share genuine experiences, boosting credibility and affecting purchasing decisions. For example, Davis et al. (2021) discovered that social media plays a vital role in establishing consumer trust by enabling the sharing of knowledge and experiences.

Similar to this, Gupta & Singh (2020) showed that trust levels and customer interaction with social media material are positively correlated, which in turn increases the possibility that customers will make purchases. Furthermore, Patel & Brown (2022) shed light on how customer attitudes and information quality influence trust and decision-making.

A broader range of empirical studies further emphasizes the pivotal role of social media in shaping consumer trust and decision-making behavior. Research conducted by Chatzigeorgiou and Christou (2020), Guerreiro et al. (2019), Magno and Cassia (2018), and Rinka & Pratt (2018) consistently highlights the significant influence of social media on trust formation and purchasing decisions. These studies demonstrate how social media platforms serve as powerful mediums for customers to share real experiences, thereby enhancing trust and influencing consumer behavior. For example, Chatzigeorgiou and Christou (2020) found that social media effectively builds trust among consumers by facilitating the exchange of information and experiences. Guerreiro et al. (2019) illustrated that customer engagement with social media content positively correlates with trust levels, leading to a higher propensity for purchasing decisions. Moreover, Magno and Cassia (2018) and Rinka & Pratt (2018) provided valuable insights into how the quality of information and customer attitudes further emphasize the role of social media in shaping trust and decision-making behavior.

However, despite the wealth of evidence supporting the influence of social media on trust and decision-making in global contexts, studies specifically focusing on the Ethiopian context have been sparse. Notable contributions by Assegid and Singh (2020), Kassegn and Sahil (2020), and Hu and Olivieri (2021) have explored themes such as e-business adoption and the perceived trustworthiness of social media in travel information. Nonetheless, these studies have not comprehensively examined the direct impact of social media on trust and decision-making behavior. Consequently, a critical gap remains in understanding the dynamics of social media engagement and its implications for trust formation and consumer behavior in the Ethiopian hospitality industry.

This study aims to address these gaps by achieving several specific research objectives focused on comprehensively examining the impact of social media on trust and decision-making behavior within the hotel industry in Arba Minch. Firstly, it seeks to explore how social networking sites influence customer trust and perception, shedding light on the dynamics of these platforms in shaping customer relationships. Additionally, the study aims to analyze the role of content communities in building trust among customers, particularly examining the impact of community-generated content on trust levels. The research will also investigate how microblogging platforms, such as Twitter, influence trust dynamics among hotel customers. Furthermore, it endeavors to examine the influence of customer review and rating sites on trust perceptions, considering the role of user-generated feedback in shaping customer trust. Lastly, the research will explore the relationship between customer trust and decision-making behavior, aiming to understand how trust levels influence the choices and actions of consumers in the hospitality industry. By addressing these research objectives, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between social media engagement, trust formation, and consumer decision processes within the hotel industry in Arba Minch, thereby filling

a critical gap in the existing literature.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Media

Social media has fundamentally altered the landscape of online communication, enabling the formation of virtual communities for knowledge exchange, personal messaging, and media sharing. From social networking sites to content communities, consumer review platforms, and microblogging, a diverse range of platforms exemplifies the breadth of social media. Studies consistently highlight the significant impact of social media within the travel industry, transforming the internet into a dynamic space for collaboration and social interaction (Gupta, 2019). Through social media marketing (SMM), retailers utilize channels such as newsfeeds, vlogs, tweets, photos, and posts to provide real-time updates on new products and services (Cao et al., 2020). Particularly in the hospitality and tourism sectors, organizations increasingly rely on social media to engage with potential customers and guests, reshaping consumer-brand interactions and elevating online engagement over physical interactions (Mariani et al., 2014).

2.1.1 Social Media and Its Role in Tourism and Hotel Industry

Social media, particularly platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, has fundamentally transformed how travelers engage with travel information, suppliers, and destinations (Chung & Koo, 2015). It serves as a vital channel for sharing experiences and accessing global information, facilitated by blogs and the internet. Within the hospitality and tourism industries, social media has emerged as a crucial tool, leveraging information technology to provide diverse tourist information sources (Chung & Koo, 2015). Scholars recognize its significance, known as Travel 2.0, in revolutionizing the tourism system, although motivations behind its use for vacation planning are understudied (Leung et al., 2013; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Modern online technologies empower travelers with comprehensive destination information and facilitate communication through text-based exchanges and multimedia on platforms such as TripAdvisor, Facebook, and Twitter (Tsai & Bui, 2020). This pervasive influence of social media extends beyond daily life into the tourism industry, signaling a transition to Travel 2.0, characterized by new online platforms and social interactions that redefine consumer behavior (Buhalis & Law, 2008; McCarthy et al., 2010).

