

**CREDIBILITY OF ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH IN THE SOCIAL
COMMERCE CONTEXT: THE CASE OF TRIPADVISOR**

LAYLA NASSER

Thesis submitted to the University of Ottawa
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Doctorate in Philosophy in Electronic Business Technologies.

Department of Communications
Faculty of Arts
University of Ottawa

Abstract

Background: Online reviews generated by consumers are a vital source of information that drives purchasing decisions by consumers. Nevertheless, identifying the credibility of online reviews remains an obstacle, as not all online reviews are credible. Furthermore, the influence of visuals, such as photos and videos, on credibility and the effects of social electronic word of mouth (S-eWOM) on the trustworthiness and credibility of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) are still being explored. This paper aims to determine the influence of credibility on the consumption of eWOM and S-eWOM in the tourism industry.

Design/Methodology: A qualitative approach was followed using semistructured interviews and observation via the walk-through method with 18 participants from Ottawa. NVivo 12 software was used to organize, categorize, and analyze the data. This research was both deductive and inductive and involved the application of the media richness theory (MRT) and the grounded theory approaches to deduce theories that explain the credibility of eWOM and S-eWOM.

Results: The general findings uncovered the following themes: content, consumer, communicator, context, and community. The advanced analysis revealed that the integration of three frameworks—MRT, Grice's cooperative principle, and the Big Five personality traits—shaped the credibility of eWOM and S-eWOM. Regarding S-eWOM, if a social relationship is not strong enough to expose an individual's personality and attributes, then that social tie is weakened.

Research Limitations/Implications: The inability to generalize the data due to a small sample of participants is a limitation of this research. Outcomes can help tourism managers support reviews that accommodate a balanced view of the positive and negative aspects of travel-related products and services.

Keywords: consumer, information, data, eWOM, S-eWOM, review, traveller

Acknowledgements

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious and Most Merciful, I give thanks to Allah and His blessing for granting me the strength, inner courage, knowledge, and opportunity to complete my PhD studies. I would not have completed this journey without His blessing.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my supervisor, Dr. Heather Morrison, and Professor Rocci Luppacini for their guidance, advice, understanding, and support throughout this process, which began in the winter of 2017. I am fortunate to have worked with them and benefited from their knowledge and expertise in electronic business and qualitative research.

I would like to thank to my committee members, Professor Murad Benyousef and Dr. Elizabeth Dubois, for their insightful counsel and contributions. I am also thankful to the Saudi Arabian government for providing me with financial assistance during my time at the University of Ottawa.

I am grateful to my partner, Ibrahim, and to my kids, Maria, Salman, and Lina. Thank you, my Ibrahim, the most supportive person I have ever known, and my children for your encouragement and patience with your busy wife and mother.

In addition, I would like to express my gratitude to my mother, my father, and my sister, Khalidah, for believing in me and supporting my efforts leading to this significant achievement.

Lastly, I would like to express my appreciation to the participants of this study for allowing me to conduct the walk-through and the interviews with them. Their participation was crucial, and I am incredibly appreciative of their generosity in sharing their time and insight regarding the credibility of eWOM in the context of social commerce.

Dedication

To my father, who has always inspired me to pursue my goals and be passionate about education.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1. Statement of the Problem	1
1.2. Purpose of the Study	6
1.3. Overview of the Theoretical Framework and Methodology	8
1.4. Research Questions	13
1.4.1. Central Question	13
1.4.2. Subquestions	13
1.5. Structure of the Thesis.....	13
Chapter 2: Literature Review	16
2.1 Theoretical Framework	17
2.1.1 MRT	17
2.1.2 SC and Its Importance in Contemporary Economic Activity	20
2.1.3 Social Media, SC, and MRT	23
2.1.4 Credibility Theory and Online Trust.....	25
2.1.5 Credibility of Online Reviews and MRT.....	29
2.2 The Tourism Industry	31
2.2.1. Tourism Industry Characteristics	31
2.2.2. Tourism Industry Challenges	32
2.2.3 OCRs as Conventional eWOM.....	34
2.2.4 Credibility of eWOM in Tourism	37
2.2.5 Critical Elements of a Trustworthy and Credible Review	43
2.2.6 The Effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Tourism Industry.....	53
2.2.7 The Possible Effect of COVID-19 on Consumers' Credibility Judgement of eWOM.....	55
2.2.8 Crisis Management	56
2.3 Chapter Summary.....	58
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	60
3.1. Research Questions	60
3.2. Research Design	60
3.2.1. Grounded Theory Approach	63
3.2.2. Case Description	66
3.3. Justification for Research Design.....	69
3.4. Data Collection.....	70
3.5. Role of the Researcher	79

3.6. Data Analysis	81
3.7. Overview of the Code Development Process.....	85
3.7.1. Coding Software	85
3.7.2. Description of Coders	86
3.7.3. Intercoder Reliability	86
3.8. Ensuring Trustworthiness.....	86
3.9. Research Limitations.....	88
3.10. Ethical Considerations.....	89
Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis	93
4.1. Demographics and Study Context.....	93
4.1.1. Participants' Backgrounds	93
4.1.2. Age.....	93
4.1.3. Gender.....	93
4.2. Data Analysis	95
4.3. Participant Perceptions of Credibility	97
4.4. Major Theme 1: Content	99
4.4.1. Minor Theme 1: Quality	103
4.4.2. Minor Theme 2: Quantity	124
4.5. Major Theme 2: Customer	132
4.5.1. Minor Theme 1: Relevance.....	133
4.5.2. Minor Theme 2: Customer Behaviour, Subjectivity, Cross-Referencing Behaviour, and Self-Trust	138
4.5.3. Minor Theme 3: Customers' Analytic Thinking	142
4.6. Major Theme 3: Communicator, Source (Reviewer), and Platform	145
4.6.1. Minor Theme 1: Source Credibility and Trustworthiness	145
4.6.2. Minor Theme 2: Source Expertise, Seeing Reviewers with Numerous Reviews Posted.....	162
4.7. Major Theme 4: Context, Socioenvironmental Factors, Platform, and Product Types	165
4.7.1. Minor Theme 1: COVID-19	165
4.7.2. Minor Theme 2: Platform	170
4.7.3. Minor Theme 3: Product Types	172
4.7.4. Minor Theme 4: Brand Name and Reputation.....	174
4.8. Major Theme 5: Community and Strength of Social Ties to Disseminate S-eWOM.	175
4.8.1. Minor Theme 1: Strength of Social Ties.....	176
4.8.2. Minor Theme 2: Media Type Preferences	180

4.9 Summary	181
Chapter 5: Discussion	187
5.1. Perception of Credibility	188
5.2. Determinants of Credibility and Trustworthiness	189
5.2.1. Content	190
5.2.2. Customer	191
5.2.3. Communicator	193
5.3. Logic and Conversation	195
5.3.1. Quantity	196
5.3.2. Quality	197
5.3.3. Relationship (“Relevance, Be Relevant”)	198
5.3.4 Manner	201
5.4 Application of the MRT and Its Determinants	202
5.5. The Effect of S-eWOM on Credibility Judgement	208
5.5.1. Personality Traits of Individuals	208
5.5.2. Big Five Personality Traits	209
5.5.3. Verification Behaviour of Customers	217
5.6. S-eWOM on Social Media Platforms	218
5.6.1. S-eWOM and eWOM	219
5.7. Proposed Integrative Framework to Evaluate eWOM Credibility	221
Chapter 6: Conclusion	230
6.1. Conclusion	230
6.2. Limitations	231
6.3. Significance and Contribution of the Study	233
6.4. Directions for Future Research	239
References	242
Appendices	273

List of Figures and Tables

Figure 1: Total Number of Codes by Theme

Figure 2: Determinants of Credibility and Trustworthiness in eWOM

Figure 3: Maxims of Conversation: Grice Model to Grant Credibility

Figure 4: A Proposed Integrative Framework for Evaluating the Credibility of eWOM.

Table 1: Participant Demographic and Study Context

Table 2: Breakdown of the Major and Minor Themes in Response to RQ1

Table 3: Breakdown of Themes in Response to RSQ1

Table 4: Breakdown of Community Minor Themes in Response to RQ2

Table 5: Breakdown of Themes in Response to RQ3 (MRT Determinants)

List of Abbreviations

ELM	Elaboration likelihood model
eWOM	electronic word of mouth
MRT	Media richness theory
OCR	Online consumer review
PII	Personal identification information
PSR	Parasocial relationships
SC	Social commerce
SCC	Social commerce constructs
S-eWOM	Social electronic word of mouth
SNS	Social network site
TAM	Technology acceptance model
TRPS	Travel-related products and services
UGC	User-generated content
WOM	Word of mouth

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The search for a greater understanding of word of mouth (WOM) and electronic word of mouth (eWOM) by marketers has resulted in a significant body of academic literature in marketing, sociology, and psychology (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Ismagilova et al., 2017; King et al., 2014). According to the marketing literature, WOM or eWOM is much more credible and trustworthy than traditional advertising in the consumer decision-making process (Bone, 1995; Herr et al., 1991; Thomas et al., 2019). In fact, reviews and opinions from other users of goods and services have come to be held in high regard among online shoppers.

There is empirical support for the power of WOM opinions that circulate in a social group (Brown et al., 2007; Cheung et al., 2008; Cheung et al., 2009; Schindler & Bickart, 2012). However, traditional WOM is restricted to a small network, thus limiting its reach and accessibility (King et al., 2014). In contrast, eWOM is a web-based communication platform that allows customers to create, share, and request recommended reviews from individuals outside of their immediate social network (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Because of its infinite reach and extensive accessibility, eWOM gained importance and popularity with the advent of e-commerce (Lee & Koo, 2012). The entire value of e-commerce trade climbed from 1.34 trillion US dollars in 2014 to 4.21 trillion US dollars in 2018 (Statista, 2020). In the next three years, its value is estimated to expand by 16%–17%, reaching 6.54 trillion US dollars by 2023 (Statista, 2020).

According to Cheung and Thadani (2012), more than 90% of customers read online recommendations and reviews before making a purchasing decision. Furthermore, 66% of consumers trust other consumers' opinions that are posted online—this applies to 70% of Asian consumers, 71% of African consumers, 60% of European consumers, and 63% of

American consumers. Millennials have the highest level of trust in eWOM (70%) of all age groups (baby boomers, 58%; Generation Z, 63%; Generation X, 69%; Silent Generation, 47%; Nielsen, 2015). This demonstrates the importance of eWOM and its worldwide acceptance across different age groups and cultures.

Consumers are becoming increasingly dependent on user-generated content (UGC) when completing electronic commercial transactions in online settings (Felieri & McLeay, 2014). The constant development of both web and mobile technology has revolutionized consumer behaviour, and many of these changes have been driven by the rise in prominence of social media networks. This behaviour has been amplified by the use of mobile devices and applications (commonly called apps) that allow consumers to search for products and services and conduct online transactions. Examples of these advancements in information communication technology include the development of business opportunities, such as Uber and Airbnb, which are part of the sharing economy (Geissenger et al., 2020). The convenience of requesting a ride with the press of a button, travelling from one place to another, or even sharing the ride with someone has made Uber a successful business model (Smith, 2016). Additionally, Airbnb is capitalizing on promoting an exceptional experience for travellers by offering them an affordable yet unique place to stay (Roelofsen & Minca, 2018).

People can look for information online using a range of electronic devices, such as laptops, tablets, and cell phones. This also allows them to comment on and share their knowledge and experiences of their purchases with others. In the past, consumers heard about products and services only from business advertisements through traditional media, such as television and magazines, as well as through WOM. Today, with globalization and the widespread use of social media and the internet, consumers have the power to compare prices online and seek alternative products, which grants them buying power (Hajli & Sims, 2015).

Additionally, by means of online platforms, consumers can contribute their knowledge, feedback, ratings, and referrals about products and services based on their consumption experiences. Previous studies have considered ratings, reviews, consumer feedback, and referrals as forms of eWOM (Hajli & Sims, 2015). This phenomenon has driven the emergence of a new business model called *social commerce* (SC; Hajli, 2013). Consequently, the commercial use of social network sites (SNSs) has given rise to SC, which, unlike e-commerce, allows consumers to interact with one another on platforms separate from the vendor's hosted site (Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016).

SC can be considered a vehicle for a collaborative effort among individuals that promotes intelligent knowledge of available products and services (positive and negative feedback) via UGC, otherwise known as eWOM, on communication-based electronic platforms (Lin et al., 2017). More specifically, social media networks have been shown to facilitate online trust in e-vendors and subsequently shape consumer behaviour (Curry & Zhang, 2013). Llewellyn (2019) reported that, in 2019, SC generated \$5 billion in sales in the United States, and given its significance in the marketplace, it has attracted considerable academic attention. Today, website giants, such as TripAdvisor and other review platforms with millions of users, demonstrate the enormous demand for online reviews as a component of the purchasing decision-making process. This research considers the TripAdvisor platform as an SC platform, as it capitalizes on the use of social leverage among travellers and reviewers through its collaboration with Facebook, the largest social network site, by showing reviews from the travellers' Facebook friends (Needham, 2019).

Due to the unique nature and special characteristics of the services offered in this industry, consumers are increasingly motivated to share and create eWOM related to tourism and travel (Litvin et al., 2008). Several general tourism industry challenges persist, even in an online context. These challenges are inherent in travel and tourism products and services,

which consist of both tangible and intangible offerings that are not available for sampling prior to purchase (Furner et al., 2016; Litvin et al., 2008; Sparks & Browning, 2011).

Additionally, there are higher perceived risks, uncertainties, and perishable perceptions in travel-related activities compared to other products and services (Furner et al., 2016; Litvin et al., 2008). Consumers rely heavily on eWOM when making purchasing decisions about travel-related products and services (TRPS; Ramos et al., 2014). Thus, the credibility of eWOM has become increasingly important, receiving much attention in academia.

As demonstrated by online consumer reviews (OCRs), for example, eWOM has been shown to influence consumer awareness of offered products and services, alter attitudes and beliefs (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009), affect consumer purchasing decision-making (Filiari & McLeay, 2014; Sparks & Browning, 2011), and influence the final selling of products and services (Ye et al., 2009). Customers value eWOM messages because they provide thorough and trustworthy information that firms hardly ever provide on public platforms (Yang & Mai, 2010). In most cases, an eWOM message describes both the positive and negative elements of a product or service (Kusumasondjaja et al., 2012), and obtaining a balanced perspective improves the credibility of the eWOM message (Cheung et al., 2009).

Consumers may find it challenging to identify reliable online reviews because of the large amount of eWOM information generated by unknown individuals (Hwang & Jeong, 2016; Park & Lee, 2008). Millions of positive and negative reviews can be provided on various eWOM sites for a single product or service (Tsao et al., 2015). From the consumer's standpoint, processing such a large amount of data is nearly impossible. In such cases, most customers rely primarily on the first few recommendations and the overall rating (Lo & Yao, 2019). This encourages businesses to falsify reviews and manipulate customers with false information and fake reviews. According to a *New York Times* article, some firms mishandle online reviews to boost their overall product ratings on e-commerce platforms (Maheshwari,

2019). Thus, the credibility and trustworthiness of online reviews are harmed by fake and firm-sponsored reviews (Ballantine & Au Yeung, 2015). As a result, academic researchers and practitioners are increasingly interested in how consumers assess the legitimacy of eWOM (King et al., 2014).

Due to the observed influence of eWOM in the tourism industry, it is critical for both businesses and consumers to be aware of the abundance of low-quality and fake information provided by anonymous users, unfiltered OCRs, and even contradictory eWOM (Akehurst, 2009). A key example of the challenges associated with eWOM in online reviews is the recent emergence of review “trolls,” who are compensated by other companies for posting negative, anonymous reviews online about competitor companies to manipulate potential customers and their purchasing behaviour (Mayzlin et al., 2014). OCRs and eWOM are often subject to targeted attacks, or “review bombs,” in which falsified information is posted by users aiming to undermine the reputation of other service providers (Smith, 2013; Wood, 2018). The hospitality and tourism industry specifically suffers from fake and malicious reviews, and up to 85% of reviews for travel-related products have been found to be artificial or promotionally motivated (Gerrard, 2017). Therefore, it is crucial to provide a comprehensive framework of eWOM and S-eWOM credibility in the tourism industry. This will aid customers in learning how to critically analyze and assess online reviews and judge the credibility of eWOM and will also assist companies and businesses in maintaining a trusted brand image by allowing verified and honest reviews on their websites.

For the purposes of this research, SC is defined as a commercial application launched via the internet, originating with Web 2.0 technologies and social media, to provoke social interaction among consumers and that supports UGC to assist consumers’ decision-making processes and purchases of goods and services within online communities and marketplaces (Huang & Benyoucef, 2013). Specifically, this study focuses on TripAdvisor as an SC

platform, where consumers rely on peer recommendations and reviews to plan their trips and destinations. Because SC relies on social leverage among consumers and on the way the concept of eWOM moved to the level of S-eWOM (in this case, being able to see reviews and recommendations from friends in one's social network, such as Facebook friends), this influences consumers' decision-making and evaluation of the reviews posted on TripAdvisor (Tham et al., 2013).

1.2. Purpose of the Study

Research focused on the credibility of eWOM has been an important body of research (Chakraborty, 2019; Ismagilova et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2023; Park et al., 2014; Verma et al., 2023). However, the findings and results of previous research on the credibility of eWOM have been somewhat contradictory. Some studies have found that negative reviews have more credibility than positive reviews (Chen & Lurie, 2013). Other studies have found that negative reviews have no influence on consumers' decisions (Moriuchi, 2018). This highlights the need for further analysis of eWOM and S-eWOM and how credibility is granted to both of its uses in SC. Therefore, there is a need to address the identified research gap to determine factors contributing to the credibility of online reviews in the tourism industry in the SC context and to reveal the underlying relationships among these factors in a way that might reinforce or undermine the credibility of eWOM.

In most previous studies, researchers have used quantitative research to determine what triggers the credibility of online reviews and whether travellers trust online reviews, with scarce qualitative data describing how consumers think and act when judging the credibility and trustworthiness of OCRs being available (Banerjee, 2022; Filieri, 2016; Llamero, 2014; Pihlaja et al., 2017). In addition to the importance of the relationship among the factors that lead to the credibility of eWOM, the influence of the interaction among

credibility determinants, especially the source and the message, remains underexplored (Lo & Yao, 2019).

This research also examined the effect of S-eWOM on travellers' credibility judgements of TRPS. According to Nielsen (2012), eWOM shared on social media platforms is presumably restricted to specific user groups and content providers who follow one another. Thus, it is presumed that eWOM on social media platforms would be deemed more trustworthy, given its similarities to traditional WOM compared to other sites with anonymous reviews available to anyone.

Research exploring the difference between anonymous eWOM and S-eWOM is warranted as a first step toward developing new theories specific to the social media phenomenon society is currently experiencing (Pihlaja et al., 2017). As such, the purpose of this thesis is also to address this gap and to explore the unique characteristics of S-eWOM, including reviews from Facebook friends on TripAdvisor compared to anonymous eWOM on the TripAdvisor online platform. A more concrete definition and profile of S-eWOM and its differences from anonymous eWOM can provide much-needed clarity and guidance to practitioners who might leverage the potential power of S-eWOM in the context of SC and driving consumers' online purchasing behaviours.

Moreover, OCRs that consist of written text combined with photos and other visual aids have been shown to be highly effective in influencing consumers (Ma et al., 2018). Hence, in this paper, the author explores the possible influence of visuals in online reviews through the application of media richness theory (MRT) to explain and describe the credibility of eWOM in tourism. Finally, the author explores the possible influence of the pandemic on travellers' evaluations of online reviews.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the travel and tourism industry and caused vulnerability in the short-to-medium term (Duro et al., 2021). For example, trust

in the sanitation and public health practices of venues and countries decreased. Pitrelli (2020) stated that most tourism establishments implemented strict sanitization regimes developed by the American Hotel and Lodging Association and innovative ways of preventing contact between guests and staff. The latter include digital keys, which facilitate check-in and check-out processes for travellers and allow invoice payments via cell phone, thus eliminating the need for magnetic key cards that must be sanitized after each use. Countries that were perceived as acting quickly and effectively may have an advantage in the recovery of this sector when the pandemic is over. South Korea is a good example, with many initial cases countered by an admirable response that limited the spread (Normile, 2020).

1.3. Overview of the Theoretical Framework and Methodology

For this research, it was necessary to use a communication theory, such as MRT (Daft & Lengel, 1986) to explore and justify why consumers grant credibility to online reviews posted on online platforms in various forms. Examples include writing text, adding numerical ratings to the review, and attaching pictures and videos about their trip and their overall experience.

Scholars have focused on many theories to understand and describe the relationship between consumers' usage of technology and their cognitive behaviour and credibility in eWOM. The most common theories used are the technology acceptance model, attribution theory, and the elaboration likelihood model (ELM). The technology acceptance model explains how individuals grant credibility based on the usability and usefulness of a system (Chong et al., 2018). Attribution theory states that reviews posted online are acknowledged by readers, and this acknowledgement may be evaluated based on the degree of actual product information behind the review and the level of impact of non-product-related aspects on the review site. Nonrelated aspects include inappropriate or ill intentions of the reviewer, overexaggeration, or understatement of product performance. In the ELM (Sen & Lerman,

2007), a purchasing decision is preceded by cognitive processing and interpretation of reviews or persuasive content by the potential buyer, who must have the capability to interpret the persuasive messages successfully (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). This implies that people are willing to reflect upon these messages and process the information. This practice is identified as the central route in the context of the ELM. However, if readers are incapable of reflecting upon and interpreting the message properly, they are more likely to make decisions to buy or reject a product based on minor indications of product performance (Mazursky & Schul, 1992).

Hence, in such circumstances, communication theories emphasize a discussion about the method of interpretation of information by a person and their consequent decisions of giving credibility to eWOM. These theories have been used to understand the credibility of eWOM among scholars, such as Yan et al. (2016) and Tran and Sutton (2020), who found that consumers are moving more toward eWOM than e-commerce advertisements, possibly because they find eWOM easier to understand than the potentially more subtle messages of e-commerce suppliers. Nevertheless, current trends suggest moving beyond these factors, which led to the credibility of eWOM being able to capture cognitive thinking and attitudes while navigating through former travellers' OCRs. With advancements in information communication technology, reviewers now post their reviews and share their experiences publicly with friends using Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, which can be called S-eWOM, and with strangers via eWOM. Using multiple media cues through posting photos and videos of a trip creates an environment for travellers to walk through different types of online reviews, expanding the richness of the media (Choi et al., 2018; Mkono & Tribe, 2017). It is therefore useful to apply the MRT as a communication theory to develop a deeper understanding of this phenomenon.

Since the emergence of SC, users and customers have developed the habit of sharing their personal experiences with a product or service online and contributing to online content (Gvili & Levy, 2019). EWOM includes both positive and negative reviews and experiences about a product or service shared by a past, present, or future buyer on online platforms with numerous internet users (Fang, 2014). However, researchers have recently begun to regard eWOM and S-eWOM as two distinct concepts (De Keyzer et al., 2017; GonÁalves et al., 2013). S-eWOM refers to eWOM generated through social media by readers' friends and relatives. Similarly, the methods of processing and, consequently, giving credibility to both types of eWOM differ. This thesis makes a pertinent contribution to the current research and to the literature pertaining to eWOM and S-eWOM. In this context, previous research employed MRT, which states that "information shared on various types of media is processed differently by these communications media" (Daft & Lengel, 1986). According to this theory, communication channel personnel used a variety of types of media to tailor and communicate their messages. According to Rambe and Jafeta (2017), different media have different "extent[s] of richness" (p. 654); for example, the extent of richness is poor for media such as email, while it is greater for one-on-one communication, which has greater potential to convey messages effectively. Modern developments in the communication field have revealed other rich platforms and applications for communication, such as Skype and FaceTime. These have overtaken previously used face-to-face discussion channels.

Besides the communication medium, a person's culture also plays an important role because peoples' views and behaviours depend on their cultural values. Differences in culture may influence customers' behaviours when reading and evaluating consumer-generated content. Culture is the collection of shared values, moral standards, and traditional ways of behaving that are upheld, followed, and passed down within a particular society (Alesina & Giuliano, 2015). The prior work on culture and eWOM is based on Hofstede's notion of

cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1983, 2001). A cultural dimension involves a framework that may be used to understand differences in culture in different countries. The cultural values and consequently the framed behaviour of individuals is discussed in this research in terms of the “cultural dimensions” proposed by Hofstede (2001), namely.

- individualism or collectivism,
- power distance,
- uncertainty avoidance,
- masculinity or femininity,
- long-term orientation or short-term orientation, and
- indulgence or restraint.

It is imperative to consider conventional methods of sharing and spreading information while applying methodological theories of communication. Additionally, it is important to consider the novel features and attributes of technology in a specific culture or area while applying these theories online. People’s perceptions about the reliability of information and credibility of eWOM depend on their culture; hence, the acknowledgement of the culture generated by online reviews, particularly the specific values associated with the use of online platforms, is of equal importance (Fan et al., 2018). Despite the continuous evolution of information technology and its role in enhancing communication among travellers through the option of online reviews and information sharing, the probability of misuse cannot be denied.

The term *communication theories*, as used in this research, implies MRT and logic of conversation. Perceived information credibility can result in the acceptance of information and consequently in persuasion, highlighting the way perceived information credibility emphasizes the development of models and principles by integrating communication theories. Moreover, in this dissertation, communication theories are used and incorporated to inform

models and principles to build an understanding of the perceived credibility of information, which leads to information adoption and persuasion. Because generating credibility and trust in online information varies greatly from culture to culture, cultural dimensions influence the way people think and react in an online environment when they encounter enormous amounts of information posted on online platforms.

This research was aimed at knowledge creation and leveraging the understanding of the credibility of eWOM and S-eWOM in the tourism industry. The walk-through approach and semistructured interviews were employed as the qualitative research methodology to determine the significant factors of eWOM credibility within the sphere of SC by capturing participants' perceptions, including both short- and long-term memory. These methods allowed the researcher to extract comprehensive information regarding the topic under discussion (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Merriam, 1988).

The researcher used multiple data collection methods to gather the data for this research because it allowed the extraction of insights from the relevant sample (Merriam, 1988). The most effective method to gain access to information on how to grant credibility to eWOM was by conducting a walk-through experiment. The researcher observed the cognitive processes of participants when they chose which reviews to read and trust while they thought aloud about how they felt about these reviews and the reason they found them credible or trustworthy. In this way, participants' memory was triggered in the moment of reading and evaluating online reviews, which stimulated short-term memory, and the researcher and participants could discuss participants' reactions in greater detail during the follow-up interviews. Therefore, the walk-through method and semistructured interviews were central to this study.

The researcher's role is an essential variable in qualitative research (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 1988; Stake, 2010), but the researcher also needs to maintain objectivity and avoid

bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This can be ensured by using a range of data collection techniques, as opposed to using only one, as described above. The researcher used descriptive and pattern coding procedures to analyze the data, as these methods allowed the efficient description and interpretation of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 1988). The researcher used several approaches to attain research trustworthiness, including the identification of researcher bias, thick descriptions, triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995). Furthermore, I ensured that all research stages were based on ethical principles.

1.4. Research Questions

1.4.1. Central Question

The overall aim of this research study was to address the existing gaps regarding eWOM in the tourism literature by answering the following research question:

- RQ1. What are the factors that influence the credibility of eWOM in the tourism industry?

1.4.2. Subquestions

- RSQ1. How do these factors shape travellers' perceptions of the credibility of eWOM?
- RQ2. How do the social cues of social network friends influence travellers' trust in eWOM?
- RQ3. How does media richness, as measured by visual clues (e.g., photos and videos), influence credibility and trust in eWOM?

1.5. Structure of the Thesis

This thesis has been divided into six chapters. The introductory chapter, "Chapter 1: Introduction," provides insight into the problems faced by the tourism industry in ensuring

that the industry remains viable. I specifically discuss issues regarding the authenticity of online feedback, which results in the spread of eWOM, and how the psychology of tourists works to maintain the trust and reliability of online reviews, where S-eWOM appears to be influencing the advertising messages of the formal tourism industry. This chapter also details important factors and definitions, such as the significance of SC channels in current economic activities and the authenticity and reliability of online businesses. It contributes to the literature on the impact of public health crisis, such as COVID-19, on tourists and the tourism industry. The objectives of the study are presented, and an outline of the theories provided, along with the methodology employed for the research. The final section of this chapter describes the research questions pertaining to this study.

“Chapter 2: Literature Review” sheds light on the authenticity of eWOM in the context of the tourism industry. I evaluate pertinent studies and their use to explain the implementation of online feedback by tourists and to explain how the trust and credibility of the design and features of online reviews are established. The chapter also highlights the condition of the tourism industry from the perspective of travellers regarding the credibility of eWOM in the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter emphasizes the strategies adopted by different countries to tackle the virus that influence clients’ trust in online reviews and on their potential to undertake holiday travel. Finally, the rationale for investigating this phenomenon and the theoretical framework is set out at the end of this chapter.

In “Chapter 3: Methodology,” the qualitative research design employed in the current research is discussed. Furthermore, this chapter sets out the details and arguments regarding data selection, the researcher’s contribution, and the collection and analysis of information, in addition to explaining the development of codes and the ethics underpinning the study.

“Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis” presents the findings of the study with the help of appropriate explanations of the most frequently identified codes among participants and the themes revealed in data analyses, such as communicator, content, receiver, and context.

“Chapter 5: Discussion” presents a discussion of the findings set out in the previous chapter. The relationship between the findings of this study and the academic literature and research is established through pattern coding to determine the factors that enhance the credibility of online reviews, which is significant for eWOM in tourism. The analysis concentrates on the following broad categories: the communicator, receiver, content, and context. The chapter offers an overview of collaborative elements that interact to increase or decrease the credibility of eWOM or S-eWOM, as well as a discussion about the relationship between the context (the platform and COVID-19) and the collaborative credibility model.

In “Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations,” the author evaluates the importance of this research, the drawbacks associated with this study, and the contributions made to the existing literature. At the end of the chapter, suggestions for further research are presented.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The chapter begins with a presentation of the theoretical framework of the study. Various communication theories, such as the media richness theory (MRT), Daft and Lengel's (1986) affordances concept, and the evolution of MRT theory were used to develop a framework for evaluating the credibility of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) within the context of social commerce (SC). The SC context, along with its ability to provide social leverage to share the generated content with peers who disseminate online reviews among users in a social network, is referred to as social eWOM (S-eWOM). This [S-eWOM] differs from conventional eWOM posted on TripAdvisor, and the connection between SC and MRT also differs between S-eWOM and eWOM. Furthermore, the development of credibility theory and online marketplace trust were used as a theoretical framework because some dimensions of the credibility concept and trust overlap. The literature indicates various other contexts for providing credibility within eWOM and S-eWOM contexts.

Next, a possible connection between the credibility of eWOM and MRT theory is provided. The tourism sector and its related features are also analyzed. This is followed by the literature on eWOM in general and its antecedents and consequences, in addition to S-eWOM. The antecedents and determinants of the credibility of eWOM posted by earlier travellers are also presented. Lastly, tourism crisis management is evaluated considering the possible influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on travellers' credibility perceptions and is contextualized within different cultures.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section deals with the evolution of communication theory, the SC context, and definitions and dimensions of credibility. The second section discusses the tourism industry, the credibility of eWOM in general and in tourism, and crisis management in the tourism industry.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.2 MRT

No single theory has been used to design a framework to understand the credibility of eWOM in the online marketplace; instead, scholars have used a combination of theories to develop different aspects that lead to the credibility of eWOM. The evolution of digital technologies, particularly the internet, since the 1980s has resulted in multiple new forms of communication, each offering specific advantages and disadvantages. Daft and Lengel (1986) proposed a formal theory for evaluating the value of various communication methods in the context of their “richness,” described as the amount of social interaction and aspects of communication that a medium offers and its subsequent ability to present information in an understandable way. For example, a telephone call offers audio information to the receiver within which inflections in speech and other verbal cues may be picked up. However, a video conference call offers not only audio cues, but also visual social cues provided by gestures and body language, which enhance the clarity of the message and the understandability of the context. Through the lens of the MRT, Daft and Lengel (1986) argued that video conferencing is therefore richer than telephone communication and thus also more effective. The theory becomes even more relevant when applied to more sophisticated methods of technology people experience today due to social media and industries that have shifted to relying heavily on web-based social interactions with and between consumers. For example, the travel and hospitality industry thrive on positive reviews on global sites such as TripAdvisor (Filiari, 2016).

The trustworthiness and credibility of user-generated content (UGC), specifically of online reviews, has been the focus of research, as its effects on vendors, other users, and the industry are merely beginning to be understood. Consequently, this thesis illustrates the key

aspects and characteristics of MRT in the modern-day context of the credibility of online reviews on the TripAdvisor travel website.

When MRT was first described in 1986, only selected communication platforms were available to exemplify the theory: telephone, fax, and generic email. At the time, the theory generally described that all communication media vary in their ability to enable users to communicate and to change understanding; the magnitude to which they can function to do so is referred to as their richness (Daft & Lengel, 1986). Determining a medium's richness involves assessing its ability to handle multiple information cues simultaneously, facilitate rapid feedback, establish a personal focus, and use natural language (Communication Theory, 2020). The theory also addresses strengths related to a communication medium's richness, specifically in the context of uncertainty or in reducing equivocality. The theory states that less rich, or lean, media, which consist of written text only, are best suited for reducing uncertainty, whereas rich media, such as face-to-face personal communication, are best suited for reducing equivocality. Essentially, leaner media provide less information and therefore are often more straightforward and easier to understand, whereas richer forms of communication often provide much more information but lead to a clearer understanding of all the facets of the issue at hand (Communication Theory, 2020). With the advancement of technology, particularly the rapid improvement of internet-based technologies, MRT has been revisited and re-examined.

Evolution of the MRT. Dennis and Valacich (1999) proposed the idea that the original MRT appears to be missing several important considerations. They argued that the original theory was built on the assumption that social presence increases when richer forms of communication are used. They further stated that the richness of a communication medium is based on social factors but may also be influenced by several other characteristics, such as the information-processing capabilities of the receiver, the immediacy of feedback, and the

ability to fine-tune messages before sending. Many of the arguments made in their paper were based on the increased sophistication and prevalence of email and internet-based communications compared to the 1980s. The complex variables associated with online social networking and user interfaces were simply not as large of a consideration when the original 1986 theory was published. Dennis and Valacich (1999) therefore proposed a new theory—the theory of media synchronicity—that explained the extent to which individuals worked together on the same activity at the same time. To assess the synchronicity of a communication method, one must first explain the five capabilities of the method (immediacy of feedback, symbol variety, parallelism, reprocess ability, and rehearseability) and their ability to support two communication processes (conveyance and convergence) in three critical tasks (production, group well-being, and member support; Dennis & Valacich, 1999). Ultimately, the authors concluded that this more complex model was ideal for the time of publication.

Four years later, Sheer and Chen (2003) argued that the theory required updating and additional considerations, given the implications of the rapidly developing online communication environment. They studied more than 100 managers in various corporate positions in Hong Kong to assess management considerations when selecting specific communications media to complete tasks and deliverables in the most efficient manner possible. In addition to the previously considered characteristics, such as uncertainty and reducing equivocality (Daft & Lengel, 1986) and various capabilities for critical tasks (Dennis & Valacich, 1999), Sheer and Chen (2003) also observed that managers made decisions based on relational and self-presentational goals. The authors argued that in a hierarchy such as in the corporate environment, communication is driven by goals that are instrumental, relational, or self-presentational. Relational and self-presentational goals or tasks are completed because the success of the manager (a) typically relies on the

performance of their employees and (b) reflects beneficially on their reputation and status in the workplace. The authors therefore argued that managers appeared to favour communication methods that not only increased efficacy but also boded well for their own relational or self-presentational goals and were dependent upon the negative or positive nature of the message (Sheer & Chen, 1999). Sheer and Chen (1999) revealed an interesting layer of the theory in their paper by focusing on the valence of messaging.

The influence of negative and positive, or even neutral, messaging would become even more significant as digital technology, social media platforms, and e-commerce began to emerge in the late 2000s. For instance, a new avenue for eWOM was represented by consumers' behaviour on TripAdvisor, such as review ratings, recommendations, feedback, and travellers posting pictures of places they had visited and perhaps food pictures. Sometimes, the motion in videos posted by travellers reviewing a particular place influences the online review reader to learn more about the place. In this research, I have studied the applicability of these different communication tools and channels used by travellers on TripAdvisor, which is considered an SC platform. TripAdvisor affordances were explored in terms of how rich or poor the platform is in terms of the three determinants of MRT (informative, contextual, and interactional). The influence of offering texts in the reviews and of facial expressions revealed using visuals on consumers' credibility judgement and trust were explored and analyzed.

2.1.2 SC and Its Importance in Contemporary Economic Activity

SC is not wholly dependent on the internet and can exist independently of online commerce, for example, in social groups of people meeting face to face (Jăşcanu et al., 2007). SC predates social network sites (SNSs), as it contains the essence of word of mouth (WOM) among individuals. Prior to the internet, people would recommend products and services to their family and friends when they socialized; thus, social shopping was a model of SC in the

past, before social networking became available (Jăşcanu et al., 2007). Multiple views about the nature of SC websites stem from uncertainty regarding the concept of SC. This gives rise to the argument of whether SC should be considered a component of e-commerce. This subject was also discussed by Hajli (2013), Kim and Park (2013) and Chen et al. (2017), who described SC as an essential component of e-commerce, which involves the employment of Web 2.0 technology and social media to allow consumers to share content with online social communities. SC and social interaction go hand in hand, and SC allows different parties, such as consumers and sellers, to interact with the assistance of internet technology; hence, this definition pertaining to the social significance of SC is apparently reliable (Han & Trimi, 2017).

The extensive development of SNSs has led to the emergence of SC in online platforms (Hajli, 2013, 2014, 2015; Hajli et al., 2017; Huang & Benyoucef, 2013, 2017). SC has become prominent in the contemporary economic environment due to the extensive use of SNSs by individuals (Amblee & Bui, 2011). It has become a dominant force in determining levels of consumer trust, given that it acts as some form of “social proof” (Hew et al., 2016). Furthermore, it has been argued that within such an environment, consumers are more likely to rely upon social knowledge as a means of supporting their purchasing decisions (Curty & Zhang, 2011). Most importantly, SC enables online businesses to gain useful insights into consumer behaviour in terms of their experiences and expectations (Kim & Park, 2013). In turn, online vendors can quickly adapt their business strategy to suit consumer expectations and needs and to further increase their sales and customer satisfaction.

Various definitions are available in the literature for SC, as it is a vast field that entails multiple disciplines, such as marketing, computer science, sociology, and psychology (Wang et al., 2022). One can comprehend the big picture of SC by considering diverse perspectives through these multiple definitions. The literature suggests that SC can be classified based on

social media and commercial acts (Yadav et al., 2013). However, these definitions of SC lack consistency (Huang & Benyoucef, 2017). SC can be described as an internet-based business application initiated through social media and Web 2.0 technologies to promote the basic objective of SC, which is to facilitate social interaction among consumers through the sharing of UGC. This activity allows consumers to make sound purchasing decisions while keeping in mind the perspectives and experiences shared by other online consumers (Huang & Benyoucef, 2013).

The holistic definition of SC implies that it has been derived from e-commerce and involves the sociocommercial activities of sales and purchases. In addition, it enables consumers to be a part of the product life cycle from the initial product production phases to the ultimate marketing phase through social media and Web 2.0 (Zhou et al., 2013).

Consumers' online reviews are considered a way of marketing and diffusing information among customers during the product life cycle; they are also considered an SC construct (SCC), as proposed by Hajli (2015). The SCCs developed by Hajli are ratings and reviews, forums and communities, and referrals and recommendations. These SCC are said to create eWOM and influence consumers' trust (Hajli, 2015). Companies use consumers' reviews on social media to modify their products and services according to consumers' wants and needs. SC is also beneficial for consumers, as it allows them to evaluate the features of a product by considering reviews from other users of the product. Consumers can also look for alternatives to the product, which allows them to make better purchasing decisions. SC further enables consumers to interact and make social contributions in the form of UGC to allow other consumers to make better purchasing decisions.

SC has made continuous progress in the field of e-commerce through its dual function as a social media activity and as a means of conducting business online (Hajli, 2014). Thus, there are two main aspects of SC. First, SC is based on the commercial transactions within e-

commerce. Without e-commerce, SC is a mere concept that cannot be put into practice in the commercial world (Linda, 2010). There is evidence to suggest that e-commerce provides an essential infrastructure for SC to make it useful for business purposes (Turban et al., 2011). Second, social activity while shopping online is another important aspect of SC. Some studies have concluded that social networking and online shopping are two sources of SC (Stephen & Toubia, 2010).

An example of this progress in SC is the recent collaboration of TripAdvisor with Facebook to take TripAdvisor to a social level where travellers can see recommendations from network friends with whom they have social connections. This creates S-eWOM, and it might have a different effect on travellers, motivating them to grant more credibility to S-eWOM than to conventional eWOM. This thesis explores the possible influence of S-eWOM on travellers' perceptions of credibility and how the social relationship between the reviewer and the customer reading the travel reviews may or may not moderate the influence on the credibility of online reviews.

2.1.3 social media, SC, and MRT

The emergence of social media and users' ability to purchase goods and services online (e-commerce) presented an entirely new perspective on MRT. In 2009, Brunelle published an article that intertwined MRT with consumers' decision-making processes in purchasing goods online. The integrated model used known variables related to the theory and incorporated a new dimension called *perceived media richness* (Brunelle, 2009). The integrated model showed that consumers' intentions to use online stores are likely to make a significant contribution to the understanding of consumers' online behaviour. The results supported the idea that the best approach to developing e-commerce strategies is to establish them entirely according to the company–consumer interface (Brunelle, 2009). Brunelle's model underscores how important it is for companies to gain a deep understanding of how

consumers perceive the richness of their online stores. The author made a significant point that online communications relied heavily on the perception of the message being conveyed and that certain elements or characteristics may skew that perception, a hallmark barrier of social media and online communication platforms.

A 2011 study by Dong and Chen further examined these personal characteristics that could skew perceptions and the consumption of media, specifically from the perspective of the use of digital or mobile communication platforms to purchase items online. They surveyed 300 cell phone users and found that positive hedonic or emotional factors, such as enjoyment and pleasure, were associated with online purchasing, consultation, searching, and site revisits. Similarly, negative utilitarian factors, such as poor perceived ease of use and usefulness, often had negative effects on the consumption experience of consumers online (Dong & Chen, 2011). Overall, the authors concluded that consumers preferred channels that offered tailored messages or information that best corresponded to what they desired or with rich and varied ways of communication (Dong & Chen, 2011).

These studies offered insight into the complex nature of characteristics that influence the MRT in internet-based communication platforms but were published at a time when the age of social media and user-to-user communication had not yet fully taken off. For example, Yelp and Twitter were still in the early stages of development in the early 2000s. By the mid-2010s, social media websites had become globally accessible, and they have since established themselves as the most critical and popular communication platforms of the masses. Following suit, many industries transformed their online stores to allow UGC to appear in the form of online reviews in the hope that users seeking input and suggestions from other users would drive sales. The travel industry also adopted this format, as can be seen on popular travel websites, such as TripAdvisor. The website provides ample opportunity to study the aspects of contemporary MRT, including the influence of valence and emotional factors of

the users on their behaviour and perceptions of messaging, which leads to their evaluation of eWOM credibility.

2.1.4 Credibility Theory and Online Trust

The internet plays a significant role in various daily-life activities; hence, it has drawn the attention of various research fields, such as health, journalism, e-commerce, education, and, of course, tourism. Due to the emergence of competing theories, the idea of credibility has become quite complex. A major challenge exists regarding the wide range of indicators used to evaluate credibility issues (truthfulness, accuracy, fairness, completeness, factuality, lack of bias, objectivity, trustworthiness, etc.). The significance of these measures is typically ranked in the quantitative studies conducted. However, those studies continue to have vague interpretations, and it cannot be determined whether they are predictors of perceived credibility or fundamental dimensions of the credibility concept itself (Rieh & Danielson, 2007). This is because there is no agreement regarding the attributes that describe credibility. To solve this issue, participants were allowed to present their own definition of credibility. This method conforms to the idea of it being a perceived quality; therefore, when credibility is being discussed, it is based on the observer's perspective (Fogg et al., 2003).

However, in the literature, credibility is seen as a multidimensional concept that has been investigated from many perspectives. Wathen and Burkell (2002) defined credibility as a complex theory that relies on two dimensions: trustworthiness and expertise. Further, they proposed the idea that credibility develops when a set of dimensions interact with each other. These dimensions are source characteristics (e.g., reputation, expertise, and trustworthiness), receiver characteristics (e.g., cultural background, involvement, and motivation), content characteristics (e.g., consistency, plausibility, and quality), and medium-channel characteristics (e.g., the design features of the medium that carries the information, including usability and navigation control).

According to Levy and Gvili (2015), *eWOM credibility* refers to the ability of individuals' ideas to be trusted by others. The critical aspects of eWOM communication are the message, source, channel, and receiver (Yan et al., 2018). Another perception of credibility is the one proposed by Verma and Dewan (2020), who referred to credibility as the likelihood of an intended audience believing a message. The content and communication used in eWOM directly affect its credibility, but the characteristics of the receiver may act as a moderator, weakening the effect.

Researchers have used primarily the elaboration likelihood model (ELM), dual-process theory, and source credibility literature to explain how various factors influence eWOM credibility. For instance, the ELM indicates that when people use a centralized method to process information, the quality of the arguments lends credibility to eWOM. Alternatively, when people use the peripheral route to evaluate information, the consistency, review sidedness, and volume of eWOM content all influence the credibility of eWOM (Park & Lee, 2008). According to the dual-process theory, the credibility of eWOM is determined by two factors: informational factors based on the message's quality and normative factors based on social opinions (Cheung et al., 2009).

Consumer trust has been recognized as one of the key factors in e-commerce transaction success (Beldad et al., 2010; Lin et al., 2019). This trust helps customers overcome the perceptions of possible risk and insecurity associated with online transactions (Jones & Leonard, 2008). Moreover, responsibility, capability, reliability, and honesty have all been linked to trust, as suggested by Iglesias and Ind (2020). Lack of trust is the main hindrance that prevents customers from shopping online, as there is no direct connection between buyers and sellers or physical experience with the product (Gefen & Straub, 2004; Hajli et al., 2017). When shopping online, consumers lack tangible, first-hand experience with the product, such as smelling it or touching it. Thus, the opinions of other consumers can

be more appreciated if these customers have had direct physical experience with the products or services (Lin et al., 2018). Hence, their reviews, remarks, and rankings become fundamental supports for other consumers.

According to Oliveira et al. (2017), online trust plays a vital and significant role in facilitating commercial transactions on e-commerce sites and in users' intention to use websites. Online trust is also a multidimensional concept that can be defined in several contexts. In general, trust is defined as mutual confidence that no party will exploit another's vulnerabilities (Gajda, 2020). The meaning of trust can be derived from several disciplines, including sociology, economy, and social psychology, and it can also be derived from a personality trait. According to Farivar et al. (2017), when dealing with trust in e-commerce, the most relevant perspective is the social-psychological one because it implies that the consumer must have a specific level of trust to partake in the social aspect of conducting transactions with a retailer. More specific to consumer trust in an online shopping environment, trust implies that any personal or financial information that is disclosed by the customer will be protected and not shared and that the products will have the described quality (Mutimukwe et al., 2020). Even more specific is *brand trust*, which represents a customer's belief that a brand will uphold its advertised promises and values (Beldad et al., 2010; Portal et al., 2019).

Trustworthiness is a credibility construct component. It has been described as the expectation of the trustor regarding the trustee's behaviour and motives (Doney & Cannon, 1997, p. 21). A review would be trustworthy, according to the reader, if the customer has posted a truthful, sincere, honest, and noncommercial perception of the product or service experience. Reviews that are fake, sponsored, and untrustworthy are regarded as promotional or deceptive. Deceptive-opinion spam or promotional reviews are regarded as opinions that are fictitious and have been written deliberately so that they may sound authentic (Ott et al.,

2011, p. 309). An individual, staff member, manager, or owner may write a promotional review in exchange for a benefit (e.g., discounts, free goods or services, and money). They behave like customers to present a glowing review reflecting a satisfactory experience with the products. This action is known as stealth marketing (Roy & Chattopadhyay, 2010). Such promotional reviews present an unfair perception regarding the business, product, or service to enhance the reputation of the product and influence consumers' perceptions (Dellarocas, 2006).

The present study focuses on UGC, particularly credibility or trust in online consumer reviews (OCRs)—a form of eWOM—by identifying credibility cues determined by consumers. This enables the study of the interaction among these cues and how this leads to enhanced credibility in online tourism. The following section links the credibility of online reviews with MRT theory and reviews eWOM literature on tourism and perceived eWOM credibility in the SC context.

Source Credibility and Trustworthiness. When a consumer lacks product or service knowledge, they depend on unbiased and expert sources to attain valuable information. When the consumer perceives that the communication source is honest, sincere, and reliable, it is referred to as *source trustworthiness*. Such credibility is extracted from the perceptions of the reviewer, who has expertise, skills, and knowledge through a particular source domain (Ohanian, 1990). The opinions of consumers and source message acceptance for offline WOM are strongly influenced by trustworthiness and source credibility (Brown & Reingen, 1987; McGinnies & Ward, 1980). Bauman and Bachmann (2017) stated that communication between consumers and e-vendors that promote eWOM is crucial in building consumers' trust and triggers the multidimensional concepts of trust: ability, integrity, and benevolence.

The source credibility model can be used to determine the effect of the source's trustworthiness, expertise, and competence on eWOM credibility (Hovland & Weiss, 1951).

According to the model, source credibility significantly influences how the receiver thinks and feels about persuasive messages (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). According to the social information processing and uncertainty reduction theories, source credibility and homophily positively influence eWOM credibility (Berger & Calabrese, 1974; Hoang, 2015; Kusumasondjaja et al., 2012). Individuals may reduce the uncertainty associated with eWOM communication by drawing on factors such as a person's number of followers, gender, and profile picture.

2.1.5 Credibility of Online Reviews and MRT

Users' capability to generate content on a vendor's website or social media, often in the form of a review of a product or on a discussion board, has become a staple of SC. However, in online settings, most cues that assist in the proper interpretation of opinions (e.g., acquaintance with the person providing the information and inferences from the person's facial expression or mode of dressing) are lacking. Driven by MRT and its several proposed iterations, UGC provides personal content to a vendor's website and allows the user to become involved in the experience of purchasing a good not only as a consumer but also as an advisor to other consumers (Timoshenko & Hauser, 2019). By allowing consumers to post photos, videos, and text for others to view, the richness of the media content available is enhanced, and consumers may be more driven to perceive the content as credible and complete the purchase of an item. Nevertheless, beyond this is the element of trustworthiness and expertise, or the perceived credibility of UGC, and how it influences consumer behaviour online. Brunelle (2009) pointed out the importance of the perception of messaging in a media-rich digital communication platform, such as TripAdvisor. A decade later, the influence of the perceived credibility of UGC, such as online reviews, had been heavily studied (Thomas et al., 2019).

In 2019, Ishii et al. revisited MRT to suggest further revisions, given the contemporary methods of online communication and e-commerce. The authors argued that their review of previous MRT literature showed inconsistent results concerning media richness across communication contexts, specifically social media, and e-commerce, which offer technology-driven, instant gratification. In short, they found that although media richness may still be somewhat relevant today in the objective sense, it appears that media richness is highly subjective based on how receivers use the channel and take advantage of the characteristics of advanced technology. These findings link back to the views of Brunelle (2009) and Dong and Chen (2011), who suggested that user perceptions (subjectivity) of messaging in e-commerce situations is highly influential in relation to the influence of media richness on users' understanding and behaviour.

To further this point, Tanupabrungsun and Hemsley (2018) assessed the influence of various celebrity (scientist, pop star, and athlete) tweets on Twitter, weighing the richness of messages based on a variety of characteristics, including informational, interactional, and contextual characteristics. By using crowdsourcing tactics on Twitter and completing regression analyses, the authors observed that scientists tended to create tweets with the highest informational scores. This suggests that scientists give more weight to creating more complete, less ambiguous text—or through lean media messaging, through the lens of the MRT. In contrast, pop stars with large followings on Twitter were found to tweet more casual sentence structures and hashtags to indicate inclusiveness, which appeared to be correlated with popularity and, therefore, positive public perceptions of the celebrities themselves. Rossini et al. (2018) noted that Tanupabrungsun and Hemsley's (2018) study demonstrated the importance of subjectivity in messaging consumption on social media platforms, specifically that richer media does not always result in a more positive interaction and that

less ambiguous or contextual messaging can be perceived as being more rich or credible due to the feelings or subjective perceptions of the users receiving that message.

