

## Consumer Research Identifies How To Present Travel Review Content For More Bookings

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### Executive Summary

Data from reviews and online user generated content are highly useful for consumers when making an online purchasing decision. In the travel context, where this study found that 93% of travelers read reviews, this phenomenon is particularly true. Therefore, many travel intermediaries and hotels have incorporated review content onto their websites. However, there are many different ways to present this content. This research was designed to understand exactly how hotel reviews impact a website's user experience and to understand which presentation of review content (full text, aggregated visualization, or a combination of both) is easier for travelers to consume and understand. Data about this behavior were gathered from 510 respondents via an online survey. Respondents were shown two different visualizations of reviews: 1. ten randomly selected full-text hotel reviews, 2. a graphical, visual summary of verified hotel reviews. In each example, respondents were asked to describe their user experience and rate their confidence level in making a booking decision. Following, respondents were asked about their preferences when booking given the option of reading no reviews, full text reviews, summarized review content or a combination of full text reviews and summarized content.

Findings show that:

- Summarized review content is easier to consume than full text reviews
- Summarized review content gives travelers the most useful overview of a hotel compared to full text reviews
- Summarized review content is more mobile friendly compared to full text reviews
- Travelers prefer a combination of the two to feel most confident in making a booking decision

## Method

To examine the impact of reviews and optimal visualization of review data, an electronic survey was developed by online reputation management firm, TrustYou. The objective of the research was to understand how hotel reviews impact a website's user experience and to understand how reviews are consumed and understood by travelers.

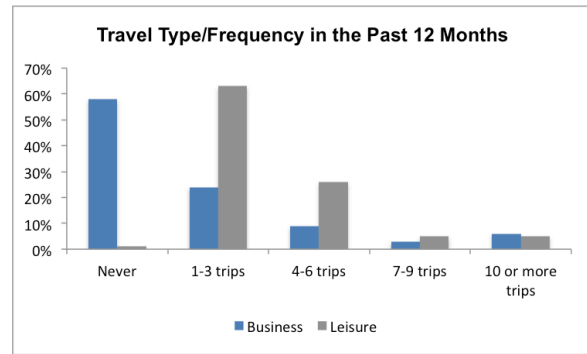
The sample was drawn from a nationally representative US panel of Internet users from Qualtrics during January of 2015. The sample consisted of 510 adults over the age of 18. To participate in the study, all respondents must have traveled within the past 12 months, either for business, leisure or both.

Respondents participated in an online questionnaire about their hotel booking habits. Respondents were shown two different visualizations of reviews: 1. Ten randomly selected full-text hotel reviews, 2. a graphical summary of verified hotel reviews. In each example, respondents were asked to describe their user experience and rate their confidence level in making a booking decision.

Further details and analysis from the study follow below.

## A Profile of Today's Travelers

99% of the respondents had traveled at least once in the past 12 months for leisure, and 42% had traveled at least once in the past 12 months for business. Among the leisure travelers, the majority (63%) took between one and three holiday trips in the past 12 months, and another twenty-six percent reported taking between four and six leisure trips in the past 12 months.

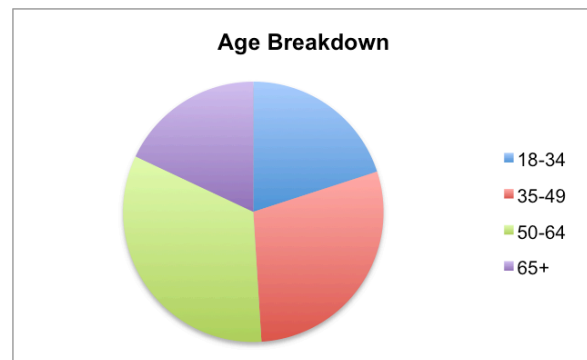


## Accommodation Type

For both business and leisure travel, respondents reported that they are far more likely to book a hotel/resort over any other accommodation (B&B/inn, hostel, apartment, home-sharing, etc.).

## Gender and Age

Respondents were 64% female, 36% male. The age breakdown is as follows:



## Household Income

The median annual household income for this sample was around \$58,800. Respondents who traveled at least once in the past 12 months for business averaged higher annual household incomes (\$64,000).

