



KADIR HAS UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
PROGRAM OF NEW MEDIA

**THE INFLUENCE OF ELECTRONIC WORD-OF-MOUTH
ON PURCHASING DECISIONS OF ONLINE
CONSUMERS: THE CASE OF AIRBNB USERS IN
TURKEY**

ODAY AL-HADEETHI

MASTER'S THESIS

ISTANBUL, SEPTEMBER, 2020

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MASTER'S THESIS

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies of Kadir Has University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master's in the Program of New Media

ISTANBUL, AUGUST, 2020

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This work entitled **THE INFLUENCE OF ELECTRONIC WORD-OF-MOUTH ON PURCHASING DECISIONS OF ONLINE CONSUMERS: THE CASE OF AIRBNB USERS IN TURKEY** prepared by **ODAY AL-HADEETHI** has been judged to be successful at the defense exam held on **AUGUST, 31,2020** and accepted by our jury as **MASTER’S THESIS**.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	i
ÖZET	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
LIST OF TABLES	vi
1.INTRODUCTION	1
2.LITERATURE REVIEW	7
2.1 Cultural Differences	7
2.2 Collaborative Consumption	9
2.3 Background of Airbnb	10
2.4 Word-of-Mouth	12
2.4.1 Electronic word-of-mouth	14
2.4.2 Trust in eWOM increases the purchasing decisions	15
2.5 The Review System of Airbnb as a Successful Business Model	20
2.6 The Trusted Platform Fosters User Profile Credibility	22
3. METHODOLOGY	27
3.1 Research Design	27
3.2 Data Collection	28
3.3 Sampling	28
3.4 Measurement of the Constructs	30
4. RESULTS	33
4.1 Demographics of the Respondents	33
4.2 The Importance of Online Reviews on Airbnb Customers in Turkey	33
4.3 The Influence of The Education Level on The Purchasing Decision	46
5. CONCLUSION	50
5.1 Implications	52
5.2 Limitations and Future Studies	54
REFERENCES	56
CURRICULUM VITAE	61
APPENDIX A	62
A.1 The Turkish Survey Questions in The Original Form	62

THE INFLUENCE OF ELECTRONIC WORD-OF-MOUTH ON PURCHASING DECISIONS OF CONSUMERS: THE CASE OF AIRBNB USERS IN TURKEY

ABSTRACT

Airbnb is one of the most prominent online peer-to-peer companies in the short-term rentals business. The company works as a mediator between the host and the guest. The face-to-face interaction found in Airbnb entails more risks than other e-commerce platforms. Therefore, the heaviest burden on the company is to build trust among its users. The main goals of the study reported here are to examine the importance of online reviews found in the Airbnb, and the factors that increase the trust of the consumers in the company as well as those that impact the purchasing decision-making processes. This study gathered all the membership requirements that may motivate consumers to trust and purchase the services from Airbnb, where these requirements were never being tested altogether. The study targeted Airbnb's consumers in Turkey, who never been tested. An online survey was conducted (N=405) on Airbnb users who reside in Turkey. The results produced a significant relationship between the frequency of Airbnb use and the need to read reviews before making a purchasing decision, especially among new subscribers of Airbnb. The governmental ID was found to be the most important membership requirement which positively influenced the trust of users. Results suggested that both the review system of Airbnb and the way the platform is designed increase consumers trust and purchasing decisions. Overall, the study found that online reviews and the information found in it are important no matter where they are located, and they have a greater influence than commercial advertisements on online users' purchasing decisions in Turkey. This study contributes to enriching the academic literature on the role of eWOM as a free marketing tool. The findings also help sharing economy companies to take into consideration the crucial role of a well-designed online review system in increasing sales.

Keywords: eWOM, Trust in Online Reviews, Sharing Economy, Purchasing Decisions, Airbnb, Smart Tourism, Review System, Online Interpersonal Trust.

Elektronik Söylentinin Tüketicinin Satın Alma Kararı Üzerindeki Etkisi: Vaka
İncelemesi Olarak Türkiye'deki Airbnb Kullanıcıları

ÖZET

Airbnb, çevrimiçi kullanıcılar arası kısa vadeli kiralama sektöründe lider firmadır. Şirket, ev sahibi ile misafir arasında arabulucu olarak çalışır. Sektörünün doğasında bulunan yüz yüze görüşme ve yaşam alanı paylaşma gerekliliği, diğer e-ticaret platformlarından daha fazla risk içermektedir. Bu nedenle, şirketin en önemli sorumluluğu, kullanıcıları arasında güven inşa etmektir. Burada bildirilen çalışmanın ana hedefleri, Airbnb'de bulunan çevrimiçi incelemelerin önemi ve tüketicilerin şirkete olan güvenini artıran faktörlerin yanı sıra satın alma karar verme süreçlerini etkileyen faktörleri incelemektir. Bu çalışma, tüketicileri Airbnb'den hizmet satın almaya ve güvenmeye motive edebilecek tüm üyelik gereksinimlerini bir araya getirdi.

Bildiğimiz kadarıyla bu araştırma, Airbnb'nin üyelik gereksinimlerinin dördünün de satın alma kararları üzerindeki etkisini test eden ilk çalışmadır.

Türkiye'de ikamet eden Airbnb kullanıcılarıyla bir anket (N = 405) gerçekleştirildi. Sonuçlar, Airbnb kullanım sıklığı ile satın alma kararı vermeden önce yorumları okuma ihtiyacı arasında, özellikle yeni Airbnb aboneleri için, pozitif bir ilişki bulunduğunu gösterdi. Resmi kimlik beyanı yükümlülüğü, kullanıcıların güvenini olumlu yönde etkileyen en önemli üyelik şartı olarak bulundu. Sonuçlar, hem Airbnb'nin kullanıcı değerlendirme sistemi kullanmasının hem de platformun belli özelliklerinin kullanıcıların satın alma kararlarını olumlu yönde etkilediğini gösterdi. Genel olarak çalışma, çevrimiçi incelemelerin, hangi platformda göründüklerine bakılmaksızın önemli olduğunu ve Türkiye'deki çevrimiçi kullanıcıların satın alma kararlarında ticari reklamlardan daha büyük bir etkiye sahip olduklarını ortaya koydu. Bu çalışma, eWOM'un ücretsiz bir pazarlama aracı olarak rolüne ilişkin akademik literatürün zenginleştirilmesine de katkıda bulunacaktır.

Bu bulgular, satışları artırmada iyi tasarlanmış bir çevrimiçi inceleme sisteminin önemli rolünü göz önünde bulundurmak için paylaşım ekonomisi şirketlerine yardımcı olabilir.

AnahtarSözcükler: eWOM, Online YorumlardakiGüven, EkonomiPaylaşımı,
SatınAlma Kararları, Airbnb, AkıllıTurizm, YorumSistemi, Online KişilerarasıGüven.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I cannot express enough thanks to Dr. ÖZEN BAŞ who provided continual support and encouragement from reading the early drafts until the end of the study. I offer my sincere appreciation for the learning opportunities provided by Dr. ÖZEN BAŞ. My completion of this study could not have been accomplished to this standard without her support. Special thanks to my friends, PARIS ACHEN and CAMILLA ABDULLAH, who helped me in the proofreading process. I am so grateful for their help.

Thanks to all of my friends who supported me especially WALID MOHAMMED, and to all of my friends who encouraged me and took many the burdens of my daily life in order to grant me full dedication and time in completing my study.

**To the man who spent his entire life protecting the sky and the land of my country,
at the same time, he kept working on providing me with all means of prosperity to
have a better future.**



To my father

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Examining Frequency Responses of Survey Question 5	33
Table 2 Comparing Survey Questions 1 and 4	34
Table 3 Comparing Survey Questions 3 and 4	35
Table 4 The Frequency of Survey Question 2	36
Table 5 Comparing Survey Questions 3 and 2	37
Table 6 Comparing Survey Questions 3 and 5	39
Table 7 Comparing Survey Questions 4 and 5	40
Table 8 Comparing Survey Questions 2 and 4	42
Table 9 The Frequency Responses of Survey Question 4	44
Table 11 Comparing Survey Question 6 with 2.....	46
Table 12 Comparing Survey Question 6 with 2.....	49

1. INTRODUCTION

The revolution of information technologies provided marketers with an opportunity to market their products in order to attract new customers without the need of old marketing techniques or mediators. One of the most important aspects of this development relied on the phenomenon of consumers influencing one another. Obviously, it is a fundamental principle that consumers have a strong ability to influence each other. Marketers are seeking to manage this influence with the increasing number of technologies and communication methods. It is not surprising that these communication methods are becoming increasingly popular. Many studies found that the behavior of customers is affected by the electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in buying services or products online (Thurau and Gremler 2004). eWOM may have positive or negative effects on the purchasing decision making, for example, if the customer is satisfied with the commodity or the service that they have already purchased, then the customer will write a positive review about it to convince or advise others to try it or to thank the provider of the service or product. Conversely, the consumer may leave a negative review as a kind of retaliation against the one who had potentially sold a bad service or fake product to warn others before buying or investing in that particular service or product. This study deals with the impact of online reviews in making purchasing decisions, specifically in the context of hospitality services. The case study examines Airbnb.com, which is one of the fastest-growing peer-to-peer economies in the online medium. The company presents itself as a mediator between guests who are willing to rent a full house or part of a place and the hosts who own that property. Before the guests book a property, they are able to see what former guests, who stayed at the same place, articulated about the host and the place itself by exploring the reviews.

When someone wants to travel to another place, they will look for an accommodation in that destination as it is essential to have a comfortable, safe place to stay. Let's suppose that this person is not familiar with the destination they intend to travel to, or it is the first time they have traveled abroad or to another city. The travelers will try to seek recommendations from friends, conduct online research or check travel agencies. All of these actions are motivated by the desire for advice before making a decision. There are many different types of goods and services offered to customers on the web. The volume of choices and diversity of opinions in online reviews of these goods and services can leave some consumers confused. Customers can have a range of opinions on the credibility of the reviews or expertise of the reviewer. Skepticism often occurs in the e-commerce medium and especially on hospitality services platforms such as Airbnb. The buying decision becomes more sophisticated and increasingly risky as there will be a direct face-to-face interaction after the transaction is completed. Within this interaction there are negative prospects which may occur such as physical violence or asset abuse or property theft towards users. Expectations, therefore, are a vital part of the transaction process for both the host and the guest. Finding a trustworthy platform may decrease this risk. Online sharing economy platforms include a variety in their review systems especially with respect to how reviews are generated.

The next obstacle is that the customer could seek advice within the platform. The question is, how can the customers have confidence in the authenticity of these reviews especially if there are no interpersonal relationships with the individuals who posted their reviews? How can customers be sure that it is not a fake review that the provider of the service has submitted themselves to enhance their reputation? Another question may arise as to how the customer can make sure that the reviewer has a real profile. Although the technological developments specifically in the online medium have brought a lot of advantages, it also has also brought many challenges. One example is the spammers who manipulate platforms and insert fake reviews intended to promote their products and services, even worse is the new professional spammers who manipulate reviews or ratings in a systematic way by employing automated computerized activities as opposed to physically spamming. This results in the creation of fake ratings and reviews to support

the services or products offered. This may artificially raise the trust of newcomers oblivious to these techniques and eventually increase the sales process. Online trust is a broad concept. For example, the trust in e-commerce platforms varies from the trust in peer-to-peer economy platforms, each platform gives a specific perception of trust and this is what Keymolen (2013) found in his study that, the evaluation of trust in the online medium is not only about you and me, but it expands to the system that brings both of us together. The only way that trust can thrive is when users are aware of the platform system that connects the supplier with the buyer. Consequently, understanding the review system of the Airbnb platform, which shows how rating and reviews are working, how it is designed, and how it could build confidence among consumers and eventually increase the profits of the company.