In support of MRT, more complex and richer messaging can be positive from the perspective of commercialization (Brunelle, 2009). However, the contemporary trend of including UGC and online reviews as components of richness, particularly on travel websites, does not always result in positive consumer interaction. In fact, the valence of messaging in online reviews can directly affect the perceived credibility of the vendor and have an overall negative effect on user behaviours. Furthermore, richer online reviews, such as those that include detailed text and photos or videos, can influence other users' perceptions of source credibility depending on the valence. There appears to be a conflict regarding whether richer media is beneficial to the receiver (users, in this case)—a conflict grounded in the credibility of that media and whether the valence is overly negative, negative, neutral, positive, or overly positive. It seems as if contemporary MRT, in terms of online reviews, is governed by the perceived trustworthiness and credibility of UGC, perhaps suggesting a warranted divergence in the theory depending upon users' subjective perceptions and emotional factors, which are explored in this study.

2.2 The Tourism Industry

2.2.1. Tourism Industry Characteristics

Tourism scholars have devoted much attention to the power of travel-related reviews among consumers. For example, research has revealed the positive influence online reviews have had on hotel sales (Li et al., 2020; Ye et al., 2009), purchasing intentions of consumers (Filiari & McLeay, 2014; Sparks & Browning, 2011), and consumer attitudes to and awareness of products, services, and brands (Chakraborty & Bhatt, 2018; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009).

Worldwide, the tourism industry is faced with various challenges that are being passed on to the online setting. The products and services related to travel and tourism are open to challenges since they include tangible and intangible contributions. Hence, e-business is also suffering (Furner et al., 2016; Litvin et al., 2008; Sparks & Browning, 2011). As it is impossible to sample tourism products before purchasing (Furner et al., 2016; Litvin et al., 2008), the perceived risk is higher, and travel-associated products and services are uncertain compared to other products and services. These may also be perishable and seasonal (Furner et al., 2016; Litvin et al., 2008). Several scholars have focused on understanding the characteristics of online reviews, as they consider them a vital SC tool (Busalim et al., 2019; Filieri, 2016; Furner et al., 2016; Sparks & Browning, 2011).

Tourism and hospitality industry scholars such as Mody et al. (2019) and Wang et al. (2018) have suggested two tourism service dimensions: periphery and core. In the accommodation context, for example, a core failure could be a dingy or small room or problems with checking in. Some interpersonal issues may arise, such as poor communication services, rudeness, or unfriendliness by the frontline staff. The peripheral context may be the promise of an exotic holiday destination. Due to the interaction between the dimensions, customers are subjected to complexity when providing feedback, online reviews, and information. The customer may be delighted with the destination but unhappy about the services provided by the accommodation and thus may find themselves in a dilemma in expressing their opinion about their holiday.

2.2.2. Tourism Industry Challenges

Information Processing. Information processing affects consumers (Furner et al., 2016). The online platform contains so much information that it leads to information overload, which makes it challenging for potential travellers to select the information they need because they can process only a limited amount of such information. These issues have

been expanded by Akehurst (2009) within the context of tourism industry information processing in an online context. The business and the consumers are both faced with issues of UGC in terms of interpretation, extraction, and location. It is not only a costly but also a time-consuming process. Successful blogs focus on entertaining and engaging visitors and presenting valuable network and information opportunities. Failure in this sense would be that the travel blog maintained a positive objective but was unable to continuously update its content. Hence, the blog has become stagnant and dormant (Akehurst, 2009; Pirolli, 2018).

For decision-making, consumers are subjected to significant amounts of information that they need to process. Thus, that their decisions would be informed decisions could be expected. However, is it possible that the vast amount of information could be a disadvantage? It may create confusion, which leads to loss of perspective or withdrawal, and then loyalty may decline rather than increase. Social media includes stealth marketing, which is a challenge for SC within the tourism industry and e-business. Stealth marketing within e-tourism refers to the practice of employees posting positive comments as though they are satisfied and happy customers (Litvin et al., 2008). They would naturally be expected to put a positive spin on the message. When consumers process this positive information, they might keep in mind the potential behaviour of stealth marketing of reviewers, which may influence their credibility judgement.

Intangibility of Products. Hospitality and tourism marketers consider eWOM development vital to their marketing strategies for several reasons. The products

- are intangible in nature and cannot be assessed before consumption (Furner et al., 2016; Litvin et al., 2008; Sparks & Browning, 2011),
- cannot be sampled prior to purchase (Furner et al., 2016; Litvin et al., 2008),
- carry higher perceived risk and uncertainty than other products and services (Furner et al., 2016; Litvin et al., 2008), and

- are considered seasonal and perishable (Litvin et al., 2008; Furner et al., 2016).

Hence, interpersonal influence is essential. It is essential for the SC platform to integrate a wide range of published information presented in travel guides, in esoteric newsletters, by tourist bureaus, and in online brochures, and vendor information such as hotel reservations and airline schedules. Rich informational environments are provided by communities focused on traveller communication, which include chat rooms and bulletin boards, where experiences are shared by the users, pointers and information are exchanged, questions are posted, and answers are received. With development, compared to conventional procedures, the travelling community could be a source of reliable, rich, and updated information.

2.2.3 OCRs as Conventional eWOM

The purpose of this review is to provide a general overview of eWOM and S-eWOM, followed by the credibility of eWOM in the tourism industry, which is the focus of this research. These analyzed elements of eWOM credibility in the tourism industry, which are discussed in detail throughout this paper, shaped the research process by guiding the development of interview research questions and by contributing to data analysis. For instance, source identity, or reviewer identity, has been found to trigger credibility judgements in online reviews (Kusumasondjaja et al., 2012). The brief review covers three specific topics: eWOM in terms of the antecedents, consequences, and effects of eWOM in general. The credibility of eWOM in a tourism-based SC context is discussed in the following section. I use the terms “online reviews” and “eWOM” interchangeably in this narrative because online reviews are a form of eWOM and lead to the dissemination of eWOM.

Research has shown that consumers build trust with one another by using UGC, which creates and propagates eWOM more than traditional promotional content produced and disseminated by companies (Dickinger, 2011). EWOM is considered a consequence of

online consumer interaction and refers to any negative or positive statement that is made for the public to see via the internet. It is stored on the internet and made accessible to the global user population, allowing new consumers to access old knowledge and information on goods and services (Fang, 2014). This concept includes any message that is made by former, actual, or potential customers regarding a product or service. Furthermore, eWOM, with its low cost and broad scope and information exchange inherent to the internet in general, provides solutions to consumers' concerns and influences purchasing decisions.

Litvin et al. (2008) proposed a conceptual framework for eWOM adoption and found that the outcomes of eWOM adoption could also enhance business performance in SC. These opportunities include customer loyalty, improved product evaluation, purchasing decisions, consumer empowerment, and product acceptance. From these positive outcomes, Kim et al. (2016) investigated the motivational factors driving consumer engagement and the creation of positive eWOM. These factors appear related to individual users, such as helping a firm enhance its reputation, creating feelings of self-enhancement, or being perceived as more knowledgeable than other consumers. Additional motivational factors are related to product involvement, such as the high quality of the products and excellent customer service (Yusuf & Busalim, 2018). As a result of these driving factors, consumers often choose to spread positive eWOM through a variety of diverse social media platforms. For example, TripAdvisor is a popular website on which people can search for a variety of travel-related services and information, primarily categorized by other users' ratings and opinions. In addition, statistics also indicate that most tourists engage in online communication not only when they are planning their trips but also when they are on their holidays (Jacobsen & Munar, 2012).

S-eWOM. S-eWOM has features that indicate that it is restricted to a specific social network (Pihlaja et al., 2017). Compared to anonymous eWOM, which is presented to an

indefinite audience, there is clearly an intended audience for S-eWOM. This means that even though S-eWOM and conventional anonymous eWOM (e.g., that which is web hosted) share attributes, there are conceptual distinctions between these two kinds of eWOM. When the social element is incorporated into eWOM, it offers additional advantages to those who provide and use information (Pihlaja et al., 2017).

There are three main distinctions between anonymous eWOM and S-eWOM. First, the information target differs. Generally, eWOM is considered publicly available information that can be accessed by anyone, while there is a limited and intended audience for S-eWOM. For instance, posting on the TripAdvisor website creates a comment transmitted to an anonymous audience (eWOM), but when using the TripAdvisor–Facebook collaborative version, users present and obtain information within their personal social networks (S-eWOM). Because the audience is limited, providers may wish to post different content. It is important to carry out additional studies to determine whether S-eWOM decreases the likelihood of anonymous eWOM postings being bimodal (Hu et al., 2009). Second, information content validity is indicative of a consumer's capability to examine the extent to which the information is accurate. The source of anonymous eWOM is unidentified; therefore, it is difficult to ascertain its accuracy. Studies have shown reprehensible eWOM-associated behaviour (Mayzlin et al., 2012), and information offered by friends is believed to be more reliable. According to Nielson (2012), trust pertaining to product and service information decreased from 93% if the source of information was known to 70% if it was provided by an unknown source. Third, incentives to share eWOM and S-eWOM differ. For instance, a significant incentive that is distinct in S-eWOM is the development of interpersonal associations. Interpersonal relationship building is a goal on its own in S-eWOM.

2.2.4 Credibility of eWOM in Tourism

The adoption of eWOM by consumers is highly influenced by the credibility and trustworthiness levels of other consumers' online reviews (Fileri, 2016; Nilashi et al., 2023; Verma and Dewani, 2020). Several studies have determined the factors that influence the credibility of eWOM (Ismagilova et al., 2021). In the tourism industry, consumer trust in online reviews is low, and it is necessary for tourism establishments to attempt to enhance consumer review credibility. Fake reviews are another issue that needs to be addressed.

EWOM is widely recognized as significant in shaping consumer behaviour and driving decision-making processes. This study presents an overview of eWOM by examining previous research on the effects of eWOM on consumer behavioural patterns. In this examination of the influence of eWOM on consumers, it becomes clear how eWOM influences consumers' trust level and image of a particular destination. In addition, the review delves into various adoption factors that could affect an individual's purchasing decision or perception of authenticity in online reviews. The review further offers an insightful examination of how eWOM affects consumers behaviour based on an amalgamation of research results. The ability to comprehend the dynamics of eWOM is critical for businesses seeking to harness its potential and engage customers productively.

According to Pyle et al. (2021), one can determine the evolving nature of consumer trust in the eWOM market space. The explanation of trust in offline WOM does not entirely conform to the complexity presented by the online environment. However, the authors' research uncovered that consumers create networked and multidimensional evaluations of trust within eWOM based on naïve theories and experiences gathered over time. This research enhances the knowledge of how eWOM influences consumer trust in products or services.

Previous research focused on the destination image and travel intention. According to Ran et al. (2021), their eWOM and destination image evaluations significantly affected U.S. visitors' travel intentions in Beijing, China. The research showed that eWOM's utility value and legitimacy influence perceptions of tourist destinations, which leads to changes in visitors' views of their behaviours. This ultimately influenced consumers' intention to visit the travel destination. Moradi and Zihagh (2022) study focused on synthesizing previous research on the factors influencing eWOM adoption and consumer behavioural intentions. Using a meta-analysis, they discovered that the usefulness and credibility of eWOM significantly affect behaviour objectives and that this relationship is moderated by eWOM adoption. The study also demonstrated the influence of SNSs and e-commerce platforms on eWOM adoption patterns.

Authenticity and Exaggeration in Online Reviews. Banerjee (2022) investigated the impression of authenticity and exaggeration in accurate and false online evaluations. Through two experiments, the author discovered that the degree of perceived exaggeration changes depending on the hotel type and review polarity. The results show that perceived exaggeration affects reviewers' judgements of the authenticity of reviews.

Mumuni et al. (2020) examined the factors that influence online product reviews and how they affect their credibility. The study introduced review relevance as separate from the reviewer's competence and trustworthiness. The results demonstrated that, in describing the effects of online product reviews, review relevance has almost as much weight as review credibility. Conflicting results remained regarding the connections between the reliability of reviews and their proposed drivers, such as trustworthiness and expertise.

Kim, Park, and Mariani (2023) investigated the content depth and source credibility of online reviews, explicitly distinguishing credible from manipulated reviews. The results showed that less trustworthy reviews contain more superficial information than more

trustworthy ones. Additionally, the effects of source credibility vary on box office earnings, demonstrating the importance of review credibility in influencing consumer behaviour. Kim, Srite, and Zhao (2023) examined the influence of national culture on customers' reliance on trust-inspiring elements in online reviews. They also examined the role of argument quality, source reliability, and visual information in decision-making. Their findings suggested that information quality is more beneficial to consumers in individualistic and low uncertainty-avoidance cultures, but in the opposing cultures, source credibility is highly prized. These findings highlight the significance of culturally relevant tactics in international e-commerce company review systems.

Daowd et al. (2020) focused on Generation Y consumers and their reliance on eWOM. This study identified factors that affect eWOM credibility and its association with purchase intention. The research findings indicated that source style, source credibility, argument quality, and source homophily significantly influence eWOM credibility. This study provides valuable insights for firms building effective marketing strategies targeting Generation Y consumers.

Siddiqui et al. (2021) investigated the factors affecting the credibility of eWOM stimulation through SNSs. The findings reveal that SNS activities significantly contribute to eWOM credibility by shaping the brand image and purchase intentions. Ismagilova et al. (2020) determined that the characteristics of source credibility in eWOM communications influence trust in online reviews. The utility and trustworthiness of eWOM, buying intent, and information adoption are all significantly influenced by source expertise, trustworthiness, and homophily. These results can help marketers enhance their marketing strategies by fostering a better understanding of how source attributes affect consumer behaviour.

According to Verma et al. (2023), determinants connected to reviews and reviewers have a favourable effect on the credibility of eWOM. Additionally, eWOM adoption, product

attitude, and purchase intention are intimately tied to eWOM credibility. Culture, product type, and platform type were also included in the research as moderating variables. Nilashi et al. (2023) used cluster analysis and structural equation modelling to examine the influence of eWOM factors on passengers' trust and choices made throughout the COVID-19 outbreak. The findings strongly correlated with perceived risk, trust, and travel decisions. Users with low e-trust reported higher perceived risk and lower travel intention, whereas users with strong e-trust reported lower perceived risk and greater travel intention.

The effects of eWOM on consumer preferences was identified through a literature review, which revealed several interesting research areas regarding multiple facets associated with eWOM. These revelations, attained through reviewed studies, include the ability of eWOM to boost customer trust levels and put forward a better company destination image. The literature also uncovered important factors driving increased adoption rates and influencing purchase intentions and examined the importance people place on authenticating their reviews online. It is apparent that eWOM significantly affects how consumers perceive and approach the decision-making process. Understanding and harnessing the power of eWOM is essential for businesses that want to bolster their marketing plans and earn consumers' confidence. This subsection focuses on emerging patterns and advancements in eWOM credibility.

According to Tsao and Hsieh (2015), positive eWOM has higher credibility for credence than search goods. *Credence goods* are products that cannot be fully assessed and evaluated by customers for their effects and utility, such as skin care products. Yan et al. (2018) examined the effect of platform type on eWOM trustworthiness. Moreover, according to Luo et al. (2013), consumer culture influences perceived eWOM credibility. Furthermore, Moran and Muzellec (2017) developed a 4C framework in which content, community,

competence, and consensus play significant roles in the credibility of eWOM on social networks.

Filieri (2016) highlighted the issue of exaggerated reviews being published by tourism organizations. Hence, online review credibility is influenced by the review source, messages, and trustworthiness level (Lao & Yao, 2019; Sparks & Browning, 2011). Furthermore, Filieri (2016) observed that it was difficult for consumers to assess travel-related products and service attributes because of the experiential nature of offerings; it was also difficult to negotiate within the virtual environment. The analysis was based on the influence of online review characteristics, such as customer review acceptance, ratings, valence, and framing. *Ratings* are the stars given by reviewers evaluating their travel experience on a Likert-style range from 1 to 10 or 1 to 5. *Valence* refers to the positives and negatives of reviews posted by reviewers. In review framing, negative and positive consumer review orders are presented (Kaushik et al., 2018). Consumer judgement and attitudes toward services or products are shaped by online review characteristics. Negative framing reviews may not always be accurate because they are consumers' highly subjective judgements about their purchasing decisions (Sparks & Browning, 2011). They may also establish distrust among consumers.

A specific subfocus of this area of research includes identifying the factors that allow online travel reviews and eWOM to be perceived as helpful (Ismagilova et al., 2021; Park & Nicolau, 2015), trustworthy (Filieri et al., 2015), and significant or useful in the various stages of online trip planning (Chang & Wang, 2019; Gretzel et al., 2007). From these studies, several interesting themes emerged, including the influence of negative or positive valence and framing characteristics of eWOM (Hong & Pitman, 2020; Sparks & Browning, 2010), the value or profitability of eWOM channels (Chen et al., 2014; Ciasullo et al., 2020), and the overall perceived credibility of eWOM (Xie et al., 2011). Taken together, the literature demonstrates that travel-related eWOM has a strong influence on consumer

attitudes, behaviours, and purchasing decisions. However, limited data exist regarding the methods by which consumers evaluate the credibility and deceptiveness of online travel-related reviews (Cantallops & Salvi, 2014; Cox et al., 2009). Thus, this study aimed to expand upon the scarce literature on the trustworthiness of eWOM and S-eWOM—specifically online reviews—in the tourism industry.

Several elements of the credibility of eWOM in tourism have been discussed in the literature. Some studies (Bandi Tanner & Hämmerli, 2018; Ukpabi & Karjaluo, 2018) assessed user-based and technology-based characteristics that influenced whether eWOM was perceived as credible. Other studies have analyzed the influence on credibility of the location or medium channel (e.g., brand website, blog, social media; Choi et al., 2017) and valence of the reviews (e.g., positive vs negative; Agarwal & Singh, 2018). Further studies (Reyes-Menendez et al., 2019) assessed the influence of credible eWOM on final purchasing decisions. In general, this review of the literature provided an interesting evaluation of the elements that encapsulated the perceived credibility of eWOM and of the effects of the reviews deemed credible by the user. In general, papers with similar designs and objectives reported consistent findings; however, there were also inconsistencies among factors leading to the credibility of eWOM. These findings are summarized below.

Personal Characteristics of User-Influenced Perceived Credibility. Several studies have shown that the specific individual characteristics of users seeking out and receiving eWOM played a role in determining which online travel reviews were deemed credible or trustworthy. Duffy (2017) hypothesized that trust in the self becomes more important than trust in others on information-abundant channels such as the internet. Computer literacy and competency to navigate trustworthy and untrustworthy sources on the internet relied heavily on each user's capacity to do so, rather than on other users. The results, based on interviews, indicated that no participant trusted TripAdvisor in its entirety as a third-party travel website.

Consumers reported that they trusted the website only to the extent that they trusted themselves to use it. In the same vein, Moran and Muzellec (2017) developed a 4C framework in which content, community, competence, and consensus play significant roles in the credibility of eWOM on social networks. They found that the elements of credibility and competence, or the expertise level of the receiver, heavily influence the perceived credibility of online travel reviews. Lopes et al. (2013) found that users' prior beliefs heavily influenced which travel reviews they deemed credible. Inevitably, if some of these beliefs included using and relying on eWOM to gather information about a travel-based good or service, then seeking out eWOM was a significant part of the purchase process and final decision-making (Reichelt et al., 2014). Chih et al. (2013) noted that travel-related discussion forums typically consisted of individuals with similar interests; therefore, individuals were likely to trust each other in this medium because they shared the effect of relevance.

2.2.5 Critical Elements of a Trustworthy and Credible Review

Message Content. Studies tend to agree on the importance of message content in conveying trustworthiness. Using TripAdvisor as an example medium, Filieri (2016) noted that three specific elements of message content were critical to users, including high levels of detail, length, and personalized points. These characteristics are relatable to MRT theory in reducing equivocality and bringing clarity and better understanding to the situation, which was used in this research to explore the effects of MRT on consumer's granting credibility. Participants in the interviews conducted by Filieri (2016) reported that short generic reviews were more likely to be fake and less relatable. Moran and Muzellec (2017) and Chen (2020) also noted that the content and clarity of a review are critical for credibility. Exaggeration in the content of the review affected the perception of its authenticity (Banerjee, 2022). It was found that the extent to which perceived exaggeration might explain the perceived

authenticity of reviews varied depending on the category of hotel and the review valence (positive vs negative).

Effect of Visuals. Aside from the content of online travel reviews, the style in which they are posted is important. Two studies noted that reviews of hotels and other travel-related products and services (TRPS) accompanied by user-submitted photos were perceived as significantly more credible than any other type of review (Fang et al., 2018; Filieri, 2016; Yin et al., 2018). Additionally, the effects of the two forms of visual information, user appearance in a profile photo versus in a review picture, vary across cultures (Kim et al., 2023). Researchers have focused less on some critical aspects that can influence eWOM credibility, such as the amount of visual content (number of pictures, length of the video; Verma & Dewani, 2020). There is also a need to capture the informational value from visual information in online reviews, as is evident in research focusing on the effects of visuals (photos) on credibility of online reviews (Kim et al., 2023).

It appears that no previous study has used MRT to understand the value of visuals in addressing the credibility of eWOM in an SC context. Thus, it is important to address the research gap related to the influence of visuals (photos and videos) on the credibility of eWOM by answering the related research question: How does media richness, as measured by visual clues (e.g., photos and videos), influence credibility and trust in eWOM?

Review Valence. Review valence (positive or negative reviews) was a predominant topic among the studies included. Several studies have found that users were suspicious of both extremely negative and extremely positive online reviews (Filieri, 2016; Kusumasondjaja et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2012). In some studies, users reported extremely positive reviews as more suspicious than negative reviews, citing beliefs that these reviews were likely paid for or posted by the brands themselves (Filieri, 2016; Kusumasondjaja et al., 2012).

These findings are challenged by two studies that reported that positive reviews had a positive effect on consumers, whereas negative reviews had no effect whatsoever on purchasing decisions (Chih et al., 2013; Moriuchi, 2018). In fact, Chih et al. (2013) reported that when eWOM contained positive reviews of a product, consumers were more likely to develop positive product attitudes and would therefore be more inclined to buy a product. This ripple effect from positive eWOM represents a specific marketing opportunity in e-commerce. However, Moriuchi (2018) and Chih et al. (2013) both assessed close-knit online communities with user groups with similar interests, whereas the remaining studies assessed broad, traditional travel-related sites, such as TripAdvisor.

The consensus is that both extremely positive and extremely negative reviews are thought to be less credible than others. As concluded by Chen and Lurie (2013), users often perceive negativity as a sign of credibility compared to positivity, as it is more likely that a consumer will write a negative review—for example, one expressing frustration.

Source Identity. Across the board, source identity, or source credibility, was noted as a strong influencer of online review trustworthiness. Park et al. (2014) assessed the influence of self-disclosed personal profile information on other users' interpretations of their reviews. The experiment conducted by the authors showed that reviews posted by users with complete profiles, specifically with travel interests and home locations, exhibited increased credibility. Overall, a reviewer's self-disclosed information enhances trustworthiness when their information aligns with users' specific interests and travel requirements (Park et al., 2014). This finding is generally supported by the literature (Kusumasondjaja et al., 2012; Lee & Youn, 2009; Moran & Muzellec, 2017; Pihlaja et al., 2017). Researchers reported that anonymous reviews were almost universally deemed less credible (Mahat & Hanafiah, 2020) than eWOM posted by someone with publicly available identifying information, including a name or a profile picture.

Lee and Youn (2009) reported an interesting angle on this observation: Participants in their three-by-two interventional study who were exposed to positive travel reviews on a private, personal blog of someone they did not know were less likely to recommend that product to a friend. The authors highlighted that these results might have been due to either the person being a stranger or because the identity of the reviewer was meant to be unknown. Cheung et al. (2009), Lopes et al. (2013), and Sharma and Dangwal (2017) also noted source identity as having a direct, quantifiable effect on eWOM credibility. The findings of a meta-analysis conducted by Ismagilova et al. (2020) showed that the perceived usefulness and credibility of eWOM, as well as the intention to acquire and use the knowledge, were significantly affected by the source's expertise, trustworthiness, and homophily. Moreover, in addition to source credibility, argument quality, and source homophily, it was determined that source style, as a visual attribute, is the most influential factor in the credibility of eWOM on SNSs (Daowd et al., 2020). Visual attributes in the context of an online review are the combination of textual and visual signals that represent the website and SNS (Daowd et al., 2020). Results indicated that perceived persuasiveness, source expertise, and source credibility are significant predictors of the credibility of eWOM regarding SNSs (Tien et al., 2019).

Lastly, extensive involvement with SNSs, trust in SNSs, recommendation by SNS members, and message content were found to have a significant effect on the credibility of eWOM. Recommendation by SNS members was found to have the greatest influence on eWOM credibility among the four factors (Siddiqui et al., 2021). For example, strong ties assist individuals in recognizing the knowledge of their connections, thereby enhancing the credibility of eWOM messages (Tan & Lee, 2019). Many researchers have proposed that strong ties improve the trust between source and receiver, which positively influences eWOM credibility (Ismagilova et al., 2017; Yan et al., 2018). Regarding the influence of S-eWOM

on the credibility of online reviews, as per Tien et al. (2019), using associated information signals in the form of notes, status updates, photographs, videos, and messages posted on the sender's personal page, SNSs may assist eWOM recipients to better understand eWOM senders. Thus, regarding the influence on the credibility of S-eWOM, to explore how online recommendations from SNS friends influence the credibility of online reviews was explored to answer the second research question: How do the social cues of network friends influence travellers' trust in eWOM?

Source Expertise or Accreditation Certification and Code of Ethics. One study specifically targeted opinion leader among travel review communities to assess what makes their eWOM more credible than that of other users within the online community to which they belonged. Lee et al. (2011) studied users tagged as "helpful reviewers" on TripAdvisor, who were identified as such after they received a certain number of upvotes from other users. Reviews were dissected to collect reviewer information, including country of residence, age, gender, number of destinations visited, date when membership started, total reviews, and helpful review ratings. Helpful reviewers were deemed more trustworthy for several reasons: frequent travel, regular posting in discussion forums and on review boards, and lower, more realistic ratings of accommodations. This last point underlines the consensus that a more neutral valence among reviews was thought to convey more trustworthiness (Filieri, 2016; Kusumasondjaja et al., 2012). In general, the perceived expertise and competence of the eWOM sender was noted to be highly influential in users' eWOM-influenced purchasing decisions (Filieri, 2016; Moran & Muzellec, 2017).

Another interesting dynamic was noted in a few studies: consensus among expert travellers and most reviewers was observed to heavily influence a user's opinion of a travel-related product or service. Reviews that provided a service or product with a similar rating and consistency were deemed generally credible (Cheung et al., 2009; Lopes et al., 2013;

Moran & Muzellec, 2017). In contrast, Llamero (2014) found that granting credibility was an individual, free exercise and stated that consumers relied on crowd consensus to evaluate the credibility of eWOM. This suggests that despite the source of the message being an expert traveller or an ordinary reviewer, travellers sought recommendation consistency when assessing online reviews. Given the contradictory results in previous research regarding the relationship between opinion leaders and the credibility of online reviews, it is evident that there is a need to further explore what influences consumers' trust in their peers' reviews.

Another study shed light on the positive influence of the provision of a certificate of excellence by the service provider (Sparks et al., 2013). Customers perceived certifications or accreditation as a positive sign, which improved the credibility of online reviews through the belief that these were equivalent to high corporate responsibility and standards. This concept was most applicable when online tourism companies demonstrated the attainment of third-party certification (Sparks et al., 2013).

Lo and Yao (2019) studied the influence of the interaction between source expertise and the message consistency and valence in granting eWOM credibility. They found that eWOM credibility increases with an expert source who provides a negative review with consistent product rating. In an interesting *New York Times* article, Beaton (2018) stated that, to some extent, consumers look for negative reviews to reveal what could be wrong with a product or service. Individuals hunt negative online reviews because they perceive them to be more informative than positive ones. This may be due to their ability to highlight defects in a firm's offerings, thus providing more value than positive reviews, even if they are not entirely accurate.

Informational and Normative Factors. Cheung et al. (2009) discussed the determinants of online recommendation credibility in a unique method that used Deutsch and Gerrard's dual-process theory to define determinants specific to a Chinese consumer base.

These determinants include several factors that had already been discussed but warranted further discussion within the framework of the dual-process theory, including informational (e.g., traditional oral WOM factors, such as detail) and normative factors (e.g., nontraditional eWOM factors, such as larger global online audiences, reduced time, location restrictions). Cheung et al. (2009) surveyed 159 consumers regarding their most recent online reviews on Myetone, a popular Chinese website like TripAdvisor, noting several variables that influenced review credibility. The informational factors noted are argument strength, recommendation framing, recommendation sidedness (e.g., one- vs two-sided), source credibility, and alignment with the receiver's beliefs. The two normative factors noted are review consistency and recommendation rating. Specifically, argument strength, source credibility, and alignment with the receiver beliefs were noted to have a strong influence on the user-perceived trustworthiness of reviews. This comprehensive and novel study highlighted the findings above and uniquely reframed the critical determinants of trustworthy eWOM.

Information Channels Produce Varying Degrees of Perceived Credibility. Other than the specific characteristics of eWOM deemed credible by most online travel community users, the media through which eWOM is transferred and received also play a role. The rise of social media has dramatically altered the way people communicate daily. The abundance of information available between exchanges on SNSs, such as Twitter and Facebook, has also altered the way consumers make purchasing decisions. Social media provides an excellent opportunity to spread eWOM to a massive audience; however, the credibility of eWOM has been threatened by marketing campaigns that produce false, illegitimate, or incentivized eWOM about goods and services (Moran & Muzellec, 2017).

Furthermore, S-eWOM has unique elements: intended audiences, trustworthiness, source evaluations, and interpersonal relationships among online community members

(Pihlaja et al., 2017). These factors influence cognitive processes involving the selection of a destination choice by consumers. The ability to influence that process is an important marketing device, and eWOM can be seen as a tool for influencing the source, content, and channel used to make purchasing decisions (Tham et al., 2013). Traditional WOM has an instinctual level of credibility, but eWOM is not face to face and therefore relies on other cues for trustworthiness. Social media disseminates eWOM and enhances exposure to multiple perspectives of a single destination; visibility, destination branding, and marketing can be manipulated to entice final purchasing decisions among consumers (Tham et al., 2013).

Chen et al. (2018) described three dimensions of eWOM influence on online holiday purchases by consumers, which include motivation as a key factor, followed by convenience of searching and availability of reviews and information. This motivation and its subdimensions are readily available to consumers due to the public availability of social media channels propagating this information.

Influence of eWOM Perceived as Credible on Review Adoption and Purchasing Decisions. The evaluation of the credibility of travel-related eWOM in review adoption and purchasing decisions appears to be related to the influence of eWOM itself. Once eWOM is deemed credible by users, it is of interest to determine what influence, behaviours, or actions it reciprocates and entices among the users in return.

Chih et al. (2013) investigated the role of perceived positive eWOM in purchasing decisions among tight-knit online communities in Taiwan. Using structural equation modelling, the authors assessed whether website reputation and source credibility influenced positive eWOM and whether eWOM influenced purchasing decisions. The authors observed that when eWOM contained positive reviews about a product, consumers were more likely to develop positive attitudes toward a product and were more inclined to buy the product. This

ripple effect from positive eWOM is a specific marketing opportunity in e-commerce.

Further, websites need to be user-friendly and easy to navigate, as this, together with positive eWOM and product attitudes, further enhance purchasing intention. Reichelt et al. (2014) noted similar ripple effects in which perceived trustworthiness had the greatest influence on the social and utilitarian functions of eWOM. Their quantitative study of 839 German users validated that attitude toward a behaviour determines intention to act. The attitude itself originates from the beliefs about behaviours that are influenced by like-minded people or online users. Lastly, Cheung et al. (2009) reported that perceived credibility explained more than 30% of the variance in eWOM review adoption and purchasing decisions among a Chinese consumer cohort. This highlights the significant behavioural influence credible eWOM has on consumers.

People also perceive negative reviews as a gateway to what could go wrong. In previous research, findings regarding consumers' attitudes toward either positive or negative reviews were contradictory, as explained earlier. A thorough analysis of the literature showed that quantitative research studies were conducted to assess message credibility variables selected by the researchers. Existing measures in which the information is believable, accurate, actual, and credible were used to measure the reliability of the message (Cheung et al., 2009). Such research studies cultivated the focus on the effects of a single review message, even though consumers in real life read and evaluate multiple reviews (Qiu et al., 2012).

Kim et al. (2023) researched the differences in online review readers' reactions to authentic and fake online reviews. Their findings revealed that less credible reviews tend to contain less substantive information than more credible reviews and that varying levels of source credibility result in distinctly different sales effects of online reviews. This led to an

important research area to address how consumers perceive and respond to various levels of source credibility.

As previous studies have thoroughly analyzed the credibility determinants of online reviews and most previous research has been quantitative in nature, this area of research requires a qualitative study to derive insights on how and why consumers trust online reviews. Answering the first research question becomes important to what the credibility determinants of eWOM are and how they interact to influence credibility judgement. Furthermore, most past research has focused on finding credibility cues and ranking the importance of these cues in determining the credibility of eWOM. However, the interpretation of these credibility measures and the relationships among them remain unclear. Inconsistencies in research and discrepancies in findings related to the credibility of eWOM in online tourism are evident; it is apparent that further research in this area is needed. The current research aimed to bridge these gaps in the research, which speaks to the value and originality of the work. The current research goal was to provide a comprehensive assessment of how consumers process information and reviews for reliability and untrustworthiness.

The literature review has been somewhat contradictory regarding the credibility of eWOM determinants. According to Chen and Lurie (2013), the negative valence of reviews is more credible than the positive. Other research has demonstrated that negative evaluations do not affect consumer decisions (Moriuchi, 2018). This emphasizes the need for additional research on eWOM and S-eWOM, as well as the credibility afforded to both their applications in SC. Therefore, it is necessary to address the identified research gap to identify the factors contributing to the credibility of online reviews in the tourism industry. In addition, revealing the underlying relationships among these factors in a way that could influence the credibility of eWOM positively or negatively is crucial. Thus, the first research

question is as follows: What are the factors that influence the credibility of eWOM in the tourism industry?

An important area of research is the development of new theories specific to the social media phenomenon people are currently experiencing; thus, it is necessary to research the distinction between anonymous eWOM and S-eWOM (Pihlaja et al., 2017). Previous research showed contradictory results regarding S-eWOM as an antecedent of online reviews' credibility. The significance of the strength of the ties that form S-eWOM shows that even in a virtual environment, the perceived social relationship is a significant cue for assessing the credibility of the information (Verma et al., 2023). Consequently, this thesis aims to address and evaluate the distinctive characteristics of S-eWOM, including assessment from Facebook friends on TripAdvisor compared to anonymous eWOM on the TripAdvisor online platform. Therefore, the second research question is: What is the influence of S-eWOM on the credibility of online reviews?

Moreover, OCRs consisting of written text, images, and other visual aids have been highly effective at persuading consumers and need further explanations (Ma et al., 2018). Thus, the third research question is: How does media richness, as measured by visual clues (e.g., photos and videos), influence credibility and trust in eWOM? In this paper, therefore, I examine the potential influence of visuals in online evaluations by applying MRT to explain and characterize the credibility of eWOM in tourism.

2.2.6 The Effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Tourism Industry

The 2019 coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic led to global challenges, including healthcare and economic crises, and had spillover effects on the tourism and travel industry. Travel bans, the closure of businesses, and working restrictions harmed the tourism sector. For example, leisure and internal tourism experienced a steep decline, amounting to \$2.86 trillion, equivalent to a loss of more than 50% of revenue (Abbas et al., 2021). Flights

travelling to tourism destination areas were cancelled, hotels and restaurants were shut down, and the safety measures implemented had a detrimental effect on the sector.

The COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected travellers in terms of their desire to visit attractions and touristic destinations. The severity of COVID-19 cases in tourist destinations was linked to government lockdowns, a reduction in airline service, and fear of travelling to public and crowded places (Bilbao, 2021). The combination of the fear of contracting COVID-19 and the government lockdowns reduced the demand for travel to tourist destinations. According to Rahman et al. (2021), governments implemented travel bans and lockdowns that restricted the movement of travellers to tourist destinations. The measures were enacted to control the spread of COVID-19 and to reduce the rate of infection. The authors further noted that the desire to travel declined between 2019 and 2020 because of the increased fear and risk perception of being infected with the virus. The fear of COVID-19 infection led to panic and cancellation of plans among people travelling to Paris and other touristic destinations. However, travel desires began to increase as people began to be vaccinated against COVID-19 in 2021 (Ekinici et al., 2022). Vaccination against COVID-19 reduced fear of infection and anxiety and encouraged tourists to reschedule their travel plans.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a detrimental effect on tourist destinations, including Orlando, New York City, London, and Paris. Lockdown policies in the United Kingdom, France, and the United States were linked with the cancellation of travel plans and delayed flights to Orlando, London, and Paris. The first COVID-19 case in France was reported on January 24, and on February 14, 2020, an 80-year-old Chinese tourist died in a hospital in Paris (Uğur & Akbıyık, 2020). As a result, some travellers were frightened by the spread of COVID-19, leading to flight delays and cancellation of their travel plans to Paris. Orlando, Florida, and New York City experienced a decline in international and local tourism. For example, local tourism declined by 53% in Orlando between 2019 and 2020 (Bilbao, 2021).

There was also a 34% decline in visitors to Florida in 2020 compared to 2019, which was attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic. Plans to travel to the United Kingdom, especially London, were cancelled because of increased concerns about contamination (Uğur & Akbıyık, 2020). Public transport and underground journeys in London declined by 95% after strict lockdowns and travel bans were imposed in the United Kingdom (International Energy Agency, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic also affected travellers' feedback and online reviews, especially on the TripAdvisor platform. Uğur and Akbıyık (2020) analyzed 75,000 comments automatically retrieved from TripAdvisor forums in Asia, the United States, and Europe. The findings suggested that people were concerned with the pandemic and that their travel plans were delayed and cancelled. The authors established that concerns and comments on TripAdvisor forums regarding Rome, France, and Paris locations increased after the first case was reported in Paris. In 40.81% of cases, commenters on TripAdvisor forums mentioned the cancellation of trips and travel plans. People also commented on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on their ability to travel and how lockdowns and social distancing contributed to declines in their desire to visit touristic destinations.

2.2.7 The Possible Effect of COVID-19 on Consumers' Credibility Judgement of eWOM

The COVID-19 pandemic had a multitude of implications for the global economy, causing disruption of the supply chain of health-care systems and restaurants and effecting financial and operational crises in most industries. In this context, a *crisis* is referred to as “a low-probability, high-consequence event that develops very rapidly and involves ambiguous situations with unknown causes and effects” (Roberts et al., 2007). Differing from a disaster, a crisis implies some level of human action or inaction as a precipitating factor (Faulkner, 2001). The COVID-19 pandemic created a crisis in the tourism and hospitality industry, and the world witnessed the response to this pandemic unfold. Government-mandated lockdowns,

quarantine, and domestic and international travel restrictions were in place around the world, which caused tourism and related services to come to a grinding halt. Faulkner (2001) described a crisis as having the following characteristics, all of which can be seen in the tourism industry in the wake of COVID-19: a significant and triggering event that challenges the routine operations or survival of an organization, a high threat with an element of surprise or urgency, and a notable turning point at which decisive change is required to move forward.

In any crisis, even when managed successfully, an organization, industry, or company will undergo transformative changes because of surviving in a highly unstable and chaotic situation (Mazur, 2018). Moreover, the importance of trust and credibility in marketing and communication in the digital age has become incredibly important for tourism. Online forums and websites, such as TripAdvisor, rely on customer feedback to support their reputation and brand, whereas other users navigate UGC, such as online reviews, to reinforce purchasing decisions. Given the magnitude of the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism industry, the question then becomes how well the tourism and hospitality industry managed through the COVID-19 pandemic, and which specific tools or strategies have been successful in maintaining trustworthiness, the credibility of eWOM, and brand reputation.

2.2.8 Crisis Management

In the tourism industry, most crisis management strategies focus on the post-disaster stage (Mair et al., 2016). For example, within a few months of the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, most industries reached the stage of accepting the reality of the pandemic and approached the adaptation phase by strategically altering operations to survive the rest of the pandemic and thrive, going forward into a post-COVID-19 future. Altering operations in the tourism industry involves specific changes and refocusing on communication with customers, availability of resources, and pushing to address needs at a local level, especially if international travel remains restricted. At the time of writing, this scenario was playing out in

Canada, as the federal government announced funding for provincial tourism bodies to boost local and domestic tourism for the summer and fall of 2020, given that travel to international locations would likely remain difficult or restricted for the remainder of the year (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2020). However, it was too early to determine whether such initiatives would revive the tourism industry to its former levels or which strategies would be successful, although the OECD anticipated that domestic travel would recover more quickly than international tourism (OECD, 2020).

A systematic review by Mair et al. (2016) assessed the characteristics of post-crisis recovery efforts, particularly in the tourism industry. Communication was the strongest theme that emerged from this review. Three main channels were identified where communication was vital during crisis management: between emergency managers and stakeholders, between tourism clients themselves, and between the destination representatives and the tourism stakeholders (Mair et al., 2016). Perhaps the most critical element in contemporary tourism crisis management is the media. Given that tourism and hospitality industries are highly reliant on the internet, social media, and trust between stakeholders and users (clients), the media plays a significant role in ensuring the survival of the industry through a crisis. It is important that the narrative playing out on media platforms remains truthful, is managed appropriately, and aligns with post-crisis-recovery marketing strategies to maintain brand reputation and image. Finally, tourist behaviour is a key area of tourism's post-crisis recovery. In most cases, a crisis unfolds in the short term, and therefore more cancellations, more last-minute bookings, and more friends and family travel have emerged as likely changes in behaviour following a disaster (Mair et al., 2016). However, in the drawn-out situation of a global pandemic in which government-mandated travel restrictions remain in place for some time, there may be unprecedented changes to the tourism industry and, therefore, unprecedented changes in tourists' long-term behaviour.

Mair et al. (2016) described some findings that may be relevant to COVID-19 recovery in tourism: Loyal or repeat visitors should be an important target customer segment, and relationship marketing is vital for encouraging these loyal visitors to return once it is safe to do so. Essentially, organizations must focus their efforts on client relationships, which will result in positive eWOM to support their online image and drive consumer behaviour. Certainly, the ongoing response to the pandemic in late 2020 and even later into 2021 provided ample opportunity to observe and assess the characteristics of both effective and ineffective long-term crisis management strategies in the tourism industry and beyond.

2.3 Chapter Summary

This chapter describes the theoretical framework of MRT theory and its evolution throughout the years to manage technological advancements and the modern world. SC is a vital concept because it differs from e-commerce through its social leverage among online users and its role in creating S-eWOM. The evident overlap between credibility and trust in the literature is worth mentioning because they capitalize on shared dimensions and have a relationship with each other.

The literature review identifies key studies that have examined the significance of online reviews in enhancing travellers' knowledge and assessment of travel destinations and the credibility determinants of eWOM. In particular, most of the studies examined credibility determinants in the online marketplace, whereas only a few studies explored how customers engage with and react to online reviews on online travel websites to assess the credibility of eWOM. Moreover, previous studies have shown how important online reviews are in customers' decision-making and how they influence customers' attitudes toward them. Content, source, and receiver characteristics and values influence the delivery of online reviews in a way that makes them credible to customers. Finally, the possible effects of the

COVID-19 pandemic on the travel and tourism industry and the crisis management strategies to contain the critical situation are discussed.

It is evident that although recent studies have highlighted the importance of online reviews and the credibility determinants of eWOM (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Moran & Muzellec, 2017), these topics require additional research exploring the credibility of eWOM in the tourism industry through the travel website TripAdvisor and the use of SC. Additionally, the importance of travellers who read online reviews conferring credibility on eWOM and the way the factors that lead to the credibility of eWOM interact to inform travellers' decision-making require further investigation. This further research should aim to grasp the dynamic of the relationships among these factors and the way consumers think and act to form their attitudes toward credibility judgements. In particular, current trends in the credibility of online reviews within different Canadian consumer cultures need to be explored to better understand the opportunities and challenges related to the credibility of online reviews. Therefore, more research is needed on this topic.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The methods used in the current research are highlighted in this chapter. This chapter offers insights into the concepts of qualitative research design and describes the processes of data selection, data collection, and data analysis. It provides a general idea of the researcher's part in the process of coding and elaborates on the concept of trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

3.1. Research Questions

The overall aim of this research study was to address the existing gaps in the tourism literature by addressing the following research questions:

1. What are the factors that influence the credibility of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) in the tourism industry?
 - How do these factors shape travellers' perceptions of the credibility of eWOM?
2. How do the social cues of network friends influence travellers' trust in eWOM?
3. How does media richness, as measured by visual clues (e.g., photos and videos), influence credibility and trust in eWOM?

3.2. Research Design

In the current research, the researcher employed a qualitative research design. Qualitative research has a history that dates some hundred years back and has been formally organized by various historians, ethnography experts, social psychologists, and analysts (Bogdan & Biklin, 1982; Stake, 1995, 1978). According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p. 2), qualitative research involves "engaging in a multiple approach whereby an interpretive and naturalistic approach is used to study the concerned matter." Similarly, Creswell (2009) defined the qualitative method as the method that allows the studying, exploring, and understanding of social issues or human issues from the perspectives of individuals or groups. This implies that this definition considers human perception (Stake, 2010).

As stated earlier, this approach is based on investigating the subject matter as perceived by research participants, thereby implementing a holistic approach (i.e., qualitative research considers the overall picture, including the individual, their organization, and their cultural aspects, instead of focusing only on the basic unit of a quantitative factor; Jackson et al., 2011). Consequently, the world is perceived as a sequence of interpretations, such as interviews, field notes, discussions, recordings, images, and notes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Analytical and naturalistic approaches have therefore been integrated within qualitative research.

In this research, the researchers used grounded theory as an inductive reasoning approach to find patterns within the data and as a research design to identify theories that contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon and answer the research question of this study. The researcher further used deductive reasoning and the hypotheses formulated based on media richness theory (MRT).

Two complementary approaches were involved in the process of data generation: semistructured interviews and the walk-through technique. These two data collection methodologies were chosen because they draw on different memory types: short-term memory (during the walk-through session) and long-term memory (during the semistructured interview session). It is believed that conscious thoughts, provoked by experiences and stimulation, are held and used within short-term memory, while long-term memories are typically related to associations and the senses, such as smell (Israel, 2015). Using the walk-through method allows for verbalizations of conscious thought and therefore provides the potential for analyzing one's experiences and memories of actions taken seconds before verbalization. The semistructured interview attempted to answer the "why" questions related to participants' behavioural motives of granting credibility to eWOM. They provided participants with an opportunity to offer content based on experience, which differed from the

walk-through. The ability to collect and derive data from both memory types using the two above-mentioned research methods thus contributed significantly to the body of knowledge of eWOM communication.

To perform the walk-through and interviews, a protocol was required for both (see Appendix C: Walk-Through and Interview Protocol), which contained eight probe questions in case participants remained silent and 10 open-ended questions, accompanied by probes as needed, which helped guide the researcher-interviewer. The interview questions, which were motivated by the research questions suggested by Merriam (1988) and Stake (1995, 2010), were refined for relevance and clarity through informal pilot testing completed with six of the researcher's colleagues before the start of the interview meetings. The interviews also contained a section on building rapport with the participants, video recording the screens of the participants' devices during the walk-through session, audio recording the interviews, observing and taking notes of the participants' responses, and making complete and accurate transcripts of all walk-throughs and interviews.

In this study, interviews were chosen as the main source of data collection because they allowed the researcher to access participants through the University of Ottawa Integrated System of Participation in Research [ISPR] Student Pool system. They further allowed the researcher to gain information and insights about participants' personal experiences and perceptions of the credibility of online reviews posted on the TripAdvisor website or application and how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced their perceptions of the credibility of online reviews in tourism. Therefore, in-depth, one-on-one interviews were conducted to collect data for this study. In-depth interviews were carried out "to solicit people's descriptions and explanations of events taking place in their own environment" (Eid, 2011, p. 10).

The researcher conducted interviews with 18 male and female university students. Moreover, the researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with 12 students on campus, before the interruption caused by the pandemic, and interviewed six students online during the COVID-19 pandemic. Online interviews were used to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Microsoft Teams was selected based on its security features to protect the participants' privacy. Interviews were conducted over a period of approximately nine months, between February 7, 2020, and November 30, 2020. The average time for the walk-through was 15 minutes, whereas semistructured interviews lasted an average of 34 minutes.

3.2.1. Grounded Theory Approach

Grounded theory is a qualitative methodological approach first proposed by Glaser and Strauss in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (1967). Grounded theory provided a new perspective on qualitative data analysis and challenged the notion prevalent at the time of publication that the only unbiased methodology for assessing data was through quantitative approaches. Glaser and Strauss (1967) championed qualitative comparative analysis and enforced its reputation as a valid research method throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Grounded theory has led to the evolution of several other theoretical perspectives and remains a solid foundation for qualitative research philosophy.

Grounded theory has evolved into three categories: traditional, evolved, and constructivist. The traditional methodology involves assessing patterns of behaviour, evolved grounded theory includes observing symbolism and the meaning people attach to social interactions, and constructivist grounded theory addresses how research participants define the meaning of social interactions. For any type of grounded theory to be employed within a study, a priori considerations must be included in the design of the project. A framework that

includes iterative and recursive methods is often helpful in designing an appropriate study within the lens of grounded theory.

Such studies often begin with a wide range of sampling methods, all of which are purposive. Researchers target and select participants who have experience relevant to the research question and who will provide adequate responses and data. This is followed by coding and categorizing the data collected in several iterative rounds. The coding process may differ depending on the type of grounded theory being employed. The first step, initial coding, involves splitting the data into as many different codes as possible. Initial thematic codes are then compared to the others. The codes should highlight key psychological or social processes relevant to the research question. These codes are then processed again through intermediate coding, in which similar codes are grouped into categories. At this point, the core categories become clear, and the relationships between each category can be proposed and assessed. Lastly, advanced coding is initiated, in which the observed categories can be compared with other categories and continue to be deduced until theoretical saturation is reached. This deductive and iterative process creates concepts and theories.

At this stage, the researcher engages in a storyline technique whereby the researcher can construct a theory with a narrative and specific concept that are grounded in recurring themes and categories. This produces a comprehensive and final rendering of the entire data set and provides explanatory power for the qualitative data collected. Another important component of this approach is called *memoing*, or memorandum writing, which ensures consistent documentation and quality throughout the methodological process. These memoranda provide detailed logs of the researchers' contemplations, feelings, and thoughts. The process of memoing, as well as those of theoretical sampling and comparative analysis, takes place iteratively throughout the entire data collection and data analysis processes. This allows the researcher to follow leads in the data by sampling new participants or material that

provides further relevant information. Specifically, this is done to seek out additional information to saturate the categories that are being brought to light. Ultimately, this iterative system of actions and interactions between data is the foundation of grounded theory. The results of a grounded theory study are a set of concepts connected to one another and expressed through the proposition of a new theory or framework.

Several key requirements must be adhered to in the process of carrying out grounded theory in qualitative research. First, theoretical sensitivity must be maintained. This means that the data must be analyzed in the context of the emerging theory and requires the ability to accurately identify elements of theoretical significance during data collection and during data analysis. Several tools and techniques can be used to obtain and maintain theoretical sensitivity and to avoid scope creep during the process of a study using grounded theory, all of which involve analytical focus, reflection, and so on. Next, the grounded theory approach relies heavily on rigor and quality assurance, largely tied to the research teams' knowledge and skill set, the appropriateness of grounded theory for the research question at hand, and the appropriate deployment of the coding, comparative analysis, and all concurrent methods involved in grounded theory. Continuous data collection must be conducted through a rigorous approach, and it is imperative that detailed audit trails, logic, and data management strategies be recorded and reviewed often. Overall, grounded theory research that is undertaken in an ethical manner and performed with meticulous attention to the methodological requirements of the theory will result in high-quality, transferrable outcomes.

Various experimental resources, such as personal observations; case studies; cultural, historical, and observational literature, and visual data, are employed and analyzed in qualitative research with the aim of comprehending the regular and challenging implications for individuals (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The current qualitative research employed a

research design that combined the inductive grounded theory approach with the deductive approach for theory testing (MRT).

However, there are certain drawbacks to this research design. One involves overestimation or underestimation of circumstances, resulting in the reader drawing imprecise inferences pertaining to the circumstances (Merriam, 1988). Another potential drawback of this approach is the effect of the researcher's bias on their understanding and integrity.

The research was designed with the intention of using a grounded theory approach to data analysis, with the help of MRT. The aim of this study was to examine the credibility of eWOM from the perspective of travellers on TripAdvisor. The research involved students at a Canadian university. The reviews posted by travellers on TripAdvisor and their cultural values were considered while conducting detailed interviews and walk-through sessions. The grounded theory approach offered detailed insight into the research topic and facilitated navigation on TripAdvisor.