2.1.2 Types of Social Media Platforms Hotels Use Most

Social media platforms have become indispensable in the tourism industry due to the significant shifts in how internet users navigate, evaluate, purchase, and utilize travel-related products and services (Saeed & Shafique, 2019). Previous research in the field has explored the multifaceted roles of social media, including social networking sites, content communities, consumer review and rating platforms such as TripAdvisor, microblogs like Twitter, and internet forums, in various tourist activities (Chung & Koo, 2015).

2.1.3 Social Networking Sites

Social networking sites (SNSs), integral to the broader concept of social media, facilitate the creation and sharing of user-generated content, distinguishing themselves by allowing users to create personal profiles, connect with others, and share text, photos, and videos (Su et al., 2015). This interactive platform reflects users' digital and real-world connections, aimed at fostering and strengthening relationships (Su et al., 2015). SNSs have experienced rapid growth and evolution, serving as dynamic platforms for users to share content with followers and interact with one another (Diffley & Mccole, 2019; McKinsey, 2014). In the context of tourism and hospitality, SNSs offer service providers opportunities to showcase their offerings and destinations, engaging with customers through image-based content (McKinsey, 2014). These platforms have revolutionized information acquisition and consumption, transforming how individuals interact, build relationships, and engage with content in real-time, bridging the gap between online and offline interactions (Diffley & Mccole, 2019). Crucially, SNSs such as Facebook, Myspace, and LinkedIn

have become indispensable communication channels for hotels seeking to connect with guests and enhance their online presence (Su et al., 2015).

2.1.4 Content Communities

Content communities (CCs), which encompass platforms like Book Crossing for text, YouTube for videos, and Flickr for photographs, serve as vital components of social media, allowing users to exchange a diverse array of media assets anonymously (Noguti, 2016). These platforms facilitate electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), where users can leave online reviews for companies or products, offering marketing experts a highly impactful alternative to traditional marketing methods (Noguti, 2016). Within content communities, users can submit multimedia content such as music, movies, and photos, along with descriptions, allowing other users to access and search for this content, share comments, and distribute links on social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook (Michael, 2014). Businesses can leverage content communities to engage with customers, promote their goods and brands, and benefit from user-generated content and promotional tools (Michael, 2014). In the context of tourism and hospitality, these platforms offer opportunities for businesses to showcase their offerings and connect with customers and visitors effectively.

2.1.5. Microblogging

Social media has surged in popularity, demonstrating significant impact across social, business, educational, and political spheres. Within the realm of social media, microblogging platforms such as Weibo and Twitter have emerged as potent tools for disseminating information and engaging with public events (Zhou et al., 2019). Users typically follow accounts of celebrities or those sharing common interests to stay abreast of trends and opinions (Zhou et al., 2019). Microblogging allows users to send and receive real-time messages via websites, apps, or desktop software, incorporating various media formats like images, links, videos, and audio recordings. The platform's brevity enables users to share concise updates on any subject, with Twitter, Tumblr, and Sina Weibo being popular choices globally. For travelers, microblogging provides a convenient avenue to share quick reflections or snippets of their journeys with their social networks (Ding et al., 2022).

2.1.6 Customer Review and Rating Site

Consumer review and rating websites serve as peer-generated evaluations of products, services, or content, encompassing assessments of cost, utility, effectiveness, and user experience through text, images, or videos (Zheng, 2021). Like other forms of social media, these platforms are pivotal sources of information for both consumers and marketers, with businesses encouraged to boost their review count to attract new customers, while consumers are incentivized to provide positive feedback for nearly every transaction (Ding et al., 2022). These online reviews offer business organizations valuable insights and actionable feedback on performance evaluation, shaping travel decisions and preferences across various tourism-related sectors. Notable platforms such as TripAdvisor.com, Travelers point, and TravBuddy.com rely on high-quality user-generated content, serving as essential resources for managing tourism electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Ding et al., 2022).

2.2 Consumer Decision Making Behavior in Tourism and Hotel Industry

The field of hotel and tourism studies continuously evolves alongside societal, cultural, and behavioral shifts, reflecting an ever-expanding body of knowledge (Dixit et al., 2019). The study of consumer behavior, integral to various aspects of daily life, gained prominence in the 1960s, driven by the need for improved market segmentation based on values (Ashman et al., 2015). Various models have been proposed to elucidate the tourist decision-making process, recognizing its complexity and the multitude of influencing factors (Cohen et al., 2014). This process typically unfolds across five stages: the emergence of travel desire, information gathering, alternative

evaluation leading to purchase intent, final decision-making, and post-purchase assessment (Tanner & Raymond, 2012). Within the hospitality sector, several models, including the EKB model by Kollat et al. (1970) and the Howard-Sheth model (1969), have been proposed to understand consumer decision-making, emphasizing stages such as need identification, information search, decision-making, and post-purchase evaluation (Hoyer et al., 2012).

