



# The Influence Of Knowledge, Involvement, And Trust On Customer Decisions At Sutan Raja Hotel In Palu City

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the influence of knowledge, involvement, and trust on customer decisions to stay at Sutan Raja Hotel in Palu City. The target population consists of guests who have previously stayed at the hotel. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, resulting in a total of 82 respondents. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using multiple regression analysis. The findings reveal three key points. First, knowledge, involvement, and trust simultaneously have a significant effect on customer decision-making when choosing to stay at Sutan Raja Hotel. Second, when examined individually, knowledge does not have a significant influence on customer decisions. Third, both involvement and trust show a significant partial influence on customers' decisions to stay at the hotel. These results suggest that while customers may not prioritize knowledge or information about the hotel when making their decision, their level of involvement and the trust they place in the hotel play a crucial role. This implies that building strong customer relationships and trust, as well as encouraging customer engagement, are essential strategies for increasing customer retention and satisfaction in the hospitality industry.

## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is known for its diverse tourist destinations and rich cultural heritage. This is evident from the large number of domestic and international tourists who visit the country. These travelers, of course, require accommodation during their trips, such as temporary lodging options including boarding houses, inns, and hotels. In line with this, Yulanda et al. (2017) stated that tourists need temporary accommodation when traveling. A hotel is a form of accommodation that is commercially managed for the public, offering lodging services along with food and beverages (Ketut Suardana et al., 2023). The hotel industry in Indonesia continues to grow rapidly, particularly in Central Sulawesi Province. The growth in accommodation services is largely dominated by hotels, both star-rated and budget types. According to data from the

Central Statistics Agency of Central Sulawesi (2024), the number of accommodation service businesses increased by 9.27% in 2023 compared to 2022.

Customer knowledge of hotel products and services forms a crucial foundation in the decision-making process. Well-informed consumers tend to be more confident in selecting hotels that match their needs and preferences. Furthermore, customer involvement reflects the extent to which customers are engaged and interested in hotel services, which influences their information search behavior and purchasing decisions. The interaction between service providers and consumers in shaping brand image has become a common phenomenon and can be tested for its influence on purchasing decisions. Branding strategies today are increasingly implemented through digital media platforms. Marketers must leverage social media networks as new marketing tools. These factors can be optimized in marketing strategies to influence consumer decisions (Zahara et al., 2021). The mutual involvement of marketers, consumers, and organizations is a crucial innovation for collaborative economic growth and business expansion (Wahyuni et al., 2019).

In the hospitality industry, providing a pleasant and memorable experience is key to building long-term customer relationships. Positive experiences become a major motivation for repeat visits (Rini et al., 2024). Trust is a complex element of human relationships and is present when consumers are willing to rely entirely on a brand for future interactions. Establishing trust requires a strong commitment to reduce uncertainty, which is often inherent in service industries, including hospitality. Hotel businesses aim to earn consumer trust in their services and facilities, which in turn influences their decision to stay. Hotels must fulfill and deliver on their promises both spoken and written to build consumer trust. In today's competitive business world, purchasing decisions are critical for maintaining market share and outperforming competitors (Bachri et al., 2023). A purchasing decision is an integrative process combining knowledge to evaluate and choose among various products. Consumer decisions are approaches to problem-solving when buying goods or services to meet needs and desires (Setyorini & Ratno, 2020). These decisions often reflect behavioral intentions linked to service strategies focused on satisfaction and loyalty. Consumers typically compare different hotels before deciding where to stay.

