How do consumer reviews on TripAdvisor affect consumer decision making when booking an
international hotel.

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**Abstract**

**Purpose –** The development of online consumer review websites has allowed electronic word-of-mouth communications to develop. Therefore consumers have access to more information in the internet than ever before. The purpose of this study is to discover how positive and negative reviews and the credibility of the review/ reviewer on TripAdvisor affect consumer decision making when booking an international hotel.

**Methodology –** The triangulation method of research was adopted by using a combination of quantitative and qualitative research in the form of an experiment and questionnaire. Purposive sampling allowed five participants to be chosen for the experiment and a sample of 50 for the questionnaire, thus enabling the most accurate representation of the population to be obtained.

**Findings and Analysis –** The research found that negative reviews have an immediate impact on the consumer, thus affecting them more than positive reviews. Review credibility is assessed through studying the consistency between large amounts of reviews. Consumers are likely to use a combination of consumer-generated and marketer-generated reviews when booking a hotel. The affect that TripAdvisor review have on consumer decision making is very strong, especially the effect of negative reviews.

**Limitations and Further Research –** Factors that limited the research were the types of sampling methods used, the use of simple questions and participant bias. Further areas for research were discussed to overcome these limitations by using probability sampling to ensure the findings are more representative, alteration of question styles and attempting to minimise bias by closer controlling of the experiment variables.

**Keywords –** TripAdvisor, word-of-mouth communication, electronic word-of-mouth communication, positive word-of-mouth, negative word-of-mouth, online reviews.

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**1.0 Introduction**

The TripAdvisor LLC (2011) perceives TripAdvisor as a place that real travellers can leave comments and give advice to other consumers. It contains a variety of destinations and facilities that consumers can use to search for flights and there are links to booking tools. According to Carter and Jeacle (2011) TripAdvisor acts as a forum for everyday travellers to air their personal opinions regarding hotel quality whilst also reading the recommendations of fellow travellers. The TripAdvisor Media Group websites have been recognized by many top travel resources and in 2010 it generated $486 million revenue. (TripAdvisor LLC 2011). In May 2011 Expedia Inc. (TripAdvisor, Expedia and Hotel.com) attracted the most amount of unique visitors with a total of 21.7 million, (comScore 2011) which is why TripAdvisor was used in this research.

Consumer purchase behaviour can be viewed from three perspectives; the decision making, the experiential, and the behavioural influence. (Mowen 1988). This study will look into the decision making perspective, in particular the information search stage. Hennig-Thurau and Walsh (2003) state consumers are reading online product recommendations, such as TripAdvisor, to save on the time it takes to make a decision and to ensure the best purchase decision is made - these websites are therefore reducing the information search time.

The amount of internet users has increased worldwide from 360 million in December 2000 to 2,095 million in March 2011 (Internet World Stats. (2011.) and with the users of TripAdvisor in January 2011 standing at 4.6 million (Cochrane 2011) it encouraged the phenomenon of word-of-mouth (WOM) to developed into Internet facilitated online word-of-mouth (eWOM).

The WOM communication can be defined as,

*‘All informal communications directed at other consumers about ownership,
usage or characteristics of particular goods or their sellers.’*

Westbrook. (1987. Pg 261)

WOM generally takes place in small groups or with two or more persons and is an immediate and intimate interaction. (Secondary cited from Dellarocas 2003). WOM is highly persuasive due to the trust that consumers have in each other, rather than communications with marketers. (Goldsmith and Horowitz 2006). Compared to eWOM where persons are not in the company of each other or may not know each other at all. The findings from eWOM on the internet are unlimited (Dellarocas 2003) and as the consumers ability to understand the credibility of reviews has developed, by analysing the consistency and ratings, marketers should be wary. (Chen et al 2003).

This research project will explore negative and positive WOM and assess which is most common and which affects consumer’s decision making. In a 1998 research report carried out by Buttle (1998) he states that negative WOM (NWOM) has more of an affect on the consumer than positive WOM (PWOM). It continues to say that dissatisfied consumers are more likely to tell their story to others than satisfied consumers.

The main purpose of carrying out this research is to gain a greater understanding of how positive and negative reviews affect consumer decision making and how consumers assess the credibility of the reviews they choose to believe. It will be an addition to the limited amount of research there is in this area.

**2.0 Literature Review**

Consumers reduce uncertainty and perceived risks by researching information to enable them to make a purchase decision. During the decision making process the consumer must evaluate the internal and external information and assess the desirability. Decision making is either cognitive or affectively based; it is affected by the consumer’s characteristics, the decision characteristics and the characteristics of others who may be involved. The cognitive approach is where consumers combine information about the various attributes to make a decision, whereas affective decision making is when the consumer bases the decision on feelings and emotions. (Hoyer and Macinnis 2008)

*Word-of-mouth and electronic word-of-mouth*

Both WOM and eWOM are used in the decision making process, WOM is traditional and is an informal form of communication, which takes place between consumers reflecting on the quality, characteristics or seller of a product/ service. (Westbrook 1987) Whereas eWOM is a more modern version that allows consumers to share and use information worldwide with the unlimited reaches of the internet. (Burgee and Steffes 2009).

 eWOM can be defined as:

*‘any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the internet.'*

Hennig- Thurau et al. (2004. p.39)

The main difference between WOM and eWOM is that WOM takes place with people you know whereas eWOM takes place with unknown persons, which is where it becomes difficult to assess the credibility and trustworthiness of the information. eWOM has become more influential, as the majority of consumers will read reviews about a product/ service before purchasing it. In South Korea 80% of people refer to consumer reviews of products, (Doh and Hwang 2009) which is due to the speed and convenience that the information can be accessed. Also a lot more information can be accessed in a short amount of time. The emergence of eWOM has created new opportunities and challenges for marketers. It is low cost to write a review and the range of contributors can lead to comments being taken out of context and therefore having negative impacts on the reviewed item. (Goldsmith, Litvin and Pan 2008). In hospitality, if marketers use eWOM correctly it can be of a huge advantage. For example, in hotels Ye, Law and Gu. (2009) state that the content of consumer reviews can effect the number of bookings at a hotel.

*Experts and Opinion Leaders*

The credibility of an opinion leader can be ascertained through analysing their rating and the consistency of their reviews. (Lee et al 2011). Consumers will look to opinion leaders to aid their decision making process. Opinion leaders are trusted and well informed members of the online community. Bronner and De Hoog (2011) researched the motivations of opinion leaders and their reasons for posting online reviews. It was discovered that the major incentive for posting reviews was to help others in making better decisions and closely behind this were the social benefits that they gained, opinion leaders enjoy expressing their experiences to others. Following on from this, consumers are inclined to seek and follow the advice of expert sources, formerly described as opinion leaders. Although, they can be marketers and the information they provide is on the product/ service or destinations website. Expert websites are believed to provide more information that non-expert ones and are perceived to be more trustworthy and useful. (Bronner et al 2011). A statement made by Buhalis and Law (2008. p.612). 'Virtual communities are gradually becoming incredibly influential in tourism as consumers increasingly trust better their peers, rather than marketing messages.' contradicts Bronner et al (2011) and Bronner and De Hoog (2010) who found that 49% of consumers who visited ratings websites during the decision making process were viewing marketer-generated ones.

*Positive and Negative Word-of-mouth*

It is important to understand whether positive word of mouth (PWOM) or negative word of mouth (NWOM) is the most influential in the consumer decision making process as well as the effect of opinion leaders. In a study carried out by Bronner and De Hoog (2010) it showed that 75% of participants contributed positive reviews to online review websites. Although Buttle (1998) found that dissatisfied consumers would tell twice as many people as satisfied consumers, he also stated that negative reviews had a higher impact on consumers than positive ones. East et al (2008) summarised that PWOM does occur more than NWOM and as NWOM occurs infrequently when it does arise in reviews it can have a greater impact on the consumer. Although negative reviews do not always have a negative impact, they can create a commitment between the consumer and what is being considered for purchase. However, this is very uncommon, but when it does occur the reason is because a person views it as a challenge and wants to defend the product/ service.

Chung and Ying (2007) stated that the more PWOM a consumer comes across the more positive they are towards a product and have increased purchase intentions, the opposite also occurs with NWOM. This statement is supported by East et al (2008) whose results showed that PWOM has a greater impact on purchase probability than NWOM, although it is widely agreed that NWOM has more affect on consumers than PWOM. Initial research into WOM by Arndt (1967) showed that NWOM has twice as much impact on purchase decisions as PWOM. This is reinforced by Lang (2011) who states that satisfied customers will tell five people about their experience whereas dissatisfied customers will tell 15 others. Assael (2003) also supports the agreement that NWOM is more influential than PWOM.

Not all research shows that NWOM has an effect on more consumers than PWOM. Bronner and De Hoog’s (2010) study found that the majority of consumers contribute positive information to review websites. East et al (2007) also discovered that consumers produce more PWOM than NWOM, but specified you should not assume that satisfied consumers only produce PWOM and that dissatisfied consumers only produce NWOM. The reviewer will take into account those who will be reading the review and tailor it to their requirements.