2.3 The Effect of Social Media on Consumer Decision-Making Behavior

Social media technology is increasingly integrated into the tourism and hospitality sectors, notably impacting the decision-making process (Ahani et al., 2019). Hotel service providers no longer hold sole expertise in product evaluation, as social media platforms play a pivotal role by providing consumer-generated reviews and facilitating customer-to-customer communication through review sites and travel blogs (Hudson & Thal, 2013). In the past, travelers relied on limited conventional sources for information on travel-related goods and services, such as pamphlets and brochures from local travel agents or government tourism boards (Baruca & Civre, 2012). However, social media has emerged as a crucial information source and organizational tool for modern travelers, influencing various pre- and post-travel activities, including purchasing, reviewing, sharing experiences, and learning about destinations (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). The evolution of social media has also shaped consumer behaviors, resulting in a more independent, informed, and individualistic class of tourism consumers, underscoring the importance of understanding the role of social media platforms in the decision-making process (Chiappa, 2011).

2.4 The Effect of social media on Consumer Trust

Numerous interdisciplinary studies have explored trust across fields such as economics, management, technology, and psychology (Pappas, 2016). Trust is closely linked to consumer satisfaction and is built over time as businesses become familiar and reliable to customers (Lu et al., 2020; Bozic & Kuppelwieser, 2019). Social media serves as a powerful platform for fostering connections and enhancing communication between businesses and consumers, facilitated by widespread internet access and technological advancements, enabling consumers to access up-to-date information about destinations easily (Mainardes & Cardoso, 2019). Increased options for online social interaction through social media platforms contribute to enhanced customer connectivity and trust in online shopping (Hajli, 2014).

2.5. Theoratical Foundations, Conceptual Model and Research Hypotheses

The foundation of this study was a thorough theoretical framework that incorporates a number of important models to investigate how social media affects consumer trust and decision-making in the hotel sector. These include the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), the Consumer Decision-Making Model, the Social Identity Theory, the Trust Theory, and the Social Proof Theory. As a foundational paradigm, trust theory examines how trust is created, preserved, and impacted in diverse circumstances. Perceived integrity and dependability are crucial in relationships, according to this notion (Mayer et al., 1995). Trust theory can be used to examine how user-generated content, including reviews, ratings, and social media interactions, affects customers' confidence in hotels. Researchers can shed light on the dynamics of trust development in hospitality situations by knowing how customers evaluate the reliability of information published on social media platforms (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001).

According to the Social Proof Theory, people frequently use other people's actions and viewpoints as a guide for their own, particularly in situations that are unclear (Cialdini, 2001). This notion is especially applicable in online settings because users mostly rely on other people's experiences. Through customer evaluations and testimonials, social media serves as a platform for social proof in the hotel industry, illuminating how favorable comments and high levels of involvement can

boost prospective clients' trust and have an impact on their decision-making (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006).

According to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), people receive persuasive information in two ways: centrally, which requires serious thought, and peripherally, which depends on surface-level cues (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). This model can be used to comprehend how customers interact with hotel-related social media material. For instance, whereas visually appealing posts may use peripheral cues to affect decision-making without deep engagement, high-quality, thorough evaluations may stimulate central-route processing, resulting in increased trust and purchase intentions (Huang et al., 2020).

he steps that consumers go through while making decisions about what to buy are described by the Consumer Decision-Making Model. These stages include problem detection, information search, alternative evaluation, and post-purchase evaluation (Blackwell et al., 2006). It will become clearer how social media affects every step of the decision-making process if this methodology is applied to the hotel sector. For example, social media may be quite helpful when consumers are looking for information because it offers a wealth of user-generated content that helps them evaluate different hotel options (Litvin et al., 2008).

Finally, according to the Social Identity Theory, people's behaviors and choices are influenced by the social groups they associate with, which in turn shapes their identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social media can help customers identify with particular brands or experiences in the hotel industry. Given that customers frequently select hotels that fit with their social identities or those suggested by their peers on social media, this identification may promote trust and loyalty (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006).

When taken as a whole, these theoretical frameworks offer a thorough basis for comprehending the intricate relationships that exist between social media, trust, and decision-making practices in the hotel sector. By combining these theories, the study sought to provide insightful information about how social media influences customer attitudes and decisions, especially in light of the growing digital hotel industry.