Nowadays, the systems of online reviews are becoming increasingly popular. Big companies are aware of the importance of reviews and how it plays a major role in increasing sales. For instance, TripAdvisor.com – a platform specialized in travel services – in 2014 reached over 200 million reviews and 315 million unique monthly visitors. Another example is Yelp.com, which is known for restaurant reviews. In 2014, Yelp.com had a monthly average of 135 million visitors to the website with a total of 71 million reviews (Xue, Li, Seo, and Pluretti 2015). New customers, therefore, tend to read the reviews of former customers before making any purchasing decisions. Their decisions will be influenced by the judgment of customers who already purchased the offered products or services (Karakaya and Barnes 2010).

On Airbnb.com, hosts along with guests have a profile verified by the company itself. According to the company, members should submit their passport, real picture, governmental ID and finally bank account information. The verification process is mandatory. The membership requirements have been studied before separately, but the reported study gathered all the membership requirements that may motivate consumers to trust and purchase the services from Airbnb, where these requirements were never being tested altogether. Both guests and hosts have a review on their profiles, as they also want to gain a good reputation on the platform. This is due to other members going to see

what has been written about them. The matter of taking unknown peoples' opinion into consideration and following their recommendations is happening nowadays in the online medium especially in travel communities. Litvin, Goldsmith, and Pan (2008) demonstrated that in the online community world, the faceless reviewer has become a travel opinion leader. It is worth mentioning that people currently tend to tell everyday life experiences on social media, especially when they have a unique experience, they will try to share it with others who have the same interests. One of the most remarkable things in studying the influence of the online review is that when someone advises friends and/or family members about a specific product or service they bought by giving their impression about it, people then may forget about it or discuss it for a while before forgetting the whole topic. After a period of time they may not be able to remember what the review was about, but online reviews are permanent; the reviews can be found alongside the listings of the product or the service, which allows newcomers to read or watch the reviews and eventually to be influenced negatively or positively before making their decision to purchase the item or service.

Recently one of the most popular social media platforms, Facebook, added a review section to the public pages which is an indication of the significance of the online review phenomena. Discussing these phenomena may provide significant references for the online marketplace in general and to the hospitality industry in particular. The phenomena of hospitality within the sharing economy is gaining the attention of millions of users worldwide, and the winner in this game is the one who will be able to build a good reputation and a trusted platform. Many peer-to-peer economy platforms such as TurnKey, HomeAway, Vrbo, 9flats, Outdoorsy, Homestay, SellMyTimeshareNow, onefinestay, Room Key, and Third Home followed Airbnb as it is the pioneer in the short-term rental platforms. This indicates that these companies, day-after-day, are becoming a potential competitor for hotels. Since 2013 some American states such as Pennsylvania started taxing Airbnb customers and asking for detailed information about the guests. The sharing economy is in an increasing growing process. For example, this 11-year-old company made an outstanding spread worldwide within a short period of time until 2019: Airbnb recorded more than 6 million rental listings on their platform worldwide in over

100,000 cities distributed in 191 countries (Airbnb 2019). It is a matter of time until the people who are traveling to explore new experiences and places stop choosing to book a hotel room when they have other lower-cost options with new experiences available on the online hospitality platforms, which in turn, enables them to live like the local people rather than staying in a hotel.

This consumer feedback is one of the most important aspects of the Airbnb platform because the hosts have no ability to remove what the former guests posted about them or their houses. Nor do the guests have the ability to remove what the hosts posted about them and how their behavior was. Even the company itself cannot remove reviews from users who have an opposing opinion on what may have been written about them (Keymolen 2016). In such sharing economy platform, physical interaction is absent simply because purchasing is an online process. It seems riskier after the transaction process when guests go to reside in the places they have booked because the majority of the consumers are renting part of a house or a shared room, which may result in more complications because the privacy of the host and the guest is of utmost importance thus trustworthiness is an urgent requirement and may possibly be the most important concern within the purchasing process. Without trust, the customer will remain hesitant to buy the service. In order to avoid this issue, one may ask for advice in such a case, because they may feel that word-of-mouth would be an effective solution; however, the predicament in this scenario would be that the customer will purchase a service and not a product that a friend or family member has potentially bought before. It is certainly a new experience so the ideal solution in this case would be to rely on eWOM for seeking advice as this is what online review provides in the Airbnb platform.

The concept of trust in Airbnb is a sharing interest not only important to the customers but also to the provider of the service. The host will be interested in building trust as they are going to share their property with a stranger. Recently, the Google Chrome web browser added a new tool that enabled hosts to observe how other hosts had reviewed a specific guest by means of creating an extension called AirReview. This indicated how popular and important the reviews became and how risky it may be to share or stay in an

unfamiliar place. One may ask, “Why should I take the risk and use Airbnb for a reservation while there are hotels or flats or even hostels?” The rationale would be that since the company was founded in 2008, its value in the market experienced outstanding growth. The latest reports on Airbnb’s worth in the market showed that in 2019 its value reached about \$38 billion with 150 million users (Theodore Schleifer and Teddy Schleifer 2019). The company created a unique experience where the guest can live in a home within a residential neighborhood just like a local person with a price lower than hotels.

Trust amongst strangers is an important factor that is affecting the acceptance or rejection of consumers’ recommendations whether it be a positive or negative opinion. This study explores the behavior of Airbnb users in Turkey in order to understand the trust of unfamiliar individuals and how that may affect their buying decisions. Even though there are existing studies examining this relationship in the Western context, such as the North America and some European countries, there is a need to carry out the investigation in a non-Western geographical context. With this motivation, the study asked the following research questions in the context of Turkey:

1. Do online reviews, in general, have a positive impact on the purchasing decisions of the consumers in Turkey more so than the commercial advertisements have?
2. Do trust in online reviews found in the Airbnb platform increase the likelihood of the consumers in Turkey to purchase services on Airbnb?
3. Do (a) the review system and (b) membership requirements of Airbnb positively influence the trust of consumers in the company and their purchasing decisions?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the online medium, there are many platforms that are designed with various techniques and mechanisms for generating reviews to foster interactivity and trust among the consumers for the sake of using it as a free marketing tool. Of course, those consumers are coming from different cultural backgrounds, and this is going to create different attitudes toward the decision making in purchasing behavior. The chapter presents a discussion regarding the cultural differences, the historical background of the sharing economy, the background of Airbnb as company, as well the state of the literature on the influence of eWOM on the purchasing decisions of consumers.

2.1 Cultural Differences

Culture is an indicator which affects the structure of people's attitudes: and this influence on their behavior will develop the identity of those people over time. Creating trust within a specific culture is conditional on the shared identities, beliefs, and values, but the understanding of the concepts that lead an individual's attitudes and beliefs vary between certain cultures (Doney Patricia, Cannon, and Mullen 1998). This definition is almost showing that the culture is something shared among the society. Belk (2010) explained that sharing indicates the behavior of persons to use, possess, and enjoy things with others, and this attitude toward sharing will create and increase social relations.

In the last years, the rising of information communication technology alongside the increasing number of collaborative web societies, new types of sharing attitudes have grown. Within the web communities, new values had emerged, too. This brought to the scene the online sharing economy phenomenon. What is important in the online sharing

economy is to build trust in online communities, and this trust can thrive in the form of the recommendations found in online reviews. It is significant to explore the role of the cultural characteristics of a specific society, to be able understand how trust builds in different cultures. For instance, Sakarya and Soyer (2014) studied the cultural differences in online purchasing behavior, and they found that British and the Turkish consumers vary in their online purchasing behaviors. At the same time both British and Turkish consumers had the same consumption values. Furthermore, Zhong Qiuyan, Liang, Cui, Chan and Qiu (2019) examined the cultural influence of online reviews on the purchasing behavior of consumers from India, Britain, and the United States, and websites for the iPhone 5s. They found that every country has special cultural specifications, and these specifications influence the perceptions of the consumers towards purchasing behaviors. The result showed a variety in the levels of awareness toward the same examined product for consumers from India, Britain, and America. The two previous studies were conducted on the online shopping behaviors which is something would not put the lives of the consumers in danger. Yet, when it comes to renting a room or a place from strangers, the level of trust of the consumers supposedly will decrease because there will be a face-to-face interaction and the lives of the consumers will be in danger. This is the case with the study reported; the consumers are in need for greater motivations to increase their trust before purchasing the offered services.

Consumers cultural perception of trust between two different cultures was explored in a study on Airbnb by Khaliman and Rosco (2018), which constituted the motivation to conduct the study on the Airbnb consumers in Turkey, reported here. Khaliman and Rosco (2018) compared Italian and Ukrainian consumers' understanding of trust. The researchers clarified that the goal of their study was to discover how Airbnb engages the trust of its customers. They also sought to identify which indicators among Airbnb users are the most remarkable in deciding whom to trust. They conducted a face-to-face interview with women and men between the ages of 20 and 25 who already have used the Airbnb platform at least once as a host or a guest. The results of the study showed that Italians were more familiar than Ukrainians with using Airbnb. The Ukrainian interviewees chose Airbnb over other similar hospitality services and over more

traditional accommodations because they valued the importance of personal contact between the host and the guest. Yet, not all Italians interviewed attributed such high significance to personal contact as the Ukrainians did. The study confirmed that the consumers' reputation found in the reviews and their ratings increased the level of trust among consumers. Another important finding of the study is that the researchers confirmed the significance of reviews in purchasing decisions on Airbnb. Another interesting finding was that, Italians are willing to have new experiences no matter what risks are going to be found in these experiences. Ukrainians didn't appear to have the same mindset. Furthermore, they emphasized the importance of the platform system and how it enables users to see the profiles of the members prior to sending a booking request to a host. In addition to reading the reviews, users can see the members' profiles on Facebook to verify the identity of the host. The study concluded that there is a high level of trust among customers, higher than in the platform itself; this shows the importance of the reviewers's role as part of an online community. Inspired by the study of Khaliman and Rosco (2018), the reported study seeks to identify the factors that influence their purchasing decisions by focusing on Airbnb consumers in Turkey, a context which has not been studied systematically before.

2.2 Collaborative Consumption

In our everyday life parents often teach their children to share their toys with other kids, but they are not aware that they are building a sense of collaborative consumption as they are sharing their personal belongings with others. In our daily life, ordinary people are now the main players in collaborative consumption, as they share public spaces, hotels, universities, hospitals, schools, parks, etc. It is something they used to do as an innate behavior in their daily life; all of these activities are dragged under the collaborative consumption concept. Normally, no one would hesitate to share outdoor activities like people walking in a park where many people are found at the same time or to think they would ever take the school bus alone. However, it sounds strange or difficult when it comes to personal belongings as one may feel that their privacy may be jeopardized by others.

The peer-to-peer economy, collaborative consumption, and sharing economy all refer to almost the same idea, but the naming varies within the contexts it is used for. Collaborative consumption was defined by Felson and Spaeth (1978) as a situation when a group of people or individuals interact by activities that lead to the consumption of services and goods. This definition was criticized by Belk (2013) as too broad and fails to describe how these persons collaborate in consuming specific goods or services. Botsman and Rogers (2010) defined it as the situation in which people perform traditional sharing activities that include swapping, trading, bartering, peer-to-peer currencies, land shares, social lending, peer-to-peer rentals, car renting, co-working and many other examples. Exploring these definitions is for the purpose of understanding the way Airbnb performs its business, as it is one of the pioneer platforms in the sharing economy.

Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) found another description of collaborative consumption as an access-based consumption. They defined collaborative consumption as a transaction performed without transferring the ownership. This definition cannot be applied to Airbnb as this definition encompasses car rental companies due to the car rentals being completed without transforming the ownership, and the hotels do the same. The closest description of the business model of Airbnb is a monetary network hospitality (Ikkala 2014). This is a more accurate definition that can be applied to hospitality platforms. As mentioned before, sharing personal belongings jeopardizes the owner's privacy and potentially the guests' privacy also so it is a heavy burden for the administration of any peer-to-peer economy platform to guarantee the safety and privacy protection for its users.

2.3 Background of Airbnb

Airbnb stands for Airbed and breakfast. The company is an American online marketplace that works as a brokerage providing short-term rental accommodation services. It is headquartered in San Francisco in the U.S. state of California. The members have access to organize an offer for lodging, travel experiences, or to offer the whole house or part of it for rent. The company itself offers no houses for rent in the listings. Instead, it acts as a

mediator between the members who have the places to rent; in exchange, the company charges the users a commission for each transaction.

The famous saying “Necessity is the mother of invention” is a good characterization of how Airbnb developed its business model. Airbnb was founded because the founders started sharing their living room with an air mattress in order to get rid of the high costs of renting in San Francisco while they had a conference at that time. The rapid growth of the company in the online marketplace brought it to the top list in the sharing economy companies. The value of the company is estimated at about \$38 billion, which is a level difficult to reach for a company that is only 11 years old. In early 2020 Some 2.9 million hosts were on Airbnb, 800,000 people on average stayed in an Airbnb per night and about 14,000 new hosts joined per month. In addition, 300 million guests have stayed in an Airbnb since 2008 and more than 4 million places have been listed. Airbnb has formed a market for the rental of a flat, a house, or part of a house for a short-term stay, and this is happening between two parties, both of whom are strangers (Airbnb 2020).

Since Airbnb is a third-party medium that presents online matching services for accommodations, the risk might be a remarkable indicator that influences consumers’ behavior and intention; therefore, the concept of trust will be an effective factor in the case. Airbnb portrays itself as a trusted community in the marketplace. In every Airbnb transaction that occurs, there are two parties – the “host” to whom the listing belongs and the “guest” who is willing to book from that host. After the guest checks out of the place where he or she stayed, there is a period of time of up to 14 days during which both the host and the guest have the ability to write a review about each other. No one will be able to delete this review, and this is what makes the review system more trustworthy (Airbnb 2019). The period of the 14-day deadline to leave reviews has an interesting logic, that is to reduce retaliation among users so that each one of them (the host and the guest) will have patience and take into consideration that if the host writes a negative review, then the guest is likely to do the same, and these reviews are going to stay permanently on their profiles. In addition, they also have a private review option other than the public one. Another thing considered as one of the pros of the platform design is that the Airbnb

system provides information about the host's response speed and eventually will impact the placement of the host in the search engine. As a result, this information influences the host's probability of booking with them in the future. Moreover, this process will enable Airbnb's system to identify good and bad sellers (Ert and Fleischer 2019). This importance of the review system is the essence of Airbnb. Fradkin and Holtz (2018) noted that Airbnb is experiencing thriving growth in the hospitality industry and this is attributed to the rise in highly rated hosts that comes from three possible mechanisms that Airbnb employs. Firstly, the search ranking algorithm might clearly decrease the rankings of low-quality sellers. Second, the law of large numbers ensures that low-quality listings receive negative reviews, thus are never booked again. Thirdly, many bad listings or members may be caught by Airbnb's safety and trust safeguards which include verifying the identities of hosts and guests, encouraging detailed profiles, detecting and eliminating scams, and uploading high-resolution images.

2.4 Word-of-Mouth

WOM is a way of face-to-face interaction between a sender who recommends a product, service, or brand and has no commercial concern in his/her recommendation. Arndt (1967) is one of the first researchers who studied the impact of word-of-mouth on the purchasing behavior of consumers. He tried to find a specific definition of the term word-of-mouth; ultimately, he defined it as a process of oral and personal face-to-face communication between the sender of the word and receiver of it. The receiver realizes that what is transferred to him or her about a trademark, or a good or bad a service, has no commercial or promotional purposes. Stokes and Lomax (2002) said it is a form of communication between the sender and receiver with the main goal of giving a recommendation. It is relevant especially when the product is described by experiences as people search for recommendations to decrease their expected risk. The definition by Warrington (2002) was similar to the previous definitions. He said WOM is a means of communication about services or products among people who are known to be independent from the mentioned company or brand and the sources are independent from commercial impact, and this is the key power of reviews. Stokes and Lomax's (2002)

definition of WOM extends to another form which is written reviews in magazines or newspapers by an opinion leader about social life concerns, services, hotels, restaurants, or products. Blank (2007, p7) defined reviews as: “public summaries and evaluations that assist readers to be more knowledgeable in their choice, understanding, or appreciation of products or performances,” answering two questions: ‘what is it? Is it any good?’

He classified reviews into two basic types: procedural and connoisseurial. Each one has a different approach, and each has a particular power. Before diving into the explanation of these two terms I would like to mention another two terms that are important to differentiate between them. These are the reviewee and the reviewer. A reviewer is the producer of the review content, whereas the reviewee is the one who undergoes a review.

Connoisseurial reviews reflect the knowledge and the expertise of a particular reviewer. This person must have credibility for the audience to have an impact on them. Reviewees presume that the reviewer has enough knowledge of what he or she is talking about because the reviewer has written other former reviews for the same kind of service or product and has structured fame as someone who is always keeping up with the pace of the latest updates about what their interests are, which enables them to be reliable. Connoisseurs do not try to review everything; they only take care of the prominent matters that have lately come to the scene. The connoisseurs’ effect is estimated by how much they influence their audience and possibly how much they influence the producer of the service or product. Sometimes a connoisseur’s impact is so great that they catch an ordinary reviewee who may not even be interested in purchasing the presented product; nevertheless, they enjoy hearing what the reviewer has to say because the reviewer shares insights that can add to the reviewee’s understanding of a particular topic. In my opinion, it is hard to believe that connoisseurial reviews that were found as WOM no longer have a role to play in this age, but on the contrary, some connoisseurial reviewers moved totally to the digital world where self-branding is the phenomenon of this time. In fact, they transformed ordinary WOM into electronic word-of-mouth.

Procedural reviews show the consequences of tests on a product or a service; they mostly match several similar products and refer to the distinctions among them. The tests are meant to be clear and credible based on a regular standard. What makes the reviews trustworthy is that customers are looking for two features: initially that the reviewer has no financial interest in the outcome of their advice and secondly, the reviewer is knowledgeable about what he or she is discussing. Even when the reviewees are certain that the review is written by a real customer, they probably still have questions such as how much that customer knows about what they are talking about and how trustworthy their judgment is Blank (2007). Last but not least, WOM communication is an innate adjective that takes place among consumers about products or services. It is not controlled by anyone such as a company or an advertising agency. The spread of WOM is no longer limited to personal face-to-face interaction but extends through modern means of communication. From this point of view, a new expression came to the scene which is electronic or online word-of-mouth.

2.4.1 Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM)

eWOM is a new form of ordinary word-of-mouth but without face-to-face interaction. It is found in the online medium such as on blogs, websites, or social networks, and it can include comments, ratings, or videos. eWOM can be valuable to customers within the different steps of making purchasing decisions, and these steps consist of the need to search for information, recognition, evaluation of the available alternatives, post-purchase evaluation, and purchasing (Pan and Fesenmaier 2006). Dwyer (2007) referred to eWOM as a form of ordinary word-of-mouth communication using internet applications. Social networking sites are one of the electronic channels that enable us to follow the recommendation of this word. While Hennig-Thurau et al (2004) clarified the definition as any expression made by a former consumer about an enterprise or product, eWOM could be negative, positive, or neutral, and anyone can see it online.

Ordinary word-of-mouth differs from eWOM in that people glean information from a limited number of individuals while eWOM comes from an unlimited number of people,

and these individuals have differences in culture and experiences. Additionally, ordinary word-of-mouth can be found among acquaintances such as friends or family members while eWOM is usually shared amongst strangers. The content and its credibility affect the intention to buy the service. Ordinary word-of-mouth communications require face-to-face oral communication, but in eWOM, face-to-face and oral interaction are absent. Instead, eWOM largely takes the form of written posted online reviews. Adding another value to eWOM's importance is that it's available to anyone at any time on the internet. This kind of access via the internet enables many people to participate and explore their experiences freely.

eWOM plays an important role in the online medium in general due to it providing different platforms for customers to exchange their experiences and information (Trusov et al 2009). eWOM is playing a significant role in consumers' purchasing decisions as a free marketing tool, as the information on the online customer review is based on personal expertise. It also works to boost sales by providing customers with the required information. In addition, eWOM can work as a modern element in the marketing communications mix (Hwang, Gretzel, Xiang, and Fesenmaier 2006). In short, both eWOM and commercial advertisements have the main goal of reaching the consumers. Against this backdrop, the following question is posed to investigate the influence of the eWOM found in the internet in general, in comparison to the commercial advertisements:

Research Question 1: Do online reviews, in general, have a positive impact on the purchasing decisions of the consumers in Turkey more so than the commercial advertisements have?

2.4.2 Trust in eWOM increases the purchasing decisions

Over the past decade, many things have rapidly changed especially the way we communicate and the emergence of social media and eWOM as ubiquitous parts of life. Many users nowadays cannot be separated from their smartphones or computers, and they receive a huge number of messages coming from family members, friends, and

commercial advertisements. These messages all provide a constant stream of warnings, advice, and personal opinions, all confirming the significance of eWOM. eWOM provides consumers with the information and details they need to know about what they are willing to purchase; this helps them to have an opinion about the services or available products based on the judgment of former consumers who have tried the service or product. The reason why internet forums can engage consumers to search or browse for product information affecting the behavior of consumer purchases more than corporate websites is that, consumers consider the information gathered from the internet as more trustworthy than the information on the targeted companies' platforms. Information and content provided by internet forum participants are more credible about the point of view of consumers because most reviewers base their reviews on their own experience with the services and products (Bickart and Schindler 2001).

The available trustworthy choices are too little to obtain information about offered services or products for online consumers. But they have three main sources of information: the commercial ads, information about the product available on that website, and the reviews by the former consumers. The influence of eWOM on the purchasing decision includes many types of online businesses. A study on craft beer confirmed the same impact of online reviews and found a strong relationship between product sales and ratings, the online reviews about this play an important role in determining which new products grow quickly in the marketplace. In online sales, there is no criteria that enable customers to try a product or service before purchasing it (Clemons et al 2006). Hence online reviews by former customers are the best choice to estimate the properties of the particular product or service presented. Online book sales are one example. Because it is rather hard to find someone who shares the same interests in reading, online book retailers usually provide a way for consumers to see what other readers wrote about a specific book, found that there is a positive relationship between online customer reviews on the platforms of book retailers such as Amazon.com and product sales (Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006). In some cases, products that are sold online need to be tested and the results on former consumers, in this case, need to be clear. Here, online reviews are going to play a significant role in making purchasing decisions such as body care products.

Chang, Lee, and Huang (2010) focused on the influence of eWOM used in internet marketing on consumer purchasing behavior, the study used a sample of 275 users of body care products in China and discussed the relevance between eWOM and its impact on purchase decisions, the study used five constructs for this purpose: the effect of eWOM, the users' own experience, search extent, trustworthiness, and expertise. It was found that users' own experience of those who purchased the products before, was the most effective construct in eWOM on the buying decision process. Jalilv and Samiei (2012) tested the influence of eWOM in the automobile industry, they found that eWOM has a significant impact on the purchasing behavior of the customers because it determines the customers' outlook toward purchasing tourism services given that these services contain a number of risks. The question here is, will the eWOM messages have an influence on the trust of the consumers? Doh and Hwang (2009) identified the impact of eWOM on consumer purchasing decisions and the role of eWOM in building attitudes toward the product. Their study used a sample of 10 different messages distributed to 143 groups in three South Korean universities, one of the most prominent results of the study was the adoption of eWOM before buying the product or service and the high credibility of eWOM. Hu, Liu, and Zhang (2008) found that a consumer's online reviews are recognized as an indicator of the presented service or product, these reviews are influential in minimizing the doubt or potential risk about what is presented. This would result in helping the customer in making their purchase decisions. Furthermore, consumers consult the provided information in the review and pay attention to the reviewer's reputation as well.