Based on these considerations the first research question is formulated:

 **RQ1. Are consumers affected more by positive or negative reviews?**

*Online review and reviewer credibility*

Consumers make purchase decisions by researching and reading consumer reviews, but how do they assess the credibility of the review or the reviewer? Do consumers even consider it? What creates trust where no relationships exist?

Credibility in this case can be defined as:

*'The extent to which an information source is perceived to be believable, competent,
and trustworthy by information recipients.'*

Cheung. Lee and Rabjohn (2008. Pg 232)

The number of reviews a product/ service has is an influencing factor on the consumer. It shows whether it is popular and a judgement can be made about the credibility by comparing positive and negative reviews. When the amount of positive reviews outweigh negative reviews it is considered credible. Another way to assess credibility is to compare reviews of the same product/ service on other review websites. (O'Reilly and Marx 2011). Assessing the credibility of the review can be achieved through studying the consistency of reviews. (Chen. et al. 2009). The timeliness of the review is also a way to assess credibility; the sooner the review is written after an experience gives it more credibility because it was fresh in the reviewers mind. The amount of information in a review can lead to a positive impact upon the consumer. (Lurie et al 2008). According to Bronner et al (2011) reviews that have high levels of argument density and diversity are considered to be more useful, therefore making a more credible source of information. Doh and Hwang (2009) state that a few negative reviews on a website helps promote a positive attitude towards the website and consumers feel that it is more credible. If there is a lack of negative reviews consumers believe that the website is filtering the reviews it receives.

After analysing current research into a consumer’s ability to assess online review credibility, the second research question was created:

**RQ2. How does the consumer decide if a review is credible and can it be made more so?**

The credibility of the reviewer can be ascertained through a reputation rating, if other consumers agree with the review they will rate the reviewer, the higher the rating, the more credible the source is. (Chen et al 2009) With anonymous postings it is difficult to decide how credible or biased the reviewer is. If the reviewer was to disclose information on whom they were it would lead to an immediate increase in credibility for the review. (Forman, Ghose and Wiesenfeld 2008) This is confirmed by the prominence-interpretation theory (Fogg et al 2007)(Secondary cited from Kuo.et al 2010). The theory shows that consumers will use information that personally identifies the reviewer as cues to assessing the credibility of the review. It is believed that a more genuine reviewer is more likely to disclose personal information. (Kuo et al 2010)

Helpful reviewers are used on many ratings websites, such as Ebay, a helpful reviewer is someone whose reviews are seen as credible and widely used by consumers.

A helpful reviewer can be defined as:

*'A peer-generated product evaluation that facilitates
the consumer's purchase decision process.'*

Mudambi and Schuff (2010. Pg 186)

The helpfulness of a reviewer can be decided through ratings, consumers who agree with the review and found it useful will rate it positively. (Mudambi and Schuff 2010). This method is similar to the reputation rating mentioned previously.

In 2007 Adviva undertook research into the credibility of online reviews; it found that one half of British public that take over five weeks holiday a year stated that consumer-generated reviews are more reliable. (Anon 2007) According to TripAdvisor the people that post reviews on their website are the most trusted members of the travel community. However there are no checks on the people who post reviews and no proof of stay at a hotel is required. (Starmer-Smith 2010). TripAdvisor was investigated by the UK's Advertising Standards Agency into claims of fake reviews; it uncovered evidence that hotels were employing freelance writers to post favourable reviews. (Anon 2011)₁ Following this, the slogan on the site for hotel listings has changed from 'Reviews you can trust' to 'Reviews from our community'. (Anon 2011)₂ Consumers should be wary when using review websites, according to Dr Kohei Kawamura from the University of Edinburgh who found that those writing reviews are likely to exaggerate experiences to gain attention from readers. (Doward 2011) Although the general consensus from consumers is that consumer-generated reviews are more reliable and are being used more regularly. (Buhalis and Law 2008) Gallone (2011) stated that one look on TripAdvisor could stop her vacationing anywhere, which makes it clear how much of an impact that a negative review can have.

The final two research questions were developed through careful consideration of the current research and also the lack of information that was available on that topic:

**RQ3.Are consumers likely to use consumer-generated reviews or marketer-generated reviews?**

**RQ4. Do the reviews on TripAdvisor strongly affect consumer decision making and which element has the most affect on the decision making process?**

The research questions are summarised below in the diagram showing how they link together.

RQ2. Credibility of review

RQ4. Do reviews affect decision making, which element has the strongest affect

RQ1. Positive or negative reviews

RQ3. Consumer or marketer- generated

Consumer Decision Making

**3.0 Research Methodology**

The triangulation method of research was used as both qualitative and quantitative research practises were deployed to gather a variety of results; doing this meant that a particular phenomenon could be studied from different angles, thus improving the understanding of the topic. The different techniques may reveal areas that would not be found by the use of one method. Purposive sampling is a form of non-probability sampling and was implemented for the experiment and questionnaire. This ensures that the participants will answer the questions. (Clark et al 2000 & White 2000). The age and profession of each participant for both types of research was collected, allowing the researcher to understand if there were any differences in decision making within each separate group.

An experiment was chosen as the most appropriate method to obtain findings for the first part of the research. An experiment allows the researcher to control a situation so that the relationships between the variables can be evaluated. In a typical experiment one variable is altered and the effect it has on another variable is measured. An experiment allows the researcher to create an artificial situation in which the variables can be monitored. (Zikmund 2000). For this research, the experiment created a TripAdvisor situation by using a mixture of real hotel reviews for the participants to analyse. A semi-structured interview technique with open ended questions was also implemented throughout the experiment. Open ended questions were used to enable the results to be compared with other research methods. The main benefit to using an experiment and interview techniques is that you are face to face with the participant and any misunderstandings or uncertainties can be cleared up immediately. A negative of this type of research is that it is time consuming for the researcher and the participants. (White 2000).

For the experiment five subjects were chosen to participate, time slots were arranged and a friend accompanied the researcher to ensure that they were safe at all times. (Clark et al 2000) The participants were selected through convenience sampling because it enabled the researcher to collect optimum findings. Each experiment was 30 minutes long and primarily looked into why people make certain decisions, using positive and negative TripAdvisor reviews to establish which has the most affect on the consumer. Using observation and analysis during the experiment it will become clear as to why consumers react a certain way to positive and negative reviews. Using a qualitative approach allowed more information to be gained from a smaller sample size.

The second part of the research took a quantitative approach in the form of online questionnaire. Results obtained from the questionnaire allowed the results from the experiment to be generalised to a larger group of people. (Hutcheson, G and Moutinho, C 2011). SurveyMonkey was chosen because it is quick, cheap, simple to create and complete, furthermore, it allows the participants to remain anonymous. Short and pre-coded questionnaire allow a large amount of information to be gained from many people in a short period of time with relatively little effort from the researcher.

*Experiment*

Prior to the experiment the key areas of questioning were decided, edited and prioritised, all the questions were analysed for relevancy and a format was designed. It was important to ensure the language used was simple and that all results could be analysed appropriately. A pilot experiment was carried out using a reliable subject to identify any flaws within the structure or questions. (Fisher 2007).

The first part of the experiment was designed to look at how consumers respond to positive and negative reviews in a TripAdvisor situation. Five 3\* hotels were chosen in five different international, popular tourist destinations. They were chosen by stratified sampling with the criteria being a range of cultures, destinations that are similar and attractive to leisure travellers. The cities and hotels that were chosen are listed below:

* London, United Kingdom – London House Hotel
* Allicante – Hotel Gala Placidia
* Rome, Italy – Hotel Piazza Di Spagna
* Paris, France – Best Western Premier Le Carre Folies Opera
* Pollensa – Hoposa Uyal Hotel

The hotels were all of a 3\* rating so that there was consistency in the hotels characteristics and expectations of reviewers and the participants. Each hotel case study contained a description of the hotel, taken from the hotel’s website. These descriptions were written by the hotel and are marketer-generated. After reading these, participants were asked to state which hotel they would prefer to stay at. To aid the researcher to better understand the candidates personal preferences and how they are affected by marketer-generated reviews. Following this each participant read the five TripAdvisor reviews provided for each hotel, each of the case studies had a different combination of positive and negative reviews. The combination is listed in the following diagram:

Increasing Negativity

A mixture of positive and negative reviews were used to create a TripAdvisor hotel review scenario, to encourage participants to critically analyse the reviews as they would normally when looking for hotel accommodation on TripAdvisor. The combination of reviews was designed to enable the researcher to see which type of review has most affect on the consumer. For each individual review the day the review was created, the date the reviewer stayed, the home town of the reviewer, how many times the reviewer has written a review and the number of helpful votes were listed. As consumers may use them when making a decision about review credibility. See appendix (7.1) for the five hotel case studies.

The second part of the experiment was to look into whether consumers believe the reviews on TripAdvisor to be trustworthy, if they can be made more credible and if reviews have ever stopped the consumer from staying at a hotel. A range of closed and open ended questions were used; the simplest questions opened the experiment to allow the participant to relax. Open ended questions were used to allow new ideas to develop and to enable the researcher to press areas that they feel more information can be gathered from.