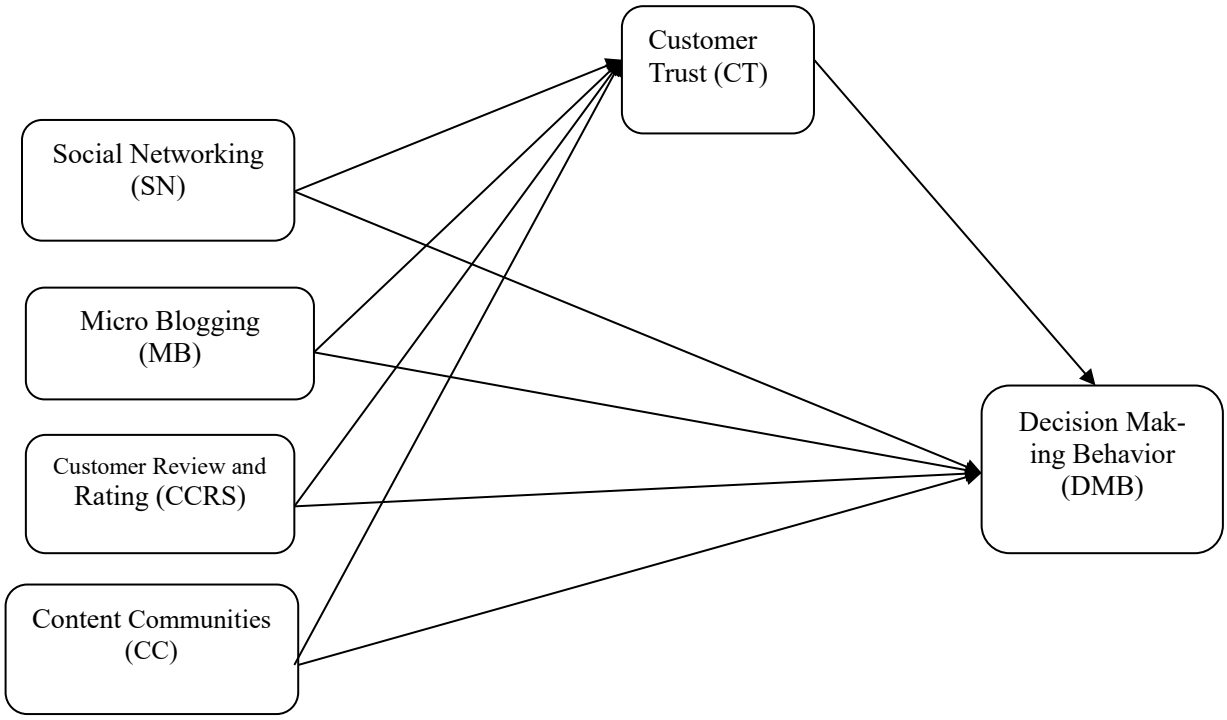

Figure 1: Conceptual framework Extended from Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), the Consumer Decision-Making Model, the Social Identity Theory, the Trust Theory, and the Social Proof Theory (2024)

2.6. Research Hypotheses

H_1: Social networking sites significantly influence customer trust

H_2: Content communities significantly affect customer trust

H_3: Microblogging significantly affects customer trust

H_4: Customer review and rating sites significantly influence customer trust

H_5: Customer trust significantly affects consumer decision-making behavior

H_6: Social networking sites positively and significantly influence consumer decisionmakingbehavior

H_7: Content communities positively and significantly affect consumer decision-making behavior

H_8: Microblogging positively and significantly affect consumer decision-making behavior

H_9: Customer review and rating sites positively and significantly affect consumer decisionmaking behaviour

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Research Context

Arba Minch City is found in the southern nation, nationalities, and people's regional state of Ethiopia, and is one of the developing towns in that country. The term "forty springs," which refers to a grouping of more than forty springs found in the Arba Minch natural forest, was used to form the name, Arba Minch. The study will be carried out in Arba Minch city hotels. Geographically, Arba Minch has located the two well-known rift valley lakes, Abaya and Chamo. Currently, the town acts as the administrative center for both Arba Minch Zuria Wereda (AZW) and Gamo Zone (GZ). The city is located 505 kilometers from Addis Ababa and 275 kilometers south of Hawassa city which is the capital city of the Sidama region respectively.

Arba Minch's economy is currently being greatly boosted by the growth of service-providing sectors like educational institutions, financial institutions, tourism, and hospitality firms. The tourism and hospitality sectors are the most significant sources of income, which attract both domestic and foreign tourists to the area to visit its natural resources and tourist attractions and encourage them to purchase the goods and services provided by those service providers. This aids the city in obtaining foreign exchange and provides employment opportunities for employers.

