



**How Reviewers' Identity Disclosure and Expertise Affect Consumer Responses: The Mediating Role of Perceived Deception**

**Abdulrahman Alzaid**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Sheffield  
Faculty of Social Science  
Management School

November 2023

## Acknowledgments

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful

First of all, all thanks and gratitude are to Allah, the lord of the worlds, for the guidance and blessings that are countless, and more than I could have ever imagined.

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to my supervisors, Professor Fraser McLeay, Dr. Victoria-Sophie Osburg and Dr. Anthony Grimes, for their unwavering support, invaluable guidance, and insightful feedback. I deeply appreciate the significance of their feedback, which has played a pivotal role in the successful completion of my thesis.

I offer my deepest thanks and special gratitude to my mother, Wafa, who passed away during my studies. I wish I could share this achievement with you and celebrate it together.

I wish to convey my heartfelt thanks and deep appreciation to my father, Professor Abdulhamid, for his unending prayers and unwavering support throughout my entire life. I owe my current position in life to his constant encouragement and assistance.

I extend my gratitude to my wife, Bshayer, and my son, Rakan, for their unwavering support, encouragement, and patience. I would not be at this stage in my life without their essential support.

Special thanks to my brother, Abdullah, who has passed away. I wish I could share this achievement with you and witness how your valuable advice has come to fruition.

I want to express my sincere thanks and heartfelt appreciation to my sisters for their boundless encouragement.

Last but certainly not least, I extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to King Saud University for their generous funding of my PhD studies.

## Abstract

Deceptive reviews which include posts by businesses (or individuals) to promote their own products/services or denounce their competitors are increasingly being used to mislead those making purchase decisions. Mass media globally and online review websites have acknowledged the existence of deceptive reviews that can undermine trust in online review websites. However, the challenges faced by both online review websites and businesses whose products and services are being reviewed extend beyond the existence of actual deceptive reviews. Another significant problem is related to the issue of perceived deception (what consumers perceive is a deceptive review regardless of whether the review is deceptive or not), which is the focus of this thesis.

A systematic review of literature regarding online reviews suggests that consumers' perceived credibility and trustworthiness can be influenced by various factors related to reviews, reviewers, online review websites, and consumers' characteristics, either independently or interactively. In turn, perceived credibility and trustworthiness play a role in influencing consumers' responses. However, there is a lack of academic knowledge regarding the antecedents and consequences of perceived deception in online reviews that this thesis seeks to address.

Building on two well-known theories (social information processing theory (SIPT) and the persuasion knowledge model (PKM)) and supplementing them with existing online review literature, a conceptual framework is developed and tested. The framework assesses how reviewers' profile cues (reviewer's identity disclosure and reviewer's expertise), influence perceived deception. In addition, consumers' responses to online reviews that they perceive to be deceptive, such as reduced booking intention, negative emotion, warning other consumers by sharing negative word of mouth (NWOM), or experiencing reduced trust towards a hotel are explored. The role of online review scepticism on the relationship between reviewers' profile cues and perceived deception is also investigated.

An online experiment (pre-test 1:  $n = 93$ ; pre-test 2:  $n = 82$ ; main study:  $n = 321$ ) using a 2 (reviewer's identity disclosure: high, low) x 2 (reviewer's expertise: high, low) between-subject design was used to explore how a reviewer's profile cues influence perceived deception and ultimately consumer responses. The results reveal the significant effects that reviewer's identity disclosure and expertise have on perceived deception, particularly when online review scepticism is high. These cues also influence booking intention, NWOM, and negative emotion through perceived deception.

Drawing on SIPT and PKM, the thesis extends online review literature by developing and testing a conceptual framework which shows how reviewers' profile cues (i.e., low identity disclosure and low expertise) impact perceived deception and, in turn, subsequent consumer responses. The conceptual framework also shows the moderation effect of online review scepticism on the relationship between reviewer's profile cues and perceived deception. Practically, this thesis validates a model that identifies the causes and negative effects of perceived deception. The model is designed to assist online review websites and hotels understand the importance of ensuring that genuine reviews (non-deceptive reviews) are not mistakenly perceived to be deceptive. Online review websites and hotels might achieve this by foregrounding reviewer's profile information (i.e., reviewer's identity disclosure and reviewer's expertise level).

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## Declaration

*I, the author, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means ([www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means)). This work has not been previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.*

Parts of the thesis appeared in the following proceedings:

Alzaid, A., McLeay, F., Osburg, V.S. and Grimes, A. (2023) 'How Reviewers' Identity Disclosure and Expertise Affect Consumer Responses: The Mediating Role of Perceived Deception', *2023 AMA Summer Academic Conference: A World Disrupted: Marketing's Role in Understanding, Adapting and Transforming the Business Ecosystem*. San Francisco, CA, USA, 4–6 August. pp. 277-280.

Alzaid, A., McLeay, F., Osburg, V.S. and Grimes, A. (2023) 'How Reviewer-Related Cues Influence Consumer Behaviour: The Mediating Role of Perceived Deception', *Academy of Marketing 2023 Annual Conference and Doctoral Colloquium: From Revolution to Revolutions*. Birmingham, UK, 3-6 July. pp. 170-171.

# Chapter 1 : Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the thesis titled *“How Reviewers’ Identity Disclosure and Expertise Affect Consumer Responses: The Mediating Role of Perceived Deception”*. It begins with an in-depth look at the issue of deceptive review, emphasising the importance of understanding the antecedents and consequences of perceived deception (what consumers perceive is a deceptive review regardless of whether the review is deceptive or not). The chapter then in details explores the research background (section 1.2) and then proceeds to introduce the research questions and objectives (section 1.3). Next, it summarises the research contributions (section 1.4) before outlining the thesis structure (section 1.5)

Deceptive reviews, which evaluate products or services using fake accounts or paid reviewers, are increasingly being used to mislead those making booking decisions using online review websites. Deceptive reviews have become a widespread issue on many online review websites, namely “those websites that provide consumer-generated content such as online reviews” (Filiari, Algezau and McLeay, 2015, p. 175). In 2022, Yelp eliminated more than 700,000 reviews that violated its policies, including some that were abusive or deceptive (Cramer, 2023). As of 2022, TripAdvisor had received over 30 million reviews. 1.3 million reviews were deemed to be deceptive and subsequently deleted (TripAdvisor, 2023). These online review websites take action by removing online reviews they judge to be deceptive based on their guidelines, treating them as actual deception.

Beyond mere numbers, the existence of deceptive reviews threatens long-term trust in online review websites, which is essential for online markets to flourish (He, Hollenbeck and Proserpio, 2022). This is because online review websites are designed to enable reviewers to

share their feedback and thoughts about their actual experience with other consumers who are searching for product information and/or evaluating alternative choices (Dedeoğlu *et al.*, 2020). The potential impact of deceptive reviews on online review websites raises concerns about their reliability and trustworthiness in consumer's attitude (Filieri *et al.*, 2018b). This issue is significant because deceptive reviews can drive consumers to make decisions based on misleading information, thereby undermining the overall trustworthiness of an online review website (He *et al.*, 2022).

The rise in deceptive reviews, as highlighted by mass media sources (e.g., Coffey, 2019; Cannon, Gillett, and Evans, 2019; Cramer, 2023), and reports from online review websites (e.g., TripAdvisor, 2023), adds another layer of complexity to the issue of consumer perception of deception (i.e., the extent to which a consumer perceives a review intends to mislead them), regardless of the review's actual deceptive or not.

The exposure of news related to individuals and businesses engaging in unethical and illegal activities in posting deceptive reviews not only enhances consumer awareness (Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016), but also might influence consumers' perceived deception. News and reports on deceptive reviews can lead consumers to see genuine reviews as deceptive, causing them to respond negatively to a hotel, even if the hotel does not publish deceptive reviews but is perceived as doing so. Perceived deception is likely to impact consumers' attitudes toward the reliability of online review websites (Filieri *et al.*, 2018b; He *et al.*, 2022). Addressing the issue of perceived deception in online reviews is essential to assist online review websites and hotels understand the importance of ensuring that genuine reviews are not mistakenly perceived to be deceptive. The next section discusses in detail the research background.

## 1.2 Research Background

The internet offers valuable sources of information that influence consumer booking-decisions. Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) is one example that assists consumers in their booking decisions. eWOM can be defined 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” (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004, p. 39). Online reviews are frequently referred to as a special type of eWOM (e.g., Chatterjee, 2001; Sen and Lerman, 2007; Hong and Park, 2012; Filieri and McLeay, 2014) and are defined as “any positive, neutral or negative evaluation of a product, a service, a person, or a brand, presumably posted by former consumers on websites that host consumer reviews” (Filieri, Hofacker, and Alguezaui, 2018a, p. 122). This implies that there are three main components of online reviews: (1) the reviewer (the source of information “presumably posted by [a] former consumer” who does not make any profit from posting a review (Filieri *et al.*, 2018a); (2) online reviews, which might be an individual review that reflects the reviewer’s experience of a product, a service, a person, or a brand through numerical ratings and/or text (Fang, Kucukusta and Law, 2016) or an aggregated rating that “reflects former consumers’ overall evaluation of a service provider” (Liu *et al.*, 2019a, p. 110); and (3) the website that hosts online reviews, which can be an independent consumer review website (e.g., TripAdvisor), a third-party e-commerce website (e.g., Booking), or a hotel website (e.g., ihg).

In the tourism industry, consumers increasingly rely on online reviews to plan their holidays regarding which destinations to visit, where to eat, what hotels and flights to book, and other types of accommodation; these reviews help them to make an informed decision (e.g., Dickinger, 2011; Sparks, Perkins and Buckley, 2013; Filieri and McLeay, 2014; Filieri *et al.*,

2021). For instance, TripAdvisor, considered as one of the largest online travel platforms, has hundreds of millions of visitors each month who browse over one billion reviews and opinions of hotels, restaurants, experiences, airlines, cruises, and other types of accommodation (TripAdvisor, 2023). Yelp, an online review website, attracts over 30 million monthly visitors who browse through more than 260 million online reviews of five million businesses (Yelp, 2023).

However, the growing practice of deceptive reviews being posted on online review websites threatens online reviews as valuable sources of information. Notably, deceptive reviews are not related to specific services or online review websites; they exist on various online review websites and service types (e.g., Yoo and Gretzel, 2009; Ott, Cardie and Hancock, 2012; Mayzlin, Dover and Chevalier, 2014). This widespread issue has been highlighted by mass media and shedding light on some businesses engaging in deceptive practices (e.g., Coffey, 2019; Cannon *et al.*, 2019; Cramer, 2023). Exposure to news about deceptive reviews has the potential to increase consumers' awareness of this issue (Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016). However, it may also impact consumers' perceived deception causing even genuine reviews to be mistakenly seen as deceptive.

Consumers assume that the source of information (i.e., reviewers) are prior and/or existing consumers who have actual experience with tourism services (e.g., hotels) (Bickart and Schindler, 2001; Brown, Broderick and Lee, 2007; Park, Lee and Han, 2007; Dickinger, 2011). Regrettably, not all reviews are posted by actual or prior consumers. Indeed, the ability to stay anonymous and the simplicity of posting reviews on many online review websites create possibilities for the creation of deceptive reviews. Reviews are usually posted by reviewers who have neither a previous relationship nor expectations of any relationship in the future

with consumers (Xie *et al.*, 2011; Xu, 2014; Shan, 2016). Consumers may have insufficient information about reviewers since they do not know their intentions or motivations for posting a review (Park and Nicolau, 2015). This anonymity creates unethical opportunities for deceivers to disguise themselves as actual consumers and post deceptive reviews. Furthermore, restrictions on online review websites in terms of who can post a review also have a significant impact in the existence of deceptive reviews. For instance, some online review websites allow anyone who has a valid email address to post a review (e.g., TripAdvisor, Google).

In a way to respond to the issue of deceptive reviews, many online review websites utilise detection technology and expert investigators, which allow them to tackle potentially deceptive reviews before they are published (e.g., TripAdvisor, 2023). Despite these measures, there is a growing number of deceptive reviews that are difficult to detect. In 2022, TripAdvisor identified 1.3 million reviews as deceptive, and notably, 28% of these were only recognised after being posted on the website (TripAdvisor, 2023). This highlights the evolving nature of the challenge, and the limitations even advanced detection methods may face in identifying deceptive reviews.

Furthermore, some online review websites have provided illustrations of types of deceptive review activities. Table 1.1 summarises some types of deceptive reviews on TripAdvisor (TripAdvisor, 2023), while Figure 1.1 presents the percentages regarding the prevalence of these types of deceptive reviews on TripAdvisor in 2022. 1.3 million reviews were deemed to be deceptive. Review boosting accounted for 61.6% of deceptive reviews, member fraud accounted for 32.02%, paid reviews accounted for 3.9%, and review vandalism accounted for

2.48%. These statistics suggest that businesses and individuals may, in some way, be involved in activities related to posting deceptive reviews.

Table 1-1 Summary of some types of deceptive reviews on TripAdvisor

Type of deceptive review	Description
Review boosting	When an individual associated with the business, such as an owner, employee, or family member, submits a positive review.
Review vandalism	When an individual connected to a competing business intentionally posts a malicious review about a business with the aim of unjustly diminishing its ranking or discrediting it in some manner.
Paid reviews	When a business engages the assistance of an individual or a company to enhance its ranking position on TripAdvisor by generating positive reviews.
Member fraud	When a user deliberately and with ill intent submits a review that violates TripAdvisor guidelines, possibly with the aim of impacting a property’s ranking, but does so of their own accord, without any influence from a property listed on TripAdvisor.

Adapted from TripAdvisor (2023)

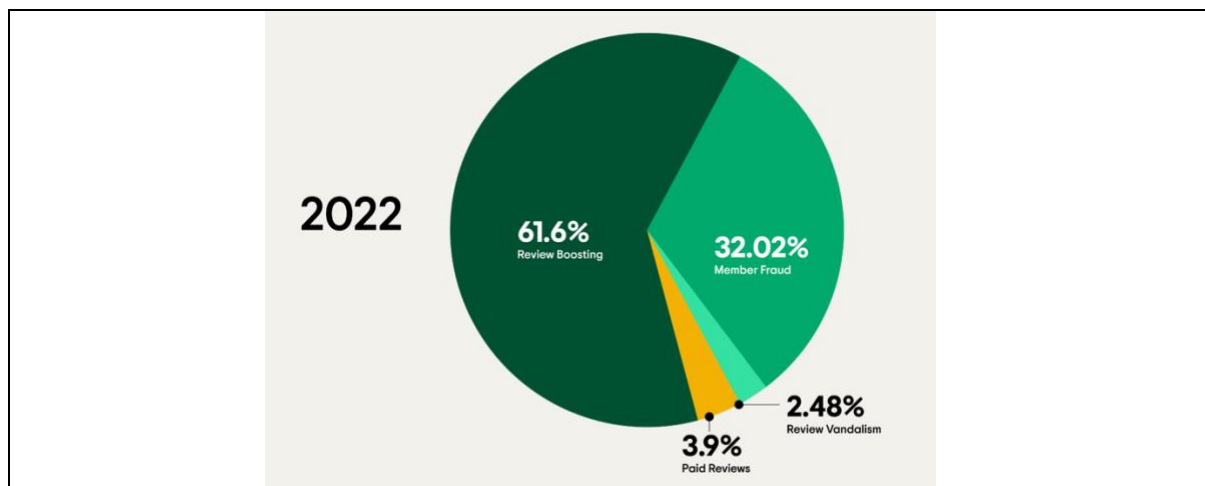


Figure 1-1 Summary of some types of deceptive reviews on TripAdvisor (TripAdvisor, 2023)



In contrast, online reviews are valuable for some products and services (i.e., hotels): the UK Competition and Markets Authority has reported that around £23 billion of annual consumer expenditure in the United Kingdom is potentially impacted by reading online reviews. Within this context, the hotel industry exerts the most substantial impact, accounting for £14.38 billion in consumer spending on travel and hotel-related purchases (The Competition and Markets Authority, 2015) (see Figure 1.2).

It is probably unsurprising that deceivers may be driven to manipulate online reviews in order to affect consumer decisions, such as by increasing the number of reviews, improving ratings and reviews' content, and/or eliminating negative reviews (Zhuang, Cui and Peng, 2018). For a number of hospitality businesses, posting deceptive reviews has unfortunately become an intentional communication strategy whose purpose is to influence consumers' booking decisions (Gray, 2022). For instance, the owner of a business who was offering to write deceptive reviews of hospitality businesses was found guilty of using a fake identity to post deceptive reviews on TripAdvisor. The owner was sentenced to nine months in prison and ordered to pay approximately £7,100 in costs and damages (Cramer, 2023).

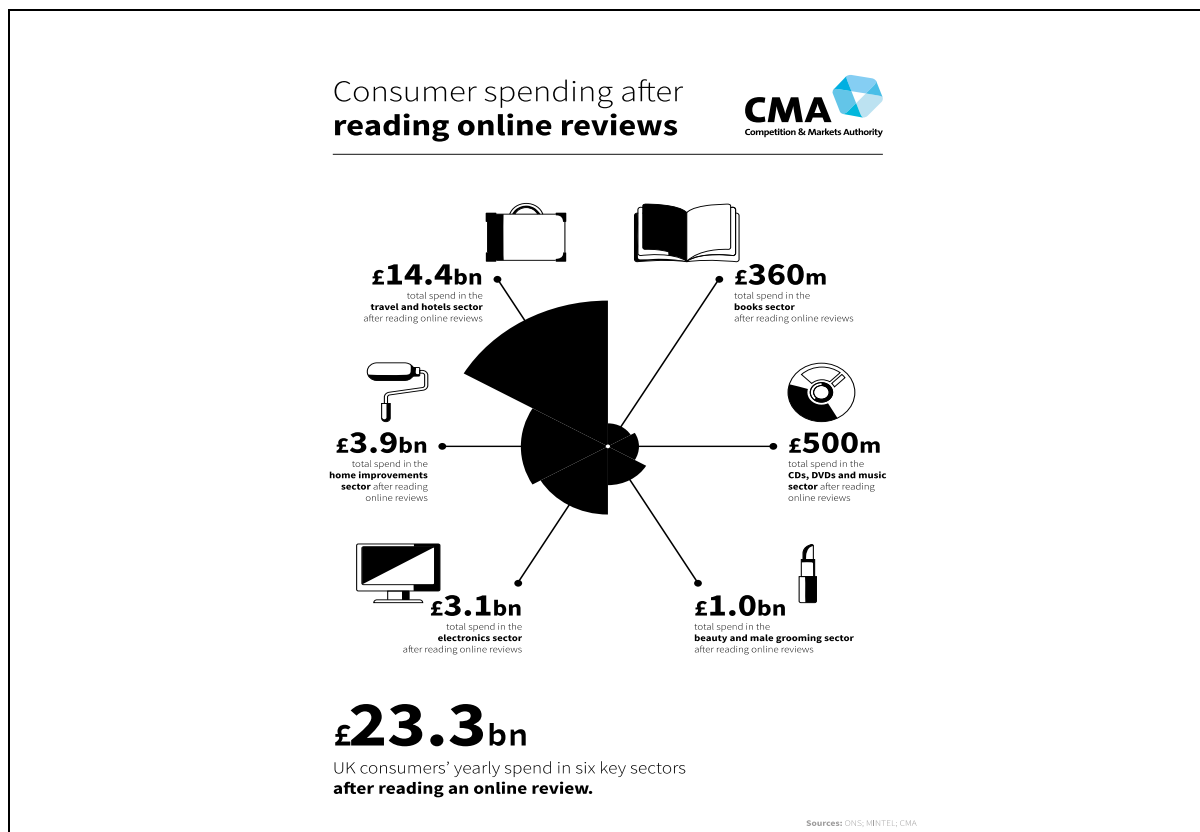


Figure 1-2 UK consumers' yearly spend after reading an online review

Research on online reviews has established the power of online reviews and their impact on sales for a variety of product categories, including books, beers, restaurants, movies, and hotels (e.g., Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006; Clemons, Gao and Hitt, 2006; Forman, Ghose and Wiesenfeld, 2008; Duan, Gu and Whinston, 2008; Ye, Law and Gu, 2009; Cui, Lui and Guo, 2012; Banerjee, Bhattacharyya and Bose, 2017a). Research in tourism has examined the effect of online reviews on consumer awareness (the extent to which consumers are familiar with a particular hotel), attitude (consumers' overall evaluations or feelings towards a particular hotel) (e.g., Vermeulen and Seegers, 2009), and information adoption ("the extent to which consumers modify their behavior by utilizing the suggestions made in online reviews") (Filieri and McLeay, 2014, p. 44).