The results obtained from the experiment were analysed using the coding method, this allows key themes to be identified and divided into chunks or units. After this process the results were subjected to context analysis, showing the frequency at which the main themes occur thus making it easier to compare. (Fisher 2007).

*Questionnaire*

To obtain a representative sample of the population the optimum number of responses for the questionnaire was decided to be 50. The questionnaire design was simple, attractive, had a logical structure to ensure the respondents could follow it easily and could understand what the survey was about. Pre-coded and structured questions were used, these were mainly dichotomous and multiple choice. A few open ended questions were used so that the participants did not feel they were being forced to answer all the questions in the same way. (Fisher 2007). Appendix (7.2) shows the questionnaire and questions used.

The participants of the questionnaire were anonymous; delivered to respondents through a social networking site and emails where it could be accessed through a hyperlink. Emails were encouraged to be forwarded to friends and relatives to gain a wider sample in a form of snowball sampling. (Clark et al 2000).

Systematic sampling was used to select the respondents, an initial starting point was chosen and every 3rd person was selected to be sent the questionnaire. The main purpose of the questionnaire was to understand whether consumers use marketer or consumer-generated reviews. Do they consider TripAdvisor to be reliable? Is there any way it could be made more so and have reviews ever stopped the participant from staying in a hotel and the reasons? The information gained from the questionnaire can be used to understand why consumers use TripAdvisor, thus gaining knowledge on opinion leaders and opinion seekers.

**4.0 Findings and Analysis**

The findings obtained from the experiment and the questionnaire was arranged into tables to allow the data to be assessed more efficiently and effectively. Appendix (7.4 and 7.5) show the full data collected for the experiment and questionnaire.

Of the 54 people who took part in the questionnaire 79.6% had used TripAdvisor before, from those who had used TripAdvisor before 52.2% use it regularly, with the majority of people using it every month. Table 1 shows the reasons why consumers use TripAdvisor; most consumers use it to check hotel reviews and get advice prior to making a hotel booking.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Reasons for using TripAdvisor | % of total answers |
| Check hotel reviews | 23 |
| Check on restaurants | 4 |
| Use actual customer feedback not a hotel sales pitch or travel agent | 4 |
| Large amount of independent reviews | 2 |
| Get a feel for location or accommodation | 4 |
| Details on resorts or accommodation | 2 |
| Honest detailed reviews of accommodation or restaurants | 4 |
| Largest amount of hotel/ restaurant reviews | 2 |
| Cross references a multitude of sites to find best deal | 2 |
| Advice on hotels before booking | 12 |
| For advice | 2 |
| Look for places to visit | 2 |
| Information on a hotel or resort | 2 |
| See what other people think | 4 |
| Check reviews on my place of work | 9 |
| To find a place to eat  | 2 |
| Look for a good night out | 2 |
| Information on quality | 2 |
| Express my views on a restaurant/ hotel/ resort | 4 |
| Gain an insight into the area, quality of hotel and attitudes and helpfulness of staff | 2 |
| Use for comparing before booking | 2 |
| Teaching purposes | 2 |
| See other peoples experiences | 2 |
| See best rated hotel in an area | 2 |
| University research | 2 |
| Total | 100 |

**Table 1.** The reasons for consumers using TripAdvisor .

The respondents to the questionnaire were of a variety of ages with a mixture of professions, which can be seen from observing the pie charts below in Figure 1 and Figure 2. The age range of respondents was from under 20 to over 60, with the most common age category being 21-30. The professions were varied and split into sectors; the most common sector was student and other.

The pie charts show that the findings can be a representative of the population because there is a high amount of variation.

31.5% were aged 41-60 and according to comScore (2011)¹ the over 45's spent the most amount of time on the internet in 2010, at an average of 32 hours per month and therefore using websites such as TripAdvisor most regularly. The over 50's age category is the second largest segment and this age group have a 30% higher disposable income than the under 50's, meaning they are most likely to take vacations and use TripAdvisor to check hotel reviews. (Barker and Peck 2011)

The following section will discuss the results from the findings to determine whether the four research questions were answered.

***RQ1. Are consumers affected more by positive or negative reviews?***

 Questionnaire

Question 8 showed 62.8% of respondents who had used TripAdvisor stated negative reviews are more influential than positive reviews.

 Experiment

Negative reviews affected the participants more, although Participant 2 was very rational during decision making and review analysis. Their decision was based on the reviews that were well balanced; with a mixture of positive and negative reviews that were well-reasoned and articulate.

 Literature

The literature states that negative reviews have more of an affect on consumers than positive reviews. (Arndt 1967 Assael 2003 Buttle 1998 and Lang 2011)

 Summary

Analysis of the findings and literature shows that negative TripAdvisor reviews have more of an affect on consumers than positive reviews.

***RQ2. How does the consumer decide if a review is credible and can it be made more so?***

Part One – how the consumer decides if a review is credible.

 Questionnaire

This question was not asked in the questionnaire; instead the respondents were asked if they thought the reviews were credible.

69.9% of respondents think TripAdvisor reviews ‘maybe’ credible and 31.1% think ‘yes’ they are credible. The main reasons given for TripAdvisor reviews to be viewed as ‘maybe’ credible were:

* “Reviews are people’s opinions and people’s opinions vary.”
* “Fictional, made up reviews.”
* “More likely to post about poorer stays, proportion of reviews could be unbalanced with more negative reviews posted.”

See appendix (7.3) for findings showing why TripAdvisor and the reviews are considered to be 'maybe' or are credible.

 Experiment

The validity of reviews is assessed by looking at a large number of them and the reviews that are most consistent with each other are assumed to be credible. Participant 2 said, they think that reviews which sound too good to be true are less credible.

 Literature

Chen et al (2009) research confirms the research findings of this report, that a very good way to decide if reviews are credible is to assess the consistency. Doh and Hwang (2009) findings are similar to the answers given by Participant 2; negative comments can create trust in consumers and therefore strengthen review credibility. Starmer-Smith (2010) asks the question whether you can really trust TripAdvisor. The article states that the site is anonymous; no personal details have to be disclosed. He carried out an experiment and created a fictitious hotel with false reviews, it took ten days for it to be detected and removed, thus showing not all reviews are credible. An alternative solution to assess review credibility is to compare them to ones on another review site. (O’Reilly and Marx 2011).

 Summary

Consumers struggled to assess the credibility of reviews mainly because they can be false and are a consumer’s opinion. However the most common method used to ascertain the credibility of a review is to assess a large amount of reviews and look for the ones that are most consistent with each other.

Part Two – can reviews be made more credible?

 Questionnaire

The majority of findings stated that it is not possible to make TripAdvisor reviews more credible. The most common answers given to make it more credible were:

* “Confirm that the reviewer has stayed at or been to the hotel they are reviewing.”
* “TripAdvisor employ a reviewer to visit hotels and write reviews, and then allow consumers to respond to these and create a debate situation.”

The table below shows the suggestions given to make TripAdvisor more credible.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Suggestions to increase review credibility | % of total answers |
| Do not think you can | 14.3 |
| Fine as it is | 4.76 |
| Get a professional to review and then guests comment underneath | 9.52 |
| Difficult because of the number of reviews | 4.76 |
| Not sure | 23.8 |
| All written by one person, but not possible | 4.76 |
| Have set questions that people have to answer | 4.76 |
| Check on those who have reviewed, confirm they have been there | 14.3 |
| Pay to post a comment | 4.76 |
| Would be very difficult | 4.76 |
| TripAdvisor investigates comments before released | 4.76 |
| Reviewer provides more details about themselves | 4.76 |
| Total | 100 |

**Table 2.** Respondent **s**uggestions to make TripAdvisor reviews credible.

Experiment

One out of the five participants thought it was possible to make the reviews credible and this was by:

“Asking hotel operators to verify whether the reviewer stayed with them.”

Participant 2 felt the current system is satisfactory and consumers are able to make their own decision on which reviews to trust, verifying reviewers could stop consumers writing reviews.

 Literature

An alternative solution to making the reviews more credible is to get the reviewer to disclose more personal information. This creates trust and makes the consumer believe the reviews to be genuine. (Forman, Ghose and Wiesenfeld, 2008. Fog et al, 2007. Kuo et al, 2010)

Summary

The overall consensus was that it is not possible to make TripAdvisor and the reviews posted more credible. Suggestions were made to create a more credible reviewing system, such as, asking the hoteliers to confirm whether a consumer stayed with them. However, the current system is satisfactory and altering it could change the whole idea of the consumer forum, where anyone is allowed to post their opinions.

***RQ3.Are consumers likely to use consumer generated reviews or marketer-generated reviews?***

In this study consumer-generated reviews are defined as,

*‘a review composed and written by a person who is not an expert.’*

And a marketer-generated review as,

*‘a review composed and written by a person who is an expert in a specific field, with a wide knowledge of the operating environment, possibly under the employ of the hotelier.’*

 Questionnaire

9.1% of respondents use only consumer-generated reviews and 90.9% use a combination of both, no one uses marketer-generated reviews on there own.