Overall, the influence of knowledge, involvement, and trust on hotel-stay decisions reflects the complexity of market dynamics in the hospitality sector. Research focusing on these factors can offer valuable insights for hotel managers to design more effective and appealing marketing strategies. Sutan Raja Hotel is a star-rated hotel in Palu City, strategically located near Mutiara SIS Al-Jufrie Airport. This makes it a practical choice for out-of-town guests on business, government duties, or vacations. A preliminary survey of Sutan Raja Hotel customers revealed that most guests were well-informed about the hotel through social media and online booking platforms. Many actively searched for information and considered reviews before making a booking decision. Trust in service quality and prior experiences also played a major role in their choices. In the context of Sutan Raja Hotel, effectively managing the three factors knowledge, involvement, and trust can help increase occupancy rates and competitiveness in an increasingly saturated hotel market. Therefore, it is crucial for the hotel to understand how these factors interact and influence customer decisions.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

A social psychology expert, Icek Ajzen, developed an important theory to examine the relationship between attitudes and behavior. According to Widyarani (2009), the likelihood of an attitude manifesting as behavior can be explained by a theory known as the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). The Theory of Planned Behavior was introduced by Icek Ajzen in 1985 through his article *"From Intentions to Actions: A Theory of Planned Behavior."* TPB is based on various

attitude theories such as learning theory, value-expectancy theory, consistency theories, and attribution theory. The Theory of Planned Behavior is an extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). In psychology, the Theory of Planned Behavior explains the relationship between beliefs and behavior. According to Manuntung (2018), the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is a theory that describes the causes of behavioral intentions.

## **Hypotheses**

### **The Influence of Knowledge on Hotel Stay Decision-Making**

According to Agustino and Syaifullah (2020), product knowledge includes all information about a product, both in terms of function and form, including its category, brand, features, specifications, and price. In general, knowledge refers to facts, feelings, or experiences known by an individual or group (Abd Rahman et al., 2015). According to Roisiyatin and Raudatun Nisa (2021), the indicators of knowledge are divided into several aspects, including:

1. Product Knowledge – the image a particular product holds in the consumer's mind. Positioning may be more crucial for success than the actual characteristics of the product.
2. Usage Knowledge – storage, expenditure, and usage are often linked to social class. Higher-class consumers tend to be future-oriented and confident in their financial management abilities.
3. Purchase Knowledge – encompasses a variety of information consumers possess, closely related to how they acquire products.

Syamsul & Ponirin (2017) stated that product knowledge, including corporate image, product image, and user image, significantly affects purchase decisions and has a partial effect on repeat purchases. The influence of product knowledge can be optimized through marketing strategies. Many marketing concepts serve various purposes depending on the growth of consumer knowledge and the goals of a given company (Djuma et al., 2015). One effective method is utilizing social media to broaden public awareness of a product. According to Fadjar et al. (2022), the rise of social media has influenced consumer behavior, enabling them to quickly and easily access information, which in turn often shapes their psychology and decision-making based on what they frequently see.

**H4: Knowledge has a significant influence on customer decisions.**

### **Customer Decision-Making (Y)**

Consumers go through several stages when making purchasing decisions. A purchase decision is a process through which consumers choose a product—either goods or services—that fits their needs (Tamara Citra, 2016). The indicators of customer decision-making include:

1. Confidence in a product – consumers select one option from several alternatives based on quality and other factors that reinforce their decision.
2. Purchase habits – repeated purchases of the same product. Once consumers are satisfied and perceive lasting benefits, they tend to be loyal and avoid switching.
3. Speed of decision-making – some consumers make quick decisions based on simple rules and limited information.

According to Fattah et al. (2024), marketers can tailor their strategies by understanding the customer decision-making process. This aligns with Kotler & Keller (2016), who explain that the purchase decision process includes five stages: problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior. Therefore, variables such as knowledge, involvement, and trust are crucial to understand, as they influence these stages.

**H1: Knowledge, involvement, and trust simultaneously influence customer decisions.**

### **The Influence of Involvement on Hotel Stay Decisions**

Customer involvement is a behavior that allows customers to voluntarily contribute to a brand, where such contributions are not limited to transactions. These contributions can take the form of feedback, opinions, or ideas. Forms of contribution may include electronic word-of-mouth, referrals, and others that can increase company revenue (Talwar et al., 2020). With customer involvement, brands become more focused on fulfilling customer needs by delivering added value or outperforming competitors to build trust and commitment in long-term relationships. This reciprocal relationship between companies and consumers is considered beneficial and has become widespread in recent times. From the consumer's side, they receive the assistance they need, while the company gains brand exposure to the broader public, which in turn motivates and encourages product selection. Consumer involvement is now considered an essential strategy deliberately activated by marketers to institutionalize and sustain competitive advantage. According to Utami & Saputri (2020), there are five indicators used to measure involvement:

1. Enthusiasm – reflects the level of excitement and interest in a brand.
2. Attention – indicates the degree of attention given to a brand.
3. Absorption – reflects a state in which the customer is deeply engaged with the brand to the point of losing track of time.
4. Interaction – shows interactions between the customer and the brand or with other customers.
5. Identification – reflects the level of unity the customer feels with the brand.

