Stockholm School of Economics
Department of Marketing and Strategy
Bachelor Thesis in Marketing, Spring 2014

THE ANONYMOUS FRIEND

Effects of eWOM Sources' Personal Identifying Information

Abstract   Thanks to technology development, the concept of word-of-mouth has been given a new meaning. Electronic word-of-mouth allows a single message from an unknown sender to be seen and interpreted by millions of people on the Internet. Consumer-generated online reviews have an immense impact on other consumers' perceptions of the reviewed products and services, even though an eWOM receiver rarely knows anything about the message source. Questions that may arise could be: *How do I know that I have the same preferences as the reviewer? Is this review and its source credible?* The presence of personal identifying information (PII) about eWOM sources might help consumers to better assess online reviews. With this thesis, we aim to shed light on how and why differing levels and forms of eWOM source PII influence consumers' perceptions of online reviews, reviewers and the reviewed objects. The results from our experiment revealed that the more PII supplementing an identical hotel review exposed to respondents – especially PII in the form of a video presentation of the sender – the higher perceived source credibility, the more favourable the attitude towards the reviewed hotel, and the stronger the intention to choose it. Besides, respondents' attitudes and intentions were significantly mediated by their perceptions of likeness to the eWOM source and of source credibility.

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Examiner

Our sincerest thanks to

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 ELECTRONIC WORD-OF-MOUTH AND ONLINE REVIEWS

It is common knowledge that the opinions of other people, communicated through word-of-mouth (WOM), influence consumers in their choice of products and services (Bearden and Etzel 1982). Dichter proposed some influential ideas about how WOM advertising works already in 1966, emphasising the face-to-face interplay between speaker and listener, and Arndt defined WOM as an "oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, regarding a brand, a product or a service" (Arndt 1967). Now, the prevalence of the Internet has led to new ways for consumers to share their experiences of products and services with each other (Avery, Resnick, Zeckhauser 1999). In short, "Word-of- mouth, one of the most ancient mechanisms in the history of human society, is being given new significance by this unique property of the Internet" (Dellarocas 2003). This digitalization of WOM is commonly denominated as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), and has been defined by Hennig-Thureau et al. (2004) as: "Any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet".

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) can be transmitted through numerous different channels such as e-mails, blogs, social media or online reviews (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004), the latter being the focus of this thesis. Online consumer product- and service reviews play an increasingly important role in other consumers' purchase decisions (Chen and Xie 2008) and are in fact commonly considered to be equivalent to face-to-face WOM exchanges (Jensen et al. 2013). There are, however, many differences between eWOM and traditional WOM (Dellarocas 2003), two of which are: 1) the unprecedented scale that is achieved by low-cost, bi-directional communication capabilities, 2) the volatile nature of online identities with a near complete absence of contextual cues. Furthermore, the information source is always known in traditional WOM, which allows potential buyers to make source credibility attributions of recommendations (Brown and Reingen 1987), whereas information about the source is frequently separated from the recommendation in eWOM, in effect "placing a

significant burden on the potential buyer to make credibility attributions of an anonymous source…" (Jensen et al. 2013). Consequently, there is a great need to critically evaluate the credibility of reviewers (ibid) and many of Dichter's thoughts on traditional WOM are applicable in the online environment as well. The receiver of WOM, consciously or subconsciously, always asks herself the question "Does the person making this recommendation want to help me make a good decision or sell this product to me? What is my relation to this person? Do I trust this person? How authentic is this person?" (Dichter 1966). In the context of eWOM, a supplementary question is then how sender anonymity and different levels of disclosure of identity descriptive source information affect these concerns.

1.2 ONLINE ANONYMITY AND eWOM SOURCE SELF-DISCLOSURE

Analogously to the theoretical proximity of traditional WOM and eWOM, a large part of the existing theory on information processing and message source attribution is applicable in the online context as well. This literature has accumulated an extensive body of research supporting the notion that information source attributes have powerful effects on how people react to messages (Forman et al. 2008). Moreover, numerous researchers have demonstrated that attributes of a message source often exert direct effects on message recipients' attitudes and behaviours, independent of the message content (Kang and Herr 2006; Menon and Blount 2003; Petty et al. 1998; Pornpitakpan 2002).

In the context of this thesis, a person who posts a review on the Internet is an information source. Contrary to face-to-face communication, the amount of source information made available to the recipient can range from none, i.e. the reviewer is completely anonymous, to the reviewer disclosing increasing levels of personal identifying information (PII). Also the nature of source PII present in an online environment, today generally in the form of demographic information on most web sites, might influence receivers' perceptions of both the reviewer and the reviewed object. Presumably, presenting eWOM receivers with more source characteristics, including both quantitative and qualitative information, should aid them in making better assessments of the review, the reviewer and the reviewed object.

1.3 PURPOSE

Previous research has demonstrated that identity-relevant information about reviewers shape consumers' judgment of both reviews and the reviewed object (Forman et al. 2008; Xie et al. 2011). However, these studies have not explicitly emphasised how differing levels of PII made available to consumers affect perceptions of the review, the reviewer and the reviewed object. By showing an identical review to all respondents in the experiment while manipulating the level of disclosed PII – from a completely anonymous reviewer to a reviewer with PII such as previous reviewing behaviour, a profile picture and a personal presentation video available – the aim is to demonstrate how source information alters overall perceptions of the review, the reviewer and the reviewed object. This aim will be pursued through an empirical examination of how respondents' perceptions of reviewer characteristics influence variables such as perceived likeness and source credibility, as well as what effects these variables may have on respondents' attitudes and intentions. Hence, the main purpose of this thesis and the hypotheses presented in the next chapter is to answer the following question:

Does increased self-disclosure of online reviewers' PII lead to higher perceived likeness to the source and to source credibility, and does this result in consumers shaping more favourable attitudes and intentions towards the reviewed object?

1.4 INTENDED CONTRIBUTION

On a general level this thesis adds to the body of research concerning the relatively new, yet increasingly important, concepts of eWOM and online reviews. However, most previous research has primarily been focused on the consequences of online reviews, often in the form of subsequent product sales (Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006; Dellarocas 2006; Duan, Gu, Whinston 2008). It has been proven in a few studies that identity-descriptive information about reviewers, over and above product information in the review, shapes consumers' judgment of products and reviews (Forman et al. 2008; Xie et al. 2011). Still, theory that deals with the role of online anonymity and eWOM source information in this context is scarce, and existing research has limited identity-descriptive information about reviewers to cues such as name, gender, age and state of residence. With this thesis, we aim to shed more light on the significance of different forms of eWOM source information in shaping consumers' attitudes. To

our knowledge, no existing study has tested the consequences of eWOM by exposing experiment respondents to an identical online review while attributing the reviewer differing levels of PII. Especially the results of using a video presentation as a form of PII could help both researchers and marketers in assessing new ways of enhancing the impact of eWOM. Consumers might benefit from the findings by understanding how and why they are influenced by source characteristics in an eWOM context.

1.5 DELIMITATIONS

Certain delimitations were necessary in order to bring this study down to the scale and scope of a bachelor thesis. Firstly, the type of eWOM examined is limited to online hotel reviews. In addition to being a communication channel that in recent years has gained significant importance among both consumers and marketers, online reviews provide a convenient method of isolating an identical eWOM message, i.e. the review text, from manipulated levels of sender self-disclosure in the conducted experiment. Specific delimitations of the experiment are further discussed in the methodology chapter. Secondly, the type of online review is limited to hotel reviews. Even though the aim is that our findings may be applicable to reviews of other services and goods, this cannot be ascertained. Thirdly, antecedents of eWOM, the reasons why people engage in eWOM, are not studied. Instead, we have emphasised the consequences of eWOM and the "mediating variables" that affect the relationship between sender and receiver. Only certain variables are evaluated: level of disclosed eWOM source PII as an independent variable and manipulation check; perceived likeness and source credibility as mediating factors; receiver attitudes and intentions as effect variables. There are likely other variables in this context that deserve attention, but after an extensive literature review these were chosen as central in the scope of this thesis. Fourthly, the experiment only serves to show attitudes and intentions, rather than actual behaviour and actions.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter is organized with our proposed hypotheses in mind. A brief theoretical introduction to eWOM and online reviews is presented, followed by theory regarding personal identifying information online. Next, we examine the properties of our chosen mediating variables, perceived likeness and source credibility, concluding in hypothesis 1 and 2. Finally, we review existing theory on our effect variables, attitude and intention, concluding in Hypothesis 3 and 4.
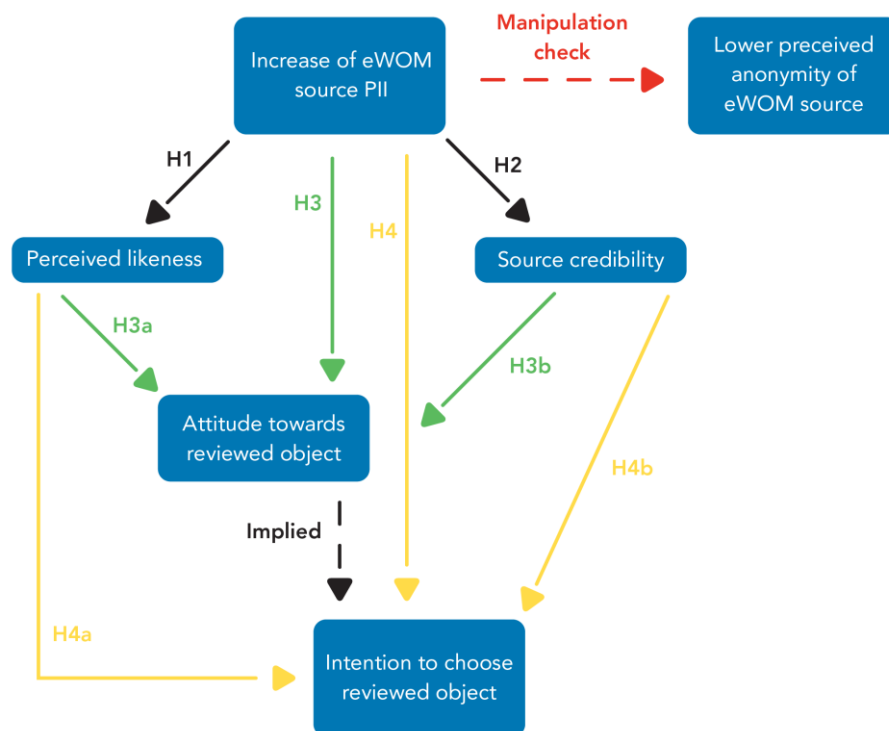
H1: Increasing disclosure of eWOM source personal identifying information (PII) makes the receiver perceive her-/himself to be more alike the source.

H2: Increasing disclosure of eWOM source personal identifying information (PII) makes the receiver perceive the source as more credible.

H3: Increasing disclosure of eWOM source personal identifying information (PII) improves the receiver's attitude towards the reviewed object.

   Mediating factors:

   H3a: If supported, H3 is mediated by the receiver's perception of source likeness.

   H3b: If supported, H3 is mediated by the receiver's perception of source credibility.

H4: Increasing disclosure of eWOM source personal identifying information (PII) strengthens the receiver's intention to choose the reviewed object.

   Mediating factors:

   H4a: If supported, H4 is mediated by the receiver's perception of source likeness.

   H4b: If supported, H4 is mediated by the receiver's perception of source credibility.

2.1 eWOM and Online Reviews

Extensive research supports the idea that WOM has a greater influence than marketer-controlled sources on consumers' awareness, expectations, perceptions, attitudes, behavioural intentions and behaviour (Buttle 1998). WOM has proved to be an especially viable source of information for consumers regarding services, due to their intangibility and heterogeneity (Webster 1991). As discussed in the Introduction, the majority of findings concerning traditional WOM are also applicable in the context of eWOM, and in effect of online reviews. Consequently, online reviews ought to influence the consumer conditions presented by Buttle in a way similar to traditional WOM.