 Experiment

After reading the consumer-generated reviews from TripAdvisor, only one of the participants would have stayed at their initial choice hotel, that hotel was chosen after only reading the marketer-generated review. It is therefore important to use a combination of both review types.

 Literature

Research by Adviva (Anon, 2007) found that those who vacation for more than five weeks a year find consumer-generated reviews more credible and will use them more often than marketer-generated reviews. Buhalis and Law’s (2008) research shows the general consensus of consumers is that they will use consumer-generated reviews over marketer-generated ones.

 Summary

Consumers are most likely to use a combination of consumer-generated reviews and marketer-generated reviews. This allows a balanced perspective of the hotel to be created and thus gaining a more accurate representation.

***RQ4. Do the reviews on TripAdvisor strongly affect consumer decision making and which element of the review has the most affect on the decision making process.***

Part One - Do TripAdvisor reviews strongly affect consumer decision making?

 Questionnaire

TripAdvisor reviews strongly affect consumer decision making, this can be seen as reviews have stopped 60.5% of respondents from going to a hotel.

 Experiment

TripAdvisor is used as part of the initial and final stages of the decision making process, showing that it is important and has a strong affect on consumer decision making.

 Literature

In a newspaper article Gallone (2011) states that, TripAdvisor reviews could stop her from going to a hotel anywhere and even positive reviews start to put doubt in her mind.

 Summary

The reviews on TripAdvisor strongly affect consumer decision making, they stop consumers from booking a hotel and are used in various stages of the decision making process.

Part Two – Which element of the review has most affect on consumer decision making?

 Questionnaire

Negative reviews affect the consumer the most, the main reasons given for a respondent not booking a hotel was because of negative reviews.

 Experiment

The experiment also showed negative reviews have the most affect on consumer decision making. Participant 1 would not stay anywhere with negative reviews, however, Participant 2 bases their decision on all the information about the review and reviewer, where there are too many positive reviews it makes the hotel sound too good to be true.

 Literature

Arndt (1967) initially discovered NWOM had twice as much impact on a purchase decision than PWOM, Buttle’s (1998) research confirms this and East et al (2008) found that because NWOM is less frequent than PWOM it has a greater affect on the consumer. Assael (2003) supports this research that NWOM is more influential than PWOM.

 Summary

The negative reviews on TripAdvisor have a greater affect on consumers than the positive reviews.

The findings are summarised in Table 3, showing the results from the questionnaire and experiment and whether there is supporting literature.

**Table 3.** Summarised research questions and answers, with supporting literature.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Research Question | Questionnaire | Experiment | Literature |
| RQ1. Are consumers affected more by positive or negative reviews? | Negative | Negative | Negative.Arndt, 1967. Assael, 2003. Buttle, 1998. And. Lang, 2011.  |
| RQ2. How does the consumer decide if a review is credible? | - | Assess majority and look for consistency | Look for consistency.Doh and Hwang, 2009. Starmer-Smith, 2010.O’Reilly and Marx, 2011. Chen et al, 2009 |
| RQ2. Can reviews be made more credible? | No | No | Yes.Forman, Ghose and Wiesenfeld, 2008.Fog et al, 2007.Kuo et al, 2010. |
| RQ3. Are consumers likely to use consumer-generated reviews or marketer-generated reviews? | Both | Both | Consumer-generated.Anon, 2007Buhalis and Law, 2008 |
| RQ4. Do the comments on TripAdvisor strongly affect consumer decision making? | Yes | Yes | Yes.Gallone, 2011 |
| RQ4. Which element of the review has most affect? | Negative | Negative  | Negative.Arndt ,1967. Assael, 2003. Buttle, 1998.East et al, 2008 |

**5.0 Conclusion**

The research was designed to explore how consumer reviews on TripAdvisor affect consumer decision making when booking a hotel, with a purpose specifically to understand whether positive or negative reviews have the greatest affect on the consumer and how the credibility of the review/ reviewer can affect the decision making process. After a literature analysis was carried out the following questions were generated to help answer the research question:

* Are consumers affected more by positive or negative TripAdvisor reviews?
* How does the consumer decide if a review is credible and can it be made more so?
* Are consumers likely to use consumer-generated or marketer-generated reviews?
* Do the reviews on TripAdvisor strongly affect consumer decision making and which element of the review has the most affect on the consumer decision making process?

Research revealed that the negative TripAdvisor reviews have a stronger affect on the consumer, shown by 62.8% of questionnaire respondents stating out right that negative reviews have a greater impact on them, these findings are supported by the literature. Buttle (1998) also found that negative reviews have a higher impact on the consumer, therefore they are more influential. (Assael 2003 and East et al 2008).

Assessing the consistency between a large amount of reviews was the most commonly used technique to ascertain review credibility by participants in the experiment. This technique was highlighted by Chen et al (2009) as the most appropriate way to decide the credibility of a review. An alternative solution to assess review credibility was discussed by O’Reilly and Marx (2011), which was to compare the consumer reviews on one website to another review website; however, this technique could slow down the consumer decision making process.

The majority of findings showed that it was not thought to be possible to make the reviews on TripAdvisor credible, 14.3% of questionnaire respondents did not think it was possible, as did four of the five experiment participants. Participant 2 from the experiment felt the current TripAdvisor system is fine as it is, which is supported by 4.76% of questionnaire respondents. However, the literature shows it is possible to make TripAdvisor reviews more credible. (Forman, Ghose and Wiesenfeld 2008 Fog et al 2007 and Kuo et al 2010). The method given to create a more credible reviewing website was to get the reviewer to divulge more personal information, this should make the reviewer appear genuine and therefore the consumer believes the review is credible. Although this could lead to fewer reviews being written because consumers do not want to reveal personal information when concerns about internet security are high. (iC3 2011). As the research and literature does not support each other, does this mean a factor has been overlooked? The researcher thinks the current format of TripAdvisor is satisfactory and that consumers approach TripAdvisor critically, which enables them to identify the reviews that are and are not relevant. Does previous research show consumers are naïve? Or have consumers perceptions of reviews developed since that research was conducted?

Marketer-generated reviews give the opinion of the hotel operator and provide a positive overview of the facilities, products and services offered. Consumer-generated reviews can focus on one experience at a hotel and are generally made in comparison to other hotel experiences. Both review types can be bias and not give a balanced argument, it is therefore important to use a combination of both review types to gain a more accurate representation of the experience. The research confirms this, as 90.9% of questionnaire respondents use both and the experiment showed that the impression given by the marketer-generated review is not all that it seems, therefore using both allows a balanced perspective to be gained. The literature found that consumer-generated reviews should be used over marketer-generated reviews (Buhalis and Law 2008), which is confirmed by Adviva (Anon 2007), where frequent vacationers found consumer-generated reviews to be more credible and accurate to the experience.

The research showed that TripAdvisor reviews strongly affect consumer decision making, 60.5% of questionnaire respondents did not choose a hotel because of its reviews of TripAdvisor. The experiment revealed that TripAdvisor is used during the initial and final stages of the decision making process. It was used to either select a hotel in a specific destination or to help decide between a few hotels. The literature also confirmed that TripAdvisor has a strong affect on consumer decision making, as it could stop them from booking a hotel anywhere. (Gallone 2011). The element found in the research to have the greatest impact on consumer decision making was the fact that a review was negative. This was the main reason given in the questionnaire as to why a respondent did not book a hotel, which was confirmed by Participant 1 in the experiment, who stated they would not stay anywhere with negative reviews. However, Participant 2 based their decision on booking a hotel not only on review content, but, where the reviewer was from, the age of the review and how long after the stay the review was written, thus showing it is not only the negative element that affects the consumer decision making process. The literature confirmed that the negative element of the review is most influential on the consumer decision making process. (Arndt 1967, Assael 2003, Buttle 1998 and East et al 2008).

Even though this research looked at how reviews on TripAdvisor affect consumer decision making, there are other factors that need to be considered; location, language, city, country and cost all play a part in consumer decision making. Out of these, cost is the most important factor; consumers are always looking for value for money, if they do not feel that this would be achieved at a hotel they will not stay there. Cost was emphasised in the experiment as a factor that makes a huge difference to consumer decision making, in relation to how reviews are perceived and the hotel that is booked.

**5.1 Limitations and Further Research**

A few limitations were identified within the research; these are discussed below and are used as a starting point for further research. Firstly, the convenience sampling method used to select participants for the experiment does not produce findings that are representative of the population. However, for this research it enabled results to be obtained with ease and that would answer the research questions. A probability sampling method, such as systematic sampling, could be used to obtain findings that are representative of the population and therefore more accurate.

Secondly, some of the questions used in the questionnaire were very simple, for example, the question asking; ‘Is it the positive or negative reviews that influence you the most?’, the answers available to choose from were, ‘positive’ or ‘negative’. The question gave an answer, but, it was a main part of the research and it could have been taken further, through using a scale. Thus, allowing respondents to rate the affect that positive and negative reviews have on them, giving results that are more specific.