In line with the above explanation, Ponirin et al. (2024) argue that brand involvement and familiarity have a positive impact on consumer loyalty, which in turn influences decision-making.

**H3: There is an influence of involvement on customer decision-making.**

### **The Influence of Trust on Hotel Stay Decisions**

Trust is the expectation held by an individual that another person's statements can be relied upon. Building trust with consumers is not an easy task in the context of increasingly intense competition. Consumer trust in a service company arises from the company's good reputation in the community, employee honesty, and the ability to fulfill promises generating customer satisfaction that fosters trust. There are three main factors that shape a person's trust in a company's brand: benevolence, ability, and integrity. According to Mowen and Minor (as cited in Donni, 2017), trust is all the knowledge possessed by the consumer and all the conclusions they make about an object, its attributes, and its benefits. The indicators of the trust variable, according to Linda Sujana Pura (2020), include:

1. Honesty – the most crucial value for avoiding deception that harms others. Honesty is reflected in the alignment of words and reality, although it is often difficult to implement.
2. Competence – the ability to carry out tasks effectively based on knowledge and experience, acknowledged by society.
3. Openness – a transparent attitude that rejects secrecy, necessary for building trust between both parties.

**H4: Trust has a significant influence on customer decision-making.**

## **METHODS**

According to Sugiyono (2019), in a quantitative approach, the term population refers to a group of objects or subjects within a generalization area that share certain characteristics and traits in accordance with criteria established by the researcher. This population becomes the focus of the study, from which conclusions are drawn. Meanwhile, a sample is a subset of that population. This study employs a quantitative research approach, involving 100 respondents

who had stayed at the hotel within the past month. The sampling technique used is purposive sampling, with the following criteria for guests of Sutan Raja Hotel in Palu City:

1. Currently staying or having stayed at least once,
2. Aged over 17 years,
3. Actively participated in deciding the place to stay, not merely following someone else's decision.

Based on these criteria, 82 respondents qualified to be included in the sample. The tests conducted in this study include validity test, reliability test, classical assumption test, multiple regression test, F-test, and t-test, using SPSS version 26.0.

## RESULTS

### Descriptive Analysis

**Table 1. Respondent Characteristics**

No	Description	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Age	< 20 years	17	20.7%
		21 – 25 years	51	62.2%
		26 – 30 years	13	15.9%
		31 – 35 years	1	1.2%
		> 36 years	0	0.0%
2	Place of Residence	Palu City	62	75.6%
		Outside Palu City	20	24.4%
3	Number of Stays	1 time	36	43.9%
		2 times	30	36.6%
		More than 3 times	16	19.5%

The respondents in this study generally came from a younger age group, with the majority being in their early twenties. This indicates that the customers of Sutan Raja Hotel in Palu City are predominantly young individuals who tend to be active, dynamic, and likely accustomed to independently seeking information and making decisions, including when choosing accommodation.

In terms of place of residence, most respondents are residents of Palu City. This suggests that, in addition to serving out-of-town guests, the hotel is also a preferred choice for local residents for various purposes such as staycations, business activities, or family events. It shows that the hotel is not only a destination for travelers but has also become part of the accommodation needs of the local community.

Regarding their stay experience, most respondents had only stayed at the hotel once or twice. Only a small portion had stayed more frequently. This indicates that most customers are still in the early stages of experiencing the hotel's services, suggesting that factors such as knowledge, involvement, and trust likely play a significant role in shaping their decision making.

