



The Influence of Emotional Customer Reviews on Perceived Usefulness, Credibility, and Booking Intention

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Affidavit

I hereby affirm that this Bachelor's Thesis represents my own written work and that I have used no sources and aids other than those indicated. All passages quoted from publications or paraphrased from these sources are properly cited and attributed.

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Abstract

The increased utilization of the internet has led to digital booking platforms gaining a great amount of popularity among travelers, because of their easy accessibility, increased convenience, and associated lower costs. As customers of the hospitality and tourism industry are purchasing intangible or experiential products, they heavily rely on online reviews for evaluating a hotel and its potential alternatives. These online reviews are a form of electronic word of mouth (eWOM), which is beneficial for both consumers during the information searching and alternative evaluation stage of their purchasing decision process, and for marketers when developing a digital marketing strategy, making it a highly interesting and relevant topic to investigate. Extensive research on eWOM and online booking platforms already exists, however, very few have focused on how specific emotional words embedded within online customer reviews influence users' perception of usefulness and credibility. This thesis aims to answer how positively, negative, and neutrally valenced emotional words in online reviews influence the perception of usefulness and credibility, and how, in turn, this potentially affects people's booking intention.

An online experiment tested how respondents perceive the credibility and usefulness of an online review, while also asking them how likely they are to book a given hotel, based on the review they read. The experiment consisted of three groups that each received an exemplar online review from a hotel in Vienna, which either included positive emotional words, negative emotional words, or a mixture of both, which served as a control group. Participants were randomly allocated to one of the three conditions through the use of an online survey platform. The data analysis reveals that positive emotional words have a greater impact on both the perceived usefulness and credibility of an online review, in comparison to the negative and mixed condition. Additionally, statistical tests propose that the perceived usefulness of an online review has an impact on users' booking intention, while the construct of perceived credibility does not. This leads to the conclusion that managers should try to encourage or incentivize their previous visitors to write positive reviews that are perceived as useful by potential customers, to increase their future booking intentions. These results contribute to existing literature regarding eWOM, while also

offering an insight into which specific online reviews are most useful to consumers, and, therefore also marketers.

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1 Introduction

Advancements in technology and the continuously increasing usage of the internet has led to accelerating numbers of travelers utilizing these tools to book their vacations online through travel websites (Wang, 2016). Online booking platforms have evolved into become the hotel industries' main distribution channel (Lien et al., 2015), providing various benefits to users, such as increased convenience, lower costs, and most importantly the ability to rapidly receive details about any of the listed hotels along with various reviews from previous guests (Bucur, 2015). Online reviews are a form on electronic word of mouth (eWOM), which is defined as internet- based informal communications, discussing goods and services (Litvin et al. 2008). This is essential for customers of the hospitality and tourism industry, as they are purchasing intangible or experiential products, which cannot be assessed beforehand (Reza Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012). Therefore, consumers heavily rely on online reviews to evaluate a hotel and its potential alternatives, as this information is seen as highly trustworthy (Pan & Crotts, 2012). The significance of WOM does not only arise from the potential benefit it gives consumers' insights, but also from it being a possibly cost-effective marketing strategy (Litvin et al., 2008). Hospitality and tourism marketers are highly interested in managing online interactions to gain a competitive advantage (Litvin et al., 2008), therefore making it crucial to first research the influences of eWOM.

To date, there has been a vast amount of research in regards to eWOM and its influence on consumers, predominantly concentrating on either volume or valence (Manes & Tchetchnik, 2018). Some studies have narrowed their focus on individual customer reviews' usefulness and credibility, suggesting which components are most vital in establishing this (Zhang et al., 2014), however there are few studies that have explored the association between emotions and the perception of usefulness and credibility. Until we understand the impact and the relevance of emotions in customer reviews, their influence on other customers' booking behavior will remain unknown. Therefore, to close this knowledge gap, this thesis will explore how emotional words embedded in online reviews, with are either positively, negatively, or mixed valenced,

influence the perceived usefulness, perceived credibility, and henceforth the booking intention of consumers.

The objective of this thesis is to identify the impact of different emotional words on the perceived usefulness and perceived credibility of an online review, and furthermore the impact of the perceived usefulness and perceived credibility on customers' booking intention. Therefore, the main guiding research questions this thesis aims to answer are as follows:

- 1. What impact do different kinds of emotional words (positive, negative vs. mixed) have on customers' perceived usefulness of an online review?*
- 2. What impact do different kinds of emotional words (positive, negative vs. mixed) have on customers' perceived credibility of an online review?*
- 3. How does the perceived usefulness of an online review influence a customers' booking intention?*
- 4. How does the perceived credibility of an online review influence a customers' booking intention?*

The findings of this research will help contribute to existing literature in multiple ways. First, it will provide further insight into the impact of online reviews on potential customers. Secondly, it will outline how the perceived usefulness and perceived credibility changes in relation to emotional words. Lastly, this will help expand the understanding of how emotions in regards to the perception of usefulness and credibility shape customers' booking intention.

The remainder of this thesis is structured into four main parts. The subsequent part is the literature review, which focuses on defining key terms and investigating all relevant topics in support of this research. It includes five sections: word of mouth, hotel industry and online booking platforms, consumers' perception of online customer reviews, emotions, and hypotheses. The investigation of word of mouth will include the three different types: oral word of mouth, written word of mouth, and electronic word of mouth. Within the section "consumers perception of online customer reviews" the two constructs usefulness and credibility will be defined and

discussed. In addition to a literature review, this thesis will also include a methodology section, which first discusses the various types of research designs, then, the chosen quantitative approach will be described and justified, along with an explanation of the data collection. The section following this is called “data analysis and results”, in which the analysis and interpretation of the gathered survey data will be shown. In the final conclusion section, the limitations, further research recommendations, and implications of the study can be found.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Word-of Mouth

Consumers tend to interact with each other and discuss their opinions regarding purchases, which is commonly known as word-of mouth (WOM), and can be defined as the “communication between customers about a product, service, or a company in which the sources are considered independent of commercial influence” (Litvin et al., 2008, p.461). While this paper will be using the stated definition of WOM, it is important to note that this concept is challenging to define, as it has gone through various changes with the growth of the internet and digital marketing (Carl, 2006). Early definitions of WOM stated it to be face-to-face communications without attachment to commercial entities (Arndt, 1967; Carl, 2006). This definition was revised by Buttle (1998) due to WOM’s ability to be spread through electronic media, such as cell phones or websites, as well as the increased popularity of company’s offering incentives in return for their customers’ WOM.

WOM can also be used as a consumer-dominated marketing strategy, which is perceived to be more trustworthy and credible than direct communications from a company (Arndt, 1967). Therefore, it is one of the most important sources of information for consumers when deciding if they should make a purchase (Litvin et al., 2008). WOM has thoroughly been researched and various studies suggest that it influences awareness, expectations, perceptions, attitudes, behavioral intentions and behavior (Buttle, 1998). The reason why WOM is a powerful marketing tool, is because findings suggest that WOM is nine times more effective than advertising at changing

customers negative or neutral attitude into a positive attitude (Day, 1971). This type of marketing strategy can be especially impactful for service providers, as WOM directs customers' expectations and potential perceptions during the stage of the buying process, in which they search for sources to guide their pre-choice evaluation (Buttle, 1998). Important to note is that there are multiple types of WOM: oral, written, and electronic. These three categories will now be examined and distinguished in greater detail.

2.1.1 Oral Word of Mouth

As this paper will further discuss the impact of online reviews, a form of eWOM, on the perception of usefulness, credibility, and influence on customers' booking behavior, it is important to distinguish between the three different types of WOM. The main difference is whether this communication is happening orally or written. Oral word-of-mouth includes face-to-face conversations, or conversations over the phone, which occur in real time with only short delays between a statement and an answer (Berger & Iyengar, 2013). This is the traditional type of WOM, which was only spread through speech, and is believed to be quicker, less specific, and more easily forgotten (Shen & Sengupta, 2018). Additionally, speakers tend to have a greater focus on the interaction with someone than, for example, a writer of an online review, whose intention is to convey information to others; this is called an interpersonal involvement (Shen & Sengupta, 2018).

2.1.2 Written Word of Mouth

Unlike oral WOM, written communication is asynchronous, as it can take a long time until a statement receives a response (Berger and Iyengar, 2013). Examples of written word of mouth include sending a letter, an e-mail, or a text message, therefore these can either be tangible or intangible (ibid). Although written WOM is more asynchronous than oral WOM, this varies depending on the medium being used, as a letter would for example display this to a greater extent than a text message (ibid). The written aspect allows for longer time periods of constructing and confining messages, as Rettie (2009) found that text messages allow users to carefully put their thoughts into words; the participants called this the benefit of the "thinking time".

Additionally, written WOM causes changes in people's beliefs, as research suggest that they feel like they are expected to describe interesting things, because they have had more time to think about it (Berger and Iyengar, 2013). An additional form of written word-of mouth is electronic word-of-mouth, which can be found on various online websites, and has become increasingly popular among customers, due to the strong shift to e-commerce (Eisingerich et al., 2015).

