

# Brand trust in the hotel industry – How online customer reviews affect tourist behavior

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## **Abstract**

Online reviews offer a convenient possibility for tourists to compare hospitality offerings prior to their journey. But what kind of review characteristics are most decisive for their perceived trust in a hotel brand? Based on social comparison theory and persuasion research, we conduct two online experiments to investigate how specific review characteristics (i.e., review depth, review valence and reviewer expertise) influence brand trust. Further, we contribute to current research by examining how tourists' personality traits (i.e., consumer conformity and recommendation adoption) moderate these effects. The results indicate a strong impact of review valence on brand trust, strongly depending upon readers' level of recommendation adoption and conformity. Reviewer expertise and review depth, by contrast, did not exert a significant impact on brand trust. For hotel managers it thus is essential to increase incentives for engaging online, reward user commitment and respond adequately. The article concludes with valuable suggestions for future research.

**Keywords:** *Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM); User-generated content (UGC); Online reviews*

**Track:** Tourism Marketing