**Description of Research Variables****Table 2. Mean Value Interpretation Table**

Variable	Indicators	Minimum Value	Maximum Value	Mean	Interpretation
Knowledge (X1)	1. Product knowledge 2. Usage knowledge 3. Purchase knowledge	4.21	4.29	4.27	Very High / Very Good
Involvement (X2)	1. Enthusiasm 2. Attention 3. Absorption 4. Interaction 5. Identification	4.20	4.28	4.23	Very High / Very Good
Trust (X3)	1. Honesty 2. Competence 3. Openness	4.21	4.33	4.29	Very High / Very Good
Hotel Stay Decision (Y)	1. Confidence in the product 2. Purchase habit 3. Speed of purchase	4.22	4.40	4.30	Very High / Very Good

Based on the results of the descriptive analysis, all research variables show high mean values with the interpretation of "Very High/Very Good." This indicates that respondents have a very good level of knowledge, involvement, and trust in the product and demonstrate positive stay decision-making. Each indicator within these variables consistently reflects positive perceptions, indicating an optimal quality of consumer experience. Although the descriptive analysis results show very high mean values across all variables knowledge, involvement, trust, and stay decision the minimum values for each indicator still need attention as a basis for operational improvement. These minimum values indicate that a portion of respondents still have below-average perceptions or experiences, which could be targeted for improvement to better influence stay decisions.

**Data Instrument Testing****Validity Test**

The validity test is conducted to ensure whether a questionnaire truly measures what it is intended to measure. A questionnaire is considered valid if the statements within it accurately reflect the concepts being measured. Validity is assessed by correlating the score of each individual item with the total score of the construct or variable. The significance test is performed by comparing the calculated *r*-value with the critical value of *r*-table at the degree of freedom ( $df = n - 2$ ), where *n* is the number of samples. A statement is considered valid if the calculated *r*-value  $>$  *r*-table and the *r*-value is positive.

**Table 3. Validity Test**

Variable	Description
Knowledge (X1)	Valid
Involvement (X2)	Valid
Trust (X3)	Valid
Customer Decision (Y)	Valid

Source: Primary data processed by the researcher, 2024

Table 3 above shows that Knowledge (X1), Involvement (X2), Trust (X3), and Customer Decision (Y) have calculated r-values greater than the r-table value of 0.217, indicating that all statement items are considered valid.

### Reliability Test

The reliability test is a method used to measure the consistency of a questionnaire that serves as an indicator of a variable or construct. A questionnaire is considered reliable if respondents' answers to its statements remain consistent or stable over time. This test is conducted by calculating the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for each instrument within the variable. An instrument is considered reliable if the Cronbach's Alpha value is greater than 0.60.

**Table 4. Reliability Test**

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Description
Knowledge (X1)	0.669	Reliable
Involvement (X2)	0.680	Reliable
Trust (X3)	0.739	Reliable
Customer Decision (Y)	0.842	Reliable

Source: Primary data processed by the researcher, 2024

Table 4 above shows that all variables Knowledge (X1), Involvement (X2), Trust (X3), and Customer Decision (Y)—have Cronbach's Alpha values greater than 0.60. Therefore, it can be concluded that all variables are reliable.

### Normality Test

The purpose of the normality test is to determine whether the regression model and the variables studied follow a normal distribution. A good regression model is indicated by data that is normally or approximately normally distributed. Normality can be visually assessed by observing the spread of data points along the diagonal axis of a graph. To ensure more accurate results regarding whether the observed data are normally distributed, normality can also be tested using the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test, with the results shown below.

**Table 5. Normality Test**

#### One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

	Unstandardized Residual
<b>N</b>	82
<b>Normal Parameters<sup>1 2</sup></b>	
Mean	0.000000
Standard Deviation	1.22099323
<b>Most Extreme Differences</b>	
Absolute	0.092
Positive	0.084

- Test distribution is Normal.
- Calculated from data.
- Lilliefors Significance Correction.

Source: SPSS output for Windows version 26.0, 2024

Based on Table 6 above, the results of the normality test using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test show an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.083, which is greater than 0.05, indicating that the residuals are normally distributed.