3.2.2. Case Description

TripAdvisor. The defining criterion for choosing a suitable case study was relevance rather than representativeness (Stake, 1994). Hence, the emphasis was on determining a fitting case that had the same essential features as social eWOM (S-eWOM) and hence was distinct from anonymous eWOM. TripAdvisor is the largest travel website worldwide (TripAdvisor, 2022), and since 2000, it has served as a platform where consumers can post reviews on hotels, travel services, sights, and destinations. As travel-related services are of an experiential nature, it is generally more difficult to examine them compared to actual products; hence, they signify contexts in which word of mouth (WOM) can have a powerful influence on decision-making (Wirtz & Chew, 2002). TripAdvisor has integrated its services with online social networks in the last few years, including Facebook. The collaboration

between Facebook and TripAdvisor is a suitable illustrative instance of an online application formulated to encourage consumer decision-making in closed networks.

TripAdvisor operates as one of Facebook's instant personalization partners through which it becomes possible to use Facebook's user data in TripAdvisor accounts (MacManus, 2012). In this relationship, two features are prominent. First, users can use a Facebook application (previously called "Cities I've Visited") to add data regarding the cities they have visited, the things they liked about these cities, and the cities they wish to visit in the future. Second, TripAdvisor can use this data to improve its services by transforming anonymous reviews into S-eWOM by combining and presenting information that is limited to the user's personal social network. Therefore, information is obtained by the consumers (e.g., destinations visited, future interests, perspectives, and reviews) that is restricted to their personal social network. Those using the information are aware of who wrote the content on the website.

As an online social travel network, TripAdvisor has changed the way travellers plan their trips. Through this website, users can stay connected and analyze hotels or nearby travel attractions by asking others on the website and referring to online reviews. TripAdvisor is believed to be the largest online travel website among the various travel websites. The website was developed in 2000 and currently includes over 1 billion reviews and travel recommendations related to almost 8 million businesses worldwide (TripAdvisor, 2022) The basis of the TripAdvisor platform is the engagement of travellers in a collaborative effort, as users post online reviews that are helpful for travellers in planning their trips and making decisions by narrowing down their choices through comparisons of online reviews on travel-related products and services (TRPS). Feedback from other tourists is considered. The reviews and comments on TripAdvisor are posted by 490 million active users, while 463 million tourists are reported each month (TripAdvisor, 2022).

A study was performed on the hotel and restaurant industry in Europe in 2007, which showed the increasing value of online shopping and the effect of travel behaviour. The study showed that 80% of U.K. consumers searched the internet before finally booking a hotel. Around half of these customers stated that they refused reserving a particular hotel after reading bad reviews on websites like TripAdvisor. Reviews, ratings, and recommendations are given by TripAdvisor users on the attractions, hotels, location, or activities related to tourism. Multimedia components (photos and videos) or travel maps from earlier travels are also added to the website. Further, users can be involved in discussion groups, and there are web applications that allow users to share materials and deal with a particular issue.

A ground-breaking product, known as the Travel Network, was released by TripAdvisor in 2007. This network allows users to give relevance to their travel maps by creating a link with key sources (e.g., email addresses and specific blogs). This helps users organize their vacations more efficiently. A visitor may establish a network of travellers, and this can help them present their reviews, ideas, and opinions. These kinds of links with individuals with whom a person travels, or even with strangers travelling to the same location and making plans to meet, help to develop an actual social network. This saves time in identifying users with similar travel preferences.

The researcher considers TripAdvisor a social commerce (SC) platform since it capitalizes on social leverage among travellers by showing the eWOM receiver a review from, for example, a Facebook friend about a particular place. It further uses the social relationship between the reviewer and the receivers of the review to influence the receivers' decisions and opinions to accept the review. A trust effect may exist in this relationship, and according to trust transfer theory, the trust transfers from the reviewer to the review itself—that the review is credible is based on the idea that “my friend recommended it, and I know this person and I know their taste.”

3.3. Justification for Research Design

The researcher opted for the qualitative design because most previous related research used quantitative methods, and a qualitative approach can uncover insights that other research has not uncovered. A qualitative research design also allowed the researcher to produce an intricate and in-depth comprehension of the research topic by allowing direct interaction between the researcher and the study participants. The researcher employed mainly walk-through sessions in which online reviews posted on TripAdvisor were shown to the participants and their perspectives regarding those reviews were noted by the researcher. The data were also collected through interviews to obtain relevant data pertaining to the reliability of eWOM in the view of travellers based on their personal experiences (Creswell, 2013).

Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods all have specific strengths and weaknesses (Bernard, 2006). A qualitative method was the optimal choice given the aims and objectives of the present study regarding reaching an exploratory understanding of the credibility of eWOM and thoroughly investigating this phenomenon. Using a qualitative method created a greater degree of flexibility in collecting vast amounts of information during data collection compared with quantitative methods, which was useful in exploring travellers' first-hand experiences and perspectives about the extent of the credibility of online reviews on TripAdvisor. The researcher also focused on how various characteristics of eWOM and S-eWOM interact with each other to increase and enhance or degrade the perceived credibility of travellers' eWOM on a travel SC website. Thus, employing a qualitative methodology was best suited to examining the key issues and challenges regarding "why" or "how" in relation to this phenomenon, which deals with the experiences of individual participants rather than the statistically aggregated experiences of a larger sample (Lee, 2014).

3.4. Data Collection

One of the essential steps in data collection for qualitative research is sampling. Sampling is the process whereby the place, time, population, and circumstances to be involved in the research are decided (Merriam, 1988). The sampling process allows the researcher to discover new theoretical concepts and shed light on the factors that distinguish various types of individuals and social circumstances, leading to greater comprehension of complicated and sophisticated circumstances when performing qualitative research (Neuman, 2011a). The purposive and selective sampling technique was used in this study. A purposive sampling technique is used by qualitative researchers to recruit participants who can provide in-depth and detailed information about the phenomenon under investigation. It is highly subjective and determined by the qualitative researcher, who constructs the qualifying criteria each participant must meet to be considered for the research study. Purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research to identify and select information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest. Although there are several purposeful sampling strategies, criterion sampling was chosen for this study, as participants meeting certain criteria was important to offer rich insights on the youth perspective in evaluating the credibility of eWOM on the TripAdvisor website and application.

The recruited participants opted to participate in the study through the ISPR at the University of Ottawa. The ISPR Student Pool includes University of Ottawa students who are registered in introductory courses at the university and allows researchers to display their research advertisements to a large, diverse pool of interested participants, who can earn credit rewards for their participation in studies.

The researcher opened multiple research slots at different times and dates to suit the participants' daytime schedules. The researcher could personally conduct interviews and walk-through sessions for the first 12 participants who opted to participate; the latter received

one point as compensation for their time and effort. The researcher contacted the Research Ethics Board and applied for ethical approval to conduct the study in person, with the walk-through session being video recorded (only the screen of the participant's device would be video recorded) and the interview session being audio recorded for data transcription purposes. To maintain confidentiality, participants' identity was not disclosed at all (see Appendices B and C). The walk-through experiment and the interview were designed to take place in person, with the researcher and participant both present. The researcher met with each participant individually, observing their responses during the walk-through session and discussing them in depth in the interview that followed. This meeting took place in a laboratory at the University of Ottawa for confidentiality purposes and to protect the privacy of participants.

However, the data collection phase was interrupted on March 13, 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, when the University of Ottawa closed all in-person learning facilities with only a few days' notice. The participants cancelled the remaining booked slots due to the lockdown. The researcher had to move the data collection to a remote platform, Microsoft Teams, and file a modification to the research to acquire new ethical approval to continue the data collection virtually. Microsoft Teams is a business communication platform developed by Microsoft that can be used for videoconferencing, with audio and video capabilities. It allowed the researcher to conduct the walk-through session during which participants shared their screens with the researcher. The researcher observed the walk-through steps undertaken by participants and then conducted a virtual discussion during the interview session. The researcher recruited six more participants through the ISPR and successfully continued the interviews and walk-through sessions using Microsoft Teams.

The study was featured on the ISPR, with a written introduction and clearly specified research objectives and eligibility criteria. The study advertisement was posted on the Ottawa

ISPR page to provide awareness of the study and made available for students and briefly explained to them. Undergraduate and graduate students were invited to participate in a voluntary walk-through and interview (see Appendix B). The researcher then chose the best candidates using the criteria and quota strategies. The selection criteria were for participants to have travel experience and to have previously read and evaluated online reviews through the TripAdvisor platform. Participants also had to be University of Ottawa students in the age range 16–30 and considered active users of online review platforms (reading online reviews on at least a weekly basis) to capture the youth perspective on online reviews. Individuals who were willing to participate but did not meet the criteria because they had no travel planning experience that involved reading and evaluating online reviews responded but were not included in the study. Only those who met all the criteria were included. Before the pandemic, the first 12 participants responded fast, but after the outbreak of the pandemic, responses slowed, despite data collection being conducted remotely using Microsoft Teams. The researcher completed the data collection with six participants after the pandemic began. A total of 18 participants participated in the study.

Throughout the course of the research, a point is reached where the data obtained from participants agrees with the available data; this point is known as saturation (Jackson et al., 2011). Saturation indicates completion of data collection and analysis, as the accumulation of new information has ceased at this stage, which that there is no further requirement to collect and analyze data (Saunders et al., 2018). At the point of saturation, the researcher is convinced that the research topic has been successfully elucidated (Jackson et al., 2011). The researcher stopped collecting data from students at the University of Ottawa on achieving data saturation.

Qualitative research commonly employs various methods of data collection (Eid, 2011). This is done mainly to allow researchers to explore the research topic freely without

being directed or influenced by the research method (Jackson et al., 2011, p. 241). Such research significantly depends on qualitative data obtained through observations and interviews (Merriam, 1988). The data collection techniques mentioned above allowed the researcher to obtain experimental data and develop a conceptual view of the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). These intricate processes not only facilitated the collection of data by means of unstructured or semistructured interviews and the assessment of literature and visual data but also established study limitations and preformed the task of information recording (Creswell, 2009, 2014). For the current study, various data collection methods, including interviews and walk-through sessions, were employed.

The study was featured on the ISPR, with a written introduction and clearly specified research objectives and eligibility criteria. The participants included undergraduate and graduate students chosen through the ISPR. The study advertisement was posted on the Ottawa ISPR page to provide awareness regarding the study. Using this method, a total of 18 participants were selected. The target sample of the study was made up of undergraduate and graduate students so that the researcher could obtain the youth's viewpoints on the way online reviews provided by previous travellers could be analyzed and on the way credibility and trust could be awarded to these online reviews, bringing about the spread of eWOM in the tourism sector.

Participants had to meet two key criteria. The participant had to (a) have experience in reading reviews pertinent to TRPS, such as top attractions, hotels, and restaurants, and (b) have travel experience based on using online reviews on the TripAdvisor application or website for travel planning (i.e., participants had expertise in reading online reviews of TRPS when planning a trip) and be an active user of online reviews (i.e., they read online reviews on a weekly basis). The purpose of the first criterion was to identify informants who had recently used TRPS reviews. The second criterion aimed to identify informants who already

knew about the anonymous content provider version of TripAdvisor (eWOM) and who could subsequently be made aware of the collaboration between TripAdvisor and Facebook to create S-eWOM. The informants were all part of the young adult age group (16–27 years old), which was the age group believed to be the biggest consumer of social media (Duggan & Brenner, 2013) and a major consumer of online reviews. It was determined that there were enough informants because after eight interviews, data saturation began to occur.

The researcher asked the informants to perform a travel-related search on TripAdvisor. Before the study, the participants were not informed about the content or nature of the search task. Every informant had to log in to their TripAdvisor account through their Facebook username before performing the search. After this, the informants had to identify two travel destinations with which they were not familiar but wished to visit. During the search, the informants learned about user-generated destination-relevant content (eWOM). However, none of the informants could identify or view information from the travel experiences of those in their personal social networks. This may be because the researcher gave informants the option to choose from five distinct travel destinations that they had not visited previously to remove the bias effect of having previous knowledge of and experience regarding the travel destination when assessing online reviews. The informants could not see what others in their social networks stated about their chosen destinations. During the interview in the second stage of the research, the researcher asked the informants about their opinions and attitudes regarding a review posted by their Facebook friends.

Observations used during walk-through sessions were crucial research instruments in this study because participants' engagement in navigating the TripAdvisor website or application would stimulate their instant responses through being exposed directly to reading and evaluating online reviews. The researcher believed that this experience would provide

fruitful insight into this phenomenon. The script for the walk-through sessions, and the interview questions, was developed solely by the researcher.

First, the walk-through session was one to one, conducted with online individual participants and researcher present. Each participant was asked to navigate the TripAdvisor application or website as they usually would when planning a trip but to talk aloud about their searches, what keys they were pressing, and how they reacted to certain information on the screen. Specifically, each participant was asked to log in to the TripAdvisor website or application using their own device (cell phone, tablets, or personal computer) and to navigate through the TripAdvisor app for 15 to 20 minutes. Participants were instructed to choose a travel destination among five options (Orlando, New York, London, Paris, and Vancouver), selected in terms of popularity and population size, for travel planning. This was done to ensure that there would be enough online reviews about these tourism destinations. Five travel destinations were provided to control for the potential effect of travellers' travel experience and knowledge, which could introduce bias or influence their perceptions.

Several categories of TRPS appeared on the screen. The researcher observed participants navigating through these categories, noting which ones they tended to choose to read more about according to their preferences. The researcher then observed participants navigate the site freely, but if the participants did not click on the travellers' reviews, the researcher probed them to investigate the "Reviews" bar (see Appendix C). The researcher observed participants' experience in navigating the TripAdvisor application and website and collected data about their evaluations and their online behaviour regarding their perceived credibility of these reviews.

This observation process sought to define key informational content that could positively or negatively influence the participants' decision-making process (with a specific focus on the online reviews left by other users on TripAdvisor). The researcher probed

participants to think aloud about how they evaluated these online reviews and what aspects of the chosen reviews were the most influential. During this process, the participants verbally described and shared their opinions on and perceptions of the importance or influence of the following components of the application as they planned their trip:

- Informational content (source of online review and/or identities of the reviewers)
- Valence of online reviews (positive vs negative)
- Consistency of reviews
- Quality of information
- Ratings of reviews (presentation of review content and level of detail in online reviews)
- Design (accessibility of videos and pictures posted by reviewers)

For example, if a participant highlighted a review or rating as being particularly trustworthy and helpful in their decision to book a certain hotel, the researcher asked the participant to mention the specific factors that motivated them to adopt this information.

To highlight the social aspect of TripAdvisor and for it to be considered an SC platform, TripAdvisor has recently created a new feature called “Customize your travel experience,” based on reviews and recommendations from Facebook friends. TripAdvisor pulls information from the user’s Facebook account to show the travellers the reviews left by their Facebook friends when the user navigates through the TripAdvisor application or website while logged in to their Facebook account. None of the participants could find reviews from their Facebook friends on the travel destinations included in the walk-through; thus, the researcher asked participants how they felt about and evaluated reviews posted by their Facebook friends during the interview session. The preliminary exploratory study involved 18 informants.

During the walk-throughs, informants came across traditional eWOM in the TripAdvisor application. This approach is particularly appropriate for examining the way information is considered and employed in consumers' decision-making. When this method is used, informants are asked to verbally explain what they see and think while performing a particular task. Verbalization allows researchers to determine informants' thought processes (Kuusela et al. 1998). No effort or intention existed to facilitate informants' decision-making or enforce a preconceived theoretical framework. The researcher permitted informants to freely express their decision-making processes; the only input from the researcher was to remind the informants to actively verbalize their thoughts when they stopped talking audibly (Todd & Benbasat, 1987). Because the method reveals the parts played by certain pieces of information and the rules followed when making decisions (Kuusela et al. 1998; Todd & Benbasat, 1987), it was considered appropriate for examining the attributes of eWOM.

The researcher used probe questions to ensure that participants responded appropriately and provided information that reflected their own experiences with the online reviews theme by asking the following types of questions: "What do you do when you plan your trip?" "How do you evaluate online reviews to inform your decision-making?" "Why did you click on this particular review?" At the end of each session, each participant engaged with the researcher in a semistructured interview and talked about their travel experiences and their evaluation of online reviews for approximately 25 to 30 minutes.

Semistructured interviews were carried out in the second stage of the data generation process to further examine noteworthy issues and views that emerged in the first stage and from informants' travel history. This enabled the researcher to ask further complementary questions and extensively discuss how informants considered the role of eWOM and S-eWOM in their decision-making and the factors that influenced their credibility judgement of eWOM and S-eWOM. This was achieved by asking about the participants' travel history and

their inspiration for reading online reviews. Further, they were asked about the significance they ascribed to online reviews by providing a numerical rating from 0 to 10 (0 = *not significant at all*, 10 = *most significant*). Moreover, they were asked about their definitions and perceptions of credibility and their assessments of credibility as a concept. This was important, as there is no consensus on the definition of credibility within the literature. The credibility dimensions vary among individuals; therefore, the researcher wanted to capture the essence of credibility dimensions from informants and analyze the credibility determinants of eWOM from the informants' perceptions. Subsequently, informants' perceptions of a credible online review were examined with respect to the characteristics of a credible review and how one is obtained. S-eWOM was also examined, and the impact of visuals was determined using photos and videos to evaluate the richness of the platform as a medium and how it influenced the informant's credibility judgement. Altogether, walk-through analysis and the recorded and transcribed interviews provided almost 13 hours of data.

Interviews serve as an effective tool for qualitative data collection (Merriam, 1988), particularly semistructured ones that enable the researcher to interpret patterns, themes, and implications by collecting large quantities of qualitative data (Kendall, 2008). The researcher can obtain a wide variety of opinions and views from participants by asking open-ended questions, hence adding different types of experiences to the quality of the research (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). This fulfilled the research objective of collecting diverse viewpoints pertaining to eWOM in the form of online reviews posted by travellers on SC websites. The interviews helped the researcher obtain participants' perspectives on the interactive activity (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), during which the participants' attitudes were observed by the interviewer to make inferences (Denzin, 1978). The researcher must ensure the comfort of the

interviewee during the interview and adopt a flexible and sensitive attitude toward the participants while gathering the desired data (Eisner, 1991).

Qualitative research mainly intends to determine the opinions and perspectives of the participants regarding a specific matter (Merriam, 1988). This implies that qualitative research is conducted primarily to gain insight into exclusive information to obtain the quantitative outline of information, besides understanding a phenomenon not yet experienced by the researcher (Stake, 2010). Interviews were employed in this research as the major data collection technique, as interviews allowed for better comprehension of the condition of the credibility of eWOM, specifically in the form of online reviews written by experienced travellers, by exploring the opinion of youths in this regard. Hence, interviews were deemed ideal for this kind of study.

The researcher also explored the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic situation and the global public health crisis on the perceived credibility and trustworthiness of online reviews when travellers read them to inform their purchasing decisions. The researcher believed that enhancing and increasing the credibility of eWOM would lead to a faster and more efficient recovery of the tourism industry. Examining what travellers appreciate and want to see in online reviews to be assured that it is safe to travel again, and that the destination is socially responsible or has responded rapidly to COVID-19 to keep their guests safe is crucial for travellers.

3.5. Role of the Researcher

The researcher plays an integral role in the collection and analysis of data during qualitative research (Merriam, 1988). Stake (2010, p. 101) likewise noted that the researcher is an essential instrument in qualitative research who performs the principal tasks of searching the available data for relevant information, understanding the matter, and using their listening skills to extract useful information from an experienced individual. The data

collection process requires the researcher to make optimal use of their expertise and knowledge to extract relevant information, thereby delivering an effective qualitative study (Morse, 1994). The role of the researcher also involves being part of the experience, along with the participants (Creswell, 2009). The researcher defines the perception of the subject matter, although they may be directed by a case study (Stake, 1994). Moreover, it is the responsibility of the researcher to perform an effective analysis to allow readers to gain insight into valuable information and to pave the way for future research (Stake, 1995).

Because the researcher is an integral player in any research, the interpretations made in the study depend on the researcher's personal context; hence, any bias, values, and other personal aspects must be addressed (Creswell, 2009, 2014). As mentioned earlier, the researcher is responsible for dealing with any emerging ethical issues and accessing the research site. The reader can recognize the researcher's connection with the research if the researcher's experiences, such as their educational status, job experience, background, creed, and other demographic aspects relevant to the research, are mentioned in the research problem or conveyed to the study participants (Creswell, 2014). The role played by these aspects in the researcher's interpretation of the study must be clearly elucidated. For example, the researcher may form biased interpretations or conclusions regarding a matter or individual and may favour or oppose some matter or individual based on their personal experiences (Creswell, 2009). To mitigate the risk of introducing researcher bias, questions were kept simple, and an effort was made to avoid words that might introduce bias. The researcher was careful not to use leading question to prompt participants and direct them in a way that favoured any assumptions the researcher had.

The series of steps taken to seek approval from the Institutional Review Board regarding the protection of study participants must also be declared by the researcher by showing the letter of approval issued by the board as evidence of the researcher's efforts to

seek this approval (Creswell, 2009). The researcher is responsible for dealing with any emerging ethical challenges by concealing the participants' identity, location, and other personal information. The procedure followed for maintaining participant privacy and confidentiality must also be declared (Creswell, 2009, 2014).

The researcher who conducted this study is a Saudi national who completed her early education in her homeland and completed a master's program in the United Kingdom, the University of Glasgow in Scotland. She then returned to her homeland and lectured at a university for about a year. Afterward, she left for Canada to complete her graduate degree. She has always been interested and involved in online shopping, in addition to being a frequent traveller. She habitually referred to online reviews prior to making a purchase online. Hence, this research topic corresponds with her interests and activities. All the researcher's positive traits were addressed through a researcher journal, which Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed as a tool to allow the researcher to share and express their personal information and their views pertaining to the research topic as well as the techniques employed within the research. The researcher journal was used to record all relevant information. The researcher also maintained and recorded a diary-like document in the form of personal logs during the entire research process. The spontaneous and reflective explanations pertaining to the researcher's views compared with the reality of the SC platform and travellers' online reviews were included in the personal log.

3.6. Data Analysis

Understanding and comprehending the data gathered is essential for any research study (Eid, 2011; Merriam, 1988). Huberman and Miles (1994) identified three subprocesses involved in data analysis: data reduction, data display, and conclusion. The conclusion involves making inferences and confirming them. Qualitative research involves a continuous process of data analysis whereby data are constantly examined, systematic questions are

probed, and memorandums are stated (Creswell, 2009, p. 184). Simply put, qualitative data analysis involves continuous inquiry and verification of results (Jackson et al., 2011).

Qualitative data are analyzed to infer the meanings from textual and graphical data (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative data analysis may be performed on various forms of data, including textual data such as written online reviews, copies, or records of open-ended interviews; notes besides the audio, visual, or graphical data; and artifacts presented in online reviews (Neuman, 2011a). Creswell and Poth (2018) defined data analysis as the process through which data are arranged and represented, the database is thoroughly read, themes are coded and organized, and interpretations are made. The current study performed data analysis as outlined by Merriam (1988), Miles and Huberman (1994), Neuman (2011a, 2011b), Eid (2011), Saldaña (2015), Creswell (2009, 2013, 2014), and Creswell and Poth (2018).

The researcher thoroughly examined the collected data to make general interpretations of the organized data. This was followed by the main processes of data analysis, including data categorization with respect to the themes, concepts, and attributes of the data (Eid, 2011). The subsequent step involved data interpretation and explanation of the phenomenon using coding methods. Qualitative coding originates from given research queries and gives rise to novel queries, which implies its significance for data analysis (Eid, 2011). The process of qualitative coding involves considering textual or visual data and organizing this data into categories based on the information contained in it. This is followed by reviewing various databases involved in the research to confirm the code and ultimately label it (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 190). Moreover, the researcher employed descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2015) as the first-cycle coding method. Descriptive coding involves labelling the components of qualitative data with basic labels (usually a word or phrase; Creswell, 2009). The label is usually assigned depending on the topic of that part of the data. Data collected through various methods, such as interviews and walk-through sessions, were analyzed in this

research. Five themes from the interview data were developed during the first cycle of descriptive coding.

Various coding techniques for the analysis of descriptive codes were proposed by Saldaña (2015); however, second-cycle pattern coding was deemed appropriate for this research. Miles and Huberman (1994) defined pattern coding as a technique of organizing summaries into a few sets, themes, or constructs. This technique analyzes the data codes based on rules, reasons, and descriptions (Saldaña, 2015). Creswell (2009) explained this process as a coding technique that extracts the descriptive phrases relevant to the research topic and develops categories based on these phrases. Usually, research queries are used to develop patterns that facilitate the analysis, but in rare cases, the analysis may itself generate patterns (Stake, 1995). These patterns that emerge develop a theory that explains the true implications of data and, hence, supports data analysis (Merriam, 1988). Simply put, the patterns that emergence within data must be followed by the researcher's interpretation of the patterns with respect to the relevant social theory or social context (Neuman, 2011b).

The listing of descriptive codes in the coding system of this research Included five categories and 30 subcategories that were subsequently condensed into 27 categories during pattern coding. The data collected through walk-through sessions and interviews were analyzed, and categories were established based on the rate of replication. Although the researcher ensured that the collected data were open and communicative, the process of data analysis was also simplified through the use of the research queries and interview questions and the research's theoretical framework. The researcher used theoretical concepts to develop a connection between diverse concepts within the developed categories (Neuman, 2011b). Moreover, the researcher employed the manual coding approach. The role played by the researcher during the data analysis in qualitative research is quite evident. This is apparent from the fact that the analysis of the research offers insight into the interpretations made by

the researcher. Huberman and Miles (1994) supported this fact by stating that the data set is influenced significantly by the context of the researcher who defines the interpretation of the data. Thus, the interpretations drawn from the research depend on the researcher's personal understanding of the study data.

Descriptive coding, a first-cycle coding process, enables the researcher to provide a detailed description of the research settings and entails explanations about the events occurring then and the events that followed (Huberman & Miles, 1994). The researcher's interpretation of the data enables them to understand the collected data. This process involves code development, the generation of themes from the developed codes and, consequently, the arrangement of the generated themes into broader units (Creswell, 2013). In this study, data analysis began with the researcher's presentation of the background and credibility of online reviews. This involved shedding light on significant themes that emerged from the data collected through the walk-through sessions and interviews. This was followed by the researcher's description of the presentation of the context of eWOM and S-eWOM on the TripAdvisor website, which highlighted significant themes and categories that were discovered in the walk-through sessions and interviews. Then, the researcher classified 27 categories and 37 subcategories with their definitions, which revealed the state of the communication process between communicators (reviewers) and receivers (customers) in giving credibility to eWOM.

The 27 categories and 37 subcategories offering insight into the credibility of eWOM posted by travellers on SC sites were explored. These categories were arranged in a sequence that pertained to explaining the different phases customers went through to grant credibility to the generation of the significant factors that trigger the credibility of eWOM. Next in the sequence, the level of credibility supplied by customers was enhanced, followed by a decrease in the factors that limit the credibility of eWOM. Last in the sequence was the effect

of external factors, such as the context in which the website operated, the way the platform was being used, and environmental factors, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, on travellers' perceptions of UGC.

The second-cycle coding process for pattern coding follows the first coding process to further organize and analyze the data (Saldaña, 2015). This process involves the creation of a consistent meta-synthesis of data by identifying associations between categories. This implies that the researcher's interpretations will be analyzed with respect to a greater data set of available literature (Creswell, 2013). The current research explained the credibility of eWOM posted by travellers on SC sites by employing a complex analysis and interpretation. The analysis concluded with the researcher's explanation of the phenomenon, the research outcomes and implications, and lessons learned.

3.7. Overview of the Code Development Process

3.7.1. Coding Software

The current research employed the NVivo 12 software tool to conduct the process of coding (<https://www.vivo.com>). The researcher performed and recorded 18 interviews in English, in addition to the walk-through sessions. All the data obtained from the interviews and walk-through sessions were fed into NVivo 12. The insertion of recorded data was followed by the manual analysis of all the interviews and walk-throughs, and subsequent coding by the researcher. This involved labelling relevant concepts and developing categories. Initially, 17 major themes emerged, which later accounted for five major themes and 27 categories and 37 subcategories. Next, the researcher developed an Excel bar chart so that the categories could be displayed and organized. The Excel bar chart also allowed the comparison of values pertaining to different categories.

3.7.2. Description of Coders

Several instructors from the Saudi Electronic University assisted the researcher in first modifying the coding system and then performing the formal reliability test. This involved testing the coding of 10% of interviews (amounting to almost two interviews) and referring to the provided list of categories and coding regulations for the classification of obtained data. All the details pertaining to the coding system, coding regulations, and example codes also had to be stated clearly.

3.7.3. Intercoder Reliability

The researcher conducted an official intercoder reliability test as part of the coding process. The reliability of qualitative research is indicated by the consistency of responses with respect to various data coders (Creswell & Poth, 2018). An instructor/researcher from Saudi Electronic University in Saudi Arabia performed an initial round of codes for two interviews (i.e., 10% of the interviews). The coders showed a consistency rate of 86% upon testing the coding of 10% of interviews with the help of a categorization list and coding regulations. This was followed by resolving the remaining 14% of the inconsistency by coders. The inconsistent codes were studied, and the cause of the inconsistency was discussed and eradicated by the coders, ultimately leading to consistent outcomes.

3.8. Ensuring Trustworthiness

Research trustworthiness or reliability is of utmost importance, as the reader will only consider the research if it is proven to be based on reliable data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Hence, the reliability of the current research was proven using various strategies. Triangulation, thick description of context, finding research bias, participant validation, and peer debriefing were among the strategies used in this research to enhance the validity of research outcomes.

The research must begin with the explanation of the researcher's assumptions, their perspective of the world, and the theoretical basis relevant to research queries (Merriam, 1988). The research will be more understandable for readers if the researcher's bias has been addressed (Creswell, 2009). This type of explanation may be presented in a personal log to express the researcher's views about the research topic (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This research entailed an introductory part about the researcher (mentioned earlier in the chapter) that highlighted their views, biases, and background to address the issue of researcher bias.

Moreover, the researcher expressed the research outcomes through the strategy of thick description. A thick description that sheds light on the contextual details of the social world is considered essential by qualitative researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). *Thick description* was described by Stake as

depicting things with contextual details that are attractive to readers (such as specific places, experiences, and individuals) instead of keeping the description basic and simple ... [by] making use of the interpretations made by people having relevant experience and info pertaining to the concerned matter. (Stake, 1995)

Through thick description, the researcher conducting a case study can depict their case using various kinds of descriptions. The significance of thick description was emphasized by Creswell (2014, p. 202), who stated that this strategy has the potential to depict an event such that readers can equally experience the event described. Similarly, Creswell and Poth (2018) believed that a thick description is essential to ensure that the researcher and participants can equally relate to the research findings. Thick description enhances the validity of the research outcomes, as it allows the qualitative researcher to depict the outcomes in a practical and realistic manner (Creswell, 2009). Hence, the researcher employed this strategy in this study to help the reader thoroughly grasp the research settings through the given contextual details.

Lastly, a peer debriefing of this qualitative study was conducted prior to the interview sessions to enhance the accuracy of the accounts. The peer debriefing served to ensure that all aspects of the inquiries within the study were clear to all outsiders, not just to the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Creswell (2009, p. 192), “this process involves locating a person (a peer debriefed) who reviews and asks questions about the qualitative study so that the account will resonate with people other than the researcher.” This strategy further adds validity to the study by involving an outside person in the interpretation (Creswell, 2014). For this study, the interview questions were refined through informal pilot testing conducted by the researcher with professors, colleagues, and acquaintances prior to the interview sessions.

Furthermore, for the sake of trustworthiness, it is worth mentioning that generalization is not an essential component of qualitative research. Qualitative scholars do not generalize between cases because each case has a different context (Creswell, 2007, 2013). As noted by Stake (1994), the aim of a case study is to represent a particular case rather than to represent the world. Stake (1995, p. 85) further noted that “single cases are not as strong a base for generalizing to a population of cases as other research designs.” Unlike other qualitative approaches, the case study approach concentrates on providing an in-depth understanding of a case or multiple cases and developing an in-depth description and analysis of a case or multiple cases (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.9. Research Limitations

This research is not without limitations. First, the research is exploratory in nature and involved a qualitative method and relied on a small sample of youth of mixed cultures at a Canadian university; therefore, the results of this research cannot be generalized to the overall population. Another limitation relates to participants’ activity when browsing the TripAdvisor site. Given that participants used their own devices, their online activities and

personal histories were stored by TripAdvisor, as the site adjusts recommended places according to previous travel searches conducted by travellers. Furthermore, the researcher could not control the possible effects of the reputations of the selected tourist destinations (New York, Paris, London, Vancouver, and Orlando) on participants' perceptions and evaluations of online reviews of those destinations. The researcher chose these travel destinations to ensure that enough data and reviews on these destinations were available. Results may vary with unknown places participants had never heard of before. Due to the COVID-19-related interruptions and the pandemic causing delays in collecting data and moving to online or virtual meetings with participants to conduct semistructured interviews, the researcher took advantage of the possible effect of the pandemic on participants' perceptions of the credibility of eWOM. Because no participants could access Facebook friends' reviews through their TripAdvisor accounts during the walk-through sessions, they were asked about S-eWOM during the interview sessions.

3.10. Ethical Considerations

In qualitative research, ensuring reliability and that all observations and analyses are performed without any violations of ethical values is imperative (Merriam, 1988). The researcher ensured compliance with all ethical and moral concerns throughout the research process. For this purpose, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board at the Office of Research Ethics and Integrity at the University of Ottawa was approached in November 2019 and presented with an ethics request for reconsideration and approval. The concerned authorities granted their final accord in January 2020 (see Appendix D). This research emphasized multiple data collection methods, including interviews and walk-through sessions to confirm ethical standards.

Regarding privacy concerns while using information from participants' Facebook friends, according to the TripAdvisor Privacy policy, users have already consented to

Facebook using their publicly posted information, and the content is available to any internet user on TripAdvisor as online reviews. TripAdvisor will show users online reviews already posted on TripAdvisor by their social network friends (Facebook friends) and the places they have visited. This personalized content will be provided only if Facebook users have consented to Facebook sharing their information with a third party (in this case, TripAdvisor) and have chosen to share it according to the privacy settings of their Facebook accounts. The information users of Facebook choose to share publicly may include the user's name, gender, profile picture, and friend list (Needham, 2019).

Information was extracted from the TripAdvisor website, including input from friends who did not participate in the study. Hence, only aggregate content from the online reviews posted by participants' Facebook friends, which they chose to make available publicly to everyone, and the general comments from friends were documented and analyzed. Facebook friends remained anonymous, and this information has neither been used in this research nor will it be used in the future. No identities were disclosed. This guarantees the anonymity of individuals. Further, during the walk-through and interview sessions, the researcher was careful not to provide information that would compromise the anonymity of either participants or their Facebook friends.

The researcher video recorded the participants' screens while they used either the TripAdvisor application or website during the walk-through session. This was done to ensure the accuracy of the information while the data were transcribed. The recorded information was crucial for the researcher, as it shows the steps the participants took while reading the online reviews. These steps were important because they instantly captured participants' responses to online reviews, which were triggered by their short-term memory through being exposed to online reviews during the session. The information gathered from participants

during the walk-through sessions (the cognitive process participants undertook) differs from the information provided in the interview sessions, which adds value to the research findings.

Every interviewee participated in this research of their own free will. All the participants were asked to submit their approval by signing an approval document prior to their involvement in the walk-through session and interview (see Appendix C). The main purpose of the approval document was to clarify all the study attributes to the participants so that they could decide whether they wanted to participate in the study (Christensen et al., 2011). The approval document or form was intended to communicate the research objectives to the participants and clarify their role in the research. The document also empowered the participants to leave during the research if they found it necessary, without facing repercussions for doing so.

The researcher assured the participants that their anonymity and confidentiality would not be compromised. *Anonymity* means that the identity of the participants will not be revealed and disclosed to anyone, whereas *confidentiality* means that their personal information and experiences will not be disclosed to a third party (Christensen et al., 2011). Hence, the researcher concealed the names and designations of the participants. Creswell (2009) stressed the protection of research participants by the researcher. He further emphasized the need to win participants' trust, enhance research integrity, prevent any offense aimed at the participants' organizations, and be prepared to deal with any emerging issues (Creswell, 2009, p. 87). Information about participants' identities was available only to the researcher. The study outcomes quote anonymous remarks. The participants' personal experiences and views expressed during the interviews have been kept confidential and are accessible only to the researcher and her supervisor.

The risks and benefits associated with research must also be considered as part of the ethical considerations. The benefits offered by the current research outweigh the associated

risks. In fact, no risks have been identified in this research, but the benefits are numerous. The participants benefitted from this research because they could express their views and share their experiences pertaining to the condition of eWOM. The participants also benefitted from contributing to and participating in qualitative research.

The participants expressed their experiences of reading the reviews posted online and identifying whether the reviews were reliable and trustworthy enough; they then made decisions based on their interpretations of reviews. Considering the prevailing scenario of the spread of COVID-19, the participants were asked to share their views on the credibility of eWOM posted on SC sites before and after COVID-19 and to be open about the effects of the pandemic on the tourism sector by partaking in the interviews and walk-through sessions arranged by the researcher. The researcher allowed them to consider this matter from various angles.

Additionally, the participants had the opportunity to be part of a real-life scenario whereby they scrolled through the TripAdvisor website and recalled their previous travel experiences, which would be shared with the world. It is also essential to acknowledge the efforts of the participants to enhance the literature by contributing data related to the credibility of eWOM associated with tourism reviews posted on SC sites. Another benefit enjoyed by research participants is that they will be provided with an electronic copy of the research before publication. The participants can use this copy to consider and practically apply the strategies recommended in the research.

Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis

Chapter 4 contains the findings and thematic analysis of the data from interviews and documents. This chapter begins with a presentation of the demographic information of the participants and the context of the study, followed by a thematic analysis of the data. The thematic analysis discusses the data collected and the coding schemes that were created in the form of categories. All names within the quotations have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the participants, as illustrated in Table 1.

4.1. Demographics and Study Context

In this section, participants' backgrounds and demographic information are revealed, such as their country of origin, gender, and age, followed by the study context, including elements such as travel destinations, perceptions of credibility, level of importance they ascribe to online reviews, and whether they were included in the pre- or post-COVID-19 groups. This information is provided in Table 1.

4.1.1. Participants' Backgrounds

The participants ($N = 18$) in this study were from different countries: Canada ($n = 4$), China ($n = 3$), Lebanon ($n = 3$), and one participant each from Kurdistan, Ireland, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, Congo, Dominican Republic, Libya, and Egypt. All participants were undergraduate students from the University of Ottawa in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

4.1.2. Age

The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 27, with the following age distribution: 18 years old ($n = 6$), 21 years old ($n = 3$), 19 years old ($n = 2$), 20 years old ($n = 2$), 22 years old ($n = 2$), 23 years old ($n = 1$), and 27 years old ($n = 1$).

4.1.3. Gender

Online review platforms and, in this case, the TripAdvisor travel platform can be accessed by both genders equally. Communicators (reviewers and the source of information)

and consumers (the receivers of online reviews) can be of any gender. Most participants were female, constituting 77.8% of the total sample size (14 students), while 22.2% (four students) were male. Both genders could access the TripAdvisor account and navigate the website freely and openly.

Table 1

Participant Demographics and Study Contexts

Participant	Gender	Age (Years)	Country of Origin	Target Place of Vacation
A10	Male	22	Sri Lanka	Paris
A2	Female	18	Egypt/Pakistan	Orlando
A6	Female	21	Canada	Paris
C4	Female	18	Canada (Lebanese)	London
D18	Female	23	Central Asia/Kurdistan	Paris
E1	Male	19	China	Vancouver
G15	Female	21	United Kingdom/England	London
K11	Male	17	Nigeria	Vancouver
L14	Male	22	Central America	New York
M13	Female	27	Congo	London
M17	Female	18	Canada (Libyan)	London
M7	Female	19	Canada	Paris
N3	Female	18	Canada (Lebanese)	Paris
S16	Female	21	United Kingdom/Northern Ireland	Vancouver
T9	Female	18	Canada (Lebanese)	New York
V12	Female	18	Unknown white	London
Y8	Female	20	China	New York

This thesis aims to address the research gap in exploring the unique characteristics of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and social eWOM (S-eWOM), such as comparing the influence of reviews from Facebook friends on TripAdvisor to anonymous eWOM on the TripAdvisor online platform. Two sets of data were collected from 18 travellers who participated in the study to gather their perceptions and experiences of the phenomenon being explored. The researcher used NVivo 12 by QSR to generate the study themes and categorical codes. The following research questions are addressed in this chapter:

- RQ1. What are the factors that influence the credibility of eWOM in the tourism industry?
 - RSQ1. How do these factors shape travellers' perceptions of the credibility of eWOM?
- RQ2. How do the social cues of social network friends influence travellers' trust in eWOM?
- RQ3. How does media richness, as measured by visual clues (e.g., photos and videos), influence credibility and trust in eWOM?

In this chapter, the researcher presents the data analysis of the two sources of data collection: the walk-throughs and the interviews. Along with the themes, the raw responses of the participants are incorporated to support the new findings and demonstrate that the themes were formed from the data collected and not the researcher's presumptions.

4.2. Data Analysis

The researcher performed two phases of data collection before the analysis. The first was a guided walk-through for the participants as they explored the TripAdvisor website. The second phase involved in-depth interviews with the participants. Both sets of transcripts—

walk-through and interview transcripts—were thematically analyzed, following the six-step process suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). The themes with the most participant reference codes were considered the major themes of the research study. Following the major themes are the minor or other essential themes with fewer participant references than the major ones. Finally, categories were established to encapsulate the specific details and examples of the major and minor themes.

In this section, the researcher discusses findings in the study and performs an analysis of the combined responses of the travellers who participated in both the walk-through and the interview stages. The initial coding scheme of this study incorporated four major themes and 13 minor themes, with 30 categories and 42 subcategories. The final major and minor themes number five and 11, respectively, with 27 categories and 37 subcategories. The percentage of responses in each category is presented in Table 2 (Appendix E).

During the walk-through stage, participants navigated the TripAdvisor platform freely and engaged in two phases. The first phase comprised the preliminary steps they undertook before reading and evaluating the online reviews. All participants were interested in choosing hotels, restaurants, or top attractions and activities. During this first phase, participants navigated through visuals (stock photos) and browsed overall information such as TripAdvisor ratings and prices for various travel-related products and services (TRPS) as part of their initial decision-making process for choosing which TRPS to learn more about. The second phase—reading and evaluating online reviews—was the more important one. Most participants noted the importance of reviews containing descriptive, two-sided evaluations from customers where both positive and negative aspects of the travel experience were shared with the support of visuals (photos or videos) included by the reviewers themselves. As they browsed, most participants desired the perceived credibility of photos shared by other tourists rather than stock photos.

4.3. Participant Perceptions of Credibility

During the interview session, the researcher invited participants to define credibility from their perspective. This was done to set the foundation for credibility and its different dimensions according to the participants' perspectives. As a level-setting exercise, the participants were asked: "How would you define credibility?" In their responses, seven participants alluded to expertise being an important dimension in their determination of credibility, which they thought was a factor that led to the credibility of eWOM in their perspective. Six participants stated that perceptions of reliability and trust in another individual led to perceiving that individual as credible. One participant stated that trust was a subjective exercise that depended on how she viewed a person. Hence, trust and credibility developed when communication occurred between individuals who had invested time in building relationships and understanding the other person's preferences. The same participant also stated that to consider another person credible, they first had to feel that an adequate amount of past information from that person had been considered reliable or factually correct. Subsequently, five participants agreed that the idea of consistency was indeed a strong foundation for their concept of credibility.

Out of the total sample, five participants thought that diversity and comprehensiveness were important dimensions of credibility. Two participants stated that diversity leads to comprehensiveness. The researcher believes both terms underlie the concept of thoroughness in their essence to grant credibility (e.g., thorough assessment considering multiple aspects such as positives and negatives and explaining the entire travel experience in the context of eWOM in tourism). Moreover, four participants agreed that credibility consists of honesty and believability as well as the concepts of correctness, accuracy, and truthfulness.

Interestingly, only one participant thought providing justification for and reasoning behind statements as important in forming a perception of credibility. Similarly, only one participant mentioned that credibility followed on from the provision of proof, which could be considered a way of indicating that an evaluation was justified and reasonable. Moreover, only one participant, L14, mentioned that the positive reputation of the source (e.g., a brand name) influenced credibility judgement.

RQ1: What are the factors that influence the credibility of eWOM in the tourism industry?

SRQ1: How do these factors shape travellers' perceptions of the credibility of eWOM?

The first research question of the study explores the characteristics or factors of online reviews that influence travellers' perceived credibility of eWOM, a with the follow-up question examining how these factors interact to increase or decrease travellers' perceptions of the credibility of eWOM. Details regarding these aspects are included in Table 3 (Appendix F). Five major themes emerged from the data, as well as 11 minor themes that involve 27 categories and 37 subcategories.

From the thematic analysis, the most significant characteristic or factor that emerged related to content as the largest major theme. The presence of customer reviews (with qualifications discussed in a later section) and the availability of holistic reviews containing both positive and negative observations formed the objective dimension of the overall evaluation of the reviews. Specifically, most participants noted the positive effects other tourists' suggestions and recommendations had on their decision-making process compared to advertisements by tourism companies.

This study identified five key themes surrounding the credibility of eWOM. Figure 1 presents these themes—content, customer, communicator, context, and community—by number of codes or mentions by participants.

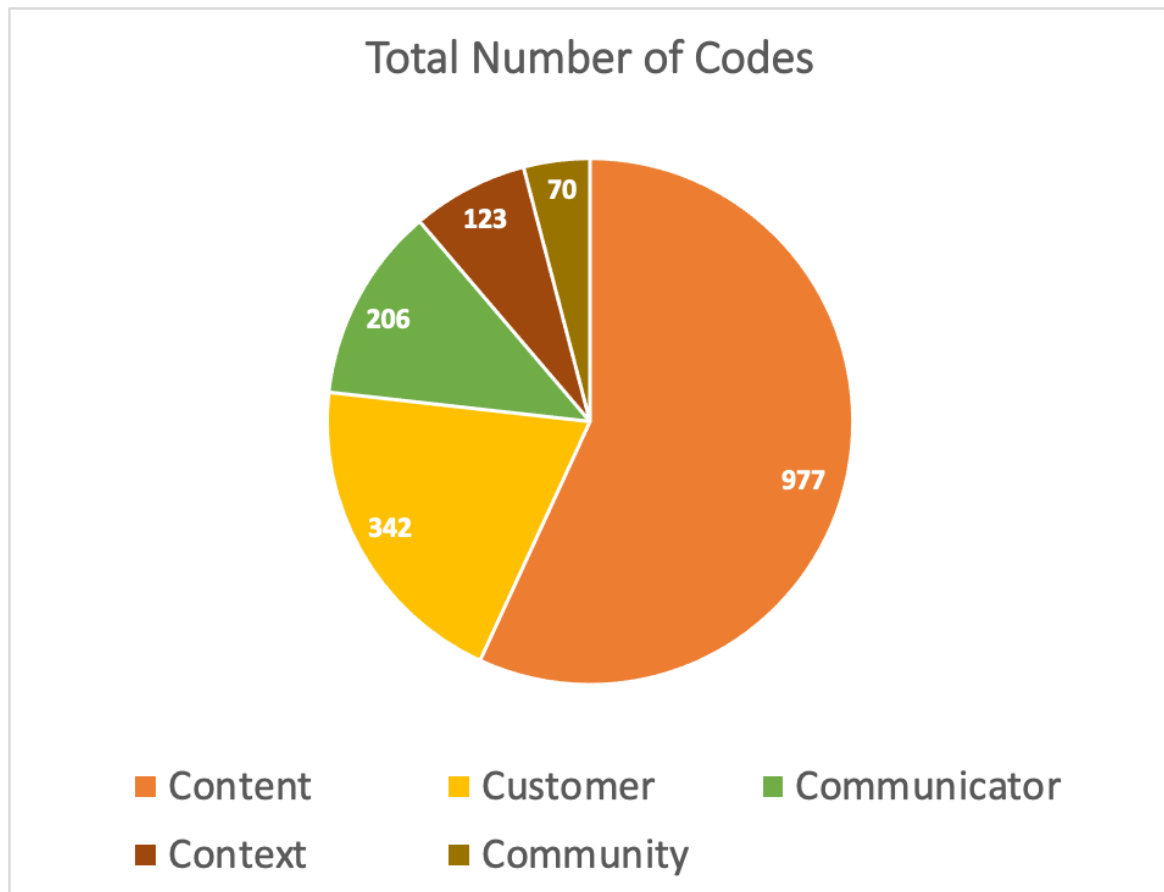


Figure 1. Total Number of Codes by Theme

4.4. Major Theme 1: Content

Content in eWOM is linked to the quality and quantity of online reviews posted by previous travellers. This theme is considered the most prevalent in coded participant responses (18 participants with 977 coded references), which signifies the important role content plays in granting credibility to eWOM.

The most prominent minor themes related to content were quality (18 participants with 587 coded references) and quantity (18 participants with 314 coded references). Quality is linked to the major theme, content, and consists of four minor themes: argument quality (18 participants with 323 coded references), visuals (18 participants with 192 coded

references), consistency (16 participants with 64 coded references), and writing style (four participants with eight coded references). Argument quality and visuals are the prominent minor themes within this major theme (content). Argument quality was mentioned by all participants and involved five categories: descriptive details (18 participants with 225 coded references), recency (13 participants with 32 coded references), diversity (10 participants with 45 coded references), content clarity (eight participants with 12 coded references), and comprehensiveness (five participants with nine coded references). The second prominent minor theme was visuals, which involved two categories: photos (18 participants with 161 coded references) and videos (14 participants with 31 coded references). The less prominent themes were consistency and writing style. These were considered the third and fourth minor themes, respectively.

The quantity theme, which is also linked to content, consisted of four categories: number of star ratings (17 participants with 90 coded references), review quantity (17 participants with 86 coded references), review valence (17 participants with 82 coded references), and the length of the review (14 participants with 56 coded references). Ratings consisted of star ratings for travel-related products and services (TRPS; 12 participants with 28 coded references) and individual reviewers' star ratings (12 participants with 34 coded references). Extremity in positive or negative reviews means that the valence of reviews is either completely positive or completely negative or that the ratings are all five stars or one star (nine participants with 16 coded references). Finally, the TripAdvisor rating system refers to the TRPS recommended by the TripAdvisor platform, either by listing the top 10 best places to visit or by categorizing the TRPS based on value, price, location, and so forth (four participants with 12 coded references). The review valence consists of positive reviews (15 participants with 45 coded references), average reviews (nine participants with 19 coded references), and negative reviews (eight participants with 18 coded references).

Most participants reported that, due to eWOM, they had become more critical decision-makers, carefully checking and reviewing the available data before finalizing their bookings. This highlights the second major theme: the customer's ability to filter the information provided to facilitate their decision-making process. Lastly, concerning the communicator, the subjectivity and social identity of the reviewer are discussed to highlight the relevance of the relationship between the reviewers, content, and customers. In the study, participants also carefully evaluated the TripAdvisor platform while evaluating online reviews.

The titles of the reviews and the locations where the participants found the information, they were seeking within the reviews were important for participants during the walk-through. Regarding lengthy reviews, they mentioned the importance of the information being located largely at the beginning of a given paragraph, as well as in a couple of sentences in the middle of the review, followed by the last two to three sentences at the end of the paragraph.

The interviews provided the researcher with in-depth information that enabled her to analyze the data in depth using qualitative open coding and pattern-coding analysis. The researcher explored two major themes and three minor themes as well as their categories and subcategories to answer the first research question.

The content contains customer reviews (diversified for holistic evaluation and a mix of positive and negative reviews). The first major theme of the study indicates the significance of reviews from customers or travellers, both positive and negative. Participants further appreciated the reviews that included suggestions and recommendations from other tourists. Participant A10 explained that both positive and negative evaluations were expected in reviews that included people's authentic experiences. Hence, this participant also noted that extremely positive reviews were more often difficult to believe:

Reviews are real-life experiences of people, whether positive or negative. These people have already done the experience, they have gone through it, and they are the ones that have gone through this, like have gone through the customer service, the buildings, the products, whatever it may be. So, they are the ones who have real-world experience, and what they experience is what is supposed to be the same sort of experience that's supposed to be for everyone. OK, so if somebody has a positive experience, I am more inclined to feel that I will have a positive experience. And the same thing for negative. ... Yes, because if it is completely positive and zero negative, then I don't believe that, and I feel like there is either someone is deleting reviews, or it's fake reviews. Yeah. Because in my understanding, there's nothing that would be perfectly positive or perfectly negative.

Participant A2, a law student, described the meaning of credibility and provided examples of how credibility could be applied to online reviews:

So, I'm taking law, and credibility is a term we discuss a lot and like a legal or medical term. Credibility is basically... let's talk about TripAdvisor and the TripAdvisor sense. Credibility is attaching photos; credibility is taking the time to leave a review. Credibility is saying whether you liked it or not, and it is backing it up, as you talked about. And credibility is really just everything that contributed towards your experience for me; like, you know people had a good experience when they upload fifty pictures and not just that one picture.