It is important to understand the role of eWOM within online travel communities because that will guide travelers to preferable services and service enhancement, eventually leading to better marketing effectiveness. The sources of information witnessed an important change in the last few years due to the emergence of Web 2.0 which led to greater interactivity and influence on tourist decision-making behavior. Tourists searching for information have changed from ordinary WOM to online word-of-mouth. This trend was confirmed by the latest statistics on how tourists are seeking information from official travel webpages, social network sites, and travel blogs. Park, Wang, Yao,

and Kang (2011) found that the credibility of eWOM in hospitality sector depends on the information found in the eWOM, which in turn can be a source of trust for customers. It is this confidence of the customers with their information that leads to the tendency to make a purchasing decision. This trust comes from the sender of the information, whether or not they seem trustworthy to the receiver of the eWOM, and whether the producer of the review seems to have experience with what they are talking about.

Nowadays the majority of the travel agency websites provide the customer with the ability to submit reviews for the services they provide, these reviews could have a powerful impact on the appeal of the product or the service to new consumers. Eventually, an accumulation of these reviews can raise confidence or increase doubts and either raise or decrease the rate of purchase decisions. Litvin, Goldsmith, and Pan (2008) defined eWOM in the tourism medium as all online communication about the features or the use of services, products or a company, these reviews by the “faceless reviewers” are increasingly playing a significant role in the purchasing decision. This study followed up by the same researchers Litvin, Goldsmith, and Pan (2018) 10 years later and confirmed the same previous results. eWOM played a significant role in the context of tourism in that travelers seek the advice of others and need encouragement and guidance before purchasing. eWOM plays a crucial role in the process of consumer decision-making, and day-by-day these people who are leaving reviews on travel platforms are becoming the travel opinion leaders. Ye, Law, Gu, and Chen (2011) explained that the knowledge and considerations of customers were influenced by the online reviews on a hotel website, and these reviews were considered as a helpful tool to travelers. Simultaneously it makes newcomers expand their consideration about the hotel; they concluded that a 10% rise in the traveler review rating raises the hotel online sales by more than 5%. In the sharing economy and especially in hospitality services platforms, it is an important need to read about the experiences of former customers (Vermeulen and Seegers 2009).

Therefore, as the mentioned existing studies suggest, eWOM has great significance in purchasing decisions because consumers are not going to purchase a piece of clothing from the internet if it is not going to fit them or if they did not like the particular garment;

they would rather return it or leave it in the closet. In the hospitality sector and precisely staying in an Airbnb's place can be dangerous without checking the existed reviews about the providers of the service. Consequently, eWOM is the only reliable source of information about the presented service for customers, although it should contain specific characteristics to be deemed as qualified information. The platforms, for instance, should be easy to use, have sufficient security and privacy policies, look appealing, and foster trust and interaction among platform visitors.

Bae and Kil-Soo Suh (2017) tested the way that travelers in the pre-trip stage make their purchase decisions in the sharing economy platforms based on the experiences shared by others. This was based on a survey consisting of 411 Korean users who used Airbnb before. They explored how the quality of their travel experiment was and how they comprehended information that influenced their behavior in sharing their experiences. The results showed that the process of the flow of travelers' experience information and the design of the platforms to increase the growth of interactivity comes from the review system. The study indicated that travelers make their purchasing decisions by interacting with other travelers who have experienced the service before or those who have not finished their trip yet. This is what Airbnb provides within its review system. The study also found that the presence of reviews shared by close friends and indirect friends positively affects travelers' adoption of reviews and raises the rate of their purchase decisions. This study is important because it links the importance of the online recommendations, the review system of Airbnb platform that indicated these recommendations, the importance of the interactivity among users, and how all of these factors lead to increase the trust on the consumers and eventually raise the willingness to purchase the services. Also, the information found in the reviews on Airbnb are unique, it explains the experiences of every user who used the services of the platform previously, and this may give reviews on Airbnb a crucial role in the purchasing decision process. Judging the quality of the information found in any review and trusting it will vary, according to the perspectives and the standards of understanding the concept of trust of a certain culture. Therefore, the Airbnb consumers in Turkey may have a different or

similar point of view to the influence of the eWOM messages. This raises the following question:

Research Question 2: Do trust in online reviews found in the Airbnb platform increase the likelihood of the consumers in Turkey to purchase services on Airbnb?

2.5 The Review System of Airbnb as a Successful Business Model

The mission of the curator is the interaction among the users; in this case the Airbnb platform creates the medium that would be able to strengthen the online trust in the interpersonal relationships among the users who may be unfamiliar individuals. One of the most important tools in the platform is the reviewing system, where users can form a judgment about each other in a trusted reviewing system. “You can trust me” is the essence of Airbnb’s review system, and it is the pillar of the new sharing economy. This pillar is what fuels the value of the Airbnb platform. Airbnb is not the first or the only platform that indicates the review system within the platform. eBay the second-hand marketplace founded in 1996, is the pioneer of all online systems in the sharing economy where users can interact and build up a reputation to the trusted seller or buyer.

The way that Airbnb designed interaction among users was by creating certain algorithms that raise trust in the review system and the company itself (Botsman and Rogers 2010). The most substantial element in the hospitality sector is building a reliable, trusted review system that consumers can rely on. As a result, peer-to-peer companies need to keep pace with developing this system. This system is a designed program enables customers to review each other and review the offered products as well and build trust among the users through their reputation. Many examples that use this system are found in the online medium, Amazon.com, Tripadvisor.com, and many other peer-to-peer websites. The review system design of Airbnb platform is significant because purchasing processes are related to the social involvement that enable users to have two-sided reviews. The reviews on Airbnb have something special differ from many other platforms, and this is the requirements the platform ask the users to submit to be a members then they have the

ability to add reviews, in addition no one outside of the platform can add a review except the actual guests or hosts of the platform. The review system of Airbnb has two forms of reviewing, one is secretly between the guest and the hosts and this is to reduce retaliation between the members, and the second one is the public reviews that available for all of the members. Moreover, the submitted reviews no one can delete it except the one who submitted it, even the platform has no right to delete it, only in case there is an evidence from the host or the guest that what have been written is not true.

One may ask why it is important to build a trusted review system in hospitality services while many successful companies in the online medium lack a review system on their websites or their smartphone applications. The thing is that the experience in Airbnb is unique, and users explains their actual experiences; then newcomers may make their decisions based on the former experiences of previous guests especially they know that the it is not a fake automated review, or these reviews submitted by unknown profiles. “Our community is built on a great deal of trust – trust that makes hosts feel comfortable allowing travelers to stay in their home, and trust that helps travelers feel like they belong anywhere. The foundation of that trust is our review system” (Airbnb 2015).

Abrahamoet and her collogues (2017) discussed to what extent a peer-to-peer platform can layout features that are artificially engineered, such as review systems to exceed people’s natural tendency to make a base from judgments of trustworthiness on social biases. The study concentrated on the tendency to trust others who are similar homophily. They employed an online test on Airbnb with a sample of 8,906 users, and the results found that review system of Airbnb can remarkably increase the trust among users who have diversity in their characteristics. The study found proof that the Airbnb reputation system by taking into consideration the star ratings and number of reviews may fill the gap between the originally created trust presented in social platforms and the institutionally produced trust. At the same time, it showed that users have the tendency to trust those who are similar to them, and even those users who have a high degree of dissimilarity with the other users are still willing to share trust as a result of trusting the reputation system itself. Fradkin and Holtz (2018) confirmed that guests get more advantage from

leaving positive reviews and dislike misrepresenting their experiences. They also insisted on the importance of the review in the Airbnb platform and especially that the platform contains a unique review system. In turn, improving the review system may give Airbnb an essential competitive advantage in the marketplace of the peer-to-peer economy.

However, the mentioned studies focused on the western countries. While the reported study will examine a new area. This leads us to the following research question:

Research Question 3a: Does the review system and of Airbnb positively influence the trust of consumers in Turkey in the company and their purchasing decisions?

2.6 The Trusted Platform Fosters User Profile Credibility

When people see the source of the review as highly trustworthy, then the eWOM effect will increase the willingness to purchase products or services (López and Sicilia 2014). This would indicate the need to have trust in the producer of the reviews. An important incident happened to one of the hosts of Airbnb in 2011 when the guest who rented her home stole her belongings, and that incident caused a shift in the trust system of the platform. The woman accused the company of leaving their client out in the cold and claimed the company did nothing for her. Brian Chesky, the CEO of Airbnb, wrote about the incident that the company's main pillar is built on trust, authenticity in their community, and the safety of its members is the highest priority. We will continue with the authorities to give her rights back. Later on, the company offered the woman financial assistance (Arrington 2011). This case prompted the company to expand its safety and trust team by employing former government investigators. Since that incident, these officers work on examining suspected interactions among the users. These officers also sometimes function as a mediator when there are problems that users cannot resolve on their own. Communication between prospective Airbnb hosts and guests is restricted to the platform; any attempt to share an outside means of communication such as a phone number or email is automatically shut down by the company's system. This policy leaves Airbnb with valuable data that it can analyze and use to modify the platform in many

ways that could enhance the faith among the consumers. Since that occurrence, Airbnb started offering compensation of up to 1 million American dollars as a guarantee for property in the case that anything is damaged or stolen (Airbnb 2019).

When someone is willing to be part of a particular community for a long time, they will take into consideration the importance of their reputation and the consequences for doing something that is unacceptable to that community or threatening members of this community. Logically, this person would have to behave reliably to convince the community of his/her good intentions. Axelrod and Hamilton (1981) find out that the interpersonal interaction found easily is the shadow of the future. The interpersonal communication within the online community harkens back to the old days of small closely-knit communities and how their interpersonal relationships were (Keymolen and Esther 2016). In such communities everyone notices when an individual makes a negative comment or engages in unacceptable behavior according to the morals of that community; sooner or later everyone is going to talk about it then the wrongdoers lose their reputation. In the online medium, especially in the sharing hospitality platforms, the users are similar to these closely-knit communities: Their opinions or feedback about their experiences will be posted on that platform whether it be writing, rating, a video, or voice recording. Anyone can then access the platform and see what has been written about the one who they were willing to deal with. Things get more interesting in this way because even if someone changed his/her behavior, then it won't change the existing review.

Kamal and Chen (2016) discussed the factors that influence people's trust and their willingness to try sharing-economy services. The study was conducted by using a survey in the business school at a Midwestern State University in the United States. It showed that one out of five students has tried a sharing hospitality service before. The biggest obstacle in sharing rooms or houses is the lack of trust among sharing platform members because of many factors. The top three reasons are the destruction of property, loss of life, and being burglarized. The researchers suggested that security measures may increase the member's trust, contain access to information on a member's background, descending order criminal background check, online video chatting, safety insurance, and

the use of a security certificate. These requirements should be implemented in any platform willing to gain the trust of the consumers.