**Multicollinearity Test**

The purpose of the multicollinearity test is to detect whether there is a linear relationship between the independent variables in the regression model. The multicollinearity assumption states that independent variables should be free from multicollinearity symptoms in order for the regression analysis results to be valid and reliable.

**Table 6. Multicollinearity Test**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>		
Model	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)		
Knowledge (X1)	0.821	1.218
Involvement (X2)	0.740	1.352
Trust (X3)	0.712	1.405

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Decision (Y)

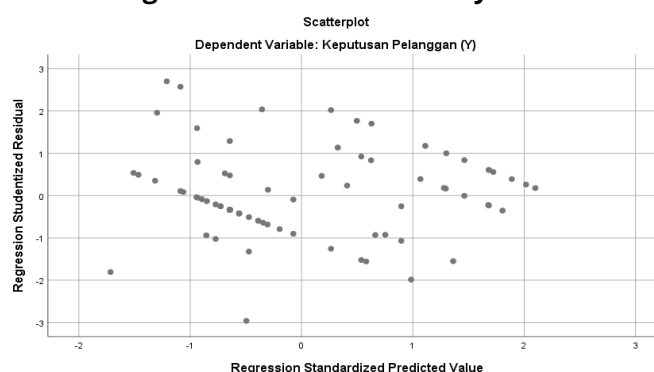
Source: SPSS output for Windows version 26.0, 2024

Based on Table 7 above, it can be concluded that there is no correlation between the independent variables, or in other words, no multicollinearity symptoms are present. This is evidenced by the calculation results where all three variables have Tolerance values > 0.100 and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values < 10.00. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no multicollinearity among the independent variables in the regression model.

**Heteroscedasticity Test**

The purpose of the heteroscedasticity test is to determine whether there is a difference in the residual variance from one observation to another in the regression model. If the residual variance is constant, this condition is called homoscedasticity; if the variance differs, it is referred to as heteroscedasticity. In this study, symptoms of heteroscedasticity are detected using a scatterplot graph.

**Figure 1. Heteroscedasticity Test**



Source: SPSS output for Windows version 26.0, 2024

Based on the scatterplot above, the points are randomly distributed and spread both above and below the value of 0 on the Y-axis. This indicates that heteroscedasticity is not present in the regression model, and therefore, the model is suitable for use.

### Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Multiple linear regression analysis is a statistical method used to examine the relationship between one dependent variable and two or more independent variables. The goal is to understand the effect of each independent variable on the dependent variable and to predict the value of the dependent variable based on a combination of independent variables.

**Table 7. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)
1 (Constant)	4.961
Knowledge (X1)	-0.103
Involvement (X2)	0.157
Trust (X3)	0.648

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Decision (Y)

Source: SPSS output for Windows version 26.0, 2024

Based on Table 7 above, the regression coefficient values obtained from the multiple regression analysis are then entered into the multiple linear regression equation model with the following formulation:

$$Y = 4.961 - 0.103X_1 + 0.157X_2 + 0.648X_3 + e$$

The equation above provides an overview of the magnitude of influence that the independent variables have on the dependent variable. The coefficient for Knowledge ( $X_1$ ) is negative, meaning that if  $X_1$  increases, it will decrease Y by 0.103. Meanwhile, the variables Involvement ( $X_2$ ) and Trust ( $X_3$ ) have positive coefficients, indicating a direct (positive) relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable, Customer Decision (Y).

### Hypothesis Testing

#### Simultaneous Test (F-Test)

The F-test is intended to determine whether all independent variables included in the model simultaneously have a significant effect on the dependent variable. The results of the simultaneous test are shown in the following table:

**Table 8. F-Test**

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	122.719	3	40.906	26.422	.000 <sub>b</sub>
Residual	120.757	78	1.548		
Total	243.476	81			

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Decision (Y)

b. Predictors: (Constant), Trust (X3), Knowledge (X1), Involvement (X2)

Source: SPSS output for Windows version 26.0, 2024

Based on Table 8, the results of the F-test show that the calculated F value is 26.422 with a significance value of 0.000. The calculated F value of 26.422 is greater than the F table value of 2.72, and the significance level is less than the 5% confidence level ( $0.000 < 0.05$ ). Therefore, this indicates that the variables Knowledge, Involvement, and Trust have a simultaneous and significant effect on customer decisions to stay at Sutan Raja Hotel in Palu City.