Lastly, Participant G15 touched on the availability of recommendations integrated into the reviews of the user or traveller. The participant then shared the following example:

Sometimes also if there are recommendations. I'm talking mostly about restaurants, but I guess it could also apply to travel reviews. If someone gives five stars and says, "You must try this," I don't know, the chicken shawarma, then I'm a bit more inclined

to try the chicken shawarma. Sometimes if I have my eye on a restaurant, we're on a destination, but I don't know what good exactly I want to eat, then I'll maybe have a look at the reviews and see at the five-star ones because that means that the person had a very positive experience.

4.4.1. Minor Theme 1: Quality

This qualitative research found that argument quality, consistency, visuals, and writing style make up the content's quality. First, argument quality is the most predominant subtheme, followed by the visuals of multimedia (photos and videos) attached within the review, which appear to make the TripAdvisor platform richer, influencing the credibility ascribed by participants. After that, consistency becomes important for influencing the credibility of online reviews and, finally, the writing style of the content, which involves grammar mistakes by reviewers, which signal a lack of effort and care by the reviewer to convince the customer of the veracity of the review.

Argument Quality. To support argument quality, the most prominent subcategories that contributed to the quality of the argument within the content of the review were ranked as follows:

1. Providing descriptive details related to the TRPS (18 participants with 186 coded references)
2. Justification and reasoning (16 participants with 39 coded references)
3. The recency of the posted review date (13 participants with 32 coded references)
4. Diversity involving positive and negative assessment of the TRPS and the different TRPS elements (10 participants with 45 coded references)
5. Content clarity (eight participants with 12 coded references)
6. Comprehensiveness (five participants with nine coded references)

To assess argument quality, the participants paid attention to the descriptive details within the written content of the review. They are provided within the text of the review and come in three forms: (a) TRPS descriptive details, (b) helpful tips, and (c) personalization (identifying individuals). The success of a persuasive message depends on how well the message is presented and perceived by the individual as valid and convincing. Participants attributed the required descriptive details, which consist of the TRPS details related to whether the review contained any advice that made the review helpful for the second traveller. As A10 said, "... long descriptive pictures like those, they put work into, whereas fake reviews they don't put work into it." The general terms and sentences of the review triggered a lack of descriptive details, which negatively influenced the credibility of eWOM. As A2 stated, "Lack of content like this person said everything included in the condo. Like what's everything, like you're giving me your cups and plates, too."

Content personalization through identifying individuals, which proves that the reviewer has gone through the travel experience, was also important. A2 affirmed, "When they mention names, it makes it more credible because they're using that authority to advance their opinion; it feels good." Review personalization and identifying individuals influenced the credibility of online reviews, especially with negative reviews. A2 noted, "Well, some of them did specify people, which made it more reliable for me because it's like, OK, well, I want to avoid that person then."

Descriptive Details. "TRPS descriptive details" was the first subcategory for argument quality and the most-coded reference among all study participants. This subcategory involves information about a given destination and all details contributing to the consumption experience of the TRPS by the reviewers (18 participants with 186 coded references). The participants perceived this information as useful, as it offered insight related to TRPS and made the reviewer appear objective in their evaluation and assessment. In other

words, it facilitated the relationship between the source (being objective) and the descriptive content of the review (being relevant to TRPS). Additionally, it reflected the effort and work done by the reviewer to include those descriptive details; this contrasts with fake reviews, which are seen as lacking descriptions and most likely contain a one-to-two-word general description. This also applies to visuals (photos), which function the same way as the written text content in terms of being informative and involving important details and background information regarding the travel experience. For example, A10 stated that a photo that shows only a small corner of a chair in an opera (travel attraction and activity) is not representative of the TRPS. It lacks the information required for participants to know what to expect from the TRPS and to paint an image in the participants' minds of how to be prepared for the travel activity.

There is a relationship between the length of the content and the descriptive details mentioned within the content of the review. Short reviews tend to lack the required details due to the length of the content. On the other hand, medium to long reviews tend to have descriptive details within the content. In the study, relevance was also mentioned because participants tended to think critically about whether the descriptive details within the appropriate content length were related to the TRPS. A10 stated the following:

But to me, a fake review is one that, like, I've seen many on different places like Amazon and, like, other sorts of places where fake reviews are very clear. They'd be short and not say anything about the product or the destination. I think they just said great, super, fantastic. One-worded review with nothing backing it up. So, without, like, yeah, if it doesn't give any indication of how it actually is.

General statements describing the amenities of the accommodation, which lack descriptive details.

Examples of such a general statement are “everything is included in the condo” and “easy access to everything.” The word “everything” in a review was perceived by participants as vague and potentially referring to many things both related and unrelated to the customer’s preferences and travel needs. The lack of specifics as to what exactly was included in the condo within the content of the review decreased the credibility judgement of participant A2. Providing TRPS details within the content, such as stating what the reviewer ordered in the restaurant in a positive or negative review, positively influenced the credibility of online reviews. Such specific and descriptive details acted as justification and reasoning for the review, increasing the credibility of eWOM, and were perceived as descriptive content supported by facts (use of visuals).

In the present study, descriptive details that were deemed to include enough context related to the TRPS, especially when the reviewer included emotion in the content of the review, were seen as supporting the credibility of online reviews (18 participants with 158 coded references). However, a review that lacked context and included only information about how the reviewer felt about the travel experience was seen as less credible, as the reviewer was perceived as emotional or biased, detracting from the credibility of eWOM. Thus, providing context in a review determined the relevance of the review in terms of whether it was in line with the customer’s preferences, allowing it to be seen as credible. In contrast, including random information, such as background information regarding the reviewer’s feelings, was perceived as unnecessary and detracted from the credibility of eWOM.

A relationship between the categories of the content, such as review valence (negative reviews) and TRPS descriptive details (argument quality), was found in the negative reviews, which tended to be more descriptive and were perceived as having a higher credibility level than the positive reviews. Positive reviews were perceived as biased and presenting a greater

opportunity for stealth marketing; hence, relying on positive reviews for evaluation purposes was seen as difficult. “Helpful tips” (six participants with 15 coded references) provided by the reviewer in the content of the review give the impression of usefulness and help other customers prepare for their trip. Six participants appreciated advice and recommendations, which shows the importance of content that contains useful information for customers.

Participants in the study ascribed greater value to the quality of the content than the quantity (review rating) of the reviews. When the content of the review included the required descriptive details related to the TRPS, it was seen as an objective review. On the other hand, participants perceived ratings as subjective and of lower value than content, as ratings were seen as requiring justification as to why the reviewer gave a specific rating (number of stars) to the TRPS. For all the reasons above, the written content of the review was seen as more credible than the review’s star rating.

Participants who mentioned the role of gender believed that women write with more detail, have “picky” personalities, and write longer content. The relevance of the gender of both participants and sources (reviewers) was also shown in this research. Female participants wanted to read descriptive details written by female reviewers, such as information about the TRPS and the best time to visit. Additionally, they sought explanations of directions in the content for the purpose of easy navigation.

“Personalization and identifying individuals” (four participants with 13 coded references) was the subcategory least related to descriptive details. Personalization details within the content of the review, either by stating the names of individuals or by describing them, influenced the credibility of eWOM. Including this personalized information made the participants perceive reviews as reliable and credible, particularly positive ones. There could be a relationship between personalized content and review valence (positive vs negative) in increasing or decreasing the credibility of eWOM. However, identifying individuals either by

description or by name increased the participants' perceptions of the credibility of eWOM in the positive reviews, while identifying individuals by the description in negative reviews increased the credibility of eWOM. For example, A2 stated:

Or like a specific hotel branch or when they mention names, it makes it more credible because it's like they're using that authority to advance their opinion it's like it feels good. So, like, this person describes this specific clerk so, so you can't just describe someone like that without having been through it.

A14 supported identifying individuals and quotes:

That would probably give it even more bonus points for me, because let's say I do go there and I see this guy, I'm like, "Oh. Oh my God, I read about this guy. This is legit." Right there, that would confirm the review with the person that was there. That would already give me a green sign, a good sign.

On the other hand, identifying individuals by name in negative reviews was seen as decreasing the credibility of eWOM, as it might trigger reviewer bias (emotion or anger). A question arises here as to whether identifying individuals by description or by name in positive or negative reviews influences credibility positively or negatively.

Justification Reasoning (Adequate Explanation, Review Justification, and Rating). For participants in the study, providing justification and reasoning for positive and negative reviews was seen as important in increasing the persuasiveness of the message and represented the second subcategory of argument quality (16 participants with 39 coded references), especially in negative reviews. Supporting the review by stating the justifications for the reviewer's evaluation convinced the participants that the review was logical, offering credibility. Out of all the study participants, 16 paid attention to the importance of justification and reasoning within the review. A6 explained:

If there is a detailed explanation of why they didn't have a good time or why they had a good time. That would help a lot with credibility since they would explain why.

Most people say, "Oh, I just had a bad time." Why are you not explaining why?

Because if you don't back up your argument, the credibility would be—for me—would be very. It would be less credible.

C4 also noted, "I don't like anything generic, either. So, if you're saying it's good to be credible, you have to explain why it is good.

Supporting negative reviews with justification and reasoning was seen to help customers understand the reviewer's struggle and feel satisfied with the reasoning provided by the source to back up their argument. However, a lack of congruence within the information provided in an evaluation triggered a lack of clarity regarding the review for the participants, negatively influencing their understanding of it. To further elaborate, this lack of clarity was created either through a generally positive evaluation of the positive content (food was great), lack of specification and justification regarding the TRPS (which food was ordered), or the presence of specification and justification of the TRPS through visuals (photo of painting) in a positive review. Were the review of a huge tourism attraction with nearly unlimited offerings like a museum, it would have triggered an unrepresentative evaluation of the review, hence lowering the credibility of eWOM, as G15 pointed out:

Yes. For example, in museums, I don't really look at the photos because it's such a big thing that it's just having one photo of one exhibit isn't representative. I don't really pay attention to photos of things like museums or galleries or attractions or parks or something. Restaurants, yes, I do care because the food is the biggest element of the restaurant. It matters a lot to me what the food may look like. I think in restaurants, it's a bit more crucial to have for me personally to look at photos of the food because I'm only going to eat one or two dishes, so it matters a lot. Whereas in a

museum, I can look at a lot of things. The one picture someone takes in a museum might not be something I have seen. To me, it's not as a representative, the photos of museums versus the photos of food in restaurants maybe.

The relationship between the visuals and the product type influences the evaluation of online reviews. Justified and supported reviews were triggering the presence of source expertise, including time and effort invested in the review, positively influencing participants' evaluation of such reviews. The relationship between the star ratings and the justification and reasoning (argument quality) of the review was evident. The quality of the content and quantity of the star ratings interacted with each other to increase or decrease the credibility of the review, as judged by the participants. A6 stated:

Yeah. Because if you don't back up your argument, the credibility would be, for me, would be very, it would be less credible. Meaning, like, if it's a 4.5-star hotel, and then there's someone that just said, "Oh, I just had a bad stay there." Like why you had a bad stay. It's a 4.5-five hotel, like if you had a bad stay, explain your reasons, and we would believe what you're saying because there are a lot of people; I know in this society there are a lot of people that are very mean, and how can I say this not backstabbing but that you think about me myself. I don't know how to explain it, but I know that there are people that actually put reviews that are not true. That I'm aware, that I'm aware.

Participants who paid attention to the star ratings when a review included four out of five stars with positive general content indicated that this kind of review lacked justification and reasoning for the one-star gap from a perfect rating. The lack of consistency between the content and the given rating was seen as questionable according to A10: "The number of stars they give should be aligned with what they're saying, or at least like they should justify it why they give that specific rating." This may lead one to wonder why a reviewer would give

a four-star rating instead of a five-star rating without justifying this gap within the written content of the review. The participants believed that the reviewer should justify this difference in the number of star ratings with written content so that customers can properly evaluate the review.

Visuals act as proof, or another way to support an argument and provide justification and reasoning in a review. The participants believed that the number of star ratings should be justified within the content of the review as another way to provide justification and reasoning. The TripAdvisor rating system, which includes the location, value, and service rating, was seen as adding to the justification of the review by the participants when they rated these aspects of the TRPS provided on the platform. This was also noted during the walk-through experiment, with participants recognizing this rating system provided by TripAdvisor while navigating online reviews on the TripAdvisor website. The need for suitable explanations that fully justify the reviews or ratings given by the traveller or user was seen as vital by the study participants. Providing personalized examples from experience, for instance, was seen to increase credibility. Participant A10 noted that longer and well-explained reviews were more convincing:

So, I feel more at ease with reviews that are longer. They give me a lot more information in terms of what is good about it. What is bad about it? What they did that tells me, OK, this person did this and this and this but not this. So, that gives me a better understanding of their experience. If they advise if they tell us if they recommend something or if they tell us don't do it, that would be ... better for me. If they include pictures, it's really good. If their rating matches the text and the pictures, then that's better because it's more in sync.

Similarly, Participant A6 shared her opinion that reviews require explanations and personalized examples of the positive and negative points of the experience. For this participant, the lack of support in a reviewer's claims pertained to decreased credibility:

Honestly, credibility would depend on ... I would believe someone if ... sorry, on TripAdvisor if there is a detailed explanation on why didn't it. They didn't have a good time or why they had a good time. That would help a lot with credibility since they would explain why. Most people that say, "Oh, I just had a bad time." Why are you not explaining why? Like you must just like you should explain why so that people know why you're mad and unsatisfied with your stay there. Just why.

Recency. The third subcategory of argument quality is the presence of recently published reviews (with 13 participants and 32 coded references). As most participants stated, recency was an important factor in the credibility of eWOM. Moreover, the recency of the information provided, as in the date of the posted review, influenced the perception of various TRPS elements, such as content clarity, comprehensiveness, justification, and reasoning, with each being an important element that contributes to the quality of the argument within the content of the review. Recency for participants came in two forms: the age of (a) the written text of the review and (b) the visuals (photos) posted by reviewers. The influence of review recency on online reviews' evaluation and granting of credibility was an important factor in how participants judged reviewers' travel experiences.

Recency was viewed as an indicator of the current quality of a product or service. A10 stated:

Because these people have visited these buildings in recent times, which means this is what I would expect if I would go there right now. If it was an older review, then things could change, like buildings can get restored, renovated, and things like that.

So, it's better that it's more recent because these pictures are more representative of what is—what it looks like today.

It can show how recently something happened and, as a result, can provide a sense of reality. This is especially important for products or services that represent a certain reality or experience. Customers tend to judge businesses by their recent customer experiences indicating how the business is currently operating. Participants were also aware that businesses change over time, which may influence the quality of the products and services, as C4 said, “because things change over time. So, looking at a really old review, it's not the same workers. It's not the same scene. Things could have changed.”

The recency of reviews also played an important role when participants found both recent and old reviews. Participants compared the most recent reviews to the older ones and concluded that the newer ones were more relevant to them. M7 said: “... am like it's from 2018. So that's kind of like almost two years ago. Not as relevant as the other one from October 2019.” Other dimensions of the importance of recency are accuracy and reflection of reality. The recency of reviews is not influenced by the seasonal changes that may happen, making the TRPS appear different when customers visit. Z5 stated:

It's one of the reviews like if you are going to there like the next three days, those—like those reviews are like reflecting like the time like during this period. It's not like summer season, and it's not winter season, like it's different.

Recently published reviews were deemed more credible and useful, as they helped keep users updated regarding what to expect for their trip. Participant N3 emphasized the importance of the date a review was posted, providing an example as to why:

The date is also important to see, like, can I go back? Is it like four years ago, or is it like last year? Yeah. Recency is important. And like the management like answers is

also important to see like is like actually. Are they going to do something or are they just saying they're just giving it a flat apology?

Meanwhile, Participant Z5 noted that the date of review was another crucial factor in increasing the credibility or authenticity of the review:

Like when you're writing an essay. OK. I feel like it must be peer reviewed. That's like you must be in recent in five years. That's like trust. That's the most upcoming. That's the newest resource. The recency, if it's recent. Or if it's old.

Recency is an important factor that signals the credibility of eWOM, as it indicates the sense of reality and accuracy of the travel experience. It also presents relevance to the customer, especially when it accompanies a management response to indicate the goodwill and intention of the business to care about customers.

Diversity and Comprehensiveness. Diversity in a review was defined as the reviewer stating things they did and did not do or experience at a given attraction or location, contributing to improved clarity, and allowing participants to better understand the review (10 participants with 45 coded references). This is because customers are aware that a given TRPS may have a variety of offerings. Nevertheless, participants found that when a reviewer focused on only one thing in the review or only the things the reviewer did, an unfair assessment and evaluation of the overall travel experience might be presented. As C4 stated:

I think people are more honest when they give good and bad evaluations because I can go to a random place and like everything about it, but there are a lot of times where you like certain things, and you don't like certain things. So, when you give a more accurate review like you can go to a place, love the food, but your wait was long.

Furthermore, if the reviewer had a positive experience with one aspect of the TRPS, this could negatively influence the accuracy of the representation of the TRPS. Hence, this

phenomenon decreased the participants' ability to judge the credibility of online reviews. Another form of diversity in reviews is the two-sided review, which contains both positive and negative statements about a given TRPS. This has been shown to signal the perception of balance in a reviewer's evaluation and assessment, also contributing to the provision of an objective review without bias, seeking neither to support nor to defame the particular TRPS brand.

Comprehensiveness means listing all elements that contribute to the overall travel experience. Five participants evaluated the written content of the review in terms of how many TRPS areas were covered. A2 said: "So that plays a role in their overall ratings because let's say this person did not leave a location, service, or value rating. Are the three stars out of five really reliable?"

Comprehensiveness within an online review indicates a richness of information and a holistic image of the travel experience; this can be achieved by evaluating various TRPS aspects (five participants with 9 coded references). Providing different opinions about multiple things further facilitates the comprehensiveness of review content. A relationship also exists between comprehensiveness and relevance. If a review is comprehensive, it becomes easy for participants to relate to the review and the reviewer, as all information about the travel experience is included in the review, as G15 indicated:

So, instead of letting one thing skew their entire view, they look at things globally.

They look at not just one aspect of the experience but the entirety of the experience. I think that gives a better sense of how other people will see it because some people might not care about that one thing that this person cares a lot about, but if there are many different things, everyone can see their preferences in that.

Narrative storytelling style featuring descriptive details within an online review, such as staff, food, location, building, and ambiance, was an influential factor for participants.

Such details can be, for example, about the prices being high or low and the place being poorly or highly maintained. G15 described this as

when the review talks about the whole dining experience, the service, the food, the quality of the food, that the server was too good to the client and just how tasty the food was, and the experience was. The dessert was also included, and also looking forward to coming back to New York City.

This also influenced the credibility judgement of the participants positively.

The comprehensiveness effect of visuals was also noted as affecting the participants' perceptions of the credibility of online reviews. For example, visuals showing only one angle of a recorded video failed to meet their standard of comprehensiveness, which involves video quality and influencing the richness of the information provided via the video.

Content Clarity. A lack of descriptive details and the use of general terms influenced participants' evaluations of reviews, as they perceived them as vague and lacking clarity (eight participants with 12 coded references). Regarding visuals and multimedia, participants found reviews to have increased clarity when the reviewer supported the text with visuals, such as photos, that are consistent with the text in terms of describing the location and explaining what the reviewer thought was good or bad about the TRPS. Hence, this increased participants' perceptions of the credibility of a review. Furthermore, reviews presented with logic and reasoning, which are easily read and understood, were seen by participants as enhancing the clarity of the content.

The comprehensiveness and diversity of a review were shown to be determinants of the clarity of the content for participants. The more a reviewer showed a global perspective in their evaluation of a TRPS, the more participants assessed the review as clear. Such diversity and comprehensiveness were also seen as facilitating the relevance of the review for other customers who might be able to relate to the different aspects of the TRPS according to their

preferences. This shows a relationship between the content (diversity and comprehensiveness) and the customer (relevance). G15 said:

If someone looks at a lot of different points, I think that means that they're looking at the thing a bit more clearly, so instead of letting one thing skew their entire view, they look at things globally. They look at not just one aspect of the experience but the entirety of the experience. I think that gives a better sense of how other people will see it because some people might not care about that one thing that the person cares a lot about, but if there are many different things, everyone can see their preferences in that.

Difficulty understanding information within a review triggered a lack of clarity in the content for the participants, which negatively influenced the credibility of eWOM. E1 stated: "Firstly, the review has to be clear. Yeah, I can easily read it, and it has to contain logic."

Providing examples within the review to explain the review's positive or negative evaluation was also seen as important in enhancing the clarity of the content. Additionally, with a two-sided review, the presentation of both positive and negative sides may lead to the perception of the review as clear. S16 said: "That they do give their perspective that they're not like, 'Oh, this was excellent,' but they'd be like, 'The breakfast was excellent,' and they give like very specific parts that it's not just like an overall generalization."

The wording and the choice of simple vocabulary that is easy to understand by average customers and the avoidance of sophisticated words and language were seen by participants as enhancing the clarity of the content. Nevertheless, A6 recognized the use of specific "fancy" words within the content and appreciated this because it played a role in her view of the credibility of the judgement, as it was linked to source expertise and language skills. However, A6 is Canadian and fluent in English; thus, she did not encounter a language barrier. Meanwhile, Z5 is Chinese, and English is not her first language. This may have

influenced Z5's evaluation of the online review and her pinpointing the features of word use and simple vocabulary. These differences in cultural backgrounds and language fluency play a role in identifying the word selection that can be used to enhance the clarity and understanding of the content.

Another factor that influences the clarity of the content is the inability to determine the negative factors within a negative review that showed a lack of clarity in the content. N3 stated, "Because they say breakfast is very expensive but enough cheese. I don't really get the point out of that because the sentence does not really make any sense to me, I won't really regard that." The participants' inability to make sense of reviews negatively influenced their evaluations. Moreover, a review needs to make sense to participants and be easily understood for them to judge the clarity of its content.

Visuals. The use of multimedia photos and videos has been shown to strongly influence the credibility of online reviews in this research. The source of the visuals is also important because it has a different effect on credibility (16 participants with 65 coded references), especially when it is perceived as evidence and proof. M13 noted, "Because what they're saying in their review is backed up by evidence because pictures are evidence... proof." She added:

First, the video is recorded exactly at the place. It shows you the details about the place and explains even the photos you see. That's why in my reviews, and my evaluation, the video, and the photo, they are reliable sources to help me make my decision.

Nevertheless, the source, whether the reviewer (the traveller) or the property (the business owner), had a different intention of sharing the visuals—influencing credibility. Reviewers' photos and videos are seen to be more credible and to act as proof and evidence to contribute to and support the quality of the content. While business photos and videos are

seen as a way to advertise the TRPS, they degrade participants' perceptions of credibility of the review. A2 said:

So, it's like I personally would maybe not trust the owners' reviews that much because there is a lot of bias coming into play. And with like online stuff like, come on, how many times have you gone into a hotel and seen something like this? Like, I travelled a lot.

Participants reached a conclusion about the genuineness and authenticity of the visuals through the quality of the multimedia, which involved high resolution use by professional photographers or blurry, shaky-hands photos, bad photo angles, photoshop, and editing. Participants looked into property photos uploaded to the TripAdvisor website or application by business owners and reviewers they perceived to be previous customers, like when the participants read and evaluated online reviews. Participants critically compared and contrasted the two sources of visuals and the quality of the visuals depending on the source. One source was the business owner, whether of a hotel or restaurant, who invested in high-quality pictures provided on the TripAdvisor platform and increased the number of posted photos within a given TRPS. The high quality of visuals triggered the presence of photoshopped photos by a professional photographer, which decreased credibility as judged by the participants. On the other hand, low photo quality was linked to the source being the reviewer, reflecting genuineness and increasing credibility for participants.

The number of photos provided by the business owner became important for participants in their evaluations. Participants asked critical questions about the high number of photos for a core versus supplementary TRPS for a hotel that showed mostly the amenities of the hotel, in addition to questions related to the high number of beautiful views of the location while offering few photos of the rooms themselves and the sizes of the rooms, bathrooms, and so on. Thus, the core and supplementary products of the TRPS (the hotel)

became important in terms of participants' judgement of decreased credibility when seeing the high quantity of supplementary product photos of the hotel (pool, spa, lobby, view) and the low quantity of core-product photos of the hotel (size of the room, bathroom, bed, etc.). M17 recognized the importance of the core and supplementary TRPS within the descriptive details as playing a role in customers' judgements of relevancy (whether they relate to the customer), particularly for negative reviews. This was like the view of the descriptive details of the content, again, especially in negative reviews where reviewers complained about the core versus supplementary TRPS. Due to differences in the travel tastes and styles of individuals, including the descriptive details for both core and supplementary TRPS, both are equally important for facilitating customers' relevance customization (what to take from the review and what to ignore).

Photos posted by reviewers were seen as adding value to the review and contributing to the credibility of online reviews. This assertion is valid provided the photos are informative (six participants with 13 coded references), showing reviewers' emotions and feelings (four participants with seven coded references), and photo-text congruent, supporting each other instead of contradicting each other (three participants with seven coded references). N3 stated:

But like if like a place is like a five-star review and I personally like maybe the pictures aren't like all that nice or something I would maybe be like, OK, this is not as trustworthy as these people might be saying, so I might steer away from that place, maybe go somewhere.

Videos, on the other hand, are known to be (a) audio-visual and contain motion (eight participants with eight coded references), (b) difficult to edit and photoshop compared to photos (three participants with three coded references), and (c) long rather than short (two

participants with five coded references). This influenced the credibility judgement of participants. A10 said:

Because the pictures and videos that these reviewers' posts show me firsthand from an audience or how they're experiencing the destination or what the service, so like if I'm looking at pictures from the website itself of the destination, they're obviously going to have professional photographers and marketing tactics to make that thing look nicer, but it's the pictures of an audience or a person who's actually been there before. That tells me this is what I can expect to see when I go there because no matter what, the person who the tourist is like the eyes that everybody has, you know, like, everybody. If anybody goes there, that's what they're going to be seeing.

The source of the visuals being the business provider, or the reviewer influenced participants' evaluation of the review, shaped the participants' expectations of the travel experience, and signalled a sense of reality.

Photos Required to Justify Reviews. The second minor theme pointed to the need for photos to justify and rationalize user reviews. Videos can provide even more detail than photos. They were seen as more informative than photos and as harder to edit and photoshop in a way that might make them feel unrealistic. This is in opposition to photos, which were seen as easy to edit and photoshop by a professional photographer, thereby detracting from the credibility of eWOM. Participants recognized the importance of visuals (photos and videos) during both the walk-throughs and the interviews. However, all participants advocated for visuals, especially photos, during the walk-through session, unlike in the interview phase, when they recalled their past reading of an online review of activities and travel experiences. This may be because of the short-term memory triggered in participants as they were navigating the TripAdvisor platform.

The angle of the photos and the camera lens reflected the photos' quality for the participants when assessing visuals. "Shaky" photos were perceived by participants as unhelpful, as they seemed unclear; however, these photos also triggered the source's credibility as the real reviewer (traveller). As a result, participants felt they connected more with travellers than business owners, who ultimately had the financial intention of selling the products and services for profit. The motion and audio-visual quality of videos also triggered participants' responses, with them learning more from videos that provided details about the background and the environment of the given location.

Furthermore, there was a contradiction between participants' responses regarding which photos to trust and grant credibility to depending on the quality of the photos. Some participants stated that the quality of the photos (blurry, shaky) revealed the genuineness of the reviewer, meaning they tended to trust such photos. However, G15 stated that blurry photos showed that the reviewer did not care about others gathering information from photos, as they lack clarity; this triggered the perception of a lack of effort by the reviewer in taking "proper" photos. Furthermore, A2 valued the expertise of strangers who had travel experience, giving more weight to experience than to social influence from friends and family who lacked travel expertise. Finally, the specific details mentioned within the content of the review, such as the history of an opera building, triggered the perceptions of the reviewer's expertise in TRPS information.

The participants believed that pictures could increase the credibility of a review and demonstrate the effort put into it by the traveller in their review. Participant A2 explained that reviews that contain photos are helpful, as they can help to prepare one for travel by managing one's expectations:

I definitely think a review is more personal and more reliable and credible when they attach their pictures because it shows that they were having a good or bad time, and

they want to let you know in advance to be prepared. OK, before I like unforeseeable situations. So, attaching pictures makes it more credible for me because, like as a travel or as a traveller, when I go, I want to take pictures too. So, I want to already see people who took pictures before me.

A personal preference of participant G15 was seeing pictures of her target location or experience. For her, travellers who provided pictures along with a positive or negative review took more time and effort to share their experience and were thus more credible:

I like pictures. The pictures are nice. Just because it's also helpful to see what—for example, if it's a restaurant or something, I know that's not the topic, but if they post pictures of dishes like, "Oh, that's very helpful." If they say, "Oh, this is a five-star dish. Here's what it looks like." "I had ... this is my favourite dish," I think that's quite helpful. If there were photos, again, might also be the effort thing. Maybe that also, subconsciously, makes me think, "Oh, maybe you put a bit more effort into your review; you uploaded those pictures on TripAdvisor," so this is a bit more time spent on that review.

Consistency and Finding Patterns. Consistency was found to be an important factor that contributed to the credibility of eWOM. The consistency effect was stronger with negative reviews than with positive reviews, as a relationship between the review valence (negative) and consistency was revealed in this research. The consistency of rating and content was also evident, as L14 said:

Yes. For example, if this was one star and it just said, "The service was bad," I'd be like, "This isn't really telling me much. You need to tell me more. Why was it bad for you to give one star?"

Participants viewed consistencies and trends within the written content and statements by reviewers as credibility factors, acting as proof when more than one or two people

experienced the same situation. In this research, consistency came in more than one form. One form of consistency occurred within the content of the reviews, when multiple reviewers (travellers) shared complaints about one aspect of the TRPS. Another form of consistency was related to content rating. Participants indicated that content ratings should go hand in hand with one another rather than contradict each other, or the credibility would be reduced. Multiple participants agreed on the concepts of justification and consistency as dimensions of credibility when asked about credibility itself as a concept and what it meant. For the reviews to be justified from the participants' perspective, consistency between the rating and content (or even the rating, content, and photos) was required. The consistency between the content and the photos influenced the credibility of eWOM positively. K11 noted:

Then I connect to what I've seen. If it's the same or somewhat similar, I tend to think of that as more credible because you know you have someone standing there taking a picture, and it looks like what they've used for advertising, how the places are going to be OK.

Conversely, inconsistency in the text and photos decreased participants' perceptions of the credibility of the reviews.

Within TripAdvisor, consistency, helpful voting, the high number of posted reviews, and the special TripAdvisor rating system for best value were generally seen to trigger consensus among travellers, influencing the credibility of eWOM.

4.4.2. Minor Theme 2: Quantity

The quantity of the reviews came second after quality as a subtheme linked to the content (18 participants with 314 coded references). Quantity subthemes included the star ratings (17 participants with 90 coded references), review valence (17 participants with 82 coded references), and length of the content, which contributed to the credibility of online reviews (14 participants with 56 coded references). In addition, review quantity consisted of

two subcategories: (a) the number of positive reviews versus negative ones to count for the majority and minority of these reviews (13 participants with 48 coded references) and (b) the number of posted reviews for a particular TRPS (12 participants with 38 coded references), which leads to consensus among travellers.

The first quantity minor theme to emerge was the star ratings posted by reviewers related to their travel consumption experience of TRPS.

TRPS Rating Stars. Recommendation star ratings are meant to reflect product and service quality and overall customer satisfaction on a scale from one (lowest level of quality and satisfaction) to five (highest). The recommendation star ratings in this research involved four subcategories:

1. The overall star ratings aggregated by all travellers for a certain product or a service, which refers to the TRPS star ratings.
2. The individual star rating for a specific product or service by a reviewer, which is accompanied by written text and sometimes visuals (photos and videos).
3. TripAdvisor ratings and evaluation of the TRPS in terms of its value, price, and popularity.
4. Extremity ratings, whether positive or negative.

The *overall TRPS star rating* refers to the rating of the offerings of TRPS, ranging between one-star ratings, which reflect a negative evaluation (being poor) by travellers, and five-star ratings, which reflect a positive evaluation (being excellent) by travellers. This overall star rating was met with consensus among travellers as either high- or poor-quality TRPS.

The *star ratings* refer to the rating assigned by an individual (reviewer) rating a TRPS, which is accompanied by the written text of the review, with the title, and sometimes pictures posted by the same reviewer. It is important for this star rating evaluated by the reviewer to be consistent with and justified by the content of the review. As A10 stated, “The

number of stars they give should be aligned with what they're saying, or at least, like, they should justify it why they give that specific rating."

The *TripAdvisor star rating* refers to the platform evaluation of certain TRPS compared to other travel offerings. This evaluation by TripAdvisor is based on the value, service, and popularity of the TRPS, among other offerings. L14 said:

For example, right here, it says right here, "This restaurant is number 3 out of almost 9,000 restaurants," so the credibility is very high for this restaurant. You're going to have a good time, and this is a good-quality place to go to just by looking at this, honestly.

Extremity in online reviews (five stars vs one star) facilitates the perception of data aggregated through shopping bots that post either negative or positive reviews, influencing credibility judgement. Extremity negatively influenced the credibility of online reviews, as participants were aware that nothing could be fully positive or fully negative.

The overall TRPS star rating is the collective evaluation of a particular TRPS that reflects its reputation and popularity among travellers. The average and overall positive evaluation of the TRPS creates a sense of positive reputation, popularity, and consensus among travellers that the TRPS is of a certain quality. The clashes regarding a positive reputation and a lack of justification for negative content influenced participants' credibility judgement. In the relationship between review valence and review quality, positive reviews tend to share similar positive statements lacking justification and reasoning. In other words, positive reviews were seen as tending to be of lower quality than negative reviews. On the other hand, negative reviews were viewed as more likely to be descriptive, and participants looked for justification and reasoning as to why the reviewers had not enjoyed their travel experience.

Review Valence. Review valence pertains to the negative or positive emotions and inferences related to information. Recommendation framing or valence influences how well the message is perceived. The negative effect of a message involves individuals focusing on content framed negatively rather than positively. The review valence consisted of positive, negative, and average reviews. Users may pay more attention to negative reviews due to their negative effects. Therefore, negative online reviews may have more credibility than positive reviews. This effect is boosted especially if the content of the review scored high in argument quality by providing justification and reasoning for the reviewer's bad experience. Average or neutral reviews with positive and negative elements were important for most participants ($n = 17, 82\%$). They were seen as two-sided reviews involving both the positive and negative aspects of a specific product or service, which also triggered the neutrality and objectivity of the reviewer. Interestingly, review valence was associated with the theme of quantity rather than quality, as participants tended to pay the most attention to the number of positive or negative reviews. The impact of positive or negative eWOM was more influential when in higher quantities due to the crowd consensus effect.

Average reviews were perceived by nine participants as the most trustworthy since they involve "both sides" of the online review evaluation—the positive and the negative. In a way, average reviews were considered two-sided, triggering perceptions of the diversity of the overall evaluation presented in the review. This was the second-most-coded reference in terms of argument quality after descriptive details, justification, and reasoning. The most-coded reference in this category was the provision of positive reviews. Most participants exhibited decreased perceptions of credibility of positive reviews for several reasons. First, they perceived positive reviews to be a summary of the TRPS created in such a way that they reminded them of the property's advertisements. Second, positive reviews tended to be short and not the most descriptive compared with negative reviews. The lack of descriptive details

related to the TRPS made the review appear like it did not contribute to the travel experience of the reviewer, hence reflecting negatively on the TRPS for the participants. Consequently, participants tended to trust the average review the most. The last form of review valence is the negative review. Participants perceived negative reviews as more descriptive than positive ones and tended to look for negative reviews to learn about any defects they might encounter during their trip. Anticipating and preparing for worst-case scenarios was seen as a way of mitigating risks associated with online purchases, especially TRPS.

Although some participants believed that both valences—positive and negative reviews—could be fake, they tended to believe the negative ones more. E1 explained this by saying that “the positive reviews can be posted by their owners and the negatives reviews can be posted by competitive restaurants, so the latter can be fake too, but most of the time, I prefer to believe the negative one.” It could be because they believed that negative reviews were more informative and descriptive than positive ones. K11 said:

Positive reviews are less descriptive, looking like simple summaries. You know, when you say that people tend to answer questions without actually, you know, supporting it with facts. Yeah. That’s how the positive reviews are; they tend to just be like “Oh, we had a fun time. It was a great experience. You should go there.”

L14 asserted that positive reviews lacked a description of the travel experience: “Yes. It’s usually like, ‘Oh, this was great.’ That’s it. They just say a quick little comment.” However, some participants tied negative reviews to extremely negative star ratings, long reviews, and reviewer bias, which all reduced the credibility of eWOM.

Length of Review Content. The third category to emerge is the minor theme of quantity—the presence of short but descriptive and informative reviews. Participant L14 commented: “Yes, the content of the review. Like this guy right here, Zack, ‘An amazing server, so attentive, knowledgeable. Delicious drinks. I would recommend them.’ Super

simple in that, but great.” Moreover, participant V12 chose not to read long reviews and was more critical of the content and meaning within:

OK. Well, first of all, I go from the title, I would say. And then the length. So, I don't go for like the really long ones. And then, after that, it's more like the first or second sentences of a review to see if someone speaks about their emotional side or if it's a description of something. So, yeah. And then pictures are going to be something, like if there is a picture, it adds something, but it's not something that's going to be like, this is it for me.

The quantity of information provided within the review was highly important in the consumers' evaluation of TRPS. The length of the review could vary from very short (one- to two-word review) and short (a couple of sentences; short description of TRPS) to medium (small paragraph) and long (detailed, like an essay). S16 said:

I guess I want not a super short response but in the middle. You don't want too long because it just gets too much to understand if there was good or bad stuff. Then too short if they just said, “It was a good stay. Staff was good.” Then I'm like, “No, I want more information.” I think this one here is a good size because they talk about the room, and then they talk about their breakfast. Mentioning more than one aspect is also what I like to look for.

There was a connection between the length of the review and the review being perceived as fake by the participants. A2 stated:

But to me, a fake review is one that, like, I've seen many on different places like Amazon and, like, other places where fake reviews are very clear. They'd be short and not say anything about the product or the destination. I think they just said great, super, fantastic. One-worded review with nothing backing it up. So, without, like, yeah, if it doesn't give any indication of how it actually is. Those fake reviews just

make you want to go look for actual reviews, which are in my mind like long descriptive pictures like those ones they put work into, whereas fake reviews they don't really put work into it.

A relationship between a review's length and its descriptive details was evident. Shorter reviews tended to be perceived as fake and not authentic due to the lack of descriptive details explaining the positive and negative aspects of the TRPS based on the reviewer's experiences. This relationship was reinforced even when a review was supported with visuals (photos or videos) from the reviewer acting as justification for the review and as proof or evidence of the travel experience. As M17 said: "Because what they're saying in their review is backed up by evidence because pictures are evidence, proof." Participants indicated that the appropriate length of the content ranges from medium to long, without overloading the review with too much information and without omitting necessary information, as in a very short review. The participants all commented on the importance of descriptive details within the content and the justification and reasoning provided, particularly for negative reviews.

Some participants mentioned that both very short reviews and very long ones influenced credibility judgement negatively. These two types of reviews tended to be perceived by customers as fake either because of the short length of the review or because too many details were included, which participants were either not interested in evaluating or felt signalled reviewers' bias as emotional. Hence, participants tended to distrust these two types of reviews, perceiving them as not credible. For example, short reviews (one or two words) were perceived as placed by bots, thereby diminishing the total credibility of eWOM. Finally, participant G15 also examined the length of the reviews and noted that she viewed shorter reviews without specific experiences and examples as less credible:

The first thing I judge is the length. If it's maybe one short sentence, I don't usually pay that much attention. I just look at the tagline if it's one short sentence, but if it's a

very long review, then I'm a bit more interested because either they have a very specific experience or they bear a lot of things to say. So, the reviews that I like to read are the long ones.

A relationship was found between the review being long and the quality of writing containing grammar mistakes, lowering the perceived quality of the review. It may indicate an emotional reviewer, as G15 said:

Importance, I think length, but if it's a long review with a lot of grammar mistakes, sometimes it just means that person is ranting. That's not very credible. So, it's a combination of the two. It needs to be long and well written. If it's long and badly written, then it just looks like someone is complaining and just has a lot to say to complain.

Number of Posted Reviews. The review quantity of eWOM involves a platform that may contain numerous reviews of a certain product. The higher number of reviews was crucial in determining the credibility of the information. An increased quantity of positive or negative reviews of an eWOM message indicates more agreement between sources of information, which triggers consensus among travellers, helping to reduce the amount of uncertainty and improve the legitimacy of the information. In addition, more individuals agreeing on online reviews enhanced their persuasiveness. As M17 said, "The average review rating, I think, was 4.2. That makes me think it's reliable because so many people reviewed it."

The aspect of high quantity versus low quantity of published reviews contributed both positively and negatively to participants' overall evaluation of online reviews depending on the number of reviews posted. A high quantity of posted reviews initiated a consensus among travellers that the TRPS was popular and high quality. Furthermore, the number of posted reviews, the helpful votes by other travellers about a particular source (reviewer), and a

majority of either positive or negative reviews about a particular TRPS all led to the idea of consensus among reviewers. This led to increasing the participants' perceptions of credibility. A relationship between the length of the content (long) and the time and effort spent by the reviewer to publish a review that is informative and useful for other customers was shown. Another relationship was found between the source credibility (emotional or bias), the writing style (grammar mistakes), and the length of the content (very long review). Very long reviews with grammar and spelling mistakes lowered their credibility to participants, as the reviewer was seen as angry or engaged in dishonest behaviour (e.g., exaggeration). In this case, the review is seen as tied to feelings and emotions, which triggers the subjectivity of the message and signals a subjective reviewer. Therefore, long, well-written reviews trigger the idea that a source has credibility and expertise.

A relationship between the individual star ratings and the length of the content was especially evident with five- or one-star reviews. These were considered extreme, meaning excellent and poor, respectively. Thus, justification and reasoning became more important; that is, adding to the review's length and justifying the reviewer's evaluation. A relationship was also found between the source and the content of the review through the number of reviews posted by a given reviewer. A source's minimal online review-posting activity, such as posting only one short review from their profile that lacks detail and visuals (no photos), decreased the review's credibility. Finally, V12 paid attention to the importance of comprehensiveness in terms of reading a higher number of reviews to seek different perspectives rather than reading a lengthy review.

4.5. Major Theme 2: Customer

The receiver of an eWOM message receives, understands, and interprets the message based on their knowledge, culture, and attitude. EWOM messages may have a different impact depending on the reader's (customer's) characteristics. "Customer" is the second

major theme identified in this research (18 participants with 342 coded references). This major theme consists of three minor themes: relevance (18 participants with 155 coded references), the customer's behaviour (17 participants with 123 coded references), and the customer's cognitive effort (17 participants with 64 coded references). "Relevance" had five categories: customer preferences, sociocultural identity, TRPS and COVID-19, travel group, and homophily. The cognitive effort consisted of two categories: customer's analytical thinking and awareness of stealth marketing. Finally, customer behaviour consisted of three categories: customer's subjectivity, cross-referencing style, and self-trust.

The role of relevance between the source, content, and customers was the most cited code among participants. EWOM messages may also have a different impact depending on an individual's personality and culture. For example, consumer ability and involvement influence the persuasiveness of an eWOM message. Consumer involvement appears to influence the credibility of eWOM information. Additionally, consumer traits may influence the trustworthiness of eWOM information.

4.5.1. Minor Theme 1: Relevance

The customer's cognitive evaluation of the review, the source of the review, and the context were influential factors in determining the credibility of online reviews. The three dimensions that were noted to be associated with the subtheme of relevance are as follows:

- Homophily (18 participants with 136 coded references), which consisted of
 - the customer preferences and travel tastes (17 participants with 73 coded references),
 - the culture and the socioeconomic status between the source and the receiver (10 participants with 50 coded references), and
 - the travel group (seven participants with 13 coded references).
- Relevance to the TRPS (five participants with 15 coded references)

- The context in this case (the COVID-19 pandemic; three participants with four coded references)

Homophily (customer preferences) involves the level of similarity between the traits of the communicator and the recipient of information. Such traits may include education, values, social status, and attitudes. The relevance of reviewers to customers in terms of preferences, travel style, and taste was important to granting credibility to the review. A2 said:

And also, yeah, just overall reviews like I give it up for four stars. I do a four-star and value it because it's very accessible to all the activities I wanted to do versus someone who says I give it two stars because the food was bad. It's like, OK, well, for us, the purpose of the hotel is just to stay there.

The message in the review that is tailored to the customer's travel wants and needs facilitates the perception of relevance to the customer's likes and dislikes, hence they select the review. Homophilic individuals have many similarities and often keep communicating. A robust social relationship may significantly influence individuals' opinions, thus elaborating on the positive effects of homophily on eWOM credibility. The sociocultural identity group, which signals to the receiver the level of knowledge and experience of the individual posting the review, was significant. Tourist reviews were considered more relatable to participants if they and the reviewers shared similar travel experiences.

The relatedness of the review to the relevant product or service was highly influential. When information is unrelated to a specific product, individuals may question the intention and credibility of the source. However, when an eWOM message is linked to a specific product, the information is reliable and trustworthy. C4 stated:

More description about the place itself and not the person's background information as in, like, why they decided to go to this place or, OK, what they did during the day before they went to this place. Things like that.

The relevance of COVID-19 within the content and to the travel destination influenced credibility, as it reduced ambiguity during the pandemic. Participants appreciated the importance of new updates within the content of reviews regarding TRPS during COVID-19 and regarding the travel destination. For example, G15 said:

Especially these days, like when things are changing about coronavirus, I think those are most helpful because people will mention different requirements like, "Oh, make sure you check in because of COVID. This is a new policy they implemented, and I know because I went yesterday." It's a bit more helpful because the situation has changed. The most helpful review might be from last year, and that might not be what it's like now.

Additionally, the different travel experiences the participants perceived due to the pandemic influenced their desire to visit travel destinations. L14 said:

Honestly, yes. I was going to travel somewhere, but I'm not going to anymore because it won't be the same experience, I think. Let's say I wanted to go to Spain, for example, it wouldn't be the same. Everything will be closed. Nobody's going to be around. So, I'm going to have to keep my distance and not interact with anybody. I wouldn't get the same experience if I was to travel when it's quarantine, COVID, or whatever.

Being able to customize reviews based on demographics and the preferences of participants showed an influence on eWOM evaluation. Regarding the first minor theme of the major theme (the content), participants discussed being able to customize the reviews based on the preferences of the traveller or user in terms of their background and

sociocultural identity, as well as the relevance of the TRPS. For the participants, credibility was also viewed as increased when they could tailor their user experience based on the experiences of others. Participant K11 stated, “Someone we have certain things in common. Not everything in common. You know, for certain things in common. It’s something we like the same gender, I guess.” Participant M13 provided another example:

When you’re doing your research, let’s say I want to plan my trip when I’m doing my research for the hotel or for a restaurant. I know exactly that, OK, I’m going to see the price, I’m going to see the hotel location, I’m going to see the service, how they do it in that hotel. It is important for me to look at the information according to what I have in mind about what I want. So that I will know if I will choose that hotel or not, that is why it is important for me.

Relevance to customers’ preferences was the first subcategory in the minor theme of the customer. Participants identified relevance as related to the reviewer, being a tourist in general and regarding the shared activities they may engage in as a tourist, and to a lack of bias related to previous knowledge as a local or to the culture of the tourist (reviewer). Relevance to customers’ preferences refers to their likes and dislikes and what they want to learn, tailored to their specific needs, interests, quality standards, and travel style.

The social identities of reviewers also reflect their travel experiences, and these identities were considered important for participants in terms of relevance and feeling connected. The culture of the reviewer and where they came from was important in evaluating the content of the reviews, especially negative reviews wherein the reviewer stated issues they encountered during the consumption of the TRPS and posted visuals (photos). Reviewers from Arab countries visiting Europe, or the United States evaluated the TRPS differently than Americans or Europeans. For example, a reviewer from the United States posting a review for a hotel in Paris has a low likelihood of speaking French, thus influencing

their travel experience due to potential cultural clashes between American and French culture. The culture of the source of the review was considered more important than the rating given in the review.

In terms of comparing the source and the star ratings, A2, for example, ascribed more importance to the culture of the reviewer and the source of the review than to the star ratings. This may have been because participants perceived star ratings as subjective and not informative enough compared to the written text of the review. On the other hand, understanding the cultural background of the reviewer helped bring context to the review, clarify why the reviewer liked or disliked the travel experience, and provide a link between the content and the source of the review. Thus, the socioeconomic status of the reviewer was seen as playing a role in relevance to customers, leading to a potential disconnection between the source and the receiver of the eWOM and the credibility of the message.

The participants compared two reviews with different star ratings—one positive and the other average. Then, participants critically assessed the reasons and justifications for the positive and average reviews, concentrating on the source identities of the two reviews to determine the relevance of the social identities of the customer and the communicator (reviewer). This critical-thinking exercise led the participants to grant credibility to reviewers who somehow shared relevance with them.

Locals and foreigners were considered the same for N3 in terms of credibility, as she believed she could glean feedback on the place from a local perspective via a local reviewer. In contrast, a foreigner review would help her understand how she might be treated at a travel destination. On the other hand, A2 stated that she preferred to read reviews from foreigners, as she felt locals were biased toward their country and city, thus not providing an entirely honest opinion.

Perceptions of the subjectivity versus the objectivity of the review were found to facilitate the relevance of the source to the customer. Such subjectivity or objectivity can be judged through the mentions of the core and supplementary products of the TRPS, playing a role in customers' evaluations of the relevance of TRPS to customer preferences. The objectivity and subjectivity of the reviewer, product types, and relevance to customers interacted together to directly influence participants' credibility judgements of online reviews.

4.5.2. Minor Theme 2: Customer Behaviour, Subjectivity, Cross-Referencing Behaviour, and Self-Trust

Customer Subjectivity. The second minor theme in this study was customer behaviour, which consisted of customer subjectivity, cross-referencing style, and customer self-trust. Customer subjectivity in this research (16 participants with 92 coded references) came in five forms: customer's prior perceptions and beliefs (12 participants with 60 coded references), applying past experience (10 participants with 17 coded references), customer's characteristics (seven participants with 17 coded references), customer's purchase involvement (six participants with 15 coded references), and first time experiencing the products (five participants with six coded references). The first form was the preconceived ideas and perceptions of participants about TRPS. These preconceived ideas are formed from participants' previous experiences, either through their previous work or their previous ideas about TRPS.

Participants applying their experience influenced their online review evaluations, especially in terms of reviews with a negative valence. For example, A6 and C4 tended to apply their own experience working in customer service. C4 stated: "I worked in retail, so I do not care if the service is slow because I understand that sometimes it can be because they're low staffed or things happened." A6 applied her working experience and said:

That kind of hotel would not let that kind of thing happen. Of course, it can happen, but it's very unlikely. And if someone writes a review like that. You see where I'm going. Like I like. I worked at Hilton, and I know that this is very unlikely to happen. If someone writes a review like that, it's probably 100% sure that they're lying because they know from experience.

Evaluating negative online reviews related to the participant's experience working in customer service or a five-star hotel chain made the participants subjective in their assessment of online reviews. Participants' preconceived ideas and attitudes played a role in evaluating online reviews, as noted by A2:

I wouldn't have left a review like that. Like, overall, if I enjoyed the experience, and there were a couple of things I didn't like to look at. For example, a rude staff or like kind of nasty food I would have overlooked it. And I would have, like, I personally would have overlooked it because there are so many good things that you could talk about; why would you talk about the negative?

This indicates differences between customers' behaviour and the subjectivity of customers' influence in how they pick the information in the reviews and what to overlook.

Several participants ($n = 7$) alluded to the awareness that their characteristics and experiences subjectively influenced their perceived eWOM credibility. For example, some participants tended to apply their experience from their previous work in customer service or their travel experience. Applying personal experience made the participants subjective in their assessment of review credibility. They mentioned their perceptions of TRPS based on past travel activity and their prior perspectives on how online reviews can be fake. Two participants from China E1 and Z5, applied their experience with writing fake online reviews. Applying past work experience in retail and customer service also influenced participants' evaluations of negative online reviews. For example, Z5 said:

A copy-paste style from shopping apps, like, some, like, if you buy clothes when I receive it, I got, like, a card [that] says if you post comments, good comments about it you got two dollars up, and they already wrote the comments for you. I got that when I was shopping in China. OK. Yeah, if I was close to like 30 bucks, they might give you credit like money back for two bucks.

Regarding customers' attitudes and characteristics, participant T9 had a positive attitude and tended to look at the positive side of things, not paying attention to negative reviews. She was the only participant unaware of fake reviews, unlike all other participants who were fully aware of fake reviews and a reviewer's possible intentions behind posting fake reviews. This participant showed strong credibility judgement with positive reviews and a weak correlation between credibility judgement and negative reviews.