In addition, researchers highlight the importance of understanding how online reviews influence consumers' perceptions (e.g., Chen *et al.*, 2015; Liu *et al.*, 2019a). Researchers have attempted to evaluate the impact of online reviews on consumers' perceptions in many areas including perceived review helpfulness and usefulness (i.e., the extent to which a consumer believes that the information in an online review helps them evaluate the quality and performance of a product or service before making a purchase) (Purnawirawan, Pelsmacker and Dens, 2012; Filieri *et al.*, 2018b), review trustworthiness ("the degree of confidence in the validity of the information in terms of objectivity and sincerity") (Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016, p. 5993), credibility; that is reviews that consumers perceive as trustworthy and reliable (Jiménez and Mendoza, 2013; Luo *et al.*, 2015), and reviewer expertise and trustworthiness ("expertise generally refers to a reviewer's knowledge and ability to provide accurate information, while trustworthiness is related to a reviewer's motivation to provide truth") (Xie *et al.*, 2011, p. 179). Scholars have shown that online reviews affect consumers' future purchase intentions (i.e., a consumer's plan or willingness to buy a product or service in the future). This influence is mediated by the perceived helpfulness, usefulness, and credibility of the reviews (e.g., Purnawirawan *et al.*, 2012; Jiménez and Mendoza, 2013; Filieri *et al.*, 2018b). However, empirical investigations of the causes and effects of perceived deception in consumers' responses are still scarce.

Although computer science and information system scholars have increased their efforts to investigate deceptive reviews, they focus more on what leads to the existence of deceptive reviews. Scholars have investigated the effect of product characteristics on deceptive reviews (Hu *et al.*, 2011a), the types of business more likely to post deceptive reviews (Hu, Liu, and Sambamurthy, 2011b), and the business characteristics and market conditions that may lead

to deceptive reviews (Mayzlin *et al.*, 2014). Other studies have examined consumers' motivations to post deceptive reviews (Choi *et al.*, 2017), how consumers may become involved in activities related to the posting of deceptive reviews (Anderson and Simester, 2014), and how the restriction of the website itself (in terms of low and high restriction) can play a role in creating bias in a review (Moon, Kim, and Bergey, 2019). Numerous methods have been developed to identify deceptive reviews, including those proposed by Ott *et al.* (2011), Zhang *et al.* (2016), Heydari, Tavakoli, and Salim (2016), Kumar *et al.* (2018, 2019), and Plotkina, Munzel, and Pallud (2020). These valuable tools can benefit online review websites seeking to improve their ability to detect and filter out deceptive reviews. Nevertheless, deceptive reviews still exist on many online review websites, and our understanding of the factors influencing consumers' perception of deception (regardless of whether a review is deceptive or not) in online reviews remains limited.

While some studies have explored factors leading to consumers' perceptions of credibility or trustworthiness and their effects on responses (e.g., Cheung *et al.*, 2009; Jiménez and Mendoza, 2013; Filieri *et al.*, 2015; Munzel, 2016; Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016; Ahmad and Sun, 2018), scholars do not fully understand what leads consumers to perceive deception and, in turn, how consumers respond to online reviews they perceive as deceptive. The existing literature on online reviews focuses on specific aspects, such as factors influencing consumers' perceived credibility or trustworthiness and their effects on responses, leaving gaps in our knowledge regarding perceived deception. Therefore, the current research explicitly addresses these gaps by investigating the factors lead consumers to perceive deception in online reviews and the subsequent effects on consumer responses.

The focus on the research is not on identifying deceptive reviews. Many online review websites have implemented their own methods to detect deceptive reviews (Walther *et al.*, 2023). However, online services that specialise in filtering reviews (e.g., fakespot.com) agree that definitively confirming whether a review is fake or not is impossible. In addition, and as mentioned previously, in 2022, TripAdvisor, out of the total 1.3 million reviews identified as deceptive, 28% were recognised after being posted on the website (TripAdvisor, 2023). While the existence of deception on numerous online review websites has the potential to influence consumers' perceptions of these websites, raising concerns about their reliability and trustworthiness (Filiari *et al.*, 2018b). To mitigate the negative impact of perceived deception on online review websites and hotels, this study's focus is on understanding what leads consumers to perceive deception in online reviews and in turn its effects on consumers' responses. It is expected that the perception of deception (regardless of whether a review is deceptive or not) can have negative consequences for hotels. The next section introduces the research questions and outlines the objectives.

### **1.3 Research Questions and Objectives**

Despite the adoption of online reviews as a significant information source for consumers (Filiari and McLeay, 2014), online reviews are still criticised in terms of their trustworthiness, credibility, and helpfulness (e.g., Xie *et al.*, 2011; Willemsen, Neijens and Bronner, 2012; Liu and Park, 2015; Munzel, 2016; Filiari, 2016; Filiari *et al.*, 2018b; Lo and Yao, 2019). Reviews perceived as credible, trustworthy, or helpful influence consumers' responses (e.g., Xie *et al.*, 2011; Munzel, 2016; Filiari *et al.*, 2018b). On the other hand, reviews perceived as less credible or trustworthy are discounted by consumers, leading them to not consider these reviews in their decision-making (e.g., Cheung *et al.*, 2009; Filiari, 2016).

In the traditional retail industry, the two primary parties involved are identified (i.e., a retailer and a consumer). Previous research has indicated that consumers' perceptions of deceptive practices applied by retailers might result in negative outcomes such as consumer complaints, dissatisfaction, switching behaviour, negative word of mouth (NWOM), and distrust (e.g., Román, 2010). However, as online reviews usually occur between online parties (i.e., a reviewer and consumer in an online review website) who might do not know each other nor expect any future relationship, it would be expected that consumers' perceptions of others are impacted by whatever information is available on an online review website (Walther, 1992). In addition, it would also be expected that consumers' persuasion knowledge – which results from their previous experiences of online reviews – influences how they interpret information about reviewers and how they respond to online reviews (Friestad and Wright, 1994).

In broad terms, cues in an online review can be defined as signals or pieces of information that consumers utilise to make judgments or decisions about a target object (e.g., review) (Filiari *et al.*, 2018b). However, many online review websites have issues related to cues about reviewers, as cues are limited. For instance, some online review websites provide many cues about a reviewer such as a reviewer's name, location, photo, number of reviews submitted, expertise level, etc. (e.g., TripAdvisor, Google), while other online review websites only provide limited information about a review such as name and location (e.g., Booking). However, cues in a reviewer's profile still play an important role that affects consumers' perceptions. Prior online review researchers conclude that reviewers' profile cues affect consumers' perceived online review helpfulness (e.g., Liu and Park, 2015; Filiari *et al.*, 2018b),

credibility (e.g., Xie *et al.*, 2011; Lo and Yao, 2019), and trustworthiness of a reviewer (e.g., Willemsen *et al.*, 2012; Munzel, 2016).

Despite the importance of a reviewer's profile cues in affecting consumers' perceptions, the area of how cues in a reviewer's profile cause consumers to perceive deception requires further investigation. Understanding this relationship is fundamental, as it can help to understand how reviewers' profile cues affect consumers who depend on online reviews to make informed booking decisions and shape their perceptions of deception. Moreover, online review websites and hotels benefit from deep understanding to ensure that genuine reviews (non-deceptive reviews) are not mistakenly perceived to be deceptive.

This study investigates how cues related to reviewers' profiles influence consumers' perceived deception drawing upon social information processing theory (SIPT) (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978; Walther, 1992; Walther and Parks, 2002). Based on SIPT, individuals use alternative cues to make judgments about other users in computer-mediated communication, without the non-verbal cues such as tone of voice and facial expressions that are available in face-to-face (FtF) interactions. Individuals' perceptions of other web users are impacted by whatever information is available online (Walther and Parks, 2002). Reviewers' profiles on an online review website are a common source of information about reviewers. This thesis does not intend to examine all the potential cues in a reviewer's profile that might affect consumers' perceived deception. Rather, the thesis focuses on two cues, namely reviewer's identity disclosure and reviewer's expertise, as initial steps to understand what causes consumers to perceive deception. These cues are visible on many online review websites such as TripAdvisor and Google reviews. In addition, online review scholars have recognised the importance of these cues and investigated their effects in many areas.

However, they have revealed mixed findings (e.g., Park and Nicolau, 2015; Liu and Park, 2015; Filieri *et al.*, 2018b; Chung *et al.*, 2018; Filieri, Raguseo and Vitari, 2019).

A reviewer's identity is defined as "a social identity that an individual establishes in online communities and/or websites" (Liu and Park, 2015, p. 142). In the online review context, reviewer's identity disclosure is considered as an act that makes it easy for others to find the reviewer's personal profile information such as their real name, age, and/or location. Consumers may examine reviewers' identities to enhance their understanding and knowledge about the reviewers themselves (Forman *et al.*, 2008). Reviewers' expertise is used here to refer to the extent to which the reviewer is perceived as having knowledge, skills, and/or expertise in a specific domain (Filieri *et al.*, 2018b). In the presence of a large number of reviewers on many online review websites, consumers tend to trust reviewers who have a high level of expertise and seem to have high levels of knowledge about the service being reviewed (Racherla and Friske, 2012). In the online review context, consumers might assess a reviewer's expertise based on the reviewer's past behaviour, which is provided on the online review website (Weiss, Lurie and MacInnis, 2008), such as the number of previous reviews written on the online review website and a reviewer's expertise level (e.g., Zhu, Yin and He, 2014; Liu and Park, 2015; Filieri *et al.*, 2018b; Hwang, Choi and Mattila, 2018). The effect of a reviewer's profile cues on perceived deception therefore acquires a particular relevance. A better understanding into how a reviewer's profile cues might impact perceptions of deception (regardless of whether a review is deceptive or not) is essential. The reviewer's profile cues expect to be directly influences consumers to form opinions toward online reviews. This knowledge not only contributes to understanding how consumers interpret a reviewer's profile cues but also has broader implications for online review websites and



hotels to ensure that genuine reviews are not mistakenly perceived to be deceptive. Thus, the first research question of this thesis is as follows:

**RQ1:** How do a reviewer's identity disclosure and expertise cues affect consumers' perceived deception?

Online reviews extend beyond offering convenient access to information regarding hotels. Furthermore, it is expected that consumers gain an increased understanding over time of the persuasive techniques employed in online reviews. Online review scepticism is defined as the general tendency to disbelieve online reviews (Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016). Online review scepticism is considered an essential conditional factor affecting the impact of a reviewer's profile cues on perceived deception and in turn consumers' responses. It can help researchers understand the reason why perceived deception is higher for some consumers.

According to the persuasion knowledge model (PKM), interpreting and responding to a persuasive message (e.g., online review) is crucial. Consumers are sceptical about persuasive messages. As time passes, consumers improve their personal knowledge about methods utilised in these attempts to persuade. By developing consumer knowledge, consumers can learn to identify how, when, and why such hotels influence them. It also helps consumers adjust their responses to these attempts to persuade (Friestad and Wright, 1994). In addition, the initial level of trust consumers have towards persuasion attempts (e.g., online reviews) is influenced by their prior experiences (McKnight *et al.*, 2002). Moreover, the level of initial trust in an online review is different among consumers even if they receive the same cues (Fogg, 2003). Grazioli (2004) showed that the same message, whether it is deceptive or not, can be perceived as deceptive (or not) by different consumers because of their different backgrounds and situational contexts (i.e., the available information cues). Therefore, it

would be expected that consumers' persuasion knowledge (i.e., online review scepticism) plays important role in affecting consumers' interpretation of and response to such attempts on an online review website. Thus, the question that arises as a second question in this thesis is:

**RQ2:** How does online review scepticism moderate the relationship between a reviewer's profile cues and perceived deception?

Furthermore, this thesis assesses the role of perceived deception (regardless of whether a review is deceptive or not) in the relationship between a reviewer's profile cues and consumers' responses. Online review studies show that consumers' perceptions of online reviews can affect their responses (e.g., Purnawirawan *et al.*, 2012; Jiménez and Mendoza, 2013; Filieri *et al.*, 2018b). This is in line with PKM: when consumers are presented with a persuasive message (e.g., an online review), their key tasks are to interpret and respond to it (Friestad and Wright, 1994).

In this thesis, the persuasion attempt is an online review that has been perceived as a deception. Hence, this thesis considers the role that perceived deception plays in the relationship between reviewers' profile cues and consumers' responses for four types of consumer responses, namely booking intention (consumers' willingness to book a hotel room) (Sparks and Browning, 2011), NWOM (consumers' belief that they will tell others about their negative experience with a target object) (Ingram, Skinner and Taylor, 2005), emotion (positive or negative affective reactions to perception situations) (Verhoef, 2005) and trust ("one party's confidence in an exchange partner's reliability and integrity") (Morgan and Hunt, 1994, p. 23). These responses primarily relate to protecting consumers from potential harm such as future booking, emotion, trust, and/or even to warn other consumers about

potential risks (i.e., NWOM). However, the effect of perceived deception might not be limited to these responses. It will be used these constructs to show the potential role that perceived deception plays in the relationship between reviewers' profile cues and consumers' responses. This knowledge not only enhances our understanding of how consumers respond to perceived deception but also carries broader implications for hotels that might suffer from their reviews being perceived as deception. It emphasises the importance for hotels to actively participate in developing tools to ensure that genuine reviews are not mistakenly perceived to be deceptive. The third research question of this thesis is as follows:

**RQ3:** How do a reviewer's profile cues influence consumers' responses through perceived deception?

To sum up, the aim of this research is to explore how reviewers' profile cues (identity disclosure and expertise) influence consumer responses (booking intention, NWOM, negative emotion, hotel's trustworthiness) via perceived deception, and to examine the moderation effect of online review scepticism on the relationship between reviewers' profile cues and perceived deception. The motivation behind this investigation lies in addressing the challenge caused by perceived deception (regardless of whether it is deceptive or not). This knowledge has wider significance for online review website and hotel to make sure that genuine reviews are not mistakenly seen as deceptive, in addition to helping to understand how cues related to reviewer's profile influence consumers perceived deception. The objectives of this thesis are outlined as follows:

- 1- To undertake a comprehensive examination of the existing literature on online reviews through a systematic review.

- 2- To explore how cues related to a reviewer's profile influence consumers' perceived deception.
- 3- To examine how online review scepticism moderates the relationship between a reviewer's identity disclosure and expertise and perceived deception.
- 4- To assess the role of perceived deception in the relationship between a reviewer's profile cues and consumers' responses.
- 5- To examine the mediating role of perceived deception in the relationship between identity disclosure and expertise interacting with online review scepticism and their impact on consumers' responses.

#### **1.4 Research Contribution**

This thesis contributes to the existing literature on online reviews in several ways. This thesis addresses gaps in the extant literature by building on two well-known theories (i.e., SIPT and PKM) (Walther, 1992; Friestad and Wright, 1994) and supplementing them with existing literature on online reviews (e.g., Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016; Filieri, 2016; Ahmad and Sun, 2018; Filieri *et al.*, 2018b). The thesis extends online review literature by developing and testing a conceptual framework which shows the role played by reviewers' profile cues (i.e., a reviewer's identity disclosure and expertise) in influencing consumers' perceived deception and in turn subsequent consumer responses (i.e., booking intention, NWOM, and negative emotion). In addition, this thesis also emphasises the important role of consumers' persuasion knowledge (i.e., online review scepticism); in effect, how they interpret such information in online reviews and, consequently, how they respond to such attempts.

This thesis aims to understand how consumers perceive deception (regardless of whether it is deceptive or not) in online reviews, rather than simply identifying deceptive reviews. The systematic review of the literature on online reviews undertaken in this thesis (discuss it in more details in chapter 2) makes it clear that there is scant research addressing deceptive reviews from the consumers' perspective. Computer science scholars have investigated the existence of deceptive reviews and developed approaches to detect deceptive reviews (e.g., Ott *et al.*, 2011; Heydari *et al.*, 2016; Zhang *et al.*, 2016; Kumar *et al.*, 2018, 2019; Plotkina *et al.*, 2020). Prior online review literature concludes that cues in online reviews can affect consumers' perceptions in many facets including perceived online review helpfulness and usefulness (e.g., Liu and Park, 2015; Filieri *et al.*, 2018b), credibility (e.g., Xie *et al.*, 2011; Lo and Yao, 2019), and trustworthiness of a reviewer (e.g., Willemsen *et al.*, 2012; Munzel, 2016). Several studies have shown how consumers' perceptions of online reviews can affect their responses such as their adoption of reviews (Cheung *et al.*, 2009; Lee and Koo, 2012; Luo *et al.*, 2013; Filieri *et al.*, 2015), booking intention (Xie *et al.*, 2011; Jiménez and Mendoza, 2013; Munzel, 2016; Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016; Ketron, 2017), and positive WOM (Filieri *et al.*, 2015). On the other hand, reviews perceived as less credible or even untrustworthy are discounted by consumers (e.g., Cheung *et al.*, 2009; Filieri, 2016). Instead, this study emphasises the important role played by reviewers' profile cues in influencing consumers' perceived deception and in turn their responses.

Furthermore, this study goes further in exploring how consumers with different characteristics interpret cues in online reviews and how they respond to such interpretations. Due to the fact that many reports have been published in mass media regarding the existence of deceptive reviews on many online review websites, this thesis assumes that some

consumers develop persuasion knowledge (i.e., online review scepticism) as a result. Building on PKM (Friestad and Wright, 1994), online review scepticism might result from consumers' prior persuasion knowledge (e.g., reading online reviews, reading news reports about deceptive reviews) and socialisation (e.g., interactions with family or friends). Therefore, online review scepticism is considered in this thesis to understand consumers' differences in perceiving and interpreting persuasion attempts (i.e., online reviews) (Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016). Also, applying PKM provides insights into how consumers cope with persuasion attempts by using their persuasion knowledge. The effect of perceived deception might not be limited to these consequences. This thesis uses booking intention, NWOM, negative emotion, and hotel's trustworthiness to show the potential role played by perceived deception in the relationship between reviewers' profile cues and consumers' responses.

The results have practical implications. The presence of deceptive reviews has become a paramount concern for numerous online review websites. This growing concern prompted representatives from many online review websites including Yelp, TripAdvisor, Trustpilot, Google, and several other review websites met for a closed-door conference to discuss how they could work together to tackle deceptive reviews (Cramer, 2023). As show in section 1.2, not only businesses posting deceptive reviews to promote their products and/or services but also some individuals deliberately submit deceptive reviews with intent to impact a hotel's ranking, without any influence from the hotel itself (TripAdvisor, 2023). This thesis provides empirical validation of a model that enables online review websites to identify those reviews that are most likely to be perceived deceptive and thus most likely to undermine consumer's attitude toward online review websites (Filiari *et al.*, 2018b). In addition, the model also confirms that perceived deception has negative impacts on booking intention, WOM, and

emotion. To mitigate the negative impact of perceived deception, the model is designed to assist online review websites and hotels understand the importance of ensuring that genuine reviews (non-deceptive reviews) are not mistakenly perceived to be deceptive. Online review websites and hotels might achieve this by foregrounding reviewer's profile information (i.e., reviewer's identity disclosure and reviewer's expertise level).