2.1.3 Electronic Word of Mouth

With the growth of the internet and social media, word of mouth has shifted, as consumers now rely heavily on electronic word of mouth, known as eWOM (Yang, 2017). Through the internet's various available communication channels, both the provider and consumer have been given more power, with the option of sharing information from one consumer to another (Litvin et al., 2008). Litvin et al. (2008, p. 461) describes eWOM as: "all informal communications directed at consumers through internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristics of particular goods and services, or their sellers". In comparison to WOM, eWOM has a significantly greater influence, because it is fast and conveniently reaches a large amount of people, without the writer feeling any face-to-face pressure (Sun et al. 2006).

Due to the great variety of accessible electronic media, there are several types of eWOM channels, which are important to differentiate. A typology for eWOM channels, with regard to their communication scope and level of interactivity, was created by Hoffman & Novak (1996). This has been recreated, and can be seen in Figure 1.

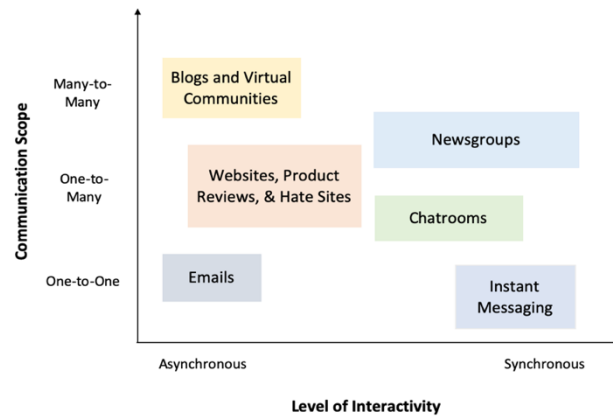


Figure 1: Typology of eWOM Channels (Hoffman & Novak, 1996)

Figure 1 categorizes various eWOM channels based on their communication scope, ranging from one-to-one to many-to-many, and their level of interactivity from asynchronous to synchronous (Hoffman & Novak, 1996). This research paper is going to focus primarily on online traveling reviews, which fall into the category of websites, product reviews, and hate sites, which is an asynchronous medium with a communication scope of one-to-many (ibid).

The tourism industry, especially hotels, are highly impacted by eWOM, because of the increasing importance of a hotel's reputation, which is derived from online customer reviews (Cantalops & Salvi, 2014). Reading someone else's online review, which portrays either their positive or negative attitude toward a product or service, has the potential to impact a potential customer's booking behavior (Yang, 2016). In regards to hotels, this occurs, because a destination's image is an influencing factor in the decision-making process, which is shaped by external information sources, such as online reviews (Ishida et al., 2016). EWOM is especially vital when customers are looking to purchase hospitality and tourism products, as they are intangible and can only be evaluate to a limited extent before purchase (Murray & Schlacter, 1990). Also, booking a vacation online incorporates a high degree of uncertainty and high involvement, because it is risky and costly (Ishida et al., 2016). Therefore, eWOM is of essence, as it helps decrease uncertainty and risks, because customers can rely on reviews from people who have already booked this vacation (Cox et al., 2009). Due to the associated ambiguity of purchasing a tourism product,

customers tend to trust online reviews from other travelers to a greater extent than commercial entities (Ishida et al., 2016).

Electronic word of mouth does not only impact customers' purchasing decisions, but has also shifted many companies' marketing strategies (Cantallops & Salvi, 2014). Companies understand how important customer-to-customer communication is, because it is seen to be highly credible and persuasive (Trusov et al., 2008). Unlike the traditional word of mouth marketing, online reviews are openly available for long periods of time, to anyone who is accessing the website, making them something companies can measure (Godes & Mayzlin, 2004). Due to the low costs associated with this type of information sharing, a significant amount of eWOM is available, potentially leading to new dynamics in the market, which can easily be controlled with technology (Dellarocas, 2003). The unique properties of eWOM have generated many companies' interest in developing strategies for managing these communications, which can be separated into either informal or revenue generating categories (Litvin et al., 2008). First, informal strategies aim to gather information through discussions and feedbacks online, which can then be used to increase satisfaction by problem solving, making improvements, and managing the image of a company (Litvin et al., 2008). The second aspect is revenue generation, which occurs through spreading positive WOM in the hopes of it increasing a company's sales (ibid).

2.2 Hotel Industry and Online Booking Platforms

The continuous advancements in technology have heavily impacted consumers' attitudes towards the collection of information, and their means by which they decide on their hotel accommodations (Tsao et al., 2015). The hotel industry provides its customers with various intangible services or experience products, as well as additional tangible products, such as for example fitness facilities (ibid). The internet, and more specifically online booking platforms, have evolved into become the hotel industries' main distribution channel (Lien et al., 2015). This shift away from traditional hotel methods has been caused by the various benefits these online booking platforms provide its users, such as the ability to rapidly receive details about

any of the listed hotels along with various reviews from previous guests, the increased convenience of the websites, and their lower costs (Bucur, 2015).

However, the increased popularity of online reviews has caused a massive overload of available information, which makes it harder for customers to accurately evaluate a review (Bucur, 2015). The internet supplies users with a vast number of websites that provide online reviews, which can potentially confuse consumers, as they do not know how to assess individual reviews, or how to prioritize information (ibid). Therefore, online booking websites often implement rankings, which help users quickly compare their various options (Martin-Fuentes & Mellinas, 2018). This will be explained in further detail below, however with a specific focus on only one platform, as the ranking systems of platforms vary to a great extent.

Hotels commonly utilize online accommodation- booking websites as a travel intermediary, as they provide customers with an easy environment in which they can compare prices and use customer reviews of previous travelers to aid them in their booking decision (Martin-Fuentes & Mellinas, 2018). There are multiple options that hotels can choose from, but this research paper will specifically investigate the platform booking.com. According to the official booking.com website, they promise their customers the best prices on every property they have listed, which can be accessed at any given time and place, without any additional fees (Booking.com). The platform offers more than 950,000 hotels in more than 92,000 destinations, with over 95 million online reviews available to their customers to read through before purchasing a stay at a hotel (Booking.com).

When a customer is browsing for a hotel to potentially book on the platform booking.com, they will be first asked to select the destination they want to go to, as well as the dates for this stay. After this, they are provided with small summaries of the different available hotels, which include the property name, a main picture, the location and distance to the city center, a star rating, user rating, price, and sometimes a few extra key features, such as “free cancellation” or “no prepayment needed” (Booking.com). All of these features are visible in Figure 2.

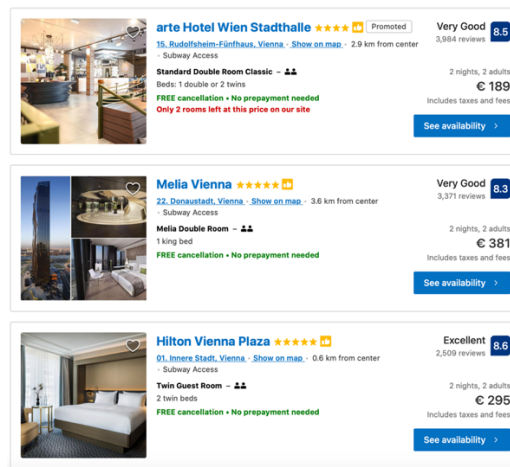


Figure 2: Hotel General Display found on Booking.com (Booking.com)

While there are various features present on the platform, this research paper is most interested in the blue user rating in the top right corner, and the corresponding online reviews written by previous travelers, which can be found when looking at one specific hotel. Booking websites, such as booking.com provide users with online reviews that include comments, or qualitative numeric scaled through allocating stars or a similar symbol (Gonzales del Pozo & Garcia-Lapresta, 2020). Booking.com utilizes a smiley face scoring scale that is sent to users after their stay via email, encouraging them to rate their experience and leave a review to aid other potential customers (ibid). There are four available smiley faces ranging from very sad to very happy; the saddest smiley face corresponds to a rating of 2.5, followed by the next smiley representing 5.0, then 7.5, and lastly the happiest smiley face corresponds to a rating of 10.0 (ibid). The survey that is sent out to users asks them to evaluate their stay based on six main criteria, which are host(s), facilities, cleanliness, comfort, value for money, and location (ibid). The outline of the survey can be seen in Figure 3.

2. Rate this property:

Your ratings will impact the review score.

Host(s)

Facilities

Cleanliness

Comfort

Value for money

Location

5.8 Your review score
We calculated your overall review score

Figure 3: Customer Review of a Hotel on Booking.com (Gonzales del Pozo & Garcia-Lapresta, 2020)

The smiley face scale that booking.com implements to make customer reviews easier and less time consuming for their customers differs from the final rating they display on their website, as this is visible in an ordered qualitative scale consisting of five elements ranging from very poor to wonderful (Gonzales del Pozo & Garcia-Lapresta, 2020). The final rating which is visible for potential customers that are browsing on the booking.com website is depicted in Figure 4.