Still, WOM differs significantly from eWOM in the sense that WOM usually refers to opinions from friends and relatives, whereas eWOM in the form of online reviews often appear as opinions posted by complete strangers (Chen and Xie 2008). In order to moderate the negative effects on perceived review helpfulness that such source anonymity may induce, some third-party online intermediaries encourage reviewers to provide personal identifying information (PII). An additional consequence of online reviewers being unknown to the receiver is the absence of detailed contextual information about someone's experience with a service provider, which is usually obtained when engaged in traditional WOM. Given reviewer anonymity and lack of contextual information, consumers may view online reviews as insufficient ground for making decisions (Xie et al. 2011). Despite these characteristics, eWOM has been proved to have a large impact on consumers' behaviour (Amblee and Bui 2011; Cheung, Lee, Rabjohn 2008; Reichelt, Sievert, Jacob 2014) though research has yet to explore thoroughly how and to what extent eWOM source information and contextual cues affect consumers' perceptions. Existing research concerning online product reviews has often overlooked the implications of eWOM source information and other mediating factors, instead focusing mainly on the quality, valence and dispersion of online reviews directly, and their effect on product sales (e.g. Chatterjee 2001; Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006; Park, Lee, Han 2007) .

In examining this direct link, research has often produced ambiguous and inconclusive linkages between review characteristics and purchase intentions or

decisions (Jensen). Some studies have found review quality and valence to be most decisive in forming consumers' purchase decisions (Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006; Clemons, Gao, Hitt 2006; Park, Lee, Han 2007), while others have found familiarity (Chatterjee 2001) or dispersion (Duan, Gu, Whinston 2008), regardless of valence and review quality, to be most influential. This inconsistency in research findings could perhaps be explained by the fact that the influence of mediating factors is often omitted in such direct linking.

However, studies that do incorporate mediating factors in this context do exist. Forman et al (2008) demonstrated that consumer perceptions and behaviour is influenced by user-generated online reviews, and that these eWOM receivers emphasise disclosure of source PII in addition to, and sometimes instead of, the actual review content. Xie et al (2011) showed that reviews that disclose identity-descriptive information about the reviewer are perceived as more helpful than anonymous reviews. These results, along with a few other studies e.g. (Kruglanski et al. 2006), indicate that the disclosure of eWOM source PII plays a significant role in shaping consumers' perceptions of online reviews. Hence, characteristics and consequences of disclosing source personal identifying information will be further explained in the next section.

2.2 PERSONAL IDENTIFYING INFORMATION (PII)

Personal identifying information (PII) in its basic form concerns identity-descriptive demographic information about an eWOM source, such as name, state of residence and gender. In this study, reviewers will be attributed different levels of PII and the definition is at times expanded to incorporate a personal descriptive text, a profile picture and a personal presentation video (see Methodology). Online reviewers' PII may be used by consumers as elements or cues for assessing the credibility of online reviews (Xie et al. 2011).

Previous research has demonstrated that reviewer disclosure of PII significantly influences receivers' perceptions of the reviewed object, but as far as our literature review stretches these studies have primarily emphasised demographic information. Besides, it has not yet been thoroughly evaluated how differing PII disclosure levels affect the receiver. In order to assess how this could ideally be tested in an

experiment, existing literature on information processing, as well as consequences of self-disclosure and anonymity, needs to be examined.

Self-disclosure is defined as "verbal communication of personally relevant information, thoughts and feelings" (Derlega et al. 1993). According to the social penetration theory (SPT) presented by Altman & Taylor in 1973, self-disclosure develops along the dimensions of breadth and depth. Roughly, breadth refers to the quantity of information disclosed, whereas the depth dimension indicates how personal this information is. Naturally, self-disclosure along both dimensions provides a stronger foundation on which to build opinions about one another. Even though this framework originally sought to explain interpersonal face-to-face relationship building, it is also applicable in a computer mediated communication (CMC) context (Jiang, Bazarova, Hancock 2013). Thus, each different disclosure level of eWOM source PII in our experiment should ideally be manipulated consistently along both the breadth and depth dimension in order to assure feasible receiver perceptions of differing self-disclosure levels. However, the online context presents some difficulties in achieving consistency, since the effects of visual anonymity and lack of nonverbal cues that often characterize CMC induce people to self-disclose more along the breadth dimension (Ibid). In order to compensate for this, the highest eWOM source disclosure level in our experiment includes a personal video presentation of the reviewer, which is primarily intended to communicate along the depth dimension.

A 2012 study by Lin, Lu and Wu examined how manipulating the level of visual information in eWOM communication affects the receiver, but video presentations were not included in the experiment. There is a large body of research examining the effects of visual communication. In summary, it can be concluded that visual information has a large impact both on recipients' memory e.g. (Kisielius and Sternthal 1984; Shepard 1967; Starch 1966) and attitudinal responses e.g. (Kisielius and Sternthal 1984; Mitchell and Olson 1981; Then and DeLong 1999). Thanks to technology development, it has become much easier in recent years for Internet users to post pictures and video clips online. Naturally, this advance should have a significant influence in the eWOM context, drawing on existing theory about visual communication and the role of source characteristics in WOM. Indeed, as most

communication experts agree that at least two-thirds of communication is nonverbal, enriching eWOM messages with visual information does improve their perceived helpfulness to receivers (Lin, Lu, Wu 2012).

In theory, simulating a sender-receiver relationship in the eWOM context to be as similar to traditional WOM as possible should allow the receiver to form stronger perceptions of sender/source attributes. It has been demonstrated in research on traditional WOM that perceived attributes of the source affect receivers' responses to the actual message (Brown and Reingen 1987). A probable explanation for this behaviour is that message recipients make use of social information about the source as a heuristic device in order to reach decisions (Chaiken 1980; Chaiken 1987). In other words, source cues do not only help receivers to make assessments about the information source itself, they also help in guiding judgment of the whole message. Translated to the context of this study, the presence of eWOM source PII could then be assumed to provide a richer and better foundation for message recipients on which to base their judgments on. Indeed, Forman et al (2008) found that reviews disclosing identity-descriptive information were rated as more helpful than anonymous reviews.

Drawing on existing information processing theory, a natural presumption would then be: eWOM receivers' consumption intentions are affected by the eWOM source's disclosure of PII. It has been established by theory and extensive empirical evidence in marketing and psychology that source characteristics often directly impacts receivers' perceptions of the reviewed object, regardless of the actual message content (See Forman et al 2008 for a review). For instance, Chaiken and Maheswaran (1994) demonstrated that source cues, independent from message content, exerted a direct and persuasive impact on consumer attitudes towards a fictional product. Menon and Blount (2003) referred to this phenomenon, where judgment is based primarily on source cues, as "messenger bias". On the contrary, messenger bias could not exist in anonymous reviews with a complete absence of eWOM source PII. These offer readers no contextual information at all, forcing them to base their evaluation of the review and reviewed object solely on the message itself.

Naturally, one could believe it to be most rewarding for marketers to examine the direct relationship between reviewer disclosure of PII and consumers' purchase intentions, or preferably product sales. However, this direct link does not provide a sufficient basis for understanding the effects of eWOM source characteristics. There are several mediating factors between eWOM source PII and the eWOM receivers' purchase intentions, which influence how and why a certain review might result in subsequent intentions to choose the reviewed object.

2.3 eWOM Source PII - Mediating Factors

The differing levels of presence or absence of eWOM source PII influence message recipients in many ways. In order to understand the mechanisms behind eWOM it is relevant to ask not only what the consequences of a successful review are, but also *why* receivers perceive it as successful. Attribution theory – which proposes that consumers upon being presented with a message try to assess if it is a correct representation of information, as well as if its source is credible – has been demonstrated to be useful in an online context (Brown, Broderick, Lee 2007; Sen and Lerman 2007). In this thesis, emphasis is placed on the role of the message source in general, and how message recipients perceive the source in particular. Brown et al. (2007) considered three online influence factors that are key in deciding the effectiveness of communication between eWOM source and receiver: tie strength, homophily (i.e. perceived likeness) and source credibility (Gilly et al. 1998). However, the theoretical concept of tie strength is not applicable within the context of online reviews, since complete strangers post these. Therefore, we have chosen to examine and test perceived likeness and source credibility as mediating factors in eWOM receivers' perceptions of a review.

2.3.1 Perceived Likeness

Perceived likeness essentially refers to how similar to a sender that receiver considers herself to be. An abundance of research demonstrates that self-disclosure facilitates the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships by generating liking between communicators (Dindia 2002). The concept originates from face-to-face communication but could also be applicable to some extent in the online environment (Ren, Kraut, Kiesler 2007). Logic suggests that the more information a sender

discloses, the easier it is for a receiver to make judgments regarding the likeness between them. If the perceived likeness is high, it can be assumed that receiver attitudes and intentions are more likely to be influenced positively, whereas they should be influenced negatively if perceived likeness is low.

The measurement of likeness can be divided into two separate fields, the first being demographical measures such as age, gender and geography. The second field, which has a stronger effect than the first, goes deeper and relates to personal preferences, values and beliefs (Gilly et al. 1998). Existing theory argues that the more alike two people are, taking into consideration both of the two fields, the more likely it is that they will trust each other (Reuf, Aldrich, Carter 2003). In an eWOM setting this suggests that the more alike you consider yourself the source, the more likely you are to consider the source's message as trustworthy. This in turn means that you may be more easily influenced by the source and their message (Brown, Broderick, Lee 2007).

Some could argue that perceived likeness holds little value in an eWOM setting since the level of PII on most online forums is limited to demographic information. However, Brown et al. (2007) pointed out that perceived likeness online often relates to shared interests and mind-sets rather than traditional demographic variables. In situations where consumers are actively seeking information about products or services, e.g. hotels, the receiver will have actively found the review because he or she is interested in the same product or service as the author of the review. Though e.g. age could play an important role (a young person may not have the same hotel preferences as an older person) it could be argued that shared interests hold greater value here.

It cannot be concluded that source disclosure of PII should automatically generate higher perceived likeness, since each sender-receiver connection will occur on the individual level. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that disclosure of source PII greatly facilitates the establishment of perceived likeness (Ren, Kraut, Kiesler 2007) and prior research has indeed demonstrated that online community members identify with and assess reviewers who disclose PII more positively (Jarvenpaa and Leidner

1999; Lea, Spears, Degroot 2001). Thus, the following hypothesis is relevant to test despite ambiguous theory on the linkage between eWOM source PII and perceived likeness.

H1: Increasing disclosure of eWOM source personal identifying information (PII) makes the receiver perceive her-/himself to be more alike the source.

2.3.2 PERCEIVED SOURCE CREDIBILITY

WOM and eWOM source credibility can be defined as the extent to which one perceives a source's recommendation or review as believable, true or factual (Fogg et al. 2001; Tseng and Fogg 1999). In traditional WOM, source credibility has been described as to what extent information from a source can be considered trustworthy in a specific context (Eagly, Wood, Chaiken 1978). Hence, eWOM receivers' perceptions of credibility and trustworthiness of the source will be tested in our study in order to determine respondents' assessment of overall source credibility. The level of source credibility might then guide the receiver in how much weight the information should be given in a certain situation compared to other sources (Xie et al. 2011). Since the presence of source PII is believed to signal credibility, it can be assumed that PII also improves the credibility of the message (Xie et al, 2011). Indeed, it has been demonstrated that disclosure of source PII in an eWOM context has a large influence on perceived source credibility (Ibid), which in turn should amplify consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions (Petty et al. 1998; Pornpitakpan 2002). This second theoretical link will be further evaluated in section 2.4.