## **1.5 Structure of Thesis**

This thesis is structured into six chapters, as illustrated in Figure 1.3. Chapter 1 extensively explores the research context. First, the chapter provides a brief background of the research. The background provides the groundwork for the development of the research questions and objectives. The chapter concludes with a summary of the research contributions along with the structure of theses.

Chapter 2 presents a systematic review of existing literature on online reviews and highlights the potential research gaps. More specifically, the chapter examines the most relevant and significant articles related to how consumers examine online reviews, including which cues might influence consumers' perceptions and how consumers' perceptions in turn might influence their responses. Finally, the chapter illustrates that there is a need for further investigation of deceptive reviews from consumers' perspectives.

Chapter 3 details the theoretical background and research hypotheses for the current research. The chapter highlights that perceived deception is considered as a growing problem in online reviews' content. To achieve the thesis's objectives, the chapter presents SIPT and PKM as the theoretical underpinnings of this research. Finally, the chapter presents the development of the research hypotheses and introduces the conceptual framework.

Chapter 4 outlines the research design and explores the selected research methodology intended to address the research questions and accomplish the research objectives. The chapter discuss issues related to the research philosophy, the choice of methodology and timeframe, and method and technique. In addition, the ethical considerations are also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 5 presents the outcomes of the data analysis and is segmented into three primary sections. First, the data preparation part deals with data accuracy and creating value from raw data for further analysis. Second, the preliminary analysis part describes the demographic information of the participants and checks the variables for validity and reliability. Third, the hypothesis testing part focuses on showing the results and findings, which includes comparisons between groups and relationships between variables.

Chapter 6 provides an in-depth discussion of the results in relation to existing literature. Considering the research objectives, it highlights the achievement of each of the thesis’s objectives and shows the main results and findings. Finally, drawing on the thesis’s results and findings, the chapter presents the theoretical contributions and managerial implications. The chapter concludes with an outline of the thesis’s limitations and future research recommendations.

<b>Thesis structure</b>
<b>Chapter 1 Introduction</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sets the research background and discusses the research problem.</li> <li>• Research aim: To investigate what leads consumers to perceive deception in online reviews and in turn its effect on consumers’ responses.</li> <li>• The research questions and objectives are identified.</li> <li>• Presents the expected theoretical and managerial contributions.</li> </ul>
<b>Chapter 2 Literature Review</b>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presents a systematic review of existing literature on online reviews and highlights the potential research gaps.</li> </ul>
<b>Chapter 3 Theoretical Background and Research Hypotheses</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presents SIPT and PKM as theoretical underpinnings of this research.</li> <li>• Shows the development of the research hypotheses and the conceptual framework.</li> </ul>
<b>Chapter 4 Methodology</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discusses issues related to the research philosophy, the choice of methodology and timeframe, method and technique, and ethical considerations.</li> <li>• Discusses the research methods used to test the research hypotheses developed in Chapter 3 and answer the research question posed in Chapter 1.</li> </ul>
<b>Chapter 5 Data Analysis and Results</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deals with data accuracy and creating value from raw data for further analysis.</li> <li>• Describes the demographic information of the participants and checks variables for validity and reliability.</li> <li>• Shows the results and findings, which includes comparisons between groups and relationships between variables.</li> </ul>
<b>Chapter 6 Discussion and Conclusion</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides an in-depth discussion of the results presented in Chapter 5 in relation to existing literature presented in Chapter 3.</li> <li>• Highlights the achievement of each of the research objectives and shows the main results and findings.</li> <li>• Presents the theoretical contributions and managerial implications.</li> <li>• Concludes with an outline of the thesis's limitations and future research recommendations.</li> </ul>

Figure 1-3 Structure of Thesis

## 1.6 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter presents in detail the research background of this thesis. The thesis's questions and objectives are also specified. Then, this chapter presents the expected theoretical and managerial contributions. Finally, the chapter presents the structure of the thesis. This chapter establishes the thesis's foundation and the flow of the subsequent chapters. The next chapter presents a systematic review of literature on online reviews and highlights the potential research gaps.

## Chapter 2 : Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

While the previous chapter discussed the existence of deceptive reviews on many online review websites and the need for further investigation in this area from consumers' perspectives, this chapter shows a systematic review of literature on online reviews and highlights potential research gaps. In general, the systematic review process assists in understanding the phenomenon under investigation and identifying areas needing further investigation (see Table 2.1). In this research, the review process of Tranfield, Denyer and Smart (2003) was followed: the identification of keywords and search terms, selection of studies, quality assessment, data extraction and monitoring progress, and data synthesis (see Figure 2.1). The following parts of this chapter discuss these stages in more detail.

Table 2-1 The purpose of applying a systematic review approach

<b>1. Purpose of conducting a literature review</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It assists manage and examine the existing knowledge for a particular topic.</li> <li>- It assists to identify a research question that needs further investigation.</li> </ul>
<b>2. Approaches to conducting a literature review</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Traditional (narrative): “the process of synthesising primary studies and exploring heterogeneity descriptively rather than statistically” (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006, p.19).</li> <li>- Systematic review: It comprehensively aims to identify, inform, and synthesise relevant existing knowledge on a specific topic.</li> </ul>
<b>3. Criticisms of the narrative literature review approach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It does not follow a method, nor does it explicitly explain the approach adopted to conduct the review.</li> <li>- It is more prone to bias because researchers frequently select articles that support their arguments and avoid including others.</li> <li>- It is usually considered lacking in a comprehensive approach, which results in a lack of understanding of the meaning of the information gathered.</li> </ul>
<b>4. Purpose of applying a systematic review approach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The systematic review approach improves the quality of the review and the understanding of a specific research topic.</li> <li>- As the systematic review presents the method that has been followed, including identifying relevant literature, making decisions regarding which papers to include or exclude, and synthesising the findings, it will improve the understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, as well as how the knowledge is generated.</li> <li>- It limits systematic error, mainly by attempting to comprehensively include all relevant studies within an explicitly stated method.</li> </ul>

Adapted from Tranfield *et al.* (2003); Petticrew and Roberts (2006); Briner and Walshe (2014).

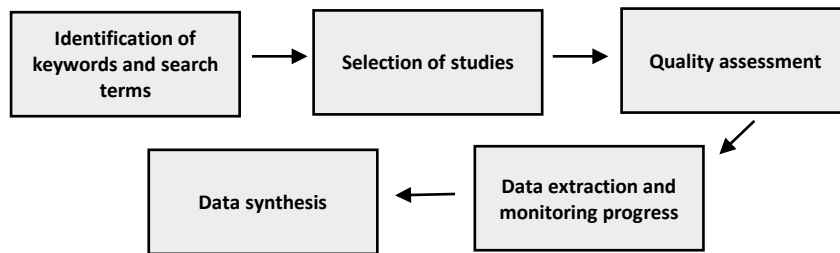


Figure 2-1 Phases of the systematic literature review process

## 2.2 Identification of Keywords and Search Terms

In this research, the research questions were used to identify the keywords and search terms. Tranfield *et al.* (2003) pointed out that the research question plays an essential part in a systematic review, as the subsequent steps are based on it. Based on the current research background and questions discussed in the previous chapter (Chapter 1, sections 1.2 and 1.3), the growing practice of deceptive reviews being posted in online review content threatens online reviews as valuable sources of information. This review is focused on understanding what causes consumers to perceive deception in online reviews and how it, in turn, affects their responses. Therefore, deceptive reviews and online reviews were identified as generally relevant concepts. To capture these concepts, some of the relevant keywords used by Cheung and Thadani (2012), Cantalops and Salvi (2014), King, Racherla, and Bush (2014), and Kwok, Xie, and Richards (2017) were adopted (see Table 2.2). These authors conducted systematic review studies of online reviews which were published in three- and four-star journals based on the Chartered Association of Business Schools (CABS) list. No systematic review studies investigating deceptive reviews were found. Therefore, keywords used in deceptive review research, such as “deceptive reviews”, “fake reviews” (Zhang *et al.*, 2016), “fraud reviews”

(Hu *et al.*, 2011b), and “manipulation reviews” (Kumar *et al.*, 2018), were employed to capture the concept of deceptive reviews. Furthermore, keywords such as “dishonest reviews”, “trustworthy reviews”, and “credible reviews” were also utilised to locate a variety of available articles that were more relevant to the purpose of this research. Table 2.3 displays the keywords used in this research. The next section presents the approach followed to search for these keywords in relevant journal articles.

Table 2-2 Summary of keywords and databases utilised in previous literature

Authors	Keywords	Databases
Cheung and Thadani (2012)	“electronic word-of-mouth”, “eWOM”, “online reviews”, “online recommendations”, “marketing buzz”, “online consumer reviews”.	“Academic Search Premier (EBSCO), ABI/INFORM Global (ProQuest), Science Citation Index (SCI), PscyclINFO, CSA Illumina, Education Resources Center, and Emerald Insights”.
King <i>et al.</i> (2014)	“eWOM”, “online reviews”, “product reviews”, “online recommendations”, “online word-of-mouth”, “online buzz”, “social networks”, “online viral marketing”, “online consumer reviews”, “online communities”, “virtual communities”.	“Academic Search Premier, EBSCO, ABI/INFORM Global, SCI, and Emerald Insights”.
Cantallops and Salvi (2014)	“eWOM”, “WOM”, “online reviews”, “user-generated content” (UGC), “consumer-generated content” (CGC), “online recommendation”, “e-satisfaction”, “e-complaints”, “online reputation”, “online travel communities”, “online opinions”, “social media marketing”, “hospitality industry and hotels”.	Search on journal databases, such as “ <i>International Journal of Hospitality Management (IJHM)</i> , <i>International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management (IJCHM)</i> , <i>Cornell Hospitality Quarterly (CQ)</i> , <i>Journal of Travel &amp; Tourism Marketing</i> , <i>Journal of Travel Research (JTR)</i> , and <i>Tourism Management (TM)</i> ”.
Kwok <i>et al.</i> (2017)	“online reviews”, “consumer reviews”, “word-of-mouth”, “user-generated content”.	Search on journal databases, such as “ <i>IJHM</i> , <i>Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research (JHTR)</i> , <i>CQ</i> , and <i>IJCHM</i> for hospitality studies. <i>Annals of Tourism Research (ATR)</i> , <i>TM</i> , <i>JTR</i> , and <i>Journal of Sustainable Tourism (JST)</i> ”.

Table 2-3 Keywords used in this research

<b>Online review</b>	“eWOM”, “electronic word-of-mouth”, “online reviews”, “online consumer reviews”, “online recommendation”, “product reviews”, and “online customer reviews”.
<b>Deceptive review</b>	“deceptive reviews”, “fake reviews”, “fraud reviews”, “manipulation reviews”, “dishonest reviews”, “trustworthy review”, “credible review”, and “untrustworthy review”.

### 2.3 Selection of Studies

Table 2.2 shows that previous research relied on several databases to search for journal articles. Searching in many databases is fundamental to finding more relevant articles (Zhao, 2014). Thus, this approach was followed, and multiple electronic databases were searched to build initial sources of information on the phenomenon under investigation. Four major databases were identified for the search: Web of Science, ProQuest, Science Direct, and Scopus. These databases cover the majority of marketing, tourism, and information system journals.

As the systematic review approach is structured, it assists researchers in making explicit decisions regarding which papers to include or exclude (Kwok, Xie and Richards, 2017). Table 2.4 shows the justification for four conditions that it was imposed regarding which journal articles were to be included or excluded. Journal articles that met the conditions imposed and contained the primary keywords in the title, abstract, and/or keywords were retrieved for further examination.

Table 2-4 Conditions imposed on journal articles to meet the minimum acceptance level

Conditions	Reasons for inclusion and exclusion
1. Limit research to journal articles published in or after 2000.	Most online review websites launched in the early 2000s (e.g., TripAdvisor and Yelp).
2. Exclude books, conference papers, theses, and dissertations.	Avoided the inclusion of studies that are not peer-reviewed and, therefore, may be less scientifically accurate.
3. Only include articles written in English and published in peer-reviewed journals.	Ensured that all articles from this step met the minimum acceptable level of quality.
4. Apply a combined search of the list of primary keywords.	Enabled to find a variety of available articles that were more relevant to the purpose of this study.

Based on the conditions imposed, the total number of results across four databases was 6,375 articles. After examining the articles to determine if they contained the primary keywords in the title, abstract, and/or keywords and removing all repeated articles, the total number of articles that met the inclusion criteria was 900 (see Figure 2.2). These articles were retrieved

for further examination in the next section to ensure that the review was conducted with the highest quality evidence.

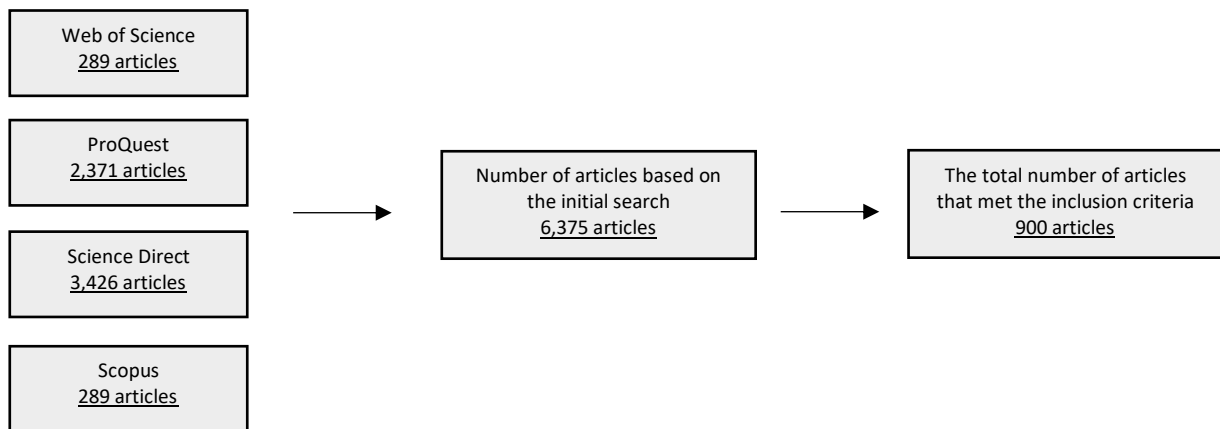


Figure 2-2 The number of articles that met the inclusion criteria

## 2.4 Quality Assessment

The results from the selection of studies outlined in section 2.3 ensured that the articles included met the minimum acceptable level of quality. In this step, it was gradually narrowed the results using three imposed conditions to make sure that the review was conducted with the highest quality evidence. First, it was only included articles that had been published in three- and four-star journals based on the Chartered Association of Business Schools (CABS) list. Table 2.5 shows that the total number of articles that met the inclusion criteria was 366 articles.

The second condition was that only articles focused on online reviews were included for further analysis; articles that focused on recommendation agents and/or social networking sites (e.g., Facebook) were excluded from this review. The rationale for imposing this condition is linked to the nature of online review websites as a source of information. On online review websites, an online review comes from reviewers who may remain anonymous and usually lack a prior relationship with consumers (Cheung *et al.*, 2008; Park and Lee, 2008).

The challenge here is that the credibility of reviews can be affected by the anonymity of reviewers and the absence of a prior relationship with consumers (Xie *et al.*, 2011).

In contrast, recommendation agents source their information from software, specifically 'software agents' that assess "the interests or preferences of individual consumers for products, either explicitly or implicitly, and make recommendations accordingly" (Xiao and Benbasat, 2007, p. 137). Unlike online review websites, the nature of recommendation agents involves the utilisation of search engines to provide recommended products to consumers (Wang *et al.*, 2018). This controlled and software-driven approach might address some of the challenges posed by the anonymous reviewers in the nature of online review websites.

Regarding social networking sites (e.g., Facebook), the source of information usually interacts within an everyday-based circle of people, such as family, friends, schoolmates, and acquaintances, making the source of information identifiable (Eisingerich *et al.*, 2015). This identifiable nature, in the case of social networking sites, contrasts with the anonymity and absence of a prior relationship found in online reviews, potentially influencing how consumers assess information in online reviews. Therefore, it was eliminated 57 articles due to their research context being focused on social networking sites or recommendation agents. The total number of articles that met the inclusion criteria thereafter was 309 articles.

Third, it was only included articles that investigated how consumers examine credibility, trustworthiness, and/or deception in online reviews; articles that focused on elements such as the effect of online reviews on sales, the credibility of hotels, online review helpfulness, review cues influencing consumers' adoption of information, and developing approaches to detect deceptive reviews were eliminated. The total number of articles reduced dramatically to 20 articles that met the inclusion criteria.

Finally, it was added four extra articles that were not found as a result of the search; neither did they meet any of the imposed criteria. The reason for including these articles was related to their focus on investigating the factors that influence consumers' perceptions of credibility or trustworthiness in online reviews. It was added these articles as they were relevant to the purpose of the review. Therefore, the total number of articles resulting from the quality assessment process was 24. Thus, the data is based on these selected articles (see Figure 2.3). The next part moves on to discuss the historical decisions made during the systematic review process and when extracting the data from the selected articles.

Table 2-5 The number of articles based on the CABS list

Ranking number	Number of articles
4 and 3	366
2	138
1	93
No matching records found	303
<b>Total</b>	<b>900</b>

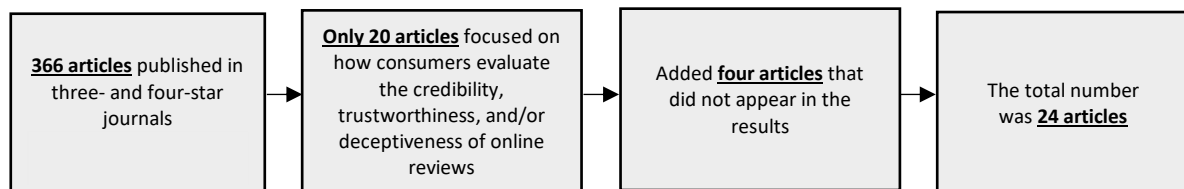


Figure 2-3 Summary of the quality assessment process

## 2.5 Data Extraction and Monitoring Progress

After identifying the articles that were to be included in the review, this step concerned data extraction and monitoring progress. Higgins and Green (2008) indicated that monitoring progress is considered an essential function and that researchers must show a historical record of all decisions made during the review process. Table 2.6 presents all of the steps taken during the systematic review.



Table 2-6 The systematic review process

Date	Steps	Process	Article outcome
November 2019	1. Identification of research keywords and search terms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Guided by the research question in identifying keywords.</li> <li>Two relevant concepts were identified: “online review” and “deceptive review”.</li> <li>Some of the relevant keywords used in the literature were adopted.</li> <li>An expansive list of primary keywords was used in the search to capture both online and deceptive reviews.</li> </ul>	
December 2019	2. Selection of studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Web of Science, ProQuest, Science Direct, and Scopus were identified for the search.</li> <li>The search was limited to journal articles published in or after 2000.</li> <li>It excluded books, conference papers, theses, and dissertations.</li> <li>It included journal papers written in English and published in peer-reviewed journals.</li> <li>A combined search of keywords was applied.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More than <b>6,000</b> articles.</li> <li><b>900 articles</b> containing the primary keywords in the title, abstract, and/or keywords.</li> </ul>
February 2020	3. Quality assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It included articles published in three- and four-star journals based on the CABS list.</li> <li>It only included articles focusing on online reviews (<b>eliminated 57 articles</b> focused on recommendation agents or social media).</li> <li>It only included articles that investigate how consumers examine credibility and/or deception in online reviews (<b>eliminated 289 articles</b>). <b>20 articles</b> met the inclusion criteria.</li> <li>The researcher included four articles that did not feature in the search results and did not meet any of the imposed criteria, as they were relevant to the purpose of the study.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More than <b>300 articles</b> were published in three- and four-star journals.</li> <li><b>24 articles</b> met the inclusion criteria.</li> </ul>
March 2020	4. Data extraction and monitoring progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A table showing all the steps and decisions taken in the systematic review process was created.</li> <li>An Excel sheet presenting the data extracted from the selected studies in the systematic review was created.</li> </ul>	

Furthermore, Tranfield *et al.* (2003) pointed out the importance of data extraction and monitoring progress in limiting error and bias and providing the basis on which to conduct data synthesis. Therefore, it was extracted the following data, which were subsequently entered into an Excel 2020 spreadsheet for analysis. The types of extracted data were as follows:

- Summary of factors considered and their meanings. Factors here refer to components of online reviews which are the review, reviewer, online review website, and receiver. Table

2.7 provides an overview of factors considered, including the different terminologies used to refer to the same factor, their meanings, and references to studies that have considered these factors.

