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**A Study of Consumer Trust in Online Reviews and Social Media Comments in the Age of Artificial Intelligence**

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**Abstract**

*As the digital landscape evolves with the continuous fast-paced development of Artificial Intelligence (AI), both businesses and consumers face numerous challenges posed by the ever-growing industry of AI. As business struggle to keep up with the technological advancements, consumers, on the other hand, face a more personal issue: their trust in an internet sustained by AI tools. Since half of the internet traffic is created by non-human bots and a third of all internet traffic is generated by “bad bots” which were developed for malicious purposes, the integration of AI managed to confer them human-like qualities. The “dead internet theory”, generated social media interactions and content, fake online reviews, generated blog posts, and the dilution of quality online content, all sustained by AI pose a threat to the trust and the legitimacy of the internet as a tool for humanity that was carefully built in the last decade. Our research is trying to find the level of trust of Romanian consumers in online platforms that are used as tools for selling and promotion of products and services, amidst the rapid integration of AI. The results can be used as a warning signal for consumers and policy makers alike to take a stronger stance on the online content that encourages or promotes online purchases. A survey has been deployed to 100 Romanian consumers, and the results have been analysed. Most respondents do base their purchasing decision on online reviews with slight differences between men and women yet most fear that AI and bots have a part in influencing these reviews.*

**Keywords:** consumer trust, artificial intelligence, review systems, social media comments.

**JEL Classification:** M3.

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## **1. Introduction**

Both scholars and practitioners agree that word-of-mouth is the most effective marketing tool. As consumers increasingly use the Internet, online reviews, a form of electronic word-of-mouth has gained an incredible importance in the purchasing decision (Arndt, 1967; Trusov et al., 2009). Online reviews are one of the most trusted forms of social proof. Even though Directive 2005/29/EC bans fake online consumer reviews in the EU, reviews are commonly manipulated or cherry-picked by online businesses that are not fully transparent with their target consumers. The authenticity of online reviews is a primary determinant of consumer trust. Reviews perceived as genuine and written by actual users are more likely to be trusted (Baek et al., 2012). Oppositely, falsified reviews, which are defined by exaggerated positive or negative wording, has the ability to reduce trust. In addition, a significant role is played by the credibility of the reviewer, since people award more trust to reviews made by verified purchasers or those who have a detailed profile (Luca & Zervas, 2016). Literature holds that retail sales are impacted in a direct manner by the online reviews made for the mentioned products, thus it may be stated that the effect of online reviews goes beyond the electronic space (Floyd et al., 2014). Even though AI technologies are generally trusted by consumers on their perceived usefulness, ease of use, and attitude on intention to use (Choung et al., 2023), their advanced capabilities to impersonate human-like can pose a threat to the slowly built consumers trust in the online space. Transparency in the review process, such as clear disclosure of any conflicts of interest or affiliations, enhances trust (Cheung et al., 2009). Platforms that rigorously monitor and disclose the authenticity of reviews, including the use of AI for detection of fake reviews, are seen as more reliable by consumers. Content authenticity and credibility are important elements to be considered when building trust in online reviews, in the case of marketers. Among this, we may include the application of robust verification processes and leveraging AI to observe and authenticate reviews. Besides these highlighted points, maintaining the trust of consumers can be realised by main pillars such as transparency regarding AI involvement and proactive management of review authenticity.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Bauman and Bachmann (2017) note that there are two categories of trust factors, meaning technological factors, for instance the website design, trust signals, privacy reassurances, general e-commerce acceptance, and social Factors such as word-of-mouth, social presence, culture, and green trust. When developing a powerful brand identity, written assessments such as online reviews, blogs, and testimonials concerning brand experiences are outstanding by comparison with verbal interactions. Consumers' perception of the brand is shaped by online product reviews, that create a unique image in the mind of consumers (Chakraborty & Bhat, 2018). A negative online review is perceived as more credible than a positive review, while a positive review leads to better initial trust than a negative review (Kusumasondjaja et al., 2012). Following the most used "5 stars" reviewing system,

a common dilemma that both sellers and consumers face is the J-shaped distribution, in which most reviews are either 5 or 1 star, with little to no in-between grades. Studies advise that in order for people to overcome the two sources of bias, purchasing and under-reporting, consumers should not solely rely on the simple average that is easily available but they should also incorporate other variables such as the standard deviation. The authors also advocate that product review systems should provide this additional information for consumers. (Hu et al., 2009).