It is worth noting that consumers seeking eWOM information about a certain product or service are not necessarily concerned with the credibility of an individual reviewer, but could rather rely on the ratings of others, the total number of reviews and the usefulness of the information presented (O'Reilly and Marx 2011). In other words, consumers in reality tend to make credibility assessments based on all available information about the relevant product or service, often including numerous reviews of the same object. However, for the purpose of this thesis, source credibility depending on the presence of PII for a single reviewer will be studied.

In all cases consumer-created information is believed to be more credible than seller-created information, since credibility of information is often positively connected to the trustworthiness of the information source (Chen and Xie 2008). Yet, in an online environment where the consumers themselves supply the reviews, the credibility of a message can be hard to assess when the level of eWOM source PII is mostly limited to short personal texts with a history of previously rated objects. In an attempt to mitigate this uncertainty, Tripadvisor assigns credibility symbols to their reviewers, such as "Expert" or "Pro reviewer". The aim is to increase the incentives for people to write and post reviews, but also to give their users more information regarding how sources should be ranked in terms of source credibility.

This practical implementation is possibly an extension of existing theory. Sussman and Seigal (2003) proposed that source PII enhances source credibility, which in turn entails information credibility and usefulness. The argument is partly supported by the findings of Forman et al. (2008), who conclude that reviewer disclosure of PII has a positive impact on sales of the reviewed objects. Nonetheless, the Forman et al. study examines the nebulous remote link between reviewer disclosure and product sales; the role of source identity in forming consumer perceptions of eWOM credibility – a more immediate link – is still underexplored empirically (Kusumasondjaja, Shanka, Marchegiani 2012). Xie et al.'s 2011 article, drawing on the prominence-interpretation theory (Fogg 2003; Fogg, Cuellar, Danielson 2007), is an exception. According to this theory, consumers' assessment of online source credibility is established by the availability of source cues, as well as their interpretation of these cues. Correspondingly, Xie et al. (2011) proposed that genuine and competent reviewers should be more inclined to disclose PII and that this would improve consumers' perceived credibility of online reviews with source PII. Indeed, the presence of PII in form of demographic information was proved to have a significant effect on perceived credibility. As an extension of these findings, we included more personalized PII and test the following hypothesis:

H2: Increasing disclosure of eWOM source personal identifying information (PII) makes the receiver perceive the source as more credible.

2.4 eWOM Source PII – Effect Variables

Now that we have outlined the importance of determining *why* receivers of a positive review may perceive it as effective, we can move on to the more relevant question at hand; *what are the actual consequences of said successful review*? As the review used in our study is fictional we cannot measure actual sales; instead we aim to measure the effect of increased eWOM PII on purchase intention and attitude. While the link between purchase intention and actual purchase action has been criticized in the past, it is still one of the best measures we have to predict future action (Söderlund and Öhman 2005). Similarly attitude can be considered a vital indicator of future consumption and purchase intention (Ginter 1974a). Therefore we have chosen to test the effect of increased eWOM PII disclosure on both purchase intention and attitude, which are thus our chosen effect variables.

As suggested in section 2.2, directly linking the level of PII disclosure in a review to consumers' purchase intentions, or the actual sales, may overlook the effect of mediating factors such as Perceived Likeness and Source Credibility. In previous passages we have mentioned several studies that have determined that high levels of perceived likeness and source credibility have positive effects on attitude and purchase intention. Therefore, as sub-hypotheses, we have chosen to test the mediating effect of these two factors on both attitude and intention.

2.4.1 Attitude

Attitude is defined as "a person's consistently favourable or unfavourable evaluations, feelings, and tendencies towards an object or idea" (Kotler 2007). In other words it is what a person likes and dislikes. When attitude is changed towards an object or an idea, Kotler suggests that a person's overall evaluation of the object, in this case a hotel, is consistently biased, thus affecting the purchasing process.

Previous research has found that a favourable attitude towards a product or service is one of the more vital preconditions influencing consumption and purchase intentions among consumers (Blackwell, Miniard, Engel 2001). Brand attitude is a well-known field of research and is known to affect present and future consumer behaviour. It is

particularly useful in predicting a consumer's future behaviour when they at some point have to decide between two homogenous products (Keller 1993).

Holding a favourable attitude towards a product or service is often a prerequisite for shaping a favourable purchase or consumption intention towards the same object and attitude adjustments are often required in order to turn product nonusers into users (Blackwell, Miniard, Engel 2001). Therefore the perceived attitude towards both the sender and the hotel is of importance to measure, since it can be seen as a first step toward the intention to choose the hotel and shape the consumer's perception of said good.

WOM in a traditional sense has been shown on numerous occasions to affect the receivers' attitudes towards the subject in question (Day 1971; Herr, Kardes, Kim 1991). In this study, the attitude towards the eWOM source is believed to be affected by the changes in PII. By influencing the attitude towards the eWOM source, the attitude towards the hotel may presumably be affected as well. Logic suggests that the better attitude towards a specific source, the more the message of said source would influence the receiver. We therefore propose that the level of source PII will affect the receiver's attitude towards the eWOM source, and in extension towards the hotel.

H3: Increasing disclosure of eWOM source personal identifying information (PII) improves the receiver's attitude towards the reviewed object.

As mentioned we also believe that factors such as perception of source likeness and perception of source credibility have a mediating effect on attitude. According to Jensen (2013), high reviewer credibility significantly improves perceptions of product quality (or attitude towards the product). In other words, we believe that increased perceived likeness and source credibility increases the receiver's attitude towards the reviewed object. This effect has been demonstrated by online reviewers with high-considered levels of credibility such as the Wall Street Journal and other well-renowned newspapers.

Perceived likeness with a source with regards to demographic values has not yet been demonstrated in an eWOM setting to affect the attitude towards a message, but it has

been shown to affect the attitude in traditional WOM (Brown, Broderick, Lee 2007). According to Brown et al (2007) it is more a question of shared mind-sets and group thinking in an online environment that drive attitude.

Therefore we are interested in testing the potential effect of mediating factors such as perception of source likeness and source credibility on a receiver's attitude towards the reviewed object.

Mediating factors:
H3a: If supported, H3 is mediated by the receiver's perception of source likeness.
H3b: If supported, H3 is mediated by the receiver's perception of source credibility.

2.4.2 INTENTIONS

The closest measurable variable before a purchase is made (action is taken) is the targeted object's *intention* to act in a certain way. In our case, this refers to the consumer's intention to book the hotel in our fictitious review. This intention measurement is used in marketing as a "subjective judgement about how we (the consumer) will behave in the future" (Blackwell, Miniard, Engel 2001) in order to predict as best possible the sought-after action (usually the action of buying a certain product or service).

A key element in studies such as this one is that you cannot control if the intention to buy really leads to a purchase. A common reference is the smoker who intends to stop but in reality never does. Studies have criticized this link between intention and actual purchase and the careless use of related intention measures. Even so, it is still believed to be one of the better measures to predict future behaviour (Dahlén and Lange 2003) and numerous researchers have actually found that intentions can have a descriptive effect on the actions taken in real life (Howard and Sheth 1970).

Both earlier and recent studies have shown that WOM affects a person's consideration and intentions (Grewal, Cline, Davies 2003) and is particularly effective when the bond between the sender and the receiver is strong (Bansal and Voyer 2000). Worth noting is also that the effect on consideration and intention is even

higher in situations where the consumer actively seeks out WOM information, for instance when trying to find a hotel to book before a trip (Bansal and Voyer 2000).

As noted under the section above, prior research in the WOM and eWOM field has studied if receivers identify with and more positively assess an eWOM source that reveals PII, and if their assessment of the eWOM sources is used to shape their evaluation of the object reviewed (Forman et al. 2008). This in turn raises the question if the probability of a receiver purchasing the reviewed good is higher if the review is given by an eWOM source that discloses information about himself compared to one that doesn't. Forman (2008) supports the theory that the probability is in fact higher, showing that the eWOM sources with higher disclosure of demographic PII are typically associated with higher sales. It is also in line with similar studies in related fields in the information processing literature, supporting causality between WOM source characteristics on reviews and purchase intentions when information is processed heuristically (Forman et al. 2008).

Our study therefore aims to test if higher levels of PII will result in a higher intention to choose a hotel when the contents of online reviews are positive.

H4: Increasing disclosure of eWOM source personal identifying information (PII) strengthens the receiver's intention to choose the reviewed object.

Perceived *likeness* has been shown to significantly influence the intentions in WOM settings (Brown, Broderick, Lee 2007) but in studies concerning an online context results are more vague. These studies however, focus on basic demographical variables as opposed to our study with which we aim to evaluate the level of self-disclosure along the dimensions of both width and breadth. By complementing basic information such as age, geographical location and gender with more personal information, as well as a video of the subject, we want to challenge existing studies and test whether or not this type of review can in fact lead to higher perceived likeness and in extension strengthen the intention to book.

Furthermore, many studies suggest that favourable reviews supplied by *credible* sources increase perceptions of product quality and purchase intention, which has also been proven in reality (Jensen et al. 2013). Some argue that online information is

higher in credibility (Park, Lee, Han 2007; Senecal and Nantel 2004) as the information is posted by experienced travellers while others argue that online information can be posted by any individual and is therefore less credible than other information sources (Gretzel and Fesenmaier 2006; Magnini 2011). In any case, Fogg (2003) argues that the presence of PII improves the perceived credibility of online reviews and that the improved perceived credibility suggests that consumers give more weight to the online reviews during their decision-making, thus increasing the persuasiveness of online reviews (Pornpitakpan 2002).

There are also studies that have found that the credibility of the eWOM source and purchase intention had no significant correlation, and that the more influential variable was actually the level of involvement in the purchase (Jensen et al. 2013). On the other hand studies conducted in the field we are interested in, namely hotel reviews, Xie et al. (2011) found that PII had a positive effect on the perceived credibility of online reviews, which in turn significantly affected the receivers' intention to book the hotel.

Therefore we are interested in testing the potential effect of mediating factors such as perception of source likeness and source credibility on a receiver's intention to book.

Mediating factors:
H4a: If supported, H4 is mediated by the receiver's perception of source likeness.
H4b: If supported, H4 is mediated by the receiver's perception of source credibility.

3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the scientific approaches chosen for this thesis and the design of the different studies conducted.

3.1 CHOSEN SCIENTIFIC APPROACH AND DATA GATHERING

We have chosen a deductive approach to our study since we are testing hypotheses based on existing theories (Olsson and Sörensen 2011) relating to the link between the degree of PII of an eWOM source, perceived likeness, source credibility, receiver attitudes and purchase intentions. An explanatory quantitative data gathering approach was used to study this relationship between PII, eWOM source and receiver, and also the mediating variables that bind them together (Olsson and Sörensen 2011). Our hypotheses are tested with an experiment based quantitative survey on a sample of individuals deemed sufficiently large and representative, in order to obtain reasonable reliability and to facilitate the possibility of drawing general conclusions from our result (Malhotra 2010).

3.2 DESIGN OF STUDY

Our study is divided into four stages. Stage *zero* was creating the message we wanted to expose our respondents to and establishing the four levels of PII of the eWOM source. Stage *one* was a test panel that helped us refine our message as well as our sender profiles for both our pre- and main studies. Stage *two* was a pre-study that tested if different degrees of PII held a value towards our proposed hypotheses, regarding the chosen mediating and the chosen effect variables. The third and final stage was our main study developed in accordance with the data collected in stage one and two. The aim of the study was to prove or discard our hypotheses.

3.2.1 EXPERIMENT DESIGN

The aim of our study is to show that different degrees of eWOM source PII will have effects on the receiver's perception of the message. The concept is therefore to expose all of our subjects to an identical review, but with differing levels of eWOM source PII. The definition of PII in this study is at times expanded to incorporate a personal descriptive text, a profile picture and a personal presentation video.