### Partial Test (T-Test)

The partial test (T-Test) is used to determine how far each independent variable individually affects the dependent variable. The results of the T-Test are presented in the following table:

**Table 9. T-Test**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>	T	Sig.
(Constant)	2.605	.011
Knowledge (X <sub>1</sub> )	-1.249	.215
Involvement (X <sub>2</sub> )	2.070	.042
Trust (X <sub>3</sub> )	6.737	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Decision (Y)

Source: SPSS Output for Windows version 26.0, 2024

Based on the results of the T-test in Table 9, the result of H1 indicates that the hypothesis is rejected because the Knowledge variable has a negative t-value and is smaller than the t-table value ( $-1.249 < 1.664$ ), and the significance level is greater than the 5% confidence level ( $0.215 > 0.05$ ). Therefore, it can be concluded that the knowledge variable does not have a significant partial effect on the customer's decision to stay at Sutan Raja Hotel in Palu City. This suggests that even though customers may have good knowledge or understanding about the hotel's facilities, services, or reputation, this factor alone is not enough to drive them to decide to stay. In terms of marketing strategy, this highlights the importance of managing customer experience and delivering attractive promotions rather than merely increasing customer knowledge. These findings align with research by Alfikaromah & Nurhidayati (2023), which also showed that knowledge does not significantly affect customer decisions.

This result can be interpreted to mean that although customers may have sufficient knowledge or information about the hotel, it does not automatically lead to a positive attitude or a decision to stay. This may be due to high expectations formed from that knowledge, which, if unmet or not aligned with the information obtained, results in a decision not to stay. Therefore, high knowledge does not necessarily drive decision-making and may even lead to more selective or critical attitudes toward the services offered. The result of H2 indicates that the hypothesis is accepted because the Involvement variable has a positive t-value that is greater than the t-table ( $2.070 > 1.664$ ), and the significance level is less than the 5% threshold ( $0.042 < 0.05$ ). This means that the involvement variable has a significant positive partial effect on the customer's decision to stay at Sutan Raja Hotel in Palu City. This shows that the higher the customer involvement in the decision-making process, the more likely they are to choose to stay at the hotel. Customer involvement includes their attention, interest, and awareness of the services offered, which ultimately influence purchasing decisions. A high level of involvement encourages customers to actively seek information and evaluate alternatives, thus strengthening their commitment to the chosen option. This finding is consistent with previous research, such as Chalil (2022), which showed that consumer involvement affects purchasing decisions.

The result of H3 indicates that the hypothesis is accepted because the Trust variable has a positive t-value greater than the t-table ( $6.737 > 1.664$ ), and the significance level is below the 5%

threshold ( $0.000 < 0.05$ ). This means that the trust variable has a significant positive partial effect on customer decisions to stay at Sutan Raja Hotel in Palu City. This implies that the higher the level of customer trust in the hotel, the more likely they are to choose to stay. Trust becomes a key factor in customer decision-making as it reflects the belief that the hotel can meet expectations and deliver the experience promised. Trust in this context includes various aspects such as the hotel's reputation, consistency in delivering quality services, and customer perceptions of safety and comfort during their stay. The Trust Theory proposed by Mayer et al. (1995) supports this finding. They explain that trust is an individual's belief that another party will act competently, honestly, and reliably in meeting relevant needs or expectations.

### **Coefficient of Determination (R Square)**

Based on Table 11, the Adjusted R Square value is 0.503 or 50%. This result means that 50% of the customer's decision is influenced by the independent variables: knowledge, involvement, and trust, while the remaining 50% is influenced by other factors not examined in this study.