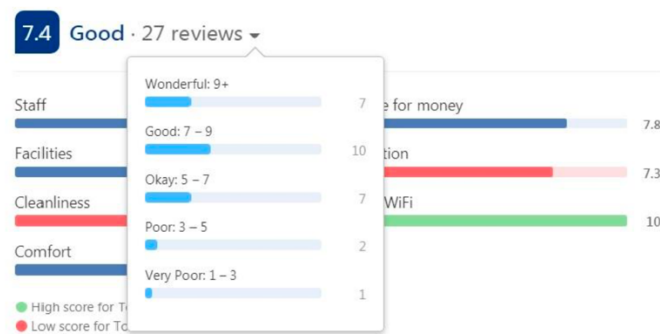


Figure 4: Scored and Criteria of a Hotel on Booking.com (Gonzales del Pozo & Garcia-Lapresta, 2020)

After having discussed the layout, customer review survey, and final user score of booking.com, this paper will now depict an exemplar online review that was taken from the website.

Reviewed: January 7, 2020

Fair

5.0

😊 · Location was great, very good breakfast, a lot of option, good coffee. Some people from reception very helpfully. Parking available. Tea and coffee provided in rooms. Fitness and sauna available, but difficult to acces. The reception, bar, restaurant and gym / sauna facilities are in the Imlauer building on the opposite side of the road.

☹️ · We received a very ugly room-525 and the last floor. A very tiny room, with a little window and a bad smell. All the photos room from booking.com looks very nice, big rooms, big windows, but we receive a small one, with a small window. Please update the type room and on booking.com, because it's not fair that someone to choose a room like in photos, and receive rooms like 523 or 525. I think all the rooms from last floor (5xx) are the same. In first night, the staff tell us that they don't have another room and give us free breakfast. Second night, we changed room, but was a little better, but we have other problems: the TV not worked and because we was on last floor, was very very cold in the room and the A/C can't have enough power to make warm... Again, we receive free breakfast.

Hotel response:

Dear Catalin,
It is good to see that you were greatly satisf... [Continue reading](#)

👍 Helpful 👎 Not helpful

Figure 5: Exemplar Customer Review of a Hotel in Vienna (Booking.com)

Figure 5 depicts a customer review that was found on Booking.com from 7th January 2020. The review includes a user rating of 5.0 on the top left corner and is separated into two parts: the happy smiley face representing the good attributes of the stay at the hotel, and the unhappy smiley face is the section where all of the downsides are described. Interesting to note is that the user describes various aspects of their stay at this hotel, which include the location, breakfast, various facilities of the hotel and how easy they were to access, and the hotel room they stayed in. Another mentionable feature that is offered by booking.com is the ability of hotels to directly communicate with customers in order to address potential issues. This is visible in the bottom of Figure 5, where the hotel that was being reviewed responded to the user. As previously discussed, managing eWOM is crucial for hotels, which includes responding to both positive and negative customer reviews on websites such as booking.com (Chen et al., 2016). A management response to a negative user review serves four purposes: service recovery, addressing and potentially clarifying problems, informing future customers about what they can expect if they purchase this stay, and demonstrating that the hotel cares about its guests and their wellbeing (ibid).

This research paper has investigated various different customer reviews on booking.com in order to be able to write an exemplar review that is easily manipulated

for an experiment, in order to test the influence of emotions within customer reviews. While many reviews were read and used as a basis for this papers' exemplar review, Figure 5 is an adequate example that was incorporated as a basis for this bachelor thesis' research design.

2.3 Consumers' Perception of Online Customer Reviews

After having introduced the concept of electronic word of mouth (eWOM), it is important to investigate how potential consumers perceive online reviews, and why it is an essential influence in their decision-making process (Sparks & Browning, 2011). As an increasing amount of people share their opinions on products and services online, these reviews have gained a great deal of credibility, and have the potential to directly influence the sales of a company (Purnawirawan et al., 2012). This is especially apparent when customers purchase an experience product, such as a stay at a hotel, through an online platform, as they utilize this as a resource for evaluating the quality of the provided service, and the consumption experience (Zhao et al., 2015).

As travelers are provided with more opportunities to gather information about the destinations or hotels that are of interest to them, their search costs decrease, however with the amount of reviews available to them at a single click, they need to judge this information, which causes an increase in their cognitive costs (Liu & Park, 2015). For this reason, various research has investigated how consumers evaluate reviews, and which factors have the greatest impact on their purchasing intention (Zhao et al., 2015). This research paper will first mention some of the various factors that have the potential of influencing customers' purchasing intention, after which it will define, and thoroughly investigate two specific factors, usefulness and credibility.

Before discussing potential factors that are linked to a certain perception of an online review, it is important to note that there are two types of online reviews which need to be differentiated between: attribute-value reviews and simple-recommendation reviews (Lee et al., 2008). Attribute-value reviews are described as being rational with a focus on facts, while simple-recommendation reviews are emotional (ibid). Considering this research paper will investigate and manipulate

online reviews filled with certain emotional words, the focus will only be on simple-recommendation reviews.

The first factor which is commonly mentioned in research regarding online reviews and its impact on customers' purchasing intentions, is trust. Consumers of the tourism and hospitality industry view the content of online reviews as a crucial factor in their information collection process, which is why websites that are promoting hotels attempt to build a relationship based on trust with their customers (Sparks & Browning, 2011). According to Sirdeshmukh et al. (2002) trust is defined as a consumers' expectation that a company can be depended on, as they will deliver on what they promise. In order to increase customers' trust, and to help them find reliable information, there are methods in place to rate a review (Liu & Park, 2015). For example, they provide their customers with the option to sort the reviews by most helpful, so customers do not have to read every review available and then evaluate their usefulness by themselves, increasing their satisfaction with the website (Liu & Park, 2015). Therefore, website that are offering more useful reviews will also offer greater potential value to their customers, which could heavily impact the confidence they have in their purchasing decision, and their trust in a website (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). While this research paper will not specifically investigate how emotional words in online reviews impact trust, it will focus on usefulness and credibility, which are two concepts closely linked, or potentially interlinked with trust.

2.3.1 Usefulness

The first construct that potentially influences customers' booking intention in regards to online reviews is called usefulness. A consumer's perception of usefulness is whether or not the information they are given satisfies their needs, and whether this is useful for them when deciding on which product to purchase (Cheung et al., 2008). Furthermore, usefulness can be defined as "the degree to which consumers believe that online reviews would facilitate their purchase decision-making process" (Park & Lee, 2009, p.334). Usefulness is suggested to be a key determinant of customers' purchasing intention, because the development of the Web 2.0 facilitates an unlimited number of websites and online reviews, forcing users to confront and

sort out this amount of information presented to them, only relying on those they deem to be valuable and usefulness (Zhao et al., 2015). Therefore, as the evaluation of usefulness becomes more challenging for users, researchers are increasingly interested in evaluation the individual factors impacting the perceived usefulness of a review, as this can impact both users who are writing future reviews, and marketers that work with online reviews (Park & Lee, 2008). In addition to this, researching the factors that affect the perceived usefulness of online reviews is highly relevant in regards to online tourism marketing, because websites that offer reviews that are perceived as more useful provide a greater amount of value to their customers (Liu & Park, 2015).

Multiple studies have researched which factors impact a user's perceived usefulness of an online review, and have come up with a long list of potential factors. Previous research suggests that usefulness is not only a predictor of users' intent to comply with a review, but can also be linked to their frequency of usage (Chen et al., 2016). A study conducted by Cheung et al. (2008) investigated argument quality and source credibility created the following adoption model which can be seen in Figure 6.

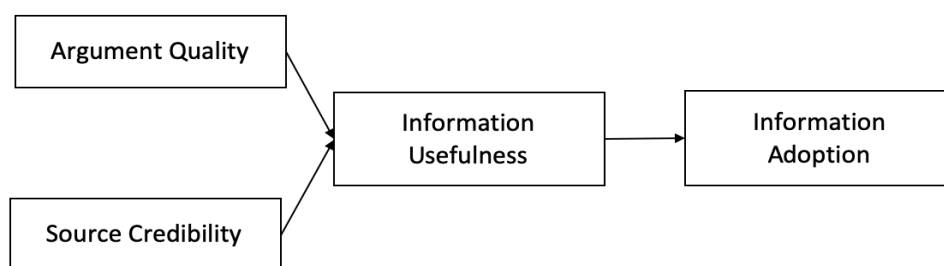


Figure 6: Information Adoption Model (Cheung et al., 2008)

Cheung et al. (2008) researched customer reviews through an investigation of both argument quality and source credibility, and how these two lead to first information usefulness and then information adoption, which are crucial when perceiving online reviews. Within this model information usefulness refers to a usage

causing an enhancement of performance, while information adoption represents users purposefully utilizing the information available online (Cheung et al., 2008). The findings of this research demonstrate that information usefulness had a significant impact on information adoption, while source credibility and quality had no significant impact on information usefulness (ibid). Therefore, further studies' findings on factors that potentially impact the perception of usefulness will be investigated.

Another relevant study that was conducted on the topic of travel related online reviews, investigated various different facts and their association with a reviews' usefulness (Liu & Park, 2015). The study investigated two broad categories, which are called messenger factors and message characteristics, which each consist of various subcategories, which can be seen in Figure 7, which depicts their original research model.