3.2. Research Approach and Designs, Target Population and Sampling Design

Methodologically, the study used a quantitative research approach. Since it attempted to investigate the effect of social media on the hotel industry in terms of customer trust and decision-making behavior in Arba Minch City, this study applied both descriptive and explanatory research designs. This is because it enables the description of phenomena, facts, events, and behaviors and helps to establish the pursuant causality, interdependence, and relationship among variables, respectively. The target population for the study was for these customers of hotels in Arba Minch City who have been avialable during the data collection process. As the exact numbers of the customers, both international and domestic, were not known, the study adopted available sampling techniques. Since it was not possible to find a concrete total hotel customer population, the researcher relied on Cochran's (1977) formula for calculating sample size when the population is indefinite (unknown). Accordingly:

$$n_0 = \frac{z^2 \cdot p \cdot (1-p)}{e^2} = 385$$

Where, $\mathbf{n_0}$, is the total sample size, **Z** value is found within a table which is 1.96

e, is the desired level of precision/margin of error which is 0.05

p, is the estimated proportion of the population which has the attribute in question which is 0.5

1-p is 0.5

From the 385 questionnaires distributed, 295 were used for futhers analysis after all data cleaning and validations were done. The response rate was about 76.6%. This figure falls whin the acceptable range to pursue for hypothesis testing.

3.3. Methods of Data Analysis

The study used SEM to test the hypothesised relationships, interpendences and causalities among the research variables. SPSS 23, Stat Tool packs and AMOS 23 were used to analysis the data.

3.4. Measurement Model Models Evalaution

To test the normality of residuals, histogram and normal probability plot were employed. When we looked at the histogram and probability plot of data, the histogram was symmetrical and approximately bell shaped. To determine whether univariate normality exists or not, the researchers examined the distribution of each observed variable for skewness and kurtosis. Thus, the absolute values of Z-scores were >1.96 and significant at $p < 0.05$, 2.58 and significant at $p < 0.01$, and >3.29 and significant at $p < 0.001$ and the data looked to fall in the normal distribution. This is consistent with the suggestions made by Hu and Bentler (1999), Hoyle (1995), Byrne (2010) and Field (2013).

Table 1: Validity Analysis

	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	CC	MB	DMB	CT	CCRS	SN
CC	0.904	0.658	0.466	0.932	**0.811**					
MB	0.921	0.627	0.466	0.965	0.683	**0.792**				
DMB	0.904	0.579	0.112	0.976	0.271	0.256	**0.761**			
CT	0.925	0.676	0.079	0.982	0.280	0.281	0.183	**0.822**		
CCRS	0.882	0.556	0.037	0.984	0.192	0.182	0.045	0.165	**0.746**	
SN	0.898	0.690	0.360	0.987	0.600	0.538	0.334	0.256	0.056	**0.831**

The composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) were computed. Hence, the CR of CC (.0904), the AVE (.657), the MB (CR=.921, AVE=.627), DMB (CR=.904, AVE=.579), CT (CR=.925, AVE=.676) and CCRS (CR=.882, AVE=.556) and SN(CR=.989, AVE=.690). Thus, consistent to the cut off points suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981), the measurement scales do not have the convergent and discriminant validity concerns). Thus, consistent with the cut off points suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981), the measurement scales do not have the reliability, convergent and discriminant validity problems.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Descriptive Summary of Study Variables

The questions that were collected using Likert items were analyzed. The researchers used descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage for analysing individual items under each variable. Individual Likert item data, being categorical in nature, were analyzed using frequency (Subedi, 2016).Moreover, the mean and standard deviation were used for summarizing the computed items which is called Likert scale data to get the representative number of a variable. This paper employs the mean and standard deviation as the most fitting measures for descriptive analysis. This approach is substantiated by the mean range framework advanced by Al-Sayaad et al. (2006). Accordingly, the ranges of values were categorized as follows: scores between 1.00 and 2.60 were considered as disagreeing, scores between 2.60 and 3.40 were classified as neutral, and scores above 3.4 were categorized as agree

Table 2: Descriptive Summary of Study Variables

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
Social networking site	3.86	.691
Content Communities	3.64	.661
Micro Blogging	3.65	.708
Customer Review and Rating Site	2.69	.889
Customer Trust	3.43	.221
Decision Making Behaviour	2.77	.908

As summarized in Table 2 respondents were inclined towards agreement on social networking site (*M* =3.86, *SD* = .691), content communities (M =3.64, SD = .661), micro blogging (*M* = 3.65, *SD* = .708), and customer trust (M =3.43, SD = .221). On the other hand, they had a neutral response on customer review (M =2.69, SD = .889) and decision-making behaviour (*M* = 2.77, *SD* = .908). Overall, respondents showed agreement with social networking sites, content communities, micro-blogging, and customer trust, as indicated by the mean scores. However, they maintained a neutral stance towards reviews and decision-making behaviour.