## The Role of Reviews in the Booking Process

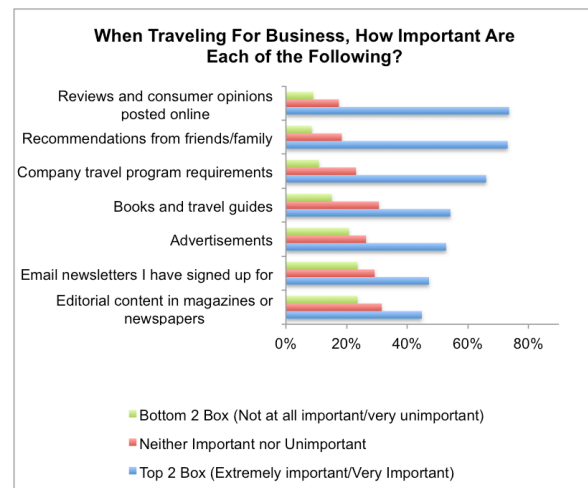
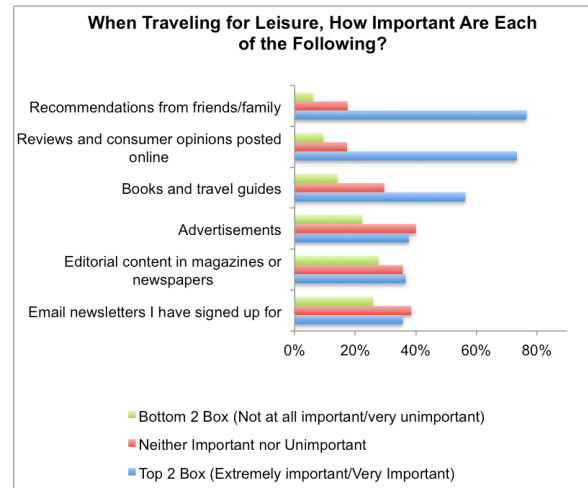
Reviews play an important role for travelers during the booking process. 95% of respondents reported reading travel reviews prior to booking, with 59% of respondents reading reviews always or very often prior to booking. Leisure travelers reported reading an average of 6-7 reviews prior to booking their trip, and business travelers reported reading an average of 5 reviews.

### Reported Time Spent Reading Reviews

Reading these reviews can be time consuming. Leisure travelers reported spending 30 minutes on average reading reviews prior to booking a hotel, and business travelers reported spending 20 minutes reading review content prior to booking. About 10% of travelers (11% leisure, 9% business) spent more than one hour reading hotel reviews prior to making a booking decision.

### The Importance of Reviews

Reviews and online opinions are extremely important when making a booking decision for both business and leisure travelers. 36% of business travelers and 31% of leisure travelers said that reviews and online opinions are extremely important, ranking these opinions ahead of traditional marketing and on par with recommendations from friends and family. When looking at top two box results, recommendations from friends and family have a slight edge over reviews and online opinions with leisure travelers. These findings highlight the significance of reviews in the booking process and suggest that including review data on booking sites could increase likelihood of conversion.



## Website Optimization: How To Present Review Content

To better understand how consumers use review data during the booking process, the study presented travelers with two different visualizations of reviews: 1. Ten randomly selected full-text hotel reviews, 2. A graphical summary of verified hotel reviews using TrustYou's Meta-Reviews™.

### User Experience and Time Spent Reading

In each presentation of reviews, respondents were timed on how long it took to read and process the review

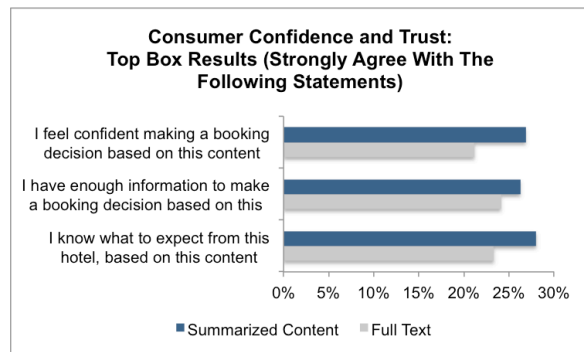
content. It took respondents 4.3 minutes to read and understand the sample of full text reviews and less than one minute to read and understand the review summary, suggesting that summarized review content offers a more efficient way for consumers to evaluate review data.

When asked about time and efficiency, 80% of respondents say that summarized review content was time efficient, compared to only 59% who said the same for full text reviews.

Furthermore, when given the option of reading no reviews, full text reviews, summarized review content or a combination of both full text reviews and summarized review content on a website, 52% of respondents rated summarized review content as the most user friendly.

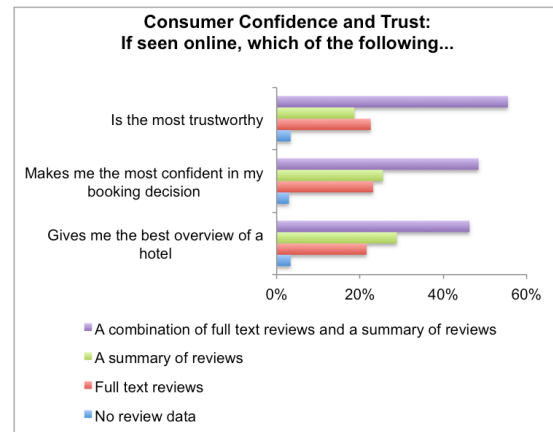
### Consumer Confidence and Trust

Comparing consumer confidence and trust among full text reviews vs. summarized review content reveals that summarized review content provided a slightly better overview of a hotel compared to full text reviews.