Wu and Shen (2018) also supported the same importance of the platform mechanisms by examining the moderating influence that cultural values might have and the inherent mechanism of trust-building by employing the data from a survey of 210 Airbnb Chinese consumers. The presented results showed that the institutional trust, i.e. the Airbnb platform, has a positive impact on product trust and interpersonal trust, and that product trust has a positive impact on interpersonal trust too. This study supports the same point of view as my research on the importance of the trusted sharing economy platform's positive influence on building trust in the users' profiles and eventually leading to a decision to rent an Airbnb space. Ma, Neeraj, and Naaman (2017) studied the perceived trustworthiness of the hosts' profiles; they tested profiles from 4,180 hosts in large cities in the United States, revealing that the more self-description that was included in the profile, the more users judged the profile as trustworthy. The study suggested that platforms can help users to transfer trustworthiness in their profiles and ease the required trust dynamics, and they demonstrated that in this context, perceived trustworthiness is required to increase purchase decision-making, the study focuses on this theme and the importance of the platform system along with how it affects trustworthiness of the newcomers, which is similar to the idea covered in my study, within the same context of how the trust in the platform leads to the trust in the users. Mittendorf (2016) investigated the concept of trustworthiness that enables strangers to frame temporary peer-to-peer relationships in the Airbnb company. The study distinguished between the trust in renters and trust in Airbnb as a mediator between the users. Answers to a questionnaire distributed to 189 participants showed that trust is the crucial element to start successfully sharing transactions between two parties. Furthermore, it demonstrated that trust in Airbnb influences the trust in renters. The importance of the trusted profile and platform is not exclusive to Airbnb but applies to all of the hospitality services providers. Lavelle (2017) found that the profiles of users who submit reviews play a significant role in the decision-making process for selecting hotel rooms.

Is it only the trust in the platform that is influencing the consumers purchasing decisions? What about the price influence? Does it affect the consumer's decision more than trust in the platform, Liang (2015) studied the effects of external factors on repurchasing decisions on Airbnb, which were: perceived value, perceived risk, and repurchase intention. The results showed that Airbnb consumers' sensitivity scale to price does not reduce their perceived risk, but their perceived authenticity of the reviews does. Another interesting result is that perceived authenticity seems to be a strong way to enhance perceived value as well as to decrease the perceived risk of Airbnb consumers. The powerful effect of perceived authenticity indicates that Airbnb consumers frequently stay with Airbnb not just because they are interested in the price, but in fact, they are looking for an authentic local experience. They perceive that they can find these authentic local experiences within the reviews of the Airbnb platform.

The importance of trust in the sharing economy platform is a priority for business success. The concern here is whether the Airbnb platform is perceived as trustworthy or not, are there any policies or practices that Airbnb implemented in the platform that can be taken into consideration before purchasing? Zervas and Byers (2015) described Airbnb as a trusted community marketplace. They justified this statement by conducting an analysis of ratings of over 600,000 listings found worldwide on Airbnb. About 95% of Airbnb listings have an average user-generated rating of either a maximum of 5 or 4.5 stars; practically none had less than a 3.5-star rating. The study compared this with the ratings of half a million hotels worldwide that they gathered from the TripAdvisor.com platform, where there is more variety across reviews and a lower average rating of 3.8 stars. Taking into consideration the listings by location and accommodation type, the study found large variability in ratings and realized that vacation rental listings on TripAdvisor have ratings mainly similar to the ratings of Airbnb listings. This is an interesting result because TripAdvisor.com was founded in 2000, eight years before Airbnb was launched. This emphasizes that the growth of the Airbnb platform is prominently successful. The study attributed the importance of the Airbnb platform to the diversity of mechanisms that build trust among its users, in turn enabling them to get information from each other. Additionally, reviews, ratings, and Airbnb's requirements for personal details that verify

user's identity enhance the trust in the platform. For example, users have an option to verify their Airbnb accounts by linking it with other social media accounts (such as LinkedIn, Google, or Facebook). In Airbnb, it is not only the platform's responsibility to provide safety and security; it is me, you, and the platform that equates the liability. Keymolen (2016) clarified that Airbnb designed its platform in such a way that the algorithms pre-sort the users and their interactions within the platform and detect suspicious interactions such as asking the guest to transfer money in any way other than Airbnb. Also, the detection could be by allowing the users to flag that suspected guest or host after giving the flag sign to that specific user. The company has a detective team of former officers to examine his/her profile alongside the submitted information process, and these actions increase the trust in the platform in general.

What makes the Airbnb platform successful and trusted by consumers is that, it created an interpersonal interaction among strangers within a platform they can rely on, and this trust depends on curation and construction that is built in the platform system. However, those strangers who belong to different cultural backgrounds may or may not have the same level of trust in the platform and the other consumers as well. Therefore, the major business model of Airbnb is to build this trust among strangers, and this was the main goal for the platform since it was founded. This outcome is achieved by asking the new subscribers to submit verifications that include a copy of a passport, phone number, high-resolution profile photo, bank account, and governmental ID which may fosters trust among the users. These membership requirements are important to investigate the platform's influence on the users, and it may or may not influence the trust of the Airbnb users in Turkey. This raises the following question:

Research Question 3b: Do the membership requirements of Airbnb positively influence the trust of consumers in Turkey in the company and their purchasing decisions?

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

In order to answer the research questions of the study, an online survey to explore the impact of eWOM on the trust and purchasing decisions of the consumers in Turkey was conducted. A quantitative result is likely to be generalized to a sub-population or whole population because it requires a random sample. To be able to confirm the results of the existing studies in the literature regarding the role of eWOM on trust and purchasing decisions of the consumers, only consumers who have used Airbnb accommodation services before were selected to be included in the sample. Therefore, the survey was distributed to respondents in Turkey who used Airbnb before by using online Google Consumer Surveys.

The first and main objective of this study is to examine the influence of the online reviews on the trust and the purchasing decision of Airbnb consumers. A second objective that differentiates this study from the previous studies, is that it tested the Airbnb consumers in Turkey, who were not surveyed before about their opinion in using Airbnb. However, as summarized before, Khaliman and Rosco (2018) study had found differences in the understanding of the concept of trust between Italian and Ukrainian people. This study gathered all the membership requirements that may motivate consumers to trust and purchase the services from Airbnb, where these requirements were never being tested altogether.

3.2 Data Collection

To address the aspects of the topic of the study, an online survey was used to collect responses. The online questionnaire was the preferred method to collect the data due to its efficiency in reaching out to a large number of respondents who fit the sample of Airbnb users living in Turkey. The SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) for Windows 16.0 program was used for statistical analysis. This statistical software package is commonly used in social sciences to conduct frequencies and do statistical tests.

3.3 Sampling

This study required sample size of 405 to represent the entire population. The study aims to explore and identify the impact of eWOM on the trust of Airbnb consumers in Turkey and their purchasing decisions. The study used Google Consumer Surveys which is a market research platform, it started in 2012 with a 2-question survey form and moved to a 10-question survey that included a mobile app and the publisher network panels. It is a paid service to collect the responses; it cost 10.6 Turkish liras for each completed response. Globally, Google Consumer Surveys reaches tens of millions of possible respondents every single day, including 5 million from the mobile application. In addition, in 2018, surveys reached an average of 5 million surveys per month.

The respondents who did not answer certain questions were excluded from the results for those particular questions. Also, Google Consumer Surveys does not charge any cost for incomplete responses. Google Consumer Surveys offers two panels of respondents to answer the survey: first, those respondents who are using Google Opinion Rewards for publishers who are using reading content on a network of web-publisher sites and secondly the panel of respondents who were using an Android app called Google Opinion Rewards on their smartphones. Within these panels, Google Survey presents convenience targeting samples for some countries and representative targeting for others. For Turkey, it was convenience targeting.

Google Survey has two ways of conducting initial representative sampling which means that Google Consumer Surveys evaluates the representativeness of a survey by balancing its sample demographics to resemble the required population demographics. This indicated adults 18 or older who are internet users. Identifying demographics is based on three dimensions: gender, geography, and in countries other than the United States with representative sampling. They depend on a set of governmental data and internal Google data sources. The subsequent method is convenience sampling which targets any available users who reside in the targeted country and speak the same language used in the created survey. That specifies that the respondents are of any age older than 18 of any gender or from any geographic region within the targeted country (Sostek and Slatkin 2018). The convenience sample can be valuable for gathering insights or basic data within the targeted country. With this study, the convenience sampling was used because representative sampling it is not available in Turkey.

Google Surveys is a helpful tool to get responses within 48 hours to a maximum of 14 days even if the sample population is harder to find (Google Surveys 2020). By using a screening question in the survey, this excluded anyone who did not use Airbnb before as a guest. The screening question is made to get a very specific targeted sample. For example, in this study, it is important to ask the consumers who had actually tried Airbnb services before, because they know how the policies, the review system, and the mechanism of the platform work generally. Thus, the respondents who answer the screening question by saying they have tried the Airbnb platform before will be able to continue answering the rest of the questions, and those who had not used Airbnb before would not be able to see the next question and will be excluded from the survey. The survey was distributed to 4,777 respondents. Only 405 of them used Airbnb before, and their answers were included in the analysis-while the rest were excluded from the survey. An interesting result was that a high number of respondents chose “I never heard about Airbnb” in answering the screening question. This showed that Google Consumer Surveys is an efficient tool in the way that it targeted the required respondents in a very short time frame in comparison with other surveying tools. The survey included 6 questions in the Turkish language.

3.4 Measurement of the Constructs

The survey has a total of 6 questions including the screening question with the five-point Likert scale from 1 to 5 rating from strongly disagree to strongly agree conducted for this purpose in addition to the frequency analysis using SPSS to summarize the total amount of the positive and the negative responses. Whilst evaluating the findings obtained in the study, the SPSS was used for statistical analysis. The appropriateness of the parameters to normal distribution was evaluated with the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. A Chi-square analysis was used to examine the relationship between qualitative data. The results were evaluated in the 95% confidence interval and the significance level was $p < 0.05$.

Onchiri (2013) said that Chi-square analysis is used for the purpose of comparing ratios found in a study taking into consideration that there will be expected significant differences between the values. If these Chi-square values increase, the expected difference will increase as well. The value of the calculated Chi-square is specified by comparing this value with the value from the table. If this calculated value is higher than the value of the table, then the difference between the observed and expected frequencies will be significant; if not it will be not significant.

Below is the translation in the English language:

1. Which one of the following best represents your familiarity with the Airbnb platform?

The Answers:

I have heard of it but never used it

I know how it works but never used it

I've used it one time

I've used it 2-5 times

I've used it 6-10 times

I've used it more than 10 times

(Respondents who choose "I have heard of it but never used it" or

"I know how it works but never used it" were excluded from this screening question.)

2. The recommendations in the online reviews in Airbnb increase my willingness to purchase the offered services because the only ones who really tested the service are able to leave a review.

The Answers:

Strongly disagree Disagree Undecided Agree Strongly disagree

3. The membership requirements in Airbnb such as governmental ID, passport and phone number or the pictures increase my trust in the platform.

The Answers:

Strongly disagree Disagree Undecided Agree Strongly disagree

4. One of the things that reduce the potential risk in renting via Airbnb is

The Answers:

The online reviews of the former guests

The platform of the Airbnb itself increase my trust

The information found in the review

All of the above

5. Online reviews influence my purchase decision more than the commercial advertisements when purchasing services and products in the online medium.

The Answers:

Strongly disagree Disagree Undecided Agree Strongly disagree

6. What's your highest level of education?

The Answers:

No formal education

High school diploma

2 years College degree

4 years College degree

Master's degree

Professional degree

Doctorate degree

Other



4. RESULTS

4.1 Demographics of the Respondents

The study was conducted on 405 participants. The gender differences were high with 246 (76.4%) of the participants being male and 76 (23.6%) female. Age was dominated mostly by the younger respondents within the total of the participants: 121 (41.9%) of the participants in the study were between 18-24 years old-, 87 (30.1%) were between 25-34 years old-, 52 (18.0%) were between 35-44 years old-, 18 (6.2%) were between 45-54 years old-, 4 (1.4%) were between 55-64 years old-, and 7 (2.4%) are 65 or older.