Finally, the international aspect of the research question was not explored in enough depth. The destinations were in Europe, so that the hotels would be of a similar standard, as star ratings vary worldwide and it would have been difficult to ensure they were similar. It would be beneficial to explore a larger range of cities worldwide and assess the response that the consumer has to those reviews. Another option would be to choose a few hotels in each city and this could potentially start to eliminate consumer bias, by hopefully reducing the amount of comparisons made between each cities location.

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**7.0 Appendices**

7.1 Hotel Case Studies

**London**

London House Hotel

81 Kensington Gardens Square, London W2 4DJ, England

London House Hotel is a newly refurbished great value London Hotel in Bayswater Central West London close to Queensway, Paddington, Hyde Park, Notting Hilland Kensington and the West End of London. The hotel offers a high standard of accommodation and service in the heart of London.

The hotel is only minutes walking distance from two of London's main underground tube stations; Queensway Tube Station (Central Line), Bayswater Tube Station (Circle and District Lines), Notting Hill Tube Station and Paddington Tube Station. And, the hotel is conveniently close to London's Euston train station and Paddington train station with the London Heathrow Express trains direct to Heathrow Airport in just 15 minutes. Whilst being easily accessible from all motorways into the city of London and also benefits from being conveniently located on London's main bus routes.

We are proud to be an affordable, cheap London hotel that provides the comfort, style and service you would usually only expect from much more expensive hotels in London.

So, whether you're visiting London as a tourist or a business traveller or maybe even both, the London House Hotel will be the right choice for you time and time again. We are a very internationally friendly hotel and if you are not familiar with London we will do everything we can to help you get the most out of your visit.

Reviews

1.“Comfortable, Clean, Great Value”

Reviewed on November 21st 2011, by AmyO\_11TX from Austin, Texas
5 reviews total and 1 helpful vote
Stayed January 2011 and travelled as a couple.

“Rooms are appropriately modern/updated, simple and clean! Great location on a quiet pretty street with a garden but just quick walk away from lots of restaurants and the Bayswater tube station. Will be my go-to hotel for a budget-concious, comfortable place to stay in London in the future.”

2.“Great location, excellent value”

Reviewed on November 1st 2011, by Michelle R from Adelaide, Australia
2 reviews total
Stayed September 2011 and travelled as a family

“Early September we stayed for 2 nights at the hotel and were thrilled with our choice. The triple room we shared was absolutely spotless and nicely decorated. The fridge,the safe and the hairdryer were very handy. Our room backed onto the Whitely Shopping Centre and although we kept our windows open all night we couldn't hear a thing. We had chosen this hotel after reading a review from a fellow Aussie and she wasn't wrong. The location was excellent, it was within 5 minutes walk of 2 tube stations and the area was full of eateries, restaurants and even McDonalds. We were not able to have early check in when we arrived at 6.45am on a Sunday but hey, it was no big deal. The staff allowed us to change into some fresh clothes and stored all our luggage until we returned in the afternoon. We enjoyed a lovely breakfast at a local restaurant then took a wonderful walk through Kensington Gardens until we reached Marble Arch and then continued down into Oxford Street for some shopping. We would not hesitate to recommend this hotel for cleanliness and good value for money.”

3.“Great Hotel! Excellant beds”

Reviewed on September 24th 2011, by 49pugie from Southampton, UK
1 review total and 3 helpful votes
Stayed September 2011 and travelled as a couple

“We have just come back home after staying two nights at the hotel. The staff were very friendly and helpful. Giving good clear advise on buses and tubes. The room was very clean. The best were one of the comfortable I have slept in away from home. Very quiet at night considering how close it is to good bars and resturants. Good access to the tube and buses to the centre of London.”

4.“Lovely hotel & staff”

Reviewed on September 22nd 2011, by tasha\_ann89 from Nottingham, UK
2 reviews total and 5 helpful votes
Stayed October 2010 and travelled as a couple

“Me and my boyf had a 3 night stay, at first we got lost & didnt help with the under ground being on strike,, we walked miles out but when i rang they stayed on the phone & helped us find our way to the hotel which we appreciated soo much! the staff was friendly & the hotel was very clean. We loved our stay here it was very close to shops, bars & resturants. if i was to go to london again i would definatley stay here!!”

5.“Quality service in quiet setting”

Reviewed on August 16th 2011, by docvaldi from Salisbury, UK
10 reviews total and 10 helpful votes
Stayed August 2011 and travelled as a couple

“My girlfriend and I spent last weekend here, having come to London to watch the London Prepares volleyball semi's and finals at Horse Guards Parade, do some sightseeing and take in a couple of the West End shows. The setting is peaceful but within easy walking distance of bustling streets in Bayswater and Notting Hill. It would be ideal for those attending the Notting Hill Carnival. Bayswater Tube Station was closed for refurbishment but Queensway was open, just a further hundred yards away. Hotel staff were friendly and helpful, the service impeccable, the double room with garden view was modern in a good state of decor and the bed very comfortable. We didn't have time to sample the breakfasts but they seemed to be ample and of good value, especially compared to some of the prices charged by nearby restaurants. We would be happy to return to The London House Hotel for next year's Olympics - indeed, I shall be booking our room straightaway!”

**Paris**

Best Western Premier, Le Carre Folies Opera

13 Rue Geoffroy Marie, Paris, Paris, 75009, France

Welcome to the BEST WESTERN PREMIER The Folies Opera Square. At the heart of Paris, the site of the legendary Folies Bergere and the Opera Garnier, the Best Western Premier Le Carré Folies Opera is a brand new hotel that welcomes you in a design and comfort, near the Sacre Coeur and the grand boulevards.

We are located 200 m from the Parisian walkways that allow you to access the Louvre and the Palais Royal on foot, busy shopping streets and one of the most authentic of the capital, 31 charming rooms, all the services you would expect, multilingual staff are available and attentive, we will make your stay exceptional.

Reviews

1."Modern and friendly hotel!"

Reviewed January 5th 2012, by maxbou from Riom, France
1 review total
Stayed December 2011 and travelled on business

"The hotel is conveniently located near the Grands Boulevards and the Folies Bergere. The area is lively but the rooms are quiet. They are modern and tastefully decorated. The bed is big and comfortable. The shower is wonderful. The reception is perfect, breakfast in the vaulted room are generous."

2."perfect!"

Reviewed December 14th 2011, by leilo83 from Roquebrune-sur-Argens, France
8 reviews total and 6 helpful votes
Stayed December 2011 and travelled with family

"The hotel is conveniently located! It is very clean with lovely modern decor, new furniture! The entire Personal is very friendly! the hotel is very quiet, the bathroom is big enough! the only small negative point it is too cold in the rooms."

3."Recommended for those only seeking a foothold in PARIS"

Reviewed July 2nd 2011, by stefanoTOD from Naples, Italy
11 reviews total and 12 helpful votes
Stayed August 2010 and travelled as a couple

"3-star hotel in an excellent location, just steps from the metro and from where you can easily reach any part of the city. The structure is a bit 'older and the rooms are tiny, I honestly do not recommend it to those looking for special comfort and want to' enjoy 'the hotel, I highly recommend it to those who, like me, sought only a strategic foothold for visit the city and we just went back to sleep. The staff were always courteous and helpful (the receptionist who speaks Italian is a reference point), great breakfast and good room cleaning. Personally I found it very good and I keep it in consideration for a possible return to Paris"

4."A two-star disguise"

Reviewed January 2nd 2012, by FERRUCCIO M from Carpineti, Italy
1 review total
Stayed December 2011 and travelled as a couple

"For our weekend last year in Paris at the last moment we were hijacked in this newly renovated hotel. Tiny room with a bathroom in sight that just does not give the ultimate in privacy! Modern style furniture but not at all comfortable and practical: only those who love the new minimalist style can accept some inconvenience. The available space is minimal, almost nonexistent wardrobe. Bath without a hair dryer. Cleaning, however, flawless. Breakfast self service and virtually standing (the room was not accessible for breakfast)! Only tea, Nespresso coffee and orange juice (industrial) and croissants. However, very friendly staff. I do not consider suitable for a holiday but only for those coming to Paris for business or just to sleep there one night."

5. "What a pleasure!"

Reviewed January 5th 2011, by vincent s from Clermont, France
1 review total
Stayed January 2012 and travelled as a couple

"A brand new. Ideally located for tourism and business. services to the top. Really pure happiness, everything was perfect. We would definitely return to this hotel with the charm striking. Also the breakfast is hearty. The attention and friendliness of the staff is nice. The decoration deserves one more star ..."

**Rome**

Hotel Piazza Di Spagna

Via Mario de' Fiori 61, 00187 Rome, Italy

The Hotel Piazza di Spagna in Rome is a small boutique family-run hotel, just steps away from Piazza di Spagna and Via Condotti. The meticulous attention to detail and passion for a first class service make the Hotel and idyllic Spanish retreat in the heart of Rome. A historic building with 20 rooms is comfortable and stylish, it is small enough to be cozy and intimate, and at the same time offer quality and service you expect from a larger hotel. At the Hotel Piazza di Spagna you are a person, not a room number.