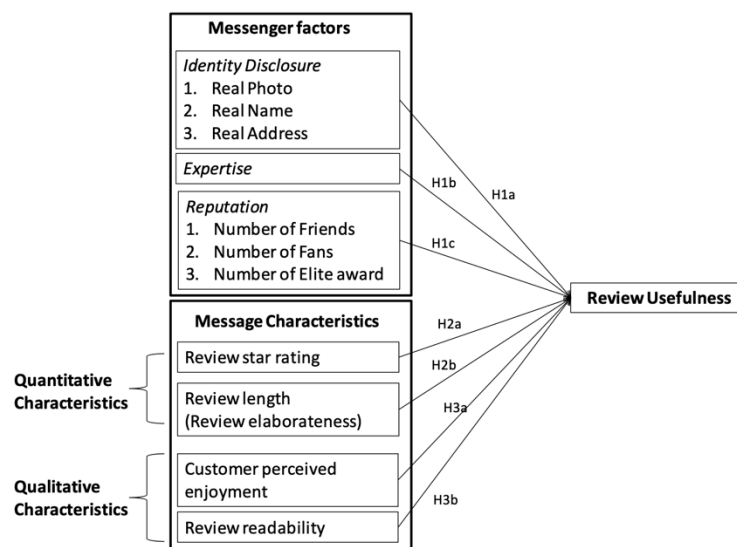


Figure 7: Research Model of Various Factors Influencing Review Usefulness (Liu & Park, 2015)

The research model of Liu & Park (2015), which can be seen above in Figure 7, visually demonstrates that they investigated a multitude of different potential key factors. The two main categories that have been investigated are messenger factors and message characteristics. The message factors consist of three sub-categories: identity disclosure (real photo, real name, real address), expertise, and reputation (number of friends, number of fans, number of elite award), and the message

characteristics consist of quantitative characteristics (review star rating and review length or elaborateness), and the qualitative characteristics (customer perceived enjoyment and review readability) (ibid). This model demonstrates how many potential factors could have an influence, emphasizing the need for further research into the topic of online reviews.

The findings suggest that the identity disclosure of the reviewer has a significant impact on a reviews' usefulness, because consumers feel more favorable towards reviews with additional person information, in comparison to online sources that cannot be identified (Liu & Park, 2015). Contrary to various other researchers, Liu & Park (2015) could not find a significant relationship between the expertise of a reviewer and the influence on usefulness, however the reputation does strongly correlate with the perception of usefulness. Additionally, the findings suggest that positive online reviews are associated with a higher level of usefulness than negative or moderate reviews, which is suggested to occur because positive comments help customers validate their pre-decision preferences (ibid). Another important factor of an individual review would be the length, as longer texts are viewed as more useful than short reviews, because of the amount of potential information they include, which users see as an indirect consumption experience (ibid). Lastly, the results also suggest that two main determinants of a users' perception of usefulness arises from the enjoyment they felt, as well as the readability of a review, because users seek out reviews as a form of entertainment, that should be easy to enjoy (ibid).

Considering the various findings suggesting the influence of usefulness on customers' booking intention, Zhao et al. (2015) suggest that due to the massive information overload customers are facing, hotel websites should invest in resources that aid in evaluating the usefulness of individual reviews, which could include a peer-evaluate system and a filter allowing customers to sort by most relevant. As previously discussed, these are both options that the online travel platform booking.com offers its users.

2.3.2 Credibility

The second construct that is highly relevant to this research paper is the perceived credibility of online reviews. Credibility can be defined as the believability of an online review, or as the characteristic that makes people believe and trust something (Wathen & Burkell, 2002). Another commonly reference definition of credibility can be found in Hovland et al.'s (1953) research, which states it to be “the resultant value (combined effect of (1) the extent to which a communicator is perceived to be a source of valid assertions (his ‘expertise’) and (2) the degree of confidence in the communicator’s intent to communicate the assertions he considers most valid (his ‘trustworthiness’)” (p.21). According to this definition, the construct of credibility is based on expertise and trustworthiness (Mumuni et al., 2019).

The perceived credibility of an online review is another important aspect to investigate, as various previous studies suggest that a users’ perceived credibility significantly reduces their uncertainty towards a product or service, and therefore directly influences their decision-making process (Nan et al., 2017).

The concept of online reviews’ credibility has become an increasingly interesting topic, not only for marketers, but also for consumers, because the abundance of online reviews available, makes it impossible for consumers to read through all of them, causing them to instead rely on information cues for an evaluative purpose (Cheung et al., 2012). However, there are only very limited peripheral cues available for users’, because of the high level of anonymity associated with online review websites (Kusumasondjaja et al., 2012). Reviewers often only have a nickname, and do not state their real name, age, or any information relating to their identity, which causes users to question the sources’ credibility and expertise (ibid). Additionally, the growing amount of fake online reviews present on the internet causes consumers to always proceed with caution (Thomas et al., 2019). According to Munzel (2016) “the increasing practice of fake reviews posted online not only jeopardize the credibility of review sites as important information sources for individuals, but also endangers a valuable source of information for service providers” (p. 96). Additionally, online review sites very commonly do not include some form of

verification, causing various criticism from consumers, who are required to be more skeptical of reviews (Kusumasondjaja et al., 2012). Therefore, it is of essence for companies to understand which factors determine how credible an online review is perceived as (Thomas et al., 2019).

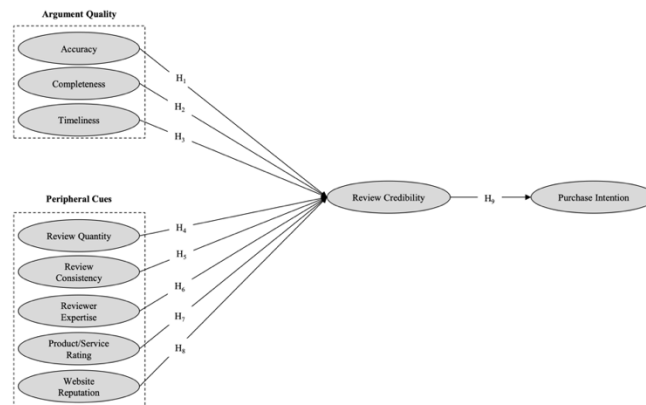


Figure 8: Factors Influencing a Reviews' Credibility (Thomas et al., 2019)

The study conducted by Thomas et al. (2019) investigated two types of factors that have the potential to influence the perception of a reviews' credibility, which are argument quality and peripheral cues. Argument quality includes the accuracy, completeness, and timeliness of a review, which are all factors processed under the central route of persuasion, as they are associated with high cognitive effort (Thomas et al., 2019). The second factor is called the peripheral core, which occurs when the peripheral route of persuasion is triggered through peripheral cues, consisting of a review's quantity, consistency, expertise, rating, and website reputation (ibid).

The findings of the study show that six out of the eight determinants have a significant impact on users perceived review credibility, with the only two exceptions being review quantity, which depicts a negative effect, and timeliness which suggests a non-significant relationship (ibid). These results have various important marketing implications, as they suggest that peripheral cues have a highly dominant role in user's perception of review credibility, therefore suggesting that companies focus on promoting their website's reputation, while also highlighting the expertise of the reviewers through a certain symbol or icon on their profile, and lastly displaying a certain rating system that helps increase the reviews credibility (ibid). Most

importantly, these findings suggest that maximizing the number of online reviews could be counterproductive, as too many reviews increase users' suspicion, therefore encouraging marketers to no further incentivize users to contribute online reviews when a certain threshold has been reached (ibid).

In conclusion, there are numerous potential factors that could either directly or indirectly influence a consumer's perception of a review's credibility. This research paper will focus less on the factors impacting credibility, and will instead investigate the relationship of specific emotions embedded within online reviews in the tourism industry, while also investigating if credibility influences customers' purchasing intention.

2.4 Emotions

In order to further understand the impact of eWOM on potential buyers' booking intention, the aspect of emotional influences will be investigated within this research paper. Emotions can be defined as "multicomponent response tendencies that unfold over relatively short time spans" (Frederickson, 2001, p.219). Emotions start with an evaluation of an event or a product, which can be made either consciously or unconsciously (Zablocki et al., 2019). Emotions are present in both WOM and eWOM, as research has found that one of the motivations to spread WOM comes from sharing emotions (Nyer & Gopinath, 2005). In the digital world consumers compensate for the lack of nonverbal cues such as the tone or added facial expressions, through the use of intense emotional key words (Kim & Gupta, 2012). Various researchers have investigated the impact of emotions in the purchasing process, and have found that customers experience a variety of emotions when making a purchasing decision (Richins, 1997). The findings from Richins' study show that emotions significantly impact customers' behavior (Richins, 1997). Therefore, it is vital to study how emotions can change a customer's opinion and purchasing decision in the context of online reviews.

In order to be able to investigate the variety of emotions, it is best to first have a look at the overall consensus and difference between good and bad. Shaver et al. (1987) stated that there are six basic emotions, namely joy, love, surprise, anger,

sadness, and fear. Of these emotions love and joy have a positive affect, anger, sadness, and fear have a negative affect, and surprise is neutral (ibid). In addition to this Shaver et al. (1987) lists the various sub-dimensions of these emotions, such as sadness which has 37 sub-dimensions, or joy containing 33 sub-dimensions.

The categorization of emotions into good, bad, and neutral is relatively basic, considering the wide variety of emotions humans are able to feel. Therefore, individual emotions need to be specified and researched accordingly. The study conducted by Kraemer et al. (2016) investigated positive, neutral, and negative valence of online reviews. In their study, they allocated the following emotions among the valence accordingly, see Figure 9.