This will result in four levels of PII and eight groups of data to be analysed. All levels of PII will be tested with one male and one female source as shown below:

1) *PII level one* – Review only (without any information about the source)
2) *PII level two* - Information in text about the **male**/**female** sender, i.e. name, location, interest and a short personal description
3) *PII level three* - All of the above, plus a picture of the **male/female** sender and symbols indicating previous reviewing behaviour
4) *PII level four* - All above, plus a video of the **male/female** sender, were he/she describes himself/herself

The subject will be exposed to one of eight different possible exposures, randomly distributed. Level one (group one and two) needs to get two identical exposures so that all levels are weighted equally in the experiment. The same exposures were used in both the pre- and main study but with different sets of questions. The experiments and data collection were conducted in the online survey tool *Qualtrics*.

Please see Appendix A, B and C for full experiment design of both the pre- and main study.

3.2.2 THE MESSAGE

To ensure that the tested variable in the study was indeed the degree of PII, the message had to be as realistic and authentic as possible. If the message was either overly enthusiastic or too negative, the differing degrees of PII might have been harder to isolate and hence not as significant. Regarding the length of the message, prior studies have shown that longer, more detailed reviews are not as common as shorter reviews (Mudambi and Schuff 2010). Therefore, we chose a medium-length message. The lexical complexity of the message also holds value, since a too advanced message may have felt inauthentic. Recent studies have concluded that, on average, online consumer reviews tend to hold moderate to low lexical complexity and thus we wrote the message with these findings in mind (Jensen et al. 2013).

The last factor to consider while writing the message was the valence of the review, whether it should be positive or negative. The majority of online reviews are very one-sided, either in favour or against a product or service (Jensen et al. 2013). We chose to limit our study to positive hotel reviews for three main reasons. Firstly, positive reviews are much more common; in an analysis performed by (ReviewPro 2012) in which more than 90 million reviews were analysed, they found that 60% were positive, 28% neutral and only 12% negative. Secondly, many companies use false positive reviews to manipulate their ratings and online reputation, which suggests that consumers need to assess the credibility of senders more often when dealing with positive reviews than with negative reviews (Jensen et al. 2013). Thirdly, positive and negative reviews do not seem to influence the purchase intention in opposite ways, as negative reviews are more complex in their nature and seem to hold more power on the consumer (Dellarocas 2003; Jensen et al. 2013). Travellers who use online hotel reviews to make a decision often have a pre-decisional disposition, meaning that they have an opinion of the hotel before they read the review and are using it to validate this opinion (Xie et al. 2011). This biased interpretation is referred to as pre-decisional information distortion and leads to consumers with a positive pre-decisional disposition to view the review positively, while consumers with a negative pre-decisional disposition will view it negatively (Bond et al. 2006; Russo, Meloy, Medvec 1998). Consumers that do not have a pre-decisional disposition and are reading the review from a neutral position, i.e. our subjects, may instead be affected by an entirely different mechanism, namely the negativity effect (Baumeister et al. 2001). This effect refers to a general tendency of humans to weigh negative things heavier than positive ones. Since we wanted to isolate the PII variable in our study, we chose a positive message to avoid the negativity effect skewing the subjects' perception of the message, thereby making the message itself too important.

Given all of these factors, we created a positive, short to medium length review, with medium lexical complexity. We chose four different messages from the leading and well-established hotel review site Tripadvisor, re-wrote them and showed them to our test panel. The panel was then given the task of choosing one of the messages. The context in which the message was displayed was designed with Tripadvisor as a

conceived framework and background, in order to make it look as realistic as possible and also to display it in a setting in which many respondents are already familiar with.

3.2.3 THE EWOM SOURCE

In the study, we wanted to isolate the effect of PII as much as possible. We therefore wanted to expose respondents to a neutral a sender as possible. We also wanted to isolate any gender effects, which meant that we needed both a male and a female sender. All other information was kept identical: the senders have identical attributes in terms of age, interests and personal presentations. The only difference was their names, pictures and video presentations. The exact same message was presented in the video; the only difference was the person expressing it.

3.2.4 COLLECTION OF DATA

The collection of quantitative data was gathered through first a pre-study and then a main study, with two completely different population samples. For the main study we wanted a broader and more evenly distributed population sample compared to the pre-study, which was conducted by use of students only. Due to the fact that students generally tend to have a lower disposable income, their experiences with traveling and hotels are arguably more limited. Students may also be viewed as a homogenous group, which is associated with risks (Malhotra 2010). For this reason, we distributed our survey for the main study to e-mail addresses obtained from the customer base of Bangerhead.se, an online retailer of beauty products. Their clientele is varied, with a decidedly more even distribution regarding income and age compared to students, giving the study a more accurate sample from the general population. Unfortunately, most of Bangerhead's customers online are women, thus skewing the ratio between women and men (only 13.8% of respondents in the main study were male). We also distributed the survey in social media and by e-mail.

	Number of participants	Mean age
Pre-Study	65	23,9
Main study	664	41,5

3.3 PRE-STUDY

In order to choose the most appropriate message and message senders with regards to the information in 3.2.1 and 3.2.2, we set up a test panel prior to the pre-study. One message, one female character and one male character were chosen for the pre-study as a result of voting. Before our main study could begin we tested some of the main variables that would later be used. The pre-study had a set of 21 questions. Below, the objectives and main findings of the pre-study are presented:

1. Show that the different exposures were seen as more or less anonymous.
   a. Measured by how anonymous and unwilling to share personal information respondents perceived the sender to be. The anonymous exposure clearly resulted in the highest ratings, and these declined as source PII increased. Thus, the study worked as intended.

2. Show that changing source PII affected the variables intended for the main study, i.e. perceived likeness, credibility and attitude towards the sender.
   a. Mean values of the measured variables differed depending on the amount of disclosed eWOM source PII.

3. Show that changing source PII influenced receivers' attitude towards the hotel.
   a. Mean values of this variable differed depending on the amount of disclosed eWOM source PII. This is a "light version" of the intention to purchase variable used in the main study.

4. Control if participants thought the study was realistic.
   a. Responses to questions about perceived realism of the study generated positive results and indicated that we could distribute the main study using the same exposures as in the pre-study.

See appendix B for full version of pre-study

3.4 MAIN STUDY

For the design of the main study we used the data collected from the conducted pre-study, as well as findings in recent research in related fields. The same experiment design and exposures as in the pre-study were used but with a new set of questions following.

3.4.1 DESIGN OF EXPERIMENT QUESTIONS

The majority of questions were designed so that participants could pick a number on a semantic seven-graded differential scale where the extremes of the scale presented to contradicting statements (See Appendix C for full set of questions). The participants could then choose which alternative corresponded most closely with their opinions (Malhotra 2010). In order to minimize measurement errors and improve internal reliability, a multiple-item measure was used to examine the variables of the experiment (Bryman and Bell 2011). Each variable was assigned at least three different statements (Dahlén et al. 2005) and a Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each variable. This was done to ensure reliability and that the answers could be correctly weighed together for each variable.

3.4.2 VARIABLES OF INVESTIGATION

The different variables that were measured in the survey through the respondents' answers are presented below. Initially, perceived likeness to the eWOM sender, source credibility and source trustworthiness were variables included in the study. However, a factor analysis on all underlying survey questions/statements of which these variables are constructed, produced a result with only two factor loadings. We chose to label these two factors Perceived Likeness and Source Credibility (the latter incorporates questions/statements on source trustworthiness as well). For full information on how the statements were categorized and weighted together, please see Appendix D.

Manipulation Check

In order to test if the study measured the different levels of PII correctly, we included a manipulation check that measured perceived source anonymity and perceived source self-disclosure. The two categories had Cronbach's alpha of 0.89 and 0.84.

Perceived Likeness

In order to test the hypothesis (H1) regarding receivers' perceived likeness to the source, three statements was weighed together, resulting in a Cronbach's alpha of 0.93.

Source Credibility

The hypothesis (H2) regarding the level of sender self-disclosure and source credibility was tested by weighing together the initial theoretical variables credibility and trustworthiness. Responses to these seven questions resulted in a Cronbach's alpha of 0.99, translating into the new variable Source Credibility.

Attitudes

In order to test the hypothesis (H3) regarding the level of sender self-disclosure in relation to receivers' attitudes towards the reviewed hotel, three statements were weighed together resulting in a Cronbach's alpha of 0.98. Three statements about receivers' attitudes towards the reviewer resulted in a Cronbach's alpha of 0.97.

Intention to choose the reviewed object

In order to test the hypothesis (H4) regarding the level of sender self-disclosure in relation to receivers' intention to choose the reviewed object, three related survey statements measuring this resulted in a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.97.

Other

In order to secure study quality and check for confounding, we measured the quality of the message and how it was interpreted by incorporating a set of additional variables. These included perceived realism of the study, perceived review length, perceived knowledgeability and experience of the eWOM source, as well as perceptions of the source as being boastful when disclosing personal information.

3.5 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

3.5.1 RELIABILITY

The fundamental concern regarding reliability is the consistency of study measures, and there are at least three different meanings to the term: stability, internal reliability and inter-observer consistency (Bryman and Bell 2011). Stability refers to the consistency over time, that if you re-test your study you will achieve similar results as before (Bryman and Bell 2011). We have not made any re-tests of the sample distribution so stability of the study has not been measured. Our findings are in line with previous research in related fields, which we believe serve as a clear indicator of reliability. Internal reliability refers to consistency between the survey questions. We had a Cronbach's alpha higher than 0.8 on all our noteworthy variables in the study, which lead us to conclude the internal consistency as satisfactory. Inter-observer consistency refers to the consistency of participants of the study, which is the most complicated of the reliability measures to assess. To secure inter-observer consistency we wrote the survey in the respondents' native language to minimize the risk of misinterpretations, which could have led to random errors in the study.

3.5.2 VALIDITY

The validity of a study is aimed at explaining how well the chosen variables for the study really correlate with the different hypotheses, or in other words, if the variables measure what they are supposed to measure (Bryman and Bell 2011).

Internal validity

Internal validity focuses on the cause-and-effect relationship between the different variables of the study. To reach internal validity there needs to be a causal relationship between the dependent and the independent variable (Malhotra 2010). Explicitly, this means that the change in the dependent variable can be explained by the change in the independent variable, and that the effect of the independent variable is isolated, or that the change is caused by the independent variable only.

In order to secure internal validity of the study and to exclude bias several measures were taken into account. All participants in the study were exposed to the exact same

message; the only difference was the level of eWOM source PII. The level of PII they were exposed to was chosen entirely at random, but evenly distributed.

External validity

This term refers to how well the findings of the study can apply on a general population or how well the cause-and-effect relationship within the study can be generalized beyond the limits of the study (Malhotra 2010). Since the goal of this study is to capture a broader socio-economic behaviour in the general population this is of importance.

To secure the external validity of this thesis and to get an even and as well-matched population sample as possible a number of measures were taken into account. Firstly, the number of participants (664) serves as an indicator of the validity. The sample size in each of the eight possible exposures was set to a minimum of 30 participants in order to reach an acceptable sample size and attain statistical validity (Wooldridge 2009). This study received a total of 729 respondents in a total of two different samples if the pre-study is included. We also took measures to secure data from a broad heterogeneous group of people in terms of age, income and geographical locations by distributing the survey to different groups through different distribution channels. We also gathered data so that we could measure and analyse the differences between the different population's samples. This study was heavily weighted with women, but all testing (see Results) with regards to gender seemed to show no differences in the data, hence the external validity is argued to be satisfactory.