4.2 The Importance of Online Reviews on Airbnb Customers in Turkey

In order to explore the importance of online reviews in general to Airbnb consumers in Turkey in comparison to the influence of the commercial advertisement, the following research question was formulated: Do online reviews, in general, have a positive impact on the purchasing decisions of the consumers in Turkey more so than the commercial advertisements have?

Table 1 Examining Frequency of the Responses of Survey Question 5

Survey question 5	Responses	Count	Percentage (%)
Online reviews influence my buying decision more than the commercial advertisements.	Strongly disagree	73	18,0
	Disagree	54	13,3
	Undecided	51	12,6
	Agree	62	15,3
	Strongly agree	165	40,7
	Negative	127	31,4

	Neutral	113	27,9
	Positive	165	40,7

Table 1 shows the distribution of the responses given by the participants to the asked question that online reviews influence purchase decisions more than commercial advertisements. The results showed that among respondents, (40,7%) were positive, (27,9%) neutral and (31,4%) negative. This means that they are influenced by online reviews more than the advertisement no matter where it was found, and this explains how important online reviews are.

The pillar that this study is built on is exploring the importance of the online reviews as a free advertisement tool in influencing the purchasing decision process; therefore, the study asked: Research question 2: Can trust in eWOM found in Airbnb increase the likelihood of Airbnb consumer in Turkey purchasing the services on Airbnb? The next 3 tables examine the online review in comparison with other factors that may influence the purchasing decision of the consumers.

Table 2 Comparing Survey Questions 1 and 4

		Survey question 1 Which one shows your best familiarity in using the Airbnb platform?				P
		I used it once	I used it from 2 to 5 times	I used it from 6 to 10 times	I used it more than 10 times	
		n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	
Survey question 4 One of the factors that reduce potential risks when renting a place using	The online reviews of the former consumers	54 (40,9%)	33 (39,8%)	16 (32,0%)	27 (19,3%)	,001**
	The Airbnb platform itself	26 (19,7%)	26 (31,3%)	16 (32,0%)	19 (13,6%)	,004**

Airbnb?						
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Table 2, the results of the Chi-square analysis related to the analysis of responses to the question of the factors that reduce potential risks occurring when a renting place using the Airbnb platform in comparison to the responses that show their frequency using of Airbnb. Accordingly, there is a statistically significant difference between the distributions of answers of the two questions ($p < ,01$). The ratio of the respondents who used Airbnb more than 10 times (19,3%) is statistically significant and lower than the others who agreed that online reviews of the former customers are reducing the potential risks in renting using the Airbnb platform. Those who used it for one time only was (40,9%), and those who used it from 2 to 5 times (39,8%), the respondents who used it from 6 to 10 times (32,0%).

The ratio of the respondents who used the Airbnb platform more than 10 times (13,6%) is statistically significant and lower than the others who agreed that the Airbnb platform reduces the potential risks in renting using the Airbnb platform. Along with those who used it for one time only was (19,7%), and those who used it from 2 to 5 times (31,3%), the respondents who used it from 6 to 10 times (32,0%).

The results above indicates that the frequency of using the platform had an influence on the new consumers more than the frequent users. Therefore, it seems to be that the newer consumers need online reviews to reduce the potential risk in the renting process, more than the regular consumers

Table 3 Comparing Survey Questions 3 and 4

		<p>Survey question 3</p> <p>Which of the Airbnb membership requirements increase your trust in this platform?</p>	
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		Governmental ID, passport, phone number, photo of users.	None of them	P
		n (%)	n (%)	
Survey question 4 What factors that reduce potential risks when renting a place using Airbnb?	The reviews of the former consumers. Airbnb platform itself. The information in the online review. The only the one who tried the services before is able to add a review.	234 (90,0%)	54 (37,2%)	,000**
	None of them	26 (10,0%)	91 (62,8%)	

In Table 3, the results of the Chi-square analysis regarding the distribution of the responses given by the participants to the question of which of the Airbnb membership requirements increases their trust in the platform and comparing their responses to the question asked about the factors reducing the potential risks when renting a place using the Airbnb platform and found that there is a statistically significant difference in the distribution of the responses ($p < ,01$).

According to Chi-square analysis a significant statistic was found, where (62,8%) of those who chose none of the membership requirements increase their trust, and (10,0%) chose none of the factors that reduce the potential risks in renting using Airbnb. This indicate implicitly that review system is more important that the membership requirements.

Table 4 The Frequency of Survey Question 2

Survey question 2	Responses	N	%
The recommendations in the online reviews in Airbnb increase my willingness to purchase the offered	Strongly disagree	52	12,8
	Disagree	34	8,4
	undecided	50	12,3
	Agree	76	18,8
	Strongly Agree	193	47,7

services.	Negative	86	21,2
	Neutral	50	12,3
	Positive	269	66,4

In Table 4, the distributions of the participants' responses to the idea that online reviews on the Airbnb platform increase the desire to purchase those services. Accordingly, (12,8%) of the participants strongly disagree, (8.4%) disagree, (12.3%) undecided, (18.8%) said agree, (47.7%) said strongly agree. In other words, (21.2%) of the participants gave negative responses to the question, (12.3%) are neutral and (66.4%) are positive. This result gives a confirmation of the positive impact of the online reviews found in Airbnb in addition to tables 3 and 2 that implicitly found statistical significance for the online review in comparison to the other factors that influence the purchasing decision. These results were also corroborated by previous studies found in the literature reviews such as Liang (2015) and Bae and Kil-Soo Suh (2017) and others.

The next tables will examine the relationship of the review system mechanisms of Airbnb and the reviews on the online medium in general. The study detected a question for this purpose that asked: Research question 3a: Does the review system and of Airbnb positively influence the trust of consumers in the company and their purchasing decisions?

The consumers of Airbnb are aware that before someone can submit a review, they have already submitted their own membership requirement before they can add a review; therefore, the study also suggested a question to fulfill the answer that asked: Research question 3b: Does the membership requirements of Airbnb positively influence the trust of consumers in the company and their purchasing decisions?

Table 5 Comparing Survey Questions 3 and 2

		Survey question 2	
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		The recommendations in the online reviews in Airbnb increase my willingness to purchase the offered services.			
Survey question 3		Negative	Neutral	Positive	p
Which of the Airbnb membership terms increase your trust in this platform?		n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	
Governmental ID	Yes	13 (15,1%)	14 (28,0%)	76 (28,3%)	,047*
	No	73 (84,9%)	36 (72,0%)	193 (71,7%)	
Passport	Yes	18 (20,9%)	14 (28,0%)	52 (19,3%)	,381
	No	68 (79,1%)	36 (72,0%)	217 (80,7%)	
Phone number	Yes	8 (9,3%)	10 (20,0%)	65 (24,2%)	,012*
	No	78 (90,7%)	41 (80,0%)	204 (75,8%)	
Photo of users-	Yes	17 (19,8%)	6 (12,0%)	62 (23,0%)	,202
	No	69 (80,2%)	44 (88,0%)	207 (77,0%)	
None of the selections	Yes	37 (43,0%)	11 (22,0%)	97 (36,1%)	,047*
	No	49 (57,0%)	39 (78,0%)	172 (63,9%)	

* $p < .05$

Table 5 shows the results of Chi-square analysis regarding the distribution of the responses about the membership requirements of Airbnb that increase guests' trust in this platform in contrast to their answers about the online reviews on Airbnb which increase their trust to purchase the offered services. Accordingly, there are no significant statistical differences found for the passport and the photo of the profile user. It is found that there is a significant statistical difference for the rest of the responses ($p > .05$).

The positive ratio of the governmental ID is (28,3%) and this has revealed higher than the negative ratio (15,1%). The phone number as a membership requirement shows that (24,2%) were positive, and this is higher than the negative rate of (9,3%). Those who chose none of the membership requirements were (36,1%) positive, and this is lower than the negative rate (43,0%). To conclude it is clear that the governmental ID is the most influential factor to reduce the potential risk while renting via Airbnb. It also showed the statistical significance of the phone number too, while the rest of the membership requirements didn't show statistical significance.

Table 6 Comparing Survey Questions 3 and 5

		Survey question 5			
		Online reviews influence my buying decision more than the commercial advertisements.			
Survey question 3		Negative	Neutral	Positive	p
Which of the Airbnb membership requirements increase your trust in this platform?		n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	
Governmental ID	Yes	23 (18,1%)	40 (35,4%)	40 (24,2%)	,008**
	No	104 (81,9%)	73 (64,6%)	125 (75,8%)	
passport	Yes	27 (21,3%)	25 (22,1%)	32 (19,4%)	,846
	No	100 (78,7%)	88 (77,9%)	133 (80,6%)	
phone number	Yes	20 (15,7%)	28 (24,8%)	35 (21,2%)	,214
	No	107 (84,3%)	85 (75,2%)	130 (78,8%)	
photo of users.	Yes	24 (18,9%)	29 (25,7%)	32 (19,4%)	,354
	No	103 (81,1%)	84 (74,3%)	133 (80,6%)	
None of the selections	Yes	44 (34,6%)	32 (28,3%)	69 (41,8%)	,066
	No	83 (65,4%)	81 (71,7%)	96 (58,2%)	

** $p < ,01$

In Table 6, the results of the Chi-square analysis regarding the distribution of responses to the question asked which Airbnb membership requirements increase your trust in the platform, in comparison to the responses given by the participants to the question that asked online reviews influence my purchasing decision more than commercial advertisements. It is found that there is a significant statistical difference for the governmental ID only ($p < ,05$). Those who positively agree with the governmental ID requirement (24.2%) are significantly higher than those who had a negative response (18.1%). Meanwhile, it found no statistical significance to the passport, phone number, photo of users.

This table shows that whoever prefers the online reviews more than the commercial advertisement is interested in the governmental ID the most, as it had the highest positive ratio and was statistically significant, according to Chi-square analysis, while the rest of the membership requirements didn't show any statistical significance. Both Tables 5 and 6 showed a priority by the consumers to choose the governmental ID in comparison to their answers about the importance of online reviews found in the online medium generally or within Airbnb specifically.

Table 7 Comparing Survey Questions 4 and 5

		Survey question 5 Online reviews influence my buying decision more than the commercial advertisements.			
Survey question 4		Negative	Neutral	Positive	p
What factors reduce potential risks when renting a place using Airbnb?		n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	
The reviews of the former consumers.	Yes	25 (19,7%)	45 (39,8%)	60 (36,4%)	,001**
	No	102 (80,3%)	68 (60,2%)	105 (63,6%)	
Airbnb platform itself.	Yes	25 (19,7%)	29 (25,7%)	33 (20,0%)	,443
	No	102 (80,3%)	84 (74,3%)	132 (80,0%)	
The information in the online review.	Yes	16 (12,6%)	37 (32,7%)	35 (21,2%)	,001**
	No	111 (87,4%)	76 (67,3%)	130 (78,8%)	
The only the one who tried the services before is able to add a review.	Yes	19 (15,0%)	24 (21,2%)	40 (24,2%)	,146
	No	108 (85,0%)	89 (78,8%)	125 (75,8%)	
None of the above	Yes	49 (38,6%)	22 (19,5%)	46 (27,9%)	,005**
	No	78 (61,4%)	91 (80,5%)	119 (72,1%)	

** $p < ,01$

Table 7 shows the results of the Chi-square analysis regarding the distribution of the responses of the factors that reduce the potential risks when renting a place using the Airbnb platform in comparison to the responses given to the question that asked about the

online reviews affecting purchasing decisions more than commercial advertisements. Accordingly, it found there is no statistical significance of two of the factors that reduce potential risks when renting a place using Airbnb, which are the Airbnb platform itself, and the only one who tried the services before is able to add a review ($p > .05$). However, there was a statistically significant difference between to the other factors the reviews of the former consumers, the information in the online review with none of the above ($p < .01$).