Valence	Low	High
Positive	Trust	Joy
Neutral	Anticipation	Surprise
Negative	Sadness	Anger, Fear, Disgust

Figure 9: Positive, Neutral, and Negative Valence and their Respective Emotions (Kraemer et al., 2016)

Their study has found that highly positive emotions such as joy are found more frequently in online reviews than neutral or negative emotions (Kraemer et al., 2016). These findings are supported by another study whose findings additionally show that reviews with positive emotions tend to be shared more frequently than those containing negative emotions (Ullah et al., 2015). Therefore, the researchers proposed, that experiences which are satisfying will lead to higher product engagement of consumers, and lead to more positive customer reviews available on a website (Ullah et al., 2015). In addition, the research of Kraemer et al. (2016) agrees that a negativity bias existed within their study, as they also found that negative emotions have a higher impact on customer's engagement behavior. The degree to which the negativity bias has an impact on the customers was not investigated.

There is a variety of research presenting the idea that a negativity bias occurs whenever lots of information is processed and evaluated. This means, that customers will be biased towards negative information, giving it more value than positive information about a product, as negative emotional information will have longer lasting effects in comparison to positive or neutral information (Baumeister et al., 2001). This is very relevant for online reviews, as this suggests that negative reviews will be more impactful, and potentially useful, for consumers when evaluating a product.

Some studies have found a link between emotions, credibility, and helpfulness, such as Yin et al. (2014), who has found that the greater the intensity of an emotion is the higher the perceived helpfulness of the review is. This link is caused by empathy felt by the reader, who will believe a review to be more trustworthy if they feel resonance to the reviewer (Ruiz-Mafe et al., 2018). Additionally, according to the information adoption model receiving advice through online reviews leads to an evaluation of this information's helpfulness and impacts to what extent the information is adopted (Ruiz-Mafe et al., 2018).

In conclusion, at first the negativity bias and the theory that positive reviews are available online more frequently than negative reviews, might seem like separate ideas that do not interact with one another. However, it is important to investigate both of these theories and how they impact customers through online reviews. The question arises if the negativity bias will still be prevalent when customers are surrounded by a larger number of positive reviews. This however might depend on how many of the positive reviews are viewed as useful by potential buyers. As discussed, various research has been done on the usefulness of reviews (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010), while other research has investigated how online reviews mirror overall emotions (Kraemer et al., 2016). This research paper will focus on how emotional words embedded within individual reviews impact the perceived usefulness and credibility, and in turn affect the booking decision of consumers. Therefore, focusing on the interactions of emotions and usefulness and credibility, while keeping in mind the various theories previously discussed.

2.5 Emotions in Online Customer Reviews

Emotions in online customer reviews differ from traditional word of mouth, as they will most likely not evoke affective reactions (Hatfield et al., 1994). However, what occurs is an “emotional understanding”, which is an evaluation of someone else’s emotions, understanding what caused this emotion and how to react to it (Planalp, 1999). One popular theory which has been investigated to gain further understanding is called the attribution theory, which states consumers can attribute emotions either to the reviewer personally (internally) or to the product being reviewed (external) (Kim & Gupta 2012). Additionally, within the attribution theory there is a self-serving bias which depicts that people connect their positive behaviors and other’s negative behaviors to the person (internal) and their negative behavior and other’s positive behavior to the product (external) (Kim & Gupta 2012). Therefore, whether emotions are attributed to the reviewer or the product depends on if the emotions present are positive or negative (ibid).

A study conducted by Mudambi and Shuff (2010) has highlighted several factors that make a review potentially more helpful to consumers. Their research has found that when purchasing an experience, moderate reviews tend to be more helpful than extremely positive or negative reviews. In addition, their research suggests that longer reviews are perceived as more useful in comparison to shorter reviews (ibid). Another key insight that this study has provided, is that a review’s helpfulness changes based on whether the product is a search or experience good (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010). Therefore, this research paper will only focus on customer online reviews of experience goods. In closer alignment with this research papers’ aim, is the study from Sen & Lerman (2007), who investigated how impactful the polarity of reviews is on a customer’s perceived usefulness. Their study has found that negative reviews have a greater impact on consumers’ purchasing decision, in comparison with positive reviews. This is due to buyers’ belief, that negative reviews were more likely based on the reviews’ actual feelings about the product (Sen & Lerman, 2007).

A study conducted by Purnawirawan et al. (2015) researched the influence of an online review’s valence on various factors, such as attitude, perceived usefulness,

purchase intention, recommendation intention, and credibility, which can be seen in the figure below.

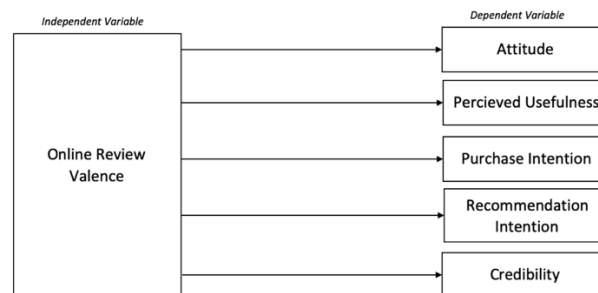


Figure 10: Influence of Online Review Valence on Consumers (Purnawirawan et al., 2015)

Another study conducted by Doh & Hwang (2009) investigated the impact of the ratio of positive to negative online reviews and the influence this has on various aspects of eWOM effects, such as the attitude towards the product, purchasing intention, attitude towards the web site, and credibility of eWOM Messages. Their findings suggest that positive online reviews aid in customers' positive attitudes towards a product, and that a few negative reviews are not necessarily harmful, if the majority of reviews are positive (ibid). In addition to this, they also found that a few negative online reviews can have a positive impact on the credibility of eWOM messages, while also positively influencing their attitude towards a website (Doh & Hwang, 2009).

A study conducted by Ullah et al. (2015), employed NLP-based computational techniques, in order to investigate 15,849 online reviews for their most frequently incorporated emotional words. The researcher's list of emotional words can be seen in Figure 11.

Positive Emotional Words		Negative Emotional Words	
Love	Beautiful	Dissapointment	Scared
Great	Delightful	Worse	Pathetic
Pleased	Comical	Unhappy	Sorry
Wonderful	Insightful	Bad	Painful
Happy	Gorgeous	Stupid	Upset
Amazed	Tremendous	Suck	Uninteresting
Excellent	Fantasized	Dislike	Irritating
Surprise	Cool	Angry	Disgusted
Fun	Phenomenal	Displeased	Dirty
Terrific	Thrilling	Awful	Pitful
Awesome	Outstanding	Worried	Nonsense
Stunning	Unbelievable	Hate	Garbage
Fantastic	Superb	Horrible	Regret
Perfect	Laugh	Bother	Allergic
Enjoy	Humorous	Annoying	Sad
Pretty	Sexy	Unfortunate	Punished
Entertaining	Exciting	Ridiculous	Unforgettable
Glad	Fascinating	Ugly	Woeful
Wow	Fabulous	Shocked	Deprived
Romantic	Spectacular	Trouble	Ruthless
Incredible	Nice	Frustrating	Torture
		Fear	Insult
		Terrible	Weird
		Embarassed	Horrifying

Figure 11: List of Emotional Words Most Commonly Found in Online Reviews (Ullah et al., 2015)

Ullah et al.'s (2015) research investigated emotional words within online reviews of both search and experience products, however their results suggest that there are no differences in the emotional content of these two types of products, making the list suitable for this research paper.

While the list of emotional words that Ullah et al. (2015) is highly beneficial as a basis for this research's further investigation into the influence of emotional words within online reviews, the study only categorizes the words into two broad categories of a negative or positive valence. The researchers Malik & Hussain (2017) also investigated the most emotional words in online reviews, however grouped them into eight emotional subcategories, which are trust (1), anticipation (2), joy (3), surprise (4), anxiety (5), anger (6), sadness (7), and disgust (8). These eight types of emotions along with various exemplar words that are prevalent in online reviews can be seen in Figure 11.

Emotion type	Example words
Trust	Admirable, authoritative, brotherhood, comfort, pleased, commandant
Anticipation	Arouse, charitable, confession, denying, eventuality, importance, opportunity
Joy	Blessed, charity, celebrated, cheerful, comfort, encourage, festival, hope, jump
Surprise	Bang, differently, blast, bomb, chance, bonus, curiosity, deal, death, detonate
Anxiety	Warning, tramp, tearful, teasing, suppression, supremacy, socialism, snake, slam
Anger	Bear, collusion, brute, casualty, clash, denounce, defense, disobey, disaster, detest
Sadness	Alienated, anthrax, bad, bankruptcy, deterioration, cutting, dark, decay, depressed
Disgust	Cancer, dabbling, coldness, creature, crude, dislike, dirty, disallowed, disappoint

Figure 12: Different Types of Emotions with Exemplar Words from Online Reviews (Malik & Hussain, 2017)

This research paper purposefully investigated various previous studies regarding the topics of emotional words within online reviews, because it aims to investigate the emotional makeup of online review's content. This will be done by utilizing the exemplar emotional words from various different researchers as a basis for creating an online review containing some of the either negatively or positively valenced words that can be seen in Figure 11 and Figure 12 above.