A vast number of reviews for various products and services exists online, yet not all those reviews can be trusted (Johnson & Kaye, 2016). Therefore, consumers are searching for credible sources of information and they only pursue online reviews if they perceive the reviews as credible (Filiari, 2015). Erkan and Evans (2016) state that credibility evaluation of online reviews can be described as a process by which consumers assess the accuracy of online reviews.

Thomas et al. (2019) proposed a theoretical model to assess a review credibility and correlate it with the purchase intention of a visitor. They identified the accuracy, completeness, and timeliness of a review as part of the argument quality and the review quantity, consistency, the expertise of the reviewer, the rating of product/service, and the website reputation as the peripheral cues. All these factors sum up to form the credibility value of a review. Even though determinants such as website reputation shape credibility in a positive manner, a great number of reviews can reduce it as a result of consumer suspicion. The volume of reviews and the consistency of ratings also impact trust. A larger number of reviews generally suggests a more reliable representation of the product or service quality (Duan et al., 2008). Consistency across reviews, with a balanced distribution of positive and negative feedback, further strengthens consumer confidence (Zhu & Zhang, 2010).

This finding is a basic theoretical pillar for our research, given that AI can generate in an easy way a variety of human-like reviews. Artificial intelligence (AI) is used to a greater extent to develop the trustworthiness of online reviews.

The identification of fraudulent reviews can be assisted by AI technologies, which can also safeguard the authenticity and credibility of the reviews that consumers rely on. Algorithms can pinpoint patterns in review language, reviewer conduct, and review timelines to identify doubtful activities (Mukherjee et al., 2012). Online retailers rely on AI to identify and erase reviews created through AI or fake reviews from their platforms (Amazon, 2024). Nevertheless, the employment of AI poses some difficulties. In this sense, consumers may be misled and their trust can be distorted due to the unclear dissemination of AI-generated reviews. In this sense, it is essential to maintain the clarity concerning the utilisation of AI in the creation and moderation of AI reviews. Consumers need to be informed about how AI is used to curate and manage reviews to maintain trust (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2015).

A popular piece of internet cultural reference that started in 2013 is the „dead internet theory” that suggests that much of the online content is in fact automatically generated, and that the number of humans on the web is dwindling in comparison with bot accounts. As the Artificial Intelligence technology advanced rapidly in the last two years, The 2024 Bad Bot Report suggests that almost 50% of internet traffic comes from non-human sources and 1/3 of all internet traffic is generated

by bad bots (Imperva, 2024). These bad bots have become more advanced and evasive and now can mimic human behaviour in such a way that it makes them difficult to detect and prevent.

These bad bots are deployed in various sectors of the Internet. Social media bots are automated instruments that are used to conduct the interaction on social platforms. Their functioning involves certain degrees of autonomy and they attempt to imitate the conduct of humans. Even though there exist bots that are helpful, a great share of them fulfils deceiving and damaging purposes. It was asserted that these malicious bots represent a considerable share of the total accounts across social media platforms. In accordance with research articles approaching this the, the following are most of the uses of social media bots (Orabi et. al., 2020; Chang et. al., 2021; Hajli et. al., 2022; Fan et al., 2020):

- **Automated Engagement:** Bots are able to like, share, comment, and follow/unfollow other accounts in an automatic manner to improve engagement and visibility.
- **Content Distribution:** The dissemination of content such as news articles, promotional material, or advertisements across social media platforms can be programmed to be conducted by bots.
- **Influence Campaigns:** The distortion of the public opinion, the emission of propaganda, or the spread of particular ideologies or political agendas is frequently performed by bots in influence campaigns.
- **Spamming:** Bots hold the ability to create and spread spam messages, links, or advertisements, and to fill the social media feeds with undesired information.
- **Fake Accounts:** Bots can issue fake accounts with the aim to increase the number of followers, the popularity of particular individuals or brands, or to spread misinformation.
- **Data Collection:** Bots can gather data regarding users' behaviour, preferences, and interactions for different purposes, for instance targeted advertising or monitoring.
- **Market Manipulation:** Bots can be utilised with the purpose of increasing or decreasing in an artificial manner the value of stocks, cryptocurrencies, or other assets by disseminating allegations or false information.
- **Cyberattacks:** Bots can be used in coordinated cyberattacks such as Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks to disrupt or disable social media platforms or specific accounts.