The measurement model's quality and overall model fit were assessed with the use of the fit indices. A good model fit was indicated by the CMIN/DF (Minimum Discrepancy/Degrees of Freedom) value of 1.788, which fell within the advised range of less than 3. This implies that the covariance structure of the observed variables is sufficiently explained by the proposed model. The Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI) value is 0.890, which is nearer 0.90 but marginally below the suggested cutoff point of 0.90. Likewise, the Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index (AGFI) score of 0.925 is within the permissible range. Lastly, the RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) value is 0.052, which is within the recommended range of less than 0.08, indicating a reasonable fit of the model to the population covariance matrix. The SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual) value is 0.0478, which is below the recommended threshold of 0.10. This suggests that the model has a good fit, with small discrepancies between the observed and predicted covariances. Finally, the TLI (Tucker-Lewis Index) value is 0.950, which is below the recommended threshold of 0.90.

4.2 Confirmatory Factor Analaysis (CFA)

Confirmatory factor analysis was used to validate the maeasurement models since the research have strong theoretical basis underlying of measurement model (Harrington (2009). Primarly CFA was used to evaluate the psychometric properties of the measurement model, validate the scales, and test the method effects and measurement invariance. The path model shown on Figure 2 illustrated that validated measurement models that have been used for futher analsysis.

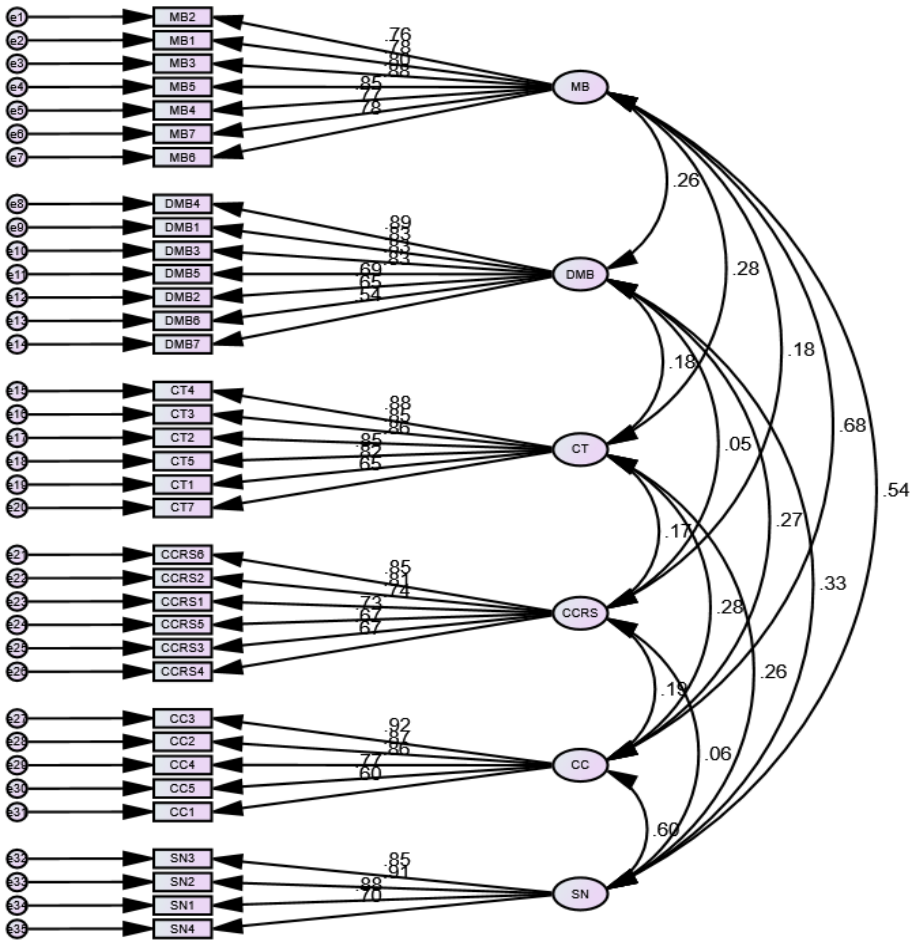

Figure 2: Path Model of CFA

Table 3: Model Finess Indecies

CMIN/DF	SRMR	GFI	AFGI	TIL	CFI	RSMEA
1.788	.0478	0.890	0.925	0.950	0.960	0.052

4.3 Testing the Causal and Hypothesised Relationships

By using path analysis, the hypothesised causal relationships and interdependences among the research variables were tested. The coefficients for each linear model were calculated. The results shown on figure 3 and tables 4 and 5 confirmed that all the hypothesised interdependences and relationships were statistically significant.

The path model confrmed that social networking exerts the strongest positive effect on customer trust (ß=0.388, $p < 0.001$). This finding aligns with Hajli (2014), who highlighted the significance of social networking features such as forums and ratings in fostering trust in online environments. Recent studies continue to support this notion; for instance, Lăzăroiu et al. (2020) found that interactive features on social media platforms significantly enhance consumer trust by facilitating direct engagement and feedback. Shen et al. (2020) further support this by indicating that active engagement in these platforms enhances consumer trust, especially when users perceive the content as credible.