2.6 Hypotheses

After thoroughly examining previous research that has been done in regards to different forms of word of mouth, the hotel industry and online booking platforms, customers' perception of online customer reviews, and emotions, multiple hypotheses have been created that this research paper aims to investigate. The six main hypotheses of this paper are as follows:

H1: Positive emotional words have a greater influence on customers' perceived usefulness of an online review, in comparison to negative emotional words.

H2: Mixed emotional words have a greater influence on customers' perceived usefulness of an online review, in comparison to positive or negative emotional words.

H3: Positive emotional words have a greater influence on customers' perceived credibility of an online review, in comparison to negative emotional words.

H4: Mixed emotional words have a greater influence on customers' perceived credibility of an online review, in comparison to positive or negative emotional words.

H5: The perceived usefulness of an online review has a positive impact on customers' booking intention.

H6: The perceived credibility of an online review has a positive impact on a customers' booking intention.

To visually depict how the variables and these hypotheses interact with one another a research model was created:

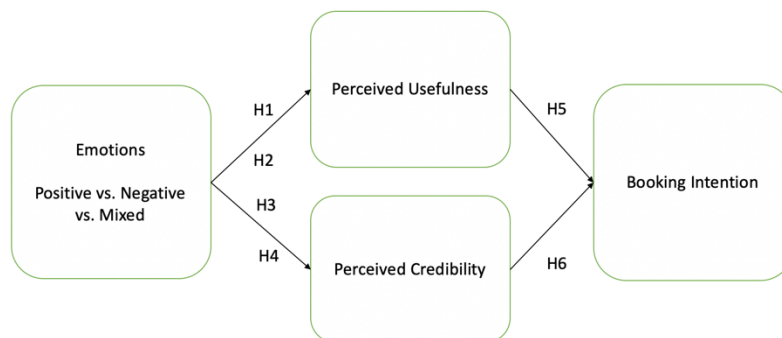


Figure 13: Research Model Showing the Interaction of Emotions, Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Credibility, and Booking Intention

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

An essential part of this bachelor thesis is determining an appropriate research approach, which includes choosing both a fitting research design and research method. There are three different types of research approaches, which are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Creswell, 2014). This thesis implements a quantitative approach, as its focus lays on investigating the relationship of measurable variables, through a thorough statistical analysis (Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, according to Creswell (2014), each research approach consists of three core elements, which are a philosophical worldview, a specific design, and a research

method. A quantitative approach entails a postpositivist worldview, which focuses on determining and investigating causes and effects, using data or gathered evidence to impact our knowledge of a topic (ibid). Furthermore, a quantitative research approach can be conducted through the use of either an experimental or nonexperimental design. With the purpose of investigating the influence of emotional customer reviews on other people' booking behavior, an experimental design was chosen, in the form of an online experiment using a survey. This experiment aims to research whether or not a specific factor impacts an outcome (Creswell, 2014), and in this thesis the factor being investigated is either positive, negative, or mixed online reviews, and the outcome is how this changes the perception of usefulness and credibility. The three treatments were distributed to participants randomly in the form of an online survey, which helps provide a numeric description of their opinions and attitudes (ibid).

3.2 Data Collection

3.2.1 Online Experimental Design

An online survey experiment was created using the platform "ScoSci" in order to test the relationship of emotional words in online reviews and perceived usefulness, perceived credibility, and purchasing intention. The survey consists of 12 closed-ended questions, and one exemplar online review of an unnamed hotel in Vienna, that participants are asked to read through in the beginning. The survey's questions can be separated into five categories, which are (1) perceived valence, (2) perceived usefulness and credibility, (3) booking intention, (4) general attitudes towards online reviews, and (5) demographics. All of the questions within the first three categories directly refer to, and are based on, the exemplar online review the participants were asked to read through at the start. The last two categories aid at understanding who the participants are and how their general attitude towards online reviews is.

The online questionnaire begins with an introductory text stating that the intent of the survey is to gather relevant data for the bachelor thesis, which is guaranteed to remain confidential and only be used for academic purposes.

The first question in the survey asks the participants to read through an excerpt of an online review, which is either positively valanced, negatively valanced, or mixed. The exemplar review was written by the researcher specifically for this thesis, and is heavily influenced by real online reviews that were found during an investigation of hotel reviews on the platform Booking.com. During the investigation of already existing online reviews, it was found that the most prominently discussed topics among users rating hotels are: the location, appearance, accessibility of the hotel's areas, cleanness, smell, staff members, and overall value. All of these aspects were incorporated into the exemplar online reviews, while specific emotional words were added. In the positive condition emotional words such as: delightful, enjoyable, lovely, wonderful, and satisfying were utilized. The negative condition contained the emotional words: repelling, irritating, annoyed, incompetent, infuriating, and agonizing. Lastly, the mixed group contained some of the positive and some of the negative emotional words. All participants were randomly allocated to one of the three groups by the survey platform, as everyone received the same link to the survey.

The three exemplar online reviews are shown below:

Positively Valanced Exemplar Online Review:

The hotel is located in the center of Vienna. The public transport is only a few minutes away by foot. The hotel has a delightful appearance and all areas of the hotel are fairly easy to find. The room, corridors, and bathrooms are relatively clean. Within my room there was an enjoyable smell for the first minutes, which made me feel lovely. Lastly, the staff members, especially the concierge were competent, which was wonderful. Overall it was a satisfying experience and a good stay. Also, the value I got for my money is fair.

Negatively Valanced Exemplar Online Review:

The hotel is located in the center of Vienna. The public transport is only a few minutes away by foot. The hotel has a repelling appearance and all areas of the hotel are challenging to find. The room, corridors, and bathrooms are relatively dirty. Within my room there was an irritating smell for the first minutes, which made me feel annoyed. Lastly, the staff members, especially the concierge were incompetent, which was infuriating. Overall it was an agonizing experience, and a bad stay. Also, the value I got for my money is not fair.

Mixed Valence Exemplar Online Review:

The hotel is located in the center of Vienna. The public transport is only a few minutes away by foot. The hotel has a delightful appearance and all areas of the hotel are fairly easy to find. The room, corridors, and bathrooms are relatively clean. Within my room there was an irritating smell for the first minutes, which made me feel annoyed. Lastly, the staff members, especially the concierge was incompetent, which was infuriating. Overall was a satisfying experience and a good stay. Also, the value I got for my money is fair.

After having read through this text, the participants were given various questions regarding their attitude about the online review, which will be further explained and separated into their corresponding categories.

The first question after the text was focused on the respondent's perceived valence of the review, in order to establish whether or not they accurately understood the message of the online review. The question directly asks whether they felt that the review is more positive than negative, which can be answered on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

This was followed by four questions regarding the usefulness of the online review excerpt. The questions focused on if the review was seen as useful, if it helped the participant evaluate the hotel, if it aided the understanding of the performance of the hotel, and if it helped them familiarize themselves with the hotel. All of the questions also utilized a seven-point Likert scale, starting at strongly disagree (1) and ending at strongly agree (7).

Next, the construct of credibility was investigated through two separate questions, regarding whether participants felt that the review was factual and credible. The same scale as before was applied.

The third construct of this research paper is the influence on the respondent's booking intention. In order to investigate the influence of these sample reviews,

participants were asked if it were likely that they would book a room at this hotel, if they would stay at this hotel, and also if they would never consider booking this hotel.

The next category of questions is about user's general attitudes towards online reviews and booking hotels, and includes various different questions regarding this topic. Questions include if users have checked online reviews before booking a hotel before, how often they check online reviews, how often they book hotels per year, how often they stay at hotels per year, and also whether a review seems more credible to them when a detailed profile of the author exists.

The final page of the survey included all questions regarding the demographics of the respondents, which included the age, gender, and educational level they have acquired. All questions from the survey can be found in the Appendix.

In order to ensure an understanding of the survey's questions, and to further increase validity and reliability multiple pre-tests were conducted before the official survey was sent out. This helped gain an understanding of other people's interpretation of the various questions, in order to see if everything was clear enough.

3.2.2 Sampling Method

The online survey was distributed through a link, which randomly allocated participants into one of the three experimental groups. Respondents were gathered through the utilization of convenience sampling, which is a type of nonprobability sampling, where subjects that are easily accessible are used (Etikan, 2016). The researcher shared the online link to the survey on the social media platforms Instagram and Facebook, in order to get responses from acquaintances and the immediate friends circle. There are various advantages to this sampling method, such as it being affordable, relatively simple, and also efficient as respondents are directly available (ibid). However, when utilizing convenience sampling it is important to state that the sample could be biased and not representative of the population (ibid). The goal of this research was to gather approximately one hundred respondents, within three weeks. This was achieved, as the survey had gotten one hundred two responses within these three weeks, all of which are valid cases.

3.2.3 Measures

This research paper includes various measures that were investigated in the online experiment, which will now be described in further detail. The four main measures include the manipulation check, booking intention, perceived usefulness, and perceived credibility. Each of these measures were tested through one or more corresponding survey questions, which can also be found in Appendix 1.

Manipulation Check

The first measure was the manipulation check, which tested if the manipulation of the three online reviews worked, by seeing if the participants could accurately assume the overall valence of the review. Participants were asked to indicate to what extent they agree with the statement: *“Overall, I felt that the review was more positive than negative”* on a seven-point Likert scale, taken from Guo et al. (2020).