- A brief description of the theories that the included articles focused on. Table 2.8 provides an overview of these theories, including their names, brief descriptions in the context of online reviews, and references.
- Summary of factors considered in the included articles, constructs associated with the consumers' responses, method, and main findings. Table 2.9 shows all of these extracted data. The yellow columns indicate the focus areas in this research, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter (Chapter 3).

The data extracted from the journal articles served as the foundation for presenting the results of the included studies. The next section, data synthesis, provides a comprehensive synthesis of the key outcomes derived from the analysed articles.

Table 2-7 Summary of factors and meanings

Factor	Meaning	Author (s)
Aggregated rating	A summary which reflects the reviewer's overall product rating.	Qiu, Pang and Lim (2012)
Ambivalent reviews	Online reviews that contain both positive and negative reviews of a specific service provider.	Xie <i>et al.</i> (2011)
Confirmation of prior belief	The extent to which consumers perceive the information received about a product or service as consistent with their prior knowledge or expectations.	Cheung <i>et al.</i> (2009)
Consumer experience (i.e., recipient's expertise, internet experience)	The recipient's prior knowledge about an object (e.g., browsing online review websites, the review's topic).	Cheung <i>et al.</i> (2012); Filieri <i>et al.</i> (2015); Nhon and Khuong (2015); Filieri (2016)
Destination experts	"Designation that denotes travellers who have extensively reviewed a particular destination on TripAdvisor".	Filieri (2016, p.55)
Extreme reviews	"Reviews that are very often associated with an overly positive (i.e., five-star rating on TripAdvisor) or overly negative rating (i.e., one-star rating on TripAdvisor)".	Filieri (2016, p.53)
Information quality (i.e., review quality, argument quality, argument strength, review argumentation, recommendation persuasiveness)	The quality of the content of a review from the perspective of information characteristics. Information quality in online reviews reflects the relevance, sufficiency, accuracy, currency, comprehensiveness, value, credibility, and usefulness of the information.	Cheung <i>et al.</i> (2009); Cheung <i>et al.</i> (2012); Racherla, Mandviwalla and Connolly (2012); Luo <i>et al.</i> (2013); Lee and Shin (2014); Filieri <i>et al.</i> (2015); Luo <i>et al.</i> (2015); Reimer and Benkenstein (2016); Shan (2016)

Level of detail in a review	"The amount of specific information about the product found in the written portion of a review".	Jiménez and Mendoza (2013, p227); Filieri (2016)
Message involvement	The depth at which an individual attends to, and is mentally engaged with, a message at the time of exposure.	Cox <i>et al.</i> (2017)
Number of submissions	Indicator that shows the number of reviews that the reviewer has submitted on an online review website.	Filieri (2016)
Openness	A personality trait that reflects the degree to which individuals are open to new experiences and ideas.	Nhon and Khuong (2015)
Orthographical errors	Cognitive errors, such as "phonetic misspellings or substituting a homophone (e.g., substituting "hite" for "height"), which might be attributed to a lack of education or to a cognitive challenge such as dyslexia".	Cox <i>et al.</i> (2017, p.246)
Perceived online review website quality	"Consumers' perception of a website's performance in information retrieval and delivery".	Filieri <i>et al.</i> (2015, p.177)
Perceived review diagnosticity (i.e., perceived information diagnosticity)	"The extent to which a review conveys relevant content that can be of use in understanding and evaluating product quality and performance".	Qiu <i>et al.</i> (2012); Huang <i>et al.</i> (2018, p.432)
Perceived similarity	"The extent to which a consumer feels similar to the sender who posts a review online in terms of attitudes, preferences, emotions and behaviours".	Racherla <i>et al.</i> (2012); Nhon and Khuong (2015, p. 320); Shan (2016); Huang <i>et al.</i> (2018)
Perceived social relationships	The extent to which individuals perceive themselves to have close and involved relationships with others who are discussing a particular product or service online.	Pan and Chiou (2011)
Product type	"Search goods are associated with low costs and low difficulty in acquiring product quality information prior to consumption, and typically involve more objective evaluative statements in online reviews" (e.g., mobile phones, laser printers, and vitamins). Meanwhile, for experience goods, "ascertaining product quality prior to consumption is more difficult and costly, and reviews of experience goods tend to be more subjective in nature" (e.g., hotels, computer games, and skincare lotions).	Pan and Chiou (2011); Jiménez and Mendoza (2013); Lee and Shin (2014); Ketron (2017, p.52)
Quality of grammar and mechanics (QGAM)	"The quality of grammar, mechanics (spelling, punctuation, etc.), and overall technical skill in written communication of online reviews". Grammar refers to "the system of rules of a language describing the way verbal constructions are organised to convey meaning". Mechanics are "the elements of a language that exist in written form only (i.e., spelling, capitalisation, punctuation, and organisational elements of writing such as paragraphs)".	Ketron (2016, p. 51, p.52,)
Receiver's involvement	The personal relevance that a consumer has in a particular purchase decision.	Cheung <i>et al.</i> (2012); Racherla <i>et al.</i> (2012); Filieri (2016)
Recommendation completeness	"The extent to which the recommendation covers a wide range of salient aspects and thus provides sufficient information".	Luo <i>et al.</i> (2013, p.94)
Reputation	"A piece of system-generated information in the form of aggregated opinions from other users, such as how many users trusted the reviewer or how many users rated the review as helpful".	Xu (2014, p.137); Shan (2016)
Review consistency (i.e., recommendation consistency; reviewer agreement; consensus information)	It is "concerned with congruence to others' opinions on the discussed product".	Cheung <i>et al.</i> (2009, p.17); Cheung <i>et al.</i> (2012); Jiménez and Mendoza (2013); Luo <i>et al.</i> (2015); Filieri (2016); Munzel (2016)
Review font	The typeface or style of text used to present customer reviews on online retail websites.	Huang <i>et al.</i> (2018)
Review length	The number of words in an online review.	Filieri (2016); Ketron (2017)
Review objectivity (i.e., review rationality, information factuality)	"The extent to which the argument is fact-based, objective, and verifiable".	Luo <i>et al.</i> (2015); Filieri (2016); Dong <i>et al.</i> (2019, p. 543)
Review rating (i.e., recommendation rating)	"The overall rating given by other readers on an eWOM".	Cheung <i>et al.</i> (2009, p.18); Luo <i>et al.</i> (2015)
Review scepticism	The general tendency to disbelieve online reviews.	Reimer and Benkenstein (2016)

Review sidedness (i.e., recommendation sidedness)	"A one-sided review contains either the positive or negative comments on a product. In contrast, "a two-sided review contains both positive and negative comments on a product".	Cheung <i>et al.</i> (2009); Cheung, Sia and Kuan (2012, p.622); Luo <i>et al.</i> (2015); Filieri (2016)
Review valence (i.e., recommendation framing)	The direction of an online review, whether it is positive or negative.	Cheung <i>et al.</i> (2009); Xu (2014); Huang <i>et al.</i> (2018); Dong, Li and Sivakumar (2019)
Reviewer's identity disclosure (i.e., source identity, personal identifying information (PII))	The disclosure of the reviewer's personal information such as real name, age, and/or location.	Xie <i>et al.</i> (2011); Kusumasondjaja, Shanka and Marchegiani (2012); Nhon and Khuong (2015); Munzel (2016)
Reviewer's profile picture	"A self-created cue showing how the reviewer looks like".	Xu (2014, p.137); Filieri (2016)
Satisfaction from previous experiences	"The general satisfaction of a customer, which is based on all cumulative experiences with a company, a product, or a service".	Filieri <i>et al.</i> (2015, p.177)
Source credibility	The extent to which an individual perceives the source of a review as "trustworthy, experienced, and reliable".	Cheung <i>et al.</i> (2009); Filieri <i>et al.</i> (2015, p. 180)
Typographical errors	Mechanical errors, such as "letter transposition or mis-striking an adjacent letter on the keyboard (e.g., substituting "regualr" for "regular"), which seem more likely to be attributed to careless writing".	Cox <i>et al.</i> (2017, p.246)
Ulterior motivation	"The extent to which the reviewer has a personal interest in or stands to benefit from misleading or persuading people to buy a particular product or service".	Ahmad and Sun (2018, p. 80)

Table 2-8 Brief description of theories

Theory	Description	References
Attribution theory	Attribution theory explains how an individual makes causal inferences using their common sense. The individual recognises two types of causes: action as a result of personal causes and causes related to the environment. The individual's attribution about the reason behind a reviewer posting a review will include whether the evaluation of the review content is based on external (product-related) or internal (reviewer-related) reasons. This inference influences the individual's actions and subsequently influences the receiver's actions.	Kelley and Michela (1980); Qiu <i>et al.</i> (2012); Luo <i>et al.</i> (2013); Cox <i>et al.</i> (2017)
Dual-process theory	Focuses on how different types of influences, normative factors (e.g., review consistency), and informational factors (e.g., information quality) work together to affect the persuasiveness of online reviews.	Deutsch and Gerard (1955); Cheung <i>et al.</i> (2009); Huang <i>et al.</i> (2018)
Elaboration likelihood model (ELM)	Suggests that individuals follow two distinct routes in the way they process information: the central and peripheral route. Individuals who are motivated and willing to process information follow the central route and spend more time examining cues in a review (e.g., information quality). Individuals who lack motivation and have less ability follow the peripheral route and examine cues unrelated to the content of a review (e.g., reviewer's identity disclosure).	Petty and Cacioppo (1986); Pan and Chiou (2011); Xie <i>et al.</i> (2011); Cheung <i>et al.</i> (2012); Lee and Koo (2012); Jiménez and Mendoza (2013); Luo <i>et al.</i> (2013); Luo <i>et al.</i> (2015); Reimer and Benkenstein (2016); Shan (2016); Ketron (2017); Huang <i>et al.</i> (2018)
Heuristic systematic model (HSM)	This theory posits that individuals process information in one of two ways: systematically, in which case individuals carefully examine the content of the review (e.g., information quality), or heuristically, in which case individuals apply shortcuts when examining a review (e.g., reviewer's overall product rating). The way that an individual processes information depends on their abilities and motivations.	Chaiken (1980); Pan and Chiou (2011)

Kramer's distrust model	(1998)	This model posits that normal individuals hold paranoid social cognitions, referred to "as exaggerated distrust, which create anxiety and stress, and lead to severe behavioural responses". The distrust model basically has three key elements: history-dependent processes, priori expectations, and posteriori attributions. The history-dependent processes are based on the idea that a person's trust grows or decreases based on the cumulative past interactions between two actors (i.e., the reviewer and the person receiving the review). In priori expectations, a person's pre-existing beliefs and expectations about whether or not to trust someone are based on their priori expectations about that person's behaviour and how much later experience confirms or discredits those expectations. Posteriori attributions affect what they think about the other person's intentions and motives.	Kramer (1998); Ahmad and Sun (2018, p.78)
Mayer <i>et al.</i> 's trust model	(1995)	In this model, the authors seek to explain how individuals develop and maintain trust with others. The key components of this model in the context of online reviews are as follows. (1) Trustworthiness, which refers to reviewers' trustworthiness and is defined as the extent to which the reviewer can be trusted. Trustworthiness has three dimensions, which are benevolence, ability, and integrity. (2) Trust in the review, which refers to "the willingness of consumers to believe the written commentaries of reviewers and to rely on them with the expectation that the reviewers are trustworthy". The authors suggest that reviewer trustworthiness is an antecedent of trust in the review. (3) Situational factors, which are online review cues (e.g., valence, review objectivity) that might influence the development of trust. According to this model, the development of review trust is dependent on reviewers' trustworthiness, and online review cues can facilitate the development of review trust.	Mayer <i>et al.</i> (1995); Dong <i>et al.</i> (2019, p. 544)
Persuasion knowledge model (PKM)		This theory posits that every consumer has a basic level of scepticism towards the persuasion message (e.g., online review). Over time, consumers improve their personal knowledge of the methods used in these persuasion attempts. Developing consumer knowledge can assist consumers in identifying how, when, and why companies try to influence them. At the same time, it assists consumers in findings a way to respond to these persuasion attempts.	Rule <i>et al.</i> (1985); Friestad and Wright (1994); Munzel (2016); Reimer and Benkenstein (2016)
Prominence-interpretation theory (PIT)		PIT suggests that two things occur when individuals assess credibility online. First, individuals notice something (prominence) (e.g., reviewer's expertise), and second, they make a judgement about it (interpretation). If either one does not happen, a credibility assessment does not occur.	Fogg (2003); Xie <i>et al.</i> (2011)
Regulatory focus theory		This theory posits that consumers have two motivational orientations, which are a promotion focus and a prevention focus. These can influence a consumer's decision-making when examining online reviews. Consumers who are promotion-focused are motivated by aspirations and achievements and focus on positive outcomes and achieving their goal (e.g., they focus on positive experiences and benefits posted by reviewers and perceive positive online reviews as more credible). Consumers who are prevention-focused are concerned with potential risks and negative outcomes (e.g., they are more influenced by negative reviews and perceive them as more credible).	Higgins (1997); Lee and Koo (2012)
Social information processing theory (SIPT)		SIPT suggests that individuals use alternative cues to make judgements about other people in computer-mediated communication (CMC) without the non-verbal cues that are available in FtF interactions. Individuals' perceptions of other	Salancik and Pfeffer (1978); Walther (1992); Walther and Parks (2002); Xu (2014); Shan (2016)

	web users are impacted by whatever information is available (e.g., reviewer's identity disclosure, number of reviews submitted, etc.).	
Theory of reasoned action	This theory posits that behavioral intentions are primarily determined by individuals' attitudes toward a behavior, such as having a positive attitude towards online reviews due to the belief that they are a valuable source of information. Additionally, subjective norms, which involve perceptions of social pressure (for example, a friend's beliefs about online reviews), play a significant role in shaping behavioral intentions. Consumers' perceptions can be influenced by their attitudes and subjective norms.	Fishbein and Ajzen (1975); Lee and Shin (2014)
Trust-building model	In this model, authors reviewed the literature on the antecedents of trust in commercial and non-commercial websites. Based on the results, the authors classified antecedents of trust into three main categories: consumers-based antecedents (e.g., users' experience with the technology used for the transaction), website-based antecedents (e.g., the quality of the online review website), and organisation/company-based antecedents (e.g., consumers' experiences with online organisations).	Beldad <i>et al.</i> (2010); Filieri <i>et al.</i> (2015)
Uncertainty reduction theory (URC)	URC deals with the initial interaction between two parties before communication. Individuals need information about the other party to reduce uncertainty (e.g., reviewer). The availability of information in an initial interaction can reduce an individual's uncertainty, as it helps them predict the other person's behaviour and resulting actions. Individuals try to apply several methods to reduce the uncertainty of others in initial interactions.	Berger and Calabrese (1975); Kusumasondjaja <i>et al.</i> (2012); Racherla <i>et al.</i> (2012); Xu (2014); Nhon and Khuong (2015)
Warranting theory	Warranting theory suggests that consumers form judgements from a variety of cues that are available in online reviews. They are more likely to trust and perceive credibility in online reviews when they possess high warranting value and are less likely to be controlled or manipulated by a reviewer (e.g., number of reviews submitted on an online review website, number of helpful reviews received from others).	Walther and Parks (2002); Shan (2016)

Table 2-9 The results from articles included in the systematic review

Author(s) Year	Factors considered				Construct associated with the response			Definition	Aim	Method and finding
	Review	Reviewer	Receiver	Website	Credibility	Trustworthiness	Deception			
Cheung <i>et al.</i> (2009)	✓	✓	✓		✓			Perceived credibility of eWOM review: the extent to which one perceives a review as believable, true, or factual.	To determine the informational (argument strength, recommendation framing, recommendation sidedness, source credibility and confirmation of prior belief) and normative (recommendation consistency and recommendation rating) factors that influence credibility judgements of online consumer recommendations.	Questionnaire. Argument strength, source credibility, confirmation of receiver's prior belief, recommendation consistency, and recommendation rating significantly influence perceived eWOM credibility. Review credibility has a significant impact on review adoption. There is a significant moderating effect of involvement and prior knowledge level on informational and normative factors.
Xie <i>et al.</i> (2011)	✓	✓	✓		✓			Perceived source credibility: the extent to which a receiver perceives the source of a message as trustworthy and knowledgeable.	To answer these questions: Q1: Is PII effective in improving the perceived credibility of online reviews? Q2: How do ambivalent online reviews, with and without PII, affect hotel booking intentions for consumers with different types of pre-decisional dispositions (i.e., positive vs. neutral vs. negative)?	Experiment. The presence of PII has a significant effect on perceived credibility. Pre-decisional disposition has a significant positive effect on booking intention. No significant interaction effect between pre-decisional disposition and the presence of PII. The presence of PII has a negative effect on booking intention for consumers with a negative or neutral pre-decisional disposition. The effect of the presence of PII on booking intention is fully mediated by perceived credibility.
Pan and Chiou (2011)	✓	✓	✓			✓		Perceived trust in online information: the extent to which information is perceived as reliable and accurate.	To explore how social relationships and positive and negative reviews affect consumers' perceptions of the trustworthiness of online information and subsequent attitude towards a product. The moderation role of	Experiment. For experience goods (e.g., hotels), negative reviews are perceived to be more trustworthy than positive reviews, and social relationships among net pals do not affect review trust. Participants have more positive attitudes towards a hotel that has positive reviews. Trust has a positive effect on attitudes towards hotels. For credence goods (e.g., health foods)

Lee and Koo (2012)	√	√	√	√	Perceived credibility of eWOM; the extent to which one perceives sources of information provided as unbiased, believable, true, or factual.	product categories is also examined. To investigate the effects of review valence and attributes on review credibility, and to examine the moderating impact of reviewer characteristics such as regulatory focus and subjective knowledge on these relationships.	neither social relationships nor whether the review is positive or negative influence trust. Experiment. Perceived review credibility has a significant positive impact on review adoption. Perceived review credibility with objective information is higher than that for online reviews with subjective information. The credibility of negative online reviews is higher than that of positive online reviews.
Kusumasondjaja et al. (2012)	√	√		√	Perceived review credibility: the extent to which online reviews are perceived as accurate, believable, unbiased, complete, and trustworthy.	To investigate the main and interactional effects of review valence and the presence of source identity on the perceived credibility of a review and initial trust in travel services being reviewed.	Experiment. The main effect of review valence on credibility and initial trust (the level of trust towards a hotel) is significant. A negative online review is perceived as significantly more credible than a positive online review. Positive reviews have a greater effect on initial trust than a negative review. There is a main effect of identity on credibility and initial trust. A review with disclosed personal identification is perceived as more credible and prompts higher initial trust than those with an undisclosed identity. The credibility and initial trust are significantly influenced by the interaction between review valence and the reviewer's identity.
Racherla et al. (2012)	√	√	√	√	Decision trust: the extent to which a consumer is willing to depend on something or someone in a given situation with a feeling of relative security, even though negative consequences are possible.	To delineate the antecedents of consumers' trust in online product reviews.	Experiment. There is a significant and positive effect of argument quality and perceived similarity on decision trust. Reviews that have a combination of high argument quality and similarity have significantly higher trust scores compared to reviews with low argument quality and similarity. In addition, there is a positive interaction effect between perceived similarity and high involvement on trust.
Qiu et al. (2012)	√			√	Perceived review credibility: the extent to which a piece of information is perceived as true and valid.	To investigate how the presence of a conflicting aggregated rating influences the perceived credibility and	Experiment. The presence of a conflicting aggregated rating has a negative effect on consumers' product-related attributions of an individual review, and this effect is more salient for



						diagnosticity of an individual review.	positive reviews than for negative ones. Consumers' product-related attributes positively affect review credibility and diagnosticity. Due to the mediating effect of review attribution, the presence of a conflicting aggregated rating reduces perceived credibility and diagnosticity.
Cheung <i>et al.</i> (2012)	√	√	√		√	Perceived review credibility: the extent to which a reader believes that an online consumer review is believable, accurate, and factual.	To investigate the antecedents of review credibility, including argument quality, source credibility, review consistency, and to understand how consumers use the various characteristics of online reviews to assess their credibility. Questionnaire. Argument quality, review sidedness, review consistency, and source credibility are all important cues that readers use to evaluate the credibility of online consumer reviews. The moderation effects of expertise and involvement on review sidedness are statistically significant.
Jiménez and Mendoza (2013)	√	√			√	Perceived review credibility: the extent to which a consumer believes that an online consumer review is believable.	To investigate the effect of the level of detail in a review and the level of reviewer agreement on credibility and consumers' purchase intentions for search (e.g., a cell phone) and experience products (e.g., hotel). Experiment. For search products, the main effects of the level of detail and reviewer agreement on purchase intention are significant. Credibility fully mediates the relationship between level of detail and purchase intention but not reviewer agreement. For experience products, the main effect of the level of detail on purchase intention is not significant, while reviewer agreement is significant. The credibility of the review fully mediates the effect of reviewer agreement on purchase intentions.
Luo <i>et al.</i> (2013)	√	√			√	Perceived recommendation source credibility: a reader's perception of the expertise and trustworthiness of a source of information.  Perceived recommendation credibility: the extent to which a recommendation is perceived as	To investigate the moderating effect of recommendation source credibility on the causal relationships between informational factors (information persuasiveness and completeness) and recommendation credibility, as well as its moderating effect on the causal relationship between  Information persuasiveness significantly affects consumers' perceptions of review credibility while information completeness is not significant. Perceived credibility significantly and positively affects consumers' review adoption. For the moderating effects, source credibility significantly moderates information persuasiveness and information completeness's effect on credibility. For information persuasiveness, the significance is negative and for information

						trustworthy, factual, and believable.	recommendation credibility and recommendation adoption.	completeness, the significance is positive. In addition, the moderating effect of source credibility on the causal relationship between review credibility and review adoption is significant and negative.
Xu (2014)		√		√	√	<p>Reviewer trustworthiness has two dimensions: cognitive trust (confidence in competence and responsibility) and affective trust (feeling towards the information provider based on the perception of warmth, openness, and friendliness).</p> <p>Perceived review credibility: the extent to which a review is perceived as trustworthy and believable.</p>	To explore how personal profile characteristics (i.e., reputation cues and profile pictures) influence cognitive trust and affective trust towards a reviewer and perceived review credibility, respectively, and in a combinatory manner.	Experiment. Reputation leads to more cognitive trust and affective trust in a reviewer. The reviewer's picture has a significant effect on affective trust only. There is an indirect effect of the reviewer's picture on affective trust through perceived social presence. Regarding effects on perceived review credibility, reputation leads to more perceived credibility. There is no main effect of the reviewer's picture on perceived review credibility. There is an interaction effect between reputation, profile picture, and valence on perceived credibility. Negative reviews are considered more credible when the reviewer is trusted by a large number of members, rather than only a small number of members, and when the reviewer has a picture than when not.
Lee and Shin (2014)	√	√	√		√	Reviewer evaluations: the extent to which a reviewer is perceived as intelligent, expert, informed, trustworthy, and honest.	To examine how the quality of reviews affects consumers' acceptance of reviews and their evaluations of sources. The moderation role of product type (e.g., search goods (vitamins) and experience goods (computer games)) and the availability of reviewers' photos is examined.	Experiment. High-quality reviews induce more positive reviewer evaluations than low-quality reviews. This effect is significant only when the reviewer's photos are present. There is no significant interaction between the product type and review quality on reviewer evaluations.
Luo <i>et al.</i> (2015)	√	√	√	√		Perceived review credibility: the extent to which a review is perceived as trustworthy, factual, and believable.	To explore how online review readers' sense of membership moderates the effects of review argument strength, review sidedness, review objectivity,	Questionnaire. Argument strength, review objectivity, review consistency, and source credibility significantly and positively affect perceived review credibility. Sense of membership positively moderates argument strength, review sidedness, and review

							source credibility, review consistency, and review rating on perceived review credibility.	ratings' effects on review credibility; it also has a negative moderating effect on the relationship between review objectivity and review credibility.	
Filieri <i>et al.</i> (2015)	√	√	√	√		√	Perceived online review website trust: one party's confidence in an exchange partner's reliability and integrity. The object is online trust which is a website (consumer-generated media (CGM)), namely those websites that provide consumer-generated content (CGC) such as online consumer reviews.	To investigate the antecedents (source credibility, information quality, website quality, customer satisfaction, user experience with CGM) of trust towards CGM and its influence on consumers' intention to adopt recommendations received and engage in positive WOM about the CGM to other people.	Questionnaire. Trust towards CGM is positively related to consumers' intention to adopt recommendations and to engage in positive WOM. The antecedents of trust towards CGM include information quality, website quality, and satisfaction with previous experiences.
Nhon and Khuong (2015)	√		√			√	Perceived online information credibility: the degree to which online consumers evaluate online information or posted messages on CGM to be trustworthy.	To investigate factors influencing consumers' perceptions of the credibility of online information (internet experience, openness, source identity, perceived similarity) and, in turn, the degree to which the perception of online information credibility affects trust and travel decision-making.	Questionnaire. Internet experience, openness, and source identity have a significant effect on perceived information credibility. They have significant indirect effects on travel decision-making and trust through perceived information credibility. Consumers with higher levels of perceived information credibility are more likely to have a positive effect on trust and travel decision-making.
Reimer and Benkenstein (2016)	√	√	√			√	Perceived review trustworthiness: the degree of confidence in the validity of the information in terms of objectivity and sincerity, which determine the effectiveness of a communication.	To investigate the moderating effect of review trustworthiness on the relationship between review valence and purchase intention. Also, to examine how review argumentation and scepticism influence trustworthiness.	Experiment. Trustworthy reviews influence purchase intention in the same direction as review valence. While in untrustworthy reviews, positive reviews decrease, negative reviews increase purchase intention. Review scepticism has a negative and significant impact on review trustworthiness. Higher review scepticism significantly reduces the positive effect of review argumentation on review trustworthiness. When review scepticism is low, review argumentation

Shan (2016)	✓	✓	✓		✓	<p>Perceived reviewer credibility: the extent to which the reader of an online product review believes that the reviewer is trustworthy and expert about the product being reviewed.</p>	<p>To understand how consumers evaluate reviewer credibility by examining the effects of reviewer (reputation), receiver (perceived similarity), and review (review quality)-related factors on consumers' perception of reviewer credibility.</p>	<p>has a positive and significant effect on trustworthiness.</p> <p>Experiment. Reviewers with high similarity have greater trustworthiness than reviewers with low perceived similarity. No significant differences between high/low reputation on trustworthiness and expertise. Under the high similarity condition, reviews produced by "top reviewers" have greater trustworthiness than those produced by laypeople. In addition, when the perceived similarity between consumers and reviewers is low, reviews produced by "top reviewers" have greater expertise than those produced by laypeople. Review quality has significant main effects on trustworthiness and expertise.</p>
Filieri (2016)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	<p>Trustworthy review: a review that is perceived by the reader as the honest, sincere, truthful, and non-commercial opinion of a customer who has experienced a product or a service.</p>	<p>To provide an in-depth understanding of consumer perceptions of trustworthy vs. untrustworthy content and reviewers.</p>	<p>Interviews. Highlights factors that can potentially influence perceived trustworthy and untrustworthy reviews. These factors are grouped under the following main categories: (1) the content and writing style of a review message; (2) the valence and review extremity; (3) the source of communication; (4) the pattern in reviews; (5) the type of website where the reviews are posted; and (6) the receivers' experience and involvement.</p>
Munzel (2016)	✓	✓			✓	<p>Source's trustworthiness: the degree of confidence in the communicator's intention to communicate the assertions they consider most valid.</p>	<p>To investigate the role of consensus and identity-related information in affecting consumers' perceptions of trustworthiness and in turn their responses.</p>	<p>Experiment. Perceived trustworthiness of the source decreases with a reduction in available information about the reviewer. Identity disclosure indirectly has a significant and positive effect on purchase intention and a negative effect on avoidance behaviour through source trustworthiness. Regarding consensus information, the source is perceived as trustworthy when consensus is high, not when consensus is low. Consensus information has a significant and positive effect on purchase intention and a negative effect on avoidance</p>

Ketron (2017)	✓	✓		✓		<p>Perception of reviewer credibility: how trustworthy and reliable a reviewer is perceived to be by the reader of an online review.</p> <p>To determine the influence of QGAM on purchase intentions through the mediation of reviewer credibility. Further, this study presents three potential moderators – product type, review length, and review valence – of QGAM’s influence.</p>	<p>behaviour through source trustworthiness.</p> <p>Experiment. QGAM has a stronger influence on purchase intentions for experience goods than for search goods. QGAM has a significant influence on purchase intentions for short reviews but does not lead to significant differences for long reviews. For positive reviews, purchase intentions are significantly higher for high QGAM reviews than low QGAM reviews. For negative reviews, high QGAM reviews have significantly lower purchase intentions than low QGAM reviews. There is a significant effect of QGAM on purchase intention through perceived reviewer credibility. Regarding the valence, reviewer credibility plays a mediating role between QGAM and purchase intentions but only in positive review contexts.</p>
Cox <i>et al.</i> (2017)	✓	✓	✓	✓		<p>Perception of reviewer credibility (trustworthiness and expertise): the extent to which a receiver perceives the source of a message as trustworthy, sincere, honest, dependable, genuine, and expert.</p> <p>To examine how the presence and type of textual errors in an online review influence internet users’ judgement of the reviewer’s credibility and how users’ responses to such errors are influenced by their general inclination to trust other people.</p>	<p>Experiment. Participants scoring high in general trust tend to perceive the reviewer as more trustworthy than those with low trust. Textual errors do not have a significant main effect on perceived reviewer trustworthiness. Participants’ reactions to textual errors are moderated by their general trust. Low-trust consumers are relatively insensitive to textual errors when judging reviewer credibility. High-trust participants are less forgiving of typographical errors than orthographical errors. A review with typographical errors results in the reviewer being rated significantly lower on trustworthiness. For expertise, the perceived expertise of the reviewer who made typographical errors is significantly lower than that of the reviewer who made no errors.</p>
Ahmad and Sun (2018)	✓	✓	✓		✓	<p>Distrust in online reviews: a lack of confidence in others, a</p> <p>To examine: (1) consumer perceptions regarding the role of two</p>	<p>Questionnaire. A reviewer’s fake identity and reviewers’ ulterior motivation have a positive and</p>

					<p>concern that the other may act so as to harm one; that is, the other does not care about others' welfare, intends to act harmfully, or is hostile.</p> <p>reviewer attributes (i.e., fake identity and ulterior motivation) in forming distrust; (2) the effect of distrust on consumers' psychological discomfort; (3) the associated negative outcomes in the form of nWOM and fewer repeat purchase intentions; and (4) in post-purchase scenarios, the moderating role of service failure attribution as a contextual factor between reviewer attributes and distrust.</p> <p>significant effect on distrust. Distrust leads to psychological discomfort and negative eWOM, which in turn reduces repeat purchase intentions. In addition, both reviewer fake identity and reviewer ulterior motivation have a positive effect on consumer distrust when consumers have high levels of service failure attributions, while when consumers have low levels of service failure attributions, both reviewer fake identity and reviewer ulterior motivation are negatively related to consumer distrust.</p>
Huang <i>et al.</i> (2018)	√	√	√	√	<p>Information credibility: the believability of information and/or its source.</p> <p>To investigate the impact of customer reviews on consumer evaluations under an easy-to-read (vs. difficult-to-read) font condition and to explore the role of processing ease, review valence, and credibility in shaping consumer behaviour.</p> <p>Experiment. The impact of reviews on consumer evaluations (the process by which consumers assess and form opinions about a product or service based on the information presented in customer reviews) is greater when the reviews – positive or negative – are presented in an easy-to-read font. Font has an effect only when participants are low in need for cognition. Participants that are high in need for cognition are less likely to rely on fluency to make a judgement. In addition, the effect of font on hotel evaluations is mediated by reviewer credibility.</p>
Dong <i>et al.</i> (2019)	√	√	√	√	<p>Trustworthiness of the reviewer: trustworthiness is a multifaceted construct comprising three factors: benevolence (the extent to which a trustor believes that a trustee wants to do good to others, beyond an egocentric profit motive), ability (a group</p> <p>To understand what drives consumer trust in online reviews. Specifically, to investigate the individual and joint impact of three review attributes – valence, rationality, and source – on the benevolence, ability, and integrity dimensions of</p> <p>Experiment. Positive reviews show great perceptions of benevolence, ability, and integrity. Factual reviews are associated with significantly greater benevolence, ability, and integrity than emotional reviews. Respondents perceive significantly greater benevolence and integrity when the review appears on a social network than on a retail site. In reviews that focus on venting emotions, respondents perceive positive reviews with greater benevolence and integrity</p>

				<p>of skills, competencies, and characteristics that confer influence on a party), and integrity (the extent to which a trustee is believed to adhere to sound moral and ethical principles).</p>	<p>trustworthiness of the reviewer, which further determine trust in online reviews.</p>	<p>than negative reviews. In addition, the advantage of positive reviews over negative reviews on perceived benevolence and integrity only occurs when the reviews appear on retail sites. Finally, the results show that the three dimensions of trustworthiness significantly influence trust in reviews (i.e., the willingness of online consumers to believe the written commentaries of reviewers and to rely on them with the expectation that the reviewers are trustworthy).</p>
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## **2.6 Data Synthesis**

The final step in the systematic review process is presenting and interpreting the findings from the selected articles. This section presents the findings from the included articles and highlights the potential research gaps. This section is split into three parts: the first part illustrates that there is a need for further investigation of deceptive reviews from consumers' perspectives; the second part presents how cues, namely specific pieces of information that consumers use to evaluate online reviews (Cheung *et al.*, 2012) as antecedents might affect consumers' perception; and the third part shows the effect of consumers' perceptions on their responses.

### **2.6.1 The Need to Investigate Perceived Deception**

There is a large body of literature on online reviews (6,375 articles) (see Figure 2.2). The majority of articles focus on areas such as the effect of online reviews on sales (e.g., Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006), the credibility of hotels (e.g., Sparks and Browning, 2011), online review helpfulness (e.g., Filieri *et al.*, 2018b), and online review cues that influence consumers' adoption of information (e.g., Filieri and McLeay, 2014). In addition, computer science scholars have increased their efforts to investigate the existence of deceptive reviews but at a different level. Some of the studies focused on the effect of product characteristics on deceptive reviews (e.g., Hu *et al.*, 2011a), the types of businesses that are more likely to post deceptive reviews (e.g., Hu *et al.*, 2011b), and the hotel characteristics and market conditions that may lead to deceptive reviews (e.g., Mayzlin *et al.*, 2014). Other studies have examined consumers' motivations for posting deceptive reviews (e.g., Choi *et al.*, 2017), how consumers may become involved in activities related to the posting of deceptive reviews (e.g., Anderson



and Simester, 2014), and how the restriction of the website itself (in terms of low and high restriction) can play a role in creating bias in a review (e.g., Moon *et al.*, 2019).

Another stream of research has focused on developing approaches to detect deceptive reviews (e.g., Ott *et al.*, 2011; Heydari *et al.*, 2016; Zhang *et al.*, 2016; Kumar *et al.*, 2018, 2019; Plotkina *et al.*, 2020). However, deceptive review detection approaches have limitations, as many of them focus on a content feature and do not include other features such as the reviewer's behaviour (e.g., the number of reviews submitted) and rating features (Zhang *et al.*, 2016). In addition, it is expected that over time deceivers may improve the methods that they use to post more deceptive reviews that read like actual consumers' reviews. Therefore, it was excluded these studies from the review because the focus was not on identifying deceptive review. Instead, it was narrowed the review to understand how cues in online reviews influence consumers' perceived credibility, trustworthiness, or deception and in turn impact their responses.

Prior online review studies have revealed the mediation role of consumers' perceived credibility and trustworthiness on influencing consumers' responses (e.g., Purnawirawan *et al.*, 2012; Jiménez and Mendoza, 2013; Filieri *et al.*, 2018b). However, when it was narrowed the research to include only articles published in three- and four-star journals and studies of online review websites with a focus on how consumers evaluate credibility, trustworthiness, and/or deceptiveness, the total number of articles reduced dramatically to 24 articles. This result is consistent with Dong *et al.*'s (2019) findings from their review of the literature, which was limited to only 19 articles that examined consumer trust and/or related terms in online reviews.

As Table 2.9 shows (constructs associated with responses), the investigation of the included articles focused on examining the effect of factors related to the reviewer, review, website, and receiver on consumers' perceptions. Specifically, the majority of the included articles focused on investigating consumers' perceptions of the credibility or trustworthiness of an online review as an object (Cheung *et al.*, 2009; Pan and Chiou, 2011; Cheung *et al.*, 2012; Kusumasondjaja *et al.*, 2012; Lee and Koo, 2012; Qiu *et al.*, 2012; Racherla *et al.*, 2012; Jiménez and Mendoza, 2013; Luo *et al.*, 2015; Nhon and Khuong, 2015; Filieri, 2016; Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016; Ahmad and Sun, 2018; Huang *et al.*, 2018). Other studies focused on examining consumers' perceptions of a reviewer's credibility or trustworthiness (Xie *et al.*, 2011; Luo *et al.*, 2013; Lee and Shin, 2014; Xu, 2014; Munzel, 2016; Shan, 2016; Cox *et al.*, 2017; Dong *et al.*, 2019), and only one article examined consumers' perceptions of the trustworthiness of websites that host online reviews (Filieri *et al.*, 2015).

A close examination of Table 2.9 (constructs associated with responses) reveals that there is no research investigating consumers' perceptions of deceptive online reviews. Deceptive reviews differ from credible and trustworthy reviews. A deceptive review is a review that has been presented as a prior consumer's evaluation; its intention is to mislead other consumers in their purchase decisions. Consumers perceive a reviewer as being a deceiver if they intentionally pose as a former consumer and manipulate a review to mislead others in their purchase decisions (Kumar *et al.*, 2018). In contrast, a credible review is a review that consumers perceive as trustworthy, factual, and believable (Luo *et al.*, 2015). A trustworthy review is a review that is perceived to be the honest, sincere, truthful, and non-commercial opinion of a consumer who has experienced a product or a service (Filieri, 2016). Consumers perceive a reviewer as being an actual consumer who has experience with the product being

reviewed. Even if a review is perceived as less credible and trustworthy, it is not necessarily perceived as a manipulation attempt. Rather, consumers might attribute these factors to a reviewer's cognitive limitations, such as their memory and linguistic skills (Masip *et al.*, 2004; Xiao and Benbasat, 2011). Therefore, deceptiveness, credibility, and trustworthiness are separate, although closely associated, constructs.