Construct validity

Construct validity refers to the "the degree to which a test measures what it claims, or purports, to be measuring" (Brown 1996). A study has construct validity if it can show an association between the results and the prediction of a theoretical feature. The basis of construct validity is to measure if the dependent and independent variables behave like existing theory suggests and how research claim that they should, in other words that our study's findings are in line with recent and previous research in related fields.

The aim of our study was to test whether or not an increased level of PII in online hotel reviews strengthen the consumer's attitude towards the hotel in question, as well as the intention to choose that hotel, while also considering the effect of mediating factors like perceived likeness and source credibility. Existing research in related fields has suggested that source credibility plays an important role in shaping attitude and creating an intention to buy a product or service. Most of this research deals with traditional WOM however, which is why we wanted to test if the same results can be concluded for eWOM. Since three of our four hypotheses and all four sub-hypotheses were proven, and our dependent and independent variables behaved as we thought, we believe our study does have the construct validity needed.

3.5.3 DATA DISCUSSION

Our samples are large enough in each quadrant (n>30) to assume that they follow a normal distribution in accordance with the central limit theorem for mean values. If they had not, the statistical reliability would have been lower and thus the overall weight of our proposed claims. The number of respondents in this study was 664, which is more than enough to support and reinforce the statistical reliability of this study (Wooldridge 2009). All relevant Cronbach's alphas were above the limit value of 0.8 (Bryman and Bell 2011). The collected data was analysed in SPSS version 22.

4. RESULTS OF STUDY

Results from the conducted main experiment and the analysis performed on the collected data are presented in this chapter.

4.1 MANIPULATION CHECK: RELATION BETWEEN PII AND ANONYMITY

For the results of our experiment to be feasible, it is a prerequisite that differing levels of eWOM source personal identifying information (PII) indeed alters respondents' perceptions of source disclosure and anonymity. This was tested through a univariate between groups analysis of variance (ANOVA), comparing the variables perceived anonymity as well as perceived source disclosure between the four PII groups outlined in Methodology. A Scheffe post hoc test – used since target groups are of unequal size – revealed that respondents perceived the two exposures with the second and third highest level of source PII as relatively similar, why these were bundled to create a new PII group. Thus, we have three source PII groups on which the analysis will be based on. First, the group of respondents exposed to an eWOM source with a complete absence of PII is denominated Anonymous (N=278; Exposure 1 in Appendix A).

Second, the group of respondents exposed to an eWOM source with PII in the form of demographic information and a brief presentation text, as well as a profile picture and information about previous reviewing behaviour, is denominated Photo (N=301; Exposure 2 and 3 in Appendix A). Third, the group of respondents exposed to an eWOM source with all information in the group Photo, as well as a personal video presentation, is denominated Video (N=84; Exposure 4 in Appendix A). Mean value differences in perceived source disclosure and anonymity between all three new PII groups were then significant at the 0.05 level. Onwards, this significance level is implied when results are declared significant, and mean- and p-values will be displayed only in the end of this chapter.

Furthermore, our intention with the experiment was to show that increasing source disclosure should lead to higher mean values of perceived likeness, source credibility, attitude towards the reviewed object and intention to choose it. In theory, the opposite could happen if respondents did not like the chosen fictional eWOM sources.

ANOVAs made clear that the manipulation worked as intended, with perceptions of and attitudes towards the eWOM source improving significantly in line with the amount of PII disclosed.

A crosstab revealed that just 13.8% of all respondents were male, with 9.3% in the group Anonymous, 15.9% in Photo and 21.2% in Video. Consequently, the population sample cannot be claimed to represent the population in Sweden at large. Fortunately, extensive testing with regards to gender of both the eWOM source and receiver, on all variables relevant in this experiment and in all appropriate combinations, showed that gender does not appear to influence any results. The same goes for the mean age of respondents since it ranges from 41.4 to 41.7 years between the three PII groups.

4.2 PERCEIVED LIKENESS AND SOURCE CREDIBILITY

In order to observe if increasing eWOM source PII does affect receivers' perceived likeness to the reviewer, as well as source credibility, ANOVAs along with Scheffe post hoc tests were used to compare mean values for these variables.

The variable perceived likeness did not appear to differ significantly depending on source PII disclosure level, why H1 must be rejected. [1] In other words an increasing amount of personal identifying information about the eWOM source does not imply that the receiver feels more alike to this source. The result is not surprising, since existing theory mainly emphasises the positive influence that perceived likeness might have on effect variables rather than on the relationship between source disclosure and perceived likeness. Naturally, the presence of source PII allows the receiver to better decide if he or she feels similar to the source, but it is not possible to ascertain whether this will increase perceived likeness since all individuals have different characteristics. Hypotheses 3a and 4a, where the mediating properties of

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[1] However, if responses to one of the three statements (of which the variable Perceived Likeness is constructed), namely "I have similar travelling preferences as the reviewer" are compared between the three groups with an ANOVA test, there is a significant difference in mean values between Anonymous and Video. This finding will be further analysed in Discussion.

perceived likeness are tested, are more in line with existing theory on perceived likeness and will be discussed in section 4.3.

Using the same tests, perceived source credibility differed significantly between the groups Anonymous, Photo and Video. Thus, H2 is supported. The findings are in line with previous research, where more available source PII has been shown to positively influence perceived source credibility (Xie et al. 2011). However, most studies to date have focused on PII in terms of demographic variables, omitting the more personal source information presented to respondents in groups Photo and Video in our experiment. The same reasoning as with perceived likeness applies here; more personal source information, especially along the depth dimension (Altman and Taylor 1973), could affect source credibility either positively or negatively depending on sender characteristics. In this experiment, source credibility does increase significantly when the receiver gets to know more about the eWOM source.

4.3 EFFECT VARIABLES: ATTITUDE AND INTENTION

One of the primary aims of this thesis is to assess whether increasing presence of eWOM source PII positively affects receivers' attitude towards and intention to choose the reviewed object (variables: Attitude and Intention). In addition to examining this direct link, we performed tests on the mediating properties of perceived likeness and source credibility. Theoretically, there is a strong link between the attitude towards a product or service and the intention to consume it (Söderlund and Öhman 2005). This notion is validated in our study by the fact that Attitude and Intention have a Pearson correlation of 0.915, significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Hence, the mediating effects of Attitude on Intention in the context of this thesis are not further explicitly tested.

One-way ANOVAs including Scheffe post hoc tests, with Attitude and Intention as dependents, and a nominal variable containing the three PII groups as factor, were used to test hypotheses 3 and 4. Mean- and p-values are presented in the end of this chapter. In summary, increasing eWOM source PII does lead to better Attitude and Intention, but mean differences between PII groups are only significant when the Video PII group is included. Thus, it is a question of judgment whether the results still serve to fully support H3 and H4. Since the video presentation included in this study

is a main driver for its originality, we choose to interpret the results as serving to support H3 and H4, with the following disclaimer: *Increasing disclosure of eWOM source PII – including a video presentation of the source – improves the receiver's attitude towards the reviewed object and strengthens his/her intention to choose it.*

It is worth noting that respondents' attitude towards the eWOM source, which is not included as a hypothesis, appears to improve significantly from Anonymous to Photo to Video. Manipulating the level of source PII thus results in stronger reactions towards the sender of information than towards the sent information. Consequently, a favourable attitude towards the reviewer could reasonably be assumed to be a prerequisite for a favourable attitude towards the reviewed object, at least in the context of experience goods such as hotels.

In order to examine if Perceived Likeness and Source Credibility mediate Attitude and Intention, we used the regression analysis mediating functions from the Preacher-Hayes PROCESS algorithm (Hayes 2013). Prior to the regressions, preliminary tests ensured that presumptions regarding autocorrelation, multicollinearity and heterosecedasticity were not violated. The results of the regressions revealed that Perceived Likeness and Source Credibility mediated both Attitude and Intention, since none of the four regressions entailed confidence intervals including any zeros. It is worth noting that Source Credibility had considerably stronger mediating properties than Perceived Likeness, but all four mediating factor hypotheses, H3a, H3b, H4a and H4b, are supported. In other words, the regressions indicate that the relation between eWOM source PII disclosure and eWOM receivers' attitude towards, as well as intention to choose, a reviewed object, are indeed mediated by these receivers' perceptions of source likeness and source credibility.

4.4 ADDITIONAL ANALYSIS

Confound checks are used to ensure that the manipulations in the study only influence the intended dependent variables. There are several factors in our study that could possibly confound the actual results found with regards to level of eWOM source PII in relation to perceived likeness and source credibility, as well as respondents' attitudes and intentions. Therefore, we performed ANOVAs with Scheffe post hoc tests on the three PII groups and compared mean values of possible confounds,

namely *perceived review length* (i.e. the review being perceived by a respondent as containing more text due to a larger amount of source information) and *respondents perceiving the sender as boastful when disclosing personal information*. Fortunately, no confounding could be observed, as the mean values did not differ significantly.

Although not explicitly included in the theoretical framework and hypotheses of this study, several other potential mediating and effect variables that may be of interest in the eWOM context were tested. In short, ANOVA tests revealed that respondents' perceptions of the knowledgeability and experience of the eWOM source, as well as perceptions of overall message quality and usefulness, significantly improved along with higher disclosure of eWOM source PII.

4.5 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Below is a summary of ANOVAs and Scheffe post hoc tests on the main variables.

Tested Variable	PII group	Mean	P-value, vs. Anonymous	P-value, vs. Photo	P-value, vs. Video	Hypothesis
Perceived Likeness	Anonymous	3.76	-	0.490	0.055	**H1 Rejected**
	Photo	3.92	0.490	-	0.267	
	Video	4.25	0.055	0.267	-	
Source Credibility	Anonymous	4.49	-	0.038	0.000	**H2 Supported**
	Photo	4.84	0.038	-	0.001	
	Video	5.61	0.000	0.001	-	
Attitude towards hotel	Anonymous	4.69	-	0.189	0.000	**H3 Supported[2]**
	Photo	4.94	0.189	-	0.010	
	Video	5.56	0.000	0.010	-	
Intention to choose hotel	Anonymous	4.61	-	0.162	0.001	**H4 Supported[2]**
	Photo	4.88	0.162	-	0.032	
	Video	5.42	0.001	0.032	-	

Mediating factors:

Receivers' attitudes towards the reviewed object improve with increased disclosure of eWOM source PII, and are mediated by perceived likeness. → **H3a: Supported**

Receivers' attitudes towards the reviewed object improve with increased disclosure of eWOM source PII, and are mediated by source credibility. → **H3b: Supported**

Receivers' intentions to choose the reviewed object improve with increased disclosure of eWOM source PII, and are mediated by perceived likeness. → **H4a: Supported**

Receivers' intentions to choose the reviewed object improve with increased disclosure of eWOM source PII, and are mediated by source credibility. → **H4b: Supported**

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[2] *Increasing disclosure of eWOM source PII – including a video presentation of the source – improves the receiver's attitude towards the reviewed object and strengthens his/her intention to choose it.*

5. DISCUSSION

In this chapter we will discuss the contribution, implications and limitations of our findings. Suggestions for future research are implied throughout this chapter and summarized in the last section.