To further understand these responses, respondents were then asked their preference on which of the following options they would prefer under different scenarios: no reviews, full text reviews,

summarized reviews, or a combination of both full text reviews and summarized review content. Findings show that a combination of the two leads to the highest likelihood to book and highest consumer trust.



### Mobile Optimization

This study also examined mobile booking habits to understand which visualization of review content is most mobile friendly. Summarized review content was the most mobile-friendly, with 72% of respondents saying that the summarized review content was mobile friendly, compared to just 40% of respondents saying the same for full text reviews.

Furthermore, when given the option of reading no reviews, full text reviews, summarized review content or a combination of both full text reviews and summarized review content on a mobile, respondents 61% prefer to see only a review summary during their mobile bookings.

### Limitations

Hotel pricing data was not presented in either example. Some respondents said that they did not have enough information to feel confident in a decision because price would be a major factor in their evaluation of the hotel.

## Conclusion

Because review content plays an increasingly important role in the travel booking process, it behooves both hotels and travel intermediaries to leverage this content on their websites to increase consumer confidence and trust and ultimately to increase their conversion rates.

There are, however, many ways for these companies to display review content online. This research explored how review content can be displayed for optimal user experience, time efficiency and consumer confidence. The research showed that summarized review content is more time efficient and more user friendly than displaying full text reviews. Summarized review content, like TrustYou's Meta-Reviews™, also makes users feel more confident in their purchase decision compared to full text reviews. On a desktop screen, if given the option to see a combination of full text reviews alongside summarized review content, users opted for a combination of the two. This combination was rated as the most trustworthy and most reliable. On mobile, however, where space is limited, users prefer to see only summarized content for the best user experience.

## Implications

Based on these findings, hoteliers and travel intermediaries should consider integrating summarized review content onto their sites across all screens to improve usability and consumer trust. On desktop/PCs, these companies may also want to include full text reviews to further increase trust and consumer confidence.

Hoteliers and travel intermediaries that incorporate this content onto their websites are likely to better connect with their users and ultimately experience higher conversion rates.

## About TrustYou

TrustYou's Mission is to positively influence travelers' decisions. Reviews and user-generated content now rank #1 in influencing travelers' hotel selections and industry reputations. Digesting all of these opinions, however, is beyond any one person's capacity. Each day things become more complicated because millions of new opinions in thousands of formats and dozens of languages enter the fray. TrustYou searches, analyzes and distills hundreds of millions of opinions scattered across this vast, fragmented market. Our products are extensively used by suppliers – hotels, accommodations, restaurants – to provide travelers with better services and enhanced offerings by monitoring, surveying and acting upon all worldwide guest feedback. Travel intermediaries – OTAs, meta-search, destination marketers – use TrustYou's Meta-Reviews™ to help travelers purchase wisely. TrustYou's Meta-Reviews™ are based solely on verified travel reviews. They do not include data from TripAdvisor.

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## About the Authors

### ***Margaret Ady***

Margaret Ady is based in Munich, Germany where she serves as Vice President of Marketing at [TrustYou](#). She graduated from the University of Southern California with degrees in Economics and Psychology, and where she was awarded the Annenberg Communications Pathway Grant in 2004 for her research in new technology and its impact on health and healthcare decision-making. Margaret has extensive experience in research, marketing and brand strategy, having served in leadership positions at The Walt Disney Company (where she was appointed to the company's Peer Advisory Board), and The Oprah Winfrey Network. She has also provided research and strategic consulting services to 20th Television (Fox), Nielsen and many other companies in FMCG/Entertainment/IT industries.

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Donna Quadri-Felitti is Academic Chair and Clinical Associate Professor of Hospitality and Tourism Management at New York University, [Preston Robert Tisch Center for Hospitality and Tourism](#) in New York City. Donna completed her Ph.D. at Iowa State University in Hospitality Management where she received a USDA-funded Sustainable Community Development grant for her research in wine tourism destination marketing and the experience economy. She was named one of the [Top 25 Extraordinary Minds in Hospitality and Tourism Sales and Marketing by Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International](#) for the year 2012. Donna has earned certifications as a Hospitality Educator from [American Hotel & Lodging Association](#), a Hospitality Digital Marketer from [Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International](#), and wine captain from the Sommelier Society of America.

## Appendix

### Example of Full Text Reviews:

#### “Great location, excellent service, luxurious hotel”

We stayed here for 4 nights with our 2 boys (8 and 3 years old) and could not have asked for a better hotel. All of the staff were friendly and helpful, the pool area was luxurious and comfortable, and the rooms were very nice with a huge tub and a separate shower. The location is great. The only complaint I could find is that almost every restaurant within walking distance closes before dinner time. However, there is a pizza place just a couple blocks away. This hotel is a little more pricey than some of the others around town, but definitely worth the extra money to feel like a king for a few days.

### Example of Review Summary:

