The review that stopped you from eating there

Negative online reviews as persuasive communication

Author: Volha Zhyhimont, 21498
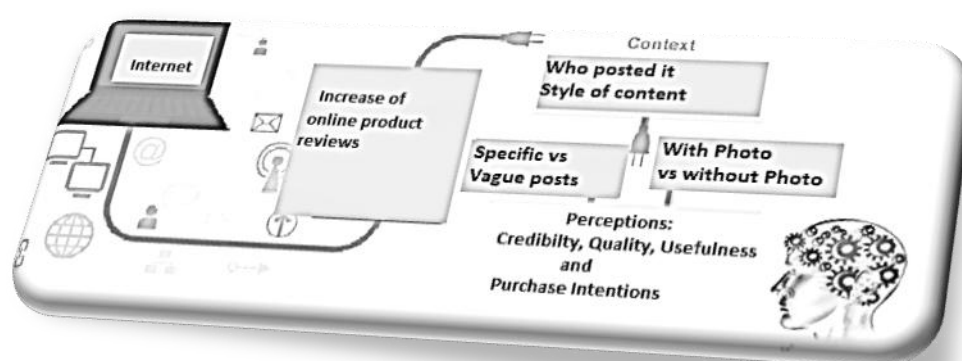
Supervisor: Sofie Sagfossen

Examinator: Emilia Rovira

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Key words: Online consumer reviews, review credibility, review quality, review usefulness, purchase decision, restaurant service.

Graphical abstract[1]

Abstract: The exponential growth of e-commerce creates a large amount of information that influences other consumers.[2] This study investigates how potential consumers perceive negative online reviews in terms of credibility, quality and usefulness. Additionally, it examines how negative online reviews influence consumers' purchase decisions in a restaurant context. It was found that consumers perceive specific content reviews as being of higher credibility, quality and usefulness compared to reviews with a vague content. Furthermore, consumers perceived reviews as being of higher credibility and quality, when they contained a reviewer's photo, compared to reviews where a reviewer's photo was missing. It was also found that the presence of a reviewer's photo had no impact on consumers' purchase decisions, while the type of the content (specific versus vague) had. Thus, for example, those consumers who had been exposed to reviews with a specific content had a higher intention to change their purchase decisions than those who had been exposed to reviews with a vague content.

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[1] Graphical abstract is modified from the picture on http://ars.els-cdn.com/content/image/1-s2.0-S0261517713000861-fx1.jpg

[2] Brown and Reingen, 1987; Chatterjee, 2001; Chen and Xie, 2008; Dellarocas, 2003; Godes and Mayzlin, 2004

Many thanks to:

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Online consumer reviews have developed into an important source of product related information (Brown and Reingen, 1987; Chatterjee, 2001; Chen and Xie, 2008; Dellarocas, 2003). This form of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) communication has also changed the way consumers search for information to support their purchase decisions. The accessibility, vast quantity, and variability of online reviews have contributed to a growing popularity (Cheung et al., 2012). Thus, for example, online review sites have gained significant popularity among travelers (Gretzel and Yoo, 2008; Gretzel et al., 2007). One of the most popular independent travel-sites – TripAdvisor – claims that it had more than 50 million visitors and about 60 million travel reviews on its site in January 2012 (TripAdvisor, 2012).

1.2 eWOM versus WOM

Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) is commonly defined as:"Any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual customers, or former customers, which is made available to a multitude of people and instutions via the Internet" (Henning-Thurau et al., 2004, p. 39). Online consumer reviews increase in popularity among consumers and sellers (Chen and Xie, 2008). Together with word-of-mouth (WOM), they play a great role for consumers' purchase decisions (Chen and Xie, 2008). In the context of this thesis WOM is defined as "An oral person-to-person communication between a receiver and communicator whom the receiver perceives as noncommercial, regarding brand, a product or a service" (Arndt, 1967, p.3). Although both eWOM and WOM are frequently and interchangeably used by many people for their purchase decisions, there also exist many differences between them (Dellarocas, 2003). Firstly, WOM is a face-to-face communication, while eWOM is many-to-many communication shared in a written form through the internet (Chatterjee, 2001). In contrast to WOM, eWOM information has a long time survival and potentially is accessed by thousands of readers (Hung and Yiyan Li, 2007). On the contrary, information which is exchanged via WOM lasts only as long as it stays in the listener's memory (Granitz and Ward, 1996).

Furthermore, perhaps the most distinctive difference is a number of ties and their strength among people, sharing their product experiences with each other (Chatterjee, 2001). In this study, the term *tie strength* refers to the relative strength of relationship between people exchanging product information (Granovetter, 1973). In contrast to a WOM context, where the

information is shared between few individuals having strong ties with each other (e.g., friends, family, colleagues, acquaintances), in a eWOM context, the information is mostly exchanged between people with relatively weak ties (Chatterjee, 2001; Schindler and Bickart, 2005).

1.3 Positive versus negative WOM and eWOM

In marketing research, WOM is sometimes classified as positive, neutral or negative. Positive WOM implies "pleasant, vivid, or novel experiences, recommendations to others" while negative WOM implies "product denigration, relating unpleasant experiences, rumors, and private complaining" (Anderson, 1998, p. 6). It has been claimed that consumers do not regard positive and negative reviews equally (Zhang, Cranium and Shin, 2010). Additionally, previous research on WOM, has showed that negative WOM compared to positive WOM attracts more attention from consumers (Ba and Pavlou, 2002; Pavlou and Dimoka, 2006).

Furthermore, it has been suggested that negative WOM could have a stronger impact on consumers' purchase decisions (Fukuyama, 1995). Some researchers also claim that in a WOM context, a negative WOM message have a stronger effect on consumers' purchase intentions compared to a positive WOM (Chatterjee, 2001; Weinger, Allen and Dillon, 1981).

Dealing with eWOM, website managers have the possibility to control the information that is shown on their websites (Park and Kim, 2008). Although, there exists empirical evidence for negative effects arising from negative online reviews, it is not always good for website managers to delete them (Khare, Labrecque and Asare, 2011). Thus, for example, according to Kumar (2006) negative online reviews mixed with positive ones may create more credibility than only positive ones. This is because consumers trust web based information more, when they are exposed to both positive and negative reviews (Khare, Labrecque and Asare, 2011).

1.4 Problem area

When making a purchase, consumers search for information to reduce uncertainty and perceived risks. To reduce the risk of buying wrong products and poor services, the Internet has created a huge community of unconstrained consumer voices giving the opportunity for consumers to share their product and service experiences with each other (Schindler and Bickart, 2003). As the result of this, eWOM is now commonly used for consumers' buying decisions (Brent and Coker, 2012).

One of the problems in eWOM marketing area is that recommendations in eWOM are typically from strangers, which provides much difficulty for consumers to determine the credibility of an information source (Park and Lee, 2009). Furthermore, another important issue, which is closely

related to online customer recommendations, is review manipulation. Following Hu et al. (2011) *review manipulation* is when reviewers employ in writing online customer reviews with the aim to increase or decrease the rating or the awareness of the product while hiding behind anonymity. Menkveld (2013) states that manipulation of online recommendations, is a growing concern about the credibility of online reviews, and points out that there is solid evidence of marketers manipulating public opinion with fake online reviews.

Given the increased interest among practitioners to use online customer reviews in their marketing (Chen and Xie, 2005), the need for a better understanding of how eWOM influences customers purchase decisions has increased (Henning-Thurau, 2004). Additionally, a better understanding of how eWOM influences potential consumers gives the possibility of taking control over the eWOM communication channel in order to make it even more influential (Dellarocas, 2003).

1.5 Purpose

The overall purpose of this study is to investigate:

- How negative online reviews about a restaurant service are perceived by potential consumers.

- How a consumer's purchase decision i.e. to make a table reservation is influenced by negative online reviews written by previous consumers on independent review sites.

More specifically, I aim to answer the following questions:

a. Do potential consumers trust a negative online review about a restaurant if it just has a general description of service failure? How does a potential consumer perceive such a review? Can such a review change a consumer's intention to make a table reservation in the reviewed restaurant?[3]

b. Do potential consumers trust a negative online review about a restaurant if they know nothing about its reviewer? How does a potential consumer perceive such a review? Can such a review change a consumer's intention to make a table reservation in the reviewed restaurant?

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[3] In this study, to make a table reservation is the same as to buy a restaurant service

1.6 Intended contribution

Despite the increased interest to online consumer reviews by retailers and consumers (Cheung et al., 2012), little research has been done about how the content of online reviews affects consumers' evaluations of the information provided in these reviews (Sparks, 2013; Chaterjee, 2001).

Although the topic of eWOM is growing within the field of marketing (Forman et al., 2008), there are many issues that are still unexplored (Sen and Lerman, 2007). While prior research has examined the relationship between review valence, volume and sales, surprisingly little research has been done investigating the effects of the information that reviewers add about themselves (Chan and Ngai, 2011; Forman et al., 2008). Despite the importance of understanding the influence of source identity on the persuasiveness of eWOM, the existing research is still scarce (Forman et al., 2008). There exists just little research about how the source information influences consumers' perceptions about product reviewed in an online environment (Zhang and Awad, 2007; Forman et al., 2008). This research points out a significant role of a reviewer's gender, age and state of residence on consumers' product evaluations (Steffes and Ragowsky, 2008; Dellarocas, Zhang and Awad, 2007; Forman et al., 2008). Therefore, this study which examines the role of a reviewer's photo on consumers' evaluations of the information provided by online reviews is going to contribute with its findings in this still unexplored marketing area.

Furthermore, it must be mentioned that most of the studies have been conducted in the United States and in Asian countries (Chan and Ngai, 2011) and the study in Sweden might be useful for a wider geographical and cultural scope of online research.

1.7 Delimitations

Due to the limitations in time, several delimitations were applied. First of all, this study aims to investigate just one type of reviews, which are the reviews on independent web sites. Much of the previous research suggests that the nature of website can also influence the impact of a review (Hoffman, Novak and Chatterjee, 1995; Metzger et al., 2004; Senecal et al., 2004). Thereby, many researchers distinguish three types of website classifications: sellers (e.g., retailer websites such as Amazon.com), commercially linked third parties (e.g., comparison shopping websites like Pricerunner.com) and finally, non-commercially linked third parties (e.g. such as Consumerreports.org) (Hoffman, Novak, and Chatterjee, 1995; Spiller and Lohse, 1998; Alba et al., 1997). The latter are also described as most preferred by consumers (Hoffman, Novak, and Chatterjee, 1995; Spiller and Lohse, 1998; Alba et al., 1997; Lynch and Ariely, 2000). In the context of this study, *independent websites* are defined as "non-commercially linked third parties with reviews posted by previous customers" (Senecal and Nantel, 2005, p. 160).

The consumers' preferences towards independent sites are explained by their trust in reviewers' opinions, knowing that reviewers have no incentives to manipulate public opinion (Folkes, 1998). This is also supported by Senecal and Nantel (2004), who claim that consumers are skeptical to reviews if they suspect that the information is skewed towards the interests of the information source[4].

Secondly, this study is limited to the investigation of negative online reviews since they are most influential (Chavalier and Mayzlin, 2006; Sen and Lerman, 2007) and have a stronger effect on consumers' purchase decisions compared to positive ones (Metzger et al., 2004).

Thirdly, this study is constrained by the investigation of online negative reviews in a restaurant service context since the research about eWOM in a restaurant context, to the best of my knowledge, is still not explored. Although it is possible that prior marketing research of such services as hotels and trips (Spark et al., 2013; Kukusmandoja et al.,2012) might be, to some extent, applicable even in a restaurant service context.

1.8 Disposition

The introduction chapter provides the background of the chosen research area. It continues with specifying the problem of the study and defining its purpose. Chapter 2 presents the previous research on this topic and the reasons behind the influence on consumers' purchase decisions. Chapter 3 provides an explanation of the chosen methodology as well as a discussion of the study's reliability and validity. Chapter 4 presents the study's results and analysis. The overall and final conclusions of this thesis are provided in chapter 5. And lastly, chapter 6 presents a critical review of the paper and suggestions for future research.

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[4] i.e. a reviewer

2   Theoretical framework

This part of the study describes the theoretical framework of the thesis. Further, the rest of the chapter is divided into four subcategories: review credibility, review quality, review usefulness and consumer's intention to change a purchase decision. Each section provides a formulation of two hypotheses.

2.1 eWOM in service situations

Uncertainty reduction theory suggests that individuals, who are exposed to uncertainty, will try to use different strategies to minimize it (Berger and Calabrese, 1975). Thus, for example, many consumers try to reduce uncertainty by finding credible information that can be used for a purchase decision (Jacoby et al., 1994). Most people perceive risk in many purchase situations, which explains why they like to take a purchase trial (Berry, 1980). However, there exists a problem with many services, since they are often intangible and, as result of this, hard to trial (Berry, 1980; Zeithaml et al., 1985). Therefore, eWOM in the form of an online review is likely to be even more influential in a service context.

2.2 Adoption model

Sussman and Siegal (2003) have proposed a theoretical model of information adoption in an online environment. This model illustrates that information acquisition is influenced by two factors: argument quality and source credibility (Sussman and Siegal, 2003). In this model argument quality refers to the persuasive strength of a message and source credibility is related to readers' trust in the source of an online message (Battacherje and Sanford, 2006). Further, Sussman and Siegal (2003) claim that both argument quality and source credibility determine information usefulness which, in turn, leads to its adoption.[5]
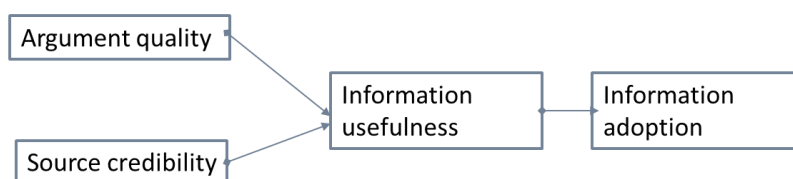

Figure 1: Adoption model, Sussman and Siegel (2003)

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[5] In this model it means that people are ready to follow others recommendations in their own organisation.

2. 3 Review credibility - Do you trust "an invisible man"?

Much of the previous research, investigating online product reviews, has ignored the effect of source credibility on consumers' perceptions (Jensen, 2013). At the same time, Cheung et al. (2009) claim that credibility is one of the biggest concerns about online consumer reviews. Several researchers state that, online product reviews, unlike WOM, come from strangers and most readers perceive them as being less credible compared to the messages from people they know (Chaterjee, 2001; Cheung et al., 2009; Menkveld, 2013). With regard to what is meant by source credibility, several studies measure it by two dimensions; trustworthiness and expertise (Eastin, 2001; Erdem and Swait, 2004; Fogg, 2003). However, some researchers state that trustworthiness might come without expertise, and vise versa (Eastin, 2001; Erdem and Swait, 2004). Therefore, some of these researchers argue that the measurement of source credibility, which is usually used in WOM research, cannot be properly applied in an online environment, and refer to source credibility as person's ability to make correct assertions and his or her motivation to provide trustful information (Li and Zhan, 2011; Metzger et al., 2004). Following this reasoning, I choose to refer to, *source credibility* as "the perceived ability and motivation of a message source to provide accurate and truthful information" (Kelman and Hovland, 1953, p. 427).

Examining the role of source identity[6] in an online environment, Sussman and Siegel (2003) provide two explanations, why it plays a crucial role. Firstly, they state that information adoption[7] will be more efficient, when the identity of the information source[8] is disclosed. Secondly, they claim that source identity increases source credibility and, as the result of this, even information credibility.

In the context of this study, the term *information credibility* is defined as the extent to which customers perceive information to be believable (McKnight and Kacmar, 2007). In previous research source credibility has been proved to have a positive effect on information credibility (Chow et al., 1995; Mak and Lyytinen, 1997; Slater and Rouner, 1996; Wathen and Burkell, 2002). However, many researchers recognise a huge problem for potential consumers to evaluate source credibility in an online environment (Jensen, 2013). Thus, for example, while

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[6] The information about who is a reviewer.

[7] Intention of a consumer to follow the viewpoint which is provided by a message.

[8] The information which is verifying who wrote the review.

examining the role of source identity on consumers' perceptions of online reviews on travel review sites, Kusumasondjaja et al. (2012) point out, that these sites usually provide too little information about their reviewers. This also supported by Metzger et al. (2003) stating that it is difficult for a reader to evaluate the trustworthiness of an online review without knowing its source. These researchers state, in particular, that the absence of information source makes it difficult to know whether to trust it or not (Metzger et al., 2003). Moreover, due to the nature of the Internet, which makes it possible for reviewers to leave their reviews anonymously, the concerns about fabricated and false information arise (Fogg, 2003).

It is reasonable to suggest that the presence of a reviewer's photo attached to the text of a review indicates a genuine intention of a reviewer to prevent potential consumers to make a purchase that they will regret. A similar reasoning has been tested by Duo et al. (2013) in his research and its results indicate that a verification of the information source plays a crucial role in helping people to judge the credibility of online reviews. In particular, a visible information source[9] was perceived by potential consumers as the intention of the source to provide truthful information. Therefore, I argue that in the cases, when reviewers' photos are not available[10] potential consumers perceive online reviews as being of lower credibility compared to the cases when review are present, and thereby I expect that:

> H 1a: Readers of negative online reviews with a reviewer's photo perceive them as being of higher credibility than reviews without a reviewer's photo.

Additionally, some researchers state that information quality can also increase information credibility (Porpritakapan, 2004; Slater and Rouner 1996; Spark et al., 2013). They have even empirically confirmed its positive effect on consumers' perceptions of information credibility: the higher information quality, the higher the level of trust among consumers in information credibility provided by this source (Porpritakapan, 2004; Slater and Rouner, 1996; Spark et al., 2013). Several researchers claim that the quality of online reviews which are provided by previous consumers is varying and may contain arguments of different strength. Thus for example, following Spark et al. (2013), the arguments in reviews can either be specific or vague. These researchers also posit that these arguments have different persuasive power and are similar to definition of strong and weak arguments (Spark et al., 2013). In their research they define specific arguments as relevant information about a hotel, describing it in detail and

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[9] The information which is verifying who wrote the review.

[10] Given that there is no any other identity descriptive information.

containing an accurate description of its service. Following their reasoning I adopt the largest part of his definition and add "supporting facts" as the description of a restaurant service failure when defining a specific versus vague review in the context of this study. Thus, the term, *a specific content review* in this study is defined as a review with an accurate description of restaurant service, containing supporting facts and details about a service failure. On the contrary, *a vague content review* is defined as a review with a general description of restaurant service lacking supporting facts and details about service failure.

Investigating the influence of the content of online reviews' on the perception of information credibility, it has been found that a detailed explanation increases the argument strength (Ajzen et al., 1996) what, in turn turn, increases information trustworthiness. Furthermore, in eWOM research about hotel services, Kusumasondjaja et al. (2012) have suggested and empirically supported, that potential consumers perceive reviews which are supported by convincing arguments and complete details as being more credible than reviews without concrete facts or examples.

Additionally, by examining the role of content of online reviews in travel services, Spark et al. (2013) have found that specific content reviews are perceived as more trustworthy than vague content ones. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest, that this is also the case in a restaurant service context i.e. specific content reviews should be perceived as more credible than vague content reviews. Therefore, my next hypothesis is:

> H 1b: Readers of negative online reviews with a specific content perceive them as being of higher credibility than reviews with a vague content.

2.4 Review quality

Since there is no standard format for reviews which are placed on independent review websites, each review looks different from others. Therefore, the content of online reviews ranges from short to long and from subjective to objective (Chatterjee, 2001). Some researchers divide online reviews in high and low quality and rank quality of online consumer review in terms of relevance, reliability, understandability and sufficiency (Park, Lee and Han, 2007). However, in this study, *information quality* refers to the persuasive strength of a content review (Li and Zhang, 2011).

In WOM research literature, together with the content of a message, consumers analyse information about its source. Many researchers claim that the perception of a reader of being similar to a reviewer leads to a stronger persuasive effect of shared information (Hass, 1981; McGuire, 1969; Price, Feick, and Higie, 1989). In eWOM research literature, to the best of my

knowledge, no research has been done investigating the effect a reviewer's photo on a consumer's perception of review quality. The only research that investigated the effect of a disclosed reviewer's photo was aimed to provide information about how consumers perceive product quality of the reviewed objects (Jensen, 2013). However it is reasonable to suggest that review credibility will also have a positive impact on review quality and therefore I hypothize that:

> H 2a: Readers of negative online reviews with a reviewer's photo perceive them as being of higher quality than reviews without a reviewer's photo.

Some scholars state that in the case, when potential consumers are unable to fully understand a product quality with the help of an online review, they will evaluate this review as being of low quality and speculate that a reviewer is unwilling to fully describe his or her consumption experience (Sen and Lerman, 2007). In addition to this, Pornpitakpan et al. (2004) claim, that a review with a detailed explanation of a reviewed product will be perceived as being of high quality. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that vague content reviews which, per definition, do not provide a clear description of service will be evaluated by potential consumers as being of low quality. Based on all mentioned above findings, it is quite reasonable to provide the following hypothesis:

> H 2b: Readers of negative online reviews with a specific content perceive them as being of higher quality than reviews with a vague content.

2.5 Review usefulness

The information acquisition is stated to be the main reason to read online consumer reviews (Liu, 2006; Park and Lee, 2008). Therefore, the most important benefit that consumers look for online reviews is their usefulness (Liu, 2006; Park and Lee, 2008; Wiertz and De Ruyter, 2007). This is also confirmed by Park and Lee (2009) claiming that if potential consumers perceive reviews as being useful, they will likely to use the information provided by these reviews for their purchase decisions. This is also confirmed by Hu et al. (2008), and Kim and Damhorst (2010) who state that those consumers, who perceive the reviews as being useful are more likely to adopt the information[11] presented in them (Mazaheri et al., 2011).

In this study, the *usefulness of a review* is defined as the extent, to which consumers perceive the product review can influence their purchase decisions (Mudambi and Schuff, 2010). Several

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[11] It means to follow the advice provided by a reviewer.

scholars have argued that source and content are two important factors which determine the impact of an online review (Park and Lee, 2008; Huang and Li, 2007). In WOM literature, Brown et al. (2007) claim that perceived likeliness between a reviewer and a reader influences the effectiveness of communication and even consumers' perceptions of its usefulness. However, the measurement of likeliness can be divided into demographical measures such as age, gender and location (i.e. state of residence) and other measures that relate to a person's values and beliefs (Gilly, et al., 1998). Some could argue that perceived likeliness is less valuable in eWOM settings, since the information on independent review sites is limited to demographical information. However, I argue that demographical information can also be valuable for judgments of online reviews on the websites with limited information about reviewers (e.g. an older person may have other preferences for choosing a restaurant than an older one).

Some researchers have also shown that many characteristics of a reviewer influence how potential consumers perceive the usefulness of a review (Forman et al., 2008; Pan and Zhang, 2011). Thus, for example, Forman et al. (2008) state that the more reviewers reveal about themselves, the more useful their reviews are going to be perceived by consumers. In WOM research, Brown and Reingen (1987) found that the more a reader of WOM knows about its writer, the more influential the message is going to be. With regard to independent review sites, it should be noted that they have a restricted amount of information about the people sharing product experiences. However, I argue that although a reviewer's photo does not tell much about a person's interests; it still gives information about a reviewer's approximate age, sex and attractiveness. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that:

> H 3a: Readers of negative online reviews with a reviewer's photo perceive them as being of higher usefulness than reviews without a reviewer's photo.

Several researchers claim that the content abstractness of product reviews have a significant effect on review usefulness (Hu, Liu, and Zhang, 2008). They have also empirically supported that potential consumers perceive concrete reviews as more useful than abstract ones (Hu, Liu, and Zhang, 2008). Some researchers have also suggested that relevant information with supporting and factual arguments contributes to the usefulness of online reviews (Slater, 2002). Additionally, Li and Zhang (2011) have empirically supported that a review with a more detailed description of product's characteristics is usually considered as more useful by their potential consumers. Based on these findings, I argue that specific content reviews will be perceived as more useful than vague content reviews. Hence, my next hypothesis is:

H 3b: Readers of negative online reviews with a specific content perceive them as being of higher usefulness than reviews with a vague content.

2.6 Consumer's intention to change a purchase decision[12]

Kozinets (1999) states that eWOM can substantially decrease consumers' uncertainty in form of perceived risk, information asymmetry, information absence, etc., and can even help potential consumers to decide whether to make a purchase or not. Thus, the aim of online consumer reviews are not just to share product experiences, but also to effect purchase decisions of those consumers who rely on them (Cheung and Luo, 2007). Thus, for example, Jensen et al. (2013) state that those consumers, who perceive the information source to be credible are more likely to adopt information for their purchase decisions. Furthermore, Metzger et al. (2007), and Park and Lee (2008) claim that potential consumers are not likely to adopt information (i.e. follow the advice) in a review until they believe that information provided by a review is credible. For the strengthening of my argumentation and for the building of my next hypothesis, I would like to add one more reason, why I expect that a reviewer's photo should increase information adoption. According to Brown, Broderick and Lee (2007) perceived likeliness has been proved to have a positive effect on consumers' intentions to follow the advice while making a purchase decision in an online environment. Thus, by attaching a reviewer's photo representing a person, who is the same age, I argue that this should increase, even if it probably has little value, consumers' intentions to change their purchase decisions. Therefore my next hypothesis is:

H 4a: Readers who are exposed to negative online reviews with a reviewer's photo have a higher intention to change a purchase decision than readers, who are exposed to reviews without a reviewer's photo.

Since there is no standard format for online reviews, each online review is different from others. Some researchers state, that specific content reviews containing a more factual and detailed information[13] about a product or service are usually perceived as being more persuasive, and have a greater effect on consumers' purchasing intentions (Spark et al., 2013). This is also supported by Park, Lee and Han (2007) by their work "Effects of review quantity and quality on purchasing intention" in which they claim that recommendations without specific reasons are less persuasive, than those containing several supporting facts. Additionally, they posit that persuasive reviews have a greater effect on consumers' purchasing decisions (Park, Lee and Han;

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[12] i.e. to change the intention to make a table reservation

[13] Se definition specific versus vague content reviews on p. 14.

2007). All the mentioned above information can, therefore, serve as the basis for my next hypothesis stating that:

> H 4b: Readers who are exposed to negative online reviews with a specific content have a higher intention to change a purchase decision than those, who are exposed to reviews with a vague content.

3 Methodology

This chapter begins with a description of the chosen scientific approach and the results of two pre-studies followed by the main study. Next, the measurements of perceived quality, perceived credibility, perceived usefulness and intention to change a purchase decision are presented. After that the reliability and validity of the study are discussed. At the end of the chapter there is a description of the methods used for analysing the collected data.

3.1 Scientific approach

It is important that the scientific approach that is planned to be implied by the study is determined by its aim. As my primary goal was to investigate the effects of online negative review on perceptions of potential consumers and given that my hypotheses are based on existing theories, a deductive approach becomes a plausible choice (Malhotra and Birks, 2007). This approach is also chosen due to the possibility to come to more credible conclusions for large scale behavior intentions (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

3.2 Research design

The experiment's construction was conducted by setting up one review and a list of questions attached to it. Real reviews from the site TripAdvisor were partly changed to be able to serve as an appropriate stimulus for this study. The letter informed the participants that the study was aimed at online reviews of a restaurant service. The participants were asked to read one review carefully before answering the questions.

To make sure that the scenario presented in the experimental reviews could happen in real life the questionnaire contained several control questions asking if it was realistic that the respondents would come across such a review in reality. The examination of the means on scale from 1 to 7 (1= very unrealistic and 7=very realistic) showed a combined mean of 6.0 which confirmed that the scenario was perceived as realistic (see appendix D).

Additionally in order to make respondents think carefully while answering the questions a scenario of high involvement was presented: the respondents were supposed to read a negative

online review about a specific restaurant in order to decide whether to make a table reservation in the reviewed restaurant or not.

3.3 Pre-studies

Two pre-studies were conducted in order to determine the stimuli and the questions suitable for the main study. The first pre-study had a more qualitative character with 10 students, while another had a mixed character, and implied an interview of 7 people and a test of 30 other students.

3.3.1 First pre-study

The first pre-study was conducted in order to determine two types of stimuli for the main study. The objectives of the first pre-study were:

1) To establish what arguments in the reviews that can be considered as specific versus vague ones.

2) Find a good example of a photo to be attached to the review text.

In the pre-study, to determine specific arguments in the review a convenience sample of 7 students were asked to name the 4 most authentic associations with the notion of specific versus vague points in an online review about restaurant service. With regard to specific arguments in an online review about restaurant service respondents named: *date when it happened (visit date of the restaurant), description of the failure in detail, how big the failure was and the factual loss for a visitor.* Among the associations describing vague arguments were: *general arguments of dissatisfaction, failure description lacking details, unclear when it happened and whom to blame.*

The second purpose of the first pre-study was to choose a photo of the person representing a reviewer. The choice of the photo of the reviewer fell upon a 23-year old man who might be in the same age as the respondents of my survey. The important criterion for choosing this face was that it had to be clearly seen and even might be classified as nice in order not to provoke the respondents to drop the survey.

3.3.2 Second pre-study

The aim of the second pre-study was to test how respondents perceive the survey. Among the critique of the text were a large text's volume and the use of strong negative emotions. As far as the questions are concerned the word "harmful" was changed to useless on a bipolar seven scale useful/ harmful. Additionally one more critical point in the manipulated review referred to having some information in the review that was of no value but which could eventually bias the

results of the research (e.g. the ratings of the reviewer, the helpfulness of the review and the number of previous reviewers' posts). Therefore, that information was deleted. To test whether the content of the reviews were manipulated satisfactory I measured how these reviews[14] were perceived by the readers. The results showed that the manipulation of the data was successful (see appendix 1).

3.4 Collection of data

The invitations to participate in the study were sent to 1 351 students of Stockholm School of Economics, and 200 of them completed the survey. Since the age range for the experiment was between 20 and 30, eight respondents were considered as outliers and therefore dropped from the data analysis. The collected data was comprised of 200 of responses in total. The low completion rate of 14, 8% was noticeable, yet it was not surprisingly low, since, according to Malhotra (2004), online questionnaires respondent rate is usually about 10%. The biasness of the study was minimized by an equal distribution of the response rate in all four groups. Table 1 shows a summary of the data collection. The total sample of observations (n = 200) contained 44% of males and 56% females.

Table 1: Summary of data collection

	Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D	Total
Invitations sent out	361	350	330	310	1 351
Questionnaire collected	51	53	49	55	208
Respondents dropped	2	2	1	3	8
Final count	49	51	48	52	200
Men/ women	23/26	22/29	20/28	23/29	88/112

3.5 The main study

Firstly, the respondents were asked to read the first page of the questionnaire, which contained a statement about the study's purpose. The statement was the same for all four groups. Secondly the respondents were asked to go through one online consumer review describing the service of the restaurant written by previous customers. To set the right state of mind the respondents were also asked to assume they were looking for a restaurant to celebrate their friend's birthday. In other words they were asked to think about the situation that required the active search for different alternatives to choose the appropriate restaurant for an important evening. One of the

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[14] They were tested how vague versus specific reviews were perceived by readers.

statements in the scenario part of the experiment was that the respondents took a preliminary decision about the restaurant of interest since they saw a nice picture of the restaurant before making a purchase i.e. booking a table in that restaurant. Several reviews from TripAdvisor.com were modified to align with the objectives of this study (see appendix D for the questionnaire used in the main study).

3.5.1 Measurement of credibility

Credibility was measured on a seven-point semantic differential scale, using the items: Not at all Believable/Very Believable, Not at all Credible/Very Credible, Not at all Reliable/Very Reliable (Sussman and Siegal, 2003). Cronbach's alpha for that dimension was 0,708.

3.5.2 Measurement of quality

Argument quality was examined with the help of the statement: Evaluate information of this review on the following scale: Not at all Complete/Very Complete (Bailey and Pearson, 1983; Sussman and Siegal, 2003), Not at all Accurate/Very Accurate (Sussman and Siegal, 2003), Not at all Relevant/ Very Relevant (DeLone and McLean, 2003). Cronbach's alpha for that dimension was 0.804.

3.5.3 Measurement of usefulness

To test the hypotheses regarding usefulness of the negative online review the subjects were asked to rate a statement on a seven-graded semantic differential scale with the following labels: Valuable/Worthless, Informative/Uninformative, and Helpful/Unhelpful (Sussman and Siegal, 2003). Cronbach's alpha for that dimension was 0.802.

3.5.4 Measurement of consumer's intention to change a purchase decision

In this study I measured the consumer's intention to change a purchase decision as response to a negative online review. Therefore two questions were provided based on this definition. An intention to change a purchase decision was measured on a 7-point scale of agreement (1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree). The statements measuring that dimension were: this online review affects whether I make a table reservation in this restaurant; this customer review prevents me from considering this restaurant as a probable choice of making a table reservation there.

3.6 Basic ideas about the survey

Most of the questions in the survey were built upon a semantic differential scale that was represented by a seven-point scale with two bipolar labels (Söderlund, 2005). The questionnaire was divided into six parts with the intention to measure (1) perceived quality, (2) perceived

credibility, (3) perceived usefulness, and (4) consumer's intention to change a purchase decision, (5) realism of the scenario and (6) demographic variables (for a detailed description of the administrated questionnaire see appendix D).

3.7 Experiment design

Two independent variables were manipulated in the study: the content of a review (specific versus vague) and the photo of a reviewer (photo versus no photo).[15]
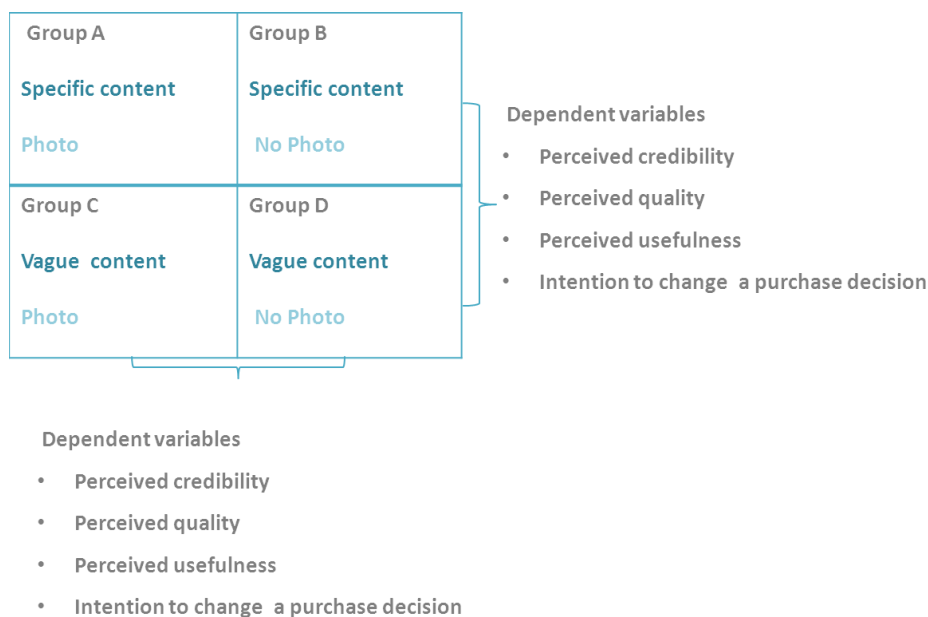
Figure 2: Experiment matrix with dependent variables

3.8 Reliability and validity

There are two dimensions which determine the quality of a research: validity and reliability. Validity implies that you are measuring what you intend to measure (Söderlund, 2005) while reliability investigates whether you get the same results using other methods of measurements (Söderlund 2005).

3.8.1 Reliability

To ensure a high reliability of the survey I used the method of having several questions to explain one dimension. Internal consistency was then measured by using Cronbach's Alpha. All

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[15] Given that there is no any other information about the reviewer.

Cronbach's Alpha of the measured dimensions were in the range between 0.708 to 0.804, which is higher than the accepted reliability level of 0.7 suggested by Nunnally (1978).

3.8.2 Internal validity

The condition for internal validity is satisfied if there is a casual relationship between the dependent and the independent variable (Malhotra, 2010), i.e. if the change in the dependent variable is caused by a change in the independent variable under condition that these effects are not caused by other variables. All four groups of respondents were exposed to identical experiments in execution, distribution and design (apart from the change of the online review). Therefore it is highly reasonable to conclude that differences in measured effects on the dependent variables result from the change in the design of the review. The questionnaire was available for respondents during one week, which minimized the risk of results being affected by external factors. Additionally all respondents answered the questionnaire in an online environment which is quite similar to the natural environment which should increase the level of validity of the experiment.

3.8.3 External validity

External validity indicates the extent to which results from the study can be generalised to other contexts e.g. another place, with slightly different people, at a later time (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2009). Further, external validity in the studies refers to whether the causal relationship can be generalised beyond the experimental environment (Malhotra, 2010). The use of a convenience sample in this study could lower its external validity since it is questionable if it is possible to generalise the results beyond the tested category of students at Stockholm School of Economics. The reason is that students in the capital of Sweden may not be representative of the whole Swedish population.

3.9 General information about the collected data

The collected data was analysed in the statistical program SPSS 22. To compare the mean values of all the dependent variables a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted. This analysis is usually used for the testing for the differences in means between two or more groups (Pallant, 2007). The objective of using a MANOVA was to find out if the dependent variables were changed by the manipulation of the independent variables (photo vs. no photo;

specific content vs. vague content). [16] After the MANOVA, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted.

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[16] Note: A MANOVA test has several advantages over an ANOVA test. Firstly, by measuring several dependent variables in a single test, there is a better chance of discovering what factor is truly important. Secondly, it can protect against Type I errors that might occur if multiple ANOVA's were separately conducted (for the results of this test, see appendix 2).
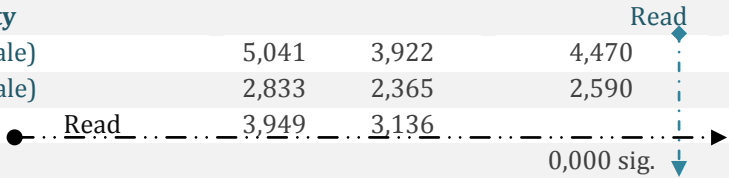
4 Results

This chapter presents the results of the experiment and gives short comments of its results. As I have mentioned in the previous chapter, firstly the results from the experiment were analysed with the help of a MANOVA test, and afterwards an ANOVA test was performed. The latter was done in order to show the results of the four dependent variables separately.

4.1 Summary of data

The data set consists of measured values of four dependent variables: (1) perceived credibility, (2) perceived quality, (3) perceived usefulness, and (4) consumer's intention to change a purchase decision. Preliminary testing has been conducted to check for normality, linearity and homogeneity of variances. A MANOVA test was conducted followed by an ANOVA (for result of the MANOVA test, see appendix 2). The results of the ANOVA test are listed in table 2:

Table 2: Means and p-levels of the dependent variables

Variable	Photo	No Photo	Total	Sig. (2-tailed)
Perceived Credibility			Read	
Specific (7-graded scale)	5,041	3,922	4,470	
Vague (7-graded scale)	2,833	2,365	2,590	
Total Read	3,949	3,136		0,000 sig.
Sig.(2-tailed)			0,000 sig.	
Perceived Quality				
Specific (7-graded scale)	4,449	4,098	4,270	
Vague (7-graded scale)	2,458	2,365	2,365	
Total	3,464	3,223		0,028 sig.
Sig. (2-tailed)			0,000 sig.	
Perceived Usefulness				
Specific (7-graded scale)	4,816	5,000	4,910	
Vague (7-graded scale)	2,771	2,442	2,600	
Total	3,804	3,709		0,489 n. s
Sig. (2-tailed)			0,000 sig.	
Intention to change a purchase decision				
Specific (7-graded scale)	3,292	3,250	3,270	
Vague (7-graded scale)	2,429	2,314	2,370	
Total	2,856	2,787		0,371 n. s
Sig. (2-tailed)			0,000 sig.	

Sig. level = 5%

4.2 Perceived credibility

When examining all four groups' means of credibility, it should be noted that group A's mean has the highest value (M_A= 5,041) while group D's mean has the lowest one (M_D = 2,365) The highest mean (M_A= 5,041) implies that the respondents who have read the specific content review containing the reviewer's photo perceived it as being the most credible review compared to all other groups. On the contrary, the lowest mean (M_D = 2,365) illustrates that the readers of the vague content review without the reviewer's photo considered that review as being the least credible compared to all other groups (see appendix 3).

Photo versus no photo (groups A + C versus B + D)

Looking at the results of the groups A+C and B+D, it should be noted that the readers who were exposed to the reviews with the reviewer's photo perceived them as being more credible than the reviews without it: M_{PH} = 3, 949 (average of A + C = 5,041 + 2,833), SD_{PH} = 1,318 versus M_{NO_PH} = 3.136 (average of B + D = 3,922 + 2,365), SD_{NO_PH} = 1,048. This difference is highly significant: F (1,196) = 62,706; p = 0,000; partial eta squared = 0,244.
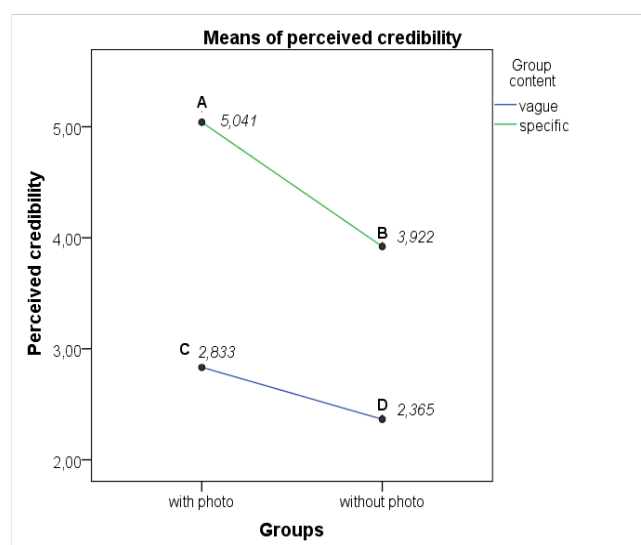
Figure 3a: Estimated means of perceived credibility

Specific versus vague content (groups A + B versus C+D)

The examination of mean scores of the groups A+B and C+D shows that the reviews with the specific content are perceived by the readers as being more credible than ones with the vague content: $M_{SPECIFIC}$ = 4, 47 (average of A + B = 5,041 + 3,922), $SD_{SPECIFIC}$ = 0,948 M_{VAGUE} = 2,590 (average of C+D = 2,833 + 2,365), SD_{VAGUE} = 0,684. This difference is highly significant: F (1,196) = 352,592; p = 0,000; partial eta squared = 0,643.

Interaction effect photo*content

The test for interaction effect between the content and the photo category shows a significant value: F (1,196) = 1,652, p = 0,001; partial eta squared = 0,008. This means that in this

experiment, the attached reviewer's photo positively moderates the perception of the specific content review. It means that the credibility of the specific content review increases more in the case when the photo is attached to the specific content category than when it is attached to the vague content category.

Summary of results: Perceived credibility

The empirical evidence for the difference in perception of credibility is found for the groups with the reviewer's photo and without it and for the groups studying specific versus vague content reviews: the readers of the reviews with the specific content considered the credibility of those reviews to be higher than the readers who examined the vague content reviews. Additionally, the readers of the reviews with the reviewer's photo perceived those reviews as being of higher credibility than the reviews without the reviewer's photo. Therefore:

> H 1a: Readers of negative online reviews with a reviewer's photo perceive them as being of higher credibility than reviews without a reviewer's photo **is supported.**

> H 1b: Readers of negative online reviews with a specific content perceive them as being of higher credibility than reviews with a vague content **is supported.**

4.3 Perceived quality

When examining the means of perceive quality of the review in the all four groups who participated in the experiment, it should be noted, that group A's mean has the highest value (M_A = 4,449) while group D's mean has the lowest one (M_D = 2,365). The first mentioned value (M_A = 4,449) illustrates that the readers of the specific content review with the attached reviewer's photo perceived that review as being of the highest quality compared to all other groups. The group D's mean value (M_D = 2,365) shows that, on the contrary, the readers who were exposed to the vague content review without the reviewer's photo, considered that review as being of the lowest quality *(for additional information see appendix 4).*

Photo versus no photo (groups A + C versus B + D)

The analysis of the estimated means of perceived quality of the groups examining the review with the reviewer's photo and without it shows, that the perceived quality of the review is higher for the groups exposed to the reviews with the reviewer's photo compared to the groups who examined the reviews without the photo: M_{PH} = 3.464 (average of A + C = 4,449 + 2,458), S_{DPH} = 1,217 versus M_{NO_PH} = 3.223 (average of B + D = 4,098 + 2,365), SD_{NO_PH} = 1,128. When analysing this difference, it should be noted that it is not very high but statistically significant: $F_{(1,196)}$ = 4,891, p = 0,028; partial eta squared = 0,024.
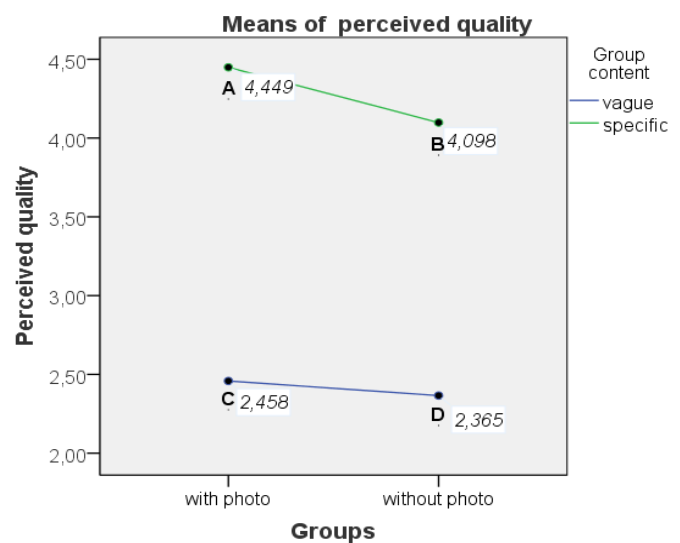
Figure 3b: Estimated means of perceived quality

Specific versus vague content (groups A+B versus C+D)

The inspection of the mean scores indicates that the specific content reviews were considered by the readers as being of higher quality than the vague content reviews; $M_{SPECIFIC}$ = 4,270 (average of A + B = 4,449 + 4,098), $SD_{SPECIFIC}$ = 0,802 versus M_{VAGUE} = 2,410 (average of C + D = 2,458 + 2,365). This difference is highly significant: $F_{(1,196)}$ = 344,098, p = 0,000; partial eta squared = 0,637.

Interaction effect photo*content

The test for the interaction effect between the content and the photo category shows no significant value: F (1,196) = 1,652, p = 0,200; partial eta squared = 0,008.

Summary of results: Perceived credibility

The groups who examined the specific versus the vague content reviews perceived them differently in terms of quality: the specific content reviews were perceived as being of higher quality than the vague content reviews. I addition to that, the groups that examined the reviews with the reviewer's photo perceived them as being of higher quality than ones without the reviewer's photo. Therefore:

H 2a: Readers of negative online reviews with a reviewer's photo perceive them as being of higher quality than reviews without a reviewer's photo **is supported.**

H 2b: Readers of negative online reviews with a specific content perceive them as being of higher quality than reviews with a vague content **is supported.**

4.3 Perceived usefulness

When examining the scores of perceived usefulness of all four groups, it can be noted that group B's mean has the highest value while group D's mean has the lowest one (M_B = 5,000 versus M_D =2,442). The first mean value (M_B = 5,000) illustrates that the readers of the review without the reviewer's photo perceived it as the review of the highest usefulness. On the contrary, another mean value (M_D = 2,442) illustrates that the readers who were exposed to the vague content review without the reviewer's photo considered that review as the least useful one compared to all other groups (for additional information see appendix 5).

Photo versus no photo (groups A + C versus B + D)

The collected data showed the slightly higher means of perceived usefulness for the readers exposed to the reviews with the reviewer's photo compared to the reviews without the photo: M_{PH}= 3,804 (average of A + C = 4,816 + 2,771), SD_{PH} = 1,304 versus M_{NO_PH} = 3,709 (average of B+D= 5,000 + 2,442), SD_{NO_PH} = 1,446. Further examination of this data shows that this difference is not statistically significant: F (1, 196) = 0,482; p = 0,489; partial eta squared = 0,002. When analysing this difference closer it should be mentioned that the mean value of group B is higher than

Figure 3c: Estimated means of perceived usefulness

the mean value of group A (M_{B} = 5,000 versus M_A = 4,816). It is somewhat surprising, since a reviewer's photo should not lower the perceived usefulness of a review. However this difference is not significant and statistically these mean values are not different.

Specific versus vague content (groups A+B versus C+D)

The mean scores of the groups who examined the specific content reviews show that the readers perceived them as being more useful compared to the vague content reviews: $M_{SPECIFIC}$ = (average of A + B = 5,000 + 4,816) = 4,910, $SD_{SPECIFIC}$ = 0,726 versus M_{VAGUE} = 2,600 (average of C + D = 2,771 + 2,442), SD_{VAGUE} = 0,765. Statically this difference is highly significant: F (1,196) = 486,267; p = 0,000; partial eta squared = 0,713.

Interaction effect photo*content

The test for the interaction effect between the content and the photo category illustrates a significant interaction: $F_{(1,196)} = 6,021$; $p = 0,015$; partial eta squared = 0,030. The collected data shows that those readers who were exposed to the reviews with the reviewer's photo perceived them as less useful than those who were exposed to the reviews without the reviewer's photo. It is somewhat surprising: by thinking logically a reviewer's photo should not lower the usefulness of a review. The probable explanation might be that in the case when the readers were exposed to the reviews with a specific content they focused more on the content of the message and were more engaged in analysing the text compared to the case when they were exposed to the reviews without the reviewer's photo.

Summary of results: Perceived usefulness

Regarding the groups who examined the reviews with the reviewer's photo versus without it the estimated perceived usefulness of the reviews was not significantly different. On the contrary, the empirical evidence for the difference in perception of the review usefulness was found for the groups who read the specific versus the vague content reviews: the readers of the specific content reviews perceived them as being of higher usefulness than the vague content reviews. Therefore:

> H 3a: Readers of negative online reviews with a reviewer's photo perceive them as being of higher usefulness than reviews without a reviewer's photo **is not supported.**

> H 3b: Readers of negative online reviews with a specific content perceive them as being of higher usefulness than reviews with a vague content **is supported.**

4.4 Consumer's intention to change a purchase decision

When examining the readers' intentions to change a decision to book a restaurant it should be noted that the highest mean value belongs to group A (M_A= 3,292) and the lowest value – to group D (M_D = 2,314). It means that the readers who read the reviews with the specific content containing the reviewer's photo had the highest intention to change their purchase decisions i.e. were less inclined to make a table reservation in the reviewed restaurant. Those customers who were exposed to the reviews with the vague content without the reviewer's photo were least inclined to change their decisions to book a table in the restaurant of interest (for additional information, see appendix 6).

Photo versus no photo (groups A + C versus B + D)

The data provides the slightly higher means of the readers' intentions for the groups exposed to the reviews with the reviewer's photo compared to the groups without the reviewer's photo: M_{PH} = 2,856 (average of A + C = 3,292 + 2,429), SD_{PH} = 0,778 versus M_{NO_PH} = 2,786 (average of B + D = 3,250 + 2,314), SD_{NO_PH} = 0,749. Although, further examination of the mean scores indicates that this difference is not significant: $F (1,196) = 0,803$; $p = 0,371$; partial eta squared = 0,004.
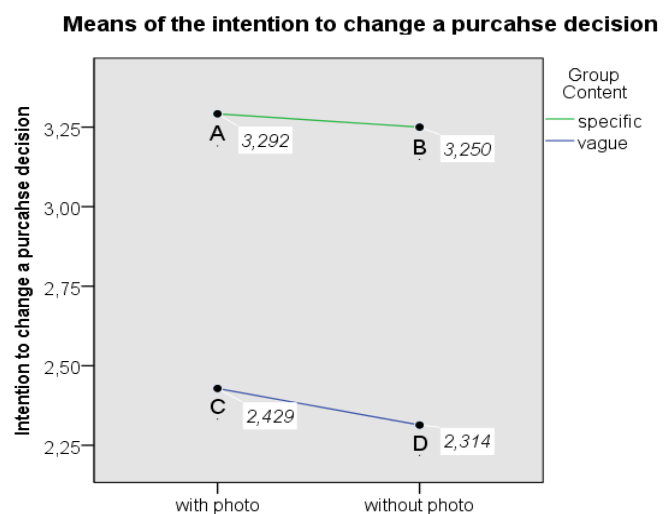
Figure 3d: Estimated means of consumers' intentions to change their purchase decisions

Specific versus vague content (Groups A+B versus C+D)

The inspection of the mean scores has indicated that the specific content; is more likely to influence the decision about the booking of the table than the vague content: $M_{SPECIFIC}$ = 3,270 (average of A + B = 3,292 + 3,250), $SD_{SPECIFIC}$ = 0,584 versus M_{VAGUE} = 2,371 (average of C + D = 2,429 + 2,314), SD_{VAGUE} = 0,646. The statistical analysis indicates that this difference is highly significant: $F (1,196) = 106,160$; $p = 0,000$; partial eta squared = 0,351.

Interaction effect photo*content

The test for interaction effect between the content and the photo category has not shown a significant effect: $F (1,196) = 0,176$; $p = 0,676$; partial eta squared = 0,001.

Summary of results: Consumer's intention to change a purchase decision

The empirical data shows that the intentions to change their purchase decisions of those readers who examined the reviews with the reviewer's photo were not different from the readers' intentions who examined the reviews without the reviewer's photo. On the contrary, the readers in the group of the specific content reviews had the higher intentions to change their decisions to make a purchase i.e. to make a table reservation than the readers in the group of the vague content reviews. Therefore:

> H 4a: Readers who are exposed to negative online reviews with a reviewer's photo have a higher intention to change a purchase decision than readers, who are exposed to the reviews without a reviewer's photo **is not supported.**

> H 4b: Readers who are exposed to negative online reviews with a specific content have a higher intention to change a purchase decision than readers, who are exposed to the reviews with a vague content is **supported.**

5 Discussion

5.1 Summary of findings

Based on eWOM theory I have hypothesized that reviews with a specific content are perceived as being of higher credibility, quality and usefulness than reviews with a vague content. In addition to that, I wanted to investigate whether consumers' intentions to change their decisions to make a table reservation were higher for consumers who read specific content reviews than those who read vague content reviews. Furthermore I wanted to find out whether consumers perceive negative online reviews with a reviewer's photo as being of higher credibility, quality and usefulness compared to reviews without a reviewer's photo. Finally, I hypothesized that negative online reviews with a reviewer's photo were more powerful in influencing consumers' intentions to change their purchase decisions than reviews without a reviewer's photo.

The analysis showed that there was a significant effect of the content type (specific versus vague) on the all dependent variables (credibility, quality, usefulness and consumer's intention to change a purchase decision). With regard to the effect of the presence of the reviewer's photo on the readers' perceptions of the reviews, the results of the analysis illustrated that the presence of the reviewer's photo increased the perceptions of the review credibility and quality but neither its usefulness nor consumers' intentions to change their purchase decisions.

5.1.1 Perceived credibility

The results of the experiment showed that the readers had higher levels of perceived credibility in the cases when the photo of the reviewer was attached to the review compared to the reviews without the reviewer's photo. The results also indicated that even if amount of personal description was limited and provided by a reviewer's photo it influenced the perception of review credibility in a positive way.

Therefore it can be concluded that a specific online review increases readers' perceptions of review credibility. This is in line with the research made by Spark et al. (2013) which illustrated that a specific content of a review positively influences the perceived credibility of its information in the context of hotel services.

Additionally, examining the interaction effect between the categories "photo" and "content" it was found that the reviewer's photo moderated the readers' perceptions of review credibility: the reviewer's photo attached to the specific review increased its credibility more compared when it was attached to the vague content review.

5.1.2 Perceived quality

The experiments of this study indicated that the readers perceived the quality of the review differently in the cases when they were exposed to the posts with the specific versus the vague content reviews. As it has been mentioned in section 2.3 there exists no research about how consumers perceive online reviews in terms of quality when they do not have a reviewer's photo attached to a review. This study showed that the negative online reviews which contained the reviewer's photo were perceived as being of slightly higher quality than those reviews that did not have the reviewer's photo attached. Therefore, this finding contributes to academic research by providing empirical evidence that indicates that a review quality can be increased by the presence of a reviewer's photo.

The results of the study's experiment also showed that the specific content reviews were perceived as being of higher quality compared to the vague content reviews. This is consistent with previous research claiming that a full description of a product in an online review increases the perception of review quality by potential consumers (Pornpitakpan et al., 2004)

5.1.3 Perceived usefulness

With regard to the effect of a reviewer's photo on the perception of usefulness of a review, no such an effect was obtained. This study does not provide empirical support for Forman et al. (2008) claiming that a description of a reviewer, even if it is of a demographical value (e.g. age, a state of residence) increases the usefulness of a review. The findings of this study do not support the research made by Brown and Regnen (1987) in WOM settings, that showed that the more readers of WOM knows about its writer the more useful the information is going to be perceived by them. One of explanations can be that a reviewer's photo does not provide enough information about a reviewer and credibility assessment.

Regarding the effect of the type of the context in the study, it was shown that the specific content reviews were perceived as more useful than the vague content reviews. Such results support the previous research made by Ajzen, Brown, and Rosenthal (1996) suggesting that a message with a more detailed explanation are considered by potential consumers as more useful. Additionally, this finding supports the conclusions made by Li and Zhang (2011) who state that a more detailed description of a product's characteristics increases the usefulness of a review.

5.1.4 Consumer's intention to change a purchase decision

Regarding the presence of the reviewer's photo, it should be noted that it did not increase the respondents' intentions to change their purchase decisions. The results of the study show that readers' intentions to book a table in the reviewed restaurant were unaffected by the fact

whether the reviews they analysed had the reviewer's photo or not. This study shows that the presence of a reviewer's photo has little value for the intention of a consumer to change her or his intention to make a purchase. Although, I argued that the same age of the reviewer should increase consumers' intentions to follow the advice in the review, this study showed that it was not the case. Therefore, I conclude that the presence of a photo has not a powerful effect on the decisions of consumers to make a purchase i.e. to book a table in a restaurant.

On the contrary, the readers who were exposed to the specific content had the higher intentions to change their purchase decisions compared to those who examined the vague content reviews. This finding is in line with the research made by Park et al. (2007) in which they claim that the presence of supporting facts in reviews influence the purchase decisions of consumers.

5.2 Limitations

The findings and implications of this study should be discussed together with its limitations. Firstly, the data used in the study were collected from the limited sources during a single period of time. Given that TripAdvisor is one of the most popular online review websites, the brand equity of the website might influence consumers' perceptions of the reviews if it is recognized by the readers.

Secondly, this study is based on the respondents' ability to imagine the situation which could be different in reality because of the emotions involved in the decision. I would suggest that the emotions can be less strong when people are just answering the questions in a survey than when they are having a real task to resolve. That is why future research conducted in real situations can precise the results of this study.

Thirdly, taking into account the large quantity of reviews available online, consumers are not likely to read every review or individually classify every review they find. Instead, they may just rely on some cues such as the source of the website or the rating of review; the variables are not investigated in this thesis.

Fourthly, it should be taken into account that the situations of when people look after the information can differ to a great extent and that is why it is should be taken into account that the variety of situations when people search for new information can take a different character depending what are the drivers of looking for online reviews.

Finally, given the difficulty of observing how eWOM affects its readers, the experiments of this study can provide information about their intentions and not their real actions.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Implications

A lot of useful information was obtained analysing the results of the study's experiment. The empirical support was found for the statement that specific content reviews can substantially increase the perception of review quality. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that online review sites should encourage and help reviewers to write comments containing specific information about their restaurant visits. For instance, review sites may ask their reviewers to support their service experiences by including such information as the date, time, and facts, including a detail description of service failure. As an example, managers can ask dissatisfied guests to give a specific example of what they disliked, including any information that can support their words. For more convenience reviews can be arranged according to their quality and usefulness ratings. This would provide an access to only those comments that likely to have an impact on user decisions, making it possible for readers to skip hundreds of useless comments.

The results of this study have implications for credibility building in an online environment. The decision-making process of consumers is influenced by the information content received. This study shows that detailed and accurate arguments influence consumers' perceptions of review credibility, quality and usefulness in a restaurant service context. This study also illustrate that the presence of a source identity in an online review enhances the credibility of a review, which eventually affects its credibility. For this reason, I recommend that managers of restaurant-related review sites design their websites in such a way that they provide the information about reviewers. Additionally, web designers should work on the design of their web pages so it must be convenient for readers to find useful and accurate reviews fast and easily. Although TripAdvisor already contains the information about how many readers have evaluated the information of each review as useful, this is based on whether readers answered "yes" or "no" on this question which does not mirror the level of message usefulness.

Moreover, websites can imply technological instruments for establishing several quality standards such as authority, accuracy, disclosure of a person's photo. Although some elements of the mentioned above recommendations already exist in many online sites, this research underlines the importance and impact of such a move. Furthermore, in order to satisfy potential consumers' needs to be able to find a useful or valuable review easily, the review sites can design them so that readers can evaluate the usefulness of a message on a seven rate scale indicating the level of its usefulness.

6.2   Further research

The experiment stimulus in this research is a review with a description of a restaurant service. I expect that factors which consumers consider in deciding to make a table reservation may be different from factors they use for purchase decisions about other types of services, such as flight services or tourist destinations. Therefore future studies should examine other services to explore whether these findings can be generalised.

Furthermore this research has a potential for response bias problems, as respondents know they 'should' critically analyse the information they obtain in an online review, yet rarely have enough time or energy to do it in real life. Additionally the respondents' answers have been based on just one review which is quite unreal in purchase situations. In real online environment consumers can be interested in reading more than just one review to build their judgment on the service. With all that mentioned above, it can be good if researchers employ other research methods beyond survey questionnaires to understand consumers' behavior intentions.

6.3 Final conclusion

The above results show that the content of a message and the photo of a reviewer are effective ways of influencing the credibility and quality of online reviews. Since electronic commerce has grown rapidly, it is essential to gain a better understanding of how online product reviews are best utilized during the decision making process. This study shows that a negative review about restaurant service can prevent an online review reader to complete the purchase.

In practice, encouraging writing good customer reviews with specific arguments supporting a service description or evaluation of it should be an important strategy for many review sites. The results of this work points out what distinguishes more valuable reviews from worthless ones and therefore the findings of this study can serve as a help for web designers in getting a better understanding what consumers look for in them. Hopefully, these findings increase our understanding of online reviews and also provide information of how consumers respond to negative online consumer reviews in a restaurant service context.

7 References

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Appendix: 1

TABLE 1:

Results from pre-study 2 (scale from 1 = does not agree, to 7 = completely agree)

Review 1 (specific arguments) (μs)
Review 2 (vague arguments)   (μv)

The arguments in this review are accurate (μs) = 5.7   (μv) = 3.7

The content of this review has a detailed description of the service (μs) = 5.6 (μv) = 3.3

The content of this review has a full description of the actual service. (μs) = 6.1   (μv) = 3.0

Number of respondents=30

The result of pre-study 2 has indicated the significant difference (p<0.000*)
Sign. level is 5 %

Appendix: 2

Table 2: Descriptive statistics from multivariate analysis

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects							
Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	usefulness	270,342a	3	90,114	165,606	,000	,717
	quality	176,273b	3	58,758	116,793	,000	,641
	credibility	213,491c	3	71,164	141,851	,000	,685
	intention_buy	40,873d	3	13,624	35,773	,000	,354
Intercept	usefulness	2820,737	1	2820,737	5183,766	,000	,964
	quality	2232,472	1	2232,472	4437,476	,000	,958
	credibility	2504,203	1	2504,203	4991,648	,000	,962
	intention_buy	1590,006	1	1590,006	4174,861	,000	,955
Group_tot_photo	usefulness	,262	1	,262	,482	,489	,002
	quality	2,461	1	2,461	4,891	,028	,024
	credibility	31,458	1	31,458	62,706	,000	,242
	intention_buy	,306	1	,306	,803	,371	,004
Group_tot_cont	usefulness	264,601	1	264,601	486,267	,000	,713
	quality	173,114	1	173,114	344,098	,000	,637
	credibility	176,888	1	176,888	352,592	,000	,643
	intention_buy	40,431	1	40,431	106,160	,000	,351
Group_tot_photo * Group_tot_cont	usefulness	3,276	1	3,276	6,021	,015	,030
	quality	,831	1	,831	1,652	,200	,008
	credibility	5,297	1	5,297	10,559	,001	,051
	intention_buy	,067	1	,067	,176	,676	,001
a. R Squared = ,717 (Adjusted R Squared = ,713)							
b. R Squared = ,641 (Adjusted R Squared = ,636)							
c. R Squared = ,685 (Adjusted R Squared = ,680)							
d. R Squared = ,354 (Adjusted R Squared = ,344)							

Appendix: 3

Table 3a: Descriptive Statistics				
Dependent Variable: Perceived credibility				
Group_photo	Group_cont	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
with photo	vague	2,8333	,66311	48
	specific	5,0408	,76265	49
	Total	3,9485	1,31791	97
without photo	vague	2,3654	,62713	52
	specific	3,9216	,77054	51
	Total	3,1359	1,04833	103
Total	vague	2,5900	,68306	100
	specific	4,4700	,94767	100
	Total	3,5300	1,25177	200

Table 3b: Tests of Between-Subjects Effects						
Dependent Variable: Perceived credibility						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	213,491a	3	71,164	141,851	,000	,685
Intercept	2504,203	1	2504,203	4991,648	,000	,962
Group_photo	31,458	1	31,458	62,706	,000	,242
Group_cont	176,888	1	176,888	352,592	,000	,643
Group_photo * Group_cont	5,297	1	5,297	10,559	,001	,051
a. R Squared = ,685 (Adjusted R Squared = ,680)						

Appendix: 4

Table 4a: Descriptive Statistics				
Dependent Variable: Quality				
Group_tot_photo	Group_tot_cont	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
with photo	Vague	2,458	,61742	48
	specific	4,449	,76543	49
	Total	3,464	1,21674	97
without photo	Vague	2,365	,62713	52
	specific	4,098	,80635	51
	Total	3,223	1,12835	103
Total	Vague	2,410	,62109	100
	specific	4,270	,80221	100
	Total	3,340	1,17529	200

Table 4b: Tests of Between-Subjects Effects						
Dependent Variable: Quality						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	176,273a	3	58,758	116,793	,000	,641
Intercept	2232,472	1	2232,472	4437,476	,000	,958
Group_photo	2,461	1	2,461	4,891	,028	,024
Group_cont	173,114	1	173,114	344,098	,000	,637
Group_photo * Group_cont	,831	1	,831	1,652	,200	,008
a. R Squared = ,641 (Adjusted R Squared = ,636)						

Appendix: 5

Table 5a: Descriptive Statistics				
Dependent Variable: Usefulness				
Group_tot_photo	Group_tot_cont	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
with photo	Vague	2,7708	,85650	48
	specific	4,8163	,75480	49
	Total	3,8041	1,30415	97
without photo	Vague	2,4423	,63904	52
	specific	5,0000	,69282	51
	Total	3,7087	1,44596	103
Total	Vague	2,6000	,76541	100
	specific	4,9100	,72607	100
	Total	3,7550	1,37639	200

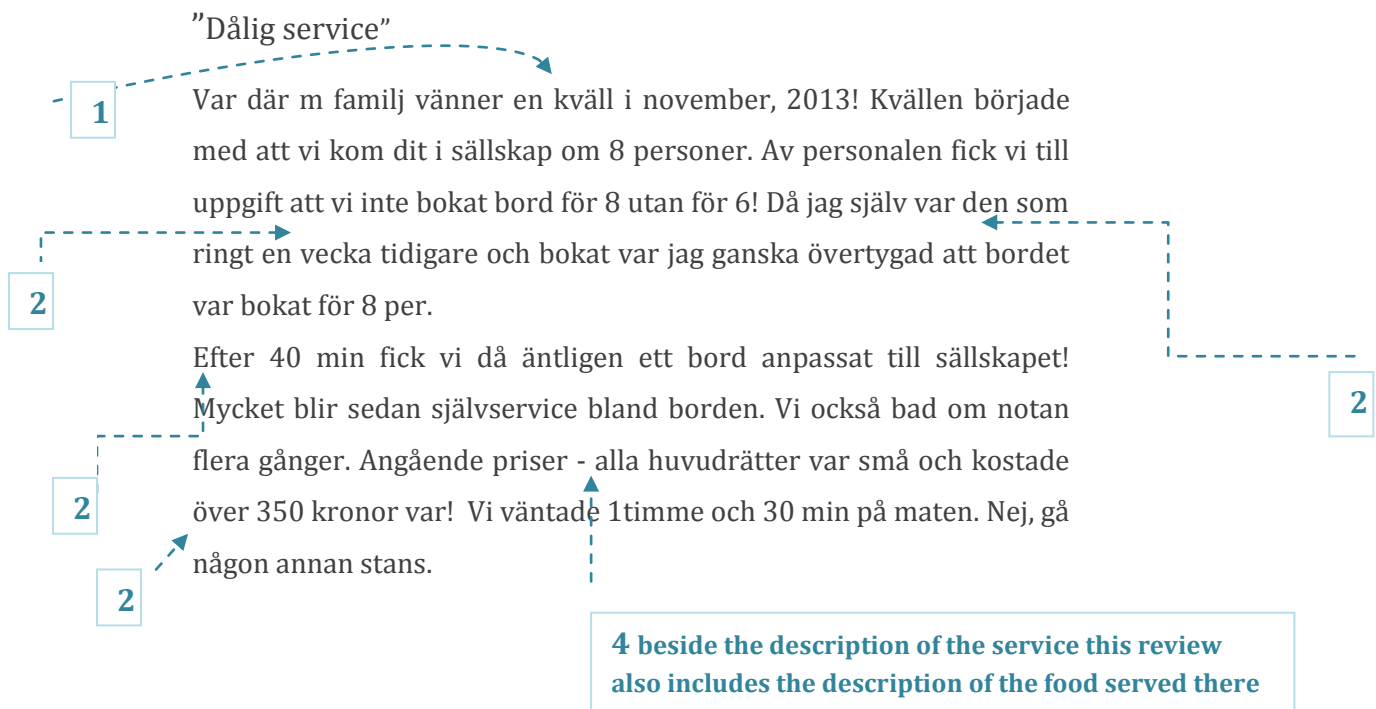| Table 5b: Tests of Between-Subjects Effects						
Dependent Variable: Usefulness						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	270,342a	3	90,114	165,606	,000	,717
Intercept	2820,737	1	2820,737	5183,766	,000	,964
Group_tot_photo	,262	1	,262	,482	,489	,002
Group_tot_cont	264,601	1	264,601	486,267	,000	,713
Group_tot_photo * Group_tot_cont	3,276	1	3,276	6,021	,015	,030
a. R Squared = ,717 (Adjusted R Squared = ,713)			There is interaction effect.			

Appendix: 6

Table 6a: Descriptive Statistics				
Dependent Variable: Intention to change a decision to buy				
Group_tot_photo	Group_tot_cont	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
with photo	Vague	3,2917	,68287	48
	Specific	2,4286	,61237	49
	Total	2,8557	,77714	97
without photo	Vague	3,2500	,47999	52
	Specific	2,3137	,67794	51
	Total	2,7864	,74952	103
Total	Vague	3,2700	,58353	100
	Specific	2,3700	,64597	100
	Total	2,8200	,76191	200

Table 6b: Tests of Between-Subjects Effects						
Dependent Variable: Intention to change a decision to buy						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	40,873a	3	13,624	35,773	,000	,354
Intercept	1590,006	1	1590,006	4174,861	,000	,955
Group_tot_photo	,306	1	,306	,803	,371	,004
Group_tot_cont	40,431	1	40,431	106,160	,000	,351
Group_tot_photo * Group_tot_cont	,067	1	,067	,176	,676	,001

Appendix: A

Review manipulation:

1) Specific content

"Dålig service"

1 Var där m familj vänner en kväll i november, 2013! Kvällen började med att vi kom dit i sällskap om 8 personer. Av personalen fick vi till uppgift att vi inte bokat bord för 8 utan för 6! Då jag själv var den som **2** ringt en vecka tidigare och bokat var jag ganska övertygad att bordet var bokat för 8 per.

Efter 40 min fick vi då äntligen ett bord anpassat till sällskapet! Mycket blir sedan självservice bland borden. Vi också bad om notan **2** flera gånger. Angående priser - alla huvudrätter var små och kostade över 350 kronor var! Vi väntade 1timme och 30 min på maten. Nej, gå **2** någon annan stans.

2

2

4 beside the description of the service this review also includes the description of the food served there

With regard to specific points in an online review about a restaurant, they are the following: date when it happened (visit date of the restaurant), description of the failure in detail, how big the failure was or the concrete loss for a visitor and completeness of the service picture. The last point depicting completeness is represented by the service description and the description of food served. Please look at the numbers and what they imply.

1. Visit date of the restaurant
2. Description of the failure in detail
3. Factual loss for a visitor
4. Completeness of the service

Appendix: B

Review manipulation:

2) Vague content

"Dålig service"

Ibland undrar man lite vad som händer när man kommer till ett ställe.

Dålig organisation i restaurangen. Servicen under all kritik. Ett tråkigt ställe

helt enkelt. Personalen är inte det minsta intresserade av dig som kund

eller av matlagning. Pengar in och ut verkar vara det som gäller…

Nej, gå någon annan stans.

All the mentioned above associations of vague arguments are presented in the text: *general arguments of dissatisfaction, failure lacking details, unclear when it happened and whom to blame.*

Appendix: C.1

1) Specific content with a photo of the reviewer

"Dålig service"

Omdömet skrevs den november

Missnöjd

Var där m familj vänner en kväll i November, 2013! Kvällen började med att vi kom dit i sällskap om 8 personer. Av personalen fick vi till uppgift att vi inte bokat bord för 8 utan för 6! Då jag själv var den som ringt en vecka tidigare och bokat var jag ganska övertygad att bordet var bokat för 8 per. Efter 40 min fick vi då äntligen ett bord anpassat till sällskapet ! Vi också bad om notan flera gågnger. Angående priser - alla huvudrätter var små och kostade över 350 kronor var! Vi väntade 1timme och 30 min på maten. Nej, gå någon annan stans.

Var detta omdöme till någon hjälp? Ja Ser du något problem med det här omdömet?

2) Specific content without a photo of the reviewer

"Dålig service"

Omdömet skrevs den november

Missnöjd

Var där m familj vänner en kväll i November, 2013! Kvällen började med att vi kom dit i sällskap om 8 personer. Av personalen fick vi till uppgift att vi inte bokat bord för 8 utan för 6! Då jag själv var den som ringt en vecka tidigare och bokat var jag ganska övertygad att bordet var bokat för 8 per. Efter 40 min fick vi då äntligen ett bord anpassat till sällskapet ! Vi också bad om notan flera gågnger. Angående priser - alla huvudrätter var små och kostade över 350 kronor var! Vi väntade 1timme och 30 min på maten. Nej, gå någon annan stans.

Var detta omdöme till någon hjälp? Ja Ser du något problem med det här omdömet?

Appendix: C. 2

3) Vague content with a photo of the reviewer

"Dålig service"

Omdömet skrevs den november

Ibland undrar man lite vad som händer när man kommer till ett ställe. Dålig organisation i restaurangen. Servicen under all kritik. Ett tråkigt ställe helt enkelt. Personalen är inte det minsta intresserade av dig som kund eller av matlagning . Pengar in och ut verkar vara det som gäller…
 Nej, gå någon annan stans.

Missnöjd

Var detta omdöme till någon hjälp? Ja Ser du något problem med det här omdömet?

4) Vague content without a photo of the reviewer

"Dålig service"

Omdömet skrevs den november

Ibland undrar man lite vad som händer när man kommer till ett ställe. Dålig organisation i restaurangen. Servicen under all kritik. Ett tråkigt ställe helt enkelt. Personalen är inte det minsta intresserade av dig som kund eller av matlagning . Pengar in och ut verkar vara det som gäller…
 Nej, gå någon annan stans.

Missnöjd

Var detta omdöme till någon hjälp? Ja Ser du något problem med det här omdömet?

Appendix: D

Questionnaire

Scenario

Tänk dig in i situationen att din bästa vän fyller år nästa vecka och att du tänkt överraska din vän genom att bjuda på middag på en restaurang. Du hittar en restaurang på internet som ser trevlig ut. Du planerar att boka bord, men dagen innan din väns födelsedag blir du osäker eftersom du egentligen inte vet något om restaurangen. Du bestämmer dig därför att undersöka om tidigare gäster har skrivit något på internet. Du hittar en sida med recensioner av olika restauranger och du hittar också en recension av den restaurang där du planerar att boka bord. Vänligen läs recensionen nedan och besvara därefter frågorna under recensionen.

Q1. Vad är ditt omdöme av denna recension?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Inte alls Noggrann	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Väldigt Noggrann
Inte alls Fullständig	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Väldigt Fullständig
Inte alls Relevant	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Väldigt Relevant

Q2. Information i denna recension är _____.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Värdelös	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Värdefull
Inte alls Informativ	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Informativ
Inte alls Hjälpsam	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Hjälpsam

Q3. Information i denna recension är _____.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Inte alls Trovärdig	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Väldigt Trovärdig
Inte alls Pålitlig	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Väldigt Pålitlig
Inte alls Tillförlitlig:	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Väldigt Tillförlitlig

Q4.

(1) Detta omdöme kommer att påverka mitt beslut att boka ett bord i denna restaurang.

 (Instämmer inte alls=1, Instämmer mycket väl=7)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
○	○	○	○	○	○	○

(2) Efter jag har läst detta omdöme kommer jag inte vidare betrakta den restaurang som mitt möjliga val att boka ett bord där (instämmer inte alls=1, instämmer mycket väl=7)?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q 5. Hur realistiskt är detta omdöme?

(1) Inte alls Realistiskt	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Väldigt Realistiskt

(2) Att gå genom omdömen from tidigare restaurangbesökare innan att välja en restaurant att fira din väns födelsedag är …

Inte alls Realistiskt   ❍   ❍   ❍   ❍   ❍   ❍   ❍   Väldigt Realistiskt

Q 6. Din ålder?

Q 7. Kön

❍ Man
❍ Kvinna