5.1 CONTRIBUTION

5.1.1 EWOM AND PERSONAL IDENTIFYING INFORMATION (PII)

Companies and its supporters have many reasons to post favourable fake reviews about their own products and services, why consumers should be cautious. Indeed, online review sites and eWOM forums have been criticized for not properly supervising reviews and controlling if these are really posted by authentic consumers (Kusumasondjaja, Shanka, Marchegiani 2012). In order to better understand the consequences of eWOM, we have therefore investigated and clarified how and why reviews with differing levels of source information influence their receivers. Prior research on eWOM in general, and on eWOM source characteristics in particular, has primarily emphasised sources' personal identifying information (PII) in terms of demographic variables such as name, age, gender and state of residence. Logic suggests that simulating an eWOM sender-receiver link that is as similar to face-to-face WOM as possible should imply greater effectiveness of the eWOM message. Striving to construct a communication link that is closer to real conversations, which provide the receiver with more personal and nonverbal source cues, we exposed some survey respondents to an embedded video presentation of the source. Since two-thirds of communication is believed to be nonverbal (Lin, Lu, Wu 2012), and since this approach has not yet been tested in an online review context as far as our literature review stretches, the results of the video PII (which are further discussed in the next section) make a considerable contribution to existing knowledge in the eWOM field. Overall, increasing the breadth and depth dimension (Altman and Taylor 1973) of the eWOM source PII should presumably facilitate for receivers to make message source attributions, and in effect to determine the quality of a review. This thesis sheds light on and contributes to the understanding of how eWOM, by featuring source information that is one step closer to face-to-face WOM, could evolve into a more effective medium for both consumers and marketers.

5.1.2 MEDIATING FACTORS AND CONSEQUENCES OF eWOM

In general, our results are in line with previous research findings on the influence of disclosing source characteristics in the eWOM context e.g. (Forman et al. 2008; Xie et al. 2011). The results of our study indicate that the presence and nature of eWOM source PII have a considerable influence on how receivers perceive and interpret the message source, i.e. the hotel reviewer, as well as the reviewed hotel. Increased PII entailed improved attitudes towards the hotel and stronger intentions to book it. This direct link is definitely of interest, but yet it is insufficient in the sense that it does not explain why source PII produces these consequences. In order to better understand the underlying causes, drawing on existing literature, we investigated the mediating properties of receivers' perceived likeness to the source and source credibility. Accordingly, it was also necessary to test if an increase of PII actually led to higher values of these variables.

Our tests on perceived likeness, which is a possible antecedent to source credibility, showed that this variable has no significant relation to increasing source PII. As discussed in Results, this is not surprising, since there is no previous research suggesting that knowing more about a source automatically implies that one should feel more alike to him or her. On the other hand, one could think that perceived likeness would be a central precondition in the context of experience goods such as hotels. The fact that prior studies have demonstrated that there is no relationship between eWOM source disclosure and perceived likeness (Brown, Broderick, Lee 2007) was therefore overlooked. Besides, the main reason for our including this hypothesis despite previous research indications was that these studies have mainly focused on basic demographic source cues, which can hardly be assumed to entail receivers feeling more similar to the source. Thus, it is an important finding that even when source disclosure is increased considerably along both the depth and breadth dimension, it does not lead to higher perceived likeness. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that Brown et al. (2007) found that shared mind-sets and beliefs are more important than demographic information in shaping perceived likeness in the online environment. This idea is supported in our experiment by the fact that the statement *I have similar travelling preferences as the reviewer* resulted in significant mean value differences between the Anonymous and Video source respondent groups, whereas

statements such as *I feel alike to the source* did not. Consequently, it is important to note that the source cues most central in forming perceptions of likeness online – and presumably other antecedents to source credibility, attitudes and purchase intentions – are not necessarily the same as in face-to-face communication. Further research might advance our findings by investigating in detail what types of PII are of greatest importance online.

Our results revealed that eWOM receivers' perceptions of source credibility increased significantly with higher disclosure of source PII. This finding is in line with prior research e.g. (Jensen et al. 2013; Xie et al. 2011), but adds to existing knowledge by demonstrating that source PII in the form of a profile picture, previous reviewing behaviour and a video presentation, result in even stronger receiver perceptions of source credibility. As obvious as it may seem, this result is by no means self-explanatory. Since perceived likeness did not increase significantly in line with the disclosure of source PII, our results do not clarify why respondents perceived PII-disclosing sources as more credible. One probable explanation could be signalling effects; that reviewers that are willing to disclose PII are assumed to have nothing to hide and would therefore not post dishonest reviews. If this notion is correct, the presence of PII alone could serve to increase source credibility, regardless of what the receiver thinks about the source. Moreover, "digital natives" – the generation of people that has grown up with the Internet and is said to be fluent in the digital language (O'Reilly and Marx 2011) – might efficiently prioritize in the clutter of consumer generated information by ranking reviews depending solely on the presence or absence of source cues, neglecting to make subjective judgments about the source. In our study (which only presented one review rather than a clutter of information to choose from), respondents' attitude towards the *source* improved significantly along with the amount of PII disclosed; perhaps this would not have been the case if we had chosen different fictional eWOM sources. In any case, it must be acknowledged that the more PII included, the more the source's personal characteristics affect perceptions of the review. This could theoretically work in two directions, and further research might shed light on whether increased source PII improves perceived source credibility regardless of receivers' attitudes towards the sender. Since perceived likeness did not appear to be an antecedent to source credibility in this study, it is also

worth noting that there probably are other antecedents to source credibility that are worth investigating, but were out of scope here.

Having established that eWOM source video PII leads to improved attitudes towards the hotel and receivers' intentions to choose it, we need to ask what role our chosen mediating factors play in this link. Our regression analyses showed that both source credibility and perceived likeness hold explanatory power in assessing why the presence of source PII might entail improved attitudes and stronger intentions. Source credibility had much stronger mediating properties than perceived likeness, which is natural in light of the results previously presented and discussed. Thus, receivers' credibility assessment of the source is presumably the single most important explanation to why an identical review message is deemed more or less effective. Given our including a video presentation as a form of eWOM source PII, both the direct effect of PII disclosure on receiver attitudes and intentions, as well as said mediating effects, contribute to existing knowledge.

5.2 IMPLICATIONS

5.2.1 PRACTICAL AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

When consumers search third-party online hotel review sites, their main objective is to find information that can guide them in their decision-making. At present, most eWOM source PII is generic in the sense that it mainly consists of shallow demographic information and looks the same on most websites. Our results demonstrate that the presence of more personalized PII has a positive influence on receivers' credibility assessment of the eWOM source, and ultimately on their intention to choose the reviewed hotel. Hence, online review sites have strong reasons to incentivise their users to disclose as much information about themselves as possible, and even more so with regards to their personal preferences. Theoretically, the stronger purchase intention pertaining from the source video PII indicates that online retailers might be able to increase sales by encouraging users to provide more personalized video PII. In order to enhance the source credibility effects, review sites could then facilitate for consumers to identify, sort and rank reviewers based on credibility cues. Given website space constraints and the demonstrated importance of source credibility, web designers may furthermore reconsider the proportions of featured product/service information, review texts and source characteristics.

According to our results, the credibility of reviews is of greater importance than perceived likeness to the source. But, as mentioned earlier, assessing if one has similar traveling preferences as the reviewer is facilitated by increased source PII. We believe that a shared mind-set towards an experience good is as important as source credibility for a review to be deemed helpful. In addition to the demonstrated source credibility and intention improvements, these review sites would then be able to more easily customize their offering by matching reviewers' and consumers' preferences. Consequently, these sites could provide more accurate and fitting reviews in any given field, in effect improving overall customer satisfaction. At present, most existing online review sites do not readily make this kind of information available to consumers and do not allow them to easily categorise reviews and reviewers in terms of consumption preferences. This is an important practical implication that could benefit not only consumers, but also the review sites and service providers.

Looking forward, the positive effects of shared preferences might even outweigh those of perceived source credibility. Some online review sites already have rigorous control procedures that ensure reviews can only be posted after actual purchases. If this development continues, source credibility – in terms of consumers trusting that the reviewer has actually consumed the reviewed product or service – could become obsolete. Instead, source PII could then mainly serve as a basis for customizing offerings.

5.2.2 CONSUMER IMPLICATIONS

It is of importance for consumers to understand their online behaviour in order to make better and more well grounded decisions in the eWOM environment. In general, consumers should also know about the flaws of many online review sites, such as the problem with fake reviews and misinformation. This contamination risk, together with our findings on eWOM source PII, should lead consumers to evaluate sources and their messages even more closely. After all, consumers can never be entirely sure about the authenticity of an online review. Even though the risk of encountering a fake review is reduced as the source discloses more PII, companies could in theory hire actors to post fake reviews with attached video presentations. Our results still

indicate that, as technology progresses and the competition between online review sites increases, it becomes harder for companies to deceive consumers.

5.2.3 ACADEMIC IMPLICATIONS

This study has demonstrated that expanding the concept of PII to include cues in the form of preferences, pictures and video presentations have important implications on eWOM receivers' perceptions of online reviews, reviewers and reviewed objects. Moreover, viewing a video of an eWOM source is as close as one gets to actually meeting the person in real life. It can thus be said that eWOM has taken one step closer to traditional WOM, even though it is still not interactive. The concept of video WOM has implications for further research since it is not yet clear how it should be categorized and interpreted.

5.2.4 METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Despite the proven advantages of including video communication in an eWOM experiment, there is a notable drawback. Our online surveys that included video presentations resulted in a much higher dropout rate of respondents. There are two likely reasons for this: 1) the video did not work as intended when the e-mailed survey was opened on a smartphone, and
2) respondents were discouraged to participate in the survey by the 1-minute video presentation and closed it down. If the former is true, an implication for researchers is that surveys must be adapted to smartphone interfaces. If the latter is true, it entails notable implications to marketers; busy eWOM users might ignore reviewers that show video presentations due to time constraints.

5.3 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

5.3.1 RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Firstly, it has to be acknowledged that there is a major difference between receiving a single eWOM message in a closed experiment such as ours and actively seeking for information in the clutter of eWOM on the Internet. Source cues presumably affect consumers in different ways depending on the reasons for obtaining information. Many consumers use eWOM to validate existing beliefs and opinions about a reviewed object, aiming to ensure making a good decision. This behaviour is called pre-decisional information distortion (Russo, Meloy, Medvec 1998; Xie et al. 2011)

and is particularly noteworthy with regards to online hotel bookers, since hotels are experience goods that often involve a high level of pre-purchase uncertainty (Huang, Lurie, Mitra 2009). Although an important concept, it was out of scope in this thesis. Moreover, people use more heuristic processing of source characteristics when faced with an overload of information than in a closed experiment where subjects view a single message from a single source (Forman et al. 2008). Consequently, our findings have to be interpreted with caution if the aim is to understand consumer behaviour on cluttered online review sites.

Secondly, we did not investigate antecedents to eWOM and self-disclosure, i.e. the reasons why people might engage in sending eWOM and sharing personal information. Motivations for reviewers to write reviews and share information may vary widely, from genuine altruism to strategic manipulation. Still, they all share a common trait: they explicitly or implicitly influence the perceptions of future potential buyers (Jensen et al. 2013).

Thirdly, an inherent limitation of any experiment that manipulates the level of anonymity and self-disclosure is that increasing disclosure of PII inevitably makes room for personal characteristics to influence perceptions. A respondent will form an attitude towards the eWOM source, but this attitude might be positive or negative depending on personal preferences. Failing to support H1 is an indication of the complications presented by this reasoning. Theoretically, we would have had to pair respondents' traits and preferences with those of the eWOM sources in order to achieve perceived likeness. This is difficult to accomplish in an experiment such as ours, but could successfully be implemented by online review sites given that both reviewers and other users are willing to share PII. However, this requires reciprocity, which is a central and well-documented aspect of self-disclosing behaviour referring to the mutual exposure by communication partners (Barak and Gluck-Ofri 2007). Evidently, reciprocity was not a concept included in our study.

Fourthly, our study deals with only one type of services – hotels. Even though our findings should be generalizable to other services and experience goods it cannot be

ascertained, since potential buyers are likely to have different expectations on reviewers depending on what type of good is searched for.

5.3.2 METHOD AND DATA LIMITATIONS

The experiment was conducted in an open online setting, which we did not have total control over. Hence, results could theoretically have been contaminated since it is impossible to ensure all e-mails being answered correctly. Another limitation resulting from this setup was that the surveys with embedded video presentations entailed a substantially higher dropout rate than the other surveys, in effect resulting in skewed and imbalanced respondent groups, and thus lower reliability.