Reviews

 1. “a charming boutique hotel walking distance to everything beautiful Rome has to offer”

Reviewed July 22nd 2010, by JoyaSydney from Sydney
2 reviews total and 4 helpful votes
Stayed June 2010 and travelled with family

"After travelling 24 hours from Sydney, what we need was to immerse ourselves into the Roman streets, eat and then sleep. And in this charming and welcoming hotel, minutes away from the Piazza di Spagna, we could do all that and more. I've stayed here a couple of times because the rooms 'feel' very Italian (even the sheets 'feel' Italian) and to my relief when you close those shutters the room is gloriously dark and quiet ( even if outside the Roman streets are bustling). The rooms I have stayed in are not large, but when in Rome you want to see Rome, so returning to a really comfortable bed with a great shower is all we needed. I travelled with my 12 year old daughter and she really loved staying there. Watching Italian TV game shows was a real insight ! And the quiet was very condusive to the 'compulsory' reading on the bed in the late afternoon, before we ventured out for a gelato and a stroll in the evening.And stroll we did....because the hotel is close to everywhere and everything. The staff are always there, always helpful, and always ready to suggest wonderful things to do and how to get there."

2. "Good stay, had to review!"

Reviewed February 15th 2010, by Airtime855 from California
1 review total and 1 helpful vote
Stayed April 2007 and travelled as a couple

"After reading the other reviews I was compelled to write one myself. In my opinion few people that have a good experience will write a review. EVERY not so good stay will get a review. My wife and I enjoyed our stay here. The staff was ok, not perfect (as we expect in America) and the amenities were meager. You have to remember though, this is not America. We're pampered and quite frankly babied in the states. You will be treated like you treat them. This is a busy area too, don't expect peace and quiet. You're staying here for the locale and nightlife. Had a great time, lots to do, great wine bar around the corner, great shopping, Spanish Steps a two minute walk...........loved it. I wasn't in my room long enough to care about the hospitality. "

3. “Great location, comfortable room, modest price -- 3 stars about right”

Reviewed July 27th 2011, by juddyray from Phoenix
21 reviews total and 3 helpful votes
Stayed June 2011 and travelled with friends

"The hotel is very close to the Spanish steps and Metro, so the location is fine. Rooms are small, but reasonably comfortable. Breakfast was not extravagant but certainly acceptable. Internet was great. A/C was necessary and worked except for a few hours one day, so that would be the biggest criticism. Staff was excellent in assisting with questions and arranging transportation and restaurant reservations. We'd stay here again. "

 4. " Try to avoid this hotel"

Reviewed June 29th 2007, by OIZ from Jerusalem, Israel
7 reviews total and 21 helpful votes
Stayed May 2007 and travelled with family

"Nice location. Unpleasant staff. Rooms overlooking the street, very noisy. Rooms look like an old furniture's depot. Breakfast was ridiculously poor. In sum, this is an overpriced B&B."

 5. " Overpriced with poor service"

Reviewed September 29th 2007, by Jason\_Suzanne from Surrey, England
2 reviews total and 9 helpful votes
Stayed September 2007

"The room was OK but noisy street at least while the bars and restaurants opposite are open. In terms of pluses, it has a good location for shops and bars. In terms of negatives, the service is poor, for 250E per night we would have at least expected some help with the bags when we arrived. TV channels had very little in English and the bathroom could have been cleaner. In all, there are better in the viccinity for similar or slightly more money. "

**Pollensa**

Hoposa Uyal Hotel

Passeig Londres s/n, 07470 Port de Pollenca, Majorca, Spain

HOTEL UYAL will be 4\* in 2012. Great improvements to come. This emblematic Puerto Pollensa hotel dates from 1954 and is a fine example of the typical architectural style to be found on the island of Majorca (Mallorca). It is formed by two buildings, both of which are beautifully decorated and in an outstanding location on the beachfront in the Bay of Pollensa. It is only 10 m from the extensive beach of fine sand located right in front of the hotel, and guests can also find a range of cultural, leisure and nature activities available just a few kilometers away.

Services include:

* Dining room with terrace where you can enjoy breakfast overlooking the sea
* Lounge bar
* Internet point
* Swimming pool snack bar (snack menu at lunchtime)
* Freshwater swimming pool
* Sun loungers and sunshades
* Terraces and solarium
* Table tennis and pool tables (extra charge)
* Tennis courts (racquet rental)
* Free Wi-Fi (New 2012)
* 24-hour reception
* Healthcare service
* Laundry service
* Rental of cars, motorcycles and bicycles
* Excursions arranged
* Currency exchange
* New Cycling facilities: bike garage, washer, dryer, bike washing area, tools, mechanical service (on request), bike tours information...

Reviews

1.“Hotel Uyal”

Reviewed on September 21st 2008, by Hough\_8 from Cheshire
1 review total
Stayed Easter 2008

“Stayed at the Hotel Uyal Purto Pollenca Majorca Easter 2008, after a six hour delay from Manchester we arrived at 1 30 am , we asked for a hot drink we were refused, We had asked and paid for a room up grade to a superior with a sea veiw and balconey the room was very basic , the shutters were not secured and kept us awake all night , along with the noisey radiator . The room was also very cold we had to ask for extra blankets. I asked to move rooms but the Hotel said it was a superior room! The room was so basic I took photographs which I sent to Thompsons who offered no compensation. The Hotel looks good from outside, and the food was good , but the room was terrible .”

2.“Poor Accommodation”

Reviewed on September 22nd 2011, by DS024 from South Shields
2 reviews total and 5 helpful votes
Stayed September 2011 and travelled as a couple

“When we booked the holiday we were happy to find we had been allocated a sea view although we had not requested it. When we arrived we found out why! Although the room faced the sea there was no view as it was blocked by the branches of the trees just outside; not that this was a great problem as the room had a window no more that 4' x 4' (the view would have been rather poor even without the trees) this made the room dark and needing the light on a lot of the time. The gloom however did not hide the fact that the room was in a poor state with dirty marks on the walls in a lot of places and a crack that had been filled with white filler and never painted. The wall under the window had water marks on it, we found out why when it rained and the water came through the window frame. We were regularly woken early in the morning by surrounding guests having showers and opening/closing doors and draws. There were two chairs in the room one of which had legs so short that I, in excess of 6 foot, could not see out of the window when sitting in it (I'd guess that the legs were about 4" tall). In an electronic age of mobile phones, Ipads, MP3 players, Digital Cameras and Ebooks it is surprising that there were only two sockets in the room, one in the Bathroom (The hairdryer was plugged into this) and one for the TV. To charge up any appliance the Dresser had to be pulled away from the wall to access the TV Socket.

We saw on the Hotels Web site that it is to be refurbished to bring it up to 4 star quality for 2012. So this may be the reason that the rooms have been allowed to deteriorate. From our experience a lot of refurbishment of the rooms is needed to bring it up to 3 star.

The staff in the Hotel are first class. The girls who looked after the rooms worked hard and always had a greeting for us, Maria who [cooked the Breakfasts](http://www.deliciousrecipe.net) was always cheery and obliging, happy to cook your food to your own taste, and encourage you to eat more. The bar staff were a great crew who were happy to oblige and also took part in the entertainments when required. One member of staff who deserves mention (as she was at the sharp end) was Christina on reception. No matter what, she always had a smile for everyone and a cheerful word and seemed to be interested in us. Queries and complaints were not a problem - she was there to help us. Our first two nights in the restaurant were not good, the vegetables on night one were Chips and Brussels Sprouts (not good), night two the veg. were Peas and Chips (poor) this led us to decide to check the menu each night before deciding to eat in or out. We never ate out, the meals improved tremendously (as our scales proved once we got home).

One reviewer complained about the noisy entertainment. Our problem was that it started before the second sitting of dinner finished so that we missed part of it, and it invariably finished before 10:30. On reading the guests comments book we noted a similar comment twice "Keep out of room 108 it is a cell" this may be because there were bars at the window! We were in room 251 and at times this felt like a cell being so gloomy with the small, tree shaded, window and the dirty ochre painted walls. The location of the Hotel is fine, not to far to the town centre and close to the beach.

If the room had been better i.e. in a cleaner state then the review would have been Very Good.

One last point. [The Hotel website](http://puncakpass.net) shows a number of pictures of the Hotel. All of the pictures of the accommodation related to the annex, none were of rooms in the original building. They obviously realize that the original building is not up to scratch.

3.“Worst hotel ever!!”