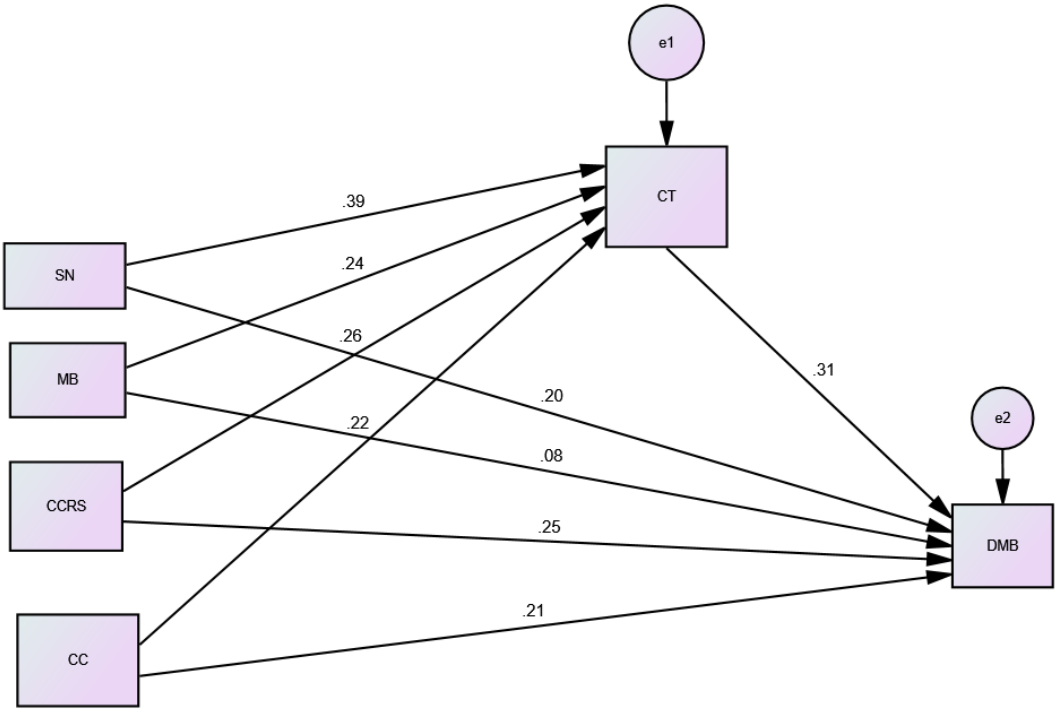

Figure 3: Structure Model

In addition to social networking, microblogging and customer review and rating sites also demonstrate significant positive influences on customer trust, with path coefficients of 0.239 and 0.258, respectively. The substantial impact of customer reviews is echoed in Zhao et al. (2019), who noted their role as social proof, thereby mitigating perceived risk for consumers. More recent research by Zhang et al. (2021) reinforces this by showing that positive reviews on social media platforms significantly increase consumer trust and purchase intentions. Meanwhile, content communities, while less influential (path coefficient of 0.215), still contribute positively to customer trust, affirming the notion that diverse online interactions can build trust incrementally.

When examining decision-making behavior, customer trust emerges as the most significant predictor (ß=0.314, $p < 0.001$). This finding corroborates Kaur et al. (2021), who emphasized the critical nature of trust in shaping purchase intentions and decision-making in e-commerce. The mediating role of customer trust highlighted by Borle et al. (2012) further reinforces the necessity of establishing trust to enhance decision-making outcomes. Recent studies, such as those by Liu et al. (2022), also confirm that trust significantly influences consumer decision-making processes in online shopping contexts.

The hypothesis test results also confirmed that social networking, customer review sites, and content communities have moderate positive effects on DMB (ß= 0.201, 0.253, and 0.215), respectively. Remarkably, social networking maintains its influence on decision-making even when accounting for customer trust, suggesting that it plays a multifaceted role in shaping consumer behavior. Liang et al. (2018) support this by demonstrating that user-generated content significantly impacts purchasing decisions. Additionally, recent findings by Wang et al. (2023) indicate that social media interactions can enhance consumer engagement and influence their purchasing decisions.

Conversely, microblogging has a smaller but still positive effect on decision-making behavior (ß= 0.079, $p < 0.001$). Research by Hu et al. (2016) confirms that microblogging platforms can influence consumer decisions, particularly when the content is perceived as informative. Erkan and Evans (2016) further emphasize the importance of content quality and credibility in shaping pur-

chase intentions through social media, a sentiment echoed by recent studies that highlight the role of perceived information quality in consumer decision-making (Smith et al., 2022).