Usefulness

The second measure is called usefulness, because it aims to investigate how useful participants perceived the online review they received to be. This was done in relation to the first, second, and fifth hypothesis, as these all incorporate the construct of perceived usefulness. The three questions in the survey are as follows: *“The online review helped me evaluate the hotel.”* (1), *“The online review helped me understand the performance of the hotel.”* (2), and *“The online review helped me familiarize myself with the hotel.”* (3). Similarly, to the manipulation check, participants were asked to rank to what extent they agree with these statements on a seven-point Likert scale, which was created on a basis of the research conducted by Guo et al. (2020).

Credibility

Credibility is the third measure that was investigated within this research paper, as it is crucial to test the third, fourth, and sixth hypothesis. The online experiment included two questions to test users’ perception of the credibility of their corresponding online review, with were: *“I think the online review is factual.”*

(1), and *“I think the online review is credible.”* (2). These questions and their corresponding scales have been taken from the research conducted by Ruiz-Mafe et al. (2018).

Booking Intention

The final measure focused on the respondents’ booking intention of the online review they were given. This measure was implemented in order to test the fifth and sixth hypothesis, which focus on the influence of usefulness and credibility on participants’ booking intention. This was tested with three survey questions, which were all measured on a seven-point Likert scale. The questions are as follows: *“After reading the reviews about this hotel, if I were traveling to Vienna, it is very likely that I would book a room at this hotel”* (1), *“It is likely that I will stay at this hotel.”* (2), *“I would never consider booking this hotel.”* (3). The first survey questions’ scale was taken from Sparks & Browning (2011), while the second and third question and scale is based on Ajzen & Fishbein’s (2005) research.

4 Data Analysis and Results

After conducting the online survey experiment, all of the data was downloaded and transferred into the program called SPSS, or Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. The software was used in order to run various statistical tests, aiming to see whether or not a correlation between the constructs of usefulness, credibility, and purchasing intention exists, and if so, to what extent. In order to be able to accept or reject the six main hypotheses of this paper, the constructs’ reliabilities were tested, after which a MANOVA, and multiple regression was conducted, all of which will be analyzed in the subsections below.

4.1 Sample Characteristics

First, this paper is going to depict and investigate the sample characteristics of the online experiment (see Table 1). These can be separated into five categories, which are gender (1), age (2), education level (3), staying in a hotel (4), and booking a

hotel online (5). These demographics help understand to what extent these findings are representative.

Table 1: Sample Characteristics

Sample Characteristics		N = 102
Age	Mean Age	33
Gender	Female	57.8%
	Male	39.2%
	Transgender	2.0%
	Prefer Not to Say	1.0%
Education	University	63.7%
	High School	32.4%
	Vocational School	2.0%
	Compulsory School	2.0%
How often do you stay in a hotel per year?	Mean per Year	6.1
How often do you book hotels online per year?	Mean per Year	5.5

Table 1 depicts the sample characteristics of the 102 participants of the online experiment. The mean age of participants is 33 years, and the majority of respondents are female, accounting for 57.8%. The majority of participants have obtained either a university degree or high school diploma. These two categories account for 96% of the total, with 63.7% having a university degree, and 32.4% having a high school diploma. Furthermore, the respondent's stay in a hotel 6.1 times annually, on average, and book hotels online 5.5 times per year, on average. This would mean that respondents utilize online booking platforms for approximately 90.2% of their travels.

4.2 Hypothesis Testing

Table 2: Cronbach’s Alpha

Measures	Cronbach's Alpha	N
Usefulness		
US1: The online review helped me evaluate the hotel.	0.829	4
US2: The online review helped me understand the performance of the hotel.		
US3: The online review helped me familiarize myself with the hotel.		
Credibility		
CR1: I think the online review is factual.	0.813	2
CR2: I think the online review is credible.		
Booking Intention		
BI1: If I were traveling to Vienna, it is very likely that I would book a room at this hotel	0.835	3
BI2: It is likely that I will stay at this hotel.		
BI3: I would never consider booking this hotel.		

The first test that was conducted is called the Cronbach’s Alpha, which is a measure of reliability. According to Field (2009), reliability means “that a measure should consistently reflect the construct that it is measuring” (p. 673). Therefore, this value reflects the consistency within the different questions of the measured constructs, which are Usefulness (1), Credibility (2), and Booking Intention (3). All of the responses were stated using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). All three constructs depict a Cronbach’s Alpha value of over 0.8 indicating that there is a strong reliability throughout. Furthermore, all values lay relatively close to one another, with booking intention showing a slightly higher value than the other two constructs.

Table 3: Results (M)ANOVA: Manipulation Check and Hypothesis Testing

MANOVA	NEGATIVE		POSITIVE		MIXED		F	P-Value
	MEAN	SD	MEAN	SD	MEAN	SD		
<i>Manipulation Check</i>								
Valence Perception	2.58	2.25	5.58	1.86	4.17	1.65	19.97	<0.01
<i>Hypothesis Testing</i>								
Usefulness	5.23	1.42	5.40	1.18	5.09	1.30	3.04	<0.01
Credibility	5.13	1.69	5.16	1.56	4.99	1.26	0.13	<0.01
Booking Intention	3.19	1.36	4.05	1.10	3.65	1.09	4.43	<0.01

Table 3 depicts the results of the multivariate analysis of variance test, also known as MANOVA, which was used for checking if the manipulation worked, and to test the hypotheses regarding the influence of online reviews on usefulness (H1 & H2), credibility (H3 & H4), and purchasing intention. The descriptive statistics depict the mean and standard deviation of the questions in the survey, which utilized a seven-

point semantic differential scale. Important to note is that the higher the mean is the greater the level of agreement regarding the construct is. However, the question regarding valence asks to what extent participants regarded their given questionnaire as positive, therefore in the case of the negative or mixed group, the mean is expected to be lower. The means of the valence perception demonstrate that participants were able to distinguish between the groups, as the negative condition has the lowest mean with 2.58, mixed the second lowest with 4.17, and the positive group reports the highest mean with 5.58. In the hypothesis testing section, it is prevalent that in all three groups usefulness reports the overall highest mean; (5.23 vs. 5.13 vs. 3.19, $p < 0.01$) in the negative group, (5.40 vs. 5.16 vs. 4.05, $p < 0.01$) in the positive group, and (5.09 vs. 4.99 vs. 3.65, $p < 0.1$) in the mixed group. These mean values are closely followed by credibility, while booking intention overall reports distinctively lower values.

While the mean values of the different conditions are visible in Table 3, in order to be able to accept or reject this research papers' hypotheses, an additional post-hoc test needs to be conducted. This will compare the significance levels of the various groups' means, in order to see where significant differences are statistically present.

Table 4: Scheffé Test for Valence

Valence		95% Confidence Interval				
(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Differece (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Negative	Positive	-3.00	.476	<.001	-4.18	-1.81
	Mixed	-1.59	.461	.004	-2.73	-.44
Positive	Negative	3.00	.476	<.001	1.81	4.18
	Mixed	1.41	.479	.016	.22	2.60
Mixed	Negative	1.59	.461	.004	.44	2.73
	Positive	-1.41	.479	.016	-2.60	-.22

Table 4 depicts the results of the post-hoc Scheffé test for the perceived valence of respondents. All of the values in the fifth column, titled significance, are below 0.05, indicating that there is a significant difference between all groups. Therefore, it can be said that the manipulation of the online reviews was effective and worked for all conditions. Overall, the output presented in Table 3 shows differences

among the mean values of all groups, and the post-hoc test validates this by depicting a significance in every condition.

Table 5: Scheffé Test for the Construct Usefulness

Usefulness		95% Confidence Interval				
(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Differece (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Negative	Positive	-.1671	.31324	.868	-.9456	.6114
	Mixed	.5647	.30347	.182	-.1895	1.3189
Positive	Negative	.1671	.31324	.868	-.6114	.9456
	Mixed	.7318	.31530	.073	-.0518	1.5154
Mixed	Negative	-.5647	.30347	.182	-1.3189	.1895
	Positive	-.7318	.31530	.073	-1.5154	.0518

Table 5 shows the results of the post-hoc Scheffé test for the construct usefulness. There is only one significant result visible, which is that of the positive vs. mixed group, which depicts a value of 0.073. This can be seen as significant, as the value can be divided by two, resulting in a value of 0.0365. This would conclude a significant one-tailed hypothesis between positive and mixed, however not including the negative condition. Therefore, the following conclusion can be made on the first two hypotheses, which are:

H1: Positive emotional words have a greater influence on customers' perceived usefulness of an online review, in comparison to negative emotional words.

H2: Mixed emotional words have a greater influence on customers' perceived usefulness of an online review, in comparison to positive or negative emotional words.

The first hypothesis (H1) states that positive emotional words would have a significantly greater influence than negative emotional words. While the mean values found in the MANOVA test from Table 3 depict that the positive group reports a higher mean value than the negative group (5.40 vs. 5.23, $p < 0.01$), the post-hoc test does not report a significant difference. Therefore, the first hypothesis is rejected.