These algorithmically driven entities that on the surface appear as legitimate users, proved to affect the online political discussion around the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, accounting for one fifth of the entire conversation as bot generated content (Bessi & Ferrara, 2016). These bots can also be used to emotionally manipulate political supporters in social media by increasing exposure to negative and inflammatory content (Stella et al., 2018).

Yet, one of the most common uses of bad bots is the creation of fake reviews and ratings. These bots can generate a high volume of artificial reviews to either positively inflate the reputation of a product or service or to maliciously damage the

reputation of competitors (Luca & Zervas, 2016). The language used by these bots is often crafted to mimic human reviewers, making it difficult for consumers and sometimes even for platforms to distinguish between genuine and fake reviews (Mukherjee et al., 2012). Astroturfing involves the establishment of a false impression of widespread grassroots support or opposition. Bad bots can be employed to spread coordinated reviews which establish an illusory consensus on review sites and social media (Lim, 2018). This approach is a dishonest one due to the manipulation of public perception and the shaping of consumer conduct. In order to initiate negative campaigns against rival products or services, competitors can adhere to the usage of bad bots. With the aim of deteriorating the image of the target company, this kind of bots post negative reviews and comments in an ongoing manner. The effects of these actions are significant, producing loss of sales, damaged reputation, and eroded consumer trust (Mayzlin et al., 2014).

Artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning are essential tools in the identification and mitigation of bad bots' influence. Patterns in review submissions, for instance the timing, frequency, and language of reviews can be assessed by advanced algorithms, to pinpoint troublesome activities that provide clues on bot conduct (Jindal & Liu, 2008).

Some examples of actions that display the presence of bad bots are the detection of repetitive language patterns or of unusually high volumes of reviews from certain IP addresses.

To make the distinction between human users and bots, platforms can use behavioural analysis techniques. The observation of user behaviour across sessions, such as browsing patterns, click rates, and interaction times, are among the actions performed in this sense. The existence of abnormalities in these patterns can assist in the identification of automated bots (Stieglitz et al., 2017). The inclusion of human verification processes, for instance CAPTCHA, can prevent the realisation of reviews by bots. The assessment of flagged content is fostered by human moderators, who ensure that reviews are authentic. The defence against bad bots receives more robustness through the mixture between automated detection and human oversight (Ott et al., 2012).

The existence of bad bots as well as their capability to launch fake reviews is considerably dangerous for consumers' trust. Consumer confidence in the platform is eroded when they face manipulated reviews, thus producing scepticism regarding all reviews, both genuine and fake. Further on, the decrease in the trust degree can negatively impact consumer conduct and brand loyalty in the long run (Cheung et al., 2009).

### **3. Research Questions / Aims of the Research**

The primary aim of this research was to investigate consumer trust in online reviews and social media comments in the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Specifically, the study sought to address the following research questions:

- To what extent do consumers perceive online reviews as trustworthy and influential in their purchasing decisions?

- What are consumers' perceptions of the credibility and authenticity of online reviews and social media content?
- How do consumers view the effectiveness of AI in identifying and mitigating fake reviews compared to human capabilities?
- What factors influence consumer preferences and decision-making processes when evaluating online reviews, particularly in scenarios involving review volume and ratings?

By exploring these research questions, the study aimed to provide insights into consumer behaviours and attitudes towards online reviews and social media content, as well as the role of AI technologies in shaping trust and credibility in the digital marketplace. Ultimately, the research aimed to contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors influencing consumer trust and decision-making processes in the context of online information and AI technologies.

#### **4. Research Methods**

This study employs a quantitative research approach to investigate consumer trust in online reviews and social media comments within the context of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Specifically, a cross-sectional survey design is utilised to gather data from Romanian consumers. A sample of 225 Romanian consumers is selected using convenience sampling techniques. Participants are aged 18 and above and are chosen based on their engagement with online purchasing activities. We developed a structured questionnaire to collect data on consumer perceptions of online reviews and social media content. The questionnaire consists of seven questions, including Likert scale items and dichotomous questions, designed to assess various aspects of consumer trust and three demographic questions.

In order to determine whether consumers trusted the overall average rating of a product/service or the number of reviews, we have run a scenario in the seventh question asking them what they would choose in a restaurant choice scenario. The first option, "Restaurant A" was featuring a 4.9/5 stars rating from 150 votes and the second option, "Restaurant B" had a 4.6/5 score from 1500 ratings. This question was important for measuring the importance of the commonly used ratings average compared with the ratings volume.