Another form of customer's subjectivity is the level of purchase involvement; the customer experience alters the way a customer evaluates online reviews. A relationship exists between the level of purchase involvement of customers and review valence (positive vs negative). Participants with a high level of purchase involvement tended to read, evaluate, and grant credibility to positive reviews. Participants with a low level of purchase involvement tended to read, evaluate, and grant credibility to negative reviews.

High purchase involvement from participants biased them and altered their evaluations of online reviews, altering how they assessed them. Participants used either positive or negative reviews to reinforce their preliminary decisions to consume a given TRPS. Depending on the degree of the participants' purchase involvement—low or high—they chose which review valence to read and evaluate. Participants tended to be biased, reading positive online reviews if they had a high degree of purchase involvement and a strong desire to visit the intended place. On the other hand, participants tended to read negative online reviews when their degree of purchase involvement was low, and they had a

weak desire to visit the intended place. There was an evident relationship between high–low purchase involvement and review valence (positive vs negative). G15 stated:

It depends on if I want to buy this product; do I want to feel good about buying this product? If I'm already inclined to visit the museum or buy that product, I will read the bad one first and then read the good one next, so I'll end up wanting to buy the product.

Cross-Referencing Style and Self-Trust. Cross-referencing activity by participants was evident as they were engaging in reassurance behaviours to verify information in the online reviews (11 participants with 26 coded references). Some participants compared what they learned from online reviews with third-party research using platforms such as Google, business websites, and other independent travel websites, such as insider magazines. This verification behaviour conducted by the customers either reinforced their judgement of credibility or impeded their granting of credibility. However, M13 searched TRPS from Google or company websites before reading online reviews. As a first step, she educated herself about the TRPS attributes; after that, she compared the information with what travellers said on the TripAdvisor platform. Other participants read online reviews and then sought reassurance from other websites to identify any consistencies and trends. The customer thus had self-trust in their review assessment and evaluation (four participants with four coded references). K11 said, "I'm more inclined to trust my own opinion." Moreover, N3 stated: "I like to make my own assessment if this is more a problem from the stay or a problem from the customer." This indicated that the participant trusted herself enough to make her own assessment and evaluation of the negative elements mentioned in the review, revealing the importance of the objectivity versus the subjectivity of the review.

4.5.3. Minor Theme 3: Customers' Analytic Thinking

The third minor theme related to the major theme of the customer is the analytic thinking participants embraced while evaluating and assessing the sources and content of online reviews (17 participants with 57 coded references). The method of calculation conducted by participants is to convert the number of positive and negative reviews into percentages, followed by a comparison between the majority and minority of positive reviews versus negative ones. What mattered for participants was the creation of expectations and overall perception of a given travel experience.

The diversity of the content in terms of explaining different aspects of a given travel experience triggered the participants' perceptions regarding the accuracy of the review. Customers could scrutinize the information included in the written content of the reviews and think critically about the possibilities of other aspects of the experience—for example, asking questions such as whether a positive review discusses only one aspect of the experience, meaning the other aspects were negative or vice versa. In other words, customers were aware that a TRPS might have a variety of offerings tailored to different travellers' wants and needs. Thus, focusing on only one thing in a review or only the things the reviewer did and neglecting the other aspects of the TRPS or the things they did not have the chance to do would be perceived as an unfair assessment and evaluation of the overall travel experience. If a reviewer had a positive experience with one aspect of the TRPS, this would influence the accuracy of the representation of the overall TRPS. Hence, this would decrease customers' ability to judge the credibility of the online review.

Explanations in a review that include what the travellers did and did not do contribute to the diversity of the content of the review. Diversity within the content leads to the creation of customer expectations. For example, visuals that fail to show the overall picture of accommodation, focusing on only a small corner of the room, were perceived by participants

as not informative and hence decreased the credibility of the review. Additionally, customers' awareness of stealth marketing influenced their evaluations of the reviews. The participants became more critical and found that the lack of descriptive details about TRPS contributed to the reviewer's experience.

Converting the positive reviews into percentages compared to the negative reviews brings fairness and justice to the evaluation of online reviews of TRPS, making the comparison representative and aiding in granting credibility to eWOM. One participant added the TripAdvisor rating to this calculation. This combination of information led the participants to side with the majority because there was a great disparity between the positives and the negatives in terms of percentage. Participants could develop customer expectations before reading and evaluating the online reviews. If those expectations were met, the credibility of the online reviews was granted, as indicated by participant S16. She asked questions when reading and evaluating the reviews, such as, "Is it credible? Can I trust you?" This customer's critical thinking in averaging the two positive review ratings to make her decision regarding the TRPS showed the application of a skill to derive suitable inferences for an overall evaluation of the reviews. The Trip Advisor rating system (such as number 2 best value out of 395) triggered a consensus among participants (travellers) that the TRPS was popular and of a high quality. This alone was not enough for participants to grant credibility to online reviews and was aided by the use of majority and consensus.

Participants engaged in reasoning behaviour regarding why a particular event occurred within a negative review. The relationship between the customers' analytic thinking and review valence (negative) was evident. Customers' analytic thinking while seeing a negative review in an overall positive assessment of a place thus led them to seek justification and reasoning as to why the negative was included. In contrast, the accommodation had a net positive review. Furthermore, participants went through collective decision-making when

planning the trip, asking family members and friends for their input, which influenced their purchasing decisions.

Customers' ability to spot emotional reviewers triggered perceptions of a biased source, leading to the overall assessment of the review as subjective. On the other hand, the objectivity of a review involves descriptive content relevant to the TRPS and is justified with reasoning and supported with visuals. Therefore, a lack of visuals (photos or videos) caused participants to question the legitimacy and credibility of a review. However, the multiple aspects related to a given TRPS that were shown in videos reinforced customers' trust in the TRPS. Moreover, participants sought reassurance via S-eWOM from family and friends. Importantly, this is why customers' perceptions of the subjectivity of the reviews were that reviewers were most likely influenced by their own experiences.

Customers applied a strategy to evaluate online reviews to reduce reviewer bias and subjectivity. This strategy involved avoiding the extremity of positive (excellent) reviews and evaluating the negative reviews with a critical eye, thus applying relevance to a TRPS within the content of the negative review. This led to the decision that the negative comments were related to the TRPS and were not personal to the reviewer. The customers applied the relevance to their preferences, travel style, and quality standards and then granted credibility to online reviews from unknown sources. Participants appreciated the provision of personalized examples related to the TRPS in the content of the reviews. They looked for diversity within reviews regarding what is and is not being said and searched for the source of information to determine relevance between themselves and the source so as to grant credibility. Participants were also hoping for length and comprehensiveness, meaning that they wanted to read reviews in which all areas related to TRPS were covered. Overall, participants were looking for all previous aspects, including comprehensiveness within the content of the reviews.

The comparison between individual star ratings and the content within the review was made to compare the relevance between the two sources. Participant A2 stated:

And I also like looking at the overall rating like this; like, out of 5 stars, this person left a 4.5., well, out of 5, a 4.5 is pretty good. It's good versus another person who left a 3-point review for the same hotel. And so, I want to see, like, what was it that the 3-star person didn't like that the 4.5-star person did, like what if the 4.5-star person was a couple, but the 3-star person was a family and familywise their accommodations weren't that nice. So, I like to look at that.

4.6. Major Theme 3: Communicator, Source (Reviewer), and Platform

A communicator is an individual or business representative that sends an eWOM message to a consumer. The characteristics and dimensions of these roles have been found to influence source credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise. This theme ranked third in terms of the highest number of codes granted by participants (17 participants with 206 coded references) and consisted of source credibility (17 participants with 163 coded references) and source expertise (nine participants with 42 coded references). The first subtheme of source credibility could be further broken down into three further aspects: source subjectivity (16 participants with 47 coded references), reviewer's bias (15 participants with 76 coded references), and personal identifiable information (12 participants with 40 coded references). The second subtheme of source expertise could be further broken down into reviewer travel expertise (nine participants with 39 coded references) and certificate of excellence (two participants with two coded references).

4.6.1. Minor Theme 1: Source Credibility and Trustworthiness

The credibility of a source or reviewer on the TripAdvisor platform was based on various factors.

Source Subjectivity and Bias. Reviewer subjectivity was found to be an important factor in determining source credibility by 16 participants (with 123 coded references). This subjectivity can be assessed by the individual star ratings for a particular travel product or service. For example, a five-star rated product or service could be a three-star for another consumer or receiver of the message. Additionally, almost all participants ($n = 16$; 88%) noted that they were subjective in terms of their preferences, values, and quality standards. Hence, participants perceived online reviews as subjective, which lowered their perception of the credibility of the online reviews observed. This lowered the credibility of online reviews. A10 said:

Yeah, I would say that because the text is more important than the actual number rating because people are subjective because they put more work into the text, and they want to explain to me of their experience. So, rather than a number of ratings, which is very subjective and not representative, because a place has a three-star rating, or a four-star rating doesn't tell me much compared to a rating with a lot of text and pictures. It means one person's two stars may be another person's fourth star. So, like, one person may find something, like if they really like it, they might give it a four star, but another person might be OK and satisfied but give it a five star.

As suggested by the participants, the written text of the content, accompanied by pictures, decreases the reviewer's subjectivity.

Reviewer bias was categorized into three elements that influenced the participants' perceptions of the reviewer and attributed bias to the reviewer: (a) the emotion of the reviewer (anger) and the exaggeration the receiver senses, which can be identified in the language used within the content of online reviews, (b) the properties' advertisements, and (c) sponsored reviews and sponsorship disclosure influenced participants credibility judgements of online reviews. Companies offer monetary incentives for individuals to write

about their products and services and create publicity for them. To illustrate, the researcher asked Participant Z5 why she did not trust sponsored reviews. She said, “They pay them the money; you get the money like incentives to do so.” On the TripAdvisor platform, there is sponsorship disclosure on some reviews posted on the platform. Bloggers may disclose sponsorship information to readers to enhance the credibility of the information. Information is perceived as less credible and trustworthy if written for the reviewer’s benefit. The sense of monetary incentives provided to the reviewer makes the reviewer appear biased from the participants’ perspective.

Seeing a reviewer as emotional (e.g., angry) influenced participants’ perceptions and evaluation of the reviews, leading to a critical assessment of the reviewer as biased, thus lowering the credibility of eWOM. A relationship existed between reviewer bias (emotional reviewer) and negative review valence. Poor writing style influenced the understanding of the written content within the reviews, negatively influencing their credibility. As per the participants, poor writing style consisted of grammar and spelling mistakes and the use of specific vocabularies such as harsh words and coarse language. There was a negative correlation between source credibility and writing styles that featured harsh words, coarse language, and spelling mistakes (emotional or biased reviewer). The source and the content together thus decreased the credibility of the online reviews for the participants. A relationship also existed between content (descriptive details and negative review valence) and descriptive details in negative reviews. Participants believed the reviews might be exaggerated when they were lengthy and accompanied by grammar mistakes (writing style). These triggered perceptions of angry reviewers as emotional or biased sources, thereby lowering the credibility of the reviews.

The language in the written texts, such as spelling and grammar mistakes, harsh (coarse) language, exclamation marks and all-capital letters, and jumbled sentences affect the

logic of the content. This reveals the emotional side of the reviewer and not a description of a place. Participants' evaluations of emotional or biased reviewers were based on the emotional state of the reviewer (extremely angry or calm) as determining the source's credibility and facilitating the credibility of the online review. Being extremely angry was seen as clouding the reviewer's judgement, causing the participants to believe that the small details scattered throughout the review were not true or did not significantly influence the reviewer's travel experience, as claimed. Participants' perceptions of reviewers' exaggeration and overreaction led to decreased credibility being extended to the source.

Most participants evaluated the content's descriptive details to determine whether the message was objective or subjective. When participants considered the content objective, they granted credibility to the eWOM based on their evaluation of the written content. Furthermore, when participants found the content to be subjective, the eWOM was considered less credible. The subjectivity of the reviewers was seen as deviating from the participants' evaluations in terms of objectivity, which influenced their judgements of review credibility. Subjectivity was perceived when reviewers talked mostly about themselves in a way that made the content of the review lack descriptive details about the TRPS, instead including their feelings without providing any real context about the accommodation or trip. Such reviews also did not include reasons and justifications supporting the quality of their arguments.

Additionally, such reviews sometimes included unnecessary details, such as detailed information about the reviewer's private life, irrelevant to the TRPS. This made participants feel that the reviewer was placing themselves on a stage and at the centre of the situation. The descriptive details of the TRPS and the issues encountered should be at the centre of the review for it to be objective. Nevertheless, feelings differed from person to person regarding perceptions of the emotional states of the reviewers (e.g., extremely happy or angry).

Another form of subjectivity within the reviews was in the customers' perceptions of the differences between reviewers' personalities, quality standards (e.g., very high expectations), and income status or differences in consumption of TRPS. For example, evaluating online reviews became harder during the pandemic due to the differences in how people perceived the severity of the pandemic and how to overcome it with safety measures and standards, thus reflecting the reviewer's subjectivity. Another form of subjectivity was the star-rating system, where stars are given to a particular product and service. However, this form of rating lacks the necessary information about the TRPS compared to the text of a written review. The latter was seen as informative and inclusive of the required descriptions of the TRPS, supported by visuals (photos).

When a reviewer considered matters from a narrow rather than broad perspective, they deviated from being objective in their evaluation and assessment within the review. Participants could sense the reviewer's objectivity and subjectivity by the unjustified star rating within the review. For example, a one-star rating of a particular product or service with insignificant details within the content led the participants to recognize that the reviewer's judgement was clouded by minor details, thus influencing the credibility of the online review.

Extremity, where only extreme positives and negatives are given by reviewers regarding a specific TRPS, conveying the idea that the reviewers were either extremely satisfied or extremely dissatisfied with the TRPS, was also considered a form of subjectivity. The lack of balance between the positives and negatives within an online review triggered a perception of the reviewer's subjectivity. Either they were having a very pleasant time, such as being on vacation, or had one bad incident wherein the reviewer became emotional and had clouded judgement, letting one bad thing influence the entirety of the travel experience and ignoring all the good aspects of the experience.

Content irrelevant to the TRPS being reviewed led to perceptions of the subjectivity of reviewers, negatively influencing perceptions of the credibility of the online reviews. On the other hand, content relevant to the TRPS led to perceptions of the reviewer's objectivity that positively influenced perceptions of the credibility of the online reviews, explaining the relationship between the content and the source. Participant A6 explained that although reviews were helpful, she was aware that other individuals did not necessarily share her perceptions and manner of thinking:

Yeah, yeah, I believe it is really important because it's as a society that we share experiences. But I'm well aware that a lot of people sometimes, just by a teeny tiny thing, write a bad review because of a tiny thing that would not be that important to other people. Well, it makes me feel like I need to give it at least a chance if it's for a 4.5; there's, like, a couple of bad reviews but mostly good reviews. I would give it a chance because it's, like, I mean, we can't really judge a place from in a way we can. But we also can't judge a place by what people say. It's, like, don't judge a person by what people say about them.

Meanwhile, participant C4 noted that although positive and negative reviews were helpful, she had always believed that individuals had different ideas that could influence how a review was written, saying the following:

So, if someone gives a bad review, you will be hesitant to visit this place, OK. But if they give a really good [review], you're going to want to go, but I'd like to see what is in between to see what people like and dislike at the same time. So, from one outing to a place, a restaurant, a cafe, what this person liked about it and what they didn't like. I mean, I'll trust them, but yeah, maybe they over-liked it. You know everyone has different ideas about a place. OK, so. So, I did go, and yeah, there was parking. The parking was not their best aspect. But the inside was nice. I found the service was

really good, and the coffee was homemade. So, it's like things like that, then you just, like, OK, so this person gave yes and no, but everything was switched around. So, at the same time, I like going and testing it myself.

Participant G15 stated that reviews could also be biased, and one should know how to determine which reviews are authentic and credible. This participant preferred more objective reviews versus ones written based on emotions and feelings, saying the following:

I think it's a mix of expertise and bias. I think someone is credible if they look at things from a more objective point of view. Of course, everything is kind of subjective, so there's a limit, but do not let small things cloud your judgement. For example, if I look at a review and it's a one-star review, and someone says, "Oh, they messed up my order." I'm not going to trust that. That's zero credibility because that person is letting that small thing cloud their entire judgement. Everything could've been perfect except that they missed the order. For me, that's not credible.

A reviewer being dramatic triggered perceptions of an emotional individual, which lowered credibility, as their review was seen as irrelevant to customers. Participants evaluated negative reviews based on the core and supplementary products they complained about. If the complaint was about the core product and supported with justification and reasoning, they tended to sympathize with the reviewer and not see them as emotional or biased, which influenced perceptions of source credibility. However, if the complaint was about a supplementary product without providing any reasoning, participants tended to perceive reviewers as emotional or biased. This influenced judgements of source credibility, which transferred to the content of the message within the review. The participants perceived the relationship between the content of the review (the review being long) and the reviewer's bias as exaggerated.

Exaggeration in Reviews. The exaggeration participants sensed from the reviewers, either feeling happy with a positive review or feeling angry with a negative review, led to the notion that the reviewer was emotional and biased, influencing participants' assessments of source credibility. Exaggeration by reviewers expressing happiness in positive reviews that lacked the descriptive context for their happiness still resulted in a general review lacking TRPS details and description. Exaggeration by a reviewer expressing anger could come in the form of a negative review stating unjustified complaints regarding a supplementary TRPS product type (e.g., restaurant). The core and supplementary products change according to product type in the travel industry. For example, the core and supplementary products for a restaurant are different from those of a hotel, which is different from an adventure ride or attraction. Reviewer exaggeration over a supplementary product in negative reviews was seen as emotional bias detracting from the credibility of eWOM. E1 explained, "Personal feelings can always be biased. I just want to read a description of the process of handling the food." This clearly shows the relationship between context (product type), content (negative review valence), and reviewer (emotional or biased). Another participant, C4, mentioned the influence of emotions in clouding the judgement of individuals:

I feel some people just when they're writing a review they might refrain from certain things because they don't want to put the whole thing in, or the review may not be 100% what you thought. Like, let's say you had a bad experience, or are you going to just focus on the bad, but you won't look at the good side? So maybe just see if there were different aspects that they forgot to mention in it. So basically, as I said, when you have a bad experience, you might not notice what was good about it. So, you're just focusing on what was terrible instead of focusing on what was actually good about it.

Personalization and the identification of individuals vary in review valence, whether the review was positive or negative. Identifying individuals by name in negative reviews triggered perceptions of an emotional reviewer and bias against this person. This showed that perceptions of extremely angry reviewers influenced source credibility, while descriptive details with personalization and the identification of individuals in positive reviews were seen as proof that the reviewer had visited the place, thus increasing the credibility of the review. Nevertheless, A2 did not find the inclusion of descriptive details with personalization but without mentioning names (e.g., advising tourists to avoid the “officious clerk”) to be problematic within the negative content of the review. This was seen as helpful and useful for other customers to be aware of this negative aspect of the travel experience, which was viewed as supporting the credibility of eWOM. To grant credibility, participants found that there was a difference between describing individuals and identifying individuals by name in negative reviews.

The relationship between review valence and the descriptive details of personalization and the identification of individuals by name, as well as the source credibility in terms of an emotional or biased reviewer, could be investigated further using a quantitative research method. A lack of congruence between the content and star ratings left the participants assessing the source credibility as biased via exaggeration, diminishing the credibility of the online reviews. Lengthy reviews with extremity accompanied by descriptive details triggered perceptions of bias, negatively influencing credibility. This formed a relationship between extremity (excellent and poor), length of content (long), and descriptions of minor details, with the source being emotional or biased (source credibility). However, a positive influence on credibility was found when descriptive details were accompanied by a two-sided review (away from the extremities) that was appropriate in length (medium).

The relationship between source identity and reviewer bias forms source credibility. The relationship between source credibility and relevance, such as local versus tourists, is shown to influence participants' assessment of online reviews. For example, the bias locals may bring into an evaluation of a TRPS due to their familiarity with a given place and their culture, previous knowledge, and experiences influenced participants' perceptions of credibility in terms of perceiving this as reviewer bias. Similarly, a tourist's point of view would be more easily connected with and relevant to that of a customer, as they both share the same situation of being tourists and lacking familiarity with the place.

Another issue influencing the credibility of eWOM is the relationship between platform type (social media) and the credibility of online reviews. The attitudes and behaviours of reviewers posting on social media such as Instagram represented an interesting finding. There was a difference in the granting of credibility by participants depending on who shared their reviews and visuals through which platform. TripAdvisor is a travel community platform hosting online reviews by travellers (eWOM) and which recently capitalized on the social leverage among customers and travellers who were able to evaluate reviews from their social network friends from the largest social network site (Facebook) that disseminates S-eWOM. Due to that collaboration between TripAdvisor and Facebook, TripAdvisor is now recognized as an SC platform that has opened the doors for opportunities of social influence on customers' judgements of credibility as perceived S-eWOM.

A2 stated that sharing a TRPS experience through social media such as Instagram lowered her judgement of the content's credibility in one respect. That is, she viewed the S-eWOM as disseminated for the intended audience on social media, comprised of friends from different social circles, whether these were strong or weak social ties. A2 stated:

I'll give you my sister's example; it's really good. When we're looking at a restaurant, she says, "But I want to post on Instagram that I eat this." I said, "You don't care if

the food tastes good. You care about if it looks good.” And she’s like, “Well, if it looks good, I will force myself to like it. I like to like the taste.” I was like, “Wow, media plays that big of a role.” Like. I remember it was the nastiest pizza in the world, but it didn’t look like it. Oh, hey, it was so pretty, and I didn’t know it was like the perfect pizza. I was like, you know when you buy a pizza, and it was like a string cheese? Yeah, I like to really get so fresh. But when you eat those, they’re the nastiest things in the world; it’s as if they had olives from like last year.

The message sent to the intended audience through the review or visuals (photos) was intended to reflect a certain image to the friends and family of the reviewer. In contrast, on the TripAdvisor platform, apart from seeing reviews from Facebook friends, the reviews were from a specialized travel community with whom the reviewer shares their travel experiences and expertise without the effects of social influence with the intended audience. For instance, A2 indicated a friend’s review as being less reliable than that of a foreigner. Lastly, participant M13 noted that she has also become more careful and critical, especially of the presence and popularity of fake online reviews, stating:

I felt that because, let’s say, these days, technology has been taking over our daily life, and things are becoming like not really the exact thing it means. Fake things are becoming more visible than before. That’s why some of the time, when I’m doing my reviews, I also need to compare things that can be fake, or it can be true. If a credible hotel puts something online a part of the comments, if it is online and the hotel has credibility, that can be true.

Personal Identifiable Information (PII). The PII of the source includes the reviewer’s (a) profile name and picture, (b) gender, (c) occupation, such as critic, fashion blogger, celebrity, or professional traveller, and (d) social status (couple, family, or student). The second is reviewer bias, the third is reviewer subjectivity, and the fourth is the reviewer’s

feelings. The credibility of a source or reviewer enhances the trustworthiness of the information and promotes the acceptance of the content. If the participants' decisions to buy a TRPS are based on sources perceived as credible, individuals are more likely to believe the sources wrote that information. Therefore, the credibility of eWOM content is enhanced by the authenticity of the communicator or speaker. Source trustworthiness involves the recipient's trust in an individual sending an eWOM message. Online review platforms provide much information that may be used to discern the credibility of the source. The reviewer's content is considered believable and trustworthy when many people in the community trust them. Authoritative and interesting content enhances the source's trustworthiness, thus making eWOM information more believable.

Interactive Model Among Communicator, Content, and Customer. A relationship exists between the communicator and the quality and quantity of the content. This means that the source using general terms within the written content and the positive review valence influenced participants' evaluation of the review. Reviewer bias was influenced by previous knowledge and the presence of extremely positive reviews. Participants tended to trust the negative reviews more while perceiving positive (excellent) reviews as similar to the property's own reviews to promote the TRPS and lacking descriptive details related to TRPS. Furthermore, the negative reviews were assessed as being more descriptive than the positive ones. Thus, the relationship between the source, content, and customer influenced the participants' evaluation of online reviews.

Moreover, the interaction between the valence of the review content (negative review), the content (descriptive details), and relevance (customer) influenced the participants' evaluation and assessment of the source. This assessment signalled the participants' perceptions of the reviewers as either objective or subjective. Participants evaluated the issue stated within the review and asked important questions: Was the reviewer

objective in his assessments? Is the issue TRPS-related or a subjective problem of the reviewer? After asking these questions, relevance comes into play. If the reviewer is found to be objective, is the issue related to the customer's preferences? To facilitate the relevance to customers' preferences and quality standards, the argument of the quality of the review provided reasons and justification, with the descriptive details of TRPS being seen as leading to better customer evaluations of the review. TRPS-related descriptive details included core and supplementary offerings depending on the product type (e.g., hotels, restaurants, things to do [adventures]), which influenced participants' evaluation of the reviews. The core offerings for hotels included cleanliness, safety and security, room size, and bed. The supplementary offerings included a spa, a pool, the ambiance, the customer service, and the food. M17 identified the core products for restaurants as cleanliness and good food.

Relationship Between Source Identity and Content. Reviewer identity refers to whether the reviewer is a critic, fashion blogger, professional traveller (travel agent), celebrity, and so forth. The high standards and expectations of a critic or celebrity and the large budget and income do not match the travel experiences of the participants, who were young students with limited budgets and income. A reviewer's social identity also refers to whether the reviewer belongs to one of the following categories: family with kids, couple, newlywed couple, or student. Participants granted credibility to eWOM originating from a source who shared a similar social status with them since there was similarity in their travel experiences.

Relationship between Quality and Quantity of the Content and the Source. The interaction between source credibility and source expertise influenced participants' evaluations of the online reviews. The inability to see the reviewers' profile pictures or names, combined with the lack of knowing their number of posted reviews, triggered perceptions of a lack of expertise and the absence of identifying personal information, which

denotes a lack of accountability. The reviewer's lack of expertise and source credibility, along with the written content being short, with ratings in the extremities (five stars or one star) negatively influenced the credibility of eWOM in the eyes of the participants. When these categories of source credibility and expertise interacted with the content of a very short review lacking descriptive details, the credibility of eWOM diminished, leading to the review being perceived as fake.

Relationship Between Writing Style and Source. The writing style and quality of content posted by reviewers, especially reviews with grammatical or typing mistakes, negatively influenced the participants' judgements of the reviewers. In addition, it appears that reviews containing strong emotional language, such as curse words, several exclamation marks, and passages written in all-capital letters, negatively influenced the reviews' credibility. A6 stated:

If there's like mistakes, like I mean grammar or like how the person writes, if it's not, like, if the person doesn't have a good base of writings is, like, people that I can't write OK correctly on the good English or French. That would be a red flag for me, meaning, well, if you can't write, why are you, why. If you want to give us your review, why are you taking the time to write a proper review so that reads properly and, like, understands you a little bit more.

This indicates that a poor writing style reflects a lack of effort made by the reviewer, which decreases the quality of the review and negatively influences participants' perception of it.

Contradictions between the profile information of a source from Canada and writing style, specifically grammar mistakes within the content of the review, were found. This contradiction lowered the credibility assessment by the participants, who believed that the PII of the source should align with the content of the review written by the same source. M7 stated:

Oh, I think if there's a lot of, especially if it's in English, and I know that there's a lot of spelling and grammar errors, I'm thinking OK, this is somebody who doesn't really speak the language. They're trying to say it's, like, really, like, you know, I mean, they're trying to make it seem like, all like, I'm just like you, I speak English and I'm from Canada, let's say in their profile. But with all this, there's, like, reoccurring, like, make mistakes.

Relationship Between the Content Argument Quality and Source. The descriptive details within the content of the review concerned the inclusion of the reviewer's feelings without providing context for the review, as noted by C4:

Because my feelings can differ from those of the next person, I can love a place, and the next person comes, reads my review, and says, this person was an idiot. This place sucks. So, it is obvious that my likings are not the same as someone else's. And about the place itself. The restaurant or attraction, whatever they visited, about that place instead of what they have said like what they felt themselves.

This explains how important it is to provide descriptive details of TRPS when reviewers explain their feelings within the review to avoid the perception of a biased source.

Participants mentioned the profile picture and name of the reviewer as important for source credibility evaluation. Participants observed the age of the reviewer through the profile picture. C4 stated that seeing a profile picture reflected the reviewer's efforts in preparing their profile. Some participants also recognized showing effort as influencing reviewers' genuine intentions and hence the credibility of eWOM, which contradicted the other participants, who stated that they wanted to see the profile pictures of the reviewer. M7 believed that for privacy and security reasons, there is no need to share a profile picture as a reviewer.

Gender also played a role in source credibility, influencing the credibility of online reviews in the eyes of participants. K11 felt that he trusted a review from a source with whom he shared relevance, such as gender—a man trusting another man. This could be due to the influence of the homophily effect that assumes that if both are of the same gender, they may like similar activities. T9 stated a similar sentiment, indicating that she trusted women more than men because she had search activities similar to those of other women. Another reason T9 and M17 trusted women was that they sometimes considered customers' own subjectivity in evaluating reviews from women versus men. T9 perceived women as cleaner than men and as paying more attention to details. A relationship between the source (gender) and customer preferences and quality standards (feeling safe) was found.

The reputation of the source, such as being a well-known hotel like the Hilton or Crowne Plaza, also influenced credibility, as it triggered perceptions of the high value of customer services at those hotels. The contradiction between the profile information of the source from Canada and the grammar mistakes within the written content of the review raised questions. Regarding the source of the reviewer, who they are, and the relevance of this to customer preferences and levels of tolerance for things that bothered or did not bother her in negative reviews, N3 asked, "who said this? Who said that? And then, is this something that really bothers me, or is this something that I can live with?" Participants also sought reviews from different sources to reach diversity in opinions and perspectives. For example, any travel experience will differ between regular travellers and professional travellers, critics, or fashion bloggers. These people evaluate TRPS differently from the average customer and have high quality standards, leading to dissimilar travel experiences.

Relationship Between Review Valence (Positive Review) and Source (Property's Advertisement). Participants recognized a property's advertisement as one of the factors that influence customer perceptions of the credibility of eWOM. A property's advertisement can

take the form of online reviews and photos and videos posted by the company. A property's reviews and information were seen by participants as marketing tactics used by the business for commercial purposes and not reflective of the actual travel experiences of travellers, whose reviews customers felt more connected with, as they shared the same situation of nonexistent financial benefit. Participants appreciated a reviewer's input when they were viewed as a traveller, the same as the participant reading the review.

In terms of visuals, the perception by customers was that to sell the product, a property's photos are enhanced and do not reflect the reality of the place. Furthermore, these photos are taken by a professional photographer to make the property more attractive and appealing to customers. Thus, high-quality pictures and the intention of the source determined the level of participants' trust. On the other hand, participants tended to trust average photo quality, such as slightly blurry cell phone photos taken with shaky hands and those that included the reviewers and their family or friends, reflecting the genuineness and reality of the travel experience.

A property's advertisement and sponsored reviews involve monetary incentives and financial gain, which triggered participants' thinking and beliefs that those are commercial and do not work for the benefit of the customers, hence leading to decreased perceptions of the credibility of online reviews and a lack of trust in the eWOM. A company's website was seen to have bias, as the company competes in the industry. This commercial interest tended to lower the credibility perceptions of participants. Any financial gain or benefit to the other party (the seller) influenced participants' perceptions of credibility toward these reviews. A property's photos were seen as more attractive and appealing, while travellers' photos were seen as less attractive and appealing.

4.6.2. Minor Theme 2: Source Expertise, Seeing Reviewers with Numerous Reviews Posted

The second minor theme of the first major theme of the communicator was the expertise of the source or the original writer of the review. The expertise of the source allowed participants to determine the credibility of content and to attribute this expertise to positively judging their responsibility for online reviews. Therefore, online reviews written by experts in a certain field were perceived as more trustworthy. Source or reviewer expertise in eWOM communication may be based on various factors, including.

- how well a reviewer has performed on a platform and other travellers agreeing to their recommendations (“helpful” vote), which other travellers on the TripAdvisor platform vote on.
- the number of online reviews they have posted on the TripAdvisor platform (contributor).
- the source’s travel expertise; and
- the certificate of excellence awarded by TripAdvisor to the TRPS.

Source expertise included the reviewer’s ability to create an expert image of themselves, leading to customer evaluation that the source is an expert. This expertise can come in several forms. The first is the number of reviews posted by a reviewer, also called a contributor, on the TripAdvisor website. On the TripAdvisor platform, a reviewer is granted the title of contributor if they are active in posting TRPS reviews and have posted several reviews.

While many participants mentioned that the number of reviews posted by the reviewer triggered a perception of travel expertise, Z5 felt the higher the number reviews posted a traveller, the more she felt suspicious about the reviewer. In addition, monetary incentives and financial gain can be had for writing reviews, which negatively influenced the review’s credibility in Z5’s opinion. An explanation as to why Z5 may have felt that way could be her cultural background. She applied her experience while evaluating online reviews and stated

that back in her home country, China, she wrote reviews for financial gain, which happens a lot there. Providing a certificate of excellence to a particular travel product or service provider contributed to a form of source expertise in providing high-quality TRPS, which built a positive reputation for TRPS providers. Travel expertise by a source was another factor that contributed to perceptions of source expertise.

The relationship between the length of the review and source expertise was seen as reflecting the effort applied by the reviewer. Efforts spent by the reviewer created customer perceptions of source expertise in that they took the time to post reviews to help other travellers. Identified forms of a reviewer not applying enough effort in writing the review were grammar mistakes and misspellings in the content. This was another reason participants were reluctant to grant credibility to reviews, aside from perceiving the reviewer as emotional, angry, and biased.

The “helpful” vote system implemented by TripAdvisor contributed to increased perceptions of source expertise. This system allows travellers to vote for a certain reviewer whose reviews were perceived as helpful by other consumers, triggering consensus among travellers about the expertise of the reviewer. Participant A10 narrated that it was also important to check the background of the writer of the post, stating the following:

Credibility in terms of reviews, I would see, like, if this person has written a lot of reviews, and yeah. The more votes, positive votes, for a rating. It tells me that, OK, this is obviously more credible because other people trust this reviewer, so it's not just me evaluating all the reviews on my own, it tells me. So, the more votes that a review has, it tells me, OK, I could trust this because other people trust it and they maybe have gone and done the tours, they went to the destination, then they, maybe they come back, and they agree with this review. It would be helpful to have maybe responses to the reviews. I'm not sure if TripAdvisor has it, but maybe if a person

went to the destination and came back and did not agree with a review. If maybe reply to the review and have it underneath. OK, it tells us conflicting arguments; OK, conflicting perspectives. Either way, you just have reviews. They're like separate experiences, but when you have a response then replies, it tells us the specific experience can be verified or not.

Meanwhile, participant D18 suggested that it would also help if reviewers could react to the posts of other travellers or users, making the experience more interactive and relatable, stating:

If they had emojis or something like that, like a thumbs up or a heart or a sad face, I think that would be nice too. Another way of describing their feeling is without saying any words. They just put a thumbs up, a thumbs down, a happy, or a sad face. Those are other ways of expressing how you feel without even saying it. You just click on an emoji.

Whether satisfied with the travel experience or dissatisfied, reviewers' feelings were shown to influence participants' credibility judgement. This effect is increased with negative reviews. The reviewers' expressions of feelings, without providing context to them, were shown to decrease the credibility of the reviews. C4 said:

Credibility, like facts, what it sounds authentic, as in, like, honest, like, this is both good and bad. Like, I don't like when there are too many contexts in it or when they talk too much about what happened to them that. Like, some will just go into too much scene setting where it's, like, "Oh, I was on vacation and this this this," but it's not your vacation that I'm, that I want to see, you know. Because I might be on vacation, but it's telling you, that it's putting in your head, that if you go on vacation and you visit there, you might not like it.

According to participants, the reviewer must show positive feelings to add value to the evaluation process of online reviews. These feelings were deemed to add value if the contexts of the situation and the travel experience accompanied them.

4.7. Major Theme 4: Context, Socioenvironmental Factors, Platform, and Product Types

The fourth major theme is the context (15 participants with 123 coded references), which consists of four categories: the COVID-19 pandemic (six participants with 65 coded references), the platform (13 participants with 35 coded references), the product type (nine participants with 11 coded references), and brand and positive reputation (six participants with 13 coded references).

4.7.1. Minor Theme 1: COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic influenced and altered the way participants evaluated online reviews and granted credibility (six participants with 65 coded references). Travel destinations where there was a connection between early and late intervention by governments to combat the pandemic and the high versus the low number of COVID-19 cases represented the most coded references, with 27 by six participants. Government regulations and the application of health and safety measures and standards followed, scoring the highest-coded references by participants in the pandemic-context theme (six participants with 26 coded references). These health and safety standards were spotted by participants in the content of reviews while conducting the walk-through and discussing their searches in more detail during the interview. Quarantine time, wearing masks, social distancing to combat COVID-19, and cleanliness became important during the pandemic, as they help to prevent the spread of the virus.

The lockdown mentioned in multiple travel destinations negatively influenced the travel experience, and participants felt uncertain about travel. The high uncertainty

participants experienced influenced their evaluation of online reviews. The impact of the COVID-19 lockdown permeated into other aspects that appeared to influence participant perception of credibility. The lowest-coded references of the COVID-19 category were the different perceptions of COVID-19 between the reviewers and customers (three participants with 11 coded references).

Sense of Safety and Feeling Secure. Travel destination was the most-cited factor by participants that altered their evaluation of online reviews during COVID-19. Travel destinations with slow government intervention to combat the pandemic led to high numbers of COVID-19 cases and high severity of cases compared to countries whose governments intervened quickly. The fast intervention by these governments led to a lower number of COVID-19 cases and positively influenced participants' evaluations of online reviews, granting credibility to the evaluations posted about those travel destinations. The governments' health and safety measures, such as travel restrictions, social distancing, mask wearing, and quarantine, altered the way participants evaluated online reviews and attitudes toward travel destinations.

Travel Destination Preferences. Participants' preferences for travel destinations were influenced by COVID-19 factors and policies, such as whether a country undertook early or late intervention to combat the initial waves of COVID-19. Six participants said that early intervention helped to contain the severity of COVID-19 cases, which resulted in them feeling safe to travel to those destinations, while late intervention reflected high risk in these countries, which led to more severe COVID-19 cases. Furthermore, six participants stated that the number of COVID-19 cases reported in each country generally reflected low- versus high-risk travel destinations, the latter which participants felt unsafe visiting when evaluating destination options.

Influences of COVID-19 Lockdown on Credibility Perception. Participants' evaluations of pre- and post-COVID-19 online reviews shared similarities and differences. Participants in the post-COVID-19 group paid more attention to source credibility than those in the pre-COVID-19 group. Participants paid attention to the source's credibility in terms of their beliefs and ideology regarding the pandemic, even beginning to wonder who would be travelling during the pandemic and what their motives might be. The pre-COVID-19 group did not question people's motives for travelling, as this travel situation was normal and people could travel safely and without restrictions, whether for leisure or work purposes. Of course, this changed after the pandemic began, as people could not travel because of the travel restrictions or did not travel because they were afraid of catching the virus and perceived travelling as high risk and unnecessary. How people worked also changed, with many workers moving to virtual meetings through applications such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams. Thus, the motive to travel during the pandemic was an important question.

Internal Factors Related to Content. Tourism business owners' adherence to health and safety measures, such as those of restaurants, hotels, and attractions (wearing masks, maintaining cleanliness, and using sanitizers), positively influenced participants' evaluations of reviews, as they felt safe visiting places with higher safety standards. Participants also considered recency important, as the COVID-19 situation was rapidly changing due to the new laws and regulations implemented by governments. A lack of descriptive details related to COVID-19 and the accompanying health measures and precautions triggered participants' sense of a threat to safety, which lowered the credibility of the eWOM message.

Cultural Differences in Credibility Perceptions After the Onset of COVID-19. Customers' and reviewers' perceptions of COVID-19 contributed to evaluations of online reviews. Reviewers' culture—where they were from—played a role in participants' evaluations of reviews during the pandemic because of the importance of how people

perceived the outcome and seriousness of COVID-19. Additionally, how individuals adhered to the safety measures and health standards in those travel destinations influenced participants' evaluations of online reviews. For example, for participants from Canada, reviews by U.S. reviewers seemed irrelevant due to the severity of COVID-19 cases in the United States and how the country adhered to health and safety standards. There were discrepancies in how the two countries handled the pandemic and how they applied different health and safety measures to combat COVID-19. For instance, mask wearing was optional in the United States, while it was mandatory in Canada. S16 stated:

Yes. I do think trustworthiness comes in, and there's also the fact of where the traveller is coming from. If you're just travelling in Canada and stuff, it's more trustworthy that you're like, OK, we have similar beliefs. For example, other countries that they can travel between each other and then you're like, OK, if we don't have the same beliefs or if our governments aren't taking the same safety measures, it's like, "Can I trust you? Am I going to be safe when I go there?" In the back of my mind, it's harder to trust a U.S. traveller right now just because you don't know where they fall and everything. Especially if they're thinking or they're travelling right now, and they're writing reviews, and they're from the States, it seems they're not taking it as seriously because with how many cases they have, they're telling people not to travel and all this stuff.

The differences in individual perceptions about the pandemic and the high number of COVID-19 cases negatively influenced the credibility judgement of participants. Participant S16 wondered how long it would take for a country with a high number of COVID-19 cases to recover after the pandemic:

The States will be fine in six months, but how bad they are right now; I'd be wanting to travel somewhere else before I travel to the States. Someone thinking that the

States is a good destination, and I feel the credibility of their review will go down a bit just because it's like, OK, obviously we don't have the same beliefs. Were you seeing the same news that I was seeing?

There were differences in participants' responses during the pandemic regarding review valence (positive or negative). Although the descriptive details related to COVID-19 were written in the text of the reviews, with positive statements, S16 still could not grant credibility fully due to the high uncertainty of the pandemic and the higher risk of travelling during the pandemic. Other participants placed more value on the positive comments, considering the pandemic and how businesses were trying hard to keep up the high quality of their TRPS while also ensuring safety and taking precautions. During the pandemic, the source of a reviewer (e.g., being from the United States) became important because it reflected the person's culture and how they may have adhered to safety precautions and health measures such as wearing masks. These factors triggered perceptions of safety, influencing participants' evaluation of online reviews. Because of the pandemic and the severity of COVID-19 cases in the United States, the travel destination from which the reviewer came influenced the trust and credibility of online reviews posted about this travel destination.

The active review of activities during the pandemic triggered perceptions of carelessness among the population in terms of combatting COVID-19, leading participants to question who would be travelling under such conditions (during the pandemic) and whether overcrowded places would represent a higher risk of spreading the virus and getting sick. The post-COVID-19 group experienced a low desire to travel abroad due to the severity of the pandemic, especially for travel destinations with high numbers of COVID-19 cases. This may have influenced participants' purchase involvement, as it moderated the effects of the

credibility judgement of online reviews. Travel desires increased for countries with very low numbers of cases, signifying a lack of danger or risk of spreading the virus to participants.

Influence of Review Valence and Experiences Offered in Relation to COVID-19 Lockdown Experience. Regarding review valence (positive or negative), the pre-COVID-19 group of participants perceived positive reviews as not the most descriptive ones, with these reviews seen to be acting as marketing tactics to promote the travel destination. On the other hand, the post-COVID-19 group valued the positive content by reviewers and felt that it was reflected in the high quality of TRPS performance during a difficult time such as the pandemic.

Because of the closure of several facilities and destinations due to COVID-19, some destinations were offering virtual tours and virtual experiences as substitutes for the real thing. D18 said: “Oh, you would have to do it virtual because of COVID; that sounds sad.” This influenced the participants’ desire to travel and visit the attraction. For instance, multiple TRPS activity closures influenced participants’ preconceptions of the travel experience and the inability to consume the whole experience of TRPS. Due to the numerous changes in and updates to safety measures and regulations that needed to be applied to protect society from COVID-19, recency was important, as more current information regarding COVID-19 was more accurate and useful. For instance, some travel experiences changed from reality, such as visiting the museum in person, to virtual reality. The experience of TRPS during COVID-19 changed, and this influenced the participants’ desire to travel and visit attractions. For instance, multiple TRPS activity closures influenced the participants’ preconceived ideas of the travel experience and the inability to consume the whole experience of TRPS.

4.7.2. Minor Theme 2: Platform

The contributor label, which is assigned to the reviewer by the TripAdvisor platform, signals the reviewer’s travel expertise in terms of posting online reviews regarding TRPS

(five participants with 13 coded references). It shows that this reviewer is proven to be active in travelling and sharing their travel experiences through posting online reviews. This was considered a grading system for reviewers, as it contributes to source expertise, hence influencing participants' credibility judgements regarding the source. The generation of the "helpful" voting system by the TripAdvisor platform was seen as encouraging consensus among travellers on whether they believe a review is helpful or not (five participants with 10 coded references). Participants see the platform as transparent because it offers no language barriers, with users of the platform feeling free to contribute their negative experiences through their online reviews. TripAdvisor was perceived as a platform specializing in travel expertise, compared to Google, which was perceived as a general search engine lacking travel expertise.

The layout and the display of information presented in categories triggered perceptions in participants of the convenience of using the site. The participants' most-cited motivations for using the TripAdvisor website were its positive reputation and popularity. The site was seen as being informative in its inclusion of all travel-related information for planning and convenience, as it contains all that data in one place and presents it via classifications and categories of travel products and services for ease of use. In addition, some participants perceived TripAdvisor as free of stealth marketing, which reflected the platform's transparency.

The participants perceived the TripAdvisor platform as providing useful information for its users, with this data being categorized in a convenient way that feeds into customers' decision-making; overall, this positively influenced participants' motivation to use the TripAdvisor website or application. Management responses to negative reviews by travellers that suggested how to address and solve the issues the travellers had faced were considered an interactional component and a service TripAdvisor, as a travel platform, offered for the

users of the platform. Reviews thus play a role in establishing a digital reputation. Online reviews are crucial, particularly in tourism, where human sources are significant and regarded as reliable for building a reputation. Three participants saw management responses to reviews. They valued these responses, which showcased the interactional quality of the platform and the care provided by the business owners in replying to and addressing negative reviews. N3 stated:

So, it's nice that there is also the management response to that. So, then you get to see this is actually a trustworthy website because you see the management going there and talking to the customers. It's not only nice for the management to do that, but it's also nice that TripAdvisor allows that to happen.

Sense of Virtual Travel Community. Individuals who are part of an online community refer to it as a virtual community or membership, which means a lot of robust relationships and trust exist between people. Therefore, the various ways individuals may think, and act based on their feelings about being part of a travel community trigger expertise in travel. For example, individuals with a higher sense of belonging use critical thinking more when evaluating information. Conversely, individuals who do not have a sense of belonging are less likely to use critical-thinking skills more effectively to evaluate information. EWOM influences readers' evaluation of online reviews and credibility assessments of these reviews, especially those of readers who feel like they belong to a particular group or travel community.

4.7.3. Minor Theme 3: Product Types

Half of the participants ($n = 9$) indicated that product type was an important factor that contributes to the credibility of online reviews. TRPS, such as accommodation, restaurants, top attractions, and things to do, with their different core and supplementary products, were shown to affect the credibility of eWOM in different ways.

Participants' responses differed regarding their evaluations of the visuals posted with the online reviews and product types (food vs experiential goods) on the TripAdvisor platform and social media platforms such as Instagram. Some participants assigned credibility to experiential photos, such as from a helicopter ride or of someone smiling while making food. Another participant ascribed credibility to food pictures, while they exhibited a decreased perception of the credibility of experiential photos, such as those of people at the Eiffel Tower. However, there was a relationship between product type (food, in this case pizza, vs experience, in this case, a helicopter ride) and the use of visuals (photos) and their effect on the credibility of online reviews. For example, a lack of facial expressions and emotions in the food photos versus those of an adventure experience like a helicopter ride could be a reason for trusting the experiential photos over the food photos.

Another reason contributing to the differences in participants' granting of credibility to the pizza photo and helicopter ride photo was the platform on which the photos were posted and the intention behind the sharing of the photos according to the platform type. For example, the participant who mentioned the food photo could not grant credibility to what was shared on Instagram (social media platform) with an intended audience (social network). In contrast, the adventurous helicopter-ride photos were shared through the TripAdvisor platform with a sense of the travel community as an audience. On the contrary, D18 granted credibility to food pictures compared to those taken by individuals atop an attraction like the Eiffel Tower. This could be because food pictures are static and do not have as many emotional aspects. Individual pictures in some places have emotional aspects, but these emotions may not be true or reflective of what is actually happening.

The relationship between product type and photos (visuals) for museums as a travel product indicated the requirement of a high number of visuals and photos to represent the museum's high number of visuals and product types. Food was seen as the biggest element in

restaurants, mattering the most regarding visuals and travel product types. For participants to pay attention to and consider the visuals (photos and videos), the visuals must represent the TRPS offerings. If the visuals failed to represent the TRPS offerings, participants tended not to pay attention to them or not to find them credible, which influenced their reliance on the visuals.

4.7.4. Minor Theme 4: Brand Name and Reputation

The brand name and reputation of the TripAdvisor platform and the TRPS business providers, such as Hilton and Crowne Plaza, were the least coded references in the major theme context (six participants with 13 coded references). This study revealed the mediating role of the positive reputation of the TripAdvisor platform or the brand image, which was perceived by participants as giving credibility to online reviews. As A10 stated, "People have used TripAdvisor a lot. So, it's always a reliable source for me to get reviews." Other participants mentioned the importance of the brand name. For example, L14 said:

Somebody's reputation. If somebody has a high reputation, it's just higher trust, probably a better exchange of whatever, better transaction, better service, just stuff like that. If a brand has a reputation, you're going to be more inclined to trust this brand than a brand that just came out. It's doing the same thing, but you've never heard about it.

M7 noted that long-time expertise in doing the business was comparable to a well-known brand name:

So, you have ... a chain of restaurants, and as I clicked on the first one, which was the high end, you know that that's an expertise; like, they have so many hotels, so many places in the world. And then, on the other hand, you might have a hotel or something that's, like, a bed and breakfast that's being run by the same family for generations, and I would give that the same amount of credibility as to somebody who has a chain.

This indicates that because expertise was the dimension of credibility most cited by participants in this research, it is equal to a well-known brand name in the industry. When A6 evaluated a negative review posted by a traveller, she refused to believe the negative comments about the branded hotel. She said: “If it’s company Crowne Plaza, you’re not supposed to have things like that happening because it’s worldwide. Not worldwide, but like Hilton’s worldwide, but I’m just saying, like, a well-known hotel shouldn’t have that kind of problems.” This shows that the participant was subjective in her assessment due to the positive brand name of the TRPS.

4.8. Major Theme 5: Community and Strength of Social Ties to Disseminate S-eWOM.

This major theme contributed to answering the second research question about the influence of S-eWOM reviews and recommendations on eWOM credibility: How do the social cues of social network friends influence travellers’ trust in eWOM? The second research question focused on the effects of S-eWOM on the perceived credibility of the traveller. For most participants, S-eWOM also activated users’ need to become much more logical and careful when choosing a place, destination, or experience online. Most participants noted how they had started to evaluate and check the reviews as they were aware of potential biases or partialities that reduced the credibility of the reviews.

The last major theme was community (18 participants with 70 coded references), and it involved one minor theme: strength of social ties (18 participants with 59 coded references). The strength of social ties had two categories: the personality traits of individuals and the relevance of social network friends to customers’ travel experience. Table 4 contains a breakdown of the community themes.

Table 4

Breakdown of Community Minor Themes in Response to Research Question 2 (RQ2)

Research Question	Themes and Subthemes
--------------------------	-----------------------------

How do the social cues of social network friends influence travellers' trust in eWOM?	Community Strength of social ties Personality traits of individuals Big Five personality traits
---	--

This study involved the ways that S-eWOM has permitted users to become more careful and rational decision-makers. The participants typically remembered that not all individuals and travellers had the same preferences and emotions, which could significantly influence the reviews posted, with all activity based on popularity and with consumer behaviour changing through social media via the online sharing of content and travel experiences.

4.8.1. Minor Theme 1: Strength of Social Ties

All participants considered the effects of social influence on the credibility of online reviews under one condition. This condition capitalizes on the personal connection between the source and the receiver of the information. Customers' recognition of the personality traits of the source (Facebook friends) is an important aspect of credibility judgements. This supports the views of Participant E1, who was the only participant who neglected the effects of social influence on credibility judgement and valued the personality traits of the source.

Social ties influenced the participants' evaluation of online reviews in several ways. First, the personal connection with friends was an important determinant in granting credibility to eWOM. One way to determine the personal connection is through the relevance created by the reviewer's and the participant's shared culture. This relevance deepened the connection between the individuals and positively influenced credibility. Participant A10 stated that he trusted friends closer to his culture more:

I would surely feel more inclined to trust my closest friend because they are closer to me and they are closer in culture, like me versus somebody who is not from the same

place as me, like I am more culturally aware. I would say so. I would trust somebody close to me but also more relatable to who I am as a person.