The second hypothesis (H2) suggests that mixed emotional words have a greater than both positive and negative emotional words. The findings in Table 3 show

that the mixed condition reported the lowest mean value, of 5.09, while the negative condition reported a mean value of 5.23, and the positive condition 5.40. These values already suggest that the mixed condition scored the lowest and therefore does not have a greater influence. The additionally run Scheffé test depicts that a significant difference between the mixed and positive condition is prevalent, however not to the negative group. Therefore, similarly to H1, the second hypothesis is also rejected.

Table 6: Scheffé Test for the Construct Credibility

Credibility		95% Confidence Interval				
(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Differece (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Negative	Positive	-.0363	.37112	.995	-.9586	.8860
	Mixed	.1393	.35955	.928	-.7543	1.0329
Positive	Negative	.0363	.37112	.995	-.8860	.9586
	Mixed	.1756	.37357	.896	-.7528	1.1040
Mixed	Negative	-.1393	.35955	.928	-1.0329	.7543
	Positive	-.1756	.37357	.896	-1.1040	.7528

Table 6 portrays the results of the test for the construct credibility, where it is visible that none of the groups report any significant differences, as none of the values in the fifth column are below 0.05. This test was conducted in relation to the third and fourth hypothesis, which are as follows:

H3: Positive emotional words have a greater influence on customers' perceived credibility of an online review, in comparison to negative emotional words.

H4: Mixed emotional words have a greater influence on customers' perceived credibility of an online review, in comparison to positive or negative emotional words.

The third hypothesis (H3) assumes that in regards to credibility positive emotional words would have a greater impact than negative emotional words. The mean values of the two conditions found in Table 3 are very similar, with positive emotional words reporting a value which is only 0.03 larger than that of the negative group. In addition to this, the post-hoc test depicts no significant difference, therefore leading to the rejection of the third hypothesis.

Lastly, hypothesis number four (H4) states that the mixed group would report higher findings in terms of credibility in comparison to the positive and negative group. However, the mixed group depicts the lowest mean value in Table 3, 4.99, while the negative group has a value of 5.13, and the positive group 5.16. Additionally, the Scheffé test reports that no significance is prevalent, therefore also this hypothesis is rejected.

Table 7: Multiple Regression

Multiple Regression	B	SE B	β
Constant	1,60	0,75	
Usefulness	0,43	0,18	0,30
Credibility	-0,01	0,15	-0,01

The final statistical test was done in order to test the fifth and sixth hypothesis (H5 & H6), which regards the influence of usefulness and credibility on customer's booking intention. The hypotheses are as follows:

H5: The perceived usefulness of an online review has a positive impact on customers' booking intention.

H6: The perceived credibility of an online review has a positive impact on a customers' booking intention.

Table 7 shows the results of the Multiple Regression, where the booking intention was used as the dependent variable, while usefulness and credibility are the independent variable. The beta value (B) of usefulness is 0.43, and of credibility -0.01. A single unit increase in purchasing intention is linked to usefulness, while credibility does not have an impact, because it is not significant. The value is significant when $p=0.01$, therefore usefulness positively impacts the booking intention. The R^2 value is 0.088, meaning that 8.8% of the variance in the purchasing intention can be predicted from usefulness. Therefore, according to these results, hypothesis 5 can be accepted, while hypothesis 6 has to be rejected.

5 Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate the influence of emotional words embedding in online reviews on the perceived usefulness and credibility, while also testing the influence these factors have on user's booking intention. This paper provided a literature review section focusing on eWOM, consumer's perception of online reviews, and emotions within online reviews. Following this an online experiment was done to test the construct's correlation and on each other to establish whether or not they influence one another. While various research has investigated the concept of eWOM and its impact on consumer's decision-making process, a comparative investigation of emotional words within these reviews has not been done yet. Therefore, this thesis aims to be an extension of existing literature on the valence of online reviews and their impact on both consumers and marketers.

After thorough research on previous studies regarding online reviews, a conceptual model and corresponding hypotheses were created, and afterwards tested. In order to test the hypotheses an online experiment with three conditions, positive vs. negative vs. mixed emotional words, was developed and distributed to participants in the form of a survey. The three conditions were used to test the influence of various emotional words, with different valences, on the perceived usefulness and credibility of the online review, to gain a greater understanding of consumer's interpretation of the eWOM.

Overall, the results of the experiment suggest that positive reviews have a greater impact on the perceived usefulness of an online hotel review, in comparison to mixed online reviews. This is visible in the MANOVA test, as the mean comparison of the conditions depict that respondents scored questions related to the positive exemplar review higher than both the negative and mixed condition. The Scheffé post-hoc test was however only able to determine a significant difference between the positive and mixed condition for the construct usefulness. Therefore, these finding do not confirm any of the first four hypotheses. Additionally, the multiple regression analysis suggests that the perceived usefulness of an online review has a significant impact on consumer's booking intention, leading to the acceptance of H5. However,

the statistical test does not confirm H6, as there was no significant correlation between the perceived credibility of an online review and the booking intention. Therefore, it is suggested that positive online reviews could have a significant impact on the perceived usefulness of a hotel's online review, and the perceived usefulness has an impact on the booking intention. However, it remains unclear how positive online reviews differ from negative reviews. Overall, this suggests that online reviews have an impact on user's booking intentions of a hotel.

5.1 Managerial Implications

The main finding of this research is that online booking reviews with distinctly positive emotional words have a greater influence on user's perception of usefulness than mixed emotional words, and that these reviews impact the booking intention of consumers. These findings provide potentially significant insights for the managers of hotels and their respective online booking profiles. These results can help guide managers when developing their online marketing strategy, as it emphasizes the importance of positive customer reviews. Additionally, it also helps further the understanding of which factors directly influence the booking intention, one of which is usefulness. Therefore, managers should try to encourage or incentivize their previous visitors to write positive reviews that are perceived as useful by potential customers, to then increase their future booking intentions.

5.2 Limitations and Further Research

In spite of this thesis' relevant findings, there are multiple limitations, which need to be addressed and possibly considered in future studies. First, the experiment only had three conditions, positive vs. negative vs. mixed, which each had various emotional words. This could easily be expanded on by testing a larger variety of emotional words, or different types of online reviews, in order to find potential differences, that could impact the perception of usefulness and credibility, or that could alter the booking intention. Another interesting aspect would be to investigate how these exemplar reviews would impact customers when they read through multiple reviews, instead of just one. This could be altered by creating an experiment where respondents are led to a booking website and asked to read through various

reviews, and then discuss one in specific, therefore testing the emotional review in a different setting. There are multiple other external influences that could be tested for, such as the influence of the authority of the review's author, for which this experiment can be a useful basis. A second limitation would be the relatively small sample size of 102 respondents, which could easily be improved. Gathering a larger amount of responses is beneficial in various ways, such as improving the quality of the experiment, increasing the mean's precision, and also aiding with identifying outliers (Zamboni, 2018).

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7 Appendices

Appendix 1: Online Questionnaire

0% completed

Dear Participant,

I am currently investigating online reviews of hotels on booking websites for my Bachelor Thesis at Modul University Vienna. I would highly appreciate it if you could spare a few minutes to answer the following questionnaire.

I guarantee that your answers will remain confidential and will exclusively be used for academic purposes.

Thank you for your input and participation.

Clicking on the "Start" Button below would indicate that you have read the information above and that you voluntarily agree to participate.

Next

[Violetta Mucha](#), MODUL University Vienna – 2021

14% completed

Please read through the following online review.

The hotel is located in the center of Vienna. The public transport is only a few minutes away by foot. The hotel has a delightful appearance and all areas of the hotel are fairly easy to find. The room, corridors, and bathrooms are relatively clean. Within my room there was an enjoyable smell for the first minutes, which made me feel lovely. Lastly, the staff members, especially the concierge were competent, which was wonderful. Overall it was a satisfying experience and a good stay. Also, the value I got for my money is fair.

[Violetta Mucha](#), MODUL University Vienna – 2021

29% completed

Strongly disagree Strongly agree
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Overall, I felt that the review was more positive than negative.

Next

43% completed

1. Please base your following answers on the online review above.

Please indicate the extent to which you agree / not agree with the following statements (1-strongly disagree – 7 strongly agree)

	Strongly disagree											Strongly agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7					
The online review provided was useful.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
The online review helped me evaluate the hotel.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
The online review helped me understand the performance of the hotel.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
The online review helped me familiarize myself with the hotel.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					

	Strongly disagree											Strongly agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7					
I think the online review is factual.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
I think the online review is credible.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					

Next

57% completed

2. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree											Strongly agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7					
After reading the reviews about this hotel, if I were traveling to Vienna, it is very likely that I would book a room at this hotel.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
It is likely that I will stay at this hotel.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
I would never consider booking this hotel.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					

Next

71% completed

3. Have you ever checked online customer reviews before booking a hotel?

- Yes
- No

4. How often do you book hotels online in a year?

Please answer this question for a usual year (no COVID-19 pandemic)

times a year

5. How often do you stay at a hotel in a year?

Please answer this question for a usual year (no COVID-19 pandemic)

times a year

6. Does a review appear more credible to you when a detailed profile of the user, who has created the review is visible?

- Yes
- No

Never Always


How often are you checking online customer reviews before booking a hotel?

Next

86% completed

Age

7. Gender

[Please choose] 

8. Highest completed education

[Please choose] 

Next