Ethical considerations in conducting this study have been ensured, whereby the confidentiality of the participants is maintained and participation in the survey is on voluntary bases. There is informed consent of the participants before engaging in the survey.

The study is inherently limited to biases in convenience sampling; it further considered using self-reported data. The sample size of 100 respondents may be biased. These results are to be validated and researched further to come up with a comprehensively comprehensive conclusion.

The study findings may have relevance to businesses, policymakers, and researchers: consumer trust in online review content and social content. Practical relevance may extend to the new ways in which transparency and authenticity in

online reviews may be built and functioning by having AI new technologies to moderate reviews.

## 5. Findings

**Table 1. Research results – gender comparison**

Question	Men (avg)	Women (avg)	Overall avg
Importance of Online Reviews	4,18	4,27	4,24
Trust Level of Online Reviews	3,46	3,70	3,62
Perceived Genuineness of Online Reviews	3,65	3,76	3,72
Perception of Authenticity on Social Media	3,37	3,57	3,31
Influence of Retailers on Online Reviews	3,72	3,75	3,74

*Source:* authors' own research.

The survey participants rated the importance of online reviews in the purchasing process with an average score of 4.24 out of 5, with women rating a slightly higher level of trust with an average of 4.27/5. This high rating indicates a significant reliance on online reviews among Romanian consumers when making purchasing decisions. The findings suggest that consumers perceive online reviews as valuable sources of information that influence their buying behaviour. Businesses should recognise the pivotal role of online reviews in shaping consumer perceptions and consider strategies to effectively manage their online reputation.

Participants demonstrated a moderate degree of trust in the online reviews, with an average rating of 3.46 out of 5. In general, consumers are known to place their trust in online reviews. The medium trust level, however, underlines the existence of some level of skepticism or ambiguity concerning the credibility and reliability of online reviews. The present finding lines up with the necessity of making online review platforms transparent and authentic to promote consumer trust and confidence.

It also measured an average rating of 3.65 out of 5 with respect to the perceived genuineness of the online reviews. This indicates that, on average, consumers find the online reviews to be at least moderately real—that is, existing with actual consumers behind the comments. Efforts to crack down on fake reviews and really nail down the authenticity of content could further shore up trust among consumers in review systems online.

The average perception of the authenticity on social media sites was relatively low, 3.31 out of 5. This result could suggest that customers are a little skeptical about the genuineness of the content and who is really posting content from accounts on social media. Working on issues of fake accounts and other possibly deceitful activities might help to build trust among users of social media.

The results of the survey showed that consumers had an average rating of 3.74 out of a 5 rating scale, which perceives a medium influence by retailers on online reviews.

The results of the survey imply that consumers are at least aware of the potential for retailers to manipulate or influence reviews posted online. Perhaps consumers take into consideration the availability of incentivized or biased reviews over the

internet. If review management is transparent and associated with strict policies against manipulation, then the concern expressed by consumers would likely decrease, while trust in online review platforms would increase.

When asked if they believed that a system based on AI would be able to distinguish a fake review from a real one, a larger portion of respondents, 65.77%, had confidence in a system based on AI versus humans, while 34.22% still remained doubtful.

The majority group trusts AI to identify patterns that would facilitate the integrity of online review platforms because it can quickly identify this type of information. The minority could be skeptical because of the concerns that AI understands subtleties in languages and biased algorithms. Accordingly, although most of the participants have faith in the potential of AI in making platforms devoid of fake reviews, there are concerns over algorithmic transparency and accuracy, which has got to be addressed very importantly to build broader trust in AI-driven solutions..

**Table 2. Research results – age comparison**

<b>Question</b>	<b>18-25</b>	<b>26-33</b>	<b>34-41</b>	<b>42-49</b>	<b>Avg</b>
Importance of Online Reviews	4,21	4,34	4,13	4,3	4,24
Trust Level of Online Reviews	3,51	3,72	3,67	2,66	3,62
Perceived Genuineness of Online Reviews	3,46	3,87	3,87	3,66	3,72
Perception of Authenticity on Social Media	3,16	3,70	3,72	3	3,50
Influence of Retailers on Online Reviews	3,48	3,85	3,93	4,3	3,74

*Source:* authors’ own research.

