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***VADOVAUJANČIO PERSONALO
ATSAKO Į ATSLIEPIMUS INTERNETE
ĮTAKA VARTOTOJŲ PASITIKĖJIMUI***

***THE IMPACT OF MANAGERS'
RESPONSES TO ONLINE REVIEWS ON
CUSTOMER TRUST***

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SANTRAUKA
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VADOVAUJANČIO PERSONALO ATSAKO Į ATSLIEPIMUS INTERNETE ĮTAKA
VARTOTOJŲ PASITIKĖJIMUI

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Pagrindinis šio magistro baigiamojo darbo tikslas yra empiriškai ištirti, kaip vadovų atsakymų kokybė – informatyvumas, personalizavimas ir empatija – atsakant į internetinius klientų atsiliepimus daro įtaką vartotojų pasitikėjimui. Šis poveikis vertinami per suvokiamos reagavimo greičio, suvokiamos atsakomybės, emocinio palengvėjimo ir pasitenkinimo atsaku mediacinius vaidmenis.

Darbas susideda iš trijų pagrindinių dalių: teorinės analizės, tyrimo metodologijos ir empirinių duomenų analizės.

Teorinėje analizėje vertinamos internetinės apžvalgos kaip elektroninio žodinio perdavimo forma (angl. „eWOM“), pristatomos vadovų atsakymų rūšys (padėkos pobūdžio, reklaminiai, gynybiniai ir kompensaciniai), nagrinėjami veiksniai, lemiantys atsakymų veiksmingumą (laiku pateikimas, empatija, tonas, nuoseklumas), ir konceptualizuojamas vartotojų pasitikėjimas paslaugų atkūrimo bei internetinių atsakų (angl. „webcare“) kontekste.

Tyrimo metodologijoje pristatomas kiekybinis apklausos metodas, paremtas scenarijumi, pagrįstu eksperimentiniu dizainu. Internetinis klausimynas pateikė respondentams viešbučio apžvalgą ir vadovo atsakymą, o suvokimo kintamieji buvo vertinami naudojant 7 balų Likert

skalę. Galutinė tinkama imtis sudarė 212 respondentų, o duomenys buvo analizuojami naudojant IBM SPSS Statistics programinę įrangą.

Empiriniai rezultatai patvirtino, kad informatyvumas, personalizavimas ir empatija reikšmingai veikia suvokiamą reagavimo greitį, suvokiamą atsakomybę ir pasitenkinimą atsaku. Be to, nustatyta, kad šie vartotojų vertinimai teigiamai prisideda prie vartotojų pasitikėjimo paslaugų teikėju. Taigi, visi hipotezių numatyti ryšiai siūlomame konceptualiame modelyje buvo patvirtinti.

Remiantis šiais rezultatais, daroma išvada, kad aukštos kokybės, personalizuoti vadovų atsakymai, matomi viešose atsiliepimų platformose, yra strateginė priemonė stiprinant vartotojų pasitikėjimą ir teigiamai formuojant pirkimo ketinimus. Todėl įmonėms rekomenduojama teikti pirmenybę empatiškiems, informatyviems ir personalizuotiems atsakymams į internetines apžvalgas, taip skatinant pasitikėjimą, stiprinant reputaciją ir didinant konversijų potencialą internetinėje aplinkoje.

SUMMARY

VILNIUS UNIVERSITY BUSINESS SCHOOL DIGITAL MARKETING STUDY PROGRAMME

THE IMPACT OF MANAGERS' RESPONSES TO ONLINE REVIEWS ON CUSTOMER TRUST

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The main purpose of the master's thesis is to empirically examine how managerial response quality – namely, informativeness, personalisation, and empathy – in response to online customer reviews influences consumer trust. These effects are evaluated through the mediating roles of perceived responsiveness, perceived responsibility, emotional relief, and satisfaction with the response.

There are three main sections that this thesis consists of: theoretical analysis, research methodology, and empirical data analysis.

The theoretical analysis evaluates online reviews as a form of electronic word-of-mouth, introduces types of managerial responses (appreciative, promotional, defensive, accommodative), considers the factors shaping response effectiveness (timeliness, empathy, tone, consistency), and conceptualises customer trust within service recovery and webcare contexts.

The research methodology presents a quantitative survey-based approach using a scenario-based experimental design. A single online questionnaire exposed respondents to a hotel review and managerial response and measured perception variables on a 7-point Likert scale. The final valid sample consisted of 212 respondents, and the data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics.

The empirical results confirm that informativeness, personalisation, and empathy significantly influence perceived responsiveness, perceived responsibility, and satisfaction with the response. Furthermore, these customer evaluations were found to positively contribute to customer trust toward

the service provider. Thus, all hypothesised relationships within the proposed conceptual model were supported.

Based on these findings, the study concludes that high-quality personalised managerial responses visible on public review platforms represent a strategic tool for strengthening consumer trust and positively shaping purchase intent. Therefore, businesses are encouraged to prioritise empathetic, informative, and personalised responses to online reviews to foster trust, enhance reputational strength, and increase conversion potential among online audiences.

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INTRODUCTION

Digitalisation has transformed the way consumers search for information, evaluate alternatives and make purchasing decisions. Indeed, in the context of the rapid global growth of online platforms and user-generated content, customer reviews have become one of the most influential sources of information shaping brand attitudes and service expectations. Generally, it is conventionally expected that consumers increasingly rely on online evaluations before selecting accommodation, restaurants, tourism services and other experiential offerings, making review platforms an essential part of the contemporary customer journey. As a result, organisations are not only observed but actively judged based on how they engage with customers publicly.

In addition to consumer reviews, managerial responses, commonly referred to as “webcare”, have emerged as a crucial component of online reputation management. Public replies to reviews offer businesses the opportunity to acknowledge experiences, provide explanations, express empathy, and reinforce service values. However, despite their growing strategic importance, there is still limited empirical insight into how the quality of managerial responses shapes consumer perceptions and trust, particularly among prospective customers who observe exchanges but have not personally interacted with the company.

As the literature analysis covered in this paper will show, previous studies have largely focused on service recovery scenarios or private customer support, analysing post-failure compensation or recovery satisfaction. Less attention has been placed on how observers – that is, essentially, potential customers evaluating a service provider online – interpret managerial responses and whether such responses influence trust and the intention to purchase. Furthermore, although, as we will review, researchers have begun to differentiate between response styles, such as appreciative, empathetic, defensive or promotional, there remains a considerable knowledge gap in understanding which attributes of responses are most effective in building credibility and reassurance in the hospitality and tourism context.

Aiming to address this gap, this research paper seeks to examine how different qualities of managerial responses to online reviews affect consumer trust towards a service provider. By assessing perceived informativeness, personalisation and empathy as key attributes, the study aims to contribute empirical insights on which response elements meaningfully shape customer evaluations.

Research problem:

How do managerial responses to online reviews influence customer trust?

Research aim:

To empirically examine the influence of managerial response quality on customer trust by analysing the effects of informativeness, personalisation and empathy.

Research goals:

1. To conduct a theoretical review on online customer reviews, managerial response strategies and trust formation.
2. To develop a conceptual framework and formulate research hypotheses.
3. To design a research instrument to evaluate consumer perception of managerial responses.
4. To collect empirical data using a scenario-based survey.
5. To analyse the relationship between response quality dimensions and customer trust.
6. To summarise findings and provide recommendations for service providers and future research.

Research structure and methods:

The thesis consists of three main parts. The first part presents a theoretical analysis covering online reviews, the role of webcare, managerial response types and customer trust formation in digital environments. The second part introduces the research methodology, including the conceptual model, hypotheses, research design, measurement scales and sample characteristics. The third part presents the results of the quantitative study, conducted using a scenario-based online survey where respondents assessed a service provider after reading a customer review and managerial response. Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics to test relationships within the proposed model.

The methodology applies a quantitative research approach, using Likert-scale measures adapted from validated academic sources. Respondents were obtained through non-probability convenience sampling. The findings inform both theoretical discussions on

digital trust development and practical recommendations for service-based organisations seeking to improve their online presence and customer relationship management.

1. THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF MANAGERIAL RESPONSES AND CUSTOMER TRUST

1.1 Online Reviews: Concept, Functions, and Benefits

1.1.1. The Concept of Online Reviews

In today's digital age, consumer decision-making processes and businesses across various sectors have been revolutionised by online reviews. As a concept, online reviews are referred to as the most impactful form of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) since it shapes the attitudes of online customers and thus facilitates their decisions to buy (Zhang et al., 2014: 78-89; Shan, 2016: 633-641; Lee et al. 2018: 436-445). Put another way, online reviews are a tool representing user-generated feedback, evaluations, and recommendations shared on digital platforms about products, services, or businesses. Serving as a digital counterpart to traditional word-of-mouth, eWOM leverages the vast reach and immediacy of the internet to affect consumer choices and perceptions (Cheung & Thadani, 2012: 461-470). Considering their influence, many scholars have explored different ways of evaluating and estimating the functionality of online reviews (Huang et al., 2015: 17-27; Weathers, 2015: 12-23; Filieri, 2015: 1261-1270).

The essence of online reviews also lies in their authenticity and accessibility. In particular, by voluntarily contributing reviews based on consumers' personal experiences, they aim to inform and guide fellow customers through tools ranging from brief star ratings to detailed narratives, offering insights into product quality, service satisfaction, and overall customer experience (Filieri, 2015:62-73). From a consumer's perspective, online reviews play a vital informational role helping in pre-purchase and decision-making processes, which involves with real-world perspectives and firsthand accounts, helping to assess product suitability and reliability before committing to a purchase (Lu, Zhang, & Zhang, 2016: 51-68). Furthermore, they also promote virtual communities where customers share common interests, exchange information, and collectively influence market perceptions (Cheung & Thadani, 2012: 461-470).

Conventionally, online reviews are distinguished between positive and negative: while positive online reviews serve as a tool to help companies strengthen their image, popularity and performance, negative ones are seen as potentially having a destructive effect on a company's reputation and attracting attention (Liu and Fan, 2020: 21). Respectively, responses to positive reviews allow enhancing relationships with satisfied consumer while

attracting future clients. In the same way, responses to negative reviews can be a way of solving service issues, providing an explanation or expressing an apology, and simultaneously preventing other customers from additional ruinous comments and follow-up discussions (van Noort et al., 2012: 131-140). Furthermore, in cases when consumers' negative reviews are sprightly and politely responded to and resolved, this may allow businesses to turn a discontented consumer into a loyal one (Fitzsimmons et al., 2011). Hence, it is generally considered that online reviews can have a contrasting two-sided impact on business performance, which encourages businesses to build effective response (or so-called "customer care") strategies.

Another useful angle may be a comparison between the absence versus presence of responses to online reviews, which, according to the data collected in 2016, and particularly referring to the hotel industry, has shown that responses have a positive impact on the reliability of the business (Sparks et al., 2016: 272-284). Yet, depending on the voice of the response (formal, conversational or other), may have different results (ibid, Zhang, 2014: 131-140; Li et al., 2016: 272-284). In the cases of hotel businesses, as one may expect, exhibiting a sense of understanding and compassion to a negative review from an unsatisfied customer can both amend his attitude and motivate potential clients to assess the hotel's replies favourably (Li et al., 2016: 272-284).

1.1.2. Functions of Online Reviews

The functions of online reviews go beyond simple information sharing as they encompass consumer decision support, social interaction, and business feedback mechanisms:

1. **Informational function:** Online reviews are used as valuable sources of information among consumers. That is because they offer insights into product features, performance, and usability that traditional advertising often lacks. Consumers use these reviews to make informed decisions by bridging the gap between marketing promises and actual product experiences (Filiberti, 2015: 62-73).
2. **Social function:** As mentioned earlier, online reviews foster social interaction and community engagement among customers. Platforms hosting reviews can even become virtual forums where individuals share opinions, validate experiences, and build trust through collective knowledge. In addition, such peer validation enhances the review's credibility as well as consumer confidence in their decision-making (Lu, Zhang, & Zhang, 2016: 5-21).

3. **Decision-support function:** Online reviews aid consumers throughout the entire purchase journey as they often face an information overload. Presenting diverse viewpoints and comparative analyses, online customer reviews assist consumers in evaluating alternatives, weighing pros and cons, and ultimately selecting products or services that best align with their needs (Hu, Pavlou, & Zhang, 2017: 99-106).
4. **Feedback function:** Online reviews serve businesses as direct feedback channels from customers by providing valuable insights into service or product delivery, performance and overall customer satisfaction. Such monitoring and analysis of reviews enable businesses to identify strengths and weaknesses and refine strategies to enhance customer experience and operational effectiveness (Ye, Law, & Gu, 2009: 180-182).

1.1.3. Benefits of Online Reviews for Businesses

Analysis of academic literature shows that online reviews have multifaceted benefits for businesses, including more effective marketing strategies, enhanced customer engagement and competitive advantage.

In terms of marketing strategies, positive online reviews help improve (1) SEO visibility through search engine rankings, which is how additional organic traffic is generated. In other words, due to the way algorithms work, the more positive reviews are received, the bigger the likelihood is that the firm is ranked higher than its competitors with fewer reviews. As a result, online reviews can amplify online presence and attract more qualified leads. In addition, it may be also argued that positive online reviews provide (2) a form of free advertising as these reviews increase brand awareness and highlight business areas of practice.

Furthermore, client reviews allow one to directly communicate with a business' consumer base and thus foster (3) relationship building. In particular, responses to online reviews give a way to address issues and provide helpful information. Hence, by demonstrating responsiveness and customer-centricity, prompt and constructive responses to reviews enhance customer satisfaction, build loyalty, and encourage repeat business (Li & Hitt, 2008: 456-474). Simultaneously, by providing social proof of product quality and service reliability, positive online reviews (4) build trust and credibility among potential customers. Thus, businesses with favorable reviews are viewed as trustworthy and reputable by consumers,

which once again, can influence purchase decisions in favor of the reviewed products or services (Chen & Xie, 2008).

As discerning prospective consumers seek recommendations from other users, businesses receiving many positive reviews are certainly differentiated from competitors as they (5) create a competitive advantage. Gaining such a competitive edge naturally also means brand preference and loyalty (Duan, Gu, & Whinston, 2008). As an additional element, online reviews can (6) provide useful insights into areas that need improvement and/or expansion of services that a business otherwise might have been overlooked.

In a nutshell, although there might be some differences between business sectors, online reviews generally play a pivotal role in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviours. The subsequent sections will delve into the dynamics of managerial responses and online reviews, and their impact on customer trust, combining insights from relevant literature and empirical studies to illuminate key relationships and mechanisms.

1.2. The Impact of Managerial Responses on Online Reviews

1.2.1. Types of Managerial Responses

As the research of this thesis will analyse the empirically approved impact of managerial responses to online reviews, it is worth digging deeper into the types of managerial responses to online reviews, exploring their strategies, impacts and other important characteristics. While it depends on the business sector, companies generally adopt varied approaches to online review responses. As S. Park and J. P. Allen note in their research on hospitality business, while diligently responding to each review posted by guests, others opt to rarely or never respond to consumer comments (Parks and Allen, 2012: 64-73). For W. Liu and X. Fan, in some cases, there is also a noticeable trend that only negative reviews are responded to by some hotels, although others respond to both positive and negative reviews (Liu and Fan, 2020: 22). This section shows that responses to positive reviews may be ramified into (1) appreciative responses and in some cases, (2) promotional responses, depending on the message of the reviewer, although they usually carry a similar message. On the other hand, responses to negative reviews may be divided into (3) defensive responses and (2) accommodative responses.

Used primarily in reaction to positive reviews, (1) appreciative responses focus on expressing genuine appreciation for the reviewer's positive feedback. These responses go

beyond a simple thank-you and often involve showing that managers are listening, expressing sincere appreciation for the reviewer's time and effort, and reinforcing customer satisfaction (ibid). For instance, a message might be, "Your kind words mean a lot to us. Thank you for taking the time to share your experience" or "We're so pleased that you had a great experience with us. Customer satisfaction is our top priority."

Although expressions of a company's willingness to foster a positive relationship with a customer might be embraced by the category of appreciative responses, it could be argued that (2) promotional responses constitute a separate category. Promotional responses also highlight the positive feedback, yet they can be used to promote the brand further. Managers might respond by thanking the customer and encouraging them to share their positive experience with others or, as this is also often the case, to return for future services. Illustratively, such a response could sound like, "Thank you for your wonderful review, Alex! We're glad you enjoyed our product. Don't forget to tell your friends, and we look forward to serving you again soon!" Thus, it is clear that this type of response leverages positive feedback to enhance the brand's image and attract new customers.

Managers employ (3) defensive responses when they feel the need to protect the company's reputation against what they perceive as inaccurate or unjust negative reviews. This approach involves a denial or excuse strategy (Lui et al., 2018: 180-190; Lee et al., 2010: 1073-1080) refuting the claims made by the reviewer, providing counterarguments, or defending the company's actions and policies. As an illustration, the message could be as follows: "We apologize if our service did not meet your expectations, but our policy is clearly stated on our website." Importantly, however, aiming to correct misunderstandings and present the company's perspective, defensive responses can sometimes backfire (Liu and Fan, 2020: 23). That is because overly defensive responses can appear as confrontational and thus further alienate a dissatisfied customer or potentially lead to a more negative perception of the brand.

Contrastingly, (4) accommodative responses embrace a strategy that is characterized by empathy and a willingness to make amends. In particular, managers may sincerely apologise for unexpected experiences and/or promise corrective action, such as remedies or compensations. For instance, "We are truly sorry for the inconvenience you experienced, Sam. Please reach out to us directly, and we will do our best to resolve this issue and make things right." Importantly, an accommodating response strategy tends to be more effective in rebuilding trust and loyalty among dissatisfied customers than the previously discussed defensive approach (Lui et al., 2018: 180-190; Lee et al., 2010: 1073-1080).

1.2.2. Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of Managerial Responses

In determining the effectiveness of all four previously discussed types of managers' responses to online reviews, multiple factors play a major role. First, the (1) communication style and tone used in online communication significantly impact their effectiveness (Zhang and Vásquez, 2014: 54-64). For Moshe Davidow, the conversational human voice, defined as "an engaging and natural style" has proved to be the most effective (Davidow, 2003: 225-230 in Liu and Fan, 2020: 23). That is because conversational style and tone creates a sense of authenticity and sincerity, and thus enhances connection with customer (ibid). In contrast, a more formal professional voice, which is also more task-oriented, is commonly perceived as impersonal and less empathetic (ibid; Zhang and Vásquez, 2014: 54-64).

Secondly, (2) empathy or "caring individualized attention provided by the firm to its customers" (Sparks et al., 2016: 76) in accommodative strategies, which are particularly intended for responding to negative reviews, is another critical factor. Research by B. Sparks, K. So and G. Bradley suggests that consumer realisation of attentiveness has been proven especially helpful in service recovery. For instance, their article refers to experimental research perceived as "not caring for the customer" leading to negative emotions like frustration or anger, which also led to unsuccessful service recovery (McColl-Kennedy & Sparks, 2003 in ibid). This creates a stark contrast with empathetic and polite communication by managers or service employees. In particular, B. Sparks, K. So and G. Bradley refer to numerous complaint incidents coupled with anger, which were successfully resolved thanks to proactive commitment and empathy (Tax, Brown, & Chandrashekar, 1998 in ibid). These results are also consistent with the empirical Study 2 of B7B by Liu and Fan, which even confirms that "regardless of the length of a consumer's review, emphatic communication is consistently effective when responding to consumer complaints." (Liu and Fan, 2020: 29)

Thirdly, (3) timeliness and responsiveness of managerial responses play a major role in customer perceptions and brand trustworthiness. Coming back to the study of Davidow on organisational responses to customer complaints, the users' perceived speed of responses to their online reviews also has a significant positive impact on service recovery (Davidow, 2003: 225-230). Multiple studies, including Liu et al. study (2017) and Liu and Fan's empirical investigation on B&B (2020), also highlight that a prompt response to online reviews can lead prospective customers to perceive a higher level of trustworthiness and concern for customers of hotels (Liu and Fan, 2020:23). Furthermore, consistent findings

from both sources indicate that timely responses are perceived by consumers as indicative of a proactive approach to customer service, more helpful, and encouraging consumers to write additional reviews (ibid; Li et al., 2017: 42-53).

Lastly, the (4) cumulative frequency and consistency of managerial responses to online reviews also significantly contribute to brand perception and competitive performance. Academic literature suggests that in cases when reviews across different platforms were responded to consistently, this had a positive relation with competitive performance, although a conclusive causal relationship was not established (Lui et al., 2018: 180-190). Generally speaking, however, consistency in tone, messaging, and responsiveness demonstrates a commitment to listening and addressing customer feedback, thereby strengthening brand-consumer relationships (ibid).

Thus, it may be also argued that these are both qualitative (communication style and tone, empathy) and quantitative (timeliness, cumulative frequency and consistency) factors of managers' responses that generally shape customers' trust and perception of business performance and reputation.

1.3. Managerial Responses and Customer Trust

1.3.1. Establishing Trust through Responses

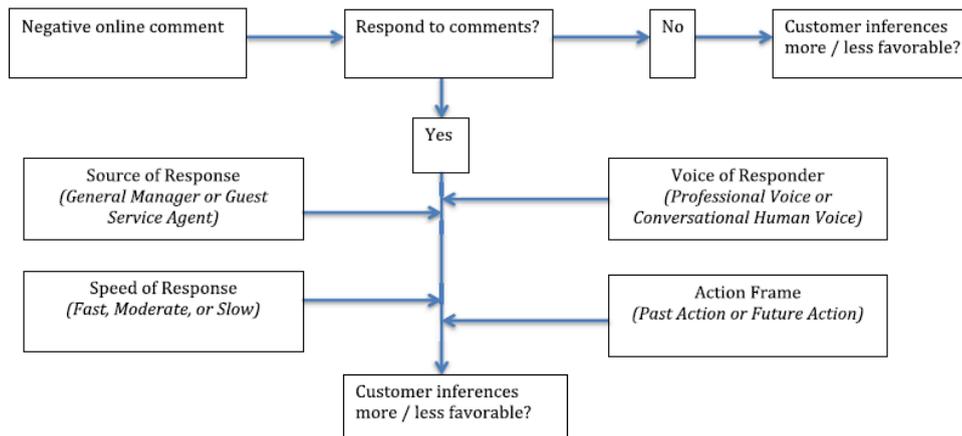
By definition, trust can be conceptualised as a consumer's willingness to rely on a business based on perceived reliability and integrity (Morgan and Hunt, 1994: 20-38; Moorman, Zaltman and Deshpande, 1992 in Sparks et al., 2016), which also holds significant implications for consumer behaviour. In the realm of online reviews, consumer trust is intricately linked to either reinforcement of positive sentiments or mitigation of negative perceptions (ibid). For Wang, Beatty and Foxx, trust can be viewed in a two-folded way: (1) experience-based trust or trust gained through repeated interactions, and (2) cue-based trust, which means trust deriving from "cues received from a single interaction" (Wang et al., 2004 in Sparks et al., 2016: 75).

By focusing specifically on hotel responses to negative online reviews, Sparks et al. provide a further empirical investigation on the "effects of hotel responses on customer inferences of trust and concern". Although the first inference, or trust inference, is more directly linked to our methodological investigation, both trust and concern appear interconnected, thus it is

worth taking a look at Figure 1, which provides an overview of the conceptual basis for the study conducted by Spark et al.

Figure 1

Conceptual model of the conceptual design from the investigation of trust and concern inferences



Source: Sparks B. & So K. (2016) "Responding to negative online reviews: The effects of hotel responses on customer inferences of trust and concern" in *Tourism Management*, Vol. Volume 53, April 2016, p. 76.

The empirical investigation by Sparks et al. confirms that the **timeliness of responses** to online reviews is an important factor in measuring consumer trust. To be sure, their research first confirmed the hypothesis that responses posted after a 30-day lag between a customer post and the hotel's response compared to no-response resulted in superior trust inferences only in three out of the eight conditions (ibid: 82). Hence, a 30-day delay has not generally showed positive customer evaluations. Yet, consistent with the authors' expectations, when a one-day lag is compared to a 30-day lag, speed has proved to be a critical factor in shaping customer perceptions of a business's commitment to customer service and satisfaction. Such a result once again confirms earlier research in the offline contexts (Swanson and Kelley, 2001; Wirrz and Mattila, 2004).

Apart from timeliness, the **tone and content of responses**, or "a high level of the human voice" significantly influence trust formation (Sparks et al., 2016: 82). In fact, the same research confirmed that the wording used to express an emphatic and authentic voice had the largest impact of any of the four independent variables used in the investigation by

Sparks et al. (ibid). This result is also consistent with much earlier research conducted in communication and public relations fields (Kelleher, 2009 in ibid; van Noort and Willemensen, 2012 in ibid). Hence, responses demonstrating empathy and understanding towards customers' experiences can effectively turn negative situations into opportunities for relationship-building and thus are crucial in service recovery situations, where negative emotions are mitigated and trust rebuilt. In addition, **authenticity** works particularly well in selecting the right tone for responses, which admit mistakes when necessary and communicate genuine efforts to rectify issues. This aspect, however, has not been investigated as a separate factor.

1.3.2. Mitigating Negative Perceptions

As overviewed in section 1.2.2, negative perceptions are generally mitigated either via (3) defensive responses or (2) accommodative responses, which have been proven to be significantly more effective (Liu and Fan, 2020: 23). As it highly overlaps with some of the sections, it may be shortly concluded that major strategies for effectively mitigating negative responses include: promptness and timeliness, expression of empathy and understanding, transparency and accountability (Sparks et al., 2016: 82), and offering remedies or compensation (Liu & Fan, 2020: 23).

1.3.3. Reinforcing Positive Experiences

Lastly, leveraging positive reviews to reinforce customer trust is equally crucial in enhancing consumer trust. As overviewed in section 1.2.2, (1) appreciative and (2) promotional responses that express gratitude and reinforce positive experiences generally strengthen customer relationships and encourage repeat business (Liu and Fan, 2020: 22-23), which is crucial for building long-term customer trust and loyalty. It is commonly considered that effective strategies include: expressing gratitude, or thanking customers for their positive feedback and acknowledging their satisfaction (ibid), highlighting customer appreciation, which generally refers to showcasing positive reviews and highlighting customer appreciation on public platforms as social proof (Sparks et al., 2016), and thirdly, engaging with satisfied customers through personalized responses (Liu & Fan, 2020).

The following section explores three specific response features – informativeness, personalisation and empathy – that are widely recognised in digital communication research as decisive drivers of customer evaluations and trust.

1.4 Response quality dimensions: informativeness, personalisation, and empathy

Building on the earlier discussion of how managerial responses shape customer perceptions, this section focuses on the more specific aspects of response that contribute to the formation of trust. Generally, empirical studies show that customers evaluate not only the very fact that the response exists, but how it is responded, including cognitive and emotional cues seen in the message (Sparks et al., 2016: 74). Three response characteristics repeatedly emerge in the literature as central to shaping customer judgements of credibility and sincerity—informativeness, personalisation, empathy. These attributes frame how customers interpret a firm’s intentions, competence, and care, ultimately determining whether a response enhances satisfaction and trust or fails to deliver on expectations.

The following sub-sections review each factor and summarise how prior research conceptualises its role in online response effectiveness.

1.4.1 Informativeness in managerial responses

Informativeness, or information quality (Zhang et al., 2016) refers to the extent to which customers perceive the content of a message as useful, relevant, and adequate for decision-making. In the context of social commerce, Zhang et al. (ibid) conceptualise information quality as customers’ evaluations of whether a brand provides excellent, comprehensive, new, and credible information. When communications deliver clear and meaningful details, consumers are better equipped to understand offerings and evaluate the organisation, which strengthens perceptions of value in the interaction. Moreover, other scholars suggest that informative messages help reduce uncertainty, support confident decisions, and enhance perceived relationship benefits (e.g., Doll & Torkzadeh, 1988; Jang et al., 2008, cited in Zhang et al.). On the contrary, formalistic or vague responses fail to demonstrate competence and may weaken trust. Thus, informativeness operates as a cognitive mechanism via which managerial responses signal expertise and transparency. Indeed, these are conditions widely recognised as foundational for customer trust.

1.4.2 Personalisation in managerial responses

Personalisation broadly refers to the tailoring of message content to characteristics, preferences or behaviour of a specific individual or segment, rather than providing uniform communication to all customers (Tam and Ho, 2006: 866-867). Empirically, advertising and online communication research shows that personalised messages (e.g. those that use the customer's name, adapt their offers to individual interests or even reference their past interactions) are perceived as more engaging. Tam and Ho (ibid), for instance, find that personalised web banners increase perceived usefulness of messages and improve users' evaluation of the online service. Similarly, in webcare context, personalisation may be expressed when managers explicitly refer to the specific details of their experience, or offer tailored solutions rather than generic templates. Hence, in hospitality and service sectors personalisation most commonly indicates that personalised replies are interpreted as signals of attentiveness and customer orientation.

1.4.3 Empathy in managerial responses

Empathy in service contexts is commonly viewed as the firm's ability to understand customers and to communicate caring, personalised attention (Darani et al., 2023: 8). Essentially, it is both a core dimension of service quality and an important component of effective service recovery. For instance, in online complaint handling, empathetic responses, explicitly recognising the customer's frustration and apologising have proved to reduce negative emotions and increase perceived fairness. Sparks, So and Bradley (2016) show that "human voice" and empathetic wording in hotel responses to negative reviews substantially strengthen inferences of trust and concern. Similarly, empirical research conducted by Darani et al. (2023) demonstrate that cues signalling attentiveness and understanding (including verbal mimicry) raise perceptions of managerial empathy. As a result, the effect is increased trust and higher chances of purchase intentions among third-party readers of online exchanges. Accordingly, in this thesis empathy is treated as a qualitative response feature that can enhance perceptions of responsiveness and responsibility and, via these perceptions, support trust formation.

1.5 Theoretical frameworks underpinning the research

1.5.1 Information Adoption Model (IAM) and managerial responses

The Information Adoption Model (IAM) provides a structured explanation of how individuals assess online information and decide whether to adopt it. Originally proposed in the context of knowledge adoption (Sussman & Siegal, 2003), the model is applied extensively to eWOM, online reviews, and social media communication. Importantly, that is because it accounts for both message quality and perceptions of the message source. Building on the argument that customers tend to evaluate online content based on what is said and who says it, IAM explains how consumers move from exposure to persuasive information to eventual acceptance and behavioural outcomes.

In the context of this thesis, IAM provides a useful lens for conceptualising how the qualitative features of managerial responses influence customer perceptions and trust. Instead of focusing on consumer-generated reviews, the model is applied to firm-generated responses visible on platforms such as Google Reviews or Booking.com. The three response quality dimensions – informativeness, personalisation and empathy – can be understood as specific facets of argument quality: they determine how helpful, relevant and considerate the response appears to observers. When responses are perceived as informative, personalised and empathetic, customers are likely to view them as more useful and diagnostic for judging the firm, which aligns with the IAM notion that high-quality arguments increase perceived information usefulness and information adoption.

Figure 2

Information Adoption Model (IAM)



Source: Nadlifatin, R., Persada, S.F., Munthe, J.H., Ardiansyahmiraja, B., Redi, A.A.N.P., Prasetyo, Y.T. & Belgiawan, P.F. (2022) "Understanding factors influencing traveler's adoption of travel influencer advertising: An information adoption model approach." in *Business: Theory and Practice*, Vol. 23, No. 1, pp. 131-140.

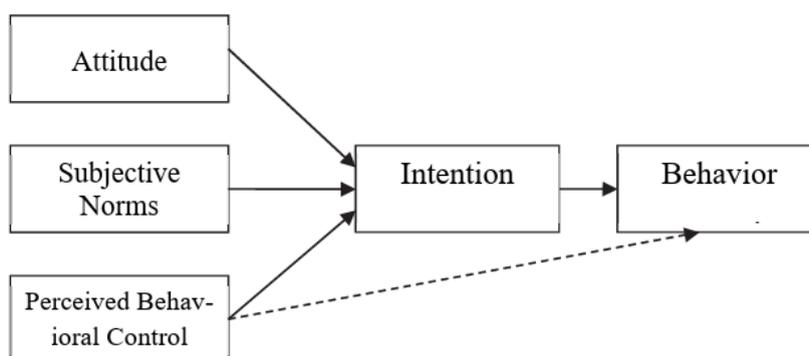
1.5.2 Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and the role of trust

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) was initially proposed by Ajzen (1991), and offers a widely applied framework for predicting and explaining human behaviour in consumer contexts more generally. According to TPB, an individual's intention to perform a behaviour is influenced by three antecedents: attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ha, 2020). Hence, attitude here reflects the degree to which a person evaluates a behaviour (whether positively or negatively). In turn, subjective norms capture perceived social pressure from important others to act, while perceived behavioural control denotes the individual's sense of control over performing the behaviour. Thus, these three elements collectively shape behavioural intention, which is the strongest predictor of subsequent behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; *ibid*).

In the context of online reviews and managerial response evaluation, TPB provides a useful lens for understanding how customers form intentions like trusting a company, considering a purchase or returning after a negative experience. Another example could be a situation where a manager's response may enhance consumers' attitudes by demonstrating competence, reinforce subjective norms if socially expected responses are delivered, and increase perceived behavioural control if the response clarifies next steps or offers solutions. In this way, managerial communication can indirectly shape (re)purchase outcomes. Yet, while trust is not a core construct in TPB, some scholars suggest that trust may serve as an intervening cognitive assessment between response evaluation and intention formation (*ibid*), making it particularly relevant to the empirical model employed in this study as well.

Figure 3

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)



Source: Ha, N.T. (2020) "The impact of perceived risk on consumers' online shopping intention: An integration of TAM and TPB." *Management Science Letters*, Vol. 10, pp. 2029–2036.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research aim, conceptual model, and hypothesis

Building on the literature analysed in the first chapter, this section introduces the research aim, explains the rationale behind the selected variables, and presents the conceptual model with hypotheses. The methodological framework here is informed by the theoretical insights into how managerial responses shape consumers' perceptions and trust in online service settings.

Recent academic literature underscores the impact of managerial responses to online reviews as a form of webcare, shaping consumers' evaluations of service encounters and, in turn, influencing their perceptions of an organisation's credibility, empathy, and responsiveness (Sparks et al., 2016). Essentially, managerial responses serve not only to address customer dissatisfaction, but also extend beyond corrective actions as a strategic element of online reputation management by publicly recognising complaints and conveying customer concern (Zhang & Vásquez, 2014). While online reviews have become a major information source in consumer intention to buy, businesses increasingly use managerial responses to influence customer evaluations and purchase intentions.

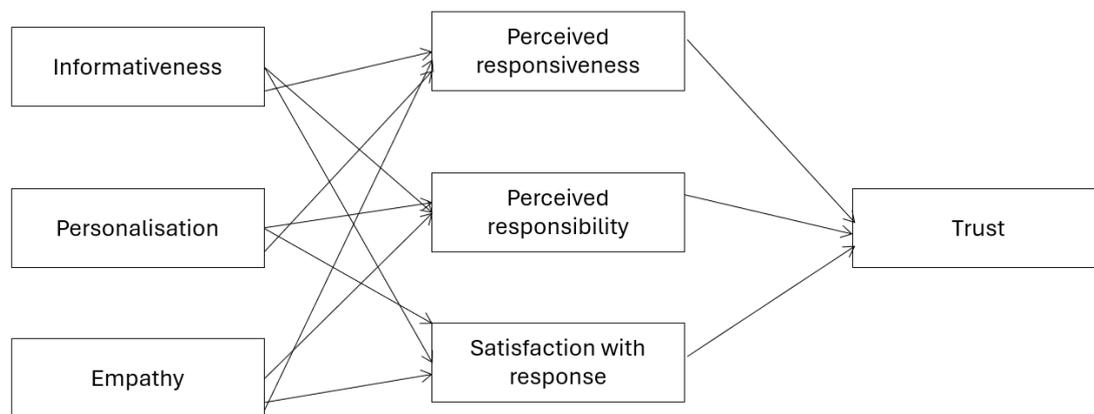
Research Aim: to empirically examine how response quality dimensions – informativeness, personalisation, and empathy – in managerial responses to online reviews influence consumer trust and intention to buy via the mediating effects of (1) perceived responsiveness, (2) emotional relief, and (3) satisfaction with the response.

To achieve the research aim, a conceptual research model (Figure 3) was developed based on the literature analysis presented in Chapter 1 and prior empirical studies on managerial responses to online reviews. The model involves three main response quality dimensions – namely, (1) informativeness, (2) personalisation, and (3) empathy – as independent variables, representing the core qualitative features of managerial responses that prior studies have highlighted as particularly influential in online service recovery and webcare contexts (Davidow, 2003; Sparks et al., 2016). Furthermore, these dimensions are expected to influence consumer outcomes via three mediating variables: perceived responsiveness, emotional relief, and satisfaction with the response. In turn, these mediating variables capture emotional and cognitive mechanisms, which further shape customer evaluations following exposure to managerial responses.

Moreover, drawing on trust formation and e-commerce research, consumer trust is commonly viewed as a primary outcome of the mediating processes because it reflects consumers' perceptions of the organisation's reliability, benevolence, and customer focus (Gefen, 2000; McKnight et al., 2002). Following this, trust is expected to influence intention to buy, which is why it is proposed in the conceptual research model as the final dependent variable. Finally, the proposed research model offers a structured methodological framework for an empirical examination of the relationships between managerial response quality, consumer perceptions, trust, and behavioural intention, forming the basis for the research hypotheses.

Figure 4

The Research model



Source: compiled by the author, based on the S-O-R framework and prior literature on managerial responses and online service recovery.

The conceptual research model (Figure 4) was developed based on an extensive review of prior literature on both managerial responses to online reviews and online trust formation. The selected constructs and their proposed relationships are informed by established empirical findings in hospitality (especially hotel business), marketing, and information systems research (e.g., Sparks et al., 2016; Min et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2019; Wei et al., 2022; Darani et al., 2023). Thus, the model may be viewed as a guiding framework for further hypothesis development and empirical testing.

Research hypotheses

Based on the conceptual research model and the literature reviewed in Chapter 1, the following hypotheses are proposed. This study assumes that managerial responses to online reviews function as observable service recovery signals that influence consumers' cognitive and emotional evaluations of the company. Prior research in online service recovery and webcare suggests that response quality characteristics – such as informativeness, personalisation, and empathy – play a crucial role in shaping how customers interpret managerial intentions, effort to engage in service recovery, and concern, particularly in situations involving dissatisfaction or service failure (Wang & Yeung, 2020; Zhao et al., 2020; Wei et al., 2022). In this context, high-quality responses that are personalised and informative are simply more likely to be perceived as effective complaint-handling strategies (Zhao et al., 2020). In a nutshell, we may view managerial responses as generally shaping customers' cognitive and emotional reactions because they act as public signals of a company's accountability, attentiveness, and customer orientation.

H1a–H1c. Effects of response quality on perceived responsiveness

Perceived responsiveness refers to consumers' perceptions of the company's ability and willingness to address customer concerns in a timely and attentive manner (Baek et al., 2012). In the context of online reviews, perceived responsiveness is commonly deduced from the tone and content of managerial responses (Wand and Chaudry, 2018). That is because customers rely on publicly available signs in deciding whether a company is actively engaging with customer feedback. Thus, it may be viewed as a cue-based evaluation: when observers see active, timely, and content-relevant communication, they infer that the firm is “present” and willing to engage, even if they did not experience the service failure themselves.

Prior research on popular travel websites reveals that tailored managerial responses to (negative) online reviews – that is, those that directly address specific content of a review – improve perceived responsiveness and are viewed by observers as more attentive and effortful (ibid). Hence, they may be approached as strengthening perceptions of the company's organisational responsiveness. Yet, while research does refer to *tailored* manager responses to online reviews as a holistic strategy rather than as distinct dimensions, its core logic aligns well with response quality characteristics, which in this study are distinguished as **threefold**: (1) informativeness, (2) personalisation, and (3) empathy.

(1) Informative managerial responses provide customers with clear explanations and relevant details regarding the issue raised, thereby signalling accountability and active problem-solving (Zhao et al., 2020). Generally, information quality is commonly conceptualised as the extent to which audiences perceive firm-provided information as high-quality (e.g., “new” and “affluent”), thereby functioning as an observable signal of how seriously a company engages with customers’ informational needs (Doll & Torkzadeh, 1988; Zhang et al., 2016). Secondly, (2) personalised responses, which explicitly refer to the customer’s specific complaint or experience, are viewed as strengthening perceived responsiveness by demonstrating attentiveness and effort beyond generic or automated replies (Jin et al., 2023). As face-to-face cues in online contexts are most often absent, Darani et al. (2023) hold that verbal cues appear critical for conveying attentiveness.

Thirdly, (3) empathetic responses communicate understanding and emotional support, reinforcing the impression that the firm is genuinely responsive rather than merely fulfilling a formal obligation (Wei et al., 2022). For instance, Darani et al. (2023) argue that mimicry functions as a “good listener” cue, meaning that it signals the manager’s paid sufficient attention to the consumer’s message. In turn, this effect is closely related to how empathy is inferred in text-only settings. Notably, their measurement approach also considers empathy as perceptions that the manager “senses what the customer is feeling” and “pays attention and listens well,” which indicates that empathic impressions are strongly connected to tailored and attentive language. Thus, empathic cues in managerial responses are expected to enhance perceived responsiveness because they help convey genuine concern and benevolent intentions, which are otherwise difficult to communicate online without verbal signals.

Based on this reasoning, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1a: Informativeness in managers’ responses positively influences customers’ perceived responsiveness.

H1b: Personalisation in managers’ responses positively influences customers’ perceived responsiveness.

H1c: Empathy in managers’ responses positively influences customers’ perceived responsiveness.

H2a–H2c. Effects of response quality on perceived responsibility

In this paper, perceived responsibility refers to consumers’ perceptions that a company acknowledges the issue raised in an online review and demonstrates accountability and a

genuine commitment to addressing customer concerns through their response (Darani et al., 2023: 5). In online reviews, such responsibility judgments are formed primarily through the content of managerial responses, as customers and third-party observers rely on written cues in assessing whether the company is taking accountability for the concerns raised (Gensler et al., 2013: 242). Generally, response quality plays a critical role in shaping these perceptions because it reflects the manager's attentiveness and ability to address customer needs.

The same three key dimensions of response quality – (1) informativeness, (2) personalisation, and (3) empathy – are considered important in fostering perceived responsibility. (1) It is generally argued that informative managerial responses enhance perceived responsibility by offering clear explanations and relevant details that signal the company's understanding of the issue and willingness to engage with it (Zhao et al., 2020). By providing actionable and problem-oriented information, such responses convey that the manager has carefully processed the customer's concerns and is actively working toward solving them (Chen et al., 2021).

Secondly, (2) personalisation reflects a genuine interest in the customer's experience since tailored responses are more likely to resonate with customers (Packard et al., 2018). Darani et al. (2023) show that, whether through paraphrasing or linguistic mimicry, such acknowledgement-based cues lead observers to infer greater managerial responsibility. Yet, although they indicate that the manager has genuinely engaged with the customer's message rather than issuing a generic reply. Interestingly, the sequential mediation analysis revealed no significant indirect effect of mimicry on purchase intention via perceived managerial responsibility or perceived managerial competence (*ibid*).

Finally, (3) empathy is considered a major signal of accountability. Study 1E of research by Darani et al. (*ibid*) argues that greater perceived attentiveness in mimicry may cause the participants to view the manager as more empathetic. Following this, empathetic responses may be viewed as a catalyst for perceived responsibility because they encourage managers to take ownership of the situation and demonstrate their commitment to resolving the issue. Additionally, empathetic responses may further strengthen perceived responsibility since they demonstrate the manager's willingness to connect on a human level (Kellelt et al., 2002).

Based on this reasoning, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2a: Informativeness in managers' responses positively influences customers' perceived responsibility.

H2b: Personalisation in managers' responses positively influences customers' perceived responsibility.

H2c: Empathy in managers' responses positively influences customers' perceived responsibility.

H3a–H3c. Effects of response quality on satisfaction with the response

Satisfaction with the response is another important aspect that reflects customers' overall evaluation of how appropriately and effectively the company addressed their review. Prior academic relationship marketing research commonly defines satisfaction as "the summary psychological state resulting when the emotion surrounding disconfirmed expectations is coupled with the customer's prior feelings about the consumption experience" (Oliver, 1981: 29). Accordingly, we may hold that in online reviews, this evaluation is primarily shaped by the perceived quality of the managerial response rather than by direct interaction.

Prior research reveals that managerial responses generally enhance customer satisfaction, especially when addressing non-positive reviews. As for (1) informativeness, prior research confirms the positive influence of informative responses on satisfaction with managers' responses (Zhao et al., 2020). That is because customers interpret clear explanations and problem-oriented information as fair and constructive recovery efforts (ibid). While (2) personalisation and (3) empathy are not measured as separate constructs in the same research, it is argued that personalisation signals attentiveness and authenticity, making customers feel recognised rather than treated as anonymous reviewers (Jin et al., 2023). Finally, (3) empathetic responses convey understanding and care, which is especially important in service recovery contexts and has been shown to alleviate negative evaluations and increase satisfaction (Wei et al., 2022). While the previous research only examined either the influence of response quality in general or, selectively, the impact of informativeness on customer satisfaction with the response, the following hypotheses are tested in this paper:

H3a: Informativeness in managers' responses positively influences customer satisfaction with the response.

H3b: Personalisation in managers' responses positively influences customer satisfaction with the response.

H3c: Empathy in managers' responses positively influences customer satisfaction with the response.

H4–H6. Effects of perceived responsiveness, emotional relief, and satisfaction with the response on trust

Customer trust reflects beliefs regarding a company's reliability, benevolence, and competence in managing customer relationships (Mayer et al., 1995). Yet, it is worth taking into account that in online environments, trust formation commonly relies on cues derived from a company's responses to customer feedback rather than from direct personal interaction.

Essentially, theoretical and empirical grounding for trust as an outcome of perceived managerial behaviour in observable online interactions is found in Zhang et al. (2016) and Darani et al. (2023) as partial but legitimate foundations. Zhang et al. (ibid) conceptualise trust as a core dimension of relationship quality and demonstrate that consumers are more likely to develop trust when a company provides high-quality information and actively engages with users. Although their study focuses on brand pages (rather than review responses), their examination suggests that observable managerial behaviours signalling attentiveness and engagement foster trust among online audiences.

Similarly, research by Darani et al. (2023) reveals that third-party observers form impressions of trustworthiness based on managers' written responses to customers. More specifically, their findings reveal that in cases when a manager's response expresses attentiveness and understanding, observers are more likely to perceive the firm as more trustworthy. In essence, this supports the perception that perceived responsiveness – that is, the extent to which a response is timely, appropriate, and relevant – functions as a key precursor to trust in online service interactions.

Beyond responsiveness, perceived responsibility signals a firm's willingness to accept ownership of issues and to act in customers' interests, which has been shown to strengthen relational trust in service recovery contexts (Zhao et al., 2020). Following the more general study on the impact of service recovery strategies and recovery satisfaction, prior scholarship supports the idea that when responsibility (or accountability) is clearly communicated in a response, this signals positive firm attributes to customers and can influence trust-related perceptions (Ali et al., 2021).

Finally, satisfaction with the response reflects customers' overall evaluation of how the company addressed their feedback. According to existing research, satisfaction with service recovery efforts enhances trust by reinforcing positive expectations about future interactions (Wei et al., 2022: 9). Thus, a satisfactory managerial response to an online review may function as a trust-building mechanism for both the original reviewer and for third-party observers. Although the earlier research does not test the exact variables of perceived responsiveness, perceived responsibility and satisfaction with response separately, they nevertheless provide a solid theoretical and empirical grounding for trust as an outcome.

Based on these arguments, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4: Perceived responsiveness positively influences customer trust.

H5: Perceived responsibility positively influences customer trust.

H6: Satisfaction with the response positively influences customer trust.

2.2 Research data collection method, instrument, creation of sponsored posts, sample size, reliability, and process

A quantitative research approach was adopted to test the proposed research model and hypotheses. Quantitative approaches are widely used in online consumer behaviour and service recovery research, as they allow systematic examination relationships between constructs such as response characteristics trust, customer perceptions, trust, and behavioural intentions (Habib et al., 2022). Previous studies investigating managerial responses to online reviews and related consumer outcomes have predominantly relied on **survey-based designs**, enabling the measurement of latent psychological constructs through structured questionnaires (e.g. Wang & Chaudhry, 2018; Zhao et al., 2020; Jin et al., 2023; Wei et al., 2022). Importantly, survey research is particularly suitable for capturing consumers' attitudes, evaluations, and intentions following exposure to online service interactions (Malhotra et al., 2017). Thus, a survey design was selected as the primary data collection method in this paper. Moreover, it was designed to measure respondents' perceptions of managerial response quality, emotional and cognitive reactions, trust, and intention to buy, using previously validated measurement scales adapted to the context of online reviews.

The choice of a data collection instrument is crucial, as it directly affects the quality and reliability of the collected data and the validity of subsequent analyses. As research increasingly focuses on online consumer behaviour and digital service interactions,

particularly in the context of online reviews and electronic word-of-mouth, data collection is frequently conducted in an online environment (Zhao et al., 2020; Jin et al., 2023). Accordingly, a survey-based research design was employed in this study, with a structured questionnaire used as the primary data collection instrument.

Questionnaires are widely applied in online service recovery and consumer perception research due to their practicality and methodological advantages. They are easy to administer, ensure consistency across respondents, eliminate interviewer bias, and allow for the efficient collection of large amounts of data (Malhotra et al., 2017). Moreover, online questionnaires enable respondent anonymity, reduce data collection costs, and allow participants to complete the survey at a time and place convenient to them, which can increase response accuracy and engagement (Malhotra et al., 2017).

For the purposes of this research, a single online questionnaire was created using Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of an introductory section explaining the purpose of the study and assuring respondent anonymity, followed by a screening question to ensure that participants had prior experience with online reviews. Respondents were then presented with a managerial response scenario and asked to evaluate a series of statements measuring the study constructs, including response quality dimensions, perceived responsiveness, emotional relief, satisfaction with the response, trust, and intention to buy.

The scenario was set within the hospitality service context and featured a customer review and managerial response from a hotel located in Italy, reflecting a realistic hotel booking experience. All construct-related items were measured using 7-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree"). The final section of the questionnaire collected demographic information using nominal and ordinal scales (Malhotra et al., 2017). The questionnaire was administered in English and distributed online through social media platforms, including but not limited to Messenger and Facebook groups, and relevant online communities, in order to reach respondents familiar with online review platforms.

In this research, the **stimulus** was presented in the form of a **scenario-based online consumer review environment**, in which respondents were exposed to a customer review followed by a managerial response (see Annex 1 and Annex 2). This format was chosen because online review platforms represent one of the most influential sources of information in consumers' decision-making processes, particularly in service-related contexts (Zhang & Vásquez, 2014; Sparks et al., 2016). The presented scenario reflects the structure commonly found on popular online review platforms, such as TripAdvisor, Booking.com, and

Google Reviews, where managerial responses are publicly visible and accessible to potential customers. By embedding managerial responses within a realistic and publicly observable review context, respondents are able to evaluate how companies address customer feedback in a way that closely mirrors real-world online service recovery interactions.

Online review environments were chosen as the study context because they represent a key source of electronic word-of-mouth in service-related decision-making and allow firms to communicate responsiveness, empathy, and accountability beyond the original reviewer (Zhang & Vásquez, 2014; Sparks et al., 2016). Prior research indicates that such publicly observable managerial responses strongly influence observers' perceptions and behavioural intentions, making this context particularly suitable for examining perceived responsiveness, emotional relief, satisfaction with the response, trust, and intention to buy (Wang & Chaudhry, 2018; Zhao et al., 2020; Wei et al., 2022).

In this research, a single scenario-based managerial response was created and used as the stimulus to examine how different response quality characteristics influence consumers' perceptions and behavioural intentions. Following prior research on online service recovery and webcare communication, response quality was conceptualised as a **threefold construct**, consisting of (1) **informativeness**, (2) **personalisation**, and (3) **empathy**. As outlined earlier, these dimensions are consistently identified in the literature as core elements of effective managerial responses to online reviews and are central to how customers evaluate firms' responsiveness and recovery efforts (Zhao et al., 2020; Jin et al., 2023; Wei et al., 2022; Darani et al., 2023).

In line with prior research on online service recovery, the scenarios were situated in a hotel and accommodation service context. This context was selected because hotels represent one of the most frequently reviewed service categories on online review platforms, and managerial responses to hotel reviews have been widely examined in previous studies on webcare and online reputation management (Wang & Chaudhry, 2018; Zhao et al., 2020). The hotel context thus provides a realistic and well-established setting for examining how response quality influences consumers' perceptions and behavioural intentions.

Based on the conceptual research model and hypotheses, a scenario-based questionnaire design was implemented in which respondents saw a customer review and a single managerial response. The scenario incorporated three theoretically established dimensions of response quality mentioned earlier – informativeness, personalisation, and empathy. These elements allowed respondents to evaluate their perceptions of the response. After

reading the scenario, participants assessed each construct using established Likert-scale items (see Annex 1 and Annex 2). This approach enables the examination of how perceived response quality dimensions relate to customer perceptions, satisfaction, trust, and behavioural intentions.

The managerial response presented in the scenario was designed to reflect three core dimensions of response quality identified in the webcare and service recovery literature: informativeness, personalisation, and empathy. Specifically, the response included factual information addressing issues raised in the review, personalised remarks referencing the customer's experience, and empathetic expressions acknowledging the guest's concerns. To avoid bias associated with brand familiarity, the scenario featured a fictional hotel located in Florence, Italy. The same review–response scenario was shown to all participants, ensuring that any variation in respondent evaluations could be attributed to individual perceptions rather than differences in response content. To situate the scenario within a plausible interaction setting, the scenario implied a culturally typical interaction by presenting a foreign guest and a local hotel manager. This effect was reflected by the use of an American-sounding guest name and an Italian-sounding manager's name. Lastly, the customer review was held constant for all participants to ensure that differences in evaluations reflected perceptions of the managerial response rather than variation in the review's tone and/or content.

2.3 Development of response quality manipulations

The development of the managerial response stimuli was guided by an extensive review of the service recovery, webcare, and online review literature. Based on this theoretical foundation, response quality was operationalised through three dimensions: informativeness, personalisation, and empathy. These dimensions were selected because they represent the most frequently examined and theoretically grounded characteristics of effective managerial responses in online review environments (Davidow, 2003; Sparks et al., 2016; Wei et al., 2022).

A single managerial response was crafted to reflect all three dimensions, incorporating (1) factual information addressing issues raised in the customer review, (2) personalised statements referring to the guest's experience, and (3) empathetic language acknowledging customer concerns. The tone, length, and structure of the response were controlled to ensure that participant perceptions were shaped by content rather than stylistic variation.

Questionnaire design

The online questionnaire was developed using Google Forms (see Annex 3). Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and assured anonymity and confidentiality at the beginning of the survey. Two screening questions were included to ensure respondent suitability: “Are you at least 18 years old?” and “Have you ever read online customer reviews that included managers’ responses (e.g., on Google Reviews, Booking.com, TripAdvisor, or similar platforms)?” Only participants who answered “yes” to both questions were allowed to continue with the survey. Hence, screening questions were included to ensure that only participants with prior experience reading online customer reviews and managerial responses proceeded with the questionnaire, which allowed for improving data relevance and response quality.

The questionnaire items were constructed using validated scales adopted from previous studies in online service recovery, webcare, and consumer response literature – all of which will be outlined in the next section of this chapter. Furthermore, all statements were adapted to reflect the context of managerial responses to online customer reviews, while retaining the semantic meaning and measurement intent of the original items (e.g., replacing “brand page” or “website” with “manager’s response”). All construct-related questions were measured using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”), consistent with prior quantitative studies investigating consumer perceptions, trust, and behavioural intentions in digital environments (Jin et al., 2023; Wei et al., 2022).

In the final part of the questionnaire, demographic questions were included to obtain background information about the respondents. Participants were asked to indicate their gender, age, and employment status (e.g., student, employed, unemployed, working student, self-employed). These questions were adopted based on prior research in consumer behaviour and online service evaluation (Jung et al., 2016; Setyani et al., 2019; Kwon & Ahn, 2021). Nominal scales were applied for gender and employment status, while ordinal scales were used for respondents’ age. The questionnaire was administered in English and distributed online via Facebook groups, personal contacts, and messaging platforms to reach individuals familiar with online review platforms.

2.4 Measurement of constructs

For this research, the questionnaire was constructed using already established constructs from prior empirical research selected following a comprehensive theoretical analysis of the literature. Essentially, they were selected from the literature on online service recovery, managerial responses, and consumer trust. Yet, while preserving the original conceptual meaning of the items, some of the constructs were minimally adapted to fit the context of managers' responses to online customer reviews. Hence, minor wording adjustments were made, aiming to ensure relevance to the study and clarity for respondents. In the questionnaire, all constructs were measured using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), which is commonly applied in consumer perception research. The questionnaire items were also presented in an order consistent with the conceptual research model. All adaptations made to each construct are outlined here as follows:

1. The perceived response quality (informativeness) variable was adjusted and measured based on Zhang et al. (2016). The original items measuring information quality on brand pages (e.g., "I think the information posted by the brand page is excellent/comprehensive/new/credible") were adapted to refer specifically to the manager's response to an online customer review. Accordingly, references to "brand page" or "posted information" were replaced with "information provided in the manager's response." Otherwise, the same evaluative dimensions of excellence, comprehensiveness, novelty, and credibility were retained.
2. The perceived response quality (personalisation) variable was adjusted and measured based on Tam (2006). The original yes/no item, "Could you see your name on the banners during the navigation?" was replaced with the Likert-scale statement "I can see the customer's name in the response." The remaining original measurement items referring to personalised website banners and messages (e.g., "I noticed that GiftShop.com sent me personalized messages" and "I noticed that there were product offers for me") were adapted to the context of managers' responses to online reviews. Specifically, references to website navigation and promotional banners were replaced with wording reflecting personalisation cues in a managerial response, resulting in the following items: "The manager sent a personalised response," "There were product offers for the customer by the company," "The company gave the customer personalised offers," and "The customer received a tailored response from the company."
3. The perceived response quality (empathy) variable was adjusted and measured based on Darani et al. (2023). The original empathy items – "This manager senses or

realizes what the customer is feeling,” “This manager shows sensitivity and understanding,” and “This manager pays attention and listens well” – were retained with no wording changes to explicitly refer to the manager’s response to an online customer review.

4. The perceived responsiveness variable was adjusted and measured based on Darani et al. (2023). The original responsiveness items – “The manager response is appropriate” and “The manager really knows what is going on; that is, he/she has a handle on the situation” – were directly adapted to the online review context by explicitly referring to the manager’s response to the customer review, without altering the original meaning of the statements.
5. The perceived responsibility variable was adjusted and measured based on Darani et al. (2023). The original responsibility items – “The manager showed responsibility,” “The manager is genuinely committed to his/her customers,” “The manager acknowledged what was said in the customer’s comment,” and “The manager endorsed what was said in the customer’s comment” – were retained in their original form, with only contextual clarification that the responsibility is demonstrated through a manager’s online review response.
6. Satisfaction with the response variable was adjusted and measured based on Zhang et al. (2016). The three original satisfaction measurement items – “I am satisfied with the brand,” “I am pleased with the brand,” and “I am happy with the brand” – were adapted to evaluate satisfaction with the manager’s response by replacing references to “the brand” with “the manager’s response,” while maintaining the original affective evaluation structure. Accordingly, the following items were adopted: “I am satisfied with the manager’s response,” “I am pleased with the manager’s response,” and “I am happy with the manager’s response.”
7. The trust (in the service provider) variable was adjusted and measured based on Darani et al. (2021). The original trust items – “This manager is friendly and approachable,” “This manager is sincere,” and “This manager is honest” – were all retained and contextualised to reflect trust formed through exposure to the manager’s response to an online customer review.

Table 2

Measurement of constructs

Construct and measurement instrument source	Statement/measurement item
<p>Perceived response quality (informativeness) (Zhang et al., 2016)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I think the information provided is excellent. 2. I think the information provided is comprehensive. 3. I think the information provided is new. 4. I think the information provided is credible.
<p>Perceived response quality (personalisation) (Tam, 2006)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I can see the customer's name in the response. 2. The manager sent a personalised response. 3. There were product offers for the customer by the company. 4. The company gave the customer personalised offers. 5. The customer received a tailored response from the company.
<p>Perceived response quality (empathy) (Darani et al., 2023)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The manager senses or realizes what the customer is feeling. 2. The manager shows sensitivity and understanding. 3. The manager pays attention and listens well to the customer's concerns.
<p>Perceived responsiveness (Darani et al., 2023)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The manager's response is appropriate. 2. The manager really knows what is going on; that is, he/she "has a handle on the situation."
<p>Perceived Responsibility (Darani et al., 2023)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The manager showed responsibility. 2. The manager is genuinely committed to his/her customers.

	<p>3. The manager acknowledged what was said in the customer's comment.</p> <p>4. The manager endorsed what was said in the customer's comment.</p>
<p>Satisfaction with the response (Zhang et al., 2016)</p>	<p>1. I am satisfied with the manager's response.</p> <p>2. I am pleased with the manager's response.</p> <p>3. I am happy with the manager's response.</p>
<p>Trust in the service provider (Darani et al., 2021) - trust in the manager's response</p>	<p>1. The manager is friendly and approachable.</p> <p>2. The manager is sincere.</p> <p>3. The manager is honest.</p>

Sample size and sampling procedure

In quantitative empirical research, the sufficiency of the sample size plays a major role in determining the robustness and credibility of statistical findings. That is because it directly affects the representativeness of the data and the reliability of statistical conclusions (Cohen, 1992: 156). In survey-based studies that examine consumer perceptions (and latent psychological constructs), an adequate number of respondents is important to ensure sufficient statistical power and decrease estimation error (VanVoorhis & Morgan, 2007: 46-49). In addition, the comparable studies method was applied to determine a suitable sample size for the present research. This approach involved reviewing prior empirical studies employing similar research designs, data collection methods, and analytical techniques, such as those conducted by Zhao et al. (2020) and Darani et al. (2023). Their reported sample sizes were also used as a benchmark for the present study (see Table 2).

As presented in Table 2 (below), prior empirical research on online consumer perceptions, managerial responses, service recovery, and trust formation has relied on sample sizes ranging from approximately 139 to more than 500 respondents. Based on prior studies, a reference sample size of approximately 190 respondents was considered appropriate for the present study in this paper. Thus, we hold that the final sample of 212 valid responses

exceeds this benchmark and falls within the range commonly used in comparable empirical research.

Table 2

Sample size calculation

No.	Author, date	Type of methods applied	No. of respondents
1.	Tam & Ho, 2006	Study 1 - Lab experiment with Likert-scale questionnaire	207
		Study 2 - Field study with Likert-scale questionnaire	139
2.	Min, Lim, & Magnini, 2015	Questionnaire (survey-based experimental design with Likert scales)	176
3.	Zhang et al., 2016	Online empirical survey	424
4.	Wei et al., 2022	Scenario experiment (Likert-scale questionnaire)	247
5.	Darani et al., 2023	Study 1A - Questionnaire (online empirical survey with Likert scales)	117
		Study 1B - Questionnaire (online empirical survey with Likert scales)	76
		Study 1C - Questionnaire (online empirical survey with Likert scales)	96
		Study 1D - Questionnaire (online empirical survey with Likert scales)	125
		Study 1E - Questionnaire (online empirical survey with Likert scales)	211
		Study 1F - Questionnaire (online empirical survey with Likert scales)	95

		Study 1G - Questionnaire (online empirical survey with Likert scales)	109
		Study 2A - Questionnaire (online empirical survey with Likert scales)	99
		Study 2B - Questionnaire (online empirical survey with Likert scales)	98
		Study 3 - Questionnaire (online empirical survey with Likert scales)	103
6.	Jin et al., 2023	Online experiment (survey with Likert scale)	170
7.	Wang et al., 2023	Questionnaire (online empirical survey, Likert scale)	582
Total			181

Source: compiled by the author.

Participants were selected using a non-probability convenience sampling approach, which is widely applied in online consumer research and is considered more practical than random sampling (Etikan et al., 2016). Data collection relied on the voluntary participation of individuals via online social media channels. Specifically, the questionnaire was distributed via social media platforms, specifically, Facebook and WhatsApp, and messaging applications, which enabled convenient and immediate access to potential respondents.

Data was collected using a single online questionnaire created with Google Forms. In this way, the responses were exported to IBM SPSS Statistics for analysis. To be sure, all questionnaires were complete and met the screening criteria. The purpose of the screening questions was to ensure that only eligible respondents – namely, adult consumers with prior exposure to managers' responses to online customer reviews – could participate in the study. Respondents who did not meet these criteria were automatically prevented from continuing the survey. Statistical analysis and reliability assessment of the constructs (using Cronbach's alpha) were conducted with IBM SPSS Statistics. The following chapter presents the results of the data analysis and hypothesis testing.

Overview of methodology and transition to results

In a nutshell, this section of the methodology chapter has outlined the research design, data collection method, sampling procedure, measurement of constructs, and sample size justification. Moreover, it explained the adoption of a quantitative research approach, along with a survey-based design, which further aims to examine consumers' perceptions of managers' responses to online reviews. As will be discussed in the following chapter, all constructs were measured using Likert-scale items adapted from previously validated scales in previous research, with responses recorded on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), ensuring methodological consistency with prior research in online service recovery and consumer trust. The final sample consisted of 212 valid responses, which exceeded the average sample size of 181 found in comparable empirical studies.

The following chapter presents the results of the empirical analysis, which includes an assessment of the reliability of the measurement scales using Cronbach's alpha, descriptive statistics of the sample, and hypothesis testing using linear regression analysis. As a result, the proposed relationships between response quality dimensions, customer perceptions, and their effect on trust are examined.

3. RESEARCH DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

3.1. The reliability of the constructs and demographic data analysis

To begin with, we start the analysis of the research data with an examination of the reliability of the measurement scales employed to operationalise the study constructs. Here, reliability refers to the extent to which a scale produces consistent and stable results when measurements are repeated (Hair et al., 2019). In survey-based research, one of the most conventionally applied methods for evaluating internal consistency reliability is Cronbach's alpha coefficient (DeVellis, 2017). To be sure, Cronbach's alpha measures the degree to which items within a construct are interrelated while representing the same concept measured in this paper. Hence, the coefficient is calculated from the average correlations between the items, thus reflecting the internal consistency of the construct (Malhotra et al., 2017). The results of the Cronbach's alpha analysis for all constructs included in this paper are presented in Table 2.

Table 3

Reliability of constructs: Cronbach's alpha

Construct	Cronbach's alpha
Perceived response quality (informativeness)	0.671
Perceived response quality (personalisation)	0.646
Perceived response quality (empathy)	0.911
Perceived responsiveness	0.8
Perceived responsibility	0.782
Satisfaction with the response	0.899
Trust in the service provider	0.860

Source: compiled by the author using SPSS statistics.

Cronbach's alpha values can normally range from 0 to 1, where higher values indicate greater internal consistency among the items of a construct. (ibid). Following this, methodological literature confirms that a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.60 or above is generally regarded as acceptable for exploratory and survey-based research. In contrast, values below this threshold may indicate insufficient reliability of the measurement scale (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 2 shows that all constructs included in the study exhibit Cronbach's alpha values exceeding the recommended minimum level of 0.60, which means that internal consistency is satisfactory. It is noteworthy that some response quality dimensions (informativeness and personalisation), exhibit a slightly lower (yet acceptable) reliability, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.671 for informativeness, 0.646 for personalisation. Overall, however, response quality dimensions demonstrate **high reliability**, ranging from 0.782 for perceived responsibility to 0.911 for empathy. To be sure, the remaining constructs include perceived responsiveness ($\alpha = 0.800$), perceived responsibility ($\alpha = 0.782$), satisfaction with the response ($\alpha = 0.899$), and trust in the service provider ($\alpha = 0.860$). Therefore, these results confirm that all measurement scales used in the study are reliable and suitable for subsequent hypothesis testing.

Data collection was conducted in December 2025 using an online survey method. The questionnaires, created using Google Forms, were distributed via Lithuanian Whatsapp and Facebook (social media) groups and chats, where potential respondents were invited to participate by completing the questionnaire. Prior to accessing the main survey, respondents were required to answer screening questions to ensure that only individuals aged 18 or older who had previously read online customer reviews that included managers' or companies' responses were included in the sample.

In total, 212 valid responses were collected and included in the final dataset. All respondents met the screening criteria and completed the questionnaire in full, and therefore no responses were excluded from the analysis. There was only one questionnaire conducted for this research, and the sample size achieved was considered sufficient for conducting the subsequent statistical analyses. As for the sample characteristics, demographic information about respondents' (1) gender, (2) age group, and current (3) employment status was collected to describe the sample and assess its suitability for the research objectives. Thus, the information both ensured that the sample reflected individuals relevant to the study context and allowed to better understand the respondent profile.

Crucially, in this study, the target audience consisted of adult online consumers who have been exposed to managers' responses to online customer reviews on digital platforms, such as Google Reviews, Booking.com, TripAdvisor. The questionnaire was administered in English to ensure accessibility for both Lithuanian and international respondents residing in Lithuania, thus avoiding language-based exclusion. As this paper focuses on perceptions and evaluations of online managerial communication rather than, for instance, purchase behaviour, no data regarding respondents' income level or occupational status were collected or taken into account.

Previous research on electronic word-of-mouth and online review environments indicates that consumer perceptions of managerial responses are not limited to a specific demographic group, but rather emerge across diverse user profiles who actively engage with digital platforms (Filiari, Algezai, & McLeay, 2015; Schivinski, Christodoulides, & Dabrowski, 2020). Online reviews and managerial replies are publicly visible and commonly consulted by users of different ages and backgrounds, making exposure to such content a shared experience among online consumers (Park & Nicolau, 2015). Furthermore, previous studies suggest that trust formation in online contexts is primarily driven by message features and response cues, such as tone, personalisation, and empathy, rather than by consumers' sociodemographic attributes (Sparks, So, & Bradley, 2016; Xie, Zhang, Zhang, & Yu, 2020). Consequently, including respondents from varied demographic groups reflects the heterogeneous nature of audiences who encounter managers' responses to online reviews in real-world digital settings.

Demographic characteristics of the respondents

An overview of the respondent distribution according to gender is presented in Table 3. The results indicate that the sample consists of a higher proportion of female respondents (60.4%, $n = 128$) compared to male respondents (39.6%, $n = 84$). This distribution reflects a moderate gender imbalance, with women representing the majority of participants in the study. Simultaneously, such a distribution appears consistent with prior research suggesting that women tend to be more active in online environments, especially when engaging with digital content like online reviews and social media platforms (Filiari et al., 2018; Schivinski et al., 2020). Yet, as this study focuses on consumers' perceptions of managers' responses to online reviews, the observed gender composition is considered appropriate for the research context and does not undermine the relevance of the findings.

Table 4*Respondent distribution according to gender*

Gender	Percentage (%)	N
Female	60.4%	128
Male	39.6%	84

Source: compiled by the author using SPSS statistics.

The age distribution of respondents is presented in Table 4. The results show that the sample is predominantly composed of younger and middle-aged adults. The largest share of participants belonged to the 18–24 and 25–34 age groups, each accounting for 37.7% (n = 80) of the total sample. Respondents aged 35 years and above represent 24.6% (n = 52) of the respondents. Hence, this distribution indicates that the majority of respondents were young and middle-aged adults who are typically active users of online review platforms.

To be sure, this age distribution is considered appropriate and aligns well with the objectives of the study, as previous studies indicate that online review platforms and digital service environments are most frequently used by younger and middle-aged consumers. That is because they are more likely to consult and evaluate publicly available customer feedback and managerial responses (Fileri & McLeay, 2014; Park & Nicolau, 2015). At the same time, as respondents aged 35 and above were also included, this reflects the diverse age composition of users engaging with online reviews in real-world settings.

Table 5*Respondent distribution according to age category.*

Age group	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)
18–24 years	37.7	80
25–34 years	37.7	80
35 years and above	24.6	52

Total	100.0	212
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Source: compiled by the author using SPSS statistics.

The employment status distribution of respondents is presented in Table 5. Overall, the results indicate diverse occupational backgrounds among the respondents. The largest group was employed individuals, which constitutes 52.4% (n=52) of the sample. This was followed by students, comprising 32.1% (n=68) of respondents, and working students, making up 20.8% (n=44). Additionally, self-employed respondents constituted 15.1% (n=32) of the sample. In contrast, only a small proportion of participants identified as unemployed (1.9%, n=4) or selected the “other” category (5.7%, n=12), which also included retired individuals. We hold that that the inclusion of a separate category for working students allows for a more nuanced understanding of respondents combining academic activities with employment.

Table 6

Respondent distribution according to employment status

Status	Percentage	N
Employed	52	24.5
Self-employed	32	15.1
Student	68	32.1
Working student	44	20.8
Unemployed	4	1.9
Other	12	5.7
Total	212	100.0

Source: compiled by the author using SPSS statistics.

To conclude, 212 valid responses were collected in total, which were included in the final analysis. As discussed earlier, the sample comprises a higher proportion of female

respondents (60.4%), is largely concentrated within younger and middle-aged adult groups (18-24 years and 25-34 years), and includes predominantly economically active individuals (employed, student and working student categories), reflecting typical user profiles of online review platforms. Furthermore, the reliability assessment conducted using Cronbach's alpha shows that all measurement constructs exhibit acceptable to high internal consistency. Thus, the sample characteristics align well with the target population defined in the methodology section – that is, adult online consumers who have been exposed to managers' responses to online customer reviews.

3.2. The research data results analysis and hypotheses testing

Following the evaluation of the reliability of the measurement scales and confirmation of the validity of the constructs, the collected data were analysed and the proposed hypotheses were tested using IBM SPSS Statistics. Across the study, 12 hypotheses were formulated in the methodology section to examine the impact of managers' responses to online reviews on customer trust. The hypotheses were tested using linear regression analysis, which allowed the examination of direct relationships between the main constructs included in the research model.

As mentioned earlier, the hypotheses are structured into four conceptual groups. The first three groups (H1a-H1c, H2a-H2c, and H3a-H3c) examine the effects of response quality characteristics – namely informativeness, personalisation, and empathy – on three customer evaluations: perceived responsiveness, perceived responsibility, and satisfaction with the response, respectively. The final group of hypotheses (H4-H6) investigates the effects of these customer evaluations on customer trust, which represents the focal outcome variable of the study. The results of each regression analysis are presented below, followed by an interpretation of whether the respective hypotheses are supported.

H1a: Informativeness in managers' responses positively influences customers' perceived responsiveness.

To test hypothesis H1a, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted using SPSS. Informativeness of managers' responses was entered as the independent variable, while perceived responsiveness was treated as the dependent variable. The results indicate that informativeness has a positive and statistically significant effect on customers' perceived

responsiveness ($\beta = 0.614$, $p < .001$). The regression model is statistically significant ($F = 127.046$, $p < .001$) and explains 37.7% of the variance in perceived responsiveness ($R^2 = 0.377$). These findings demonstrate that higher levels of informativeness in managers' responses lead to higher perceptions of responsiveness among customers. Thus, hypothesis H1a is supported.

Table 7

Regression results for the effects of response quality on perceived responsiveness

Hypothesis	Predictor	β	t	p-value	R^2
H1a	Informativeness	0.614	11.271	< .001	0.377

Source: Compiled by the author using SPSS statistics.

H1b: Personalisation in managers' responses positively influences customers' perceived responsiveness

To test hypothesis H1b, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted using SPSS. Personalisation of managers' responses was entered as the independent variable, while perceived responsiveness served as the dependent variable. The results reveal that personalisation has a positive and statistically significant effect on customers' perceived responsiveness ($\beta = 0.556$, $p < .001$). The regression model is statistically significant ($F = 93.899$, $p < .001$) and explains 30.9% of the variance in perceived responsiveness ($R^2 = 0.309$). These findings indicate that more personalised managerial responses lead to higher perceptions of responsiveness among customers. Therefore, hypothesis H1b is supported.

Table 8

Simple linear regression results for the effect of personalisation on perceived responsiveness

Hypothesis	Predictor	β	t	p-value	R^2
H1b	Personalisation	0.556	9.690	< .001	0.309

Source: Compiled by the author using SPSS statistics.

H1c: Empathy in managers' responses positively influences customers' perceived responsiveness

To test hypothesis H1c, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted using SPSS. Empathy in managers' responses was included as the independent variable, while perceived responsiveness was specified as the dependent variable. The results demonstrate that empathy has a strong positive and statistically significant effect on customers' perceived responsiveness ($\beta = 0.807$, $p < .001$). The regression model is statistically significant ($F = 392.023$, $p < .001$) and explains 65.1% of the variance in perceived responsiveness ($R^2 = 0.651$). These findings indicate that empathetic managerial responses substantially enhance customers' perceptions of responsiveness. Consequently, hypothesis H1c is supported.

Table 9

Simple linear regression results for the effect of empathy on perceived responsiveness

Hypothesis	Predictor	β	t	p-value	R^2
H1c	Empathy	0.807	19.800	< .001	0.651

Source: Compiled by the author using SPSS statistics.

H2a: Informativeness in managers' responses positively influences customers' perceived responsibility.

To test hypothesis H2a, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted using SPSS. Informativeness of managers' responses was entered as the independent variable, while customers' perceived responsibility was specified as the dependent variable. The results show that informativeness has a positive and statistically significant effect on customers' perceived responsibility ($\beta = 0.727$, $p < .001$). The regression model is statistically significant ($F = 234.840$, $p < .001$) and explains 52.8% of the variance in perceived responsibility ($R^2 = 0.528$). These findings suggest that when managers provide informative responses to online reviews, customers are more likely to perceive the firm as responsible and accountable. Therefore, hypothesis H2a is supported.

Table 10

Simple linear regression results for the effect of informativeness on perceived responsibility

Hypothesis	Predictor	β	t	p-value	R ²
H2a	Informativeness	0.727	15.324	< .001	0.528

Source: Compiled by the author using SPSS statistics.

H2b: Personalisation in managers' responses positively influences customers' perceived responsibility.

To test hypothesis H2b, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted using SPSS. Personalisation of managers' responses was included as the independent variable, while customers' perceived responsibility was specified as the dependent variable. The results indicate that personalisation has a positive and statistically significant effect on customers' perceived responsibility ($\beta = 0.470$, $p < .001$). The regression model is statistically significant ($F = 59.605$, $p < .001$) and explains 22.1% of the variance in perceived responsibility ($R^2 = 0.221$). These findings suggest that personalised managerial responses contribute to customers perceiving the company as more responsible and accountable. Therefore, hypothesis H2b is supported.

Table 11

Simple linear regression results for the effect of personalisation on perceived responsibility

Hypothesis	Predictor	β	t	p-value	R ²
H2b	Personalisation	0.470	7.720	< .001	0.221

Source: Compiled by the author using SPSS statistics.

H2c: Empathy in managers' responses positively influences customers' perceived responsibility.

To test hypothesis H2c, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted using SPSS. Empathy in managers' responses was entered as the independent variable, while customers' perceived responsibility was treated as the dependent variable. The results reveal that empathy has a very strong positive and statistically significant effect on customers' perceived responsibility ($\beta = 0.854$, $p < .001$). The regression model is statistically significant ($F = 567.738$, $p < .001$) and explains 73.0% of the variance in perceived responsibility ($R^2 = 0.730$). These findings indicate that empathetic managerial responses substantially enhance customers' perceptions of organizational responsibility and accountability. Consequently, hypothesis H2c is supported.

Table 12

Simple linear regression results for the effect of empathy on perceived responsibility

Hypothesis	Predictor	β	t	p-value	R^2
H2c	Empathy	0.854	23.827	< .001	0.730

Source: Compiled by the author using SPSS statistics.

H3a: Informativeness in managers' responses positively influences customer satisfaction with the response.

To test hypothesis H3a, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted using SPSS. Informativeness in managers' responses was entered as the independent variable, while customer satisfaction with the response was treated as the dependent variable. The results show that informativeness has a strong positive and statistically significant effect on customer satisfaction with the response ($\beta = 0.662$, $p < .001$). The regression model is statistically significant ($F = 163.859$, $p < .001$) and explains 43.8% of the variance in satisfaction with the response ($R^2 = 0.438$). These findings indicate that when managers provide clear, detailed, and useful information in their responses to online reviews, customers are significantly more satisfied with those responses. Therefore, hypothesis H3a is supported.

Table 13

Simple linear regression results for the effect of informativeness on satisfaction with the response

Hypothesis	Predictor	β	t	p-value	R ²
H3a	Informativeness	0.662	12.801	< .001	0.438

Source: Compiled by the author using SPSS statistics.

H3b: Personalisation in managers' responses positively influences customer satisfaction with the response.

To test hypothesis H3b, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted using SPSS. Personalisation in managers' responses was included as the independent variable, while customer satisfaction with the response was treated as the dependent variable. The results demonstrate that personalisation has a positive and statistically significant effect on customer satisfaction with the response ($\beta = 0.438$, $p < .001$). The regression model is statistically significant ($F = 49.899$, $p < .001$) and explains 19.2% of the variance in satisfaction with the response ($R^2 = 0.192$). These findings indicate that when managers tailor their responses to individual customers—such as addressing them personally or referring to specific issues raised—customers report higher satisfaction with the response. Therefore, hypothesis H3b is supported.

Table 14

Simple linear regression results for the effect of personalisation on satisfaction with the response

Hypothesis	Predictor	β	t	p-value	R ²
H3b	Informativeness	0.662	12.801	< .001	0.438

Source: Compiled by the author using SPSS statistics.

H3c: Empathy in managers' responses positively influences customer satisfaction with the response.

To test hypothesis H3c, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted using SPSS. Empathy in managers' responses was included as the independent variable, while customer satisfaction with the response was treated as the dependent variable. The results show that empathy has a positive and statistically significant effect on customer satisfaction with the response ($\beta = 0.563$, $p < .001$). The regression model is statistically significant ($F = 97.409$, $p < .001$) and explains 31.7% of the variance in satisfaction with the response ($R^2 = 0.317$). These findings suggest that when managers express understanding, concern, and emotional support in their responses to online reviews, customers experience higher satisfaction with the response. Therefore, hypothesis H3c is supported.

Table 15

Simple linear regression results for the effect of empathy on satisfaction with the response

Hypothesis	Predictor	β	t	p-value	R^2
H3c	Empathy	0.563	9.870	< .001	0.317

Source: Compiled by the author using SPSS statistics.

H4: Perceived responsiveness positively influences customer trust.

To test hypothesis H4, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted using SPSS. Perceived responsiveness was included as the independent variable, while customer trust was treated as the dependent variable. The results indicate that perceived responsiveness has a positive and statistically significant effect on customer trust ($\beta = 0.578$, $p < .001$). The regression model is statistically significant ($F = 105.628$, $p < .001$) and explains 33.5% of the variance in customer trust ($R^2 = 0.335$). These findings suggest that when customers perceive managers' responses to online reviews as timely, attentive, and responsive to their concerns, their level of trust toward the company increases significantly. Therefore, hypothesis H4 is supported.

Table 16

Simple linear regression results for the effect of perceived responsiveness on customer trust

Hypothesis	Predictor	β	t	p-value	R ²
H4	Perceived Responsiveness	0.578	10.278	< .001	0.335

Source: Compiled by the author using SPSS statistics.

H5: Perceived responsibility positively influences customer trust.

To test hypothesis H5, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted using SPSS. Perceived responsibility was included as the independent variable, while customer trust was treated as the dependent variable. The results indicate that perceived responsibility has a positive and statistically significant effect on customer trust ($\beta = 0.690$, $p < .001$). The regression model is statistically significant ($F = 190.395$, $p < .001$) and explains 47.6% of the variance in customer trust ($R^2 = 0.476$). These findings suggest that when customers perceive managers' responses to online reviews as taking responsibility for issues, acknowledging mistakes, and demonstrating accountability, their trust in the company increases substantially. Therefore, hypothesis H5 is supported.

Table 17

Simple linear regression results for the effect of perceived responsibility on customer trust

Hypothesis	Predictor	β	t	p-value	R ²
H5	Perceived Responsibility	0.690	13.798	< .001	0.476

Source: Compiled by the author using SPSS statistics.

H6: Satisfaction with the response positively influences customer trust.

To test hypothesis H6, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted using SPSS. Satisfaction with the response was specified as the independent variable, while customer trust was treated as the dependent variable. The results reveal that satisfaction with the response has a strong positive and statistically significant effect on customer trust ($\beta = 0.838$, $p < .001$). The regression model is statistically significant ($F = 494.309$, $p < .001$) and explains 70.2% of the variance in customer trust ($R^2 = 0.702$). These findings indicate that customers who are satisfied with managers' responses to online reviews are substantially more likely to trust the company. Satisfaction with the response thus represents a key mechanism through which managerial communication strategies translate into customer trust. Therefore, hypothesis H6 is supported.

Table 18

Simple linear regression results for the effect of satisfaction with the response on customer trust

Hypothesis	Predictor	β	t	p-value	R^2
H6	Satisfaction with the Response	0.838	22.233	< .001	0.702

Source: Compiled by the author using SPSS Statistics.

3.3. Discussion of the research results

The purpose of this study was to examine how managers' responses to online customer reviews influence customer trust, both directly and indirectly via customer perceptions and evaluations. More specifically, the research aimed at examining the effects of threefold response quality dimensions – namely, (1) informativeness, (2) personalisation, and (3) empathy (independent variables) – on (1) perceived responsiveness, (2) perceived responsibility, and (3) satisfaction with the response (dependent variables), as well as the subsequent impact of these perceptions on customer trust. Following this, 12 hypotheses were developed and empirically examined using linear regression analysis to test the proposed conceptual model.

The results demonstrate that all 12 proposed hypotheses were supported. This outcome reflects statistically significant positive relationships among the constructs proposed (see Table 18). Overall, the findings confirm that higher-quality managerial responses to online reviews play a crucial role in shaping customers' evaluations and, ultimately, in fostering trust toward the company. These results also provide empirical support for the proposed model and underline the importance of strategic managers' communication when replying to online customer reviews.

Table 19

Hypotheses overall evaluation

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	p-value	Result
H1a	Informativeness → Perceived Responsiveness	0.614	< .001	Supported
H1b	Personalisation → Perceived Responsiveness	0.556	< .001	Supported
H1c	Empathy → Perceived Responsiveness	0.807	< .001	Supported
H2a	Informativeness → Perceived Responsibility	0.727	< .001	Supported
H2b	Personalisation → Perceived Responsibility	0.470	< .001	Supported
H2c	Empathy → Perceived Responsibility	0.854	< .001	Supported
H3a	Informativeness → Satisfaction with the Response	0.662	< .001	Supported

H3b	Personalisation → Satisfaction with the Response	0.438	< .001	Supported
H3c	Empathy → Satisfaction with the Response	0.563	< .001	Supported
H4	Perceived Responsiveness → Trust	0.578	< .001	Supported
H5	Perceived Responsibility → Trust	0.690	< .001	Supported
H6	Satisfaction with the Response → Trust	0.838	< .001	Supported

Response quality and perceived responsiveness

The regression results provide strong support for the positive influence of all three response quality components – namely, (1) informativeness, (2) personalisation, and (3) empathy (independent variables) – on perceived responsiveness. Among the dimensions, empathy exhibited the strongest effect ($\beta = .807$), followed by informativeness ($\beta = .614$) and personalisation ($\beta = .556$). As a result, this result suggests that customers judge managers as more responsive not only when relevant information is provided or when the response is tailored to the reviewer, but above all, when the manager's tone communicates acknowledgement and emotional understanding. Following this, empathy may strengthen customers' perception that the company pays attention to their concerns (and addresses them) rather than issuing an obligatory reply. These findings align with research demonstrating that empathy signals care, attentiveness, and social presence in digital communication (Wei et al., 2022; Jin et al., 2023). Therefore, these results reinforce the view that responsiveness is experienced not only as a functional evaluation, but also partly as an emotional one.

Response quality and perceived responsibility

Similarly, the analysis has demonstrated strong relationships between the same three response quality dimensions – (1) informativeness, (2) personalisation, and (3) empathy (independent variables) – and perceived responsibility. In this context, empathy again emerged as the most impactful predictor ($\beta = .854$), followed by informativeness ($\beta = .727$) and personalisation ($\beta = .470$). Furthermore, these results demonstrate that responsibility is interpreted by customers as a complex (or even multidimensional) construct: companies are perceived as accountable when they provide actionable information and when they acknowledge the reviewer personally. Even more importantly, this perception appears when the managers convey regret and a willingness to improve. The considerable effect of empathy aligns with findings that responsibility is not judged solely on objective actions but also based on perceived sincerity and genuine concern (Wang & Chaudhry, 2018). Informative responses likewise contribute to perceived accountability because they provide clarity around what happened and how issues will be addressed – behaviours closely linked to procedural justice. If we take them together, these findings suggest that managerial responses that communicate emotional validation and transparency are very effective in shaping impressions of responsibility.

Response quality and satisfaction with the response

Thirdly, the regression results also provide support for the positive effect of response quality dimensions – (1) informativeness, (2) personalisation, and (3) empathy (independent variables) – on satisfaction with the managerial reply. More precisely, informativeness demonstrated the strongest relationship with satisfaction ($\beta = .662$), followed by empathy ($\beta = .563$), while personalisation showed a weaker yet still significant effect ($\beta = .438$). These findings underscore that customers derive satisfaction primarily from responses that offer clear explanations or corrective actions. It is also worth noting that this aligns with existing service recovery literature, which identifies information provision and explanation of steps taken as core drivers of post-complaint satisfaction (Davidow, 2003). While (3) empathy, specifically by reducing emotional tension, contributes meaningfully to a customer's satisfaction with response, the regression analysis demonstrates that its effect is relatively smaller than that of (1) informativeness and (2) personalisation. Hence, the results suggest that emotional tone alone is insufficient unless it is paired with substantive informational content. Here, (2) personalisation, although valued by customers, appears to have less impact, which suggests customers largely view personalised messaging as valuable only

when it accompanies meaningful information and action. This hierarchy highlights that online observers are pragmatic evaluators. Put another way, the online customers prefer feeling acknowledged, but they primarily seek reassurance that problems are understood and addressed.

Perceptions and customer trust

The final set of hypotheses (H4-H6) examined the extent to which perceived responsiveness, perceived responsibility, and satisfaction with the response – all of which were tested as dependent variables in earlier hypotheses – influence trust. To be precise, while all three constructs significantly predicted trust in the company, satisfaction exhibited the strongest effect ($\beta = .838$). Importantly, this aligns with prior studies demonstrating that satisfaction is a powerful route to trust, particularly in online environments where customers lack other direct cues to assess credibility (Zhao et al., 2020). In this context, responsibility ($\beta = .690$) and responsiveness ($\beta = .578$) also exerted considerable effects, which in turn suggests that customers build trust both cognitively and affectively. Following this, responsiveness may be viewed as reflecting the company's attentiveness in addressing concerns, responsibility signals reliability and ethical conduct, and satisfaction captures the overall emotional and evaluative outcome. Considered collectively, these findings highlight that trust formation is a cumulative psychological process, shaped by functional, emotional, and relational cues found in a single response. Thus, these results support research arguing that managerial responses to online reviews influence prospective customers, specifically, not only the complainant, but by signalling competence, care, and commitment (Wang & Chaudhry, 2018; Darani et al., 2023).

Theoretical positioning and contribution

Collectively, the results provide empirical confirmation that perceived response quality plays a critical role in shaping multiple positive customer evaluations. Moreover, the findings reinforce and extend prior research showing that effective online responses can reduce negative affect, enhance relational perceptions, and build trust among third-party readers. This study contributes to existing literature by empirically testing three response quality components – (1) informativeness, (2) personalisation, and (3) empathy (independent variables) – both simultaneously and by distinguishing their downstream effects across multiple perceptual constructs. Yet, unlike studies that focus solely on satisfaction or

purchase intention, this research isolates trust as a central outcome, demonstrating the importance of informative, credible and empathetic communication for trust formation in online review contexts. The results further suggest that customers evaluate managerial responses in an integrated manner (i.e. holistically), whereby both emotional cues (empathy) and practical content (informativeness) need to be present for trust to emerge fully.

Summary of implications

In a nutshell, the findings of this research paper validate the proposed research model and highlight the importance of strategic webcare communication. Moreover, they demonstrate that customers react favourably to managerial responses that combine (1) information, (2) personal attention, and (3) emotional acknowledgement. In turn, the result suggests that the threefold combination not only enhances immediate evaluations of the company's performance but also builds lasting trust. As mentioned earlier in the literature review, trust is considered an especially critical asset in high-involvement sectors such as hospitality, on which this paper heavily relied theoretically and focused empirically as a context. Beyond confirming prior academic assumptions, the results provide nuanced evidence on the specific pathways through which managerial response elements shape perceptions and trust. Thus, the above-mentioned insights offer a valuable foundation for both theoretical development and practical guidance on effective online reputation management.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study aimed to examine how customers interpret and react to managerial responses to online reviews, as well as how these reactions shape customers' trust in the company. The research progressed from a theoretical review in the literature analysis (Chapter 1), through a quantitative scenario-based study (Chapter 2), to an empirical evaluation of how response characteristics affect consumer perceptions (Chapter 3). Departing from the literature analysed earlier and based on the present empirical findings, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. Online managers' responses to online reviews function as meaningful touchpoints that shape how customers evaluate companies

As online review platforms have become one of the most influential information sources for consumers, particularly for services that cannot be trialled before purchase, a manager's reply is often the first visible representation of how an organisation deals with criticism in this digital environment.

The findings of the present study confirm that even third-party observers – that is, individuals who did not write the review – may form personal impressions of the company based on the tone and content of the response. As a result, managers' replies do not only address the original reviewer. Instead, they contribute to ongoing reputation-building of the company, reduce information uncertainty for prospective customers and shape expectations of future service.

2. Three elements of response quality – informativeness, personalisation, and empathy – jointly explain how consumers assess webcare communication

The study adopted a three-dimensional view of response quality and showed that all three components meaningfully shape customer evaluations. Indeed, this paper shows that the threefold approach towards response quality provides a holistic lens through which customers' evaluations of webcare can be better understood.

(1) Informativeness strengthens clarity, reliability, and perceived competence. The results indicate that when a manager's response addresses issues raised in the review, provides clear explanations, or even outlines corrective steps, customers feel better informed and more confident in the company. Additionally, informative responses help reduce uncertainty about what happened and why, signalling that the

firm is willing to communicate openly rather than avoid responsibility. As a result, such transparency contributes not only to higher perceived responsiveness and responsibility but also to greater overall satisfaction with the response. In other words, the findings support the common principle that customers value companies that explain rather than avoid.

- (2) Personalisation signals that the organisation recognises the customer individually rather than responding with scripted messages. The empirical research presented in this paper reveals that adapting a reply to the specific viewer (even if these are small cues), such as addressing them personally, referring to details in the review, and acknowledging their unique experience, are seen as important indicators of a manager's genuine engagement.
- (3) Empathy proved to be the strongest predictor of positive evaluations across all tested relationships. More specifically, empathetic expressions in this paper referred to acknowledging customer emotions, apologising sincerely, or showing understanding. Following this, empathy expressed in managers' responses to online reviews produced the most substantial increases in perceived responsiveness because expressions of acknowledgement and concern reduced psychological distance and reassured readers that the company takes feedback seriously. Thus, this study suggests that customers prioritise how they feel treated over purely factual information, and are most willing to trust a company that validates their experience.

In combination, these response attributes shape how customers evaluate the extent to which a company listens, takes responsibility, and values guest experiences.

3. The empirical model confirmed all 12 hypothesised relationships

A conceptual model (Chapter 2) was developed linking 3 response quality elements to perceived responsiveness, perceived responsibility, and satisfaction with the response, which were then tested as predictors of trust. All 12 hypothesised relationships were statistically significant and positive.

The following important patterns were observed:

- (1) Each dimension of response quality influenced the 3 evaluative outcomes (responsiveness, responsibility, and satisfaction), which effectively demonstrated their interdependence.

- (2) Satisfaction with the managerial response showed the strongest association with trust, which further suggests that broader emotional and cognitive assessments weigh heavily on relational outcomes.
- (3) Perceived responsibility – an indicator that a company acknowledges issues and accepts accountability – also played a particularly influential role.

These findings reinforce that trusting relationships are strengthened not only by what organisations do operationally, but by how they communicate publicly when service issues arise.

4. The study successfully implemented a controlled scenario-based survey to observe consumer reactions

A scenario representing a hotel guest review and a managerial response was created and embedded into a survey administered online on Google Forms. Importantly, the fictional hotel and anonymised pairing of a guest and a manager allowed this study to isolate perceptions of communication without external brand associations (especially the most popular ones). Yet, concrete examples of the booking platforms were provided in the screening section for a better understanding of the context.

By adopting a controlled stimulus – that is, a single, fixed review-response interaction shown identically to all respondents – the study was able to sustain the contextual information (of both customer's and client's messages) constant. This allowed preventing variations in setting, tone, or brand familiarity from influencing participants' evaluations and allowed differences in perception to be attributed solely to the qualities assessed within the managerial response. All construct items were derived from peer-reviewed research and adapted carefully to suit the managerial response context, safeguarding conceptual validity.

Lastly, the hospitality sector was selected because hotels are among the most frequently reviewed service providers online, making the scenario intuitive and realistic for respondents. Thus, the survey design provided a reliable and contextually grounded environment to examine how individuals interpret and evaluate managers' replies to online reviews.

5. High-quality managerial communication strengthens trust through perception-building mechanisms

The results indicate that well-crafted managerial responses have a measurable influence on customer attitudes. When readers perceive a response as attentive, carefully written, and emotionally attuned, they are more likely to trust the company, even when the experience

described in the review is otherwise negative. In contrast, generic responses signalling indifference, which can diminish perceived responsibility and trust. Thus, trust formation is not merely a consequence of service delivery, but is actively shaped by how organisations participate in public dialogue about failures, complaints, and customer concerns.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

While the current study contributes valuable empirical evidence, several limitations should be acknowledged:

(1) Single-industry context

This research only examined a hotel service scenario. To broaden applicability, future work could compare multiple industries, including non-service sectors or experience versus convenience services.

(2) Single-response design

Although the design ensured internal validity, subsequent studies could vary response length, tone, or apology strategies to test whether different combinations of response quality elements produce distinct outcomes.

(3) Perceptual outcomes only

This study focused on psychological evaluations (trust, satisfaction, perceptions). Incorporating behavioural data, such as booking intention, willingness to recommend, or review helpfulness ratings, would extend the practical insight.

(4) Demographic scope

Respondents primarily represented younger populations active on digital platforms. Future studies could examine whether older consumers, frequent travellers, or individuals with high review-writing activity interpret responses differently.

(5) Cultural interpretations

The implicit pairing of a foreign guest and a local hotel manager mirrors real-world contexts in tourism; however, cultural cues were not measured directly. Cross-country comparisons could evaluate whether empathy or personalisation are perceived differently in collectivist versus individualist cultures.

General Conclusion

This research confirms that managerial responses to customer reviews are not merely administrative follow-ups but powerful drivers of customer trust. Through a combination of clear information, personal acknowledgment, and empathetic language, firms can meaningfully influence customer perceptions and foster stronger relationships, even when faced with criticism. As consumers increasingly rely on digital platforms to evaluate service quality, high-quality online responses represent an essential capability for reputation management, customer relationship development, and service recovery strategy.

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ANNEXES

Annex 1

Scenario Stimulus

Instructions and survey

Imagine that you are browsing an online review platform (e.g., TripAdvisor, Booking.com, or Google Reviews) and come across a customer review followed by the hotel manager's response. Carefully read both the review and the response. Then, in the questionnaire, select the answers that best reflect your impressions and reactions.

Customer review



"The hotel is well located in Florence and visually elegant. However, the overall experience did not fully meet the standards I associate with a hotel in this price category. During our stay, there was a lot of noise coming from the street, which made it difficult to sleep, and we found the reception staff to be rather unhelpful when I asked for assistance with local arrangements. Also, the breakfast selection was quite limited and repetitive. For a hotel of this level, I would have expected more attention to detail."

- Steve Miller

Manager's response

"Dear Mr. Miller,

Thank you for taking the time to share your feedback regarding your recent stay with us. I sincerely regret that your experience did not fully meet your expectations.

I am truly sorry for the street noise you encountered and for the impression you received from our reception team. I fully understand how attentive service and a diverse, high-quality breakfast are essential components of a comfortable and enjoyable stay, especially in a hotel of this category.

Please be assured that your comments have been shared with the relevant departments, and we are actively reviewing our procedures to improve both guest assistance and our breakfast offerings. Your feedback is greatly appreciated, as it helps us refine our service and better meet our guests' expectations.

Kind regards,

Marco Bianchi"

Annex 2

Questionnaire

Customer Perceptions of Managers' Responses to Online Reviews

Hello! I am a master's student at Vilnius University, specialising in Digital Marketing. I am currently conducting a research study that explores how managers' responses to online customer reviews influence consumers' perceptions, emotions, and trust in a company. The survey is anonymous, and the collected data will only be used in the research. It will take about 10 minutes to complete the survey. If you have any questions about the research or the questionnaire, you can contact me via email at: gabija.zukauskaite@vm.stud.vu.lt. Thank you for contributing to the research!

Screening questions

Are you at least 18 years old?

Yes
No

Have you ever read online customer reviews that included managers' or companies' responses (e.g., on Google Reviews, Booking.com, TripAdvisor, or similar platforms)?

Yes
No

Please evaluate the informativeness of the manager's response to the customer review.

Mark your answers on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 means "strongly disagree" and 7 means "strongly agree."

I think the information provided in the manager's response is excellent.

1

2
3
4
5
6
7

I think the information provided in the manager's response is comprehensive.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7

I think the information provided in the manager's response is new.

1
2
3
4

5
6
7

I think the information provided in the manager's response is credible.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7

Please evaluate the personalization of the manager's response to the customer review.

Mark your answers on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 means "strongly disagree" and 7 means "strongly agree."

I can see the customer's name in the response.

1
2
3
4
5
6

7

The manager sent a personalised response.

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

There were product offers for the customer by the company.

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

The company gave the customer personalised offers.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7

The customer received a tailored response from the company.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7

Please evaluate the empathy of the manager's response to the customer review.

Mark your answers on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 means "strongly disagree" and 7 means "strongly agree."

The manager senses or realizes what the customer is feeling.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7

The manager shows sensitivity and understanding.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7

The manager pays attention and listens well.

1
2
3
4

5
6
7

Please evaluate the responsiveness of the manager's response to the customer review.

Mark your answers on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 means "strongly disagree" and 7 means "strongly agree."

The manager's response is appropriate.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7

The manager really knows what is going on; that is, he/she has a handle on the situation.

1
2
3
4
5
6

7

Please evaluate the responsibility of the manager's response to the customer review.

Mark your answers on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 means "strongly disagree" and 7 means "strongly agree."

The manager showed responsibility in the response.

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

The manager is genuinely committed to customers.

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

The manager acknowledged what was said in the customer's comment.

1

2

3

4

5

6
7

The manager endorsed the issues raised in the customer's comment.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7

Please evaluate the satisfaction with the manager's response to the customer review.

Mark your answers on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 means "strongly disagree" and 7 means "strongly agree."

I am satisfied with the manager's response.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7

I am pleased with the manager's response.

1
2
3
4

5
6
7

I am happy with the manager's response.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7

Please evaluate the trust in the manager's response to the customer review.

Mark your answers on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 means "strongly disagree" and 7 means "strongly agree."

The manager is friendly and approachable.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7

The manager is sincere.

1
2
3

4
5
6
7

3. The manager is honest.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7

Almost finished – Demographics

Please answer a few brief questions about yourself.

Your gender

Male
Female
Other
Prefer not to say

Your age (please enter number)

--

Your status

Student
Working student
Employed
Self-employed
Unemployed
Other

Annex 3

Reliability Test (Cronbach's Alpha)

A3.1 Informativeness

Reliability

Scale: ALL VARIABLES

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	212	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	212	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.671	.691	4

A3.2 Personalisation

Reliability**Scale: ALL VARIABLES****Case Processing Summary**

		N	%
Cases	Valid	208	98.1
	Excluded ^a	4	1.9
	Total	212	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.646	.637	5

A3.3 Empathy

Reliability**Scale: ALL VARIABLES****Case Processing Summary**

		N	%
Cases	Valid	212	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	212	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.911	.912	3

A3.4 Perceived Responsiveness

Reliability

Scale: ALL VARIABLES

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	212	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	212	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.800	.805	2

A3.5 Perceived Responsibility

Reliability

Scale: ALL VARIABLES

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	212	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	212	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.782	.809	4

A3.6 Satisfaction with the Response

► **Reliability**

Scale: ALL VARIABLES

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	212	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	212	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.899	.905	3

A3.7 Trust in the Service Provider

Reliability

Scale: ALL VARIABLES

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	204	96.2
	Excluded ^a	8	3.8
	Total	212	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.860	.858	3

Annex 4

Respondent Demographics (Gender, Age, and Status Distribution)

Annex 4.1. Gender Distribution

Statistics

Your gender

N	Valid	212
	Missing	0

Your gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	128	60.4	60.4	60.4
	2	84	39.6	39.6	100.0
	Total	212	100.0	100.0	

Annex 4.2. Age Distribution

► **Frequencies****Statistics**

Your age (please enter number)

N	Valid	212
	Missing	0

Your age (please enter number)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	20	12	5.7	5.7	5.7
	21	12	5.7	5.7	11.3
	22	24	11.3	11.3	22.6
	23	16	7.5	7.5	30.2

	22	24	11.3	11.3	22.6
	23	16	7.5	7.5	30.2
	24	16	7.5	7.5	37.7
	25	20	9.4	9.4	47.2
	26	8	3.8	3.8	50.9
	27	16	7.5	7.5	58.5
	28	4	1.9	1.9	60.4
	29	4	1.9	1.9	62.3
	32	20	9.4	9.4	71.7
	33	4	1.9	1.9	73.6
	34	4	1.9	1.9	75.5
	37	8	3.8	3.8	79.2
	40	4	1.9	1.9	81.1
	42	4	1.9	1.9	83.0
	45	4	1.9	1.9	84.9

55	4	1.9	1.9	86.8
58	8	3.8	3.8	90.6
60	8	3.8	3.8	94.3
69	4	1.9	1.9	96.2
72	4	1.9	1.9	98.1
76	4	1.9	1.9	100.0
Total	212	100.0	100.0	

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Annex 4.3. Employment Status

Frequencies

Statistics

Your status

N	Valid	212
	Missing	0

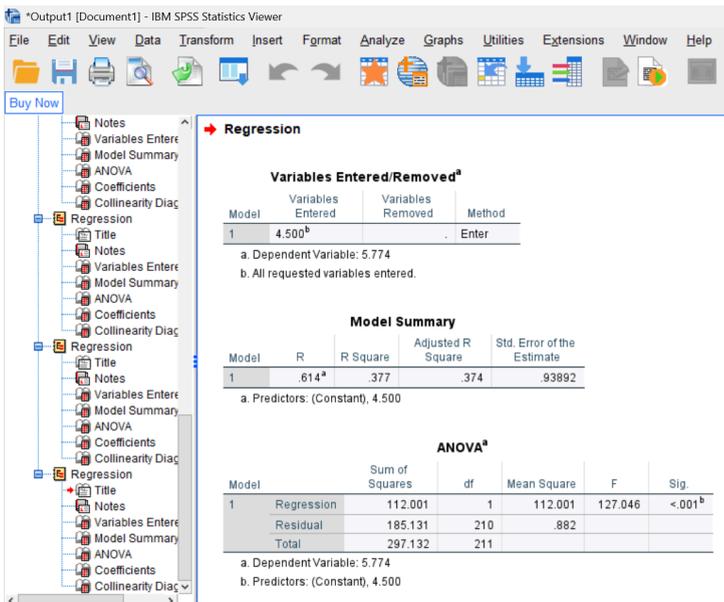
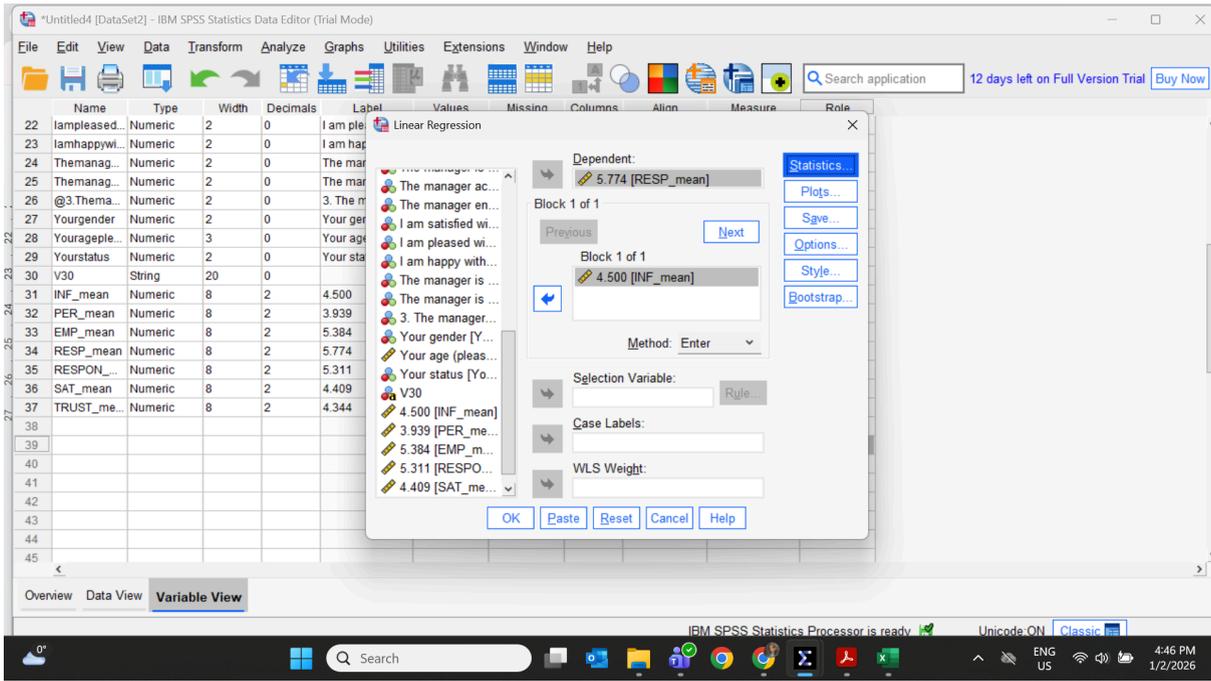
Your status

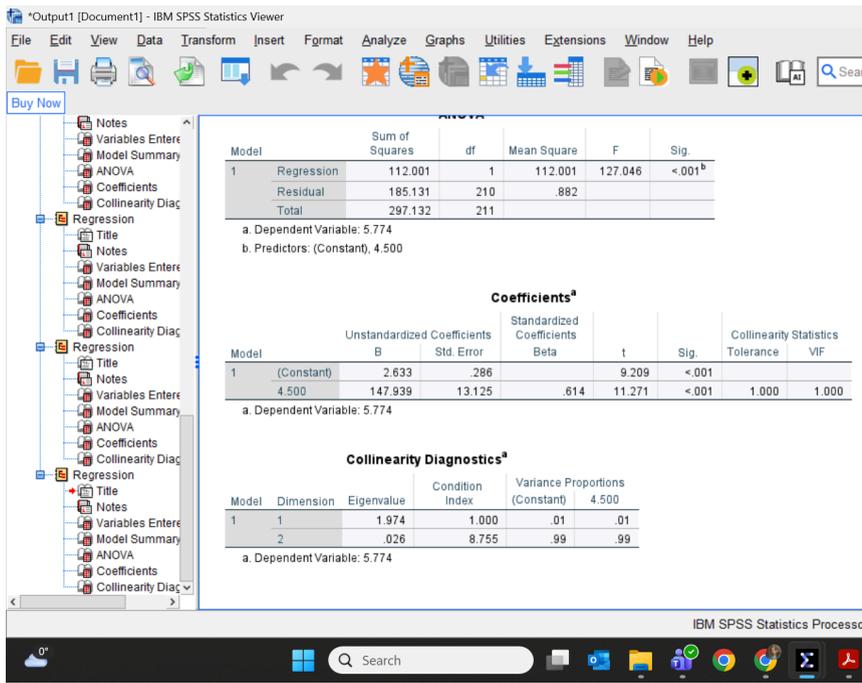
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	52	24.5	24.5	24.5
	2	32	15.1	15.1	39.6
	3	68	32.1	32.1	71.7
	5	44	20.8	20.8	92.5
	6	4	1.9	1.9	94.3
	7	12	5.7	5.7	100.0
	Total		212	100.0	100.0

Annex 5

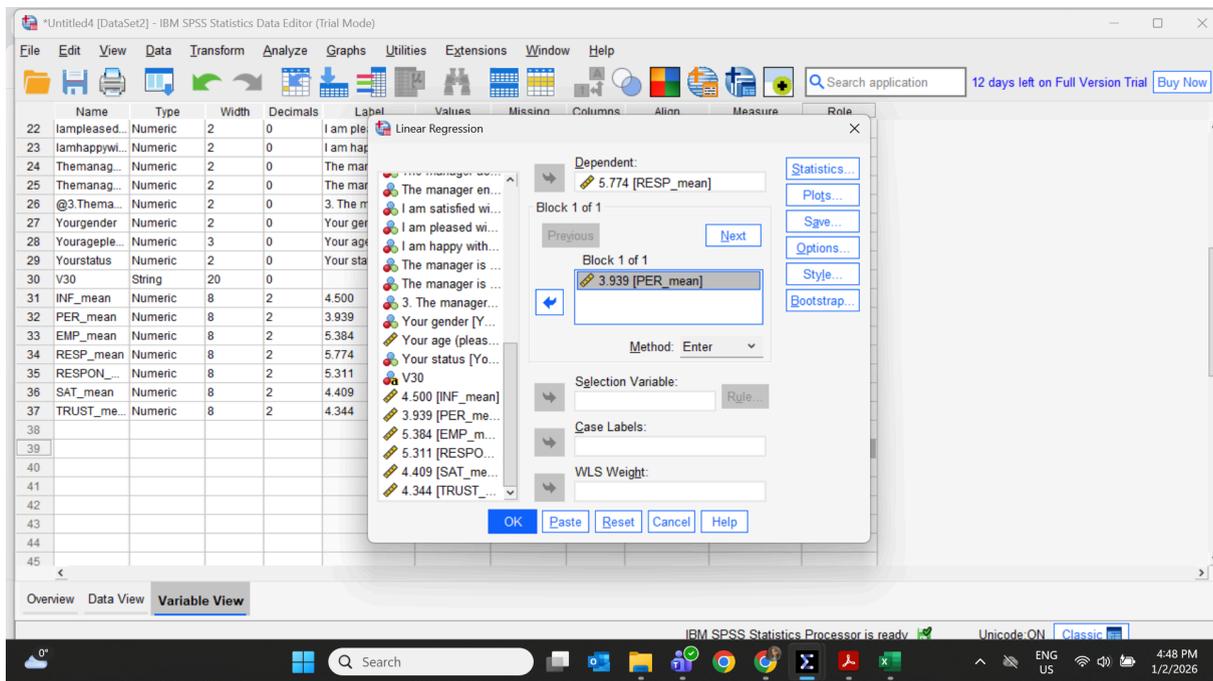
Regression analysis for hypothesis testing: Hypothesis Group 1 – Perceived Responsiveness

A5.1 H1a – Effect of Informativeness on Perceived Responsiveness





A5.2 H1b – Effect of Personalisation on Perceived Responsiveness



Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	3.939 ^b	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: 5.774
b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.556 ^a	.309	.306	.98880

a. Predictors: (Constant), 3.939

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	91.808	1	91.808	93.899	<.001 ^b
	Residual	205.324	210	.978		
	Total	297.132	211			

a. Dependent Variable: 5.774
b. Predictors: (Constant), 3.939

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	91.808	1	91.808	93.899	<.001 ^b
	Residual	205.324	210	.978		
	Total	297.132	211			

a. Dependent Variable: 5.774
b. Predictors: (Constant), 3.939

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	2.901	.304		9.540	<.001		
	3.939	.729	.075	.556	9.690	<.001	1.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: 5.774

Collinearity Diagnostics^a

Model	Dimension	Eigenvalue	Condition Index	Variance Proportions (Constant) 3.939	
1	1	1.975	1.000	.01	.01
	2	.025	8.843	.99	.99

a. Dependent Variable: 5.774

A5.3 H1c – Effect of Empathy on Perceived Responsiveness

IBM SPSS Statistics Data Editor (Trial Mode)

Linear Regression

Dependent: 5.774 [RESP_mean]

Block 1 of 1

Block 1 of 1

5.384 [EMP_mean]

Method: Enter

Selection Variable:

Case Labels:

WLS Weight:

OK Paste Reset Cancel Help

Overview Data View Variable View

IBM SPSS Statistics Viewer

Regression

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	5.384 ^b	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: 5.774
b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary

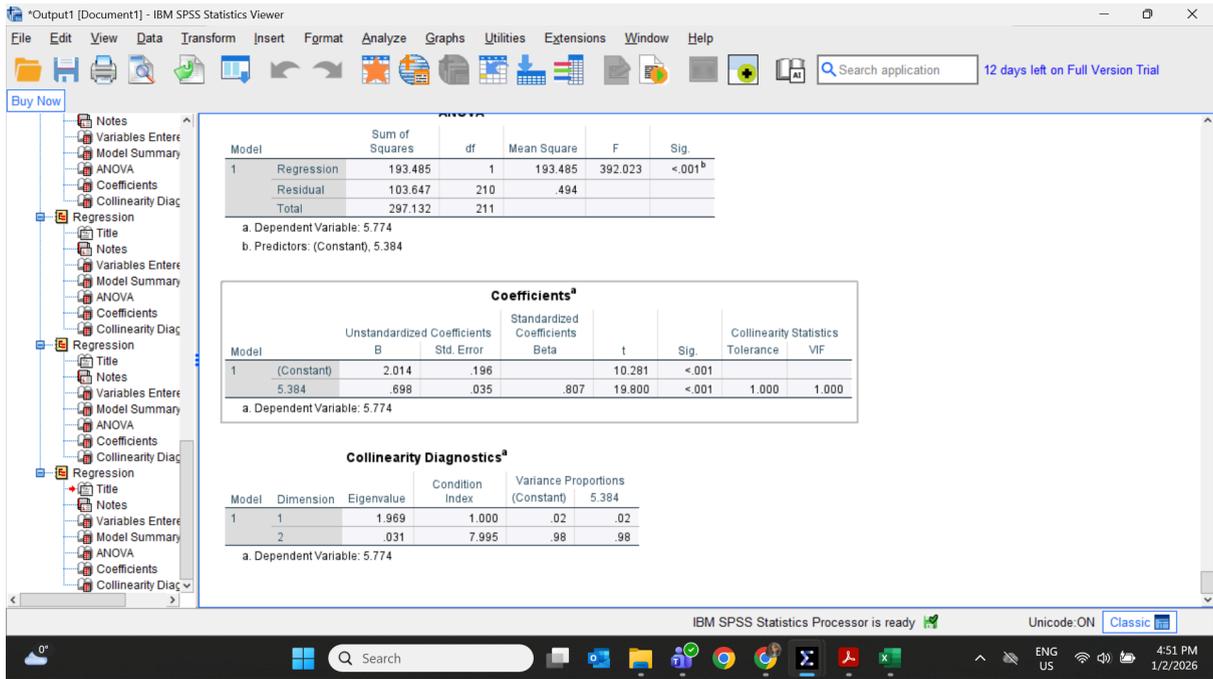
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.807 ^a	.651	.650	.70254

a. Predictors: (Constant), 5.384

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	193.485	1	193.485	392.023	<.001 ^b
	Residual	103.647	210	.494		
	Total	297.132	211			

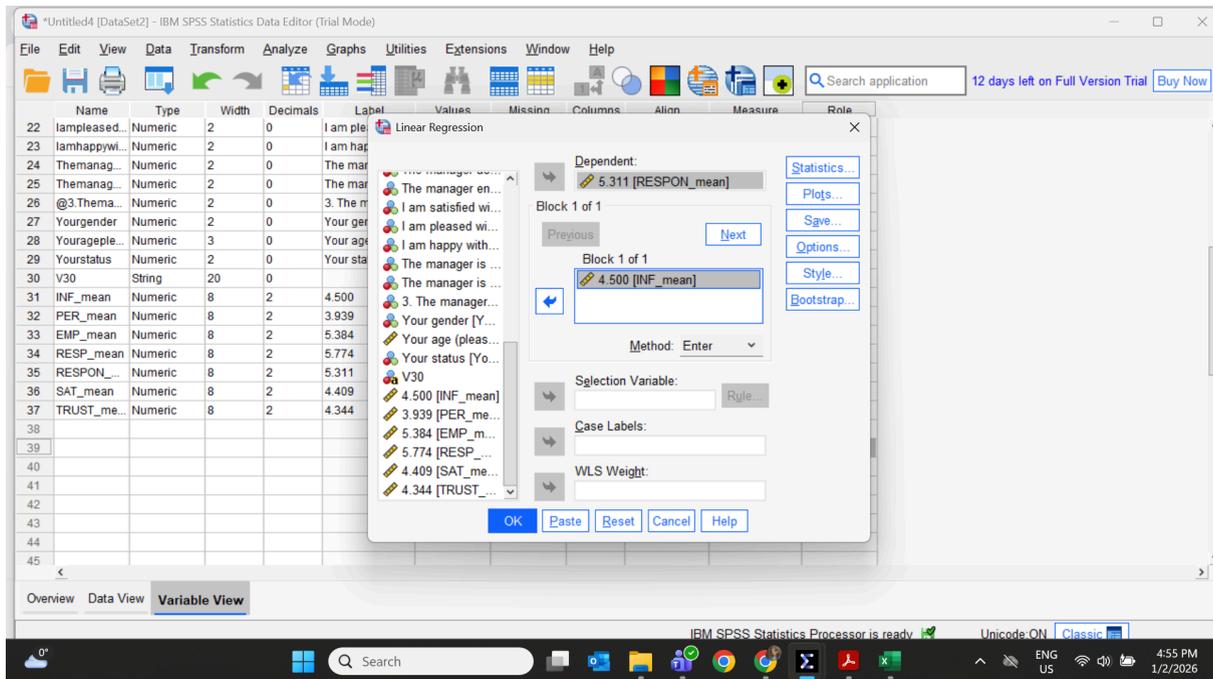
a. Dependent Variable: 5.774
b. Predictors: (Constant), 5.384



Annex 6

Regression analysis for hypothesis testing: Hypothesis Group 2 – Perceived Responsibility

A6.1 H2a – Effect of Informativeness on Emotional Relief



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Regression

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	4.500 ^b	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: 5.311
b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.727 ^a	.528	.526	.88315

a. Predictors: (Constant), 4.500

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	183.163	1	183.163	234.840	<.001 ^b
	Residual	163.790	210	.780		
	Total	346.953	211			

a. Dependent Variable: 5.311
b. Predictors: (Constant), 4.500

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ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	183.163	1	183.163	234.840	<.001 ^b
	Residual	163.790	210	.780		
	Total	346.953	211			

a. Dependent Variable: 5.311
b. Predictors: (Constant), 4.500

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	1.296	.269		4.817	<.001	1.000	1.000
	4.500	189.187	12.345	.727	15.324	<.001	1.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: 5.311

Collinearity Diagnostics^a

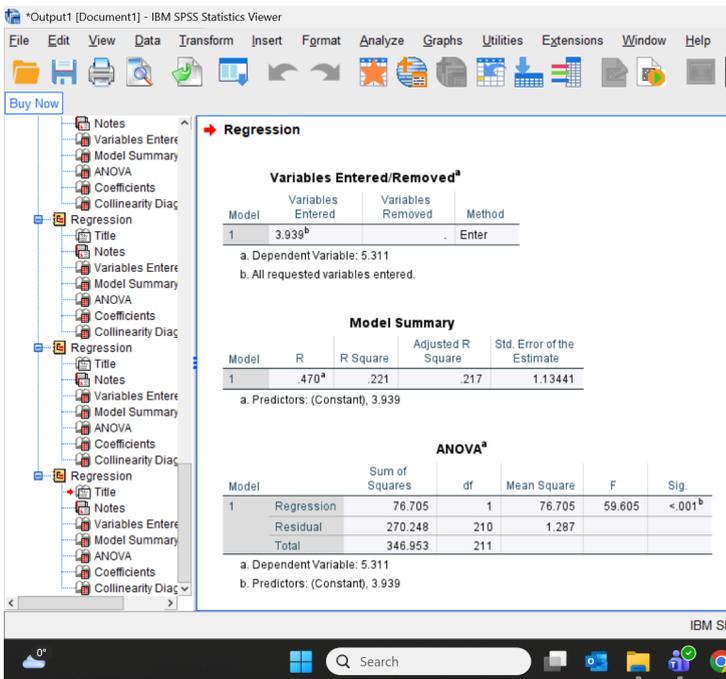
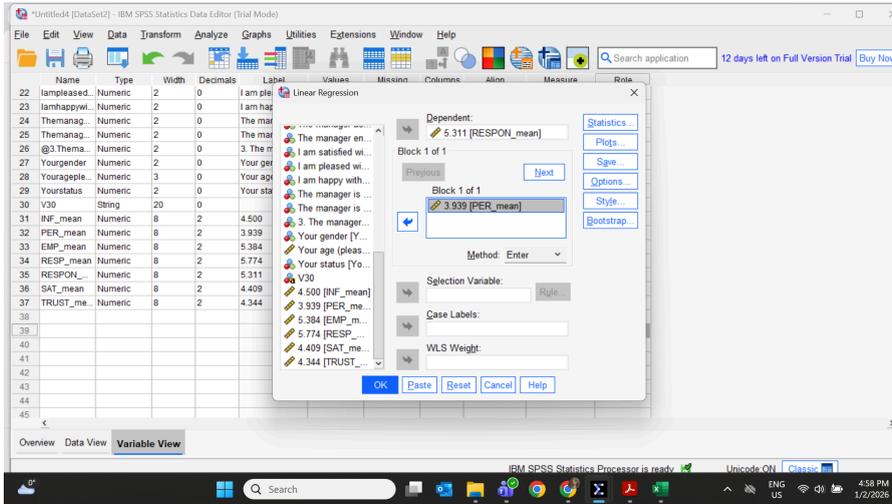
Model	Dimension	Eigenvalue	Condition Index	Variance Proportions (Constant)	4.500
1	1	1.974	1.000	.01	.01
	2	.026	8.755	.99	.99

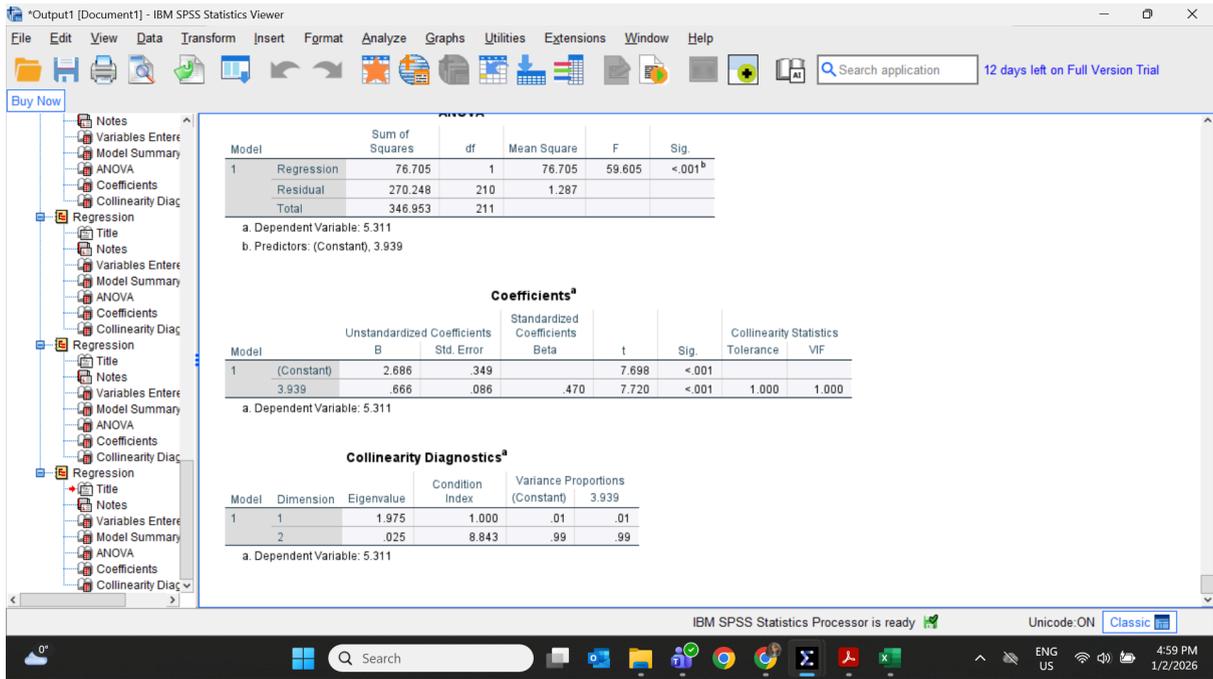
a. Dependent Variable: 5.311

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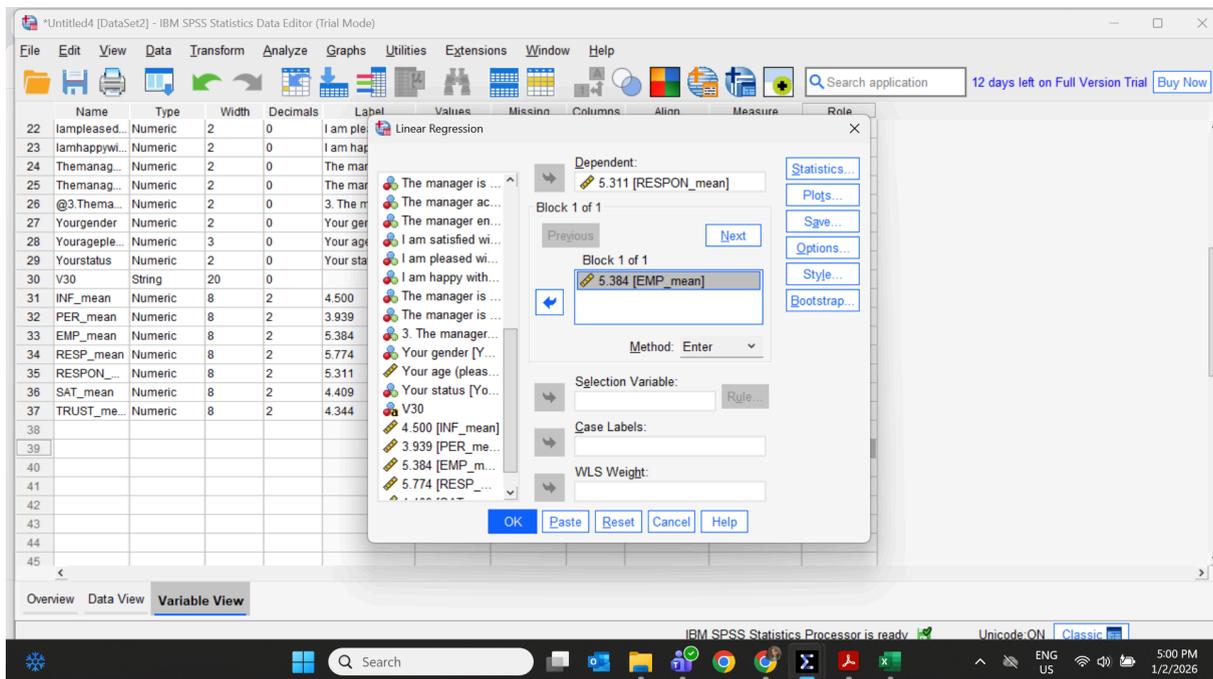
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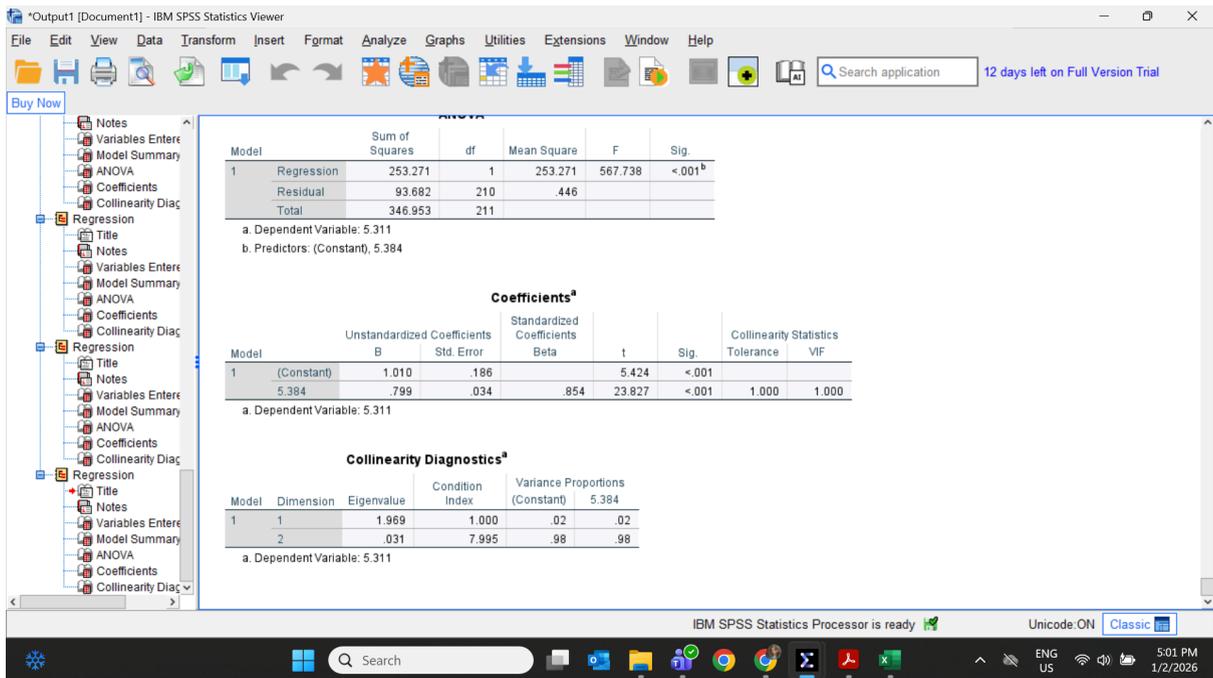
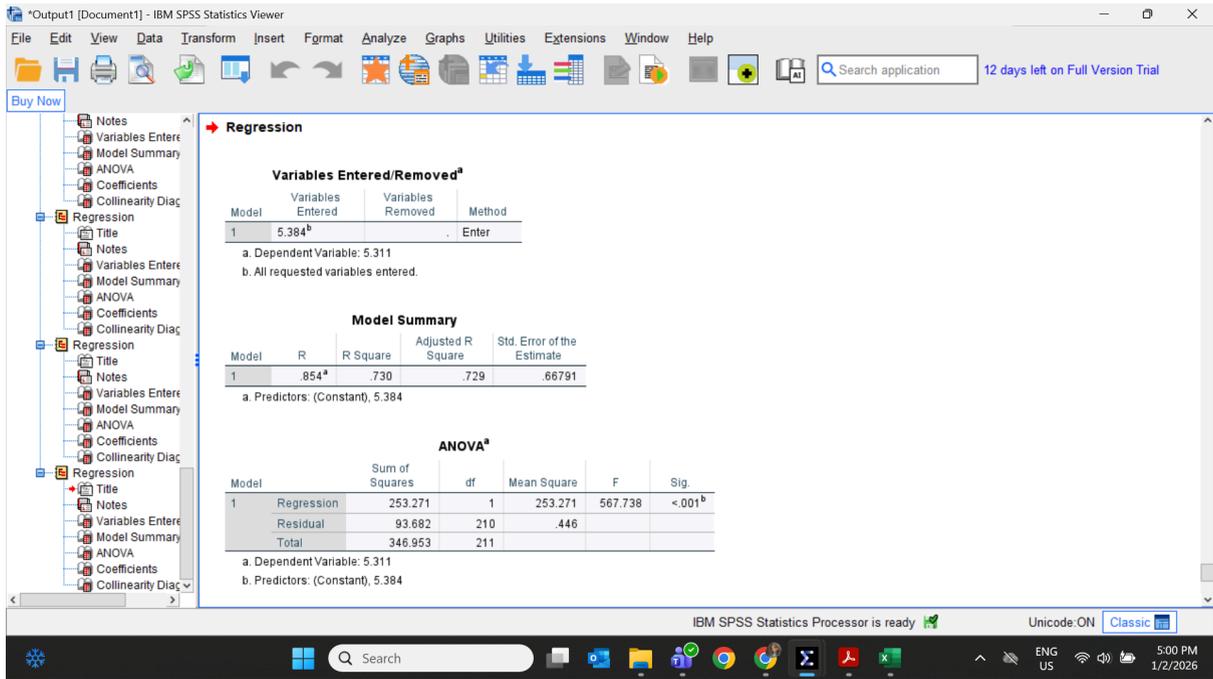
A6.2 H2b – Effect of Personalisation on Emotional Relief





A6.3 H2c – Effect of Empathy on Emotional Relief

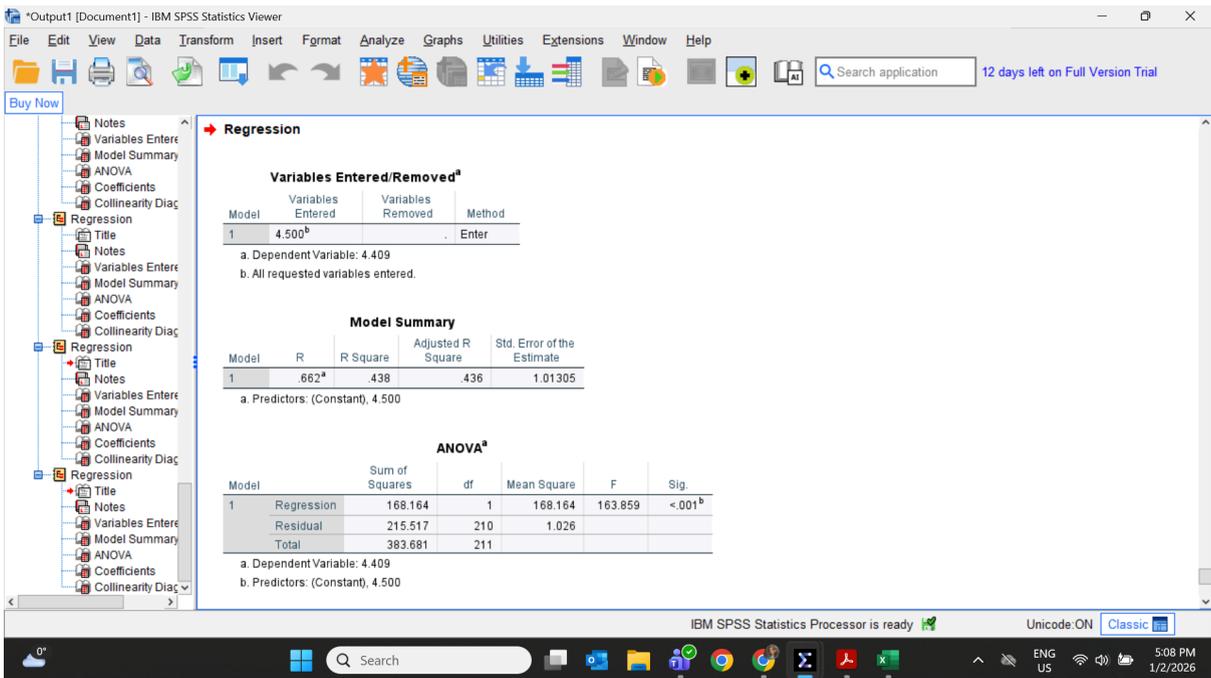
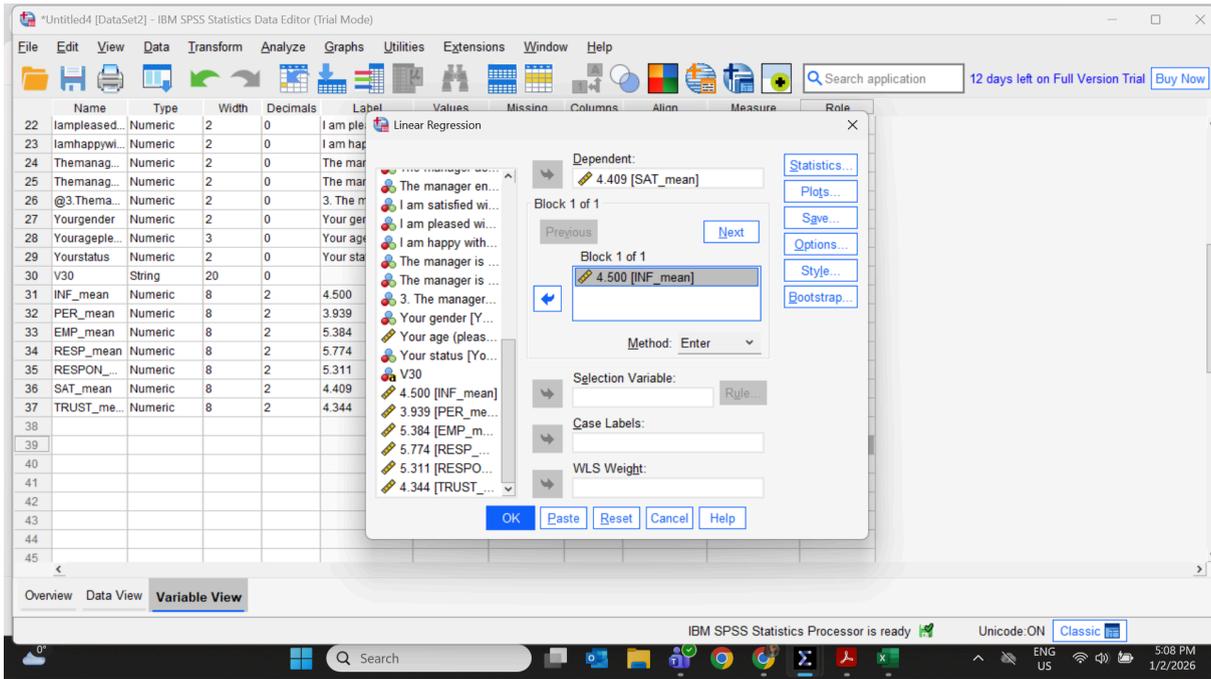


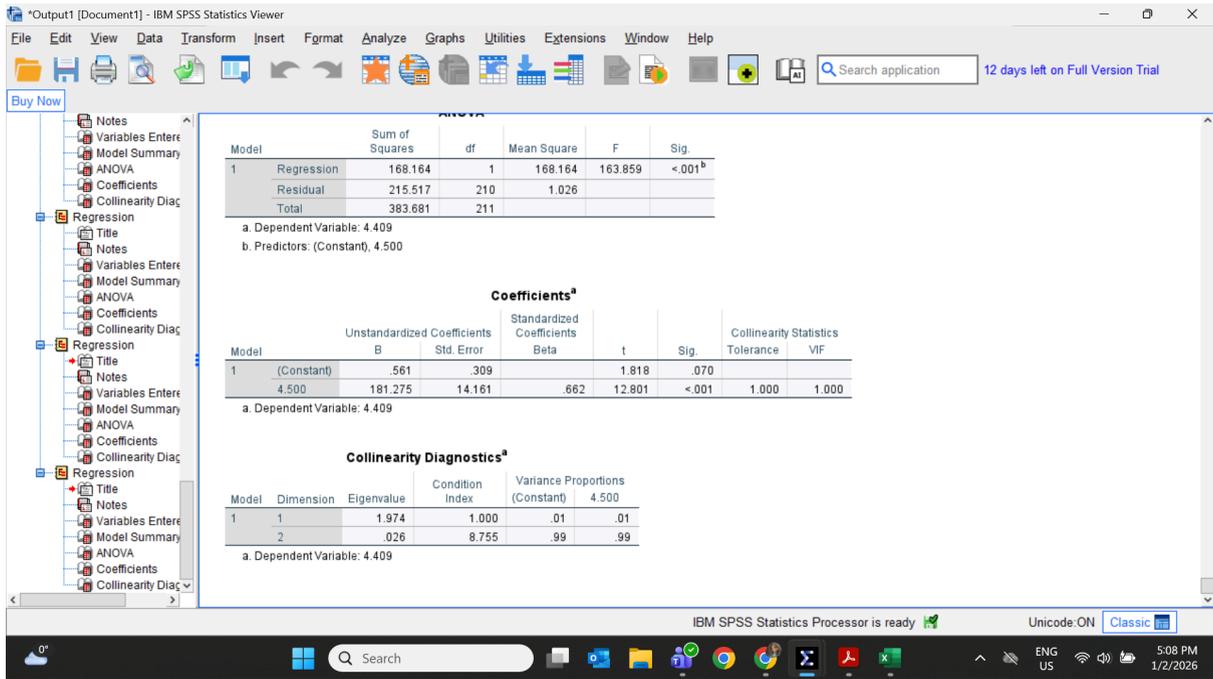


Annex 7

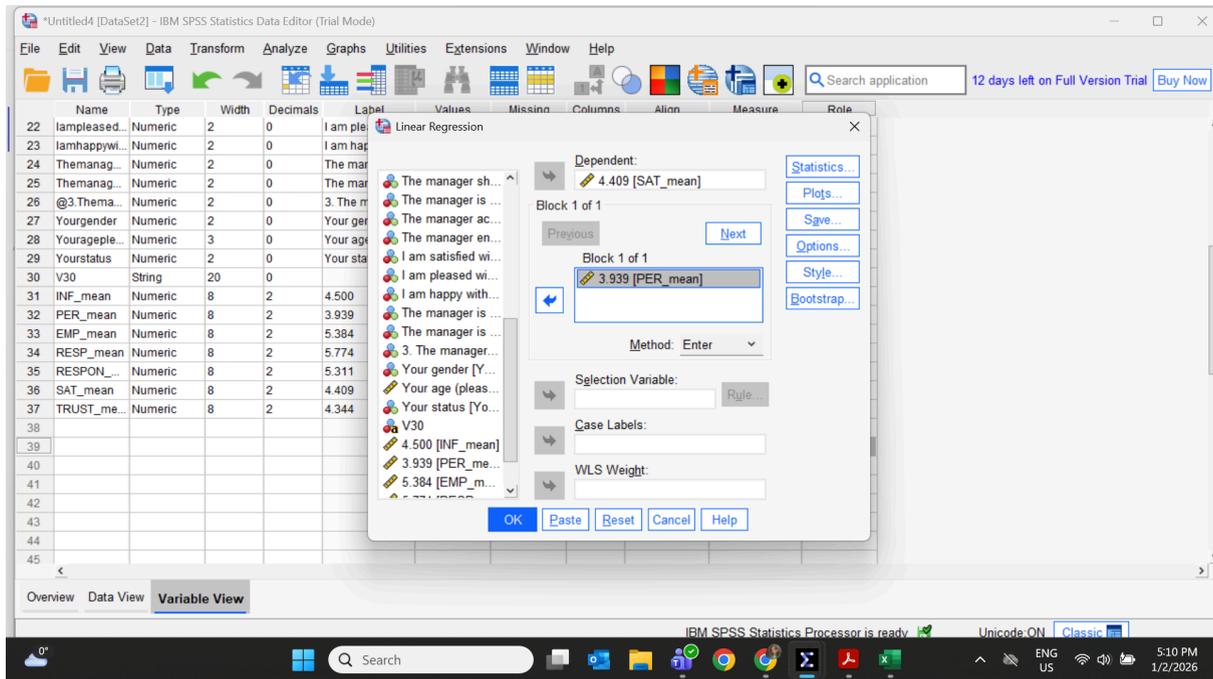
Regression analysis for hypothesis testing: Hypothesis Group 2 – Satisfaction

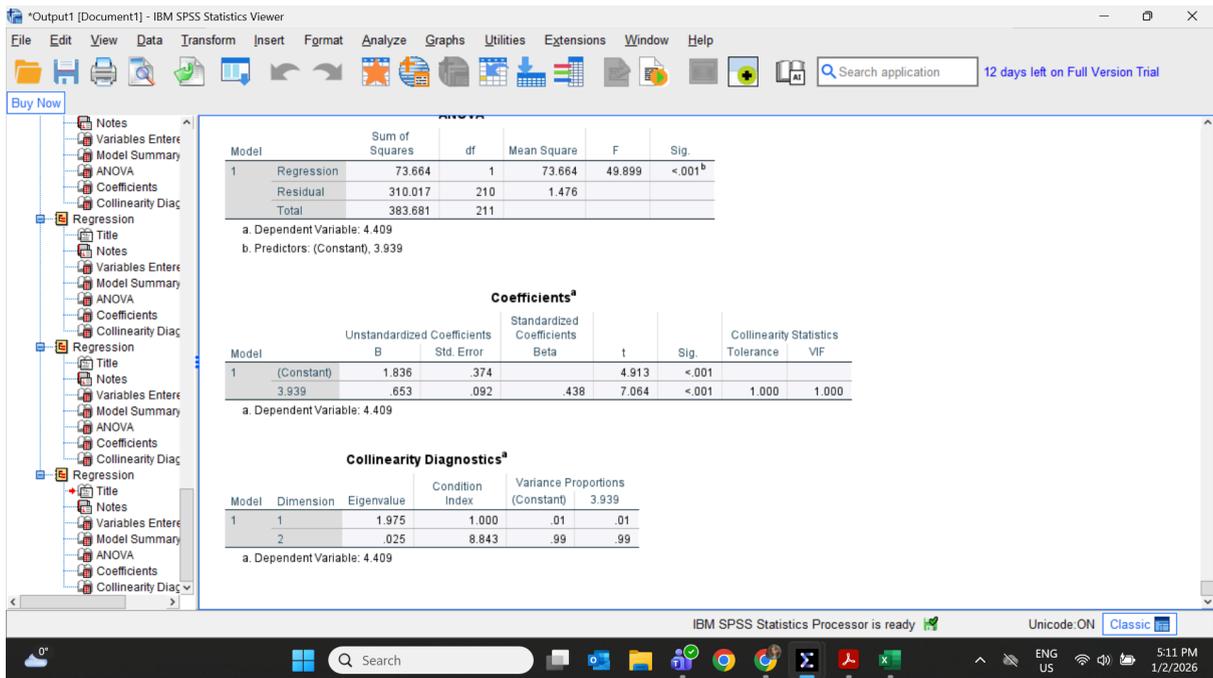
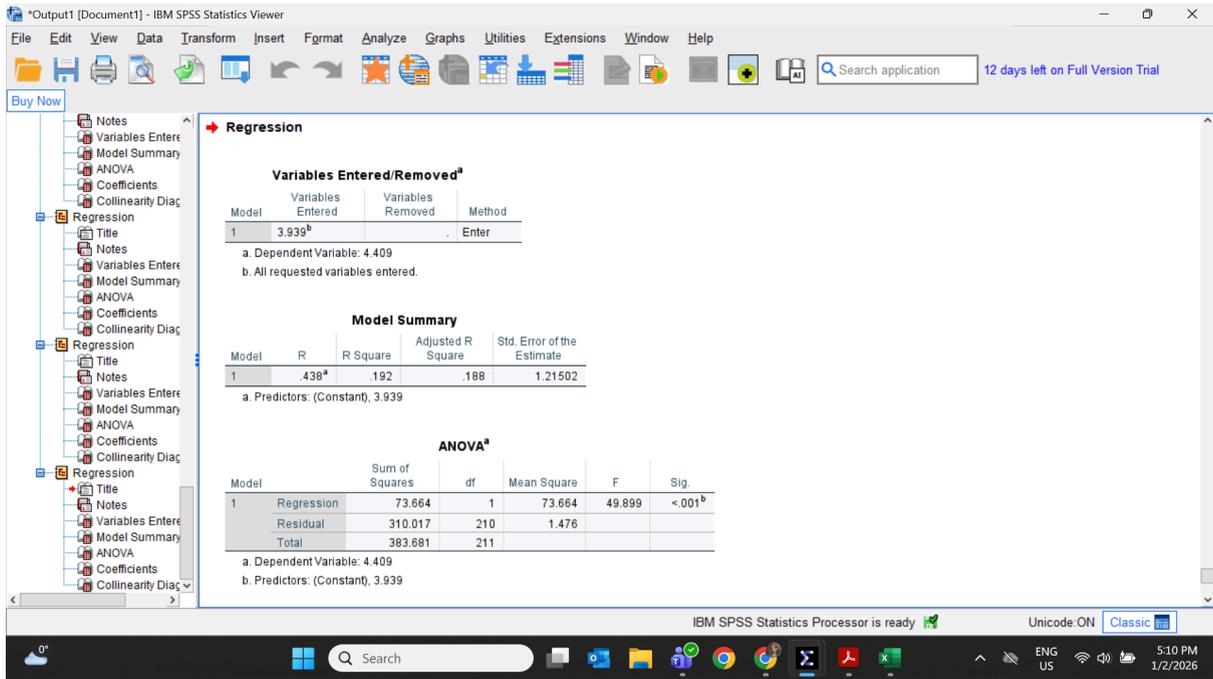
A7.1 H3a – Effect of Informativeness on Satisfaction



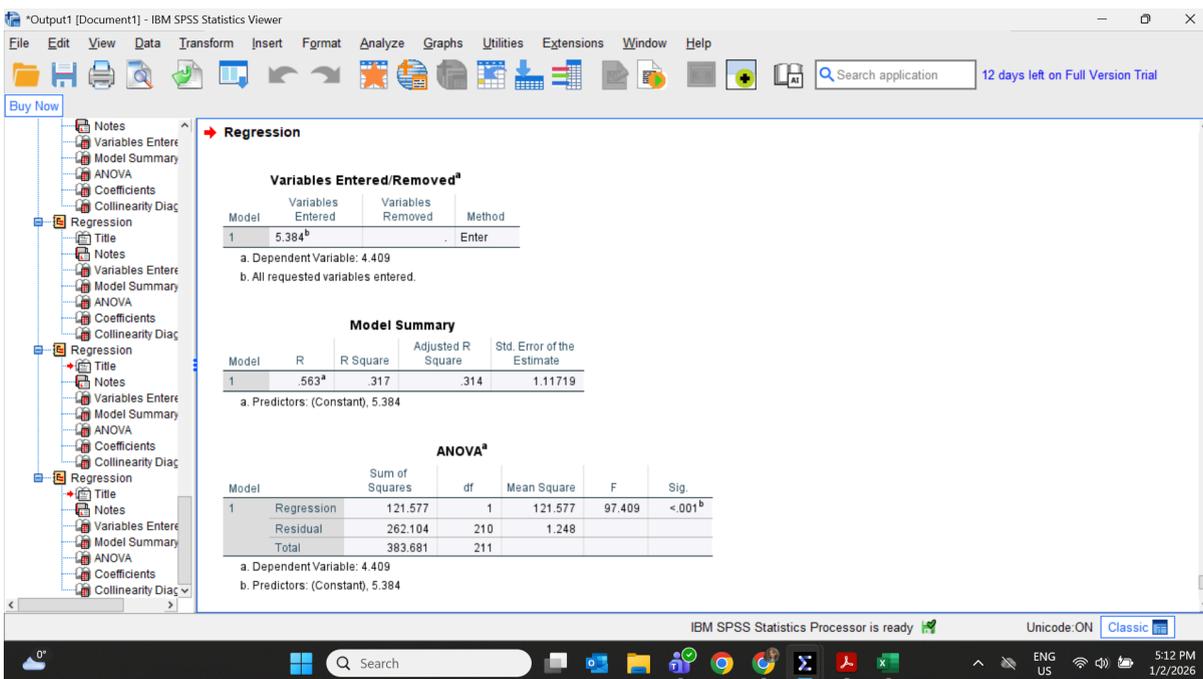
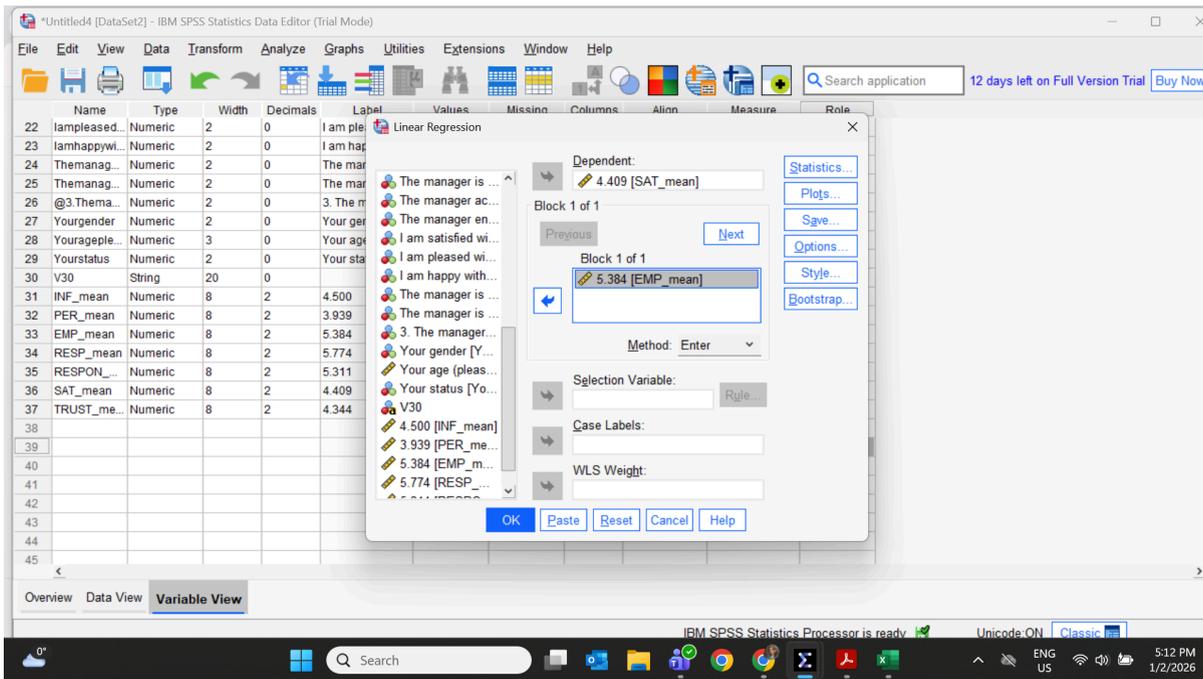


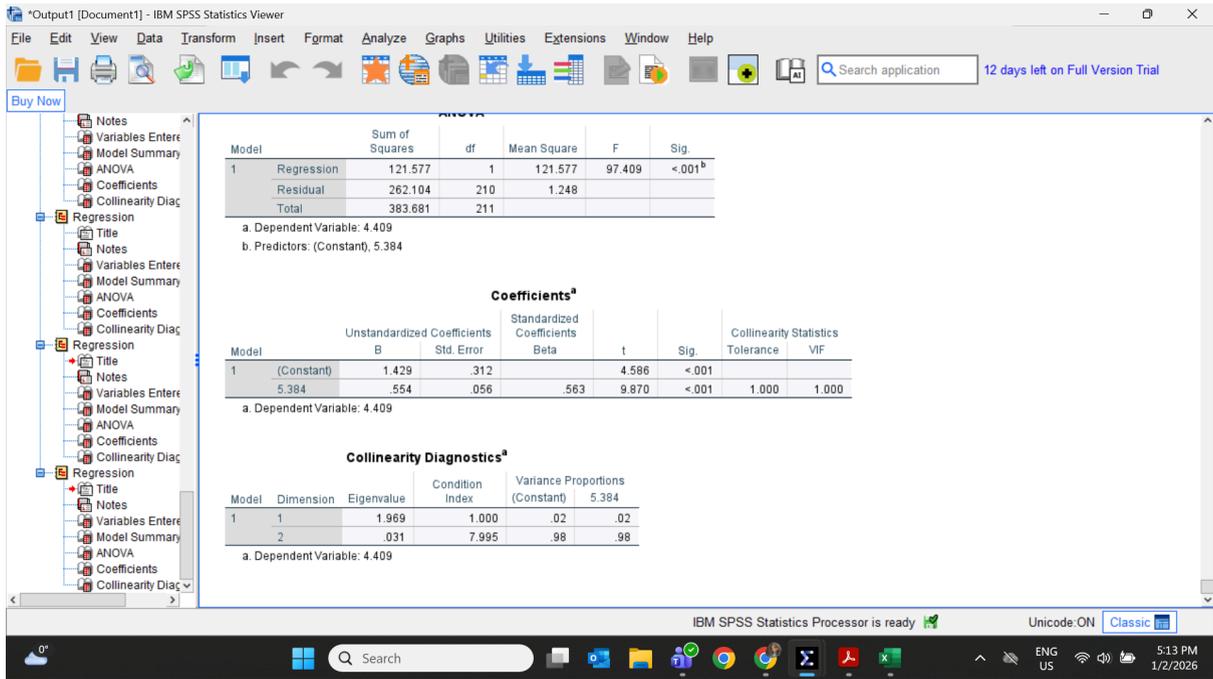
A7.2 H3b – Effect of Personalisation on Satisfaction





A7.3 H3b – Effect of Personalisation on Satisfaction

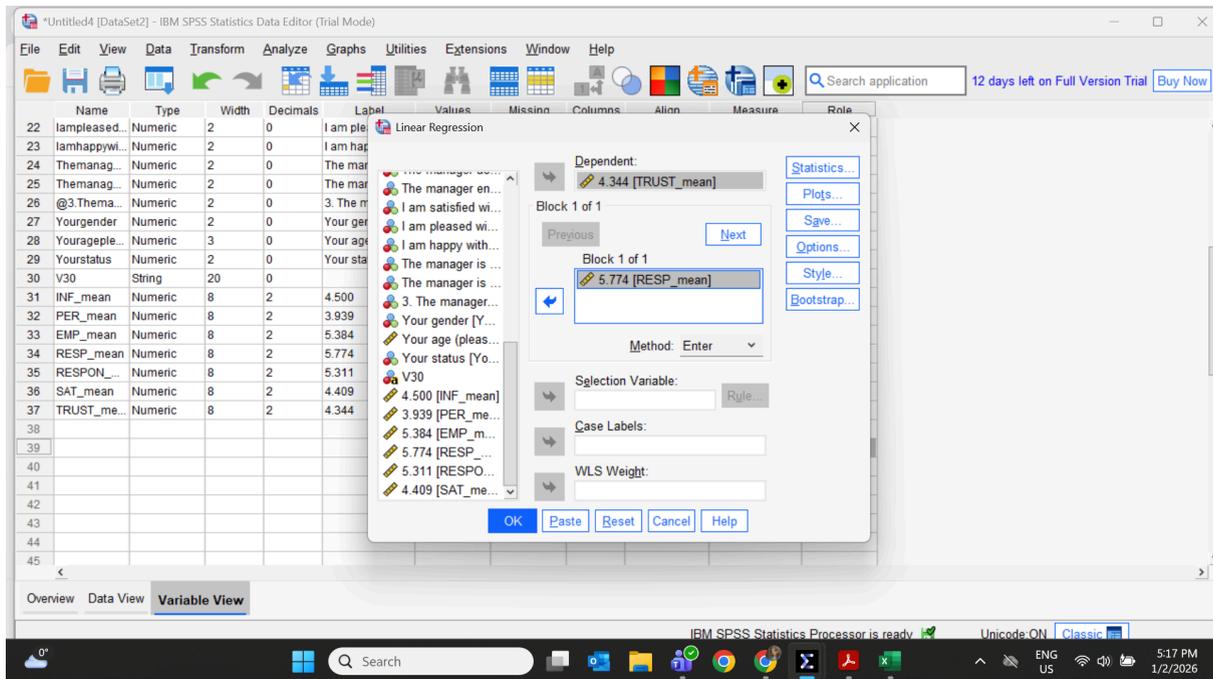




Annex 8

Regression analysis for hypothesis testing: Hypothesis Group 4 – Trust

A8.1 H4 Effect of Perceived Responsiveness on Trust



Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	5.774 ^b	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: 4.344
b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.578 ^a	.335	.331	1.04681

a. Predictors: (Constant), 5.774

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	115.749	1	115.749	105.628	<.001 ^b
	Residual	230.121	210	1.096		
	Total	345.870	211			

a. Dependent Variable: 4.344
b. Predictors: (Constant), 5.774

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	115.749	1	115.749	105.628	<.001 ^b
	Residual	230.121	210	1.096		
	Total	345.870	211			

a. Dependent Variable: 4.344
b. Predictors: (Constant), 5.774

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	.739	.358		2.065	.040	1.000	1.000
	5.774	.624	.061	.578	10.278	<.001	1.000	1.000

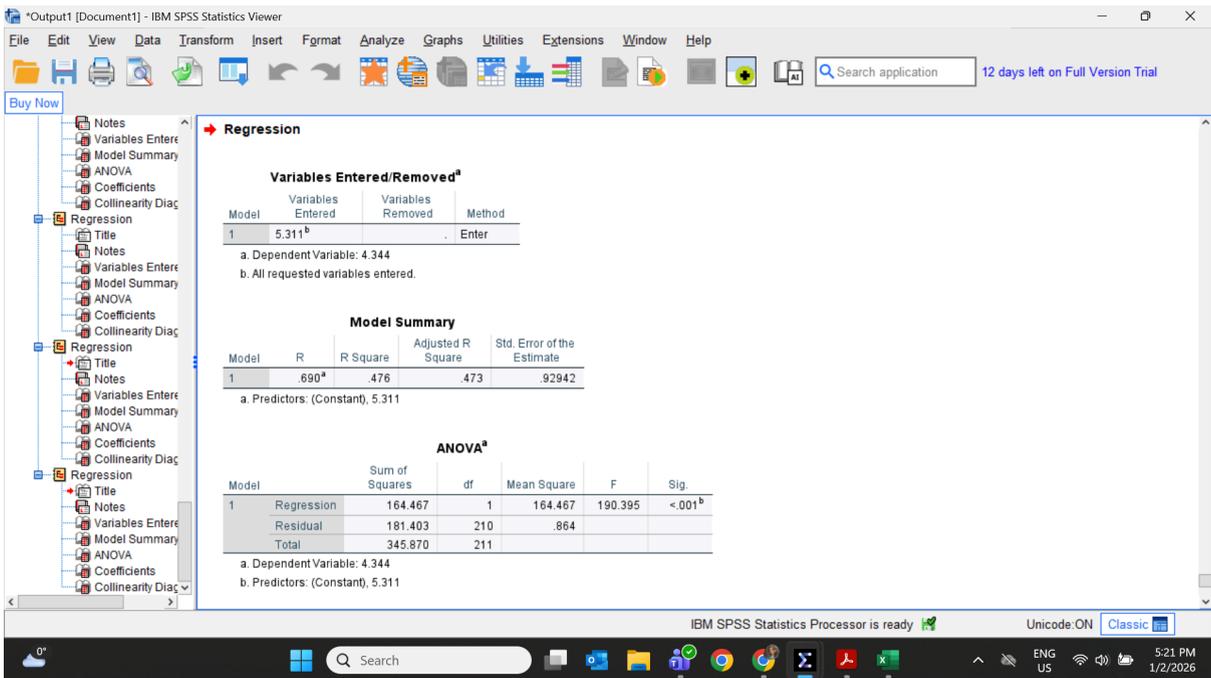
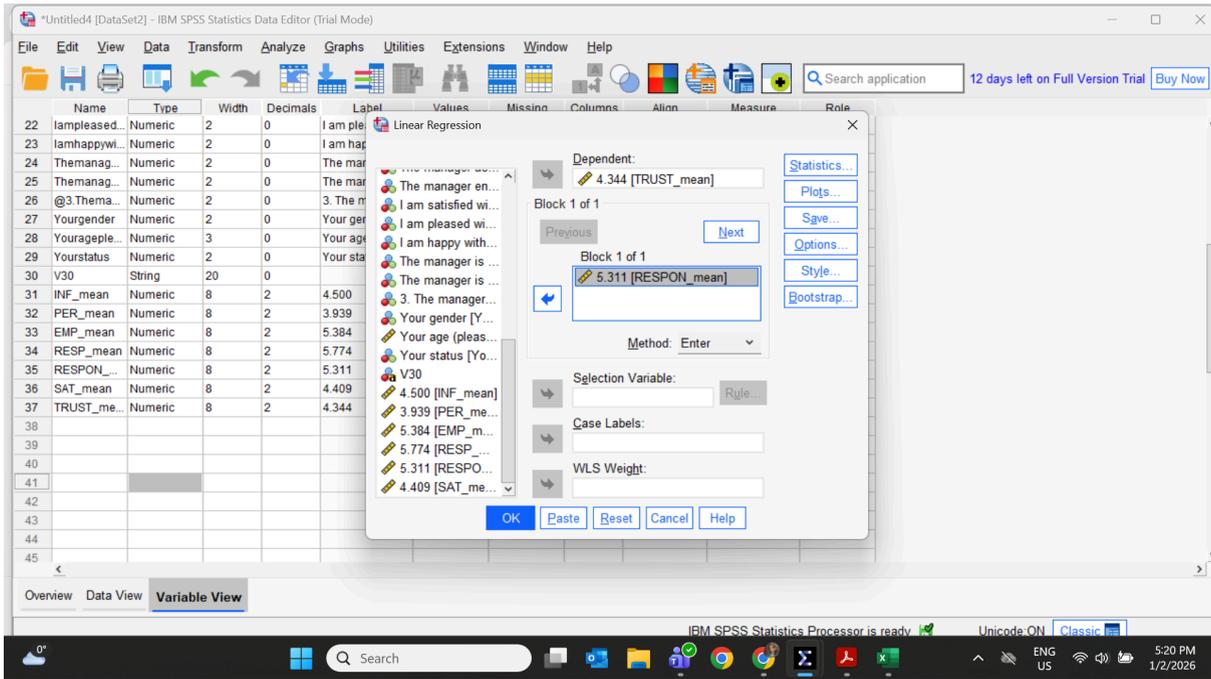
a. Dependent Variable: 4.344

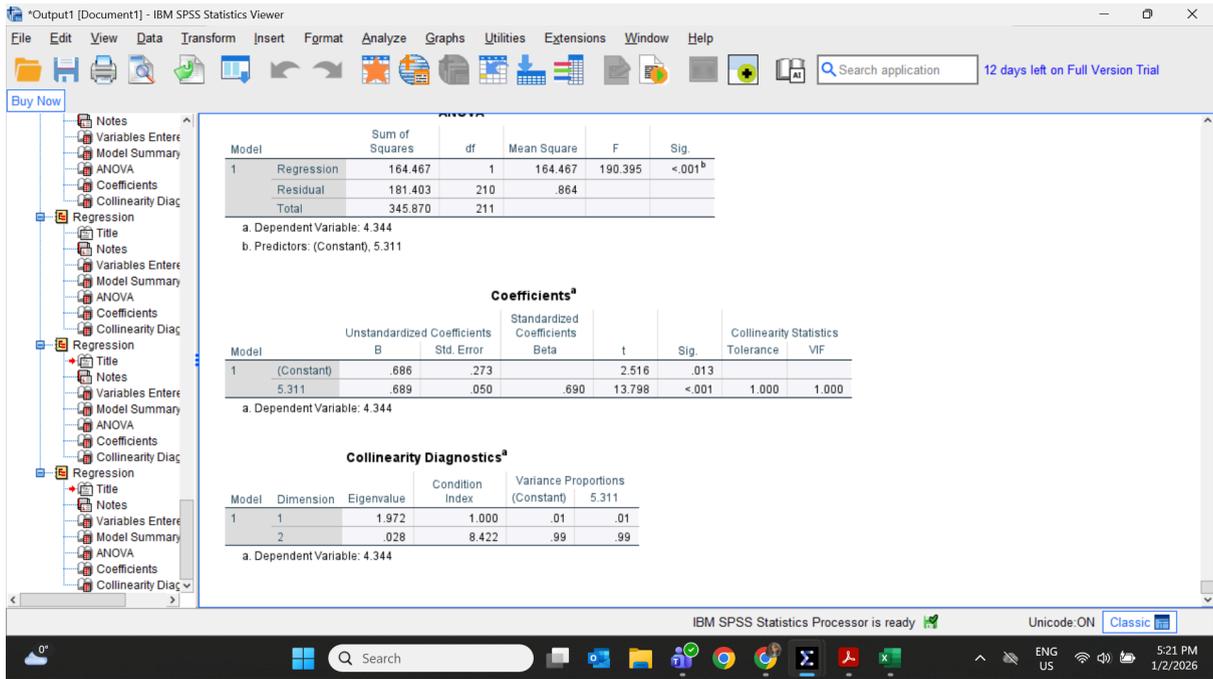
Collinearity Diagnostics^a

Model	Dimension	Eigenvalue	Condition Index	Variance Proportions (Constant)	5.774
1	1	1.980	1.000	.01	.01
	2	.020	9.855	.99	.99

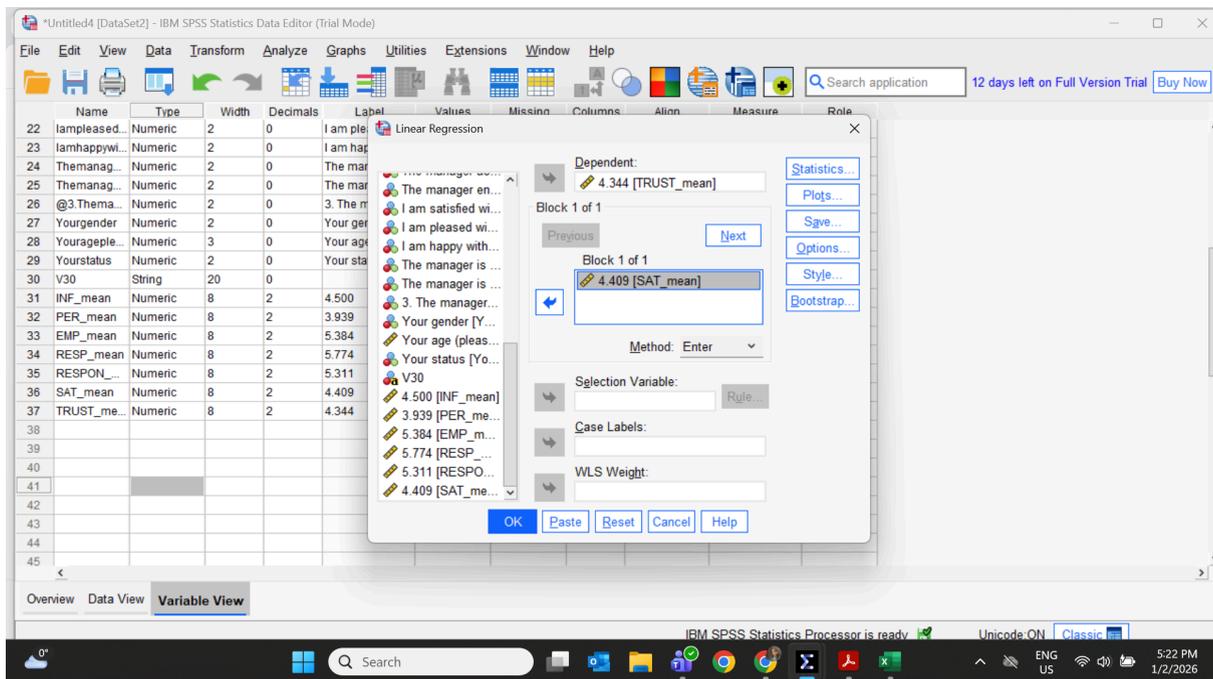
a. Dependent Variable: 4.344

A8.2 H5 Effect of Emotional Relief on Trust





A8.3 H6 Effect of Satisfaction on Trust



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Regression

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	4.409 ^b	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: 4.344
b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.838 ^a	.702	.700	.70077

a. Predictors: (Constant), 4.409

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	242.744	1	242.744	494.309	<.001 ^b
	Residual	103.126	210	.491		
	Total	345.870	211			

a. Dependent Variable: 4.344
b. Predictors: (Constant), 4.409

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ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	242.744	1	242.744	494.309	<.001 ^b
	Residual	103.126	210	.491		
	Total	345.870	211			

a. Dependent Variable: 4.344
b. Predictors: (Constant), 4.409

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	.836	.165		5.069	<.001	1.000	1.000
	4.409	.795	.036	.838	22.233	<.001	1.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: 4.344

Collinearity Diagnostics^a

Model	Dimension	Eigenvalue	Condition Index	Variance Proportions (Constant)	4.409
1	1	1.956	1.000	.02	.02
	2	.044	6.704	.98	.98

a. Dependent Variable: 4.344

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