Those who had a positive response to the question asked that online reviews influence my buying decision more than the commercial advertisements and chose the factor of (The reviews of the former consumers) were (36,4%) positive and this is significant and higher than the negative rate (19,7%). Those who had a positive response to factor that say (the information of the online review) were (21,2%) and this is statistically significant and higher than the negative rate (12,6%). Those who had a positive response to the question asked about the online reviews influence my buying decision more than the commercial advertisements and chose the factor of (None of the above) were (27,9%) and this is statistically significant and lower than the negative rate (38,6%).

The analysis of this table showed a significance correspondence in accepting the influence of online reviews and the information found in that review, as it found a statistical significance according to Chi-square analysis. It seems to be that the importance of the information of the online review is playing an important role on influencing the consumers' decision, and this was also confirmed by previous studies such as Park et al (2011) which confirmed that the credibility of the eWOM does not rely on the beliefs of the writer but depends on the information contained in the eWOM. Wang, Yao, and Kang (2011) also proved that consumers are looking for real experiences in the online review that indicate the information found there. Other studies also confirmed the same importance such as Bae and Kil-Soo Suh (2017), Hu, Liu, and Zhang (2008), Park, Jalilvand, and Samiei (2012). And Liang (2015) established that Airbnb consumers frequently use Airbnb not just because they are interested in the price, but in fact, they

are looking for an authentic local experience, and they perceive that they can find these authentic local experiences within the reviews of the Airbnb platform.

Table 8 Comparing Survey Questions 2 and 4

		Survey question 2 The recommendations in the online reviews in Airbnb increase my willingness to purchase the offered services.			
Survey question 4		Negative	Neutral	Positive	p
What factors that reduce potential risks when renting a place using Airbnb?		n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	
The reviews of the former consumers.	Yes	22 (25,6%)	14 (28,0%)	94 (34,9%)	,216
	No	64 (74,4%)	36 (72,0%)	175 (65,1%)	
Airbnb platform itself.	Yes	9 (10,5%)	9 (18,0%)	69 (25,7%)	,009**
	No	77 (89,5%)	41 (82,0%)	200 (74,3%)	
The information in the online review.	Yes	8 (9,3%)	12 (24,0%)	68 (25,3%)	,007**
	No	78 (90,7%)	38 (76,0%)	201 (74,7%)	
The only the one who tried the services before is able to add a review.	Yes	11 (12,8%)	7 (14,0%)	65 (24,2%)	,036*
	No	75 (87,2%)	43 (86,0%)	204 (75,8%)	
None of the above	Yes	38 (44,2%)	14 (28,0%)	65 (24,2%)	,002**
	No	48 (55,8%)	36 (72,0%)	204 (75,8%)	

** $p < ,01$ * $p < ,05$

Table 8 compares the recommendations on the online reviews found on Airbnb that increase the willingness of consumers to purchase the offered services with their responses to a survey question on the factors that reduce the risks in renting places listed on Airbnb. According to the Chi-square analysis, it established that there is no significant statistical ratio between the question asked if the reviews in Airbnb increase the willingness to purchase and the online reviews of the former consumers as it is one of the factors that reduce the potential risks in renting using Airbnb ($p > ,05$), although it found a significant statistical ratio for the rest of the factors ($p < ,01$, $p < ,05$).

Those who had chosen Airbnb itself as a factor influenced them and had a (25,7%) positive response to the question asked about recommendations in the online reviews found in Airbnb that consequently increase the willingness of the consumers to purchase the offered services. This is statistically significant and higher than the negative response (10,5%).

Those who had chosen the information found in the review as a factor that influences them and had a (25,3%) positive response to the question asked about recommendations in the online reviews found in Airbnb increasing the willingness of the consumers to purchase the offered services, and this is statistically significant and higher than the negative response (9,3%). This resulted in relation to the previous table that the information of the review is an important factor that influences the consumer decision no matter where these reviews are found.

Those who had chosen the only one who tried the service is able to add a review as a factor that influences them had a (24,2%) positive response to the question asked about recommendations in the online reviews, found in Airbnb that increase the willingness of the consumers to purchase the offered services, and this is statistically significant and greater than the negative response (12,8%).

Those who had chosen the option that none of the factors that influence them (24,2%) and had a positive response to the question asked about recommendations in the online reviews found in Airbnb that increase the willingness of the consumers to purchase the offered services. This is also statistically important and less than the negative response (44,2%).

This table summarizes the result of a greater acceptance for the choice of Airbnb itself, and the fact that only the one who tried the services before is able to add a review. This importance of the Airbnb platform and its standards and practices in addition to the well-designed review system it has been also confirmed by the other studies such as by Kamal and Chen (2016), Wu and Shen (2018), Mittendorf (2016), Lavelle (2017), Liang (2015),

Zervas and Byers (2015), Keymolen (2016), and Khaliman and Rosco (2018). By looking at tables 7 and 8 the shared issue between them is the factor that reduces the potential risk in renting from Airbnb or any online platform – the information that is found in the review. When it comes to Airbnb specifically, then the consumers preferred the standards and the practices of Airbnb such as: Only the one who tried the services before is able to add a review, the unique reviews existed in Airbnb and the platform itself as a source of trust. This is a significant result that shows how important the review system of Airbnb is, as well as how it is playing an important role in affecting the trust of consumers and eventually their purchasing decision. These results were also confirmed in the former studies existed in the literature review such as Chang, Lee, and Huang (2010), Bae and Kil-Soo Suh (2017), Ert and Fleischer (2019), (Fradkin and Holtz (2018), Botsman and Rogers (2010) and Abrahao et al (2017).

Table 9 The Frequency Responses of Survey Question 4

Survey question 4		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
One of the things that reduce the potential risk in renting via Airbnb is					
Yes	The reviews of the former consumers.	130	32,1	100,0	100,0
No	The reviews of the former consumers.	275	67,9		
Total		405	100,0		
Yes	Airbnb platform itself.	87	21,5	100,0	100,0
No	Airbnb platform itself.	318	78,5		
Total		405	100,0		
Yes	The information in the online review.	88	21,7	100,0	100,0
No	The information in the online review.	317	78,3		
Total		405	100,0		

Yes	The only the one who tried the services before is able to add a review.	83	20,5	100,0	100,0
No	The only the one who tried the services before is able to add a review.	322	79,5		
Total		405	100,0		
Yes	None of the above	117	28,9	100,0	100,0
No	None of the above	288	71,1		
Total		405	100,0		

The table shows that the highest ratio (32,1%) is for those who chose the online review of the former consumers as the most influential factor that reduces the risk in renting a place using Airbnb, (21,5) for those who chose Airbnb itself, followed by those who chose the information found in the review with (21,7%) followed by those who chose the only the one who tried the services before is able to add a review with (20,5%). Finally, those who chose none of the previous factors were (28,9%). The selections in this table resembled the review system of Airbnb. This table confirm the importance of the information found in the review, and this was also discussed in the cross tables which showed the same priority for the reviews and information found within that review (See Tables 4, 1, and 7).

Table 10 Frequency of The Responses to Survey Question 3

Survey question 3		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Which one of the membership requirements increase your trust in the platform?					
Yes	Governmental ID	103	25,4	100,0	100,0
No	Governmental ID	302	74,6		
Total		405	100,0		
Yes	passport	84	20,7	100,0	100,0
No	passport	321	79,3		

Total		405	100,0		
Yes	phone number	83	20,5	100,0	100,0
No	phone number	322	79,5		
Total		405	100,0		
Yes	photo of users	85	21,0	100,0	100,0
No	photo of users	320	79,0		
Total		405	100,0		
Yes	None of the selection	145	35,8	100,0	100,0
No	None of the selection	260	64,2		
Total		405	100,0		

It appears to be that the most important membership requirement is the governmental ID as it had the highest ratio (25,4%) followed by the photo of the users (21,0%). Those who chose the passport were (20,7%). Those who chose the phone number with (20,5%) while those who chose none of the membership requirements were (35,8%).

Table 6 and table 5 compared the membership requirements with the online review in Airbnb and the online reviews in the online medium in general. Both tables found the governmental ID is a high priority for the consumers. Also, by examining the membership requirement alone in this table it showed a priority for the Airbnb consumers in Turkey to trust the governmental ID the most. In the literature review Zervas and Byers (2015) found that the membership requirements in Airbnb make the platform more trustworthy, while Fradkin, Grewal, and Holtz (2018) found that high resolution profile photo was one of the elements that increased the success of the platform. Whereas While Ert & Magen (2016) found the user photo in the profile is a double-edged sword that may have a negative impact.

4.3 The Influence of the Education Level on the Purchasing Decision

Table 10 Comparing Survey Question 6 with 2

	Survey question 6 What's your highest level of education?						
Survey question 2 The recommendations in the online reviews in Airbnb increase my willingness to purchase the offered services.	Elementary and secondary School	High school	2 Years University	4 Years University	Master	PHD	p
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	
Strongly Disagree	8 (13,3%)	10 (15,6%)	6 (10,0%)	10 (9,3%)	5 (9,4%)	11 (21,6%)	,006**
Disagree	6 (10,0%)	3 (4,7%)	8 (13,3%)	5 (4,7%)	3 (5,7%)	8 (15,7%)	
Undecided	4 (6,7%)	6 (9,4%)	11 (18,3%)	16 (15,0%)	9 (17,0%)	3 (5,9%)	
Agree	5 (8,3%)	9 (14,1%)	10 (16,7%)	33 (30,8%)	9 (17,0%)	9 (17,6%)	
Strongly agree	37 (61,7%)	36 (56,3%)	25 (41,7%)	43 (40,2%)	27 (50,9%)	20 (39,2%)	

** $p < ,01$

Table 11 shows the results of the Chi-square analysis regarding the distribution of the willingness to purchase services based on the influence of the online reviews in the Airbnb platform according to the education levels of the participants. According to this, there is a statistically significant difference between the distributions of the purchasing services with their willingness based on the online reviews on the Airbnb platform and their level of education ($p < 01$).

Ph.D. holders answered with (21.6%) strongly disagree that online reviews increase their willingness to purchase services from Airbnb showing statistical significance followed by the respondents with primary and secondary school education (13,3%), then the individuals with high school diplomas (15,6%), respondents who attended two years of university (10,0%), those who have four-year university education (9,3%), and those with a master's degree (9,4%).

Among Ph.D. holders (15,7%) disagreed that online reviews increase their willingness to purchase services from Airbnb, which is statistically greater than the rate of respondents at primary and secondary school (10,0%), those at high school (4,7%), students with two years of university (13,3%), those who have four years of university education (4,7%), and individuals with a master's degree (5,7%). In summary, Ph.D. holders had a higher negative response to this question than respondents with less formal education.

Four-year university respondents (30,8%) agreed that online reviews increase their willingness to purchase services from Airbnb, which was statistically significant and higher than the rate of respondents at primary- and secondary-school level (8,3%), those at high school (14,1%), respondents who attended two years of university (16,7%), those with a master's degree (17,0%), and respondents with a Ph.D. (17,6%).

Primary and secondary-school respondents (61,7%) answered that they strongly agree that online reviews increase their willingness to purchase services from Airbnb, produced a statistically significant result and higher than the rate of respondents with only high-school education (56,3%), those who attended two years of university (41,7%), four-year university respondents (40,2%), those with a master's degree (50,9%), and individuals with a Ph.D. was (39,2%). The results suggest that the willingness to purchase from Airbnb is affected by the level of education of the consumer.