Comparing these results with the age of the responders, surprisingly we can notice a bell distribution among the overall level of trust in online retailers, reviews, and AI technologies. Both younger (18-25 years old) and older (42-49 years old) respondents display a slightly general lower average level of trust compared to the middle-aged counterparts. This may be since the 26-41 age group has been exposed to the internet for a longer period of time compared with the younger 18-25 and 42-49 age group. No 50+ response had been recoded.

The importance of online reviews in the purchasing process varies across educational levels. A significant level of importance on online reviews is demonstrated to be awarded by individuals with undergraduate and master’s degrees, the average rating being of approximately 4.25. This shows that such individuals consider online reviews to be the key element in making acquisition decisions. On the other hand, individuals with doctorate degree evaluated the importance of online reviews with 3, therefore they place a reduced emphasis on this aspect.



**Table 3. Research results – education comparison**

Question	Highschool	Undergrad	Master	Doctor
Importance of Online Reviews	4,24	4,25	4,25	3
Trust Level of Online Reviews	3,52	3,66	3,69	2
Perceived Genuineness of Online Reviews	3,47	3,83	3,86	2
Perception of Authenticity on Social Media	3,21	3,60	3,69	3
Influence of Retailers on Online Reviews	3,53	3,75	3,96	5

*Source:* authors’ own research.

The trust in online reviews also seems to alleviate in accordance with the educational progress. Undergraduate respondents show a trust level of 3.67, while those with a master’s degree exhibit the highest trust level at 3.69. However, doctorate holders display significantly lower trust, rating it at 2. This divergence suggests that higher education, up to the doctoral level, may instil a more critical perspective towards online reviews.

The perception of the authenticity of online reviews follows a similar pattern. Respondents with undergraduate and master’s degrees rate the authenticity of online reviews at 3.83 and 3.87, respectively, reflecting a higher belief in the genuineness of the reviews. Conversely, those with doctorate degrees rate this aspect at 2, indicating substantial scepticism regarding the authenticity of online reviews.

When it comes to the perception of the realness of social media accounts, higher educational levels correlate with a greater belief that these accounts are operated by real individuals. Master’s degree holders rate this belief highest at 3.69, followed by undergraduates at 3.60. Doctorate holders, though more sceptical, rate this perception at 3, which is higher than their trust and authenticity ratings for online reviews.

The perception that merchants can influence online reviews is consistently high across all educational levels. Doctorate holders are particularly convinced of this influence, rating it at 5. This indicates a strong belief in the manipulation of online reviews by merchants. Respondents with master’s degrees also express significant concern, rating it at 3.96, while those with undergraduate and high school education rate it at 3.76 and 3.54, respectively.

In summary, the analysis highlights a complex relationship between the educational attainment and the perceptions of online reviews and social media comments. While trust and perceived authenticity generally increase with the level of education, doctorate holders exhibit notably lower trust and belief in authenticity. This group’s higher scepticism could be attributed to a more critical evaluation approach developed through advanced academic training. Understanding these differences is crucial for marketers and platform operators, as it can help in tailoring strategies to enhance credibility and trust across various demographic segments.

## 5.1 The Restaurant Scenario

**Table 4. Restaurant scenario**

Restaurant	Men	Women	Total
Restaurant A – 4.9 / 150 reviews	14.81%	27.77%	23.11%
Restaurant B – 4.6 / 1500 reviews	85.18%	72.22%	76.88%
Total	36%	64%	100%

*Source:* authors' own research.

When presented with the restaurant choice scenario, a significant majority of respondents (76.88%) opted for Restaurant B, which had a rating of 4.6 out of 5 based on 1500 reviews. In contrast, only 23.11% of respondents chose Restaurant A, despite its higher rating of 4.9 out of 5 from 150 reviews. A slight preference for the Restaurant A option in the case of female responders might indicate their openness to try out new experiences whereas the slight preference for the second option in men shows their commitment to established and peer-reviewed businesses.

This preference for Restaurant B underscores the influence of review volume on consumer decision-making. Despite Restaurant A having a marginally higher average rating, the sheer volume of reviews for Restaurant B likely instilled greater confidence in its overall quality and reliability among respondents among both genders.