Reviewed on September 19th 2011, by Denise D from Glasgow, UK
1 review total and 2 helpful votes
Stayed August 2011 and travelled as a couple

“We have just returned from 2 weeks in the Uyal and regret to say it was the worst holiday experience ever! We booked and paid for a sea view through Jet2 (and won't make that mistake again) but on arrival were put into accommodation that can only be described as a prison cell without the bars on the windows. It was a horrible dark room with 2 beds crammed in to it. The "windows" were high up and when you opened them at one we had the extractor fan and fumes from the kitchen and the other had a huge air conditioning unit and the wardrobe was in the toilet! The light was hanging off the wall with wires clearly seen and the bath taps also coming off the wall.Watch out for room 171!!! We immediately went to reception to complain and although we had all the paperwork to prove we had booked a sea view the male receptionist couldn't be any less interested. He just kept saying the hotel was fully booked and we should take it up with Jet2. We asked again in the morning and every day after that only to be told the same thing. Every where we went in the hotel people were complaining of the same thing, booking and paying for rooms the hotel could not provide. Eventually 8 days in to our holiday they finally moved us to a mini suite. A nice room with a sitting area and a balcony but it was badly needing some maintenance done. We have been to PP many times and love it but this hotel and the attitude of the staff made this one we definately want to forget.”

4.“Lovely Spanish hotel”

Reviewed on December 11th 2011, by Janey42 from Guilsfield, UK
4 reviews total and 11 helpful votes
Stayed April 2011 and travelled as a couple

“I've read with much interest all the reviews for the Hotel Uyal. We stayed here in April 2011 for ten nights and were allocated the dreaded room at the back. The price we paid for our holiday was very reasonable and we certainly had nothing to complain about! On arrival, the reception was quiet and we checked in with no problem. The hotel is old spanish with a lovely feel to it, comfortable reception rooms, sitting areas and dining room. Our room at the back was absolutely fine, clean with everything we needed. The back looked out over the mountains and nature reserve of Peurto Pollensa, being at the back didn't worry us as we had no intention of spending hours in our room, Peurto Pollensa is too appealing for that. We have been to Peurto Pollensa many times and never fail to enjoy exploring. The food at the Uyal is fantastic, plenty of choice, beautifully presented both at breakfast and dinner. There is something old fashioned and charming about having the same table every night, the fact that ours overlooked the sea was a bonus.the outside area is pleasant with a pool area, sunbathing terraces and eating area. If you want a bustling, busy, noisy, brash hotel this is not for you. but if you want quiet, charming, friendly, fabulous sea views and location with a Spanish atmosphere then try the hotel Uyal. We can recommend it and are returning in April 2012 and hope the planned refurbishment just adds to the pleasure.”

5.“Disappointing Uyal”

Reviewed on September 16th 2011, by Pauline w from Liverpool, UK
1 review total and 2 helpful votes
Stayed August 2011 and travelled as a couple

“We had booked a week for a frontal sea view room from 30th August 2011 and thought this would include a balcony, but unfortunately the room we were allocated was on the 2nd floor of the main hotel and included a sea view but unfortunately no balcony. We complained immediately and were told we may be able to move the next day but when we spoke to reception the following day we were told in no uncertain terms that this would not be possible. We were informed that the hotel was very busy and the male receptionist who had a dismissive demeanour and was very unhelpful intimated that others may have paid more than us and that as we were only staying for 1 week we would not be able to move. We have stayed at the Uyal a number of years before and did not encounter this problem. This was not the only problem the room itself had very tired decor - the walls were unclean and scraped - the bedding was only changed once in a week and there were no electricity sockets in the room other than a shaving plug in the bathroom. There were two chairs in the room - one was tall and one was short, the short one being more of a childs chair. We thought ours was an isolated incident but we heard lots of grumbling around the hotel by a number of guests in similar situations to ourselves. I found the whole experience so disappointing having looked forward to the holiday so much!! Needless to say we won't be returning to the Uyal again.”

**Alicante**

Hotel Gala Placidia

Calle Roma 4, 03500 Benidorm, Spain

The magnificent Hotel Gala Placidia 3 star, renovated in 2006 and located only 600m from the Levante beach, offers all the facilities of a hotel of its class; 24-hour reception, a buffet restaurant, spacious bar lounge with TV, internet access, outdoor pool with childrens section, solarium, playground and gardens, ‘bowling green’, and a full entertainment programme for adults and children.

Its 135 comfortable rooms fully equipped and all with a terrace, offer a full bathroom, telephone, air conditioning/ heating, TV and safe (optional). You can also enjoy the gym, indoor pool and the spa Olympics special prices only 180m from the hotel.

Reviews

1.“Be warned never go to this hotel”

Reviewed on October 7th 2011, by Christine W from Kingston-Upon-Hull, UK
1 review total and 1 helpful vote
Stayed September 2011 and travelled with family

“We booked this holiday as a family holiday,my husband,daughter & her husband plus 4 children,as soon as we arrived it was pretty obvious child friendly it's not,the room was a standard room not large with 4 single beds in so no room to walk around the matresses did not fit way too big so you fall off. The kids club didn't exist,nor the kids play area,when we tried to complain,they ignored us,finally a hotel rep turned up & promptly told us about the sister hotel that we couldn't use,we bought lilo's & kids pool playthings the staff destroyed them. Now the food it wasn't all bad mainly cold,but on the all inclusive the supposed all day snacks,ie burgers, hot dogs & chips,they were there but at 1pm,the hot stove was turned off with the food in then turned back on at 3pm with no reheating.The other guests mainly consisted of the spanish version of a darby & joan holiday club 250 old age pensioners who didn't want the british in any way adult or child.The majority of the staff were rude bad tempered & overall very unhelpful,after having a meal i wanted to take my coffee with me to the terrace in a cup,the waitress shouted right across the restaurant then chased me to take them off me,the brits were only allowed plastic beakers,though the spanish could have cups & glasses.My honest opinion is this hotel should not be offered to any other guests but spanish,you will not be welcome or be made to feel comfortable.So to sum up please don't inflict this hotel on your family not unless you really don't like them,my grandchildren are not angels,but they did not deserve to be treat that way,what should've been a happy time was a nightmare.”

2.“never again if it was the only hotel in beni!!”

Reviewed on July 28th 2011, by davidchorlton200 from Preston, England
1 review total
Stayed July 2011 and travelled with family

“just got back on tuesday!! got to the room and both panels of the balcony doors were cracked, 4 beds in the room not enough to swing a cat!! dirty marks on the wall, the balcony ceiling was peeling like an orange and a rusty railing on the balcony! oh hum!! onwards and upwards we thought!! got there had a beer not 2 bad but cud only order drinks at a time not good when you got 2 thirsty boys first taste of the food!! cold/tasteless/un-inspiring!! tried the evening meals in one word crap!! the "just for all inclusive" fodder near the bar well what more can i say cold limp chips cold and grim burgers crud efforts for sossys!!! and a bit of meat and cheese in the fridge!! the bar area and the patio area always dirty!! the positive side was there is mega places to eat in benidorm which the wife and kids were thankful for!! spent about 300 squid more than i should of!! the down side is there was no rep to complain to because it was via lowcostholidays.com (thomas cook!) if u speak fluent spanish and like rude service and crap rooms and and and!!!!! go there!! if not try a decent hotel. this is one not to be tried!! we all learn by our mistakes....”

3.“Go and see for yourself”

Reviewed on October 27th 2011, by Donna H from Liverpool, UK
2 reviews total and 5 helpful votes
Stayed October 2011 and travelled with family

“Just returned from five days at this hotel. Myself two girls and mum in law. The room was small, but very clean. Hotel itself needs a little TLC. Food was fine (all the moaners who complained about cold repetative food, and rude Spaniards) do not know what that was about. We had nice well cooked food different every day. Wine by the bottle was lovely, the staff were great, my two daughters made the effort to talk Spanish and they all loved it. They even helped them with what to say. They always had great big welcoming smiles nothing at all was too much trouble. People need to look past the attitude of it's not very British. If you want British go to Blackpool. If you want a different pleasant experience go to this hotel. One minus is the pool is soooo tiny. We went to the beach everyday five minutes walk away. X”

4.“never again”

Reviewed on October 12th 2011, by smarty1959 from Tenerife, Spain
1 review total and 1 helpful vote
Stayed September 2011 and travelled as a couple

“Stayed for a week all inclusive in september 2011, on arrival was put in a first floor room that had wire mesh all over the balcony with an outlook onto a side road and 2 rubbish bins, was not happy. hext morning asked to be moved and it took them 3 days to eventually move us. Hotel was full of very rude spanish pensioners who pushed in at the mainly spanish food buffet could'nt wait to get home to be honest.”