Despite the significant body of research investigating how factors related to reviews, reviewers, websites, and/or receivers influence consumers' perceived credibility and trustworthiness, there is a notable gap warranting further investigation regarding what leads consumers to perceive deception in online reviews. The next part moves on to present and discuss the systematic review results on how various online review factors including review content cues, reviewers' profile cues, online review websites, and consumers' characteristics influence consumers' perceived credibility and trustworthiness.

### **2.6.2 The impact of key factors on consumers' perceived credibility and trustworthiness**

A thorough analysis of Table 2.9 (factors considered) shows that the majority of studies examined factors in: (1) reviews' content cues (e.g., information quality); (2) reviewers' profile cues (e.g., reviewer's identity disclosure); (3) online review websites (e.g., website quality); and/or (4) receivers (i.e., consumers' characteristics (e.g., involvement)) to determine their effect on consumers' perceived credibility and trustworthiness. The findings reveal that the factors influencing consumers' perceived credibility and trustworthiness are numerous. Consumers' perceived credibility and trustworthiness can be influenced by various factors related to reviews, reviewers, online review websites, and consumers' characteristics, either independently or interactively. The following parts discuss how factors related to reviews,

reviewers, online review websites, and consumers' characteristics influence consumers' perceived credibility and trustworthiness.

First, for the factors related to a review's content cues, one of the objectives that consumers aim to achieve by assessing online reviews is making informed decisions based on credible information (e.g., Xie *et al.*, 2011). After consumers engage with online reviews, the first step is to filter the information by examining the reviews' credibility, as reviewers are often unknown (Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016). The textual nature of online reviews provides consumers with several cues that might influence consumers' perceived credibility and trustworthiness. Lee and Koo (2012) asserted that the content of online reviews can be easily used to assess quality due to its textual nature, which allows consumers to retrieve, read, and evaluate the information available there.

As shown in Table 2.7, the included studies examined several cues in online review content which focus mainly on the information that is available in the content of online reviews (e.g., information quality, review sidedness, consistency, valence diagnosticity, objectivity, length, completeness, and level of detail in a review). In addition, other aspects of online reviews' content, such as QGAM and typographical and spelling errors, have also been investigated regarding their effect on consumers' perceptions. For instance, as shown in Table 2.9, many studies have demonstrated that information quality has a significant and positive impact on factors such as eWOM credibility (Cheung *et al.*, 2009), decision trust (Racherla *et al.*, 2012), reviewer evaluation (Lee and Shin, 2014), review credibility (Luo *et al.*, 2015), and online review website trust (Fileri *et al.*, 2015). Ketron (2017) showed that QGAM in online reviews has a significant and positive effect on perceived reviewer credibility.

Second, regarding the factors related to reviewers' profile cues, reviewers' profiles provide salient cues that may be used as indicators which influence consumers' perceived credibility and trustworthiness. The information in the reviewer's profile can be categorised into two types: system-generated and self-generated (Shan, 2016).

System-generated information refers to information that a system or website chooses to show in a reviewer's profile (e.g., reputation, number of submissions, expertise level). Cues presented by the system are usually based on the reviewer's previous behaviour on an online review website. An instance of this is the "top reviewer", which is automatically generated by the system on a review website and is beyond the control of a reviewer (Shan, 2016). In addition, self-generated information is a brief introduction that reviewers create themselves; this may include their personal information, such as their name, gender, picture, interests, and other details (Shan, 2016).

As shown in Table 2.7, the included studies investigated the influence of system-generated and self-generated cues on consumers' perceived credibility and trustworthiness (e.g., reviewer's identity disclosure, reputation, number of submissions, and destination experts). For instance, as shown in Table 2.9, Shan (2016) showed that reputation cues have a significant main effect on perceived reviewer credibility. Munzel (2016) showed that reviewer's identity disclosure has a significant and positive main effect on the perceived trustworthiness of a reviewer.

Third, regarding the factors related to online review websites, even though the most visible source of information in an online review is the reviewer, the website that hosts the online review is considered as another source of information (e.g., Lee and Shin, 2014). Online review websites can be categorised into three types: (1) independent consumer review

websites (e.g., TripAdvisor); (2) third-party e-commerce websites (e.g., Booking.com); and (3) hotel websites (e.g., ihg.com) (Filieri, 2016). A few studies in the systematic review examined the influence of online review websites' cues on consumers' perceived credibility, trustworthiness, or deception, as shown in Table 2.9. For instance, Huang *et al.* (2018) examined a cue related to review font; the findings showed that a review that was easier to read was thought of as more credible. Filieri *et al.* (2015) examined the effect of website quality on consumers' perceptions of trust towards CGM and found that it positively affected consumers' perceived trust towards an online review website.

Fourth, online reviews can provide easy access to information about goods and services. However, the impact of these reviews and/or cues on consumers' perceived credibility and trustworthiness may vary depending on the characteristics of the consumers (i.e., receivers). As shown in Table 2.7, the included articles examined many factors related to consumers' characteristics (e.g., involvement, confirmation of prior belief, satisfaction with previous experiences, consumer experience, openness, and online review scepticism). As shown in Table 2.9, for instance, Reimer and Benkenstein (2016) showed that online review scepticism – which reflects prior persuasion knowledge – plays a moderation role and found that when online review scepticism is higher, it significantly reduces the positive impact of information quality on perceived review trustworthiness.

To conclude, the studies included in the systematic review have identified and clarified the role played by factors related to review contents' cues, reviewers' profile cues, online review websites, and consumers' characteristics in influencing consumers' perceived credibility and trustworthiness. However, and as it was discussed previously, deceptiveness, credibility, and trustworthiness are separate, although closely associated, constructs. Therefore, a more

fundamental question is how factors related to reviews' content cues, reviewers' profile cues, online review websites, and consumers' characteristics either independently or interactively might influence consumers' perceived deception. The following parts move on to present the results from the systematic review regarding how perceived credibility and trustworthiness influence consumers' responses.

### **2.6.3 The effect of consumers' perceived credibility and trustworthiness on their responses**

As was pointed out in the previous sections (section 2.6.1 and 2.6.2) and shown in Table 2.9 (factors considered and constructs associated with responses), the included studies attempted to examine the effect of factors related to reviews' content cues, reviewers' profile cues, online review websites, and/or consumers' characteristics in many areas including perceived review credibility (i.e., eWOM credibility, information credibility) (Cheung *et al.*, 2009; Cheung *et al.*, 2012; Kusumasondjaja *et al.*, 2012; Lee and Koo, 2012; Qiu *et al.*, 2012; Jiménez and Mendoza, 2013; Luo *et al.*, 2013; Xu, 2014; Luo *et al.*, 2015; Nhon and Khuong, 2015; Huang *et al.*, 2018), perceived review trustworthiness (i.e., trust in online information, decision trust) (Pan and Chiou, 2011; Racherla *et al.*, 2012; Filieri, 2016; Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016; Ahmad and Sun, 2018), perceived reviewer credibility (i.e., source credibility, reviewer evaluation) (Xie *et al.*, 2011; Luo *et al.*, 2013; Lee and Shin, 2014; Shan, 2016; Cox *et al.*, 2017; Ketron, 2017), perceived reviewer trustworthiness (Xu, 2014; Munzel, 2016; Dong *et al.*, 2019), and perceived online review website trust (Filieri *et al.*, 2015). However, there is a notable gap warranting further investigation regarding how online review factors might affect consumers' perceived deception.

In the context of how consumers' perceived credibility and trustworthiness affect their responses, several studies in the systematic review have shown that it plays a role in

influencing their responses, such as their adoption of reviews (i.e., recommendation adoption – the extent to which a consumer accepts and utilises the information presented in an online review or recommendation when making a purchase decision) (Cheung *et al.*, 2009; Lee and Koo, 2012; Luo *et al.*, 2013; Filieri *et al.*, 2015), booking intention (i.e., purchase intention, travel decision-making – consumers’ willingness to book a hotel room) (Xie *et al.*, 2011; Jiménez and Mendoza, 2013; Munzel, 2016; Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016; Ketron, 2017), attitudes towards a product (an individual’s overall evaluation of an object, issue, or person) (Pan and Chiou, 2011), positive WOM (the extent to which consumers believe that “they will be to tell their friends and acquaintances where the advice came from”) (Filieri *et al.*, 2015, p.178), nWOM (“consumers’ responses to dissatisfaction in the form of negative opinions over online consumer forums”) (Ahmad and Sun, 2018, p.81), trust in hotels (positive expectations of tourism products or services, without having prior experience of the two) (Nhon and Khuong, 2015), trust in reviews (“the willingness of online consumers to believe the written commentaries of reviewers and to rely on them with the expectation that the reviewers are trustworthy”) (Dong *et al.*, 2019, p.544), avoidance behaviour (“an intentional withdrawal from doing business with the service provider in question”) (Munzel, 2016, p.99), and psychological discomfort (“a negative, internally attributed state arising from a mismatch between expectations of a product and its subsequent performance”) (Ahmad and Sun, 2018, p.81).

Several studies have shown how consumers’ perceptions of online reviews can affect their responses. On the other hand, reviews perceived as less credible or even untrustworthy are discounted by consumers, leading them to not consider these reviews in their decision-making (e.g., Cheung *et al.*, 2009; Filieri, 2016). Munzel (2016) showed that the perceived



trustworthiness of a reviewer decreases with a reduction in the reviewer's identity disclosure, which in turn significantly affects the consumer's intention to avoid dealing with the service provider. Reimer and Benkenstein (2016) demonstrated that when a review is perceived as untrustworthy, positive reviews decrease, while negative reviews increase purchase intention as a result of reactant behaviour.

However, it is to be expected that perceived deception (regardless of whether a review is deceptive or not) has a negative effect on consumers' responses. In the retail industry, the two parties are identified: a retailer and a consumer. Consumers' perceptions of a retailer's deceptive practices might result in negative outcomes such as consumer complaints, dissatisfaction, switching behaviour, NWOM, and distrust (e.g., Román, 2010). Therefore, despite the numbers of research investigating the impact of factors available on online review websites on consumers' responses regarding their influence on consumers' perceived credibility and trustworthiness, there remains a notable gap in the literature regarding the role of online review factors on consumers' responses through perceived deception. Also, understanding how the characteristics of consumers might play a moderation role in this relationship between online review factors and perceived deception is also crucial.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

In brief, this chapter has described how a systematic review of existing literature on online review credibility, trustworthiness, and deception has been conducted. Based on a review of 24 journal articles, there is scant research that focuses on deceptive reviews at the consumer level. It was demonstrated that the included articles examine the impact of factors related to reviews' content cues, reviewers' profile cues, online review websites, and/or consumers' characteristics on consumers' perceptions. This thesis has also clarified that deception,

credibility, and trustworthiness are separate, although closely associated, constructs. Therefore, it has been identified two general areas that need further investigation: (1) how factors related to reviews' content cues, reviewers' profile cues, online review websites, and/or consumers' characteristics affect consumers' perceived deception, and (2) how perceived deception influences consumers' responses. In the chapter that follows, it will be discussed the theoretical background and research hypotheses for the current research.

## **Chapter 3 : Theoretical Background and Research Hypotheses**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In Chapter 2, a systematic review of existing literature on deceptive reviews and online reviews was presented, and the research gaps were highlighted. This chapter presents the theoretical background and research hypotheses for this thesis. For this purpose, this chapter is divided into five sections to provide better understanding. The first section introduces perceived deception is considered a growing problem on online review contents. The second section introduces social information processing theory (SIPT) and persuasion knowledge model (PKM) as the theoretical underpinnings of this research. SIPT and PKM provide a general set idea of how consumers' perceptions might be impacted by online reviews and in turn affect consumers' responses. The third section presents the research hypotheses, while the fourth section shows the conceptual framework. Finally, the last section concludes the chapter.

### **3.2 Deceptive Reviews**

This section introduces deceptive reviews as a phenomenon that exists on online review websites. To provide a better understanding, it is organised into four subsections: (1) defining deceptive reviews; (2) the existence of deceptive reviews on online review websites; and (3) the effect of perceived deception.

#### **3.2.1 Defining deceptive reviews**

As discussed early in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, the focus of this thesis is not focus on identifying deceptive reviews. Many online review websites, as discussed by Walther *et al.* (2023), have developed their own methods to detect deceptive reviews. However, services

dedicated to reviewing and filtering reviews, such as fakespot.com, acknowledge the difficulty in definitively confirming the authenticity of a review. Moreover, as noted earlier in chapter 1, in 2022, TripAdvisor identified 28% of the total 1.3 million deceptive reviews only after they were posted on the website (TripAdvisor, 2023).

Recognising the role of perception in shaping consumer responses (e.g., Purnawirawan *et al.*, 2012; Jiménez and Mendoza, 2013; Filieri *et al.*, 2018b), this thesis focuses on understanding the antecedents and consequences of perceived deception (regardless of whether a review is deceptive or not) in online review websites. Grazioli (2004) demonstrated that the same message can be perceived as deceptive or not by different consumers due to their diverse backgrounds and situational contexts (i.e., available information cues). This exploration is crucial. It contributes not only to an understanding of what leads consumers to perceived deception and how such perceptions might influence consumer responses, but also carries broader implications for online review websites and hotels. Additionally, it emphasises the importance for online review websites and hotels to ensure that genuine reviews are not mistakenly perceived to be deceptive. Therefore, this study aims to understand what leads consumers to perceive deception in online reviews and how these perceptions affect consumer responses.

For the purpose to gain a better understanding of perceived deception in online reviews, it is fundamental to first comprehend the concept of deceptive reviews. This section aims to provide a thorough knowledge of deceptive reviews, setting the stage for an exploration of how perceived deception operates in the subsequent discussion. To conceptually understand deceptive reviews, the characteristics of deceptive reviews are examined (Hu *et al.*, 2011a, 2011b; Ott *et al.*, 2011; Xiao and Benbasat, 2011; Savage *et al.*, 2015; Zhang *et al.*, 2016;

Kumar *et al.*, 2018). Table 3.1 shows how previous research on online reviews has defined deceptive reviews. Although different terminologies have been used –including deceptive opinion, review management, review fraud, and fake review – the definitions share similar elements.

Table 3-1 Terminology used for deceptive reviews plus elements of deceptive reviews

Terminology	Definition	Elements	Reference
Deceptive opinion, spam	“Fictitious opinions that have been deliberately written to sound authentic.”	- Manipulation of information. - Deliberate act. - Goal-oriented.	Ott <i>et al.</i> (2011, p. 309)
Review management	“Vendors, publishers, or writers consistently monitoring online consumer reviews, posting non-authentic messages to message boards, or writing inflated online reviews on behalf of customers when needing to boost their product sales in the online review context.”	- Manipulation of information. - Deliberate act. - Goal-oriented.	Hu <i>et al.</i> (2011a, p. 627)
Review fraud	“Occurs when online vendors, publishers, or authors write “consumer” reviews by posing as real customers.”	- Manipulation of information. - Deliberate act. - Goal-oriented.	Hu <i>et al.</i> (2011b, p. 614)
Opinion, spam	“Consists of fake reviews published by individuals with vested interests.”	- Manipulation of information. - Deliberate act. - Goal-oriented.	Savage <i>et al.</i> (2015, p. 8650)
Fake review	“Deceptive reviews written to mislead consumers in their purchase decision-making, often by reviewers with little or no experience of the products or services being reviewed.”	- Manipulation of information. - Deliberate act. - Goal-oriented.	Zhang <i>et al.</i> (2016, p. 457)
Fraudulent review manipulation	“Firms consistently manipulating online consumer reviews to either promote their products or denounce competitors’ products.”	- Manipulation of information. - Deliberate act. - Goal-oriented.	Kumar <i>et al.</i> (2018)

As pointed out early in chapter 1, consumers perceive the information’s source in an online review as a former consumer who has actual experience of a product or service being reviewed. Furthermore, they perceive reviews’ content to be a reflection of consumers’ evaluation of a product or service; this might be positive, neutral, or negative (Filiari *et al.*, 2018a). However, as Table 3.1 shows, there are three elements that can be distinguished in deceptive reviews, which are deliberate act, manipulation of information, and being goal-oriented (Xiao and Benbasat, 2011).

First, a deceptive review is considered as an intentional or deliberate act. Deceivers intentionally pose as former consumers and post reviews (Kumar *et al.*, 2018). Consumers might not perceive the source of information in online reviews as existing consumers who have actual experience of a product or service being reviewed; rather, they might perceive the source of information as a deceiver who is intentionally posing as a former consumer (Masip *et al.*, 2004; Xiao and Benbasat, 2011).

Second, deceptive reviews are the result of the manipulation of reviews of a product or service being reviewed (Xiao and Benbasat, 2011; Munzel, 2016). Accordingly, it is not necessarily the case that consumers perceive reviews' contents as an actual reflection of consumers' experiences (Park *et al.*, 2007; Kusumasondjaja *et al.*, 2012; Filieri *et al.*, 2018a). Instead, consumers might perceive the information's source in an online review as a deceiver who is intentionally posing as a former consumer to distort the review's content (Hu *et al.*, 2011a; Kumar *et al.*, 2018).

Third, deceptive reviews are goal-oriented to mislead consumers in their purchase decisions (Xiao and Benbasat, 2011; Munzel, 2016; Zhang *et al.*, 2016). The goal-oriented element can occur in a situation where consumers perceive that deceivers are trying to manipulate reviews to either promote the product or service being reviewed or to denounce competitors' products and services (Kumar *et al.*, 2018). Unfortunately, not all online reviews reflect actual consumers' experiences with a product or service being reviewed (Park *et al.*, 2007; Kusumasondjaja *et al.*, 2012). Deceivers might unethically manipulate online reviews' content in order to impact consumers' booking decisions either by promoting their services or attacking competitors' services.

In accordance with these elements, deceptive reviews are defined as reviews that have been presented as a prior consumer's evaluation with the intention of misleading other consumers in their booking decisions on online review websites (e.g., TripAdvisor, Google review). As discussed previously, the focus of this thesis is on understanding the extent to which consumers perceive that a review is deceptive. Therefore, the term "perceived deception" is used here to refer to the extent to which a consumer perceives a review that they have read intends to mislead them. The next part focuses on discussing the presence of deceptive reviews in online review content.

### **3.2.2 The presence of deceptive reviews on online review websites**

The existence of deceptive reviews is not related to a specific type of product and service or online review website; they exist on many online review websites and for several types of products and services (e.g., Yoo and Gretzel, 2009; Mayzlin *et al.*, 2014; Cannon *et al.*, 2019; Coffey, 2019). In 2022, Yelp, an online review website, removed over 700,000 reviews that violated its policies, some of which were abusive or deceptive (Cramer, 2023). According to TripAdvisor's transparency report from 2023, in 2022, a total of 1.3 million positive and negative deceptive reviews were identified and removed, with 72% of them being intercepted before they could be posted. Furthermore, deceptive reviews constituted 4.37% of all submissions, an increase from 3.6% in 2020 and 2.4% in 2018 (TripAdvisor, 2021, 2023).

In practice, deceptive reviews may take many forms and come from several deceiving reviewers (e.g., TripAdvisor, 2023). Previous research has illustrated that deceivers might post deceptive reviews by using many tactics depending on when reviews are posted, including: (1) adding positive reviews to promote their products and services; (2) deleting or hiding negative online reviews about their products and services; (3) adding negative reviews to

unfairly evaluate competitors' products and services; and (4) offering an incentive (e.g., money, discounts) to encourage favourable reviews (e.g., Dabholkar, 2006; Xiao and Benbasat, 2011; Filieri, 2016; Luca and Zervas, 2016; Zhuang *et al.*, 2018).