Our measured effect variables, attitude towards the hotel and intention to choose it, cannot be proved to lead to action. However, both variables have on numerous occasions been proven to affect and precede actual purchases (Ginter 1974b; Söderlund and Öhman 2005). In the scope of our study, these variables were the best predictors to actual consumer behaviour.

The main concern regarding our data was not the sample size (N=664) or the distribution with regards to age or geographic location, but rather that our sample was heavily weighted with more female respondents. To be precise, only 13.8 % of the total number of respondents was male, which is obviously not a corresponding sample of the Swedish population at large. The cause of this skewed population sample is that Bangerhead's customer base is mainly female.
Moreover, we cannot be completely sure that our using the customer database of a specific company, i.e. a biased sample population, did not impair our results.

5.3.3 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Firstly, it would be rewarding for researchers to examine possible underlying causes to online source credibility. It has been demonstrated that the presence of eWOM source PII improves source credibility, but not *why*. Besides, the increasing importance of shared interests and preferences in assessing eWOM, as discussed earlier, should be of further interest to examine. As a result, the efficiency of eWOM websites and consumers' online experiences could be enhanced.

Secondly, other mediating factors than perceived likeness and source credibility are worth examining as antecedents to purchase intentions. Although not grounded theoretically in this thesis, our data analysis revealed that factors such as perceptions of the eWOM source's knowledgeability and experience, as well as perceived message quality, improved significantly along with the disclosure of PII in our experiment.

Thirdly, we only used one identical review from a single source. A more realistic – and more difficult – simulation of the real world online reviews environment would be to measure how a number of reviews and sources with differing levels of PII interact.

Fourthly, future research could replicate our experiment on online reviews of other types of products and services, as well as with both positive and negative reviews, in order to achieve greater generalizability.

Finally, it would be interesting to learn more about how the number of reviews of a certain product or service influence consumer perceptions of said good. If a hotel is rated enough times, the effects of fake reviews are presumably reduced. Is there a tipping point in the number of reviews where source credibility requirements are ignored?

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APPENDIX A - PII LEVELS

Exposure 1 – Male/female

"Bra hotell, centralt beläget och trevlig personal"
◉◉◉◉○ Omdömet skrevs den 31 mars 2014

Vårt rum var stort med fin utsikt mot vattnet. Badrummet var ljust och framförallt rent, något jag tycker är väldigt viktigt. Personalen var trevlig och hela hotellet gav ett fräscht och modernt intryck samtidigt som det också hade gamla originaldetaljer bevarade. Frukostbuffén hade ett relativt stort utbud och var ungefär vad man kunde vänta sig. Vi tog en drink i den eleganta hotellbaren på kvällen och jag kan varmt rekommendera deras Bloody Mary.

Vi bokade även tid i deras mycket trevliga relax- och spaavdelning som vi hade helt för oss själva, vilket kändes lyxigt. På det hela taget var det en trivsam och fin vistelse. Jag kan rekommendera alla som letar efter ett bra hotell med centralt läge att boka ett rum här.

Bodde där i januari 2014

Exposure 2 - Male

"Bra hotell, centralt beläget och trevlig personal"
⊙⊙⊙⊙◯ Omdömet skrevs den 31 mars 2014

Vårt rum var stort med fin utsikt mot vattnet. Badrummet var ljust och framförallt rent, något jag tycker är väldigt viktigt. Personalen var trevlig och hela hotellet gav ett fräscht och modernt intryck samtidigt som det också hade gamla originaldetaljer bevarade. Frukostbuffén hade ett relativt stort utbud och var ungefär vad man kunde vänta sig. Vi tog en drink i den eleganta hotellbaren på kvällen och jag kan varmt rekommendera deras Bloody Mary.

Vi bokade även tid i deras mycket trevliga relax- och spaavdelning som vi hade helt för oss själva, vilket kändes lyxigt. På det hela taget var det en trivsam och fin vistelse. Jag kan rekommendera alla som letar efter ett bra hotell med centralt läge att boka ett rum här.

Bodde där i januari 2014

Rickard Sandelin
Stockholm, Sverige

Om mig
- Har rest med oss sedan 2009
- Stockholm, Sverige, man, 25-34 år
- Favoritstäder: Paris, New York, Tokyo

Jag älskar att resa och har en blandad resstil. Dels tycker jag om att åka till mindre exploaterade resmål samtidigt som en cityweekend eller ett lokalt hotell kan vara en trevlig omväxling i vardagen.

Exposure 2 - Female

"Bra hotell, centralt beläget och trevlig personal"

◉◉◉◉○ Omdömet skrevs den 31 mars 2014

Vårt rum var stort med fin utsikt mot vattnet. Badrummet var ljust och framförallt rent, något jag tycker är väldigt viktigt. Personalen var trevlig och hela hotellet gav ett fräscht och modernt intryck samtidigt som det också hade gamla originaldetaljer bevarade. Frukostbufféen hade ett relativt stort utbud och var ungefär vad man kunde vänta sig. Vi tog en drink i den eleganta hotellbaren på kvällen och jag kan varmt rekommendera deras Bloody Mary.

Vi bokade även tid i deras mycket trevliga relax- och spaavdelning som vi hade helt för oss själva, vilket kändes lyxigt. På det hela taget var det en trivsam och fin vistelse. Jag kan rekommendera alla som letar efter ett bra hotell med centralt läge att boka ett rum här.

Bodde där i januari 2014

Evelina Sandelin
Stockholm, Sverige

Om mig
- Har rest med oss sedan 2009
- Stockholm, Sverige, kvinna, 25-34 år
- Favoritstäder: Paris, New York, Tokyo

Jag älskar att resa och har en blandad resstil. Dels tycker jag om att åka till mindre exploaterade resmål samtidigt som en cityweekend eller ett lokalt hotell kan vara en trevlig omväxling i vardagen.

Exposure 3 - Male

Tidigare recensioner:

▬	Utmärkt
▬▬	Mycket Bra
▬▬	Medelmåttigt
▪	Dåligt
▪	Hemskt

⭐ 26 omdömen (Proffsrecensent)

🛏 21 omdömen om hotell

🍴 5 omdömen om restauranger

🌐 Omdömen i 20 städer

🏅 11 hjälpsamhetsröster

"Bra hotell, centralt beläget och trevlig personal"

◉◉◉◉○ Omdömet skrevs den 31 mars 2014

Vårt rum var stort med fin utsikt mot vattnet. Badrummet var ljust och framförallt rent, något jag tycker är väldigt viktigt. Personalen var trevlig och hela hotellet gav ett fräscht och modernt intryck samtidigt som det också hade gamla originaldetaljer bevarade. Frukostbuffén hade ett relativt stort utbud och var ungefär vad man kunde vänta sig. Vi tog en drink i den eleganta hotellbaren på kvällen och jag kan varmt rekommendera deras Bloody Mary.

Vi bokade även tid i deras mycket trevliga relax- och spaavdelning som vi hade helt för oss själva, vilket kändes lyxigt. På det hela taget var det en trivsam och fin vistelse. Jag kan rekommendera alla som letar efter ett bra hotell med centralt läge att boka ett rum här.

Bodde där i januari 2014

Rickard Sandelin
Stockholm, Sverige

Om mig
- Har rest med oss sedan 2009
- Stockholm, Sverige, man, 25-34 år
- Favoritstäder: Paris, New York, Tokyo

Jag älskar att resa och har en blandad resstil. Dels tycker jag om att åka till mindre exploaterade resmål samtidigt som en cityweekend eller ett lokalt hotell kan vara en trevlig omväxling i vardagen.

Exposure 3 - Female

Tidigare recensioner:

▇▇	Utmärkt
▇▇▇	Mycket Bra
▇▇▇	Medelmåttigt
▌	Dåligt
▌	Hemskt

⭐ 26 omdömen (Proffsrecensent)

🛏 21 omdömen om hotell

🍴 5 omdömen om restauranger

🟣 Omdömen i 20 städer

🎖 11 hjälpsamhetsröster

"Bra hotell, centralt beläget och trevlig personal"
◉◉◉◉◯ Omdömet skrevs den 31 mars 2014

Vårt rum var stort med fin utsikt mot vattnet. Badrummet var ljust och framförallt rent, något jag tycker är väldigt viktigt. Personalen var trevlig och hela hotellet gav ett fräscht och modernt intryck samtidigt som det också hade gamla originaldetaljer bevarade. Frukostbuffén hade ett relativt stort utbud och var ungefär vad man kunde vänta sig. Vi tog en drink i den eleganta hotellbaren på kvällen och jag kan varmt rekommendera deras Bloody Mary.

Vi bokade även tid i deras mycket trevliga relax- och spaavdelning som vi hade helt för oss själva, vilket kändes lyxigt. På det hela taget var det en trivsam och fin vistelse. Jag kan rekommendera alla som letar efter ett bra hotell med centralt läge att boka ett rum här.

Bodde där i januari 2014

Evelina Sandelin
Stockholm, Sverige

Om mig
- Har rest med oss sedan 2009
- Stockholm, Sverige, kvinna, 25-34 år
- Favoritstäder: Paris, New York, Tokyo

Jag älskar att resa och har en blandad resstil. Dels tycker jag om att åka till mindre exploaterade resmål samtidigt som en cityweekend eller ett lokalt hotell kan vara en trevlig omväxling i vardagen.

Exposure 4 - Male

//HERE THE VIDEO PRESENTATION WAS DISPLAYED //

LINK:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ft3iR0RHOz0&feature=youtu.be

Tidigare recensioner:

Utmärkt
Mycket Bra
Medelmåttigt
Dåligt
Hemskt

26 omdömen (Proffsrecensent)

21 omdömen om hotell

5 omdömen om restauranger

Omdömen i 20 städer

11 hjälpsamhetsröster

"Bra hotell, centralt beläget och trevlig personal"
Omdömet skrevs den 31 mars 2014

Vårt rum var stort med fin utsikt mot vattnet. Badrummet var ljust och framförallt rent, något jag tycker är väldigt viktigt. Personalen var trevlig och hela hotellet gav ett fräscht och modernt intryck samtidigt som det också hade gamla originaldetaljer bevarade. Frukostbuffén hade ett relativt stort utbud och var ungefär vad man kunde vänta sig. Vi tog en drink i den eleganta hotellbaren på kvällen och jag kan varmt rekommendera deras Bloody Mary.

Vi bokade även tid i deras mycket trevliga relax- och spaavdelning som vi hade helt för oss själva, vilket kändes lyxigt. På det hela taget var det en trivsam och fin vistelse. Jag kan rekommendera alla som letar efter ett bra hotell med centralt läge att boka ett rum här.

Bodde där i januari 2014

Rickard Sandelin
Stockholm, Sverige

Om mig
- Har rest med oss sedan 2009
- Stockholm, Sverige, man, 25-34 år
- Favoritstäder: Paris, New York, Tokyo

Jag älskar att resa och har en blandad resstil. Dels tycker jag om att åka till mindre exploaterade resmål samtidigt som en cityweekend eller ett lokalt hotell kan vara en trevlig omväxling i vardagen.