5.“fawlty towers better than here what a dump”

Reviewed on September 8th 2010, by swintz59 from England, UK
2 reviews total and 3 helpful votes
Stayed January 2010 and travelled with friends

“STAY AWAY unless you want to end up in hospital for the rest of your holiday.We went to the restaurant and were greeted with what i can only describe as road kill.The fruit looked like it had been kicked round the hotel before being served up.my husband was browner than the roast potatos they must have put them on the balcony and hoped the sun would roast them.we asked for blankets as the rooms were freezing and were given rags with more holes in than a pack of polo mints.we did nt know whether to put them on the bed or wear them as ponchos.The spanish guests looked at us as if we were aliens and did not belong in their hotel.Please take heed of this warning because once you are there you will be trapped.We had to pay to move to a decent hoteland were given no sympathy from thomas cook.Why they still use this hotel is a mystery .YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED”

7.2 Questionnaire

**The Analysis of TripAdvisor**

**1. Age:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Under 20 |
|  | http://www.surveymonkey.com/i/t.gif21 - 30 |
|  | 31 - 40 |
|  | 41 - 50 |
|  | http://www.surveymonkey.com/i/t.gif51 - 60 |
|  | 60+ |

**2. Profession:**

**3. Have you used TripAdvisor before?
(If the answer to this question is No, thank you for taking part but you will be unable to answer the following questions.)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | http://www.surveymonkey.com/i/t.gifYes |
|  | http://www.surveymonkey.com/i/t.gifNo |

**4. Do you regularly use TripAdvisor?**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | http://www.surveymonkey.com/i/t.gifYes |
|  | http://www.surveymonkey.com/i/t.gifNo |

If answered Yes, how often do you use it?

**5. Why do you use TripAdvisor?**

**6. Do you think the reviews on TripAdvisor are reliable?**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | http://www.surveymonkey.com/i/t.gifYes |
|  | No |
|  | Maybe |

Why is that? **(If you answered Yes to Q6 please skip this question.)**

**7. How do you think it could be made more reliable?**

**8. Is it the positive or negative TripAdvisor reviews that influence you most?**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Positive |
|  | http://www.surveymonkey.com/i/t.gifNegative |

**9. Do you use the hotels description of the services and facilities available or those written by guests that have stayed there. Or do you use a combination of both?**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Hotels description |
|  | Guests description |
|  | Both |

**10. Has a review/ reviews on TripAdvisor stopped you from booking a hotel?**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | http://www.surveymonkey.com/i/t.gifYes |
|  | http://www.surveymonkey.com/i/t.gifNo |

Why did it stop you?

7.3 Why TripAdvisor and the reviews ‘maybe’ or are credible

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Reasons | % of total answer |
| Been places not recommended and liked them | 2.4 |
| Make up own mind on somewhere from reading between the lines | 7.3 |
| Large number of reviews so would need a lot of negatives to be bad | 2.4 |
| Hotels can post own favourable reviews or bad reviews on competitors | 2.4 |
| Large number of reviews means average scores are reliable | 5 |
| Not bias | 2.4 |
| People’s opinions | 9.8 |
| Most are reliable, base decision on majority | 9.8 |
| People have different opinions and personal preferences | 9.8 |
| Most people express poor stays | 9.8 |
| Reviews could be made up | 9.8 |
| Reviewer may not have even stayed at accommodation reviewing, anyone can post reviews | 7.3 |
| May be bias | 5 |
| Varied reviews can be confusing especially if they vary greatly | 2.4 |
| Reviews are reliable, the restaurant matched the reviews | 2.4 |
| People write the reviews to create controversy  | 2.4 |
| They are verified before they are posted | 2.4 |
| Customers have realised complaining can get compensation and freebies | 2.4 |
| Comments in the press | 2.4 |
| Give an overview of the general experiences | 2.4 |
| Total | 100 |

7.4 Results for experiment

Table showing the results from the experiment

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Participant 1** | **Participant 2** | **Participant 3** | **Participant 4** | **Participant 5** |
| **Age** | 50 | 50 | 60 | 52 | 21 |
| **Profession** | Health Care Assistant | CRM data manager | Retired | Bank Manager | Dental Nurse |
| **Q1. After reading hotel description, which would you be most inclined to stay at?** | Paris | Rome | Rome | Pollensa | Pollensa |
| **Q2. Why?** | Central to facilities, small. Description to the point | States you’re a person not a room number, small, never been to Rome | Small and family run, mentions meticulous attention to detail and passion for 1st class service | Already been to Rome and London and do not like Paris | Sounds nice, area, good location |
| **Q3. London – a) Would you stay here?** | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes |
| **b) Why? One review/ Collection** | Collection | Collection | - | Collection | Collection |
| **c) Particular review with strongest affect?** | None | None | 1,2 | None | None |
| **d)Why?** | Helpful staff, clean, quiet, modern. Central location to site seeing | Read all reviews decide on what looking for at that time. Look at country reviewers are from | Do not like the way the reviews are written. Trust 1 and 2 most because they are foreign reviewers and tend to be more critically fair | Majority very positive, if there were any negatives they were corrected and made up for what happened | Consistent reviews, clean, nice staff and good location |
| **Q4. Paris – a) Would you stay here?** | No | Yes | Yes | Maybe | Yes |
| **b) Why? One review/ Collection** | Collection | Collection | Collection | Collection | Collection |
| **c) Particular review with strongest affect?** | 3,4 | None | None | None | None |
| **d)Why?** | Negative reviews | Clean, can sleep and good breakfast are most important factors. Any negatives are not relevant to my wants. Extra facilities are not necessary | Descriptions back up what I believe it would be like and reviews are consistent with each other | If read these reviews when looking for a holiday would choose another hotel, tiny rooms, minimal space | Review 4 slightly off putting. Majority said it was nice, the negatives were petty. |
| **Q5. Rome – a) Would you stay here?** | No | Yes | Maybe | Maybe | Maybe |
| **b) Why? One review/ Collection** | Collection | One review | Collection | Collection | Collection |
| **c) Particular review with strongest affect?** | 4,5 | 1 | None | 1,2,3 | None |
| **d)Why?** | Negative reviews | The 2 negative reviews are old and therefore not relevant | Believe only 2 reviews to be fair. Contradictory and some are very scathing | 2007 reviews would be ignored, too old. If it was cheap would probably put up with the few negatives – value for money | They all said the same thing, OK but not great.  |
| **Q6. Pollensa – a) Would you stay here?** | No | No | No | No | No |
| **b) Why? One review/ Collection** | Collection | Collection | Collection | Collection | Collection |
| **c) Particular review with strongest affect?** | 2,5 | 2 | None | None | None |
| **d)Why?** | Bad reviews, unclean, needs renovating | Everything is reasoned, articulate and believable. Thorough, rational and balance. | The mood of people at the time, delayed put them in bad stead for hotel. Could lead to more negativity. Although reviews are consistent but may be too harsh | 2008 reviews ignored too old. See reviews after refurbishment to see if would go | Doesn’t sound too good, would be tempted to wait until after renovations and look at the reviews then and decided |
| **Q7. Allicante – a) Would you stay here?** | No | No | No | No | No |
| **b) Why? One review/ Collection** | Collection | - | Collection | Collection | Collection |
| **c) Particular review with strongest affect?** | None | - | 5 | None | Nome |
| **d)Why?** | Definite ‘No’ All bad reviews | Reviews support impression of hotel, majority of reviews are British and therefore less likely to trust | Consistently bad | All consistently bad and fairly recent reviews | Very bad reviews |
| **Q8. Have you used TripAdvisor before?** | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| **Q9. Would you consider using it now/ more than before?** | Yes | No, use it a lot already | No | No, use it a lot already | No |
| **Q10. Why do you trust the reviews on TripAdvisor?** | Like to think that the people writing the reviews are honest and like me. Guests who have actually stayed there, not fake reviews | Large selection of reviews and you can make your own mind up of which ones to trust. If they all sound to good to be true, less likely to trust | I do not trust them, you do not know whose writing them | Must be consistent with each other. Recent reviews. | Trusts the majority |
| **Q11. Do you think there is a way to make them more reliable?** | No | No | No | Yes | No |
| **Q12. How** | Peoples opinions, reviews only reliable as the people who write them | Fine as it is. Validating who you are may stop people from reviewing. People can make their own decision of which reviews to trust | Possible make categories of people writing the reviews, I would look at 40+ more experience | Hotel verifies reviewer has stayed there | No way to prove who you are and whether you have stayed/ been somewhere |
| **Q13. Has a review/ reviews stopped you from going to a hotel?** | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes |
| **Q14. How many times has this occurred?** | Multiple | Multiple | - | - | Multiple |
| **Q15. Why did it stop you?** | Bad reviews | Cleanliness issues | - | - | The majority were bad reviews |
| **Q16. Anything else** | Its what you can compensate on, size of room, length of stay and how much it is costing. Negative reviews are main put off – cleanliness, space, friendly staff and noise | Always look at the country the reviewer is from and the age of the review | Cost is a main factor in relation to where you are going. Value for money | Only look at reviews within last 6 months. Use it as a way to decide between a few hotels. Also use TA ratings to decide which hotels to chose in an area. |  |

7.5 Results from the questionnaire

Q1. Age of respondents

Q2. Profession in sectors

Q3. Have you used TripAdvisor before?

Q4. Do you use TripAdvisor regularly?

How often do you use it?

Q5. Why do you use TripAdvisor?

Q6. Are TripAdvisor reviews reliable?

Why are they reliable?

Q7. How could TripAdvisor be made more reliable?

Q8. Do positive or negative reviews have most affect?

Q9. Do you use marketer or consumer-generated reviews?

Q10. Has a review stopped you from booking a hotel?

Why did it stop you?