The focus of this thesis is the tourism industry. According to the UK Competition and Markets Authority (2015), the estimated amount that UK consumers spend per year after reading online reviews is around £23 billion. The travel and hotel sector has the most significant influence, comprising £14.38 billion of consumer spending on travel and hotels compared to spending in other sectors.

In addition, several studies of online reviews have illustrated that consumers might rely on online reviews to plan their holiday (e.g., Dickinger, 2011; Sparks *et al.*, 2013; Filieri and McLeay, 2014; Filieri *et al.*, 2020). Despite consumers' reliance on online review websites, they might face a challenge due to the existence of deceptive reviews. Online review websites that specialise in reviews related to tourism products (e.g., TripAdvisor.com) have been criticised in academic research and the mass media due to the existence of deceptive reviews (Ott *et al.*, 2012; Mayzlin *et al.*, 2014; Horton, 2017). Furthermore, many online review websites acknowledge the existence of deceptive reviews on their websites (e.g., TripAdvisor, 2021, 2023). Moreover, the widespread issue of deceptive review has been highlighted by mass media and shedding light on some hospitality businesses engaging in deceptive practices (e.g., Gray, 2022; Cramer, 2023).

The rise in deceptive reviews, highlighted by mass media (e.g., Gray, 2022; Cramer, 2023) and reports from online review websites (e.g., TripAdvisor, 2023), adds another layer of complexity to the issue of perceived deception. The exposure of such as individuals and hospitality businesses engaging in unethical and illegal activities related to posting deceptive



reviews not only enhances consumer awareness (Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016). They also might influence consumers' perceived deception (regardless of whether a review is deceptive or not). The way these news and reports might affect consumer perception which might lead to genuine reviews being mistakenly perceived as deceptive. Understanding what leads to consumers' perceived deception is essential. It enables online review websites to maintain their reliability (Filiari *et al.*, 2018b; He *et al.*, 2022). This understanding is also crucial in comprehending the negative consequences of perceived deception, particularly for hotels who might suffer from their reviews being perceived as deception. It encourages hotels to actively engage in developing tools to ensure that genuine reviews (non-deceptive reviews) are not mistakenly perceived to be deceptive. A more detailed account of the effect of perceived deception is given in the following section.

### **3.2.3 The effect of perceived deception**

Perceived deception in online review websites has multiple effects on consumers, host websites, and hotels. First, Grazioli (2004) demonstrated that the same message can be perceived as deceptive or not by different consumers due to their diverse backgrounds and situational contexts (i.e., available information cues). While it is true that actual deceptive reviews can potentially lead consumers to make suboptimal or incorrect decisions (Mayzlin *et al.*, 2014; Luca and Zervas, 2016), the primary concern of this thesis is the effect of perceived deception (regardless of whether a review is deceive or not). Any suboptimal decisions based on relying on an online review would likely result from failing to trust a deceptive review mistakenly seen as a genuine review. This may lead to a change in consumers' beliefs about online reviews being a valuable source of information. Therefore, online reviews may increase uncertainty, rather than facilitating consumers' decision-making

by reducing uncertainty regarding service quality (Hu *et al.*, 2011a). It is crucial to understand what lead consumers to perceived deception in online review and in turn how such perception influence consumers' responses.

Second, the existence of deceptive reviews is a serious threat to trust in online review websites. Filieri *et al.* (2015) argued that if online reviews appear to be deceptive, they will be more likely to generate disappointment. This kind of negative experience provides consumers with evidence that the website is not capable of preventing the publication of deceptive reviews, creating a lack of trust in its content. Darke and Ritchie (2007) pointed out that when the credibility of an online review website is under suspicion, this may impact consumer judgement and behaviour towards the online review website. In addition, the presence of deceptive reviews could destroy the value of information and the online review website itself (Kumar *et al.*, 2018; Baker and Kim, 2019), as consumers are less likely to pay attention to media they perceive as non-credible (Meltzer, 2003). This thesis emphasises that the challenges faced by online review websites extend beyond the existence of actual deceptive reviews. There is another equal significant problem which is related to the issue of perceived deception (regardless of whether a review is deceptive or not). Therefore, understanding the antecedents of perceived deception in online reviews is crucial.

Third, previous research has indicated that consumer perception of deceptive practices by a retailer might result in negative outcomes such as consumer complaints, dissatisfaction, switching behaviour, NWOM, and distrust (e.g., Román, 2010). As discussed in Chapter 1, section 1.2, it is important to note that not all deceptive reviews are published by hotels to influence consumers' booking decisions. Some individuals deliberately submit deceptive reviews with intent to impact a hotel's ranking, without any influence from the hotel itself

(TripAdvisor, 2023). Furthermore, mass media and report from online review website show that some hospitality businesses, unfortunately, have discovered an unethical way to boost their ratings on online review websites by posting deceptive reviews (e.g., Cramer, 2023; TripAdvisor, 2023). The exposure of hospitality businesses engaging in activities related to posting deceptive reviews not only enhances consumer awareness (Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016) but also might influence consumers' perceived deception (regardless of whether a review is deceptive or not) and in turn affect consumers' responses towards a hotel they might perceive as being a deceiver. To mitigate the negative consequences of perceived deception, hotels can actively participate in the development of methods to ensure that genuine reviews are not mistakenly perceived to be deceptive.

To sum up, consumers, online review websites, and hotels might all be affected in different ways by perceived deception (regardless of whether it is deceptive or not). This thesis seeks to investigate the reviewer profile cues (i.e., reviewer's identity disclosure, reviewer's expertise) that contribute to perceived deception and in turn their effects on consumers' responses (i.e., booking intention, NWOM, negative emotion, and hotel's trustworthiness). It also takes into consideration the role of consumers' persuasion knowledge (i.e., online review scepticism) in the relationship between reviewers' profile cues and perceived deception. The next section moves on to introduce social information processing theory (SIPT) and persuasion knowledge model (PKM) as theoretical underpinnings of this thesis.

### **3.3 Theoretical Framework**

After introducing perception of deception as a problem in the online review context, this section introduces social information processing theory (SIPT) and persuasion knowledge model (PKM) as theoretical underpinnings of this thesis. SIPT and PKM provide a general set

idea of how consumers' perceived deception might be impacted by cues related to reviewers' profiles, which in turn affect consumers' responses.

### **3.3.1 Social information processing theory (SIPT)**

In this thesis, the investigation of how cues related to reviewers' profiles might influence consumers' perceived deception draws upon SIPT (Walther, 1992). The development of SIPT drew upon Salancik and Pfeffer's (1978) idea, which explored how individuals use social information to form job attitudes. The central idea is that individuals develop their job attitudes based on social information that is available to them in their work context. The theory suggests that individuals engage in a continuous process of obtaining, interpreting, and using social information to understand their work environment and develop job attitudes. Social information refers to verbal and nonverbal cues present in interactions at work such as feedback, rewards, etc. The theory suggests that the same cues might be interpreted differentially by different individuals based on their different experiences.

SIPT is a communication theory which explains how individuals interpret the social information in online interactions. The theory was developed by Walther (1992) and focuses on Computer-mediated communication (CMC) such as email, online reviews, etc. The most explanation of the difference between CMC and face-to-face (FtF) communication is that CMC eliminates the nonverbal cues (e.g., tone of voice and facial expressions) that are available in the FtF context. Nonverbal cues can provide rich relational information which influences individuals' perceptions. However, the theory posits that even though there is a lack of nonverbal cues in CMC, individuals are still capable of developing impressions about others in CMC. Individuals can obtain more social information about others (via whatever information is available about them such as content, style, etc.). In addition, as online

interactions occur over an extended period, they might allow individuals to obtain more social information about others in CMC (Walther, 1992).

SIPT is relevant to studies related to online reviews. It offers insights into how consumers interpret social information available in CMC settings such as online reviews and how this, in turn, influences consumers' perceptions. In the online review context, consumers may have insufficient information about reviewers since they do not know their intentions or motivations for posting a review. As a result of either perceived similarities with the reviewer or the perceived expertise of the reviewer, consumers may have intrinsic beliefs in the value of online reviews offered by other reviewers (Park and Nicolau, 2015). Many online review websites support and provide several forms of social information about reviewers which might influence consumers' perceptions. There are several cues in online reviews related to review content (e.g., information quality) (e.g., Cheung *et al.*, 2009; Luo *et al.*, 2015; Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016) and reviewers' profile information (e.g., Xu, 2014; Shan, 2016); consumers utilise this social information and interpret it, which in turn influences their perceptions.

Many online review studies have drawn upon SIPT to investigate how consumers build their impressions about others without past interactions and nonverbal cues. For instance, Xu's (2014) study investigated how personal profile cues such as reputation and profile pictures might influence consumers' impressions of a reviewer and in turn influence their perceptions of review credibility. Shan's (2016) study explored how perceived similarity and expertise might influence consumers' evaluations of a reviewer's expertise and trustworthiness.

This thesis draws upon SIPT and posits that consumers possess limited familiarity with reviewers prior to determining whether to rely on their reviews. Rather than relying on

previous interactions and/or examining nonverbal cues, which are not available on many online review websites, many observable cues that are available in an online reviewer's profile might influence consumers' perceived deception. Reviewers' profiles on online review websites are a common source of information about reviewers. This thesis focuses on two cues that might influence consumers to perceive deception, which are: (1) reviewer's identity disclosure ("a social identity that an individual establishes in online communities and/or websites" (Liu and Park, 2015 p. 142)) (e.g., real name, posting geographic location) and reviewer's expertise (the extent to which the reviewer is perceived as having knowledge, skills, and/or expertise in a specific domain) (Fileri *et al.*, 2018b) (e.g., number of reviews written). As this study aims to explore how cues related to a reviewer's profile might influence consumers' perceived deception, utilising SIPT will assist in achieving the research objectives.

### **3.3.2 Persuasion knowledge model (PKM)**

PKM is a theoretical framework that draws on research on persuasion schemata (Rule *et al.*, 1985) in the fields of consumer psychology and advertising. Friestad and Wright (1994) proposed PKM, which explains how consumers develop their awareness and understanding of the persuasive communication techniques (e.g., advertisements) that are used by marketers. According to PKM, one of the essential tasks that a consumer undertakes when presented with a persuasion message (e.g., advertisement) is interpreting and dealing with it. The theory posits that every consumer has a basic level of scepticism towards a persuasion message. As time passes, consumers improve their personal knowledge about the methods utilised in these attempts to persuade. Developing consumer knowledge assists consumers in identifying how, when, and why such companies try to influence them. At the same time, it

assists consumers in adapting a way to respond to these persuasion attempts (Friestad and Wright, 1994).

PKM suggests that individuals' persuasion knowledge is contingent upon their developmental experiences and exposure to persuasive communication throughout their lives. Individuals have access to three categories of knowledge: (1) topic knowledge, which consists of beliefs about the topic of the message (e.g., a product, a service); (2) persuasion knowledge; and (3) agent knowledge, which consists of beliefs about the traits, competencies, and goals of the persuasion agent (e.g., an advertiser, a salesperson). In addition, there are many ways that individuals can learn about persuasion: from social interactions with people around them (e.g., family, friends); from conversations about people's feelings, thoughts, and behaviours; from observing marketers and/or advertising agents; and from discussions and analyses related to advertising and marketing strategies in news media. As a result of this learning, the impact of specific actions taken by persuasion agents on individuals' attitudes and behaviours will evolve over time. This is because individuals' persuasion knowledge influences how they respond as targets of persuasion (Friestad and Wright, 1994).

PKM is relevant to studies related to deceptive reviews. It can help us to understand the differences in how individuals perceive and interpret persuasion attempts (i.e., online reviews). It provides insights into how individuals cope with persuasion attempts by using their persuasion knowledge (Friestad and Wright, 1994). It is expected that persuasion knowledge is activated in many consumers; this is because many consumers are aware of the existence of deceptive reviews. Mass media around the world continues to publish many stories related to the existence of deceptive reviews on many online review websites (e.g., Gray, 2022). In addition, Reimer and Benkenstein's (2016) study drew upon PKM to examine

the moderation role of review trustworthiness on the relationship between the valence of review and intention to purchase. It considered the effect of argumentation of the review and online review scepticism on trustworthiness of the review as a result of persuasion knowledge.

This thesis draws on PKM and suggests that online review scepticism – the general tendency to disbelieve online reviews (Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016) as a result of prior persuasion knowledge – moderates the relationship between a reviewer's identity disclosure and a reviewer's expertise on perceived deception. As one of the research objectives is to examine how online review scepticism moderates the relationship between a reviewer's identity disclosure and a reviewer's expertise on perceived deception, applying PKM will assist in examining differences between consumers regarding how they interpret reviewers' profile information and perceived deception.

In addition, another one of this study's research objectives is to assess the role that perceived deception plays in the relationship between reviewers' profile cues (reviewer's identity disclosure and reviewer's expertise) and consumers' responses. In line with PKM, this study posits that developing persuasion knowledge (i.e., online review scepticism) can assist consumers in identifying how, when, and why hotels might try to influence them through online review content, while at the same time assisting consumers in finding a way to respond to these persuasion attempts. Therefore, this research assesses the role that perceived deception plays in the relationship between reviewers' profile cues (reviewer's identity disclosure and reviewer's expertise) and consumers' responses including booking intention (consumers' willingness to book a hotel room) (Sparks and Browning, 2011), NWOM (consumers' belief that they will tell others about their dissatisfaction with a target object)



(Ingram *et al.*, 2005), emotion (positive or negative affective reactions to perception situations) (Verhoef, 2005), and trust (“one party’s confidence in an exchange partner’s reliability and integrity” ((Morgan and Hunt, 1994, p. 23)). Indeed, the effect of perceived deception might not be limited to these consequences. This study uses these constructs to show the potential role played by perceived deception in the relationship between reviewers’ profile cues and consumers’ responses.

In brief, applying both SIPT and PKM will assist in achieving research objectives. SIPT provides insight how individuals interpret the social information in a reviewer’s profile (i.e., a reviewer’s identity disclosure and expertise cues) and in turn might influence consumers’ perceived deception. While PKM provides insights into how consumers with different characteristics interpret cues in a reviewer’s profile and how they respond to such interpretations. Therefore, online review scepticism is considered in this thesis to understand consumers’ differences in perceiving and interpreting persuasion attempts (i.e., online reviews). In addition, PKM provides insight into how consumers cope with persuasion attempts by using their persuasion knowledge. It will aid in assessing the role played by perceived deception in the relationship between reviewers’ profile cues and consumers’ responses (i.e., booking intention, NWOM, negative emotion, and hotel’s trustworthiness). The effect of perceived deception might not be limited to these consequences. This thesis uses them to show the potential role played by perceived deception in the relationship between reviewers’ profile cues and consumers’ responses. The section that follows shows the research hypotheses.

### **3.4 Research Hypotheses**

This section discusses the research hypotheses. To provide a better understanding, it is organised into five subsections, which are: (1) reviewer's identity disclosure; (2) reviewer's expertise; (3) the moderating role of online review scepticism; (4) the mediating effect of perceived deception; and, finally, (5) the moderated mediation effect.

#### **3.4.1 Reviewer's identity disclosure**

Online review websites provide various options for reviewers to disclose or hide their identity information, including details such as their real name, age, and location. It is crucial to understand how these choices, like the reviewer's identity disclosure or remaining entirely anonymous, impact consumers' perceptions of deception. A reviewer's identity is defined as "a social identity that an individual establishes in online communities and/or websites" (Liu and Park, 2015, p. 142). Reviewer's identity disclosure is considered a way of making it easy for consumers to find reviewers' personal profile information such as their real name, age, and/or location. Consumers might utilise the reviewer's identity disclosure as one way of increasing their awareness of the reviewer.

Generally, when it comes to online interaction, the identity of the information's source plays an important role in reducing the uncertainty that the other party in the interaction feels. This uncertainty results from the lack of nonverbal cues (e.g., tone of voice and facial expression (Walther and Tidwell, 1995)) that online users are exposed to when they search for information (Tidwell and Walther, 2002; Filieri *et al.*, 2019).

Given the anonymous nature of online reviews and the existence of deceptive reviews, it might become difficult for consumers to assess the accuracy of online reviews and the motivations of reviewers to post reviews. Prior studies of online reviews have highlighted the

significance of a reviewer's identity disclosure, arguing that it improves the efficiency of information acquisition (Racherla and Friske, 2012). When consumers seek information, their perceptions of reviewers are influenced by whatever information about them is available (Park and Nicolau, 2015). A reviewer's identity disclosure can assist consumers in obtaining details regarding the reviewer's identity and intentions, as reviewers and consumers in an online review are total strangers to one another (Forman *et al.*, 2008; Mayzlin *et al.*, 2014).

Regarding studies of reviewers' identity disclosure, Table 3.2 provides a summary of findings in the existing literature that examines the effect of a reviewer's identity disclosure. To facilitate a clearer understanding of the previous studies, they are discussed under three main headings: the focus of the studies, how the identity of reviewers has been examined, and the methods utilised.

First, recognising the importance of reviewers' identity disclosure, previous scholars of online reviews have mainly investigated the effect of reviewers' identity disclosure on certain facets, namely perceived helpfulness (Forman *et al.*, 2008; Baek *et al.*, 2012; Karimi and Wang, 2017; Filieri *et al.*, 2019), credibility (Xie *et al.*, 2011; Kusumasondjaja *et al.*, 2012; Nhon and Khuong, 2015), usefulness (Racherla and Friske, 2012; Liu and Park, 2015; Park and Nicolau, 2015; Chung *et al.*, 2018), social presence (Xu, 2014), trust towards a product (Nhon and Khuong, 2015), trust in travel services (Kusumasondjaja *et al.*, 2012), online review trust (Racherla *et al.*, 2012), trustworthiness of a reviewer (Munzel, 2016), booking intention (Xie *et al.*, 2011; Munzel, 2016; Shan, 2016; Chan *et al.*, 2017), product attitude (Shin *et al.*, 2017), and sales (Forman *et al.*, 2008).

Although extensive research has been carried out on reviewers' identity disclosure, no single study exists which examines how reviewers' identity disclosure affects consumers' perceived

deception. Deceptiveness, credibility, and trustworthiness are separate, although closely associated, constructs. Perceived deception means that consumers perceive a review intends to mislead them. Consumers perceive a reviewer as being a deceiver if they intentionally pose as a former consumer and manipulate a review to mislead others in their purchase decisions (Kumar *et al.*, 2018). In contrast, a credible review is a review that consumers perceive as trustworthy, factual, and believable (Luo *et al.*, 2015). A trustworthy review is a review that is perceived to be the honest, sincere, truthful, and non-commercial opinion of a consumer who has experienced a product or a service (Filiari, 2016). Consumers perceive a reviewer as being an actual consumer who has experience with the product being reviewed. Even if a review is perceived as less credible and trustworthy, it is not necessarily perceived as a manipulation attempt. Rather, consumers might attribute these factors to a reviewer's cognitive limitations, such as their memory and linguistic skills (Masip *et al.*, 2004; Xiao and Benbasat, 2011).

The idea for this study came from the realisation that, despite the existing literature on identity disclosure, the relationship between a reviewer's identity disclosure and consumers' perceptions of deception remains inadequately explored. The exposure of such as individuals and hospitality businesses engaging in unethical and illegal activities related to posting deceptive reviews highlighted by mass media and online review websites (e.g., Coffey, 2019; Cannon *et al.*, 2019; Cramer, 2023; TripAdvisor, 2023), might increase consumer awareness (Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016). However, these news and reports might impact how consumers perceive deception. They might lead to genuine reviews being mistakenly perceived as deceptive. This thesis aims to address this gap by specifically examining how cues related to reviewers' identity influence consumers' perceived deception in the context

of online reviews. This unique focus contributes to the existing body of research, offering insights into an important yet understudied aspect of how consumers' perception of deceit are impacted. Understanding what leads to consumers' perceived deception is essential. It enables online review websites and hotels to ensure that genuine reviews are not mistakenly perceived to be deceptive, and thus, maintaining their reliability (Filieri *et al.*, 2018b; He *et al.*, 2022).