The personal connection between individuals, which stems from the strength of social ties, is essential in creating relevance between individuals. For example, A10 stated: "I would trust a review from somebody whom I know of on social media more versus that from somebody who's just on social media." G15 said:

Yes. For example, if a friend I know has similar tastes to me, that's perfect because what she or he likes would probably be also what I would like if I were to go to a city. If it's a friend that I know more about, I'm in a better position to judge what their taste is and to determine, based on their taste, whether I will pay attention. If it's a friend I know well, but I know that their taste is different from mine, then that tells me that their review might not be relevant to me because we have different interests.

Knowing about the friend helps me judge whether the review is relevant to me because of our different interests.

Y8 noted:

If my friends tell me this restaurant is good, we must go, and I go to that restaurant and I don't like it. I was like, "Do you really know my taste? You're like that count for it, like credible. Like, oh, thank you. I cannot count on you for the next restaurant we go to."

S16 said:

I don't know. I feel like it's because you know their personality. Say, if it's one of my good friends, and I know we look for the same kind of things. If we're going on a trip, we know what we like and what we don't like, and we have similarities, then it's easier to trust than someone that—I don't know. As I say, like me going on a trip with one of my close friends, we're students; we have the same budget, and we want

to explore the same areas. We like to sightsee but go to the countryside or whatever compared to someone that's travelling to go to a party every night and stuff.

S16 further emphasized the importance of the socioeconomic status of the reviewer and the relevance between her and the reviewer when asked about her evaluation of reviews posted by her Facebook friends:

Because you're going to consider different factors. You're like, "OK, I can pay this much for a hotel," or be like, "OK, well, I'm trying to do this on a budget. This is where I have to stay in between." So, I think seeing your socioeconomic status varies, so going with someone that's similar, you're going to trust them more because you're like, "This is where they stayed, and they had this experience, and this is the experience we're going for."

Regardless of the strength of social ties, knowing the characteristics and personality of the friend became more important than whether the circle of friends was close or distant. When comparing a close or distant friend, participant A10 tended to trust the closer friend due to the relevance of their culture and character.

Relevance in character and culture can be revealed by the personality traits of the reviewer, and they are sometimes considered more important than the social influence of the participants' friends. The S-eWOM triggered credibility judgements by participants through the importance of relevance. People's behaviour on social media, such as showing off their life to their network of friends, altered the way the participants evaluated online reviews on social media platforms, thus causing them to trust S-eWOM more than friends who post on social networks. When friendships play out only or largely on social media, friends lack knowledge of the other party. The intended audience of their network and circle of friends negatively influenced how participants perceived the credibility of the message. This is because, as Participant A2 explained, on social media, individuals are not honest when

sharing photos with other friends. Consequently, it can be wise to place more value on a review from a traveller from TripAdvisor due to a lack of bias in such a setting compared to that of social media, where objectivity is complicated by friendship or prior relationships.

In some cases, S-eWOM influenced participants' perceptions of the credibility of online reviews. Depending on how close the social ties between the participants and their Facebook friends were, this translated into how well they knew their friends in terms of their personalities, characters, and cultural backgrounds. Regardless of the social interaction between the customer and the source, the social connection that stems from the personality traits of the source thus determines the granting of credibility to the S-eWOM. The relevance of the customer and the source, in addition to the personality traits of the source, can lead to personal connections between the two parties, thereby influencing the credibility of the S-eWOM.

The ability to verify the information and seek reassurance through reaching out to friends, as well as being able to hear what they say and see their facial expressions, was shown to influence participants' evaluation of the information provided. Knowing the friends to the extent that they could acknowledge the feelings of others and predict their reactions in certain situations positively influenced the credibility of eWOM. Suppose they spoke their mind and were easily influenced by others: Is this person truthful or not? Do they manipulate people? Is this person negative in their thinking, always looking at the negative side of things?

This research shows that S-eWOM influences the credibility of online reviews mostly through facilitating relevance between the communicator and the customer in terms of revealing the personality and character of the reviewer (personal characteristics and cultural background) to seek a personal connection. In addition, some participants valued the effects

of S-eWOM on the credibility of online reviews through the psychological support they sought and received.

4.8.2. Minor Theme 2: Media Type Preferences

In the section on the content theme of the study, the researcher discussed the importance of photos and videos in making eWOM more credible in the eyes of users or travellers. As Participant A10 shared, both the textual information and visuals, such as photos, provide the future travellers who were reading the reviews with an idea of what their experience would be like:

Because I like what we've seen before, like the reviews. There's, like, tens of thousands of reviews for certain places, and there are positive and negative reviews and pictures and, basically, all the details that you would need to know about a place before going there. So that's good because as a person who wants to travel somewhere, it gives as much information as in one place as possible.

Participant S16 also shared that videos and photos can help an undecided traveller in the decision-making process:

I feel videos can be a little easier to understand if they're real or not compared to pictures because pictures, anyone can take or anything, where videos, if they show, "Here is our courtyard, here's what our rooms look like." So, it's easier to be—I don't know. In my mind, it just looks easier to photoshop pictures than make up a video, but I don't know. I think with videos, you also consider that are they just showing their best feature?

This comparison made by the participant between the use of photos and that of videos indicated that since photos are easier to edit, they reflect a lack of a sense of reality compared to videos, which show more of a sense of reality of TRPS.

To summarize the credibility determinants of TRPS identified by participants, the findings of this research revealed an integrative framework for granting credibility consisting of five themes: content, customer, communicator, context, and community. The content is created by the communicator, which is considered the source of information. The interpretation of the content is influenced by the customer, who is considered the receiver of information through the evaluation of both the content and the communicator. The customer also evaluates the content provided by the community (friends and social networks), which is shown to create social eWOM, hence influencing the credibility of online reviews. The context of the COVID-19 pandemic influenced both the communicator and the customer. Additionally, the customer interacts with the platform and the product type.

The third research question of the study—How does media richness, as measured by visual clues (e.g., photos and videos), influence credibility and trust in eWOM? — investigated the effects of media richness on travellers' perceived credibility. Like the findings from the first data source, most participants also identified that photos and videos helped communicate the messages of the reviews, positively or negatively influencing the users' decision-making process. For these participants, authentic and compelling visuals encouraged them to explore the setting and destination. One other minor theme emerged that might require further research, given the limited number of references. Table 5 (Appendix G) contains the breakdown of the themes of the media richness determinant.

4.9 Summary

Regarding the characteristics or factors of online reviews that influence travellers' perceived credibility of eWOM, most participants believed in the effectiveness of the posts consisting of authentic reviews from customers that contained a mix of both positive and negative observations. They also considered other tourists' suggestions and recommendations as credible if the content of their reviews exhibited four dimensions—quality, quantity,

manner, and relevance to evaluate the content theme. The three major themes (content, customer, and communicator) with their determinants contributed to answering the first research question: What factors influence the credibility of eWOM, and how do they interact?

The content and quality and quantity determinants are considered factors that influence the credibility of eWOM. The argument quality of the written text of the review, such as descriptive details, recency, diversity, and comprehensiveness of the content, are essential factors in enhancing the credibility of eWOM, especially when the review is justified with visuals (photos and videos) and these visuals have a certain level of reasonable quality and quantity. The source of visuals became vital in assessing the intention of sharing such visuals. When participants compared the property's visuals and reviewers' (travellers') visuals, they granted more credibility to reviewers' photos and videos than to those published by the properties.

Furthermore, consistency within reviews was found to influence participants' credibility judgements. The writing style of the text and grammatical and spelling errors were found to decrease the credibility of eWOM. Moreover, the number of reviews posted was shown to influence credibility judgement. The overall ratings of TRPS and the travellers' or reviewers' ratings, especially an average rating, were shown to influence the credibility of eWOM, while extreme ratings were shown to decrease the credibility of eWOM. Negative reviews were shown to influence credibility judgement if they were supported with justification and reasoning for the negative travel experience. Thus, content length becomes vital to accommodate the required descriptive details.

Regarding the communicator, source credibility and expertise were found to influence the credibility of eWOM. The source is either the reviewer or the platform (TripAdvisor), the latter specializing in travel and providing a sense of travel community.

The customer played a crucial role in this research in critically evaluating online reviews, assessing the communicator's PII, and seeking relevance with the source, content, and socioenvironmental factors such as implementing measures to slow the spread of COVID-19. The relevancy of the content of the review to the TRPS and the context (COVID-19) increased the credibility of eWOM. The recency of the content facilitated the relevance to the situation—significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the relevancy between the communicator and customer was a crucial finding because all participants were seeking relevancy between them and the reviewer in several aspects (sociocultural status, income, travel preferences, and travel group) to reflect similar travel experiences in the hope of meeting customers' travel expectations.

The relationship between the three major themes (content, customer, and communicator) and the interaction between these themes' determinants contributed to answering the subquestion concerning how the credibility determinants interact. Consistency was found to play a role in participants' credibility judgement, as they were seeking patterns, especially with a negative valence of reviews. Moreover, this effect is increased when the relevance appears between the customer and the communicator. The inclusion of grammatical and spelling errors in reviews negatively influenced the perception of the communicator in terms of the source's credibility and expertise. Participants felt that grammatical errors and spelling mistakes could signal emotional or biased reviewers, detracting from source credibility. Likewise, the source's expertise level was also negatively affected by the inclusion of grammar and spelling mistakes, thus negatively influencing the credibility judgement.

Participants perceived the ratings of reviews as subjective, and the interaction between the star rating and the written content, especially the consistency between the ratings, content, and visuals, were found to influence credibility judgement. The star ratings

were found to signal a subjective source that did not positively influence the credibility of eWOM. Supporting a written text with star rating and visuals signalled an objective source, which positively influenced the credibility of eWOM.

A high versus low number of posted reviews, especially with review valence (positive vs negative), altered participants' decision-making because some participants were found to perform calculations between the number of positive versus negative reviews to reach a decision that the reviews are representative of the travel experience. The travellers' ratings reflect the overall TRPS ratings of the product. For example, fewer reviewers leaving only highly positive reviews lead to a high positive overall rating of TRPS. Furthermore, a high number of reviewers leaving mixed ratings (negative, average, and positive) that led to positive reviews create a true reflection of the positive travel experiences of reviewers.

Most participants perceived the association between negative review valence and descriptive details within the content, which increased credibility. In contrast, positive reviews were perceived as more generic and lacking the required TRPS descriptive details to support the decision-making of customers, decreasing credibility. The interaction between the length of the content (being lengthy) and negative review valence signalled an emotionally biased reviewer, which detracted from the credibility of eWOM.

The more respondents perceived a source as objective because the source was not viewed as emotionally biased, the more credibility the participants ascribed to the eWOM. Participants appreciated PII (name, age, gender and location, past travel experience to trigger travel expertise, and contributor status), and it was found to assist the customer's decision whether to relate to the communicator or not. Additionally, it was found that PII assists customers in their evaluation of online reviews of the travel destination because it allows the customer to determine whether the reviewer is from a similar or different culture.

The second research question addressed the effect of S-eWOM on travellers' perceptions of the credibility of eWOM. Most participants noted that they were more critical in evaluating S-eWOM compared to eWOM, as it involved the added dimension of their acquaintances' personality traits. Based on their perceptions of their Facebook friends as reliable, trusted individuals, the participants granted credibility to the former's online reviews. The community theme, which capitalized on the strength of social ties, influenced the credibility of S-eWOM through the effect of relevance to customers' preferences and travel tastes and knowledge of the personality traits of the reviewer (being a close friend to the customer). Neuroticism was identified in this research as a personality trait that decreases the credibility of eWOM. This personality trait of individuals who primarily focus on only the negative aspects of things prevents the content from being diversified and comprehensive and lacks the balanced perspective of including both the positive and negative aspects of review evaluation, which is found to increase the credibility of eWOM.

Finally, media richness has a significant influence on the perceived credibility of reviews. Consequently, diverse and comprehensive reviews containing reviewers' own photos and videos and TripAdvisor being seen as both contextual and interactional were indeed shown to improve and increase the credibility of the eWOM. This suggests that the affordances of media richness affect travellers' perceptions of credibility. The greater the richness of the medium (written text, visuals), the higher the perceived credibility of eWOM. This research contributes to answering the third research question concerning the influence of visuals on the credibility of eWOM. To answer this question, higher argument quality of the content (descriptive details, diversified and balanced review) and a medium length of the review, accompanied by a higher number of reviews and visuals posted by the reviewer, the greater the perceived credibility of eWOM. Regarding the quality of visuals, the reasonable

quality of the visuals, specifically photos, is recommended to signal more authenticity of the visuals and the source.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter provides an analysis of prior research on credibility perceptions in light of this research's findings on participants' perceptions of credibility. It provides a thorough discussion of the theories applied in this study, which form the framework of logic and conversation theory principles that explain and describe customers' granting of credibility to electronic word of mouth (eWOM), to explain the credibility of eWOM. This is followed by the application of media richness theory (MRT) to understand the richness of information provided on the TripAdvisor platform to grant credibility to eWOM. In addition, this section discusses the importance of the influence of the Big Five personality traits model on the effects of social eWOM (S-eWOM) on participants' credibility judgement. Finally, a proposed new integrated model that draws from these three theoretical frameworks provides a robust explanation of the findings of this study.

The participants were shown to apply cooperative principles through logic and conversation, consistent with the Grice model, to assess the content of online reviews. Grice's logic and conversation theory consists of four maxims: quantity, quality, relevance, and manner. In this study, this model was shown to be applied naturally by the participants to reach their credibility and trust judgements regarding the content of online reviews.

In this study, the researcher used both deductive and inductive methods, thus capitalizing on both a hypothesis using the MRT and the grounded theory approach (logic and conversation, the Big Five personality traits) to describe the framework consumers applied and used to grant credibility to eWOM. The hypothesis for the study was that characteristics of the content with visuals (photos and videos) and the customers themselves who read, evaluate, and assess both online reviews and the communicator may affect the association between eWOM credibility and its determinants.

5.1. Perception of Credibility

Credibility is contextual. In this research, the definition of credibility was based on the context of social commerce (SC; the credibility of online reviews related to tourism on social media) and participants' perceptions and definitions of the credibility of online reviews. According to Lin et al. (2012), credibility is the degree to which recipients believe the content of a message. According to Tseng and Fogg (1999), credibility can be defined as "believability." Levy and Gvili (2015) argued that "the extent to which one believes that the recommendations or evaluations of other consumers are credible, genuine, or accurate." is the definition of credibility in the context of eWOM. Since there was no agreement on a single definition of the concept of credibility in the literature, the researcher gave participants the autonomy to define credibility in their own ways and the concept of credibility from their own perspectives. Previous quantitative research studies were undertaken to analyze the message credibility variables determined by the researcher. Current indicators such as "believable," "accurate," "actual," and "credible information" are used to assess message reliability (Cheung et al., 2009). However, in this research, participants defined credibility as the viewpoint that is most compatible with their own, and ultimately, most participants perceived the expertise and trustworthiness of the source as the most influential factor underlying credibility.

Participant perception that the trustworthiness of a reviewer had been confirmed through the several dimensions and themes described herein led to the highest perception of credibility. Most participants focused on the source of information when describing the credibility dimensions to arrive at a definition of credibility. However, other participants focused on the content of the message to determine credibility in their perception. First, an expert source with a high level of trustworthiness and reliability was the most cited dimension of credibility, with seven participants mentioning this dimension. Four participants

believed that the source should be honest and believable, which aligns with Tseng and Fogg's (1999) finding that credibility is perceived as believability. Furthermore, one participant stated that the source having a favourable reputation, such as a respected brand name, contributes to the source's credibility.

Regarding the message content, five participants stated that message content should be consistent, diverse, and comprehensive to achieve credibility. In addition, according to one participant, providing justification and reasoning in the content leads to credibility. This aligns with the findings of Lin et al. (2012) that credibility is reached when recipients believe the content of a message. This means that the source and the content of the message together form the credibility definition with its dimensions (expertise, reliability, trustworthiness, honesty, a positive reputation, consistency, diversity, comprehensiveness, and justification and reasoning).

5.2. Determinants of Credibility and Trustworthiness

As for the credibility determinants of travel-related products and services (TRPS), the findings of this research revealed an integrative framework to grant credibility consisting of content, customer, communicator, context, and community. The content is created by the communicator, who is considered the source of information. The interpretation of the content is influenced by the customer, who is considered the receiver of information. Customers evaluated both the content and the communicator, who spreads the eWOM message. Customers also evaluated the content provided by the community (friends and social networks), which is shown to create S-eWOM and hence influenced the credibility of online reviews. Finally, the context influenced the communicator and the customer: the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in addition to the platform (TripAdvisor) and the product type (restaurants, hotels, and attractions). This integrative framework is illustrated in Figure 2.

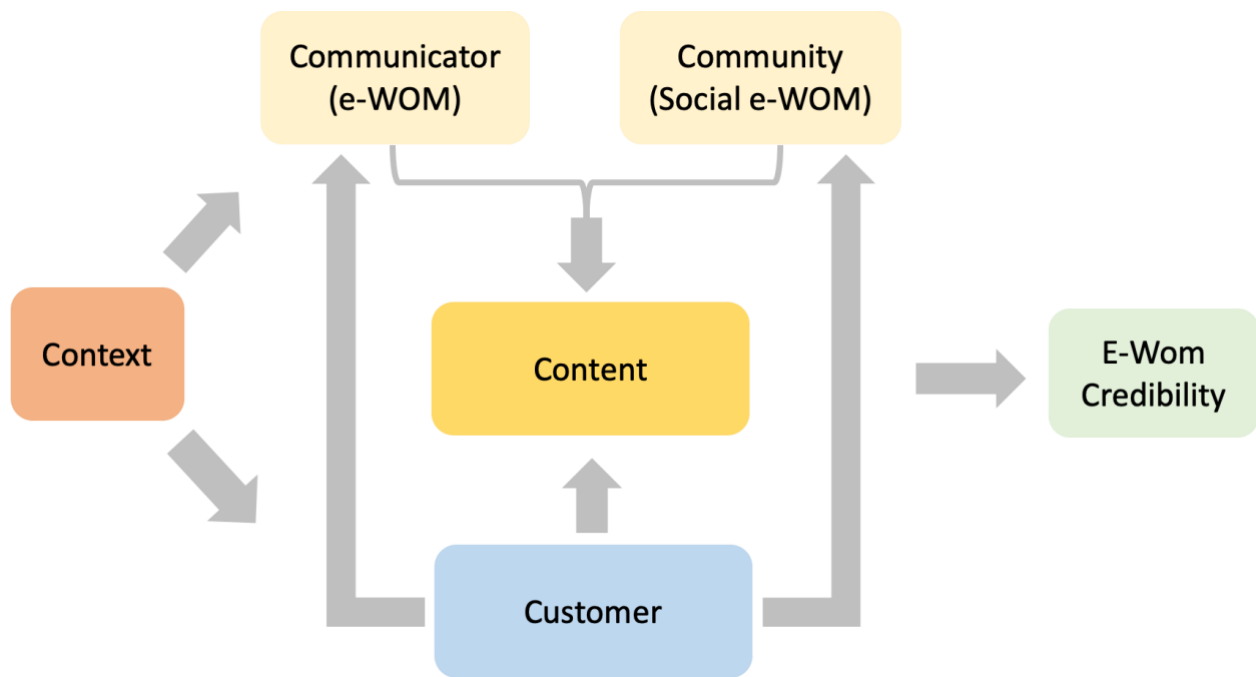


Figure 2. Determinants of Credibility and Trustworthiness in Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)

For a review to be considered informative and thus credible by participants, it should meet several determinants and criteria. First, the content, communicator, and customer themes interact to facilitate objective perceptions of eWOM by participants. The content must have the required quality and quantity of reviews to be informative. The quality factors interact with the determinants of quality, namely the advice given; recency, which suggests accuracy; and the argument quality with descriptive details related to TRPS. This diversified content includes two-sided arguments with positive and negative highlights and the different angles or aspects of the overall travel experience. The recommendations on preparing for the trip and comprehensiveness, which triggers a holistic image and picture in the customer's mind, were influential, as were the personalization and identification of individuals by names or descriptions.

5.2.1. Content

Content clarity is an essential determinant of argument quality. The participants' understanding was negatively affected if the review was unclear and not easily understood.

Justification and reasoning within a negative review are crucial for convincing participants about why the reviewer was unsatisfied with the TRPS. Consistency is essential in determining the quality of content, including consistent trends and information in the written text of the review, rating-content consistency, and rating-content visual (i.e., photo) consistency.

Another dimension of review quantity is reviewing valence: whether it is positively or negatively framed against how many reviews are positive or negative. The extremity of ratings (one star or five stars) is related to the source's credibility, as it suggests an emotional reviewer who is viewed as biased. Review quantity refers to the number of negative or positive reviews posted by a reviewer or to the TripAdvisor platform rating—that is, whether the attraction is rated as one of the top 10 attractions recommended on the TripAdvisor platform. A high number of reviews suggests a consensus among travellers, who agree with the overall positive or negative evaluation of the TRPS. Participants further highlighted the specific qualities of visuals (photos and videos), such as high resolution or light and shadow exposure manipulation within an image, which changes the feel and depth of the photo. This may suggest that either the photo has been edited or manipulated or a professional photographer was hired, which reflects business marketing tactics of selling the TRPS for financial gain. It negatively affects the credibility judgement in a way similar to that of sponsored reviews or property advertising. Cell-phone-quality photos increase the credibility of eWOM. The facial expressions shown in the reviewers' photos reflect the photos' authenticity. The theme of customer interaction with both the communicator and the content forms the basis of the credibility of eWOM.

5.2.2. Customer

Customer behaviour involves cross-referencing activity, subjectivity, and self-trust. Consumers' traits and purchase involvement drive customer subjectivity, which affects the

customer's behaviour and attitudes toward the review and hence affects the persuasiveness of an eWOM message. Cross-referencing activities to conduct third-party research with other travel websites are also vital for customer behaviour to verify and reach reassurance behaviour to grant credibility to eWOM. Finally, customer self-trust also plays a minor role in influencing the credibility of eWOM.

Customer behaviour and cognitive effort are essential in critically analyzing the content of reviews and seeking relevance to the TRPS within this content. If the written text of the review is perceived as irrelevant to the TRPS, the source of the message (i.e., the reviewer) is considered biased, which detracts from the review's credibility. If the source and written text are not relevant to the customer's preferences, socioeconomic status, culture, travel style, and quality standards, the lack of relevance negatively affects the credibility of the online reviews. Customers look for diversity and comprehensiveness in the information provided within the review before considering it representative of their own travel experience. All parts of this integrative framework interact to enable the participant to judge whether the content is comprehensive, diverse, informative, and objective. Informativeness and objectivity create a sense of reliability. An essential question for customers, however, is whether it is applicable. This is key to achieving the overall credibility of eWOM. The answer to this critical question is the relevance or the concept that bridges the gap between reliability and credibility.

Previous research has determined the role of customers in giving credibility to eWOM and their perceived role as moderators between the content and the communicator (Verma & Dewani, 2020). In this research, the customer played a significant role in critically analyzing the communicator and the content of the review. Awareness of the effect of context, such as platform, product type, and the socioenvironmental factors related to the COVID-19 pandemic, interfered with the credibility judgement of eWOM. Platform, product type, and

the COVID-19 pandemic were the three prominent factors affecting the credibility of eWOM messages in the real world. Although eWOM messages are sent or received through a channel (Cao et al., 2018), in a virtual world, it is challenging to judge the trustworthiness of eWOM based only on the characteristics of the source. Therefore, the perception of the platform is crucial in determining how effective eWOM messages are.

Additionally, more information is required before consumers can decide on products that are hard to access, but less information and time are required for other products before a decision is made. Therefore, product type is considered a significant factor affecting how individuals perceive eWOM messages about products such as restaurants and hotels versus messages about adventure activities and things to do.

5.2.3. Communicator

Communicators are sources or speakers (Ismagilova et al., 2017). A receiver is aware of the communicator's characteristics in traditional communication, but identifying the communicator's characteristics is more difficult in eWOM communication because both the sender and receiver of the information are anonymous. The primary factors affecting the credibility of eWOM information are associated with information linked to the communicators. These include the background, culture, and travel lifestyle of the reviewer. Travel taste and quality standards are also specific to S-eWOM.

Culture is a collective programming of the mind that helps differentiate one group of individuals from the rest. Individualism–collectivism orientation is considered the most crucial aspect in the different cultural dimensions. Individuals from individualistic cultures (e.g., Canadian) have loosely connected social groups and judge the credibility of information using much mental work. Individuals from collectivistic cultures (e.g., Asian and Egyptian) also prefer a tight-knit social structure and are more likely to accept consistent social

recommendations or opinions. Owing to variations in culture, individuals from different cultural backgrounds think differently about eWOM messages.

The communicator's role in reinforcing the source's status as informative to increase the richness of the medium provides source credibility. This aligns with previous work stating that a high level of source credibility involves the motivation or ability of the communicator or speaker to provide accurate and truthful information. Source expertise involves the ability of a communicator or speaker to make valid claims (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Ayeh et al. (2013) researched TripAdvisor's reliability, using knowledge and trustworthiness as the key determinants of credibility, and discovered that trustworthiness was more significant in situations where it is perceived to be compromised. This research shows that the more the source is viewed as objective by revealing personal identification information (PII, e.g., gender, profile picture and name, and sociocultural identity) combined with providing diversified content with positives and negatives and a neutral tone (not emotional), the more the customer will believe the source is far from being subjective. This facilitates the credibility judgement of customers.

Source Credibility Model. The importance of the source's objectivity is also supported by previous literature on using the source credibility model to determine the effect of the trustworthiness, expertise, and competence of the source on the credibility of eWOM (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). According to the model, source credibility significantly influences how the receiver thinks and feels about persuasive messages (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). According to the social information processing and uncertainty reduction theories, source credibility and homophily positively affect the credibility of eWOM (Verma & Dewani, 2020). Individuals may reduce the uncertainty associated with eWOM communication by using factors such as gender, number of followers, and profile picture. This research adds to

the previous argument that the customer will seek relevance between them and the source (communicator) to the degree that it signals a personal connection between them.

In previous research, the critical aspects of eWOM communication are the message, source, channel, and receiver (Yan et al., 2018). The content and communication used in eWOM directly affect its credibility. The receiver's characteristics, however, may act as a moderator, weakening or strengthening the effect on the credibility of eWOM (Verma & Dewani, 2020). Still, compared with previous studies, this research advocated customers and observed their crucial roles in building their credibility judgement. Further, tangible goods, where the quality is expected to be satisfying regardless of where it was purchased, may impose fewer risks than experiential goods and services (Chocarro et al., 2021). Hence, participants tend to adopt the integrative framework of logic and conversation to grant credibility to the content of the review. Additionally, the influence of the application of MRT to assess the richness of TripAdvisor as a travel platform reinforces the credibility of eWOM.

5.3. Logic and Conversation

The cooperative principle proposed by Grice (1975) to explain the logic and conversation theory is an important guideline for participating in online review evaluations. It states that a contribution should be made in a way that is appropriate for the purpose or direction of the conversation. Any infringement on this principle lowers the degree of credibility perceived by participants. The cognitive framework used by participants to reach a credibility judgement consists of four categories of maxims and submaxims, as illustrated in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Maxims of Conversation: Grice Model to Grant Credibility

5.3.1. Quantity

The quantity of information refers to the required content length. A medium to reasonably long descriptive review correlates with an objective source, whereas overly lengthy reviews are perceived by participants as written by a biased or subjective source, which damages the credibility of eWOM. Very short reviews that use general terms and lack descriptive details of the TRPS are perceived as fake. In other words, participants felt that credible reviewers provided an adequate amount of information, but only information pertaining to a specific service or good. Quantity involved the length of the content and number of reviews in addition to the star rating system. The optimum length of the review could range from medium to reasonably long if it had the required descriptive details, justification, and reasoning supporting the travel experience of the reviewer.

Only the required information should be included for the purpose of the conversation to be clear and to reach a high level of understanding between parties (Grice, 1975). In this study, the researcher analyzed data from a sample of participants to determine the relationships among communicator, content, and customers in granting credibility to online reviews using the TripAdvisor platform. The information required was determined through the length of the content. The optimum length of the review could range from medium to

reasonably long if it had the required descriptive details, justification, and reasoning supporting the travel experience of the reviewer. Moreover, a high number of reviews posted by reviewers triggered a consensus among travellers on the popularity and high quality of TRPS. The TRPS requires an average rating (3–4 or 3–4.5 stars), with most ratings having a positive review valence.

An infringement on the quantity maxim can be a small number of posted reviews, including very long or very short reviews that either contain unnecessary information or lack descriptive details of the TRPS, indicating both extremes, with reviews being either excellent (five stars) or poor (one star). This infringement lowers participants' perceptions of credibility. A very long review is considered an infringement on the quantity maxim that lowers the credibility of the source by questioning the motive for writing the review. For example, a participant stated, "I just feel that giving more description is better, but without overloading with too much information, then trying to question, how do you remember everything that happened?" For that, an important element comes into play in the required number of details and length of the content, which signals credibility of eWOM.

5.3.2. *Quality*

Falsehoods and statements that lack adequate evidence should be avoided (Grice, 1975). The study of online reviews, which lead to the dissemination of eWOM, assesses how customers process information. It encompasses a wide range of factors, from the structure and use of words within the content of the review to the development of visuals by reviewers and argument quality of the content with the consistency of reviewers. The quality of the review content was an important factor in understanding the customers' or readers' perceptions of the credibility of eWOM. Quality review content must contain descriptive details, including a description of the TRPS, and a two-sided review and is based on the recency of the review, the clarity of the content, personalized experience with individual

identification, helpful tips, and justification and reasoning to support the argument in a negative review. In addition, it must feature a good writing style (good grammar, no typographical errors), comprehensiveness, visuals, and consistency.

Infringement on the quality maximum lowered participants' perceptions of credibility. The quality of a review, in the sense that a poor-quality written review may contain unnecessary or irrelevant descriptive details, triggers a negative perception of reviewer bias and lowers the perceived credibility of eWOM. For example, a one-sided review that is purely positive or negative signals review subjectivity, potentially due to its lack of diversity—that is, different opinions and perspectives in the content. The lack of consistency, especially between negative reviews, lowers the credibility of the review. Lack of justification and reasoning, especially among negative reviews, fails to support the argument, negatively influencing the argument quality and hence the credibility of eWOM. The descriptive details within the content should be related to TRPS, so content irrelevant to descriptive details about TRPS lowers the quality of the review. In addition, relevance mediates the relationship between the quality (TRPS descriptive details) and the quantity (the individual star rating or traveller or reviewer star rating). This means that if the customer who reads the review sees a contradiction between the star rating and the quality of the written text of the review, the perceived credibility of online reviews would decrease.

5.3.3. Relationship (“Relevance, Be Relevant”)

Customers naturally recognize the importance of relevance in making credibility judgements (Grice, 1975). Relevance involves several factors, such as the content and the source. The description of the review content should align with the TRPS, and the relevance of the star rating of the review should go hand in hand with the written content of the review, current relevant sociopolitical concerns, such as COVID-19, and the travel activity (travel group), and relevance between the reviewer and the customer. For example, a consumer

searching for destinations for a family of five may not be interested in reviews or content related to adults-only destinations. On the other hand, the source should be relevant to the socioeconomic identity and culture of the consumer (i.e., a family review vs a solo traveller).

As described by a participant:

Another thing would also be ... is their situation like mine. For example, [to] a woman that had small children, it might be credible, but to me it's not. ... I don't have children, so I wouldn't. There is no match in interests ... so it doesn't really impact me as much.

Being able to connect with the source matters most to consumers, leading to the reflection of a similar travel experience between the source (communicator) and the receiver (customer). This shared similarity in travel experience or opinion increases the credibility of eWOM, as well as the relevance to the customer's preferences, likes, and dislikes, and allows for customization according to what is important to the customer's travel experience.

The relevance to the culture of the participants was found to be important in granting credibility to the review when participants were evaluating negative reviews (i.e., by locals vs tourists). As noted by a participant, "I like to see ... is it, like, a culture shock or is it ... are they from there or are they, like, in Europe or are they maybe from, like, a completely different country." The possibility of culture clashes between tourists and local people at the travel destination was an element that influenced the participants' evaluation of online reviews. Participants appreciated similarities in culture between the source and the receiver of the eWOM. For example:

Because, like, over here, this person is from Georgia, which is already in the USA. So, they might be already experienced with the American hotel culture, but this person has a foreigner point of view. And, like, going from Canada to Orlando, I

would also have a similar point of viewpoint like a foreigner. Because we are from different countries.

Other participants were also supportive of the role of culture and contributed to the argument: “I’ve been to Paris before. Again, it could be the culture. I’m kind of picking up the pieces that it’s not just the staff, it’s everybody else in that area, it seems like. It’s a cultural thing.”

The relevance of eWOM content also contributes to the perceived quality and quantity of the content. Relevance to the quality dimensions of the content of the review becomes of importance as well. As one participant stated, “She didn’t say, like, ‘Oh, I felt that. I felt not respected,’ or something like that, or ‘I didn’t sleep well. I stayed up all night.’ It’s really, like, it was there, and, like, that happened.” This indicated that the participant was looking for something tangible related to TRPS within the content of the review in a way to perceive the source as objective. Relevance also mediates the relationship between the quality (TRPS descriptive details) and quantity of the content, which is the individual star rating (the traveller or reviewer’s star rating). This means that if the customer who reads the review sees a contradiction between the star rating and the quality of the written text of the review, they will perceive a decrease in the credibility of online reviews:

If the text matches sort of rating that they have, then that’s obviously more credible, OK, compared to when the rating, the individual rating, may not be perfectly coherent with the text. I would trust more the overall average rating.

Another participant supported this argument:

For example, if this was one star and it just said, “The service was bad,” I’d be like, “This isn’t really telling me much. You need to tell me more. Why was it bad for you to give one star?”

An infringement on the relevance maxim appears to decrease the perceived credibility of eWOM, but there may be other driving factors behind this finding. Regardless of the other

maxims, if the source or content of the review is perceived as irrelevant to the customer's culture, preferences and taste, social identity group, profession, and income and lacks the homophily effect, the participants remove that review from their consideration of the overall credibility of all reviews. Thus, it perhaps is not so much that a review irrelevant to the specific consumer is deemed to lack credibility but rather that the lack of relevance of specific eWOM determines the content to be removed from the consumer's consideration in the process of collectively deciding whether the reviews and ratings associated with a location or service are credible.

5.3.4 Manner

Ideas should be easy to understand by being clear and concise. Ambiguity should be avoided, and a brief overview or description should be given. This facilitates the understanding between parties and enhances the quality of the conversation among people (Grice, 1975). The clarity of the review becomes an important factor in the credibility of eWOM. The clarity of the review content creates customer expectations about the travel experience and how customers learn more about the TRPS. Diversified content, with a comprehensive overview of the different aspects related to the travel experience, enhances the clarity of the content, which positively influences the credibility of eWOM. Elements of writing style and quality, such as strong emotional connotations, typing errors and spelling mistakes, coarse language, and so on, also influence perceived credibility. These writing elements indicate strong emotions from the source, which reflect bias and results in decreased perceptions of credibility from eWOM. An infringement on the final Gricean maxim of manner is a vague, general review that does not contain descriptive details that contribute to the travel experience of the reviewer. Hence, ambiguity decreases the credibility of online reviews.

To summarize, Grice's model—the four maxims of quality, quantity, manner, and relevance discussed above—is focused on content as a credibility determinant that explains the credibility of the content of online reviews adopted by participants. The submaxims derived from this model are essential in influencing the credibility of the content, which was determined to be a central theme in the results of this research, with minor themes such as the quality of the content and the quantity of the reviews, star ratings, and review valence. Furthermore, participants paid attention to the manner in which the content of the review was presented and whether it was clear and direct in terms of explaining the reviewer's TRPS experience. Finally, relevance was crucial for participants in this study and included under the major customer theme. For instance, it showed how participants (customers) evaluated the content's message relevance to TRPS, themselves, and their travel experience. Any infringement that occurred in one of the maxims or submaxims of Grice's model was found to decrease the credibility of eWOM.

5.4 Application of the MRT and Its Determinants

MRT provides a conceptual framework for evaluating a communications platform and its affordances based on its capacity to deliver rich information that can alter comprehension, typically by lowering ambiguity (Daft & Lengel, 1986). It implies that some media channels are more robust than others. For example, in a written memorandum, information is delivered through the text, its formatting, and the surrounding context. In contrast, in a face-to-face exchange, facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language provide extra clues to the context of spoken words and collectively serve as the information that alters comprehension or conveys meaning to the receiver.

According to Brinker et al. (2015), the vast array of technological affordances provided by newer media channels increases variation in media usage; for instance, images can be added to an email to make it more visually appealing. Like how companies can choose

media channels that best handle their information challenges, new media users tend to appropriate technologies to best meet their needs (Baym et al., 2004; Daft & Lengel, 1986). This shows that the richness of a selected medium is not necessarily quantified by a discrete objective value but rather fluctuates depending on how appropriate it is to meet the user's requirements. It also suggests that the depth of any given online review is contingent on its construction.

In the context of MRT, the online reviews of travellers who shared their vacation experience via written and image-based reviews were evaluated. Online reviews transfer the travel-knowledge identities of reviewers and can mediate written communication exchanges between business management and reviewers, thus enabling environments co-constructed by reviewers, business management, and the platform itself. Participants in this study evaluated and assessed this relationship and determined the authenticity of eWOM depending on the information depth retrieved from visuals associated with reviews. This research employed the theoretical lens of MRT to explore how the use of visuals (photos and videos) deliver rich information that lowers ambiguity related to travel and tourism through the three richness dimensions (contextual, interactional, and informational).

Visuals posted on TripAdvisor may serve as cues to enrich the content of any individual review (TripAdvisor, 2022). Furthermore, considering information problems as the task of broadcasting personal messages to generate shared meanings among senders and receivers (Baym, 2015), it was anticipated that richer reviews posted by travellers would be more effective at delivering easily understood messages with a higher level of clarity and quality, thereby signalling the credibility of the eWOM.

Customers with a high level of sophistication understand that different types of cues enhance visuals and online review richness in a manner that facilitates comprehension of the review's message and attributes the review's content to various cues, such as the star rating,

written text, and source of visuals (property's vs traveller's). Organizations have varying information requirements (Daft & Lengel, 1986), as do various media channels.

Understanding how various groups of actors, such as users on the TripAdvisor platform, use these affordances may provide further information related to the determining factors that inform how customers perceive the legitimacy of the social media platform. Interestingly, many of these factors have formed over time, indicating that they have developed through cultural evolution as electronic communication platforms have emerged (Bruns & Burgess, 2011).

The qualities of online review text provide many communicative action options that reduce ambiguity and therefore increase media richness in various ways. The categorization of travel-related items and services based on the highest TripAdvisor star rating and recommendation and the best value of TRPS by reviewers has emerged as a crucial capability for informing participants' decision and reaching public consensus regarding TRPS. Still, the context of the online review evaluation must be indicated. Some reviewers left a star rating without the inclusion of the written text of the review justifying the rating. Thus, a lower level of richness of the medium has been observed, which negatively influenced the credibility of eWOM. To enhance the richness of the medium, a combination of well-written text with visuals that specifies an audience for the review's message would strengthen the bond between the source and the recipient of the eWOM, hence positively influencing eWOM credibility.

An important set of affordances related to media richness is the content of the review, supported by different forms of visual information (photos and videos), and the source of information, with the written language of the reviews supported by the star ratings and the date to reflect the recency of the eWOM, thereby enriching eWOM by including more data. Based on a review of the literature, one may classify these affordances into three logical

categories: contextual (the categorization of different TRPS activities), interactional (the interaction between reviewers and the management or business brand in response to traveller reviews and comments), and informational (the quality and quantity of the content, the source's credibility, and expert information). The three affordance groups communicate information such as spoken words, body language, and tone of voice to enrich the information in a face-to-face channel. Thus, a review's depth results from the strategic mixing of various divisions. Still, these measurements could be improved (e.g., a photo could help with context and justifying the review, and a management response could be interactive). For example, based on the contextual dimension of the MRT framework, the number of photos and videos propose varying degrees of richness according to the product type. A higher number of photos of a museum makes the review richer than a high number of photos of a restaurant would. This may be because the core product of a restaurant is different from the core product of a museum, and different travel experiences can be acquired through different core products in a museum.

Additionally, the consistency between the star ratings, text of the reviews, and visuals is perceived to boost the credibility of eWOM. Participants compared the quality of photos between the properties and the reviewers. The attractiveness and appeal of the property's photos do not create customers' expectations of the travel experience, but the reviewer's photos do. This reinforced the authenticity of photos, which influenced the credibility of eWOM. When comparing visuals such as photos and videos, some participants perceived videos as more informative. Video and picture formats produce varying degrees in the dissemination of information, which influences the credibility of eWOM.

Videos have numerous advantages over pictures regarding their ability to convey information. First, videos allow for a greater depth of information because they have sound. With audio, one can explain and accentuate key points, creating a more engaging and

dynamic experience of the TRPS. This audio capability means that video messages can deliver more information than pictures, making them particularly useful for recommendations. Second, videos can depict movement and change, giving them a more natural and lifelike feel, which signals a sense of reality. This quality enables videos to present processes and events in a way that is easy for viewers to comprehend. For example, a video can illustrate how a traveller views the visited place, making these concepts more intuitive than static pictures can. This makes videos an exceptional tool in visual information where motion is vital in informing customer decision-making.

On the other hand, pictures have unique advantages as well. Pictures can present a lot of information quickly if they are of decent quality and a complete picture of the core product of TRPS. Participants greatly appreciated this for visuals to be considered informative. Moreover, details and concepts can be absorbed from a picture that might take longer with a video. This makes pictures convenient for quickly processing information, such as dishes in a restaurant. The high number of pictures posted by the reviewer increased the credibility of eWOM, especially regarding museums. Museums are institutions that house collections of objects of historical, artistic, or cultural significance for exhibition and which cater to different interests and goals of customers. Because museums have different areas of focus, the number of visuals becomes of an importance to influence the credibility of eWOM.

Both videos and pictures have advantages and limitations regarding providing informational value to feed customers' decisions. However, the choice of which one to use may depend on the context in which it is being used. For example, some participants perceived a food picture on a social media platform posted for a targeted audience (social media friends) as decreasing the authenticity of visuals, while on the TripAdvisor platform, it increased the authenticity of visuals. Videos are ideal for imparting in-depth information on

processes, events, and concepts; pictures are convenient for quickly conveying information, as some participants stated.

In the context of MRT, in the assessment of online reviews of TRPS, three determinants are considered: the informative, contextual, and interactional determinants of the reviews. For participants to consider a review informative, it had to be useful for customers, as participants reported that the usefulness of the review and the inclusion of helpful tips enhanced the credibility of eWOM. The rating system to evaluate reviews, which categorizes TRPS according to best value, location, price, and popularity (i.e., status as one of the top 10 TRPS in travel destinations), is considered added richness that makes the review more informative. The grouping of TRPS information depends on the context (product type and travel destination), and the different categories of each product type reinforce credibility assessment. The TRPS activities mentioned within the content of the review creates a holistic assessment of different TRPS activities and make it convenient for customers to evaluate eWOM. The provision of visuals from both business sources and travellers facilitates customers' ability to compare the two and grant credibility to the reviewer's visuals, as they reflect a sense of reality. In addition, the intangible factors of the brand name and the positive reputation of TripAdvisor may influence the credibility perception of the platform, affecting the credibility of eWOM. Thus, popularity and branding are as influential as the conceptual trustworthiness of unbiased sources that characterizes eWOM.

Immediate response from customers who read and assess online reviews improves the interactional dimension of MRT, hence influencing the richness of eWOM evaluation. Still, a high interactional level on the platform is needed for the platform to be considered interactional—interestingly, only three participants noticed a management response to a review that could be considered interactional. In contrast, TripAdvisor lacks a rapid response or immediate interactions (e.g., instant chat features) with its users, unlike other social media

platforms, such as Twitter and Snapchat. The variety of information (e.g., visual, written text, star ratings) and variety of sources of information (e.g., reviewers, establishment management responses) greatly enhances the richness of the communication between the customers and reviewers. In turn, this then enhances the credibility of eWOM.

5.5. The Effect of S-eWOM on Credibility Judgement

5.5.1. Personality Traits of Individuals

Personality traits are general patterns of behaviour that are activated when triggered by a situation. They allow individuals to identify their behavioural intentions and decision-making and consumption behaviours. Moral disengagement behaviour refers to individuals' awareness of their malignant behaviour and the justification to morally disengage without feeling distressed about it (Bandura, 1991, 1999). People can disengage from moral responsibility by providing others with exaggerated stories (Kapoor et al., 2021). This often amounts to lying, considered unethical and a breach of social norms. Exaggerated online reviews can lead to dissatisfaction and customer switching behaviours, which are detrimental to firms, as people may have unreasonable expectations about a product. The principle of cooperative communication is to listen and speak only what one knows to be true. It is naïve, however, to assume that this rule always holds. The literature shows that people often lie to protect themselves or to benefit others (Park et al., 2004). Detecting deception can be difficult in online environments because people share information on online platforms without face-to-face communication. Thus, a lying consumer is likely motivated to achieve the desired outcome.

In this study, for example, exaggeration in online reviews was seen as messages intentionally distorted by reviewers by overstating and misrepresenting their actual brand-related experience, which they share with others on online platforms such as TripAdvisor.

Reviewers often exaggerate when they experience the most unpleasant or pleasant moments of their consumption experiences. Participant C4 expressed this in the following statement:

Because you can go somewhere and be super angry and not like anything about it. So, it is just. Alternatively, are they overly happy, and you are going to be too It is like you are on vacation. You are going to love it. Almost every part of it, because you are just away, OK, and you are happy.

5.5.2. Big Five Personality Traits

The Big Five personality traits represent a framework with which to generalize and define individual characteristics and personalities. These personality traits were developed in 1992 by McCrae and Costa and are identified as extraversion, neuroticism, openness to experience (or simply openness), agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Furthermore, each personality trait comprises several distinct traits, including regulating one's impulses, truthfulness, responsibility, and negativity.

The findings of this study support the applicability of this theory to effectively generate a link between an individual's personality traits (the reviewer) and participants' perceptions of the credibility of S-eWOM. The strength of the social tie, whether the customer and the reviewer were closely or loosely tied, influenced the customer's credibility assessment of the source. Participants believed that the personal connection they developed with the reviewer mattered the most. This connection depends on how well the customers know the reviewers in terms of personality traits. In this research, some of participants relied on their assessment of the source and their personality traits. Alternatively, preferences, likes and dislikes, and income facilitate relevance between the two parties and reflect a travel style that contributes to the travel experience's relevance. The strength of the social tie, whether the customer and the reviewer were closely or loosely tied, affected the customer's credibility assessment of the source. Participants believed the personal connection they developed with

the reviewer mattered the most. This is based on how well they know the reviewer regarding their personality traits (12 participants), preferences, likes, dislikes, or income, which reflects a particular travel style.

Therefore, considering the data from the perspective of the Big Five personality traits can provide a framework for analyzing how consumers view the trustworthiness and credibility of S-eWOM. Based on their personality traits and the traits they perceive in others; they may know whether they are reviewing reviews from social connections. For example, an individual high in extraversion tends to possess an optimistic view of the world and speak their mind by sharing their opinions. This trait is also characterized by engagement with the external world. These individuals are full of energy, as they enjoy the presence of others. They are enthusiastic and oriented toward actions (Oshio et al., 2018). As A6 stated, “Oh, depending on how close I am with this person, OK, I would believe because I, for example, I know that this person is a person that says things out of their mind.” In the context of travel activities, extroverted individuals may enjoy exotic adventures and outdoor socialization activities. Participant M7 stated:

But, that being said, like, I have to consider whether or not, like, the Facebook friend is like me because I’ve got a couple friends I feel like, I don’t know, like we’re more inclined to stay in hostels or do, like, that route, whereas I know, like, myself and I know I wouldn’t necessarily travel the way they travel, so if I see similarities to my Facebook friend of myself [I’d] be more likely to believe them than like if I did not.

Neurotic people usually exhibit negative sentiments about other people or events. They express this through rage, despair, and nervousness. This characteristic has frequently been linked to psychological fragility. According to Daniels et al. (2020), individuals with high neuroticism levels have intense affective responses and are more prone to sadness. As reflected in the participants’ responses within this study, one participant wrote, “I feel some

people, when they are writing a review, might refrain from including certain things, like, let us say you had a bad experience or are you going to just focus on the bad, but you will not look at the good side.” Another participant supported this notion, stating,

Certain people look for the negative, and they will point out only the negative. We had a good experience, but because we did not get something, she made it seem like it was the biggest deal. Certain people take it too seriously.

Furthermore, another participant (S16) said:

Because you can see what they post online in general, you can determine their personality or their character. ... If they are online always complaining about something or you can tell, even on a Facebook page, they leave bad comments about things, then in the back of your mind you wonder how credible they are.

Openness is defined as a positive attitude toward certain things. These elements include adventure, art, everyday thoughts, experiences, and curiosity. Individuals who are open to new experiences are often inquisitive. They have gratitude for their skills and a sense of beauty (Oshio et al., 2018). Such people are more likely to have unusual opinions. Individuals scoring high in openness affect the relationship between individuals in terms of communicating and exchanging information. A reciprocal and trusting relationship between the reviewer and consumers who make purchasing decisions based on their feedback is extremely influential for advancing the credibility of that reviewer and brand in the future.

Moreover, in the context of the S-eWOM of online reviews, scoring high in openness means that this reviewer (the social friend) is willing to share their life experience with the customer and speaks their mind. A reciprocal trust relationship is developed, as the customer may feel that the reviewer trusted them with this shared information, so the customer should trust the reviewer and their statements in return. As T9 said:

And some people I feel like they are more approachable and if they were, like, I trust

them more, like, if they started opening up to me more and talking to me about their life, probably, I would be like, “OK, like, they are trusting you with, like, what they have and whatever,” so probably I should trust them, but that’s how I think.

Conscientiousness is the tendency to exercise intentional self-control to regulate one’s impulses. People high in this trait do their duties and typically set and surpass objectives and rules. This characteristic is displayed by people who want to organize rather than let things be accidental. According to Finne et al. (2019), this feature affects some habits, such as how people appreciate truthfulness and make sensible decisions. Such people may describe themselves as always being prepared, paying attention to details, and getting duties done right away. In addition, their actions are relatively organized. These people enjoy order and stick to a routine. Individuals who score high in conscientiousness tend to regulate their impulses, think clearly, and make better judgements; therefore, it is easier for others to trust their judgement and opinions. This theory is mirrored in four participants’ discussions about trusting reviews from acquaintances. N3 stated:

Because I’m so much closer to this person and because I know this person ... then that means I trust this person and I trust their opinion. So, if they say this place is horrible, then I might not go there.

Participant A6 noted:

Depends on how much I know the person, because if I know that the person likes to mess around with people, like, the person will probably mess around with critics, too. It’s really depending on the person, because if I know the person’s truthful and would not mess around with the critics, I will totally follow that person. And I believe what the person is saying.

Knowing the personality traits of the participant’s friends in terms of their level of self-regulation and their reactions in certain situations may be linked to the exaggerated

behaviour of the reviewer—for example, if the participant knows that this friend would lose their temper and there is a possibility of exaggerated behaviour by the reviewer. It is shown in this research that the exaggerated behaviour of the reviewer, especially in negative reviews, led them to be seen as a biased and emotional reviewer. Hence, that detracted from the credibility of eWOM. As C4 stated, “Of course, you can always ask still and make sure, but it’s someone that you’ve known for so long that you kind of know how they would have thought or how they would have reacted in certain situations.” Moreover, the strength of social ties influenced participants’ judgement by revealing the personality traits of their friends. As V12 stated, “It’s someone you know more, so it’s someone I’m going to know, like, if they told the truth or not. You know, like, their personality, and I know, like, what they like or not.”

The conscientiousness dimension in personality traits was important in assessing the influence of S-eWOM. Furthermore, E1 stated,

This review credibility depends on the credibility this friend has and if he has high-quality standards. It’s not about friendship; even if my mom recommends or posts a review, and I know she does not have high-quality standards, I may not go to that restaurant.

People who score high in conscientiousness tend to tell the truth, be responsible and organized, and pay attention to details. As M17 stated, “I would trust them because I remember from my time with them that this person is responsible for this person being clean.” Individuals who score high in conscientiousness also tend to regulate their impulses, think clearly, and make better judgements, so others trust their opinions. N3 stated:

Because I am so much closer to this person and because I know this person. So, for friends, then that means I trust this person, and I trust their opinion. So, if they say this place is horrible, then I might not go there.

The results were also consistent with identifying another Big Five personality trait: neuroticism. For example, C4 stated:

I feel some people just, when they're writing a review, they might refrain from certain things because they don't want to put the whole thing in, or the review may not be 100% what you thought. Like, let's say you had a bad experience or are you going to just focus on the bad, but you won't look at the good side.