## **DISCUSSION**

This study was conducted to examine how knowledge, involvement, and trust influence customer decisions to stay at Sutan Raja Hotel in Palu City. The findings offer valuable insights into consumer behavior in the hospitality sector and emphasize the importance of various psychological and informational factors in shaping customer choices. Based on the results of the multiple regression analysis, trust was found to have the strongest and most significant positive effect on customer decisions. This implies that customers who have a high level of trust in the hotel whether due to the hotel's reputation, consistent service quality, or perceived safety and reliability are more likely to decide to stay. This finding aligns with the Trust Theory by Mayer et al. (1995), which suggests that trust is built on integrity, competence, and benevolence, and plays a key role in fostering commitment and loyalty in service-based relationships.

Furthermore, involvement also had a significant positive influence on customer decisions. Customers who are more engaged who pay attention to information about the hotel, interact with the brand, and feel a personal connection tend to be more active in evaluating their options and more likely to choose the hotel. These findings are consistent with prior studies (e.g., Chalil, 2022), which emphasize the role of consumer engagement in driving purchasing behavior. High involvement reflects customers' emotional and cognitive investment in the decision-making process, increasing their likelihood of making informed and committed choices. On the other hand, knowledge, while expected to have a positive influence, was found to have no significant impact on customer decisions in this study. This result suggests that merely having information or awareness about the hotel's services, facilities, or reputation does not directly translate into a decision to stay. One possible explanation is that high levels of knowledge may raise customer expectations, and when these expectations are not met, it could result in dissatisfaction or indecision. This finding is supported by previous research (Alfikaromah & Nurhidayati, 2023), which also found that knowledge does not necessarily lead to positive purchase decisions. It indicates that customer experience and emotional connection may matter more than factual understanding in influencing choices.

Overall, the findings highlight that emotional and relational factors such as trust and involvement play a more crucial role than cognitive factors like knowledge in influencing customers' lodging decisions. This has important implications for hotel management: strategies focused on building trust through consistent service quality, enhancing customer engagement, and creating positive emotional experiences may be more effective in driving customer loyalty than solely providing product information. Therefore, hotel marketers and management at Sutan Raja Hotel should prioritize trust-building initiatives, personalized interactions, and

customer involvement programs as part of their marketing and service strategies. Future research could explore other variables such as customer satisfaction, service innovation, or digital engagement to gain a more comprehensive understanding of customer decision-making in the hospitality industry.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of data analysis, hypothesis testing, and the overall discussion, it can be concluded that knowledge, involvement, and trust collectively have a significant impact on customer decisions to stay at Sutan Raja Hotel in Palu City. However, when examined individually, the knowledge variable does not significantly influence customer decisions. This indicates that although customers may possess adequate knowledge about the hotel's facilities, services, or reputation, such awareness alone is not enough to drive their decision to stay. On the other hand, the involvement variable shows a significant positive influence on customer decisions. This suggests that the more actively customers participate in the decision-making process by seeking information, evaluating alternatives, and showing personal interest the more likely they are to choose to stay at the hotel.

Similarly, the trust variable also has a significant positive effect on customer decisions. Trust plays a crucial role in shaping customer choices, particularly in a competitive hospitality market. When customers believe in the hotel's ability to deliver consistent, honest, and reliable service, they are more inclined to stay and even recommend the hotel to others. Therefore, building trust and fostering customer involvement are essential strategies for enhancing guest loyalty and satisfaction.

## LIMITATION

limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted using a quantitative approach and relied solely on questionnaire data from a limited number of respondents specifically, guests who had stayed at Sutan Raja Hotel in Palu City within the last month. This may not fully capture the broader perspectives of other potential guests or those with different experiences. Second, the study only focused on three variables knowledge, involvement, and trust while other influential factors such as service quality, pricing, location, customer satisfaction, and promotional strategies were not included. Finally, the cross-sectional design of the study does not account for changes in customer perceptions over time. These limitations suggest that future research could benefit from a larger and more diverse sample, include additional variables, and adopt a longitudinal or mixed-methods approach to gain a more comprehensive understanding of customer decision-making in the hospitality industry.

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