Table 11 Comparing Survey Question 6 with 2

Survey question 4	Survey question 6 Education level						P
	Elementary and secondary	High school	2 Years University	4 Years University	Master	PHD	
The factors that reduces the potential risks when renting using Airbnb	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	
Airbnb platform itself	5 (8,3%)	10 (15,6%)	16 (26,7%)	39 (36,4%)	9 (17,0%)	7 (13,7%)	,000**
It is not the Airbnb platform	55 (91,7%)	54 (84,4%)	44 (73,3%)	68 (63,6%)	44 (83,0%)	44 (86,3%)	

Table 12. The results of the Chi-square analysis regarding the question asked about the factors that reduce the potential risks when renting using Airbnb and its relation to the education level of the participants. According to this, there is a statistically significant difference between the distribution of answers according to the education level and those who chose the platform of Airbnb itself as the factor that reduces the risks in the process of renting from Airbnb ($p < .01$).

The ratio of those who are with primary and secondary education is 8,3%: That is the lowest ratio to believe the Airbnb platform itself reduces the potential risks of renting a room using Airbnb, those with high school is (15,6%), respondents with two years of university (26,7%), and those who completed four years university education is (36,4%), respondents with a master's degree (17,0%) and for Ph.D. respondents (13,7%). Both table 11 and table 12 confirmed that Airbnb consumers' purchasing decisions are influenced by the level of education.

5. CONCLUSION

Day after day the number of companies moving to the online business medium is increasing with the increasing number of social media platforms users. These users are targeted by advertising techniques continuously, and consumers need to feel safe about the purchasing process. First of all, they are reading previous reviews about the offered services and/or products, where the importance of the trusted review systems comes in. Many studies proved this importance in Airbnb and other online business companies that were mentioned in the literature review such as Chang, Lee, and Huang (2010), Bae and Kil-Soo Suh (2017), Ert and Fleischer (2019), Fradkin and Holtz (2018), Botsman and Rogers (2010), and Abrahao et al (2017). The online reviews are the most credible sources to consumers in order to make an informed decision about the offered services or products because the reviewer is a former consumer who has no interest in the sales of the company. Furthermore, most importantly they explain their opinions on the offered product or service. This allows companies to use the reviews system as a free marketing tool. Some companies exploit it with unethical marketing tactics such as adding counterfeit positive reviews online about their products to increase their sales. Meanwhile, other companies developed a review system in which only someone who tried the service, or the product, is able to add a review and to be the source of trust for the newcomers, such as Airbnb by the practices and the mechanisms they created for this purpose. Why are online reviews important in this platform more than in other online platforms? In short rental platforms, the services are intangible, and the experience of someone who tried it before is important because it is a unique experience. The need for trusted online reviews gets more sensitive because the consumer will share a house or a room and will be directly in touch with a stranger. Therefore, studying the influence of the online review could help the online platforms not only in short rental platforms but in any field of business to turn the review system into a competitive advantage. This study

deducted to explore the review system of the Airbnb company and to test the influence of online reviews and understanding of online trust by Airbnb consumers in Turkey.

The study proposed a question to start testing the impact of online reviews broadly: Do online reviews, in general, have a positive impact on the purchasing decisions of the consumers in Turkey more so than the commercial advertisements have? this research questions were chosen to initiate an examination on understanding by what the consumers in Turkey are influenced the most. The study found that consumers influenced by online reviews more than the advertisement no matter where it was found, and this explains how important online reviews are.

The study answered Research question 2: Do trust in online reviews found in Airbnb platform increase the likelihood of the consumers in Turkey to purchasing decisions on Airbnb? The results found online reviews on Airbnb increase the likelihood of Airbnb consumers in Turkey to purchase services. This result was also corroborated by previous studies found in the literature reviews such as Liang (2015) and Bae and Kil-Soo Suh (2017) and others. An interesting result found that no previous study found before, which was that the newer consumers need online reviews to reduce the potential risk in the renting process, more than the regular consumers.

Worth mentioning, this study included Airbnb practices and mechanisms that no previous studies did the same before such as the membership requirements, the factors that reduce the potential risks in renting using Airbnb, and the review system. Due to Airbnb having a unique review system that has an important impact on the consumers' purchasing decisions, this study built on the former studies found in the literature review. Therefore, it is important to examine how this review system influences consumers' purchasing decisions. Research question 3a asks Whether the review system of Airbnb positively influence the trust of consumers in the company and their purchasing decisions? And Part 2: Does the membership requirements of Airbnb positively influence the trust of consumers in the company and their purchasing decisions? The study found that Airbnb review system positively influence the trust of consumers in the company and their

purchasing decisions. The most influential elements in this review system were the information found in that reviews and because of the only ones who tried Airbnb before are able to add a review. The membership requirements took a place in influencing the consumers trust and purchasing decisions too. The most influential one was the governmental ID. Another significant result was that, the governmental ID has greater impact on the trust of consumers in Turkey whether for Airbnb or in any other online platforms. Because of the review system and the membership requirements of Airbnb consumers consider the reviews on Airbnb as authentic reviews.

One of the important things to differentiate this study from the previous studies is that it examined the influence of the education level of the consumers on their behavior in the pre-purchasing process and tested their trust in the online reviews and the company itself, according to their level of education. The results confirmed that the education level had an influence on the consumers' willingness to purchase from Airbnb. It found statistical significance for Ph.D. holders as they are less likely to be influenced by the reviews if Airbnb while four-year university students and those with primary and secondary education more likely to accept the influence of the online review found in Airbnb. By testing the level of education regarding the importance of the Airbnb platform itself as a factor that reduces the risks in renting from Airbnb, it found those with the two-year and four-year university students are more likely trust the platform of Airbnb, whereas those with primary and secondary education less likely to trust the platform.

5.1 Implications

Airbnb is a pioneer company in the hospitality industry that offers short rental services with a unique experience. Some lights had been shed on it with the increasing number of social media platforms and users, due to people mostly showing a tendency to share their new experiences online. The company users are expanding too therefore, it is quite important to study how people are influenced to use this platform. Also, what motivates them the most to trust it and keep choosing it? What makes this platform special while many other platforms had emerged after it? The main strength of this study is that it

studied only the current consumers who used Airbnb at least one time, and the study suggested dependable factors that influence the purchasing decision process.

Academically, this study contributes and enriches the literature of tourism and the sharing economy resources, by focusing on Airbnb consumers in Turkey that had never been researched before in this field. The study examined the Airbnb platform mechanisms, practices, and standards which had been studied before individually, but this study brought all of them together and examined specifically Airbnb consumers in Turkey, whereas previous studies conducted were mainly examined the United States, Canada, and some European countries. The finding of the study was also appealing as it showed that those consumers are affected the most by the governmental ID first as a membership requirement and most of the factors that increase their trust were the reviews in Airbnb and the information of those reviews and if it was not to be found in Airbnb. For any other online platform then they will be interested in the reviews too and the information of the reviews as a factor that reduces the potential risk in purchasing.

Various helpful implications are found through the results of this study for practitioners especially in peer-to-peer economies who are concerned about improving their business platform: Firstly, the importance of the reviews and the system that reviews are found in. Secondly the standards of the platform and most importantly building a secured interpersonal platform that enables consumers to check profiles of whom is writing the review. Including things like their photos or their social media account by offering some advantages for those who do so. Being flagged as a secure profile, many popular peer-to-peer economy platforms are without a review system such as the pioneer shopping platform in Turkey sahibinden.com, for example. Adding a secured trusted review system could increase the sales and attract new consumers, in turn helping to identify good or bad sellers. Considering implementation of some standards will help reduce retaliation amongst users. As the study researched the understanding of online trust of Airbnb consumer in Turkey, especially in tourism, the findings of this study could help the tourism organizations within Turkey and the online tourism platforms outside of Turkey

when they are willing to target consumers in Turkey. They will then have valuable findings that will help improve their business.

5.2 Limitations and Future Studies

Every study has limitations. The study reported here is no exception. Firstly, only those who are using Google Consumer Surveys responded were included in the sample as it was the only way ensure the appropriate target for the scope of the study. Airbnb Company was contacted within the past 2 years of the study multiple times. Yet, the company was not helpful with providing the approximate number of users in Turkey or to distribute the survey to the users.

Like all of the surveying methods available, any survey is facing challenges from different types of biases such as; modal, response, drop-off, or sampling. One of the main challenges for online surveys is decreasing the sampling bias, to make sure that the sample represented the general population of internet users. Google Consumer Surveys do not fully include the size of the internet users, it is exclusive only for those who are using Google Consumer Surveys. One more limitation is that; the users of the Internet are usually educated and younger people where in the reported study 71.10% of the respondents were between 18-34. As the Google survey is a paid tool that charged for each completed response 10.6 TL. Considering other free or less expensive surveying tools for the future studies will be a good idea to include larger number of respondents.

Secondly, people who did not use Airbnb may have had different perceptions because it was not possible to target these people with an online survey, it had to be done with interviews to explain to them how the company is working so they would be able to understand the bigger picture and respond. The study examined the opinion of the guests; therefore, it will be useful if future studies examine the perspective of the hosts and what is influencing their trust in accepting a rent purchase for example. Also, the why question tool would be good way to expand the answers of the participants to see why individuals trust factor X more than Y, that which is achievable by making interviews. For example,

why the consumers in Turkey preferred the governmental ID as the most trustworthy tool to increase their trust. Another interesting finding was that the highest ratio of the survey respondents was male (76.4%) while (23.6%) were female, and those who were between 18 and to 34 years old made up 71.10% of the sample. Was this because of the demographic makeup of Google Consumer Surveys users or are Airbnb users mostly male and young? In order to answer this question, future studies can target a specific gender or age group and compare their beliefs and behavior about online purchasing.



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APPENDIX A

A.1 The Turkish Survey Questions in The Original Form

Aşağıdakilerden hangisi Airbnb platformuyla olanaşinalığınızı eniyigösterir?

Airbnb'yi hiç duymadım.

Airbnb'yi duydum ama daha önce hiç kullanmadım.

Airbnb'nin nasıl çalıştığını biliyorum ama hiç kullanmadım

Daha önce bir kere kullandım.

Daha önce 2 ila 5 kere kullandım.

Daha önce 6 ila 10 kere kullandım.

Daha önce 10 kereden fazla kullandım.

2. Airbnb platformundaki online yorumlarda yapılan tavsiyeler o hizmetleri satın alma isteğimi arttırır.

Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum

Katılmıyorum

Kararsızım

Katılıyorum

Kesinlikle Katılıyorum

3. Aşağıdaki Airbnb üyelik şartlarından hangileri bu platforma güveninizi arttırır?

Resmî kimlik

Pasaport

Telefon numarası

Kullanıcıların fotoğrafı

Yukarıdakilerin hiçbiri

4. Aşağıdakilerden hangisi ya da hangileri Airbnb

üzerinden odakiralarken oluşabilecek potansiyel riskleri azaltan faktörlerdendir?

Daha önce kimisafirlerin online yorumları

Airbnb platformunun kendisi

Online yorumlardaki bilgiler

Sadece verilen hizmetlerden daha önce yararlanmış olanlar

Yukarıdakilerin hiçbiri

5. İnternet üzerinden alışveriş yaparken yapılmış online yorumları ticari reklamlardan daha fazla satın alma kararı etkiler.

Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum

Katılmıyorum

Kararsızım

Katılıyorum

Kesinlikle Katılıyorum

6. Eğitim durumunuz nedir?

İlköğretim

Lise

4 yıllık üniversite

2 yıllık üniversite

Yüksek lisans

Doktora

Diğer