D18 supported this notion, stating:

There are certain people that look for the negative and they'll point out the negative. We had a good experience, but because we didn't get something, she made it seem like it was the biggest deal. Do you hear what I mean? Because she's a review person. Certain people take it too seriously, and it's just a review. I don't know.

Further to this, S16 stated:

Because you can see what they post online determines their personality or their character because if they're online always complaining about something or you can tell, even on a Facebook page, they leave bad comments about things, then in the back of your mind, you wonder how credible they are. You see in all these posts, and then you go on to TripAdvisor, and you see they have negative posts everywhere, then you're like, "OK." You play it up and be like, "I trust you, but also, do I trust you?" You know their background, and you know that some people just like to complain, so are they one of those people?

Interestingly, another individual in the study contradicted the influence of S-eWOM on credibility judgement, as she thought relationships could introduce bias. She explained:

I feel like, because everything has gotten so popularity based and everything has become so public with social media, to me, trusting a friend is probably less reliable than me trusting a foreigner. I think what I was trying to say is that your friends can

bring in bias and previous knowledge or compatibility. With a foreigner you do not know, it's a fresh start, and you have no connection or no previous relationship with them. So, you're sure, or at least I am sure, of being able to connect to that person as if I was in their shoes.

Another participant (A2) expanded on this point:

Sometimes I would trust people who are strangers for experience on TripAdvisor more than maybe a friend who has not travelled at all. I think depending on the friend, depending on how well-travelled the friend is, maybe their answer would be different.

This is interesting because she provided a perspective on consumer behaviour on social media and how this affects the credibility judgement of online reviews. Friends on social media can bring their own biases into their TRPS reviews and evaluation.

In the context of the Big Five personality theory, participants found it helpful to personally or socially know the user posting a review, thereby feeling that they knew the personality traits of that person and thus the legitimacy of the information posted, or by having the ability to verify information later with their friends in the real world. This was deemed to be highly valuable in the context of determining eWOM credibility (A2):

If I have a personal connection with that person, then it's most likely that they either told me about it before or I can ask them later on. Because sometimes, when you post something online, you want to give people the nice part. I know many of my friends; when we post reviews or just post a comment on Instagram, even if it's like the ugliest picture in the world, they will comment things like "Oh my god, so cute," just to be nice.

It is interesting to note the nuances observed between participants: on the one hand, trusting their honest friends and those they know in real life to offer them real opinions and reviews, but, on the other hand, potentially not trusting the information from these people

shared online for fear of them being positive simply to be nice or to avoid any negativity or potential conflict. Llamero (2014) discovered that virtual friendships positively affect eWOM credibility. Peer travellers—those who do not appear to have business interests—are initially seen favourably in terms of their credibility. Still, it is necessary to monitor other users' behaviour over time. It is possible to view the findings of this study, which examined the impact of S-eWOM on eWOM credibility, as an extension of these prior research findings, which suggest that customers' credibility judgements may be influenced by an individual's personality qualities as well. The dichotomy observed potentially deserves further study to assess the importance of openness in this context, mitigated by the online behaviours of people's social connections.

Identifying the unique features of a person's personality is an essential endeavour in understanding the effect of S-eWOM on customers' online review evaluations. The Big Five personality traits model designates the psychological qualities seen in most people. Individuals must understand others' personality traits to ensure they do not judge them for their actions. The strength of the social tie, whether the customer and the reviewer were closely or loosely tied, affected the customer's credibility assessment of the source. Participants believed that the personal connection they developed with the reviewer mattered the most. This connection depends on how well the customers know the reviewers in terms of personality traits (10 participants). In this research, some participants relied on their assessment of the source and their different personality traits. Preferences, likes and dislikes, and income facilitate relevance between the two parties and reflect a certain travel style that also contributes to the relevance of the travel experience. Finally, participants noted the ability to verify the travel recommendations and information by asking questions of friends and family (six participants), in addition to the role of relevance (nine participants), which tied customers to reviewers. A2, however, stated that she could trust a stranger on

TripAdvisor with their travel expertise over friends on social media. This is interesting, as she provided a perspective of consumer behaviour on social media and how this affects her credibility judgement of online reviews, as friends on social media can bring their own bias into their TRPS reviews and evaluation.

5.5.3. Verification Behaviour of Customers

The ability to verify the travel recommendation and information by asking friends and family relevant questions was an important factor in the influence of social ties. In addition, the role of relevance creates a tie between customers and reviewers. A2, however, stated that she could trust a stranger on TripAdvisor with their travel expertise over her friends on social media. The strength of social ties and bonding in social capital will influence eWOM credibility if the effect of relevance to a customer's preferences is applied as a moderator. The strength of social ties reaches the level of revealing friends' character and personality traits, and the effect on the credibility of reviews increases. When customers' preferences (quality standards, travel style, and taste) align with those of their social media contacts, the credibility of S-eWOM is affected. Reviewers' personality traits influence customers' evaluations of the source, as they know how friends react to negative and positive situations. Predicting the source's reaction paints an image of the source for the customer, which dictates whether the customer should trust the information provided. This finding on the importance of personality traits in social networks extends the previous literature about S-eWOM in granting credibility (Cheng & Zhou, 2010).

Objective information is perceived as more credible than subjective information in online reviews. The more descriptive the details related to TRPS, as opposed to the reviewer's personal feelings without context, the more credible the review is perceived as by participants. Trusting the source and perceiving the message as reliable and applicable (relevant) is most important. To overcome the risk of a lack of trust in online reviews,

participants used brand reputation to add to the credibility of reviews and enhance the trustworthiness of eWOM.

5.6. S-eWOM on Social Media Platforms

The current generation's increased social media consumption is often misleading in that what people post on social media does not reflect the reality in their lives (Gašo & Ranogajec, 2019). One reason for this is that many people find solace in people's comments and perceptions of what they present on social media. For example, some people boast about their happy family lives when, in fact, they are sustaining emotional or physical abuse. They may post photos of them smiling with their partners and children, and people will congratulate them and be happy for them. Unfortunately, this consumer behaviour on social media can sometimes conceal an ugly reality for fear of criticism and unkind comments from viewers. Such attempts present the only good side of life because that is what the poster believes will attract people's approval (Gašo & Ranogajec, 2019), but some of these people struggle with anger, loans, and debts, facts that they do not want others to realize. Some social media consumers boast and show off as a way of marketing, yet the reality is that things are not as they appear on social media. Such behaviour has also been observed with politicians and marketers in their campaigns for support—they may post exaggerated figures to show potential supporters that they are on the winning team. This strategy uses mass psychology to convince people to join a team with many supporters (Ibáñez-Sánchez et al., 2022). Consequently, even if one is not convinced about the item being marketed, one will be moved to buy it because of how social media presents it.

Additionally, the increased pressure to maintain certain body shapes may force some people to Photoshop their photos and share them on social media to gain acceptance (Javornik et al., 2022). This is common among people who are seeking to be liked. They may share inaccurate images showing their body shapes and sizes, and clothes, and faces with full

makeup. Javornik et al. (2022) have observed that all this is done to gain approval and acceptance, even when this is not actually the outcome. Therefore, people may brag and show off on social media simply to hide their true selves. This is mainly because they wish to sell themselves or their products to people to gain approval and credit. This consumer behaviour can be exaggerated, misleading, inaccurate, or even lacking some essential information.

5.6.1. S-eWOM and eWOM

The tie strength of eWOM information is based on the robustness of the relationship between the sender and receiver of the message. Tie strength also involves aspects of intimacy, closeness, support, and friendship (Cheng & Zhou, 2010), which were mentioned in this research by most participants. However, it shows that there is more trust in information between individuals with a strong relationship to the degree that the characteristics and personality traits are revealed to the other party. In other words, social ties are a form of social capital that involves the amount of money and other resources obtained from interactions within society (Levy & Gvili, 2015). Bridging and bonding are two types of social capital that can be used to connect individuals. Bridging refers to weak ties, whereas bonding involves strong ones (Ha et al., 2017). Bridging is crucial in providing information to individuals who are not adjacent, while bonding involves providing emotional and social support (Aharony, 2015). The interplay of social bonding between individuals and their personality traits influenced participants' judgement of the credibility of eWOM. Individuals with more bonding in social capital can help people obtain information regarding a certain subject, and the receiver can evaluate that information based on their assessment of the sender's personality traits, thereby enhancing the trustworthiness of eWOM messages. Bridging, however, did not show the same level of effect on eWOM credibility because it relies on weak social ties.

The differences in the credibility of eWOM and S-eWOM are related to social ties and whether a reviewer is an unknown traveller on the TripAdvisor platform or happens to be a friend or social media friend. Participants in S-eWOM tend to capitalize and depend upon the strength of their social ties and their bonds with friends, which translates into knowing their personalities and leads to the formation of a personal connection between them. In accordance with their personal connections and personality judgements, they decide whether to trust and grant credibility to S-eWOM. To trust the conventional eWOM from strangers (travellers) on the TripAdvisor platform, however, participants tended to look for other cues to the sociocultural identity of the source to seek relevance between the two parties. This can also lead to a sense of personal connection and the granting of credibility to eWOM. The participants did not observe reviews from any friends or social media connections during the interaction component of the research protocol. Nevertheless, during interviews several participants stated that if they did read a negative or positive review online from someone, they knew either personally or online, that the credibility of that information would be perceived as being stronger compared to unknown users. Ultimately, the personal connections felt by the participants led to granting credibility, which evolves through either knowing the personality of the source or gathering sociocultural identity cues from travellers on the TripAdvisor platform.

The study's findings align with credibility as a contextual concept (Hilligoss & Rieh, 2008). Interviewees' justifications for their points of view demonstrated that determining trustworthiness and credibility is a personal decision and a free exercise. Similarly, to the findings of Ayeh et al. (2013), homophily cues are verified to be a practical method to enable relevance and aid in assessing reliability. Interviewees tend to balance positive and negative comments. Therefore, the positive valence (Goyette et al., 2010) is not supported. Despite the reports of possible fakery being suspected because of anonymity (Mendes-Filho et al., 2010),

this challenge is answered by analytical judgements that examine the information's quality, the language used, the reviews posted, the comparison of viewpoints for consensus, or the use of visual effects.

5.7. Proposed Integrative Framework to Evaluate eWOM Credibility.

The foundational principles of the logic and conversation theory, the MRT, and the Big Five personality traits framework within the scope of this research were highly relevant. With elements of each combined, the theories contributed to developing a novel integrative framework to support the evaluation of the credibility of content, communicator, community, and platform in the context of travel-related eWOM (see Figure 3). Participants adopted the logic and conversation theory to evaluate the content theme with its subthemes and categories and seek its relevance in describing the credibility of eWOM. The MRT model was also fundamental in addressing how much the richness of the content and the travel platform in terms of its three-dimensional factors (informative, contextual, and interactional) influence the credibility of eWOM. Finally, the Big Five personality traits theory was applied to explain the strength of the relationship between the source and the receiver in addressing the personality traits of the source and how this may influence the credibility of S-eWOM. In this research, however, the Grice and MRT models were shown to be the most accurate and robust theories when applied to examine the influence of the credibility of eWOM. The Grice model, with its four maxims, was particularly relevant when assessing how participants evaluated the content in terms of its four maxims, which are quality, quantity, relevance, and manner.

The data collected were viewed through the lens of the three theories. They contributed to developing the integrative framework, which explains the requirement of this research finding to adopt the framework. This research revealed that credibility determinants of TRPS eWOM are the five major themes (content, customer, communicator, context, and

community). These five major themes, with their minor themes, categories, and subcategories, interact to increase or decrease the credibility of eWOM. The proposed integrative framework influences each major theme to explain participants' evaluation of the credibility of eWOM.

For instance, the Grice model is vital in providing the four maxims of quality, quantity, relevance, and manner to grant credibility to eWOM. The higher the argument quality of the content, accompanied by visuals and a clear writing style, the higher the credibility of eWOM. Still, not only is the quality maxim important, but quantity also is essential. A higher number of posted reviews with the average star ratings of TRPS supported and justified by the content of the review with medium-length content was important in participants' evaluation of the online reviews if the body of reviews did not consist mostly of extreme reviews (i.e., nearly all five-star, positive or all one-star, negative reviews). After the reviews' quality and quantity, relevance was vital in assessing how the review is relevant to the customer's lifestyle, culture, and preferences. Lastly, the manner maxim is essential, as the message of the review should be clear and understandable.

Nevertheless, participants needed to do more than just evaluate the content theme alone to reach the full credibility judgement. The context theme, including the platform and the community theme (the source), became important too. The platform hosting online reviews is crucial in increasing the credibility of eWOM. For example, the MRT model, with its three-dimensional concepts, influences how rich the content of the review is, such as the quality and quantity of the content theme. This means that the richer the content theme, the greater the credibility of eWOM.

The proposed integrative framework of this research contributed to enhancing the credibility of eWOM through the application of the Grice model, MRT framework, and the Big Five personality traits of individuals within the social networks of customers. However,

the four maxims of the Grice model (quality, quantity, manner, and relevance) are the best fit to explain the process customer undertake to evaluate online reviews and judge the credibility of the content of the review. The relevance maxim is considered the most influential maxim in the Grice model to increase or decrease the credibility of eWOM.

Relevance is core in the findings of this research, as it interacts with the customer, the communicator, and the context. When evaluating the content of the review, it became crucial for customers to find relevance within the content of the TRPS. The review's credibility is influenced negatively if the content is perceived as irrelevant to the TRPS. This shows the importance of relevancy of the content to the TRPS, which signals the objectivity of the communicator in addressing their travel experience and staying relevant to the TRPS being reviewed. Additionally, the relevance between the communicator and the customer was crucial in the credibility judgement of eWOM. The application of relevancy with the communicator's source credibility and social identity (e.g., couples, singles, and family) and income (celebrity vs student) was essential in evaluating the reviewers. The relevance of the communicator as a tourist versus a local (location/culture) influenced the perception of the customer's travel experience in assessing the communicator. This agrees with the study by Mumuni et al. (2020), who differentiated review relevance from the reviewer's competence and credibility.

The results demonstrate that review relevance is nearly as important as review credibility when characterizing the effects of online product reviews. Moreover, this supports Daowd et al.'s (2020) assertion that current, accurate, and relevant information is a major concern for Thai Generation Y, and it undermines the overall credibility of that review. Furthermore, perceptual homophily influences purchase intention, as consumers may favour online reviews by reviewers with similar perspectives, preferences, and experiences to their own, which are deemed more persuasive than those that are dissimilar. The result, however,

contradicts Filieri et al. (2018), who evaluated the source homophily element and found it to be insignificant. This is because they claimed that online users are more concerned with the expertise and notoriety of the reviewer than with the degree of similarity between themselves and the reviewer. Xie et al. (2011) found that online reviews containing PII were perceived as more credible than those without PII. Despite the presence of positive predecisional information distortion, ambivalent evaluations harmed participants' decisions. The negativity effect might be stronger in online hotel selection than in predecisional information distortion. This agrees with the findings of this study of trusting negative valence with an identified source through the relevance between the source and the customer.

In addition, during the pandemic, all participants sought the relevancy of the content to the socioenvironmental factors (COVID-19 or the context), accompanied by the importance of recency to reflect a sense of reality and know whether it is safe to visit the place. This agrees with Nilashi et al. (2023), who found that the higher the perceived risk of travellers, the lower the trust toward eWOM.

The quality of the content was an essential maxim in influencing the credibility of eWOM. It shaped the customer's perspective of the reviewer's travel experience by showing the reviewer's reflective effort in the content of the review. The argument quality, which includes the descriptive details and producing a justified and well-reasoned review with diversified content, signalled the objective assessment of the reviewer. The consistency that signals consensus among travellers and recency that reflects a sense of the reality of the review made the content of a higher quality. The quantity maxim is vital in addressing the required information in the review. Medium to reasonably long reviews supported by visuals were found to increase the credibility of eWOM. In contrast, very short generic reviews that needed more details related to TRPS were perceived as fake and unauthentic. The findings of this study regarding the importance of descriptive details of TRPS within the content in

increasing the credibility of eWOM and how generic reviews are perceived as fake are also supported by the findings of Kim, Park, and Mariani (2023).

Additionally, a balanced star rating, which ranged from 3.5 from 4.5, was perceived as credible, while extremities in rating, such as five stars (excellent) or one star (poor), were perceived as less credible. The manner maxim, which explains the importance of writing style and the language used within the content, is essential for clarity and to avoid ambiguity. Grammar mistakes within the text accompanied by the emotional language of the reviewer, such as the use of coarse language and the use of capital letters and exclamation marks, triggered a perception of the reviewer as emotional or biased, which detracted from the credibility of eWOM.

Yet the Grice model has limitations. Although it explains how customers evaluate the content of online reviews to trust eWOM, it needs a maxim of social interaction between individuals, as this interaction is important to increase the credibility of eWOM. Hence, the proposed MRT framework, with its three-dimensional concepts, especially the interactional concept, comes into play to influence the credibility of eWOM. With its four maxims, the Grice model was initially proposed to enhance the understandability of conversations among people, and the relevance maxim was intended to mean remaining relevant to the topic discussed. This research has shown that more than assessing the content, staying relevant to the topic is required to enhance the credibility of eWOM. However, assessing the communicator (profile information, location, and gender) to stay relevant to the recipient (customer) enhanced the credibility of eWOM.

The findings of this research highlight the primary role visual cues play in granting credibility when customers (participants) evaluate online reviews. This insight aligns with the evolution of MRT in addressing the vital role of the recipient of the information (receiver) in addressing the meaning of the messages, which highlights the importance of subjectivity in

messaging consumption on social media platforms. The theoretical framework proposed in this research, with its three dimensions (informative, contextual, interactional), was found to reinforce the credibility of eWOM. The framework assesses whether the medium is rich or poor in the context of online reviews and the visuals uploaded by reviewers. The findings of this research show that the written text of the review is rich when it contains enough context, such as photos and videos of TRPS and the supporting cues of star ratings of the TRPS, accompanying the written text of the review.

The informative dimension of the MRT framework explains how the review is considered informative for the reader to assist customers in their decision-making. The review length should provide enough information about the product or service in a medium to reasonably long length. The context of the information is also essential to be considered as informative information that revolves around the travel experience of the reviewer and that veers away from the emotional side of the reviewer, providing both positive and negative sides of the travel experience that trigger a balanced travel perspective. The number of visuals (the number of photos and videos) is also vital for the review to be considered informative. Again, participants greatly appreciated a balanced perspective, with only a few visuals, but not too few. The authenticity of visuals was vital in assessing photos and videos uploaded to the TripAdvisor platform by reviewers.

The quality of visuals played an essential role in addressing the travel experience of the reviewer. In this context, quality can be achieved through reasonable photo quality (cell phone photos) to reflect a sense of the reality of the travel experience versus a sense of enhanced reality through polished, edited visuals (Photoshop or a professional photographer), which signals the promotional, commercial intention of sharing the visuals. Another important aspect is the ability of the review reader to retrieve the information needed from the photos and videos. If the review reader cannot gain the required information from the

visuals, the review is considered uninformative, which influences the informative dimension of the MRT framework and hence negatively affects the credibility of eWOM. To be considered informative, the visuals should be representative enough of the travel experience of the reviewer.

Additionally, the facial expressions of reviewers in the photos posted and the motion and sound in videos posted by reviewers enhanced the credibility of eWOM. The interaction between the product type (restaurants, adventure activities, and museums) and visuals also played a role in customers' judgement to grant credibility to eWOM. Participants paid attention to the photos of food in restaurants, which are considered the core product of that TRPS, photos of riding in a helicopter during an adventure activity, and photos of museums. A low number of photos in museums is perceived as a lack of representation of the travel experience of the reviewer, but the same view would not apply to photos of food in restaurants. This suggests that for the visuals to be considered informative, they must be representative of the travel experience and that this can be achieved through the number of posted visuals in consideration of the product type of the travel experience. The contextual dimension is essential to classify the consumption of different product types of the reviewer enjoyed. The different classifications of the TRPS within the written text of the review signal the representativeness of the TRPS, which in this study led the customer being able to create expectations of the travel experience.

The interactive dimension of the MRT framework was shown to influence customers' judgement of the credibility of eWOM. Yet as the level of interaction was low on this dimension because management initiated the interaction as a response to a negative review on the TripAdvisor platform, it would be interesting to explore a higher level of interaction among reviewers and customers in the future to assess the higher interaction dimension of this framework on the credibility of eWOM. The interactive dimension is also crucial in

influencing the credibility of eWOM. The TripAdvisor platform, however, needs to allow online review users to interact and provide instant feedback. For the content to be considered informative, it needs to be easy to read and understand and offer a complete review, with all the necessary information regarding the travel experience. According to the findings of this study, the review should include both the quality and quantity of the content, supported with visuals of TRPS, to be considered an informative review.

The Big Five personality traits theory was essential to evaluating the source of information (community) based on their personality traits. Regardless of the strength of the social tie, knowing the characteristics and personality of the friend becomes more important than whether the participant's circle of friends is close or distant. For example, differences in personality traits, such as individuals with high neuroticism versus those with low neuroticism, led to differences in the perception of credibility. Individuals with greater neuroticism were perceived as less credible because they were more affected by perceived subjectivity and bias, focusing on negative aspects of things. In contrast, for others, the suspicion of bias decreased the credibility of eWOM.

The Big Five personality traits theory becomes essential when assessing how participants perceived the characteristics of the communicator (social network friends) and how these personality traits influenced the participant's evaluation of their reviews and recommendations. An extraverted personality in the source of information can influence the credibility judgement by the recipient of the information. For example, extraverted people speak their minds and offer their own opinions of the subject matter. Although the Big Five personality traits theory may be based on the customer's subjective perception of the communicator, it is also essential in granting credibility to eWOM, and, accompanied by Grice's model or the MRT framework, in evaluating the content and the platform richness in influencing the credibility of eWOM. To summarize, evaluating the content, the source, and

the platform based on this integrative framework becomes essential in granting credibility to eWOM, as illustrated in Figure 4.

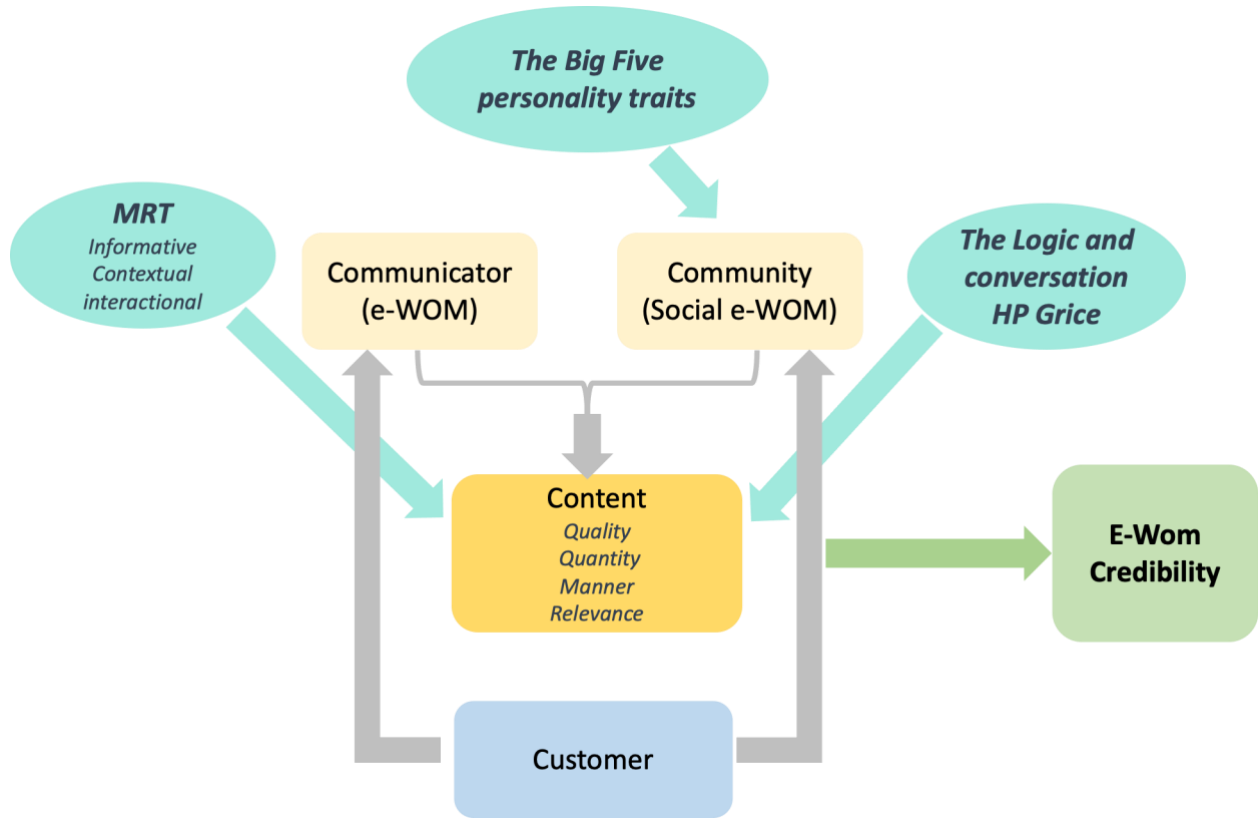


Figure 4. A Proposed Integrative Framework for Evaluating the Credibility of Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This final chapter provides a conclusion to this study, an overview of its significance and the limitations of the study. This section discusses the various benefits the study has provided, as well as its contribution to knowledge. A discussion of the limitations of the study, a reflection on the findings, and recommendations for future research follow.

6.1. Conclusion

The credibility of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and social eWOM (S-eWOM) in the context of social commerce (SC) is an important area of research. In this study, a qualitative research method was required to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1. What are the factors that influence the credibility of eWOM in the tourism industry?
 - RSQ1. How do these factors shape travellers' perceptions of the credibility of eWOM?
- RQ2. How do the social cues of social network friends influence travellers' trust in eWOM?
- RQ3. How does media richness, as measured by visual clues (e.g., photos and videos), influence credibility and trust in eWOM?

A qualitative research method, consisting of the walk-through method combined with semistructured interviews with open-ended questions, was essential to grasp individuals' perspectives on the research topic.

This research revealed five main credibility determinants: content, communicator, consumer, community, and context. First, the communicator is the individual who sends an eWOM message by posting an online review. The consumer is the person who receives the eWOM message—in this case, the participant who reads online reviews and uses their cognitive effort to evaluate these reviews. Content consists of the text within the review and

other aspects of the review structure, which comprises the ratings and visuals included in the eWOM message. Finally, the community is an interaction between communicators and consumers, which is the product of social ties and the social influence on consumers in granting credibility to travel eWOM. Regarding the characteristics or factors of online reviews that influence travellers' perceived credibility of eWOM, most participants believed in the effectiveness of posts containing authentic reviews from customers, with a mix of positive and negative reviews. They also believed in the credibility of suggestions and recommendations from other tourists if the content of the reviews had the four dimensions of quality, quantity, manner, and relevance.

The second research question interrogates the influence of S-eWOM on reviewers' perceived credibility. Most participants were more critical in evaluating S-eWOM by considering the personality traits of individuals; based on their perceptions of their Facebook friends, for example, they granted credibility to their online reviews.

Finally, concerning the effect of the affordances of media richness on reviewers' perceived credibility, factors that were indeed shown to improve and increase the credibility of eWOM included photos and videos from reviewers, TripAdvisor being seen as both contextual and interactional, and the content of the reviews being characterized by diversification and comprehensiveness.

The findings were analyzed through the lens of three theoretical frameworks: Grice's logic and conversation theory, the media richness theory (MRT), and the Big Five personality traits. This research proposes an integrative model of eWOM credibility, which is drawn from all three theoretical frameworks. This model provides a robust explanation for the findings of this research.

6.2. Limitations

No research is without limitations, and this research is no exception. The sample

reflects a representative population of University of Ottawa students and allowed the researcher to capture a youth perspective on the subject. However, the results cannot be generalized to the whole population. Similarly, qualitative research is often used to explore deeply personal and complex issues that require in-depth analysis. This leads to small sample sizes, limiting the generalizability of the findings. The results of qualitative research cannot be applied to a larger population as there may be too many variables affecting the outcome. Additionally, potential bias could exist in participants' responses because the findings are limited to famous and attractive travel destinations. Results could vary with other locations. Moreover, due to the interpretive nature of the study, guarding against researcher bias was a challenge.

Although the study was placed on the University of Ottawa Integrated System of Participation in Research (ISPR) to recruit participants, with one point compensation for participation, limited responses were received, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic and the interruption of the data collection phase for the first 12 participants in this study due to the pandemic were among the most important challenges the researcher faced during this research. Still, the researcher did her best to overcome these challenges and changed the data collection method for the last six participants by remotely collecting data through Microsoft Teams. The researcher documented all the necessary information throughout the data collection and data analysis phases.

To reduce the possible bias influence of previous knowledge on travel destinations by participants, the researcher chose five travel destinations, from which the 18 participants could choose one with which they had no previous travel experience. Only one of the 18 participants had prior travel experience in all the travel destinations selected.

Another limitation of this study was the lack of exposure to the participants' Facebook friends during the walk-through method to observe the participants' reactions while

navigating the TripAdvisor platform. The purpose of exposure to the participants' Facebook friends was to uncover the effect of S-eWOM on their credibility perceptions. This limitation was partially mitigated by asking each participant open-ended questions during the interview about their feelings and attitudes toward their evaluation of reviews posted on TripAdvisor by their Facebook friends.

For the participant-recruitment criteria, travel experience was listed as a preference to be eligible to participate in the study. Most participants, however, had previous travel experience, and only a few did not meet this criterion. All participants, however, had expertise and experience in planning the purchase of travel-related products and services (TRPS) through extensive reading of online reviews. As this research capitalized on granting credibility to online reviews, which leads to the dissemination of eWOM, having activities of reading and evaluating online reviews was more important than having travel experience. Another reason is that the intended population pool for this research was not for identifying the credibility determinants of professional travellers with extensive travel experience but rather for exploring youth and young-adult credibility perceptions of online reviews.

6.3. Significance and Contribution of the Study

This qualitative study has provided an integrative framework of MRT, the four maxims of logic and conversation, and the Big Five personality traits. Together, this integrative framework influences the aspects of online review evaluation and assessment required to consider eWOM credible. The aspects presented in this study as major and minor themes are the content, customer, and communicator. The MRT framework signifies the importance of the three dimensions that reinforce online review credibility: informative, contextual, and interactional. These three dimensions contribute to forming the credibility of eWOM. The second frame, the four maxims of logic and conversation proposed by Grice, is shown to influence the credibility of eWOM through the provision of the four maxims of

quality, quantity, relevance, and manner. This framework works best for assessing the content of the review, which is the most important major theme identified in this study. Finally, the Big Five personality traits model is used to assess and evaluate the source of the message, which helps facilitate the influence of S-eWOM on the credibility judgement of the receiver.

This research is original and contributes to the knowledge on this research field in several ways. First, it makes a theoretical and practical contribution to the existing academic literature. This qualitative study has addressed important gaps in knowledge through exploring the influence of visuals on the credibility of eWOM. Ma et al. (2018) stated that knowledge on the informational value of visuals is lacking. In this study, deeper insight about the value of the information provided through visuals has been provided by applying the three dimensions of the MRT (informative, contextual, and interactional) to assess the content of the review.

Second, the research uncovers insiders' perceptions of and attitudes toward the credibility of eWOM and S-eWOM, which aligns with a previous study by Ismagilova et al. (2021). However, the findings of this research add to the knowledge of source credibility, specifically being objective, offering a balanced perspective, and providing diversified content. The research has further uncovered the appropriate length of content that covers all the argument quality factors identified in this research that enhance the representation of the travel experience and the reviewer's information disclosure to facilitate connection between communicator and customer. Argument quality factors include recency, descriptive detail related to TRPS, medium length with average rating, supported by average-quality visuals, diversified content (two-sided review).

The integrative framework proposed in this research relies on the evaluation of both the content and the communicator (the source) to grant credibility to eWOM. The four elements of Grice's model (quality, quantity, manner, and relevance) are considered the most

robust model that best describes the process customers use to evaluate online reviews and determine the authenticity of the review's content. Through the lens of the Grice model, the relevance maxim has the most significant influence on the credibility of eWOM. Relevance is central to this study's findings, and relevance interacts with the consumer, communicator, and context. When evaluating the review's content, it became essential for customers to discover relevance within the TRPS, and a lack of relevance negatively affected credibility. This demonstrates the significance of the relevance of the content to the TRPS, which indicates the communicator's objectivity in addressing their travel experience and remaining pertinent to the TRPS being evaluated. For example, the relevance between the communicator and the recipient was crucial in determining the credibility of eWOM.

Applying relevancy to the communicator's source credibility and social identification, such as couples, individuals, and families, as well as the reviewer's income (celebrity vs student), was crucial in evaluating the reviewers as reflecting similar travel experiences to the customer reading the review. For example, A2 said, "I am dependent on online reviews, and when I look at online reviews, I like to look at family reviews because we usually travel as a family." Relevance of the communicator as a tourist versus a local (location/culture) affected the customer's perception of the communicator's travel experience. As A2 also noted,

So, like, for example, if you are travelling alone, your experience is going to be different from travelling with six other people because travelling with a family means needs like kid accommodations for my sister. You need to know that it is, like, a smoke-free zone because I do not know if my sister has asthma or something, so I look for similar identity groups or even cultural people.

Although the Grice model was found to be the most robust in the integrative framework, a maxim of social interaction between individuals should be added, as this interaction is significant in enhancing the credibility of eWOM. Moreover, evaluating the

communicator is essential in forming a decision on the credibility of eWOM. Therefore, to assess the credibility of eWOM, the MRT framework and its three dimensions, particularly the interactional dimension, was required. The Grice model was initially proposed to enhance the comprehension of conversations, with the relevance maxim being related to keeping the conversation on topic and maintaining the alignment between the communicator and the customer. This study revealed that enhancing the credibility of eWOM requires more than evaluating the content's continued relevance to the topic.

Evaluating the communicator (profile information, location, and gender) to maintain relevance to the recipient (customer) improved the credibility of eWOM. In S-eWOM, the theory of the Big Five personality traits is used to improve consumer evaluation and assessment of the source. Different personality attributes, such as high neuroticism versus low neuroticism, contributed to differences in the perception of credibility. Individuals with higher levels of neuroticism were perceived as less credible because they were more susceptible to subjectivity and bias, concentrating on the negative aspects of situations. This personality trait of the communicator will be revealed to the customer with a strong social tie with the communicator.

In sum, the integrative framework capitalized on evaluating and assessing both the content and the communicator. The Grice model assesses the content's quality, quantity, manner, and relevance. The relevance maxim was the most vital aspect of assessing online reviews. To facilitate the relevance between the customer and the communicator, a proper source evaluation through the MRT framework using the interaction between the source and the receiver will generate an essential connection between the two. The big five personality traits will also facilitate the source evaluation that aids the customer's assessments of the source, which leads to the credibility judgement of online reviews.

It has been shown in the literature that communicator characteristics significantly

influence eWOM credibility, but how consumers evaluate the communicator in eWOM communication with limited information remains largely unexplored (Verma & Dewani, 2020). The findings of this research on assessing the communicator revealed that eWOM from specialists in specific industries (such as travel) is more credible than that of broad general experts. Moreover, these findings highlighted the relative influence of various source identity signals (profile picture, name, location, and gender) on eWOM credibility. Thus, taking this research to the next level, it would be interesting to investigate the parasocial relationship (PSR) effect and influence on the credibility of eWOM, as the source in a PSR is known to the receiver (customer) on a personal level, with the information self-disclosure of the reviewer (e.g., influencers) on social media platforms.

A recent study conducted by Banerjee (2022) showed the effect of exaggeration on the authenticity of reviews for different types of hotels and found that exaggeration affected the credibility of eWOM. However, the findings of this research extend the influence of exaggeration on authenticity of reviews through the perceived subjectivity and bias of the reviewer. Regarding the influence of visual information from photos and videos on increasing the credibility of eWOM, the research findings support a recent study conducted by Kim et al. (2023).

This research is the first to qualitatively capture participants' responses to and perspectives of the credibility of online reviews before and during the COVID-19 pandemic and seeking relevance to COVID-19 measures within the content, revealing the interactional relationship between major themes (customer, communicator, content). This opens the door for future research to focus on the credibility determinants of online reviews by customers in similar catastrophic situations to support the travel industry, which is considered one of the industry's most negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Third, from this research, the three interactive integrative frameworks were developed to build and process the

credibility of online reviews by customers in the travel industry.

The findings of this study might assist tourism vendors to realize that their inherent business motivations put them at a disadvantage because of mistrust. According to the results of the observation experiment, eWOM on unpopular websites does not enjoy the same credibility benefit as that on major sites. Therefore, improving their online reputation is necessary for unpopular websites. The informants' arguments, however, did aid in understanding how the mind works to identify reliable information, particularly in their appreciation of reviews that are balanced and include both positive and negative features. Customers do not enjoy extreme review ratings, such as five-star ratings, which might indicate corporate economic objectives that taint the trustworthiness of eWOM. The interactional determinant of the TripAdvisor platform was shown to be inadequate in this study when compared to TripAdvisor potentials for MRT variables. The extent of platform sophistication has been affected by the sources and receiver's inability to instantly communicate and obtain feedback. Therefore, improving the usability and amount of interaction among consumers of online reviews might benefit their business.

Another managerial recommendation found through this research is to allow the customization or personalization of online reviews according to the past travel experience of reviewers. By obtaining each client's login information from e-commerce websites such as TripAdvisor, it is possible to connect recommendation algorithms with online reviews to personalize the reviews for each customer. This is recommended because one appraisal may be considered trustworthy by one group of people but not by another. If reviews are customized based on past consumer behaviour and comparable judgements made by other users, e-commerce platforms will be able to present customers with reviews that are considered authentic and assist them in making intelligent selections while avoiding

information overload. Customers will be able to provide feedback on the platforms as a result.

The author's analysis of the available studies in this field led her to the conclusion that it can be difficult to distinguish between valid and falsified reviews. As previously indicated, in the case of a particular review, some clients may believe that it was written by a legitimate client and that it carries some weight, but others may believe that it is not genuine. It appeared in this research that it may be possible that a person's background, such as their cultural background, sex, or both, influences how credible the reviews they post online are considered.

6.4. Directions for Future Research

Future research could focus on quantitative research to validate the proposed integrative frameworks of logic and conversation, the MRT, and personality traits of individuals in granting credibility to eWOM to generalize the present data to a bigger population. Similarly, because this research was qualitative in nature; it was difficult to quantify the increase or decrease in the credibility of eWOM caused by each factor or the combination of the credibility factors identified in this research. Future research could focus on quantifying the degree of credibility of eWOM determinants by customers.

As the relevance component was identified as the key to link the content, the communicator, and the customer together in this research, PSRs in social media emerges as a possible influence on the credibility of eWOM. A PSR arises when the customer is unknown to the communicator and refers to the one-sided connections individuals experience with public personalities such as celebrities, politicians, or influencers (Leite & Baptista, 2022). These relationships involve individuals feeling a sense of emotional attachment to and investment in these figures, despite never having met them in person. The credibility of online reviews is often called into question, especially when they are linked to PSRs. While

PSRs can influence purchasing decisions, they have also been shown to have a negative effect on the credibility of online reviews. These relationships can influence purchasing decisions because when influencers endorse a product or service, their followers may automatically assume that the recommendation is genuine and unbiased. However, in many cases, influencers receive compensation and free products in exchange for their reviews and may not disclose this information to their followers (Hoffner & Bond, 2022).

Moreover, PSRs may also cause influencers to withhold negative feedback or criticism of a product, particularly if they have a close connection with the brand or company. This can lead to a misrepresentation of the true quality of the product or service, which ultimately harms the consumer. For instance, an individual who follows an influencer on social media may feel a personal connection with them, leading to a bias toward the products they are endorsing. This bias can be intentional or unintentional, with the individual often unable to see the flaws in the product or service they are reviewing. This type of bias can be detrimental to the credibility of online reviews, as the review is no longer objective but instead influenced by the individual's emotional attachment to the product or service. Future research could investigate the effect of influencers' self-disclosure and PSRs and how these factors influence the credibility of and trust in eWOM. For example, research could examine the influence of the negative valence of influencers on the credibility of eWOM.

Customers' personal characteristics play a role in their subjectivity and bias and affect their online review evaluations and assessments. Participants' gullibility and tendency to believe almost everything may affect their credibility judgement of online reviews. For example, individuals who are classified as agreeable are not sceptical or aggressive toward others. They are often caring and cooperative and tend to trust others easily (Griebie & Immelman, 2021). The distinction between an individual who exhibits this feature and one who does not is found in their opinions on the importance of social harmony. For example,

agreeable people get along well with others, enjoy doing so, and are typically thoughtful and generous. Their friendliness encourages them to be helpful and eager and to put others' interests ahead of their own. Agreeable people are typically optimistic and believe that others are honest and nice. They are usually trusting of others. It would be interesting to conduct quantitative research identifying the relationship between the receiver's agreeableness trait and the credibility of eWOM.

Regarding the use of visuals and the characteristics of receivers, visual participants may evaluate photos and videos differently from nonvisual participants who score low on the visuality scale. Meticulous customers may exaggerate the effect of negative reviews on their credibility judgement compared to people who are not meticulous. Participants who do not easily trust others may see effects in their credibility judgement of online reviews. Participants' flexibility in accepting negative reviews concerning supplementary products and services, such as a long wait time or poor hospitality in offering tea or coffee, affects their evaluation of negative reviews and grants credibility to eWOM. Indecisive participants tend to rely more on collective decision-making and S-WOM from family and friends, which negatively affects their independence in fully granting credibility to online reviews.

References

- Abbas, J., Mubeen, R., Iorember, P. T., Raza, S., & Mamirkulova, G. (2021). Exploring the impact of COVID-19 on tourism: Transformational potential and implications for a sustainable recovery of the travel and leisure industry. *Current Research in Behavioral Sciences*, 2, Article 100033. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.crbeha.2021.100033>
- Agarwal, R., & Singh, R. (2018). e-WOM: Review and a new conceptualisation. *The Marketing Review*, 18(3–4), 307–321. <https://doi.org/10.1362/146934718X15434305916862>
- Aharony, N. (2015). What's App: A social capital perspective. *Online Information Review*, 39(1), 26–42. <https://doi.org/10.1108/OIR-08-2014-0177>
- Akehurst, G. (2009). User generated content: The use of blogs for tourism organisations and tourism consumers. *Service Business*, 3(1), 51–61. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11628-008-0054-2>
- Albayrak, M., & Ceylan, C. (2021). Effect of eWOM on purchase intention: Meta-analysis. *Data Technologies and Applications*, 55(5), 810–840. <https://doi.org/10.1108/DTA-03-2020-0068>
- Alesina, A., & Giuliano, P. (2015). Culture and institutions. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 53(4), 898–944. <https://doi.org/10.1257/jel.53.4.898>
- Amblee, N., & Bui, T. (2011). Harnessing the influence of social proof in online shopping: The effect of electronic word of mouth on sales of digital microproducts. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, 16(2), 91–114. <https://doi.org/10.2753/JEC1086-4415160205>
- Ayeh, J. K., Au, N., & Law, R. (2013). “Do we believe in TripAdvisor?” Examining credibility perceptions and online travelers’ attitude toward using user-generated

content. *Journal of Travel Research*, 52(4), 437–452.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287512475217>

Ballantine, P. W., & Yeung, C. A. (2015). The effects of review valence in organic versus sponsored blog sites on perceived credibility, brand attitude, and behavioural intentions. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 33(4), 508–521.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-03-2014-0044>

Bandi Tanner, M., & Hämmerli, S. J. (2018). Reviewing TripAdvisor and Co.: A quality analysis of hotel review sites. *Anatolia*, 29(4), 518–528.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13032917.2018.1451350>

Bandura, A. (1991). Social cognitive theory of self-regulation. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 248–287. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978\(91\)90022-L](https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978(91)90022-L)

Bandura, A. (1999). Moral disengagement in the perpetration of inhumanities. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 3(3), 193–209.

https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspr0303_3

Banerjee, S. (2022). Exaggeration in fake vs. authentic online reviews for luxury and budget hotels. *International Journal of Information Management*, 62.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2021.102416>

Bauman, A., & Bachmann, R. (2017). Online consumer trust: Trends in research. *Journal of Technology Management and Innovation*, 12(2), 68–79.

<https://doi.org/10.4067/S0718-27242017000200008>

Baym, N. K. (2015). Social media and the struggle for society. *Social Media + Society*, 1(1–2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115580477>

- Baym, N. K., Zhang, Y. B., & Lin, M. C. (2004). Social interactions across media: Interpersonal communication on the internet, telephone and face-to-face. *New Media & Society*, 6(3), 299–318. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444804041438>
- Beaton, C. (2018, June 13). Why you can't really trust negative online reviews. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/13/smarter-living/trust-negative-product-reviews.html>.
- Beldad, A., de Jong, M., & Steehouder, M. (2010,). How shall I trust the faceless and the intangible? A literature review on the antecedents of online trust. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 26(5), 857–869. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2010.03.013>
- Berger, C. R., & Calabrese, R. J. (1975). Some explorations in initial interaction and beyond: Toward a developmental theory of interpersonal communication. *Human Communication Research*, 1(2), 99–112. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.1975.tb00258.x>
- Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. K. (1982). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods*. Allyn and Bacon.
- Bone, P. F. (1995). Word-of-mouth effects on short-term and long-term product judgments. *Journal of Business Research*, 32(3), 213–223. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0148-2963\(94\)00047-I](https://doi.org/10.1016/0148-2963(94)00047-I)
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Brown, J., Broderick, A. J., & Lee, N. (2007). Word of mouth communication within online communities: Conceptualizing the online social network. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 21(3), 2–20. <https://doi.org/10.1002/dir.20082>
- Brown, J. J., & Reingen, P. H. (1987). Social ties and word-of-mouth referral behavior. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 14(3), 350–362. <https://doi.org/10.1086/209118>

- Brunelle, E. (2009). Introducing media richness into an integrated model of consumers' intentions to use online stores in their purchase process. *Journal of Internet Commerce*, 8(3–4), 222–245. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332860903467649>
- Cantalops, A. S., & Salvi, F. (2014). New consumer behavior: A review of research on eWOM and hotels. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 36, 41–51. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2013.08.007>
- Cao, C., Yan, J., & Li, M. (2018). The impact of different channel of online review on consumers' online trust. *PACIS 2018 Proceedings*. <https://aisel.aisnet.org/pacis2018/213>
- Chakraborty, U. (2019). Perceived credibility of online hotel reviews and its impact on hotel booking intentions. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 31(9), 3465–3483. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-11-2018-0928>
- Chen, A., Lu, Y., & Wang, B. (2017). Customers' purchase decision-making process in social commerce: A social learning perspective. *International Journal of Information Management*, 37(6), 627–638. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2017.05.001>
- Chen, Z., & Lurie, N. H. (2013). Temporal contiguity and negativity bias in the impact of online word of mouth. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 50(4), 463–476. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmr.12.0063>
- Cheng, X., & Zhou, M. (2010). Empirical study on credibility of electronic word of mouth. *2010 International Conference on Management and Service Science*, 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.1109/ICMSS.2010.5578458>
- Cheung, C. M. K., Lee, M. K. O., & Rabjohn, N. (2008). The impact of electronic word-of-mouth: The adoption of online opinions in online customer communities. *Internet Research*, 18(3), 229–247. <https://doi.org/10.1108/10662240810883290>

- Cheung, C. M. K., & Thadani, D. R. (2012). The impact of electronic word-of-mouth communication: A literature analysis and integrative model. *Decision Support Systems, 54*(1), 461–470. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dss.2012.06.008>
- Cheung, M., Luo, C., Sia, C., & Chen, H. (2009). Credibility of electronic word-of-mouth: Informational and normative determinants of on-line consumer recommendations. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce, 13*(4), 9–38. <https://doi.org/10.2753/JEC1086-4415130402>
- Chih, W. H., Wang, K. Y., Hsu, L. C., & Huang, S. C. (2013). Investigating electronic word-of-mouth effects on online discussion forums: The role of perceived positive electronic word-of-mouth review credibility. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 16*(9), 658–668. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2012.0364>
- Chocarro, R., Cortinas, M., & Villanueva, M. L. (2021). Different channels for different services: Information sources for services with search, experience, and credence attributes. *Service Industries Journal, 41*(3–4), 261–284. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02642069.2018.1508457>
- Choi, Y., Hickerson, B., & Lee, J. (2018). Investigation of the technology effects of online travel media on virtual travel experience and behavioral intention. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, 35*(3), 320–335. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2017.1340224>
- Choi, Y. K., Seo, Y., & Yoon, S. (2017). E-WOM messaging on social media: Social ties, temporal distance, and message concreteness. *Internet Research, 27*(3), 495–505. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IntR-07-2016-0198>
- Chong, A. Y. L., Khong, K. W., Ma, T., McCabe, S., & Wang, Y. (2018). Analyzing key influences of tourists' acceptance of online reviews in travel decisions. *Internet Research, 28*(3), 564–586. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IntR-05-2017-0212>

- Cox, C., Burgess, S., Sellitto, C., & Buultjens, J. (2009). The role of user-generated content in tourists' travel planning behavior. *Journal of Hospitality and Leisure Marketing*, 18(8), 743–764. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19368620903235753>
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Curry, R. G., & Zhang, P. (2011). Social commerce: Looking back and forward. *Proceedings of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 48(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1002/meet.2011.14504801096>
- Daft, R. L., & Lengel, R. H. (1986). Organizational information requirements, media richness and structural design. *Management Science*, 32(5), 554–571.
- Daniels, E. C., Rodriguez, A., & Zabelina, D. L. (2020). Severity of misophonia symptoms is associated with worse cognitive control when exposed to misophonia trigger sounds. *PLOS ONE*, 15(1), e0227118. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0227118>
- Daowd, A., Hasan, R., Eldabi, T., Rafi-ul-Shan, P. M., Cao, D., & Kasemsarn, N. (2020). Factors affecting eWOM credibility, information adoption and purchase intention on Generation Y: A case from Thailand. *Journal of Enterprise Information Management*, 34(3), 838–859. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEIM-04-2019-0118>

- De Keyzer, F., Dens, N., & De Pelsmacker, P. (2017). Don't be so emotional! How tone of voice and service type affect the relationship between message valence and consumer responses to WOM in social media. *Online Information Review*, 41(7), 905–920.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/OIR-08-2016-0219>
- Dellarocas, C. (2006). Strategic manipulation of internet opinion forums: Implications for consumers and firms. *Management Science*, 52(10), 1577–1593.
<https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.1060.0567>
- Dennis, A. R., & Valacich, J. S. (1999). Rethinking media richness: Towards a theory of media synchronicity. *Proceedings of the 32nd Annual Hawaii International Conference on Systems Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.1109/HICSS.1999.772701>
- Denzin, N. K. (1978). *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods*. McGraw-Hill.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Introduction: Entering the field of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (1st ed., pp. 1–18). Sage.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2017). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (5th ed.). Sage.
- Dickinger, A. (2011). The trustworthiness of online channels for experience- and goal-directed search tasks. *Journal of Travel Research*, 50(4), 378–391.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287510371694>
- Doney, P. M., & Cannon, J. P. (1997). An examination of the nature of trust in buyer–seller relationships. *Journal of Marketing*, 61(2), 35–51.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/002224299706100203>

- Duffy, A. (2017). Trusting me, trusting you: Evaluating three forms of trust on an information-rich consumer review website. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 16(3), 212–220. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cb.1628>
- Duggan, M., & Brenner, J. (2013). *The demographics of social media users—2012*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2013/02/14/the-demographics-of-social-media-users-2012/>
- Duro, J. A., Perez-Laborda, A., Turrion-Prats, J., & Fernández-Fernández, M. (2021). Covid-19 and tourism vulnerability. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 38, Article 100819. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2021.100819>
- Eid, M. (2011). *Research methods in communication*. Pearson.
- Eisner, E. W. (1991). *The enlightened eye: Qualitative inquiry and the enhancement of educational practice*. Macmillan.
- Ekinci, Y., Gursoy, D., Can, A. S., & Williams, N. L. (2022). Does travel desire influence COVID-19 vaccination intentions? *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 31(4), 413–430. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19368623.2022.2020701>
- Fan, A., Shen, H., Wu, L., Mattila, A. S., & Bilgihan, A. (2018). Whom do we trust? Cultural differences in consumer responses to online recommendations. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 30(3), 1508–1525. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-01-2017-0050>
- Fang, Y. H. (2014). Beyond the credibility of electronic word of mouth: Exploring eWOM adoption on social networking sites from affective and curiosity perspectives. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, 18(3), 67–102. <https://doi.org/10.2753/JEC1086-4415180303>