Second, the online review literature suggests that reviewers' identity disclosure might serve two main functions: (1) perceiving similarity between a consumer and reviewer ("the degree to which pairs of individuals who interact are similar with respect to certain attributes, such as beliefs, values, education, social status, etc." (Chan *et al.*, 2017, p. 58)), and (2) providing information about the reviewer's identity ("the online provision of precise information about message provider identity" (Filieri *et al.*, 2019, p. 337)). As shown in Table 3.2, studies that investigated the effect of reviewers' identity disclosure in terms of perceived similarity between a consumer and reviewer implemented an experiment between-subject design. They also manipulated reviewers' identity disclosure (demographic similarity with reviewer: high or low). These studies found that reviewers with high similarity have an effect on consumers' perceptions of reviewers being trustworthy (Shan, 2016), hotel booking intention (Chan *et al.*, 2017), and product attitude (Shin *et al.*, 2017).

In contrast, most of the studies that have investigated the effect of reviewers' identity disclosure looked at reviewers' identity disclosure as providing information about the reviewer's identity (e.g., Forman *et al.*, 2008; Baek *et al.*, 2012; Park and Nicolau, 2015; Karimi and Wang, 2017; Filieri *et al.*, 2019). These studies used the reviewer's real name, real photo, and the location that appeared next to the review content or on a reviewer's profile page.

These types of information were found to influence consumers' perception of reviews. This study utilises a reviewer's identity disclosure as function to provide information about the reviewer's identity.

Third, studies that looked at reviewers' identity disclosure from the perspective of providing information about the reviewer's identity can be categorised into two groups based on the type of data: secondary data (e.g., online reviews) collected from online review websites such as Amazon.com, Yelp.com, and TripAdvisor.com (e.g., Forman *et al.*, 2008; Racherla and Friske, 2012; Filieri *et al.*, 2019) and the use of experiments and surveys to collect the data (e.g., Xie *et al.*, 2011; Nhon and Khuong, 2015; Munzel, 2016).

Studies that used secondary data revealed mixed findings on the influence of reviewers' identity disclosure. For example, Forman *et al.* (2008) analysed reviews from Amazon.com and revealed that reviewers' identity disclosure (i.e., real name, geographic location, or both) was significantly and positively associated with both perceived helpfulness and sales. Similarly, Baek *et al.* (2012) showed that there was not a significant relationship between a reviewer's real name being disclosed and review helpfulness. The same applied in studies that analysed reviews from Yelp.com. Racherla and Friske (2012) found that the disclosure of a reviewer's photo has no significant effect on the perceived usefulness of reviews. Park and Nicolau (2015) considered reviewers' real names and photos and found that reviewers' identity disclosure has a significant effect on perceived usefulness only when reviewers' identities are disclosed through their real photos but not through their real names. In contrast, Liu and Park (2015) examined reviewers' identity disclosure (i.e., real names and photos or addresses) and found that only real names and photos have a significant effect on perceived usefulness. In terms of studies that analysed reviews from TripAdvisor.com, Chung

*et al.* (2018) found that reviewers' real names and photos have no significant impact on review usefulness, whereas Filieri *et al.* (2019) found that extremely negative ratings were more likely to be helpful when reviewers disclosed their identities (i.e., geographical origin). In all of these studies, the disclosure of the reviewer's identity was treated as a binary variable (i.e., 1 if reviewers disclosed information and 0 otherwise). This means that the disclosure of reviewers' real names, photos, or geographical origin was considered as a disclosure.

In studies that used experiments, these studies showed that the more information was disclosed about reviewers' identities, the more this influenced consumers' perceptions. For example, Xie *et al.* (2011) manipulated reviewers' identities into two levels (presence vs. absence) and found that the presence of reviewers' identities had a significant effect on perceived credibility. Similarly, Kusumasondjaja *et al.* (2012) showed a significant main effect of a reviewer's identity disclosure on perceived review credibility and initial trust in travel services: reviewers' identity disclosure led to higher credibility and initial trust in travel services than the undisclosed identity condition. Munzel (2016) manipulated reviewers' identity disclosure into three levels (high, moderate, low) and showed a significant main effect of identity disclosure on the perceived trustworthiness of a reviewer: the perceived trustworthiness of a reviewer increases with an increase in the amount of information about the reviewer.

Table 3-2 A summary of findings in the existing literature that examines the effect of reviewers' identity disclosure

Author(s) /year	Type of study	Variable	Construct associated with the response					Finding	
			Credibility	Trustworthiness	Usefulness	Booking intention	Product attitude		Social presence

Forman <i>et al.</i> (2008)	Secondary data (Amazon.com)	Reviewer's identity disclosure			√					Reviewers' disclosure of identity-descriptive information is significantly and positively associated with both perceived helpfulness, at the review level of analysis, and sales, at the product level of analysis.
Xie <i>et al.</i> (2011)	Experiment	Personal identifying information (PII)	√							The presence of PII has a significant effect on perceived credibility.
Baek <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Secondary data (Amazon.com)	Reviewer's real name exposure			√					The real-name factor does not affect review helpfulness.
Kusumasondjaja <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Experiment	Reviewer's identity disclosure	√	√						Participants exposed to the reviewer's identity disclosure condition perceive a review to be more credible and develop higher initial trust in travel services than the undisclosed identity condition.
Racherla and Friske (2012)	Secondary data (Yelp.com)	Reviewer's identity disclosure			√					The disclosure of the reviewer's identity has no significant effect on perceived usefulness.
Racherla <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Experiment	Perceived background similarity		√						Participants exposed to the high similarity condition have greater online review trust than those exposed to the low similarity condition.
Xu (2014)	Experiment	Profile picture	√	√				√		Profile picture has a significant influence on perceived social presence. Participants show more affective trust towards a reviewer with a profile picture. There is no main effect of profile picture on perceived review credibility.
Park and Nicolau (2015)	Secondary data (Yelp.com)	Reviewer's identity disclosure			√					Reviewer's identity disclosure (i.e., real photos) has a significant effect on perceived usefulness.
Liu and Park (2015)	Secondary data (Yelp.com)	Reviewer's identity disclosure			√					Reviewer's identity disclosure (i.e., real name and real photo) has a significant effect on perceived usefulness.
Nhon and Khuong (2015)	Questionnaires	Source identity	√	√						The effect of source identity on travel decision-making is not significant. The effect of source identity in perceiving information credibility and trust towards products is statistically positive and significant.
Munzel (2016)	Experiment	Disclosure of identity-descriptive information		√						There is a significant main effect of identity disclosure on the perceived trustworthiness of a review's source.
Shan (2016)	Experiment	Self-generated profile homophily		√						Reviewers with high similarity have greater trustworthiness than reviewers with low perceived similarity.
Chan <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Experiments	Demographic similarity				√				There is a significant interaction effect between valence and



									demographic similarity on booking intention.
Karimi and Wang (2017)	Secondary data (Google Play and mobile gaming applications)	Reviewer profile image			√				The results suggest that reviewer profile image, but not image type, is an important factor determining review helpfulness.
Shin <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Experiment	Perceived background similarity					√		There is a significant interaction effect between review quality and reviewer similarity on product attitudes.
Chung <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Secondary data (TripAdvisor)	Reviewer's identity			√				The results show that a reviewer's identity (i.e., real name and photo) is not a significant antecedent of review usefulness.
Filieri <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Secondary data (TripAdvisor)	Reviewer's identity disclosure			√				Extremely negative ratings are more likely to be helpful when the reviewer discloses their identity (i.e., geographical origin).

Drawing upon SIPT, this thesis suggests that reviewers' identity disclosure is made up of important cues for consumers that might be utilised to build an impression about others without past interaction and nonverbal cues (Walther, 1992). This thesis considers reviewers' identity disclosure as providing information about the reviewer's identity to examine how a reviewer's identity disclosure influences consumers' perceived deception.

On many online review websites, a reviewer's identity is categorised as self-generated information (Xie *et al.*, 2011). This means that reviewers might disclose truthful information, false information, or remain anonymous. In practice, many online review websites allow reviewers to post reviews without any confirmation process (e.g., proof of staying in the hotel). They require from reviewers a valid email address to post reviews. In addition, reviews are usually posted by reviewers who have neither a previous relationship nor expectations of any relationship in the future with consumers (Xie *et al.*, 2011; Xu, 2014; Shan, 2016). These have provided deceivers with an unethical way to post deceptive reviews to mislead consumers in their booking decisions. Since deceivers can maintain low identity disclosure on

online review websites, this thesis argues that the lower the amount of a reviewer's identity disclosure, the higher consumers' perceived deception. Therefore, it is proposed that:

H1: Perceived deception will be higher when the reviewer has low identity disclosure than when the reviewer has high identity disclosure.

### **3.4.2 Reviewers' expertise**

A reviewer's expertise is considered to play a role in impacting consumers' perceived deception. Bristol (1990, p. 73) defines expertise as:

“The extent to which the source is perceived as being capable of providing correct information, and expertise is expected to induce persuasion because receivers have little motivation to check the veracity of the source's assertions by retrieving and rehearsing their own thoughts”.

In the presence of many reviews on online review websites, consumers tend to trust reviewers with high expertise and knowledge about the subject being review, such as the quality and performance of a hotel (Racherla and Friske, 2012). When consumers perceive a reviewer as an expert, they believe the reviewer can offer valuable insights for evaluating a hotel (Filiari *et al.*, 2018b). A lack of trust in a reviewer does not necessarily indicate perceived deception. In some cases, consumers may attribute their lack of trust to a reviewer's cognitive limitations, like memory or language skills (Masip *et al.*, 2004; Xiao and Benbasat, 2011). On the other hand, perceived deception occurs when consumers perceive a reviewer to deliberately pretend to be a genuine consumer and manipulate a review to mislead others in their booking decisions (Kumar *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, understanding reviewers' expertise is crucial. It contributes to the existing body of research by providing details on how consumers'

perceptions of deceit are impacted. It also has the potential to assist online review websites and hotels to ensure that genuine reviews are not mistakenly perceived to be deceptive.

The prevalence of reports in the mass media regarding deceptive reviews on online review websites (e.g., Coffey, 2019; Cannon *et al.*, 2019; Cramer, 2023) not only raises consumer awareness of such attempts (Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016) but can also influence perceived deception (regardless of whether a review deceptive or not). In this thesis, the focus is on exploring how a reviewer's expertise can affect consumers' perceived deception. It moves on now to discuss how the expertise of a reviewer can be assessed in the online review context.

Assessment of a reviewer's expertise might be a difficult task in online reviews. A reviewer's expertise is derived from consumers' perceptions of the reviewer's knowledge, skills, or expertise in a particular domain (Ohanian, 1990). Unlike traditional WOM, online reviews are usually posted by reviewers who are anonymous and do not have a prior relationship with consumers (Cheung *et al.*, 2008; Park and Lee, 2008). This means that a reviewer's expertise cannot be examined based on the knowledge and skills that the reviewer has towards a specific service, as knowledge of the reviewer's attributes and background is limited (Brown *et al.*, 2007).

Instead, consumers are required to utilise various cues available on online review websites to build their impression and assess a reviewer's expertise. The reviewer's expertise must be assessed based on the relatively impersonal text-based resource exchange provided by actors on online review websites (Brown *et al.*, 2007; Racherla and Friske, 2012; Filieri *et al.*, 2018b). For example, consumers might assess a reviewer's expertise based on the reviewer's past behaviour, which is provided on the online review website (Weiss *et al.*, 2008) – such as the number of previous reviews written on the online review website, the reviewer's expertise

level, or the reviewer's badge (e.g., Zhu *et al.*, 2014; Liu and Park, 2015; Filieri *et al.*, 2018b; Hwang *et al.*, 2018). The following provides a brief description of how a reviewer's expertise is presented on online review websites.

A reviewer's expertise cue is categorised as the system-generated information about a reviewer's past behaviour, which can be described as information that the website has chosen to be shown on reviewers' profiles (Shan, 2016). This type of information might take several forms depending on the layout of the online review website. For instance, TripAdvisor shows two types of information as a way to assist its users in recognising reviewers' past activities on the website, namely the number of reviews written (e.g., 33 reviews) and reviewers' badges, which categorise reviewers based on the number of reviews written (New Reviewer: one–two reviews, Reviewer: three–five reviews, Senior Reviewer: six–10 reviews, Contributor: 11–20 reviews, Senior Contributor: 21–49 reviews, and Top Contributor: 50+ reviews). In the same way, Google Reviews shows two types of information, namely the number of reviews written (e.g., five reviews) and the reviewer's level (i.e., the number of levels allocated by a reviewer's previous activity, which categorises reviewers into 10 levels based on reviewer points earned). Reviewers can earn points by contributing content on Google Maps such as score ratings and by adding reviews and sharing photos and videos, etc. However, other websites do not show any information about a reviewer's past behaviour (e.g., Booking.com, Expedia.com).

Regarding studies of reviewers' expertise, Table 3.3 provides a summary of findings in the existing literature that examines the effect of a reviewer's expertise on consumers' perceptions. To facilitate a clearer understanding of the previous studies, they are discussed

under three main headings: the focus of the studies, findings, and the operationalisation of the reviewer's expertise.

First, recognising the importance of reviewers' expertise, previous scholars of online reviews have mainly investigated the effect of reviewers' expertise on many facets, namely perceived usefulness and helpfulness (Cheung *et al.*, 2008; Willemsen *et al.*, 2011; Racherla and Friske, 2012; Zhu *et al.*, 2014; Liu and Park, 2015; Park and Nicolau, 2015; Chua and Banerjee, 2016; Filieri *et al.*, 2018b; Filieri *et al.*, 2019; Choi and Leon, 2020), perceived expertise and trustworthiness (Willemsen *et al.*, 2012), perceived credibility (Lo and Yao, 2019; Thomas *et al.*, 2019), attitude (Vermeulen and Seeger, 2009; Willemsen *et al.*, 2012; Wu *et al.*, 2017; Hwang *et al.*, 2018), purchase (booking) intention (Wu *et al.*, 2017; Filieri *et al.*, 2018b; Thomas *et al.*, 2019; Syafganti and Walrave, 2022), and recommendations (Syafganti and Walrave, 2022). However, as explained previously in Section 3.4.1, deceptiveness, credibility, and trustworthiness are separate but closely associated constructs. Therefore, there is a need to shed light on the role played by a reviewer's expertise in the effect on consumers' perceived deception.

In light of the existing literature on reviewers' expertise, there is a need for further investigation into the relationship between a reviewer's expertise and consumers' perceptions of deception. This research is crucial to better understand how consumers' perceptions of deception are influenced by a reviewer's expertise, which has significant implications for online review websites to maintain their reliability (Filieri *et al.*, 2018b; He *et al.*, 2022).

Second, although scholars have investigated the impact of reviewers' expertise on consumers' perceptions, they have provided mixed findings – as shown in Table 3.3. For

instance, Cheung *et al.* (2008) utilised a questionnaire and suggested that reviewers' expertise is not a statistically significant influence on consumers' perceived usefulness. Vermeulen and Seegers (2009) manipulated reviewers' expertise (i.e., self-claims in reviewer profiles) into two levels (expert vs. non-expert) and suggested that reviewers' expertise does not change consumers' attitudes towards hotels more than non-expert reviews. Willemsen *et al.*'s (2011) findings suggest that expertise claims in a review's content are weakly related to the perceived usefulness of reviews for both search and experience goods on Amazon. Liu and Park (2015) utilised secondary data from Yelp.com and conceptualised a reviewer's expertise as the number of previous reviews written by a reviewer. The results suggested that a reviewer's expertise has no significant effect on usefulness in the service context. In addition, Racherla and Friske (2012) utilised secondary data from Yelp.com and concluded that a reviewer's expertise is negatively correlated with usefulness.

In contrast, Filieri *et al.* (2018b) utilised a questionnaire and suggested that a reviewer's expertise has a significant and positive effect on perceived helpfulness. Park and Nicolau (2015) utilised secondary data from Yelp.com and conceptualised a reviewer's expertise as the number of previous reviews written by a reviewer. The results suggested that a reviewer's expertise has a positive effect on perceived usefulness. Lo and Yao (2019) manipulated reviewers' expertise (i.e., expertise level) into two levels and suggested that a review posted by a reviewer with a high expertise level is perceived as more credible than a review posted by a reviewer with a low expertise level.

Third, it seems that the operationalisation of a reviewer's expertise could be a possible explanation for this differential effect in previous studies. The operationalisation of reviewers' expertise has taken many forms. For instance, it takes the form of self-claims in a review's

content or on a reviewer’s profile (e.g., Vermeulen and Seegers, 2009; Willemsen *et al.*, 2011; Willemsen *et al.*, 2012; Chua and Banerjee, 2016), the number of reviews submitted (e.g., Liu and Park, 2015; Park and Nicolau, 2015; Lo and Yao, 2019; Syafganti and Walrave, 2022), the helpful votes obtained (i.e., the number of reviews posted on an online review website by a reviewer and assessed as helpful by other users) (e.g., Filieri *et al.*, 2019; Lo and Yao, 2019; Choi and Leon, 2020), the number of Elite badges (i.e., the count of ‘Elite’ badges awarded by Yelp and displayed alongside the review is influenced by certain criteria. Yelp assesses the reviewer’s eligibility for the Elite status based on factors such as the frequency and quality of their posted reviews, as well as their conduct as a role model within the Yelp community” (Zhu *et al.*, 2014), and the level of reviewer expertise (i.e., categorising reviewers into different levels of expertise based on reviewers’ activities (e.g., posting reviews, photos, ratings, etc., on the website) (e.g., Wu *et al.*, 2017; Hwang *et al.*, 2018; Lo and Yao, 2019).

Table 3-3 A summary of findings in the existing literature that examines the effect of a reviewer’s expertise

Author(s) /year	Type of study	Variable	Construct associated with the response						Finding	
			Credibility	Trustworthiness	Usefulness	Attitude	Booking intention	Recommendation		Deceptive
Cheung <i>et al.</i> (2008)	Questionnaire	Source’s expertise			√					The source’s expertise and source’s trustworthiness do not impact information usefulness.
Vermeulen and Seegers (2009)	Experiment	Reviewer’s expertise				√				Expert reviews do not change consumers’ attitudes towards hotels more than non-expert reviews. Reviews by experts have a significantly stronger effect on consideration than reviews by non-experts.
Willemsen <i>et al.</i> (2011)	Secondary data (Amazon.com)	Expertise claims			√					Expertise claims in a review’s content are weakly related to the perceived usefulness of reviews for both search and experience goods on Amazon.

Willemse n <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Experiments	Review source identificatio n and peer ratings		√		√				<p>1. Expertise claims in a review's content produce two indirect effects on attitudes towards the review, i.e., one positive indirect effect, through perceived expertise, and one negative indirect effect, through perceived trustworthiness.</p> <p>2. Claims of low expertise in review content are perceived as having significantly less expert knowledge compared to high expertise claims or badges that are rated as top reviewers. No significant differences are found between the latter two sources. In terms of perceived trustworthiness, low expertise claims in review content are perceived as significantly more trustworthy than high expertise claims. However, the trustworthiness of a badge rated as a top reviewer did not show a significant difference from either of the two.</p>
Racherla and Friske (2012)	Secondary data (Yelp.com)	Reviewer's expertise			√					Reviewer's expertise has a significant and negative effect on perceived usefulness