Table 4: Hypothesis Test Results

Path			Standard Estimate	Sig
Customer Trust (CT)	<---	Social Networking	.388	***
Customer Trsust9CT)	<---	Microblogging	.239	***
Customer Trust (CT)	<---	Customer review and rating sites	.258	***
Customer Trust (CT)	<---	Content Communities	.215	***
Decision-Making Behavior (DMB)	<---	Customer Trust	.314	***
Decision-Making Behavior (DMB)	<---	Social Networking	.201	***
Decision-Making Behavior (DMB)	<---	Customer review and rating sites	.253	***
Decision-Making Behavior (DMB)	<---	Content Communities	.215	***
Decision-Making Behavior (DMB)	<---	Microblogging	.079	***

***significant at .001, ** significant at .01, *significant at .05 and ns, non-significant.

Table 5: Summary of hypothesis testing

No	Hypothesis	Result
1	**Ha_1:** Social networking site has significant effect on customer trust.	Accepted
2	**Ha_2:** Content community has significant effect on customer trust	Accepted
3	**Ha_3:** Microblogging has significant effect on customer trust	Accepted
4	**Ha_4:** Customer review and rating sites has significant effect on customer trust	Accepted
5	**Ha_5:** Customer trust has significant effect on decision-making behavior	Accepted
6	**Ha_6:** Social networking site has significant effect on decision-making behavior	Accepted
7	**Ha_7:** Content community has significant effect on decision-making behavior	Accepted
8	**Ha_8:** Microblogging has significant effect on decision-making behavior	Accepted
9	**Ha_9:** Customer review and rating site has significant effect on decision-making behavior	Accepted

5. Conclusion

Social networking sites exert a significant influence on customer trust. In today's digitally interconnected landscape, these platforms have become powerful tools for fostering meaningful engagement between businesses and their clientele. Moreover, social networking sites offer more than just marketing channels; they provide opportunities for establishing genuine rapport and credibility. Through regular, interactive engagements on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, hotels can cultivate openness, transparency, and reliability. For instance, promptly addressing inquiries, sharing valuable insights,

and showcasing positive experiences can contribute to building trust with customers. By actively engaging with their audience in these ways, hotels create a foundation of trust where customers feel heard and valued. This fosters confidence and reliance in the hotel's offerings, ultimately leading to enhanced trust levels. This symbiotic relationship transcends mere transactions, embodying a deeper connection that resonates with modern consumers who prioritize authentic, personalized experiences.

In addition to the impactful role of social networking sites, microblogging platforms also play a crucial role in shaping customer trust and decision-making behavior within the hotel industry. Microblogging platforms, with their real-time and concise communication style, foster dynamic engagement between hotels and customers. This immediacy enables swift responses to inquiries and concerns, ultimately contributing to enhanced customer trust. Furthermore, research studies have consistently highlighted the positive influence of microblogging on customer trust and decision-making behavior. Microblogging platforms empower customers by providing accessibility and ease of information dissemination, thus influencing their decision-making processes. Overall, the strategic importance of microblogging in the hotel sector is evident, as it not only builds trust but also shapes and guides customer decisions.

Moreover, alongside the impactful role of social networking sites and microblogging platforms, customer review and rating sites serve as a transparent and accessible channel for guests to share their experiences, enabling potential customers to make informed decisions based on real-life testimonials. The transparency and accessibility of these platforms further emphasize their significance in building customer trust and influencing decision-making behavior. Customer reviews contribute to building confidence in a hotel's services by providing credible and authentic peer feedback. Moreover, the collective feedback on customer review and rating sites plays a substantial role in shaping decision-making behavior, as prospective guests rely on this information to assess the overall quality of a hotel. Overall, customer review and rating sites serve as valuable tools for both customers and hotels, fostering trust and guiding decision-making processes within the hotel industry.

Customer trust has effect on decision-making behaviour. When customers have a high level of trust in a hotel, it significantly influences their decision-making process. This compelling finding suggests that trust is a pivotal factor that plays a crucial role in shaping customer choices. It prompts a deeper exploration into the specific elements and experiences that contribute to the formation of trust and how they subsequently influence decision-making behaviour. Understanding these intricacies holds immense value for marketing and sales teams in the hotel industry, as it empowers them to focus on building and maintaining trust as a cornerstone of their customer-centric strategies.

6. Implications and future Research Directions

The research highlights the central role of customer trust in e-commerce and calls for future theories to examine its mediation between social interactions and purchasing behaviour. It emphasizes the need for consumer behaviour theories to account for the diverse functions of social platforms and suggests re-evaluating existing theories on digital trust based on varying influences from different online platforms. Policymakers should promote positive online interactions, encourage authentic customer reviews, and implement regulations to ensure the authenticity of reviews. Establishing content quality guidelines on social media can also enhance trust and support informed decision-making.

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