- Fang, Y. H., Tang, K., Li, C. Y., & Wu, C. C. (2018). On electronic word-of-mouth diffusion in social networks: Curiosity and influence. *International Journal of Advertising*, 37(3), 360–384. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2016.1256014>
- Farivar, S., Turel, O., & Yuan, Y. (2017). A trust-risk perspective on social commerce use: An examination of the biasing role of habit. *Internet Research*, 27(3), 586–607. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IntR-06-2016-0175>
- Faulkner, B. (2001). Towards a framework for tourism disaster management. *Tourism Management*, 22(2), 135–147. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177\(00\)00048-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177(00)00048-0)
- Filieri, R. (2016). What makes an online consumer review trustworthy? *Annals of Tourism Research*, 58, 46–64. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2015.12.019>
- Filieri, R., Alguezaui, S., & McLeay, F. (2015). Why do travelers trust TripAdvisor? Antecedents of trust towards consumer-generated media and its influence on recommendation adoption and word of mouth. *Tourism Management*, 51, 174–185. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2015.05.007>
- Filieri, R., & McLeay, F. (2014). E-WOM and accommodation: An analysis of the factors that influence travelers' adoption of information from online reviews. *Journal of Travel Research*, 53(1), 44–57. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287513481274>
- Filieri, R., McLeay, F., Tsui, B., & Lin, Z. (2018). Consumer perceptions of information helpfulness and determinants of purchase intention in online consumer reviews of services. *Information and Management*, 55(8), 956–970. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.im.2018.04.010>
- Finne, E., Englert, C., & Jekauc, D. (2019). On the importance of self-control strength for regular physical activity. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 43, 165–171. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2019.02.007>

- Fogg, B. J., Soohoo, C., Danielson, D. R., Marable, L., Stanford, J., & Tauber, E. R. (2003). How do users evaluate the credibility of web sites? A study with over 2,500 participants. *Proceedings of the 2003 Conference on Designing for User Experiences*. <https://doi.org/10.1145/997078.997097>
- Furner, C. P., Zinko, R., & Zhu, Z. (2016). Electronic word-of-mouth and information overload in an experiential service industry. *Journal of Service Theory and Practice*, 26(6), 788–810. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JSTP-01-2015-0022>
- Gajda, K. (2020). Factors shaping interorganizational trust in e-commerce based on literature review. *Management*, 24(1), 23–38. <https://doi.org/10.2478/manment-2019-0034>
- Gefen, D., & Straub, D. W. (2004). Consumer trust in B2C e-commerce and the importance of social presence: Experiments in e-products and e-services. *Omega*, 32(6), 407–424. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.omega.2004.01.006>
- Geissinger, A., Laurell, C., & Sandström, C. (2020). Digital disruption beyond Uber and Airbnb—Tracking the long tail of the sharing economy. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 155, Article 119323. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2018.06.012>
- Gerrard, N. (2017, November 29). *Fake reviews! 85% of hospitality businesses fall victim to malicious or false online reviews*. The Caterer. <https://www.thecaterer.com/news/hotel/fake-reviews-85-of-hospitality-businesses-fall-victim-to-malicious-or-false-online-reviews>
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1999). *Discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203793206>
- Gonçalves Curty, R., & Zhang, P. (2013). Website features that gave rise to social commerce: A historical analysis. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, 12(4), 260–279. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.elerap.2013.04.001>

- Goyette, I., Ricard, L., Bergeron, J., & Marticotte, F. (2010). e-WOM Scale: Word-of-mouth measurement scale for e-services context. *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences*, 27(1), 5–23. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cjas.129>
- Gretzel, U., Yoo, K. H., & Purifoy, M. (2007). *Online travel review study: Role & impact of online travel reviews*. Texas A&M University.
<https://www.tripadvisor.com/pdfs/OnlineTravelReviewReport.pdf>
- Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole & J. L. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and semantics 3: Speech acts* (pp. 41–58). Academic Press.
- Griebie, A. M., & Immelman, A. (2021, July 11). The personality profile and leadership style of U.S. President Joe Biden. *44th Annual Scientific Meeting of the International Society of Political Psychology*.
https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/psychology_pubs/130/
- Ha, T., Han, S., Lee, S., & Kim, J. H. (2017). Reciprocal nature of social capital in Facebook: An analysis of tagging activity. *Online Information Review*, 41(6), 826–839.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/OIR-02-2016-0042>
- Hajli, M. (2013). A research framework for social commerce adoption. *Information Management & Computer Security*, 21(3), 144–154. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IMCS-04-2012-0024>
- Hajli, N. (2014). A study of the impact of social media on consumers. *International Journal of Market Research*, 56(3), 387–404. <https://doi.org/10.2501/IJMR-2014-025>
- Hajli, N. (2015). Social commerce constructs and consumer's intention to buy. *International Journal of Information Management*, 35(2), 183–191.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2014.12.005>

- Hajli, N., & Sims, J. (2015). Social commerce: The transfer of power from sellers to buyers. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change, 94*, 350–358.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2015.01.012>
- Hajli, N., Sims, J., Zadeh, A. H., & Richard, M. O. (2017). A social commerce investigation of the role of trust in a social networking site on purchase intentions. *Journal of Business Research, 71*, 133–141. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.10.004>
- Han, H., & Trimi, S. (2017). Social commerce design: A framework and application. *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research, 12*(3), 50–68.
<https://doi.org/10.4067/S0718-18762017000300005>
- Hennig-Thurau, T., Gwinner, K. P., Walsh, G., & Gremler, D. D. (2004). Electronic word-of-mouth via consumer-opinion platforms: What motivates consumers to articulate themselves on the internet? *Journal of Interactive Marketing, 18*(1), 38–52.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/dir.10073>
- Herr, P. M., Kardes, F. R., & Kim, J. (1991). Effects of word-of-mouth and product-attribute information on persuasion: An accessibility-diagnostics perspective. *Journal of Consumer Research, 17*(4), 454–462. <https://doi.org/10.1086/208570>
- Hew, J. J., Lee, V. H., Ooi, K. B., & Lin, B. (2016). Mobile social commerce: The booster for brand loyalty? *Computers in Human Behavior, 59*, 142–154.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.01.027>
- Hilligoss, B., & Rieh, S. Y. (2008). Developing a unifying framework of credibility assessment: Construct, heuristics, and interaction in context. *Information Processing & Management, 44*(4), 1467–1484. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ipm.2007.10.001>
- Hoffner, C. A., & Bond, B. J. (2022, June 1). Parasocial relationships, social media, & well-being. *Current Opinion in Psychology*. Elsevier B.V.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2022.101306>

- Hofstede, G. (1983). Dimensions of national cultures in fifty countries and three regions. In J. B. Deregowski, S. Dziurawiec, & R. C. Annis (Eds.), *Expiscations in cross-cultural psychology* (pp. 335–355). Swets and Zeitlinger B.V.
- Hofstede, G. H. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations*. Sage.
- Hu, H. H., Kandampully, J., & Juwaheer, D. D. (2009). Relationships and impacts of service quality, perceived value, customer satisfaction, and image: An empirical study. *Service Industries Journal*, 29(2), 111–125.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02642060802292932>
- Huang, Z., & Benyoucef, M. (2013). From e-commerce to social commerce: A close look at design features. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, 12(4), 246–259.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.elerap.2012.12.003>
- Huang, Z., & Benyoucef, M. (2017). The effects of social commerce design on consumer purchase decision-making: An empirical study. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, 25, 40–58. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.elerap.2017.08.003>
- Huberman, A. M., & Miles, M. B. (1994). Data management and analysis methods. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 428–444). Sage.
- Hwang, Y., & Jeong, S. H. (2016). “This is a sponsored blog post, but all opinions are my own”: The effects of sponsorship disclosure on responses to sponsored blog posts. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 62, 528–535.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.04.026>
- Ibáñez-Sánchez, S., Orús, C., & Flavián, C. (2022). Augmented reality filters on social media. Analyzing the drivers of playability based on uses and gratifications theory. *Psychology & Marketing*, 39(3), 559–578. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21639>

- Iglesias, O., & Ind, N. (2020). Towards a theory of conscientious corporate brand co-creation: The next key challenge in brand management. *Journal of Brand Management*, 27(6), 710–720. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-020-00205-7>
- Ishii, K., Lyons, M. M., & Carr, S. A. (2019). Revisiting media richness theory for today and future. *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies*, 1(2), 124–131. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hbe2.138>
- Ismagilova, E., Dwivedi, Y. K., Slade, E., & Williams, M. D. (2017). *Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) in the marketing context*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-52459-7>
- Ismagilova, E., Rana, N. P., Slade, E. L., & Dwivedi, Y. K. (2021). A meta-analysis of the factors affecting eWOM providing behaviour. *European Journal of Marketing*, 55(4), 1067–1102. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-07-2018-0472>
- Ismagilova, E., Slade, E., Rana, N. P., & Dwivedi, Y. K. (2020). The effect of characteristics of source credibility on consumer behaviour: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 53. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.01.005>
- Israel, S. E. (2015). *Verbal protocols in literacy research: Nature of global reading development*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315852201>
- Jackson, W., Gillis, A., & Verberg, N. (2011). Qualitative research methods. In M. Eid (Ed.), *Research methods in communication* (pp. 237–268). Pearson.
- Jacob, S., & Furgerson, S. (2012). Writing interview protocols and conducting interviews: Tips for students new to the field of qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, 17(42), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2012.1718>
- Jacobsen, J. K. S., & Munar, A. M. (2012). Tourist information search and destination choice in a digital age. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 1, 39–47. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2011.12.005>

- Jăşcanu, N., Jăşcanu, V., & Nicolau, F. (2007). A new approach to e-commerce multi-agent systems. *The Annals of "Dunarea de Jos" University of Galati. Fascicle III, Electrotechnics, Electronics, Automatic Control, Informatics, 30*, 11–18.
<https://www.gup.ugal.ro/ugaljournals/index.php/eeaci/article/view/665>
- Javornik, A., Marder, B., Barhorst, J. B., McLean, G., Rogers, Y., Marshall, P., & Warlop, L. (2022). "What lies behind the filter?" Uncovering the motivations for using augmented reality (AR) face filters on social media and their effect on well-being. *Computers in Human Behavior, 128*, article 107126.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2021.107126>
- Jones, K., & Leonard, L. N. K. (2008). Trust in consumer-to-consumer electronic commerce. *Information & Management, 45*(2), 88–95. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.im.2007.12.002>
- Jorge, F., Teixeira, M. S., Correia, R. J., Gonçalves, R., Martins, J., & Bessa, M. (2018). A conceptual research model proposal of digital marketing adoption and impact on low density tourism regions. In Á. Rocha, H. Adeli, L. P. Reis, & S. Costanzo (Eds.), *Trends and advances in information systems and technologies: Vol. 745* (pp. 528–537). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-77703-0_52
- Kapoor, P. S., M S, B., Maity, M., & Jain, N. K. (2021). Why consumers exaggerate in online reviews? Moral disengagement and dark personality traits. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 60*, Article 102496.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2021.102496>
- Kaushik, K., Mishra, R., Rana, N. P., & Dwivedi, Y. K. (2018). Exploring reviews and review sequences on e-commerce platform: A study of helpful reviews on Amazon.in. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 45*, 21–32.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2018.08.002>

- Kendall, L. (2008). The conduct of qualitative interviews. In J. Coiro, M. Knobel, C. Lankshear, & D. J. Leu (Eds.), *Handbook of research on new literacies* (pp. 133–150). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410618894.ch5>
- Kim, J. M., Park, K. K., & Mariani, M. M. (2023). Do online review readers react differently when exposed to credible versus fake online reviews? *Journal of Business Research*, *154*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.113377>
- Kim, S., & Park, H. (2013). Effects of various characteristics of social commerce (s-commerce) on consumers' trust and trust performance. *International Journal of Information Management*, *33*(2), 318–332. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2012.11.006>
- Kim, W. G., Li, J. J., & Brymer, R. A. (2016). The impact of social media reviews on restaurant performance: The moderating role of excellence certificate. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, *55*, 41–51. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2016.03.001>
- Kim, Y., Srite, M., & Zhao, H. (2023). Trust antecedents in online reviews across national cultures. *Decision Support Systems*, 113998. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dss.2023.113998>
- King, R. A., Racherla, P., & Bush, V. D. (2014). What we know and don't know about online word-of-mouth: A review and synthesis of the literature. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *28*(3), 167–183. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2014.02.001>
- Kusumasondjaja, S., Shanka, T., & Marchegiani, C. (2012). Credibility of online reviews and initial trust: The roles of reviewer's identity and review valence. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, *18*(3), 185–195. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356766712449365>

- Kuusela, H., Spence, M. T., & Kanto, A. J. (1998). Expertise effects on prechoice decision processes and final outcomes: A protocol analysis. *European Journal of Marketing*, 32(5/6), 559–576. <https://doi.org/10.1108/03090569810216181>
- Lai, L. (2010). Social commerce – E-commerce in social media context. *International Journal of Social, Behavioral, Educational, Economic, Business and Industrial Engineering*, 4(12), 2213–2218.
- Lee, H. A., Law, R., & Murphy, J. (2011). Helpful reviewers in TripAdvisor, an online travel community. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 28(7), 675–688. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2011.611739>
- Lee, K. T., & Koo, D. M. (2012). Effects of attribute and valence of e-WOM on message adoption: Moderating roles of subjective knowledge and regulatory focus. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 28(5), 1974–1984. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2012.05.018>
- Lee, M., & Youn, S. (2009). Electronic word of mouth (eWOM): How eWOM platforms influence consumer product judgement. *International Journal of Advertising*, 28(3), 473–499. <https://doi.org/10.2501/S0265048709200709>
- Leite, F. P., & Baptista, P. de P. (2022). The effects of social media influencers' self-disclosure on behavioral intentions: The role of source credibility, parasocial relationships, and brand trust. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 30(3), 295–311. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10696679.2021.1935275>
- Levy, S., & Gvili, Y. (2015). How credible is e-word of mouth across digital-marketing channels? The roles of social capital, information richness, and interactivity. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 55(1), 95–109. <https://doi.org/10.2501/JAR-55-1-095-109>
- Li, X., Zhao, X., Xu, W., & Pu, W. (2020). Measuring ease of use of mobile applications in e-commerce retailing from the perspective of consumer online shopping behaviour

- patterns. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 55, Article 102093.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102093>
- Liang, T. P., & Turban, E. (2011, January 1). Introduction to the special issue social commerce: A research framework for social commerce. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce* 16(2), 5–14. <https://doi.org/10.2753/JEC1086-4415160201>
- Lin, T. M. Y., Lu, K.-Y., & Wu, J.-J. (2012). The effects of visual information in eWOM communication. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 6(1), 7–26.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/17505931211241341>
- Lin, X., Li, Y., & Wang, X. (2017). Social commerce research: Definition, research themes and the trends. *International Journal of Information Management*, 37(3), 190–201.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2016.06.006>
- Lin, X., Wang, X., & Hajli, N. (2019). Building e-commerce satisfaction and boosting sales: The role of social commerce trust and its antecedents. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, 23(3), 328–363.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10864415.2019.1619907>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.
- Litvin, S. W., Goldsmith, R. E., & Pan, B. (2008). Electronic word-of-mouth in hospitality and tourism management. *Tourism Management*, 29(3), 458–468.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2007.05.011>
- Llamero, L. (2014). Conceptual mindsets and heuristics in credibility evaluation of e-word of mouth in tourism. *Online Information Review*, 38(7), 954–968.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/OIR-06-2014-0128>
- Llewellyn, E. (2019, March 13). Social commerce trends in 2019. *Smart Insights*.
<https://www.smartinsights.com/ecommerce/social-commerce-trends-2019/>

- Lo, A. S., & Yao, S. S. (2019). What makes hotel online reviews credible? An investigation of the roles of reviewer expertise, review rating consistency and review valence. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 31(1), 41–60. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-10-2017-0671>
- Lopes, R., Abrantes, J. L., & Kastenholz, E. (2013). Online reviews credibility: Implications on travellers' decision making. In M. Kozak & N. Kozak (Eds.), *Aspects of tourist behavior* (pp. 47–62). Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Luo, C., Luo, X., Schatzberg, L., & Sia, C. L. (2013). Impact of informational factors on online recommendation credibility: The moderating role of source credibility. *Decision Support Systems*, 56(1), 92–102. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dss.2013.05.005>
- Ma, Y., Xiang, Z., Du, Q., & Fan, W. (2018). Effects of user-provided photos on hotel review helpfulness: An analytical approach with deep learning. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 71, 120–131. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2017.12.008>
- Mahat, N. Z. D., & Hanafiah, M. H. (2020). Help me TripAdvisor! Examining the relationship between TripAdvisor e-WOM attributes, trusts towards online reviews and travellers' behavioural intentions. *Journal of Information and Organizational Sciences*, 44(1), 83–112. <https://doi.org/10.31341/jios.44.1.4>
- Maheshwari, S. (2019, November 28). When is a star not always a star? When it's an online review. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/28/business/online-reviews-fake.html>
- Mair, J., Ritchie, B. W., & Walters, G. (2016). Towards a research agenda for post-disaster and post-crisis recovery strategies for tourist destinations: A narrative review. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 19(1), 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2014.932758>

- Mayzlin, D., Dover, Y., & Chevalier, J. (2014). Promotional reviews: An empirical investigation of online review manipulation. *American Economic Review*, *104*(8), 2421–2455. <https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.104.8.2421>
- Mazursky, D., & Schul, Y. (1992). Learning from the ad or relying on related attitudes: The moderating role of involvement. *Journal of Business Research*, *25*(1), 81–93. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0148-2963\(92\)90006-W](https://doi.org/10.1016/0148-2963(92)90006-W)
- McGinnies, E., & Ward, C. D. (1980). Better liked than right: Trustworthiness and expertise as factors in credibility. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *6*(3), 467–472.
- Mendes-Filho, L., Tan, F. B., & Milne, S. (2010). Backpacker use of user-generated content: A consumer empowerment study. In U. Gretzel, R. Law, & M. Fuchs (Eds.), *Information and communication technologies in tourism 2010* (pp. 455–466). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-211-99407-8_38
- Merriam, S. B. (1988). *Case study research in education: A qualitative approach*. Jossey-Bass.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. Sage.
- Mkono, M., & Tribe, J. (2017). Beyond reviewing: Uncovering the multiple roles of tourism social media users. *Journal of Travel Research*, *56*(3), 287–298. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287516636236>
- Moradi, M., & Zihagh, F. (2022). A meta-analysis of the elaboration likelihood model in the electronic word of mouth literature. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, *46*(5), 1900–1918. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12814>
- Moran, G., & Muzellec, L. (2017). eWOM credibility on social networking sites: A framework. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, *23*(2), 149–161. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2014.969756>

- Moriuchi, E. (2018). Is that really an honest online review? The effectiveness of disclaimers in online reviews. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 26(3), 309–327.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10696679.2018.1451257>
- Morse, J. M. (1994). Emerging from the data: The cognitive processes of analysis in qualitative inquiry. In J. M. Morse (Ed.), *Critical issues in qualitative research methods* (pp. 23–43). Sage.
- Mumuni, A. G., O'Reilly, K., MacMillan, A., Cowley, S., & Kelley, B. (2020). Online product review impact: The relative effects of review credibility and review relevance. *Journal of Internet Commerce*, 19(2), 153–191.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15332861.2019.1700740>
- Mutumukwe, C., Kolkowska, E., & Grönlund, Å. (2020). Information privacy in e-service: Effect of organizational privacy assurances on individual privacy concerns, perceptions, trust, and self-disclosure behavior. *Government Information Quarterly*, 37(1), Article 101413. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2019.101413>
- Neuman, W. L. (2011a). Analysis of qualitative data. In M. Eid (Ed.), *Research methods in communication* (pp. 341–378). Pearson.
- Neuman, W. L. (2011b). Qualitative and quantitative research. In M. Eid (Ed.), *Research methods in communication* (pp. 303–340). Pearson.
- Nielsen. (2012). *Global trust in advertising and brand messages*.
<https://www.nielsen.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/04/global-trust-in-advertising-2012>.
- Nielsen. (2015). *Global trust in advertising*. <https://www.nielsen.com/insights/2015/global-trust-in-advertising-2015/>.
- Nilashi, M., Ali Abumalloh, R., Alrizq, M., Alghamdi, A., Samad, S., Almulihi, A., Althobaiti, M. M., Yousoof Ismail, M., & Mohd, S. (2022). What is the impact of

- eWOM in social network sites on travel decision-making during the COVID-19 outbreak? A two-stage methodology. *Telematics and Informatics*, 69.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2022.101795>
- Normile, D. (2020, March 17). Coronavirus cases have dropped sharply in South Korea. What's the secret to its success? *ScienceInsider*.
<https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abb7566>
- Ohanian, R. (1990). Construction and validation of a scale to measure celebrity endorsers' perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. *Journal of Advertising*, 19(3), 39–52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.1990.10673191>
- Oliveira, T., Alhinho, M., Rita, P., & Dhillon, G. (2017). Modelling and testing consumer trust dimensions in e-commerce. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 71, 153–164.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.01.050>
- Oshio, A., Taku, K., Hirano, M., & Saeed, G. (2018). Resilience and Big Five personality traits: A meta-analysis. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 127, 54–60.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2018.01.048>
- Park, D. H., & Lee, J. (2008). eWOM overload and its effect on consumer behavioral intention depending on consumer involvement. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, 7(4), 386–398. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.elerap.2007.11.004>
- Park, H., Xiang, Z., Josiam, B., & Kim, H. (2014). Personal profile information as cues of credibility in online travel reviews. *Anatolia*, 25(1), 13–23.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13032917.2013.820203>
- Park, N., Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). Strengths of character and well-being. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 23(5), 603–619.
<https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.23.5.603.50748>

- Park, S., & Nicolau, J. L. (2015). Asymmetric effects of online consumer reviews. *Annals of Tourism Research, 50*, 67–83. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2014.10.007>
- Petty, R. E., & Cacioppo, J. T. (1986). The elaboration likelihood model of persuasion. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, 19*, 123–205. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601\(08\)60214-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60214-2)
- Pihlaja, J., Saarijärvi, H., Spence, M. T., & Yrjölä, M. (2017). From electronic WOM to social eWOM: Bridging the trust deficit. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice, 25*(4), 340–356. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10696679.2017.1345593>
- Pirolli, B. (2018). Travel information online: Navigating correspondents, consensus, and conversation. *Current Issues in Tourism, 21*(12), 1337–1343. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2016.1273883>
- Pitrelli, M. (2020, May 15). What will hotel visits be like? Here's your room-by-room look at the future. *CNBC*. <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/05/15/hotels-during-coronavirus-resorts-make-safety-changes-for-covid-19.html>
- Portal, S., Abratt, R., & Bendixen, M. (2019). The role of brand authenticity in developing brand trust. *Journal of Strategic Marketing, 27*(8), 714–729. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0965254X.2018.1466828>
- Pyle, M. A., Smith, A. N., & Chevtchouk, Y. (2021). In eWOM we trust: Using naïve theories to understand consumer trust in a complex eWOM marketplace. *Journal of Business Research, 122*, 145–158. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.08.063>
- Qiu, L., Pang, J., & Lim, K. H. (2012). Effects of conflicting aggregated rating on eWOM review credibility and diagnosticity: The moderating role of review valence. *Decision Support Systems, 54*(1), 631–643. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dss.2012.08.020>
- Ran, L., Zhenpeng, L., Bilgihan, A., & Okumus, F. (2021). Marketing China to U.S. travelers through electronic word-of-mouth and destination image: Taking Beijing as an

- example. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 27(3), 267–286.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1356766720987869>
- Rambe, P. (2017). Impact of social media advertising on high energy drink preferences and consumption. *The Journal of Applied Business Research*, 33(4), 653–668.
- Reichelt, J., Sievert, J., & Jacob, F. (2014). How credibility affects eWOM reading: The influences of expertise, trustworthiness, and similarity on utilitarian and social functions. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 20(1–2), 65–81.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2013.797758>
- Reyes-Menendez, A., Saura, J. R., & Martinez-Navalon, J. G. (2019). The impact of e-WOM on hotels management reputation: Exploring TripAdvisor review credibility with the ELM model. *IEEE Access*, 7, 68868–68877.
<https://doi.org/10.1109/ACCESS.2019.2919030>
- Rieh, S. Y., & Danielson, D. R. (2007). Credibility: A multidisciplinary framework. *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology*, 41(1), 307–364.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/aris.2007.1440410114>
- Roberts, K. H., Madsen, P., & Desai, V. (2007). Organizational sensemaking during crisis. In C. M. Pearson, C. Roux-Dufort, & J. A. Clair (Eds.), *International handbook of organizational crisis management* (pp. 107–122). Sage.
- Roelofsen, M., & Minca, C. (2018). The superhost. Biopolitics, home and community in the Airbnb dream-world of global hospitality. *Geoforum*, 91, 170–181.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2018.02.021>
- Roy, A., & Chattopadhyay, S. P. (2010). Stealth marketing as a strategy. *Business Horizons*, 53(1), 69–79. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2009.09.004>
- Saldaña, J. (2015). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). Sage.

- Saunders, B., Sim, J., Kingstone, T., Baker, S., Waterfield, J., Bartlam, B., Burroughs, H., & Jinks, C. (2018). Saturation in qualitative research: Exploring its conceptualization and operationalization. *Quality & Quantity*, *52*(4), 1893–1907.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-017-0574-8>
- Schindler, R. M., & Bickart, B. (2012). Perceived helpfulness of online consumer reviews: The role of message content and style. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, *11*(3), 234–243. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cb.1372>
- Sen, S., & Lerman, D. (2007). Why are you telling me this? An examination into negative consumer reviews on the web. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *21*(4), 76–94.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/dir.20090>
- Sharma, M., & Dangwal, R. C. (2017). Young consumers' attitude towards trust in e-WOM sources and intention to follow. *NICE Journal of Business*, *12*(2), 28–38.
- Sheer, V. C., & Chen, L. (2004). Improving media richness theory: A study of interaction goals, message valence, and task complexity in manager-subordinate communication. *Management Communication Quarterly*, *18*(1), 76–93.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318904265803>
- Siddiqui, M. S., Siddiqui, U. A., Khan, M. A., Alkandi, I. G., Saxena, A. K., & Siddiqui, J. H. (2021). Creating electronic word of mouth credibility through social networking sites and determining its impact on brand image and online purchase intentions in India. *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research*, *16*(4), 1008–1024. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jtaer16040057>
- Smith, J. W. (2016). The Uber-all economy of the future. *The Independent Review*, *20*(3), 383–390. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24562159>
- Smith, O. (2013, July 25). TripAdvisor fails to spot fake restaurant. *The Telegraph*.
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/news/TripAdvisor-fails-to-spot-fake-restaurant/>

- Sparks, B. A., & Browning, V. (2011). The impact of online reviews on hotel booking intentions and perception of trust. *Tourism Management*, 32(6), 1310–1323.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2010.12.011>
- Sparks, B. A., Perkins, H. E., & Buckley, R. (2013). Online travel reviews as persuasive communication: The effects of content type, source, and certification logos on consumer behavior. *Tourism Management*, 39, 1–9.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2013.03.007>
- Stake, R. E. (1978). The Case Study Method in Social Inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 7(2), 5–8. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X007002005>
- Stake, R. E. (1994). Case studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 236–247). Sage.
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Sage.
- Stake, R. E. (2010). *Qualitative research: Studying how things work*. Guilford Press.
- Statista. (2020). Global retail e-commerce market size 2014–2023. Retrieved December 9, 2022, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/379046/worldwide-retail-e-commerce-sales/>
- Stephen, A. T., & Toubia, O. (2010). Deriving value from social commerce networks. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 47(2), 215–228.
<https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkr.47.2.215>
- Tan, W. K., & Lee, B. Y. (2019). Investigation of electronic-word-of-mouth on online social networking sites written by authors with commercial interest. *Online Information Review*, 43(3), 462–480. <https://doi.org/10.1108/OIR-09-2016-0254>
- Tanupabrungsun, S., & Hemsley, J. (2018). Studying celebrity practices on Twitter using a framework for measuring media richness. *Social Media + Society*, 4(1).
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118763365>

- Tham, A., Croy, G., & Mair, J. (2013). Social media in destination choice: Distinctive electronic word-of-mouth dimensions. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 30(1–2), 144–155. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2013.751272>
- Thomas, M.-J., Wirtz, B. W., & Weyerer, J. C. (2019). Determinants of online review credibility and its impact on consumers' purchase intention. *Journal of Electronic Commerce Research*, 20(1), 1–20.
- Tien, D. H., Amaya Rivas, A. A., & Liao, Y. K. (2019). Examining the influence of customer-to-customer electronic word-of-mouth on purchase intention in social networking sites. *Asia Pacific Management Review*, 24(3), 238–249. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apmr.2018.06.003>
- Timoshenko, A. (2017). *Identifying customer needs from user-generated content* [master's thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology]. DSpace@MIT. <https://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/109648>
- Todd, P., & Benbasat, I. (1987). Process tracing methods in decision support systems research: Exploring the black box. *MIS Quarterly*, 11(4), 493–512. <https://doi.org/10.2307/248979>
- Tran, G. A., & Strutton, D. (2020). Comparing email and SNS users: Investigating e-servicescape, customer reviews, trust, loyalty and E-WOM. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 53, Article 101782. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.03.009>
- TripAdvisor. (2019, October 8). TripAdvisor introduces TripAdvisor Connect, a data offering for advertisers to reach, engage and activate high-intent audiences off-platform, beyond the brand's website and app. <https://tripadvisor.mediaroom.com/2019-10-08-TripAdvisor-Introduces-TripAdvisor-Connect-A-Data-Offering-for-Advertisers-to->

Reach-Engage-and-Activate-High-Intent-Audiences-Off-Platform-Beyond-the-Brands-Website-and-App.

Tsao, W. C., & Hsieh, M. T. (2015). eWOM persuasiveness: Do eWOM platforms and product type matter? *Electronic Commerce Research*, 15(4), 509–541.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10660-015-9198-z>

Tsao, W. C., Hsieh, M. T., Shih, L. W., & Lin, T. M. Y. (2015). Compliance with eWOM: The influence of hotel reviews on booking intention from the perspective of consumer conformity. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 46, 99–111.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2015.01.008>

Tseng, S., & Fogg B. J. (1999). Credibility and computing technology. *Communications of the ACM*, 42(5), 39–44.

Uğur, N. G., & Akbıyık, A. (2020). Impacts of COVID-19 on global tourism industry: A cross-regional comparison. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 36, Article 100744.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2020.100744>

Verma, D., & Dewani, P. P. (2020). eWOM credibility: A comprehensive framework and literature review. *Online Information Review*, 45(3), 481–500.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/OIR>

Verma, D., Prakash Dewani, P., Behl, A., Pereira, V., Dwivedi, Y., & Del Giudice, M. (2023). A meta-analysis of antecedents and consequences of eWOM credibility: Investigation of moderating role of culture and platform type. *Journal of Business Research*, 154. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.08.056>

Vermeulen, I. E., & Seegers, D. (2009). Tried and tested: The impact of online hotel reviews on consumer consideration. *Tourism Management*, 30(1), 123–127.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2008.04.008>

- Wang, C., Zhang, J., Yu, P., & Hu, H. (2018). The theory of planned behavior as a model for understanding tourists' responsible environmental behaviors: The moderating role of environmental interpretations. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, *194*, 425–434. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2018.05.171>
- Wang, F., Xu, H., Hou, R., & Zhu, Z. (2023). Designing marketing content for social commerce to drive consumer purchase behaviors: A perspective from speech act theory. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *70*, Article 103156. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2022.103156>
- Wang, X., Wang, H., & Zhang, C. (2022, June 1). A literature review of social commerce research from a system thinking perspective. *Systems*. <https://doi.org/10.3390/systems10030056>
- Wathen, C. N., & Burkell, J. (2002). Believe it or not: Factors influencing credibility on the web. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, *53*(2), 134–144. <https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.10016>
- Wirtz, J., & Chew, P. (2002). The effects of incentives, deal proneness, satisfaction, and tie strength on word-of-mouth behaviour. *International Journal of Service Industry Management*, *13*(2), 141–162. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09564230210425340>
- Wood, P. (2018, August 16). Read online review sites? Here are all the ways they're faked and manipulated. *ABC News*. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-08-17/read-online-reviews-heres-all-the-ways-theyre-manipulated/10117974>
- Xie, H., Miao, L., Kuo, P.-J., & Lee, B.-Y. (2011). Consumers' responses to ambivalent online hotel reviews: The role of perceived source credibility and pre-decisional disposition. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, *30*(1), 178–183. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2010.04.008>

- Yadav, M. S., de Valck, K., Hennig-Thurau, T., Hoffman, D. L., & Spann, M. (2013). Social commerce: A contingency framework for assessing marketing potential. *Journal of Interactive Marketing, 27*(4), 311–323. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2013.09.001>
- Yan, Q., Wu, S., Wang, L., Wu, P., Chen, H., & Wei, G. (2016). E-WOM from e-commerce websites and social media: Which will consumers adopt? *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications, 17*, 62–73. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.elerap.2016.03.004>
- Yan, Q., Wu, S., Zhou, Y., & Zhang, L. (2018). How differences in eWOM platforms impact consumers' perceptions and decision-making. *Journal of Organizational Computing and Electronic Commerce, 28*(4), 315–333.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10919392.2018.1517479>
- Yang, J., & Mai, E. S. (2010). Experiential goods with network externalities effects: An empirical study of online rating system. *Journal of Business Research, 63*(9–10), 1050–1057. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2009.04.029>
- Ye, Q., Law, R., & Gu, B. (2009). The impact of online user reviews on hotel room sales. *International Journal of Hospitality Management, 28*(1), 180–182.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2008.06.011>
- Yusuf, A. S., Che Hussin, A. R., & Busalim, A. H. (2018). Influence of e-WOM engagement on consumer purchase intention in social commerce. *Journal of Services Marketing, 32*(4), 493–504. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JSM-01-2017-0031>
- Zhang, J. (2018). Trust transfer in the sharing economy—A survey-based approach. *Junior Management Science, 3*(2), 1–32. <https://doi.org/10.5282/jums/v3i2pp1-32>
- Zhang, K. Z. K., & Benyoucef, M. (2016). Consumer behavior in social commerce: A literature review. *Decision Support Systems, 86*, 95–108.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dss.2016.04.001>

Zhou, L., Zhang, P., & Zimmermann, H. D. (2013). Social commerce research: An integrated view. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, 12(2), 61–68.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.elerap.2013.02.003>

Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Date:

Time and length:

Place:

Interviewee:

Occupation of interviewee:

Coordinates of interviewee:

Introduction

Thank you for completing the walk-through session of the study. We'll now move on to the semistructured interview. I am interviewing you today for the purpose of discussing the subject of credibility of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) on the TripAdvisor platform. Online reviews are considered a form of eWOM that facilitate the dissemination of eWOM among individuals interacting on online platforms. In the interview questions, I will be using the term "online reviews" throughout the session instead of "eWOM" because the TripAdvisor app hosts online reviews by travellers to help share travel knowledge among the app users.

It is expected that you express yourself freely and openly in this interview and share your, experience, knowledge, observations, and ideas on the subject. We briefly touched on this as part of your trip-planning exercise in the walk-through portion of the study today to capture a live experience. This interview will help to develop more depth in understanding the perceived credibility of online reviews by travellers who seek other peers' recommendations prior to their purchase.

This interview will be audio recorded. I would like to assure you again that our discussion and anything you say today will be treated with full confidentiality; no identifying information from you will be included in the final research thesis.

Interview Questions

1. Please take a moment to share with me a little bit about yourself and your travel experience.
Probe: Could you please tell me what motivated you to use TripAdvisor for travel planning instead of other tourism websites or online services?
2. How do you use online reviews?
3. Tell me about how important these online reviews are to you when planning a trip online. Please describe the significance they hold for you when planning a trip. Overall, how much on a scale of 1–10 do you feel that online reviews specifically influence your final decision to make a purchase on a hotel, trip, restaurant, etc. or not?
4. I'm interested in the idea of credibility; how would you define credibility?
5. How do you evaluate online reviews posted on the TripAdvisor app or site?
6. Think about the general characteristics of reviews that shape your final decision. Bring up a specific example of a review if you can.
Probe. In other words, what makes you think a review is credible or lacks credibility?
 - Are you aware of fake reviews?
 - Have you ever come across a suspect review you perceived as untruthful? Why did you perceive it as untruthful?
7. Do you tend to spend time reading all the reviews or only some? Discuss your selection process in deciding which reviews are important to read.
8. How do you feel about a review posted by a Facebook friend (i.e., being able to see your social network connections who have reviewed a specific service)?
 - Could you tell me how close you are to this friend?
9. According to media richness theory, the use of different media channels such as photos or videos will make the media richer. Will user-posted photos or videos of a travel destination influence your evaluation of online reviews? If yes, how?
10. Do you have any advice or recommendations to share regarding increasing or decreasing the credibility of online reviews when planning trips?

11. Does the current situation of COVID-19 influence the way that you evaluate the reviews?

If yes, how?

Probe:

- In general, do you think the pandemic alters the way you determine which tourism reviews are trustworthy or not? If yes, how?
- What aspects or elements of the online review might reinforce your trust toward the destination under the COVID-19 situation?
- Do countries' early intervention and quick response to prevent the spread of COVID-19 play a role in your trust toward reviews about tourism posted in that country? If yes, how? For example, quick versus late response to managing the COVID-19 situation.

Debriefing the Walk-Through and Semistructured Interview

You have now completed the study day. I would like to express my thanks for your time and cooperation. Is there anything that you desire to add or modify?

Your participation in this study is highly appreciated. I kindly ask you to not discuss any part of this study with eligible colleagues or friends.

Don't hesitate to contact me by email if you have any questions later or any further inquiries or if you need clarification on points discussed today.

Appendix B: Walk-Through Method

Date:

Time and length:

Place:

Activity:

Hello! My name is Layla Nasser. I am currently pursuing my doctorate in e-business at the University of Ottawa. Right now, my research entails a study of online consumer reviews to understand why travellers trust and tend to adopt some online reviews posted by other travellers on TripAdvisor's application. The data collection phase will be based on two sessions that will take place today. The first one is the walk-through method, which will last approximately 15 minutes, and the second session is the face-to-face interview, which will last about 20 minutes. Before I continue, do you have any general questions about the study?

Well, the walk-through method is originally used for usability testing, but in my research, I will use it for user experience to explore your responses and experiences while navigating the site or the application using your own device. And I'm going to observe your reactions while you talk out loud about your feelings and attitudes toward travellers' reviews and the reasons for your selections.

Before we start, I would like to let you know that I will be video recording the online meeting, but your face is not going to be recorded since you opted to join the meeting without video streaming. I'm recording the online meeting so I can transcribe your responses and analyze the answers later for data analysis. I can assure you that your identity will remain anonymous and confidential, and all the data will be secured in my personal computer with a password. To illustrate more, the walk-through works like this: first, you will be asked to share the screen so I can observe the steps you take while you navigate the TripAdvisor app. Then, you will be asked to log in to your Trip Advisor account and Facebook account simultaneously and type one of the following travel destinations you have never been to—London, Paris, New York, Vancouver, or Orlando—as your travel destination and you are going to explore what is out there that will help your decision whether to pick this destination or no.

While doing this, I want you to share with me your impressions about the reviews you see and to describe the process you follow when choosing which recommendation to pick. I am looking for you to navigate freely and openly and to comment on or discuss the reasoning behind your choices, specifically the characteristics of ratings and reviews that you see that you think important to you.

Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes

Visual sketch of the setting:



Walk-Through Probes

The following probes may be used if the participant has failed to mention or describe key concepts:

- Could you please click on the review bar?
- Why did you select this review?
- What steps did you take to reach your decision to adopt this review?
- How do you evaluate your chosen review?
- Will you be interested to see a review posted by your Facebook friends, and if yes, why?

- How do you identify credible information?
- Do you think that the provision of photos and videos attached in the review played any role in influencing your evaluation of the review?
- Are you convinced by this review, and why?

Appendix C: Consent Form

TITLE OF THE STUDY: The Perceived Credibility of eWOM in Online Tourism in the Social Commerce Context: A Case Study of Trip Advisor

Layla Nasser: Principal investigator. Department of Communication, Faculty of Arts, University of Ottawa

Professor Heather Morrison: Supervisor. Department: School of Information Studies, University of Ottawa

Professor Rocci Luppicini: Co-supervisor. Department of Communication, Faculty of Arts, University of Ottawa

Invitation to Participate: This is a doctoral thesis project, and I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by Layla Nasser under the supervision of Professor Heather Morrison and Professor Rocci Luppicini.

Purpose of the Study: This study aims to define and explore the aspects of online consumer reviews, otherwise known as electronic word of mouth (eWOM), which are perceived to be trustworthy or credible by other consumers who are planning future travel. The results will expand upon a limited field of knowledge in the hospitality and tourism industry and will provide insights to expand upon best practices and standards within the realm of travel-related product and services sales.

Member Participation: Use of the Microsoft Teams application for participation is required to take part in the study. The participant will voluntarily take part in an online meeting with the researcher to engage in a 15- to 20-minute experiment called a walk-through, in which the participant will share their screen with the researcher and navigate through a travel app (TripAdvisor), read online reviews, and discuss their opinions and thoughts aloud with an investigator observing them. During the walk-through session, the participant will be asked to navigate the TripAdvisor app or website freely and discuss their response to and choices about online reviews they encounter. Reviews by the participant's Facebook friends might be accessed to observe the participant's attitudes toward these reviews. Later, the participant will partake in a one-on-one interview with the investigator that will last about 30 minutes. The interview will be informal, and the participant is encouraged to freely discuss topics such as online reviews and online travel planning, brought up by the investigator. The participant will also confirm the accuracy of their statements as documented by the investigator to ensure data collected depicts their thoughts and discussion.

Risks: There are no known or expected risks associated with your participation in this study. By consenting to participate, you are documenting your decision to voluntarily contribute your time, knowledge, and personal opinions on the research topic.

Benefits: There are no immediate benefits to the participants upon completion of the study. However, participants will be provided the opportunity to share their knowledge and opinions about the research topic and will contribute information to a growing and exciting area of research in online tourism and e-communications.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: I'm aware that the researcher is recording the online meeting using an external video recording device to record only the screen during the walk-through session and an external audio recording device to record the interview. The meeting consists of a walk-through session, during which I will share my screen with the researcher while I navigate the TripAdvisor website, followed by an interview session for data transcription purposes. I have received a guarantee from the researcher that the information I will provide will stay strictly confidential because only the researcher will have access to the information I share. I realize that the content I will share will be used for the analysis and writing of this study and that my identity will be anonymous and protected in the following manner: my identity as a participant will be revealed only to the researcher, and my name will not appear in the findings of the research or be associated with the results at all.

Conservation of Data: The collection of data will be in the form of a video recording of the walk-through session and an audio recording of the interview session. However, only the screen of the participant's device will be video recorded during the walk-through session. A transcript of these two sessions will be securely kept as a hard copy in the researcher's home and a digital copy in the personal computer of the researcher, locked with secured password. Furthermore, solely the researcher will have the ability to access the collected data, and the data will be stored for five years following the completion of the study.

Voluntary Participation: I hold no obligation to participate in this study, and if I participate, I can withdraw at any time and/or refuse to answer any queries without suffering any negative consequences. The data collected from participants who withdraw will not be used and will be deleted and destroyed.

Compensation: All participants will be recruited through the ISPR and will receive one credit point as compensation. Participants will keep their compensation even if they withdraw from the study.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5, tel.: (613) 562-5387, email: ethics@uottawa.ca.

If I have any inquiry regarding the study, I may contact the researcher.

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participant's signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Researcher's signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Appendix D: Ethical Approval Certificate**Université d'Ottawa University of Ottawa**

Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

CERTIFICAT D'APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE | CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

Numéro du dossier/Ethics File Number Titre du projet / Project Title

Type de projet/Project Type

Statut du projet / Project Status

Date d'approbation (jj/mm/aaaa) / Approval Date (dd/mm/yyyy) Date d'expiration
(jj/mm/aaaa) / Expiry Date (dd/mm/yyyy)

Équipe de recherche/Research Team

S-10-19-4647

The Perceived Credibility of eWOM in the Context of Social Commerce: A Case Study of
TripAdvisor

Thèse de doctorat / Doctoral thesis

Approuvé / Approved 20/12/2019 19/12/2020.

Role

Chercheur Principal/Principal Investigator

Superviseur / Supervisor Co-superviseur / Co-supervisor

Chercheur/Researcher

Layla NASSER Heather MORRISON Rocci LUPPICINI

Affiliation

Département de communication / Department of Communication

École des sciences de l'information / School of Information Studies

Département de communication / Department of Communication

Conditions spéciales ou commentaires / Special conditions or comments550, rue Cumberland, pièce 154 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154 Ottawa (Ontario) K1N
6N5 Canada Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5 Canada613-562-5387 • 613-562-5338 • ethique@uOttawa.ca / ethics@uOttawa.ca
www.recherche.uottawa.ca/deontologie | www.recherche.uottawa.ca/ethics

20/12/2019

Université d'Ottawa

Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

Le Comité d'éthique de la recherche (CÉR) de l'Université d'Ottawa, opérant conformément à l'*Énoncé de politique des Trois conseils* (2014) et toutes autres lois et tous règlements applicables, a examiné et approuvé la demande d'éthique du projet de recherche ci-nommé.

L'approbation est valide pour la durée indiquée plus haut et est sujette aux conditions énumérées dans la section intitulée "Conditions Spéciales ou Commentaires". Le formulaire « Renouvellement ou Fermeture de Projet » doit être complété quatre semaines avant la date d'échéance indiquée ci-haut afin de demander un renouvellement de cette approbation éthique ou afin de fermer le dossier.

Toutes modifications apportées au projet doivent être approuvées par le CÉR avant leur mise en place, sauf si le participant doit être retiré en raison d'un danger immédiat ou s'il s'agit d'un changement ayant trait à des éléments administratifs ou logistiques du projet. Les chercheurs doivent aviser le CÉR dans les plus brefs délais de tout changement pouvant augmenter le niveau de risque aux participants ou pouvant influencer considérablement le déroulement du projet, rapporter tout événement imprévu ou indésirable et soumettre toute nouvelle information pouvant nuire à la conduite du projet ou à la sécurité des participants.

University of Ottawa

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

The University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board, which operates in accordance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* (2014) and other applicable laws and regulations, has examined and approved the ethics application for the above-named research project.

Ethics approval is valid for the period indicated above and is subject to the conditions listed in the section entitled "Special Conditions or Comments". The "Renewal/Project Closure" form must be completed four weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to request a renewal of this ethics approval or closure of the file.

Any changes made to the project must be approved by the REB before being implemented, except when necessary to remove participants from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) only pertain to administrative or logistical components of the project. Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes that increase the risk to participant(s), any changes that considerably influence the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively influence the conduct of the project or the safety of the participant(s).

Germain ZON

Responsable d'éthique en recherche/Protocol Officer

Pour/For Barbara GRAVES Président(e) du/ Chair of the Comité d'éthique de la recherche en sciences sociales et humanités / Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board

550, rue Cumberland, pièce 154 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154 Ottawa (Ontario) K1N
6N5 Canada Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5 Canada

613-562-5387 • 613-562-5338 • ethique@uOttawa.ca / ethics@uOttawa.ca
www.recherche.uottawa.ca/deontologie | www.recherche.uottawa.ca/ethics

20/12/2019

Appendix E

Table 2

Breakdown of the Major and Minor Themes in Response to Research Question 1 (RQ1)

Research Question	Themes and Subthemes	No. of References	No. of Participants
RQ1. What are the factors that influence the credibility of eWOM in the tourism industry?	Content	977	18
	Quality/containing actual reviews from customers.	587	18
	Argument quality	323	18
	*Descriptive details and length of content	225	18
	*Recency	32	13
	*Diversity	45	10
	*Clarity of the content	12	8
	*Comprehensiveness	9	5
	visuals	192	18
	*The quality, source, and quantity of visuals		
	consistency	64	16
	writing style	8	4
	Quantity/ crowd consensus	314	18
	Review structure	172	18
*Ratings (TRPS star ratings, individual star ratings,			

Research Question	Themes and Subthemes	No. of References	No. of Participants
	TripAdvisor ratings, and extremity) *Review valence (positive, negative, and average) Review quantity Length of the content	90 82 86 56	17 17 17 14
	Customer Relevance *Customer preferences *Sociocultural identity *To the travel group *Homophily *Relevance to TRPS *Relevance to COVID-19 Customer behaviour (Customer subjectivity, cross-referencing style, and customer self-trust) Customer cognitive effort *Customer analytic thinking	342 155 62 50 13 11 15 4 123 64 57	18 18 15 10 7 6 5 3 17 17 17

Research Question	Themes and Subthemes	No. of References	No. of Participants
	*Awareness of stealth marketing	7	6
	Communicator	206	17
	Source credibility (Personal identification information, reviewer's bias, and subjectivity)	163	17
	Source expertise	43	9
	*Contributor	13	5
	*"Helpful" vote	10	5
	*Effort	13	5
	*Travel expertise	3	3
	Context	120	15
	Platform	32	13
	Product type	11	9
	COVID-19	64	6
	*Health and safety measures	26	6
	*Travel destinations	27	6
	*Customer's perception of COVID-19	11	3
	Brand name and reputation	13	6

Research Question	Themes and Subthemes	No. of References	No. of Participants
	Community	70	18
	Strength of social ties	59	18
	*Personal characteristics of individuals		

Note. eWOM = electronic word of mouth, TRPS = travel-related products and services

Appendix F

Table 3

Breakdown of Themes in Response to Research Subquestion 1 (RSQ1)

Research Question	Themes and Subthemes
SRQ1. How do these factors shape travellers' perceptions of the credibility of eWOM?	<p>Content</p> <p>Having adequate explanation, reasoning justifying the review or rating given to enhance clarity of the content.</p> <p>*Providing personalized examples from experience</p> <p>* Using short to medium but descriptive and informative words in reviews (length, descriptive written content)</p> <p>*Requiring the number of stars to align with the written text of the content to trigger consistency</p>
	Having reflections of reality to trigger customer's expectations
	<p>*Recency of posted reviews related to trigger's accuracy</p> <p>*Requiring photos to support and justify the reviews</p> <p>*Requiring the photos to align with the written text (content, source and customer, context)</p> <p>Length of the content and descriptive details in it; subjectivity vs objectivity of the source; core vs supplementary TRPS; customer relevance to the source; preferences (likes and dislikes)</p>

Research Question	Themes and Subthemes
	<p>(Source and content)</p> <p>Avoid the provision of emotional or biased information.</p> <p>*Evaluating extreme reviews</p> <p>*Provide diverse evaluation of TRPS and comprehensiveness to facilitate representativeness</p> <p>*Effort reflected in the content of the review triggers source expertise</p>
	<p>*Poor writing style (grammar/spelling mistakes, use of coarse language)</p> <p>*Content irrelevant to TRPS</p> <p>*Rating stars seen as subjective when review lacks descriptive content</p>
	<p>*Believing that fewer advertisements make the website more user friendly</p>
	<p>(Source and platform TripAdvisor [TA])</p>
	<p>*Having votes from other users</p> <p>(Content [visuals], product type, and platform)</p> <p>*Photos of TRPS posted on TA vs Instagram</p> <p>(Content and product type)</p> <p>*Supplementary vs core TRPS</p> <p>*Experiential vs food products and visuals</p>

Research Question	Themes and Subthemes
	<p>(Customer and source)</p> <p>Customer's analytical thinking</p> <p>Being able to customize reviews based on demographics and preferences.</p> <p>*Relevance to customer preferences</p> <p>*Relevance to social-identity group (travel group)</p> <p>*Similarities and differences in culture</p> <p>Homophily</p> <p>*Trusting known and reliable brands</p>

Note. eWOM = electronic word of mouth, TRPS = travel-related products and services

Appendix G

Table 5

Breakdown of Themes in Response to Research Question 3 (RQ3; Determinants of Media Richness Theory [MRT])

Research Question	Themes and Subthemes
<p>RQ3. How does media richness, as measured by visual clues (e.g., photos and videos), influence credibility and trust in eWOM?</p>	<p>Informative, contextual, and interactional determinants of the medium (TripAdvisor)</p> <p>Informative (content)</p> <p>Visuals</p> <p>Preferring to see actual photos and videos from reviewers as a source of information.</p> <p>Photos</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *High vs low quality of photos/videos *High vs low quantity of photos/videos *Information derived from photos *Photo quantity *Emotions in photos <p>Videos</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Audio visuals *Motion in videos *Length of videos *Difficulty to photoshop compared to photos <p>Online reviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Review quantity *Argument quality

Research Question	Themes and Subthemes
	<p>Informative (platform)</p> <p>*TA ranking system of TRPS based on popularity, value, location, price, etc.</p> <p>*Categorizing online reviews and ratings based on four categories (excellent, very good, average, poor)</p> <p>Platform (interactional)</p> <p>*Believing fewer advertisements make the website more user friendly</p> <p>*Management response to traveller's reviews</p> <p>Contextual (platform)</p> <p>Convenience in finding travel information categorized based on TRPS</p>

Note. eWOM = electronic word of mouth, TRPS = travel-related products and services