The overwhelming preference for Restaurant B suggests that consumers prioritise the consensus opinion reflected in a larger number of reviews over the potentially subjective rating of a smaller sample size. This phenomenon aligns with the social proof theory, which posits that individuals are more likely to conform to the behaviour of others when making decisions in uncertain situations.

In practical terms, this finding ascertains that is critical for organisations to act towards the fostering and management of online reviews, knowing that consumer perceptions and the increase in advocacy can be altered by a greater volume of positive reviews. Moreover, it underlines consumers' need to assess in a critical manner the credibility of reviews and make decisions relying on informed matters, by referring to the rating and the number of reviews.

The results of the survey indicate the decisive role posed by review volume in directing the preferences of consumers and strengthening the importance held by the social proof in consumer decision-making processes.

## 5.2 Discussion

The survey findings provide valuable insights into consumer trust and decision-making processes regarding online reviews and social media content. Several key themes emerge from the analysis, presenting factors that influence consumer perceptions and behaviours in the digital marketplace.

One notable finding is the high importance attributed to online reviews in the purchasing process. The majority of respondents emphasised the significance of online reviews when making buying decisions, indicating their reliance on peer

opinions and experiences to inform their choices. This underscores the influential role of online reviews as a trusted source of information for consumers navigating the vast array of products and services available online.

However, while online reviews are valued by consumers, the survey results also reveal a degree of scepticism and uncertainty regarding their credibility. Despite acknowledging the importance of online reviews, respondents expressed only moderate levels of trust and perceived genuineness in these platforms. This suggests that while consumers rely on online reviews, they are aware of the potential for manipulation, bias, and misinformation within these systems. Addressing these concerns is essential for maintaining consumer trust and confidence in online review platforms.

Furthermore, the survey highlights the evolving landscape of consumer trust in the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI). A significant majority of respondents expressed confidence in AI's effectiveness in identifying fake reviews compared to human capabilities. This reflects growing optimism towards AI-powered solutions in combating deceptive practices and enhancing the integrity of online review platforms. However, addressing concerns about algorithm transparency, fairness, and accuracy is crucial for fostering widespread trust in AI technologies.

The restaurant choice scenario provides further insights into consumer decision-making processes, demonstrating the significant influence of review volume on consumer preferences. Despite Restaurant A boasting a higher average rating, the overwhelming majority of respondents favoured Restaurant B, which had a larger volume of reviews. This underscores the importance of social proof and consensus opinions in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviours.

## **6. Conclusions**

The survey's findings provide relevant insights concerning the dynamics of consumer trust and decision-making in the domain of online reviews and social media content. The analysis opens the way to certain key conclusions, that clarify the factors shaping consumer perceptions and behaviours in the digital marketplace.

In the first place, the survey emphasises that online reviews have a major significance in impacting consumers' acquisition decisions. A great share of the respondents perceives online reviews as a trusted source of information, and underlined that they rely on the opinions and experiences of peers when assessing goods and services.

Nevertheless, the survey indicates that consumers hold various levels of trust and scepticism in online reviews. More precisely, consumers appreciate online reviews but at the same time they are worried about their credibility and authenticity. Guaranteeing that the trust of consumers in online review platforms is maintained and that they hold relevance in the digital marketplace can be assured by addressing these concerns.

Moreover, the survey indicates the growing hopefulness regarding Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the enhancement of online review platforms' integrity. Most of the respondents believed that AI can pinpoint fake reviews and reflected the change

toward the adoption of AI-powered solutions as a method to fight against deceptive practices and to shelter the credibility of online reviews.

Last but not least, the restaurant choice scenario reinforces the significant impact of the review volume on consumer preferences. Most of the respondents preferred Restaurant B, whose reviews were more numerous, even though Restaurant A held a greater average rating. This strengthens the fact that when sketching consumer perceptions and conduct, social proof and consensus opinions play a significant role.

To sum up, the survey findings delineate the intricate character of consumer trust and decision-making processes in the digital era. Organisations need to offer a greater importance to transparency, authenticity, and ethical practices when managing online reviews, and consumers need to carry on a critical analysis of the review credibility to attain informed choices. The augmentation of the integrity and reliability of online review platforms is possible when AI technologies are integrated in a responsible manner, this fact finally leading to the boosted trust and confidence of consumers in the digital marketplace.

#### *Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process*

During the preparation of this work the authors used ChatGPT 4o in order to translate and proofread our interpretations of the research that were originally written in Romanian. After using this tool/service, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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