Exposure 4 - Female

//HERE THE VIDEO PRESENTATION WAS DISPLAYED //

LINK:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tBktJEM6PwM&feature=youtu.be

Tidigare recensioner:

████	Utmärkt
███	Mycket Bra
██	Medelmåttigt
█	Dåligt
█	Hemskt

⭐ 26 omdömen (Proffsrecensent)

🛏 21 omdömen om hotell

🍽 5 omdömen om restauranger

🌐 Omdömen i 20 städer

🎖 11 hjälpsamhetsröster

"Bra hotell, centralt beläget och trevlig personal"
◉◉◉◉◯ Omdömet skrevs den 31 mars 2014

Vårt rum var stort med fin utsikt mot vattnet. Badrummet var ljust och framförallt rent, något jag tycker är väldigt viktigt. Personalen var trevlig och hela hotellet gav ett fräscht och modernt intryck samtidigt som det också hade gamla originaldetaljer bevarade. Frukostbuffén hade ett relativt stort utbud och var ungefär vad man kunde vänta sig. Vi tog en drink i den eleganta hotellbaren på kvällen och jag kan varmt rekommendera deras Bloody Mary.

Vi bokade även tid i deras mycket trevliga relax- och spaavdelning som vi hade helt för oss själva, vilket kändes lyxigt. På det hela taget var det en trivsam och fin vistelse. Jag kan rekommendera alla som letar efter ett bra hotell med centralt läge att boka ett rum här.

Bodde där i januari 2014

Evelina Sandelin
Stockholm, Sverige

Om mig
- Har rest med oss sedan 2009
- Stockholm, Sverige, kvinna, 25-34 år
- Favoritstäder: Paris, New York, Tokyo

Jag älskar att resa och har en blandad resstil. Dels tycker jag om att åka till mindre exploaterade resmål samtidigt som en cityweekend eller ett lokalt hotell kan vara en trevlig omväxling i vardagen.

APPENDIX B – PRE-STUDY

Introduction:

Hej, Tack för att Du tar dig tiden att delta i vår undersökning. Det tar bara ett par minuter och alla svar är anonyma.Ditt svar kommer att användas i en undersökning som utförs på Handelshögskolan i Stockholm. Ta del av all information som presenteras innan du svarar på frågorna.

Survey:

Givet informationen Du precis har tagit del av, vad är din attityd till hotellet?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Negativ _____Positiv	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Dålig_____Bra	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Ofördelaktig_____Fördelaktig	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

Jag tycker hotellrecensionen är:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Otydlig_____Tydlig	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Dåligt skriven _____Välskriven	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Inte alls informativ_____Informativ	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

	Instämmer inte						Instämmer helt
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Jag uppfattar avsändaren som anonym	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Jag uppfattar avsändaren som ovillig att dela med sig av personlig information	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

	Instämmer inte						Instämmer helt
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Jag uppfattar informationen ovan som realistisk	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Jag fick veta något om avsändaren	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Jag har skapat mig en uppfattning om avsändaren	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Jag har skapat mig en attityd till avsändaren	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Jag uppfattar avsändaren som en öppen person	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Jag kan identifiera mig med avsändaren	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Jag uppfattar avsändaren som trovärdig	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Jag litar på avsändaren	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

	Instämmer inte 1	2	3	4	5	6	Instämmer helt 7
Valet av hotell är viktigt för en lyckad resa	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Att välja hotell är ett beslut som kräver högt engagemang	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Jag använder mig av recensioner online när jag ska välja hotell	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Om dig

	Man	Kvinna
Jag är (1)	○	○

Hur gammal är du?

APPENDIX C – MAIN STUDY

Introduction:

Hej, Tack för att Du tar dig tiden att delta i vår undersökning. Det tar bara ett par minuter och alla svar är anonyma. Ditt svar kommer att användas i en undersökning som utförs på Handelshögskolan i Stockholm. Ta del av all information som presenteras innan du svarar på frågorna.

Survey:

Jag uppfattade hotellrecensionen som:

	Instämmer inte						Instämmer helt
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Tydlig	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Sammanhängande	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Fullständig	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Innehållsrik	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Välskriven	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

Jag uppfattade det som att arbetet med hotellrecensionen har varit:

	Instämmer inte						Instämmer helt
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Ansträngande	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Noggrant	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Tidskrävande	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

	Instämmer inte						Instämmer helt
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Hotellrecensionen var baserad på en personlig upplevelse	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Jag uppfattar informationen ovan som realistisk	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

	Instämmer inte						Instämmer helt
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Jag fick veta något om avsändaren	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Jag har skapat mig en uppfattning om avsändaren	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Jag har skapat mig en attityd till avsändaren	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Jag uppfattar avsändaren som en öppen person	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Läs extra noggrant!

	Instämmer inte						Instämmer helt
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Jag uppfattar avsändaren som anonym	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Jag uppfattar avsändaren som okänd	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Jag uppfattar avsändaren som ovillig att dela med sig av information om sig själv	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Jag uppfattade informationen i hotellrecensionen som:

	Instämmer inte						Instämmer helt
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Trovärdig	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Pålitlig	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Tillförlitlig	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Jag uppfattade hotellrecensionens avsändare som:

	Instämmer inte						Instämmer helt
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Trovärdig	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Pålitlig	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Tillförlitlig	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Jag uppfattade informationen i hotellrecensionen
som:

	Instämmer inte						Instämmer helt
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Sanningsenlig	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Ärlig	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Förtroendeingivande	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Äkta	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Jag uppfattade hotellrecensionens avsändare
som:

	Instämmer inte						Instämmer helt
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Sanningsenlig	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Ärlig	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Förtroendeingivande	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Äkta	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

	Instämmer inte						Instämmer helt
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Jag känner mig lik personen som har skrivit hotellrecensionen	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Personen som skrivet hotellrecensionen verkar påminna mycket om mig själv	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Jag känner att jag har liknande resepreferenser som avsändaren	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Givet informationen du precis har tagit del av, vad är din attityd till personen som harskrivit hotellrecensionen?

	Instämmer inte						Instämmer helt
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Positiv	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Bra	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Fördelaktig	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

	Instämmer inte						Instämmer helt
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Jag uppfattar personen som har skrivit hotellrecensionen som kunnig	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Jag uppfattar personen som har skrivit hotellrecensionen som erfaren	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Jag uppfattar personen som har skrivit hotellrecensionen som skrytsam	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Jag tycker att hotellrecensionen är:

	Instämmer inte						Instämmer helt
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Användbar	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Träffsäker	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Informativ	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Jag tycker att hotellrecensionen
är:

	Instämmer inte						Instämmer helt
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Lång	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Ordrik	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Mångordig	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Givet informationen du precis har tagit del av, vad är din attityd till
hotellet?

	Instämmer inte						Instämmer helt
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Positiv	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Bra	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Fördelaktig	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Anta att du ska boka ett hotell och att hotellet som tidigare beskrevs är ett alternativ du överväger.

	Instämmer inte						Instämmer helt
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Det här känns som ett hotell jag skulle vilja bo på	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Det är troligt att jag skulle välja det här hotellet	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Jag skulle känna mig trygg med att välja det här hotellet	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Stort tack för dina svar om hotellrecensionen, nu behöver du inte tänka mer på den. Nedan följer ett fåtal frågor om dig. De tar mindre än en minut att svara på. Tack!

	Instämmer inte						Instämmer helt
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Jag bryr mig om vilket hotell jag väljer	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Valet av hotell är viktigt för en lyckad resa	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Det krävs mycket tid för att samla information om hotell innan man väljer	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Jag använder mig av recensioner online när jag ska välja hotell	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Jag påverkas av andra konsumenters hotellomdömen på Internet	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Jag spenderar i genomsnitt per hotellnatt för ett dubbelrum:_____ SEK

Har du använt Tripadvisor eller andra liknande forum för rekommendationer av hotell eller restauranger?

	Ja	Nej
Svar	○	○

Hur många dagar per år spenderar du i genomsnitt på hotell? _____ Antal dagar

Om dig

	Man	Kvinna
Jag är	○	○

Hur gammal är du?

Skriv din e-mail nedan så kommer en rabattkod på 20% på hela Bangerheads sortiment skickad till dig. Notera att din e-mail kommer att separeras från dina svar i undersökningen och att du kommer att vara anonym oavsett. Skriv din mail här:

APPENDIX D – VARIABLES OF INVESTIGATION

MANPULATION CHECK

In order to test if the study measured the different levels of PII correctly, there needed to be a manipulation check in the study with regards to the perceived source anonymity and perceived source self-disclosure.

Regarding the perceived source self-disclosure the following four statements were processed and rated by the participants:

(1) "I learned something about the sender":

(2) "I have created an impression of the sender":

(3) "I have created an attitude towards the sender":

(4) "I perceive the sender as an open person".

Statement 1-4 was weighted together with a CA of 0.89

Regarding the perceived sender anonymity the following three statements were processed and rated by the participants

(5) "I perceive the sender as anonymous":

(6) "I perceive the sender as unknown":

(7) "I perceive the sender as unwilling to share personal information".

Statement 5-7 was weighted together with a CA of 0.84

PERCEIVED LIKENESS

In order to test the hypothesis (H1) regarding the perceived likeness with the source and the receiver the following three statements were read:

(1) "I feel alike with the person who wrote the review":

(2) "The person who wrote the review seem to remind me a lot about myself":

(3) "I feel I have similar traveling preferences as the sender".

These statements was weighted together with a CA of 0.93

SOURCE CREDIBILITY

The hypothesis (H2) regarding the level of sender self-disclosure and source credibility of the review was tested by weighing together the initial theoretical variables credibility and trustworthiness. Credibility was measured through the question

(1) "I perceived the eWOM source as", with the following endings:
(a) credible, (b) dependable, and (c) plausible.

Trustworthiness was measured through the statement:
(1)"I perceive the information in the hotel the review as", with the following endings:
(a) truthful, (b) honest, (c) trustworthy and (d) genuine.

Responses to these seven questions resulted in a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.99, translating into the new variable Source_Credibility. Using the same method on the seven questions about *message* credibility and trustworthiness, a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.99 was noted for the new variable Message_Credibility. The Pearson correlation between Source_Credibility and Message_Credibility of 0.963, significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), entailed us to emphasize the variable Source_Credibility in the following analysis.

ATTITUDE

In order to test the hypothesis (H3) regarding the correlation between the level of sender self-disclosure and reliability of the reviewed hotel the following statement was read: "Given the information you have just studied, what is your attitude to the hotel", with the following endings:
(a) Positive, (b) Good and (c) Favourable.

Cronbach's alpha was 0.98

In order to test the correlation between the level of sender self-disclosure and reliability of the reviewer the following statement was read:

"Given the information you have just studied, what is your attitude to the person who has written the hotel review", with the following endings:

(a) Positive, (b) Good and (c) Favourable.

Cronbach's alpha was 0.97

INTENTION TO CHOOSE

In order to test the hypothesis (H4) regarding the correlation between the level of sender self-disclosure and reliability of the review the following statement was read: (1)" Suppose you must book a hotel and that the hotel previously described is an option you are considering", with the following endings: (a) "This feels like a hotel I would stay at", (b) "It is likely that I would choose this hotel" and (c) "I would feel confident in choosing this hotel".

Cronbach's alpha = 0.97

OTHER

In order to secure study quality we measured the quality of the message and how it was interpreted, by incorporating a set of additional variables. The variables was tested through the following statements

(1) "I perceived the hotel-review as", then followed by five endings:
(a) clear, (b) coherent and (c) complete, (d) comprehensive and (e) well written
Cronbach's alpha of 0.96.

(2)" I perceived it as the work with the hotel review has been":
(a) strenuous, (b)careful work, (c) time consuming
Cronbach's alpha of 0.75.

(3) "The hotel review was based on a personal experience".
(4) "I perceive the information as realistic".
(5) "I perceive the person who has written the hotel review as knowledgeable".
(6) "I perceive the person who has written the hotel review as experienced".

(7) "I perceive the person who has written the hotel review as boastful"

(8) "I believe the hotel review is", then followed by three endings:

(a) useful (b) informative (c) accurate.

(9) "I believe the hotel review", the followed three endings:

(a) long (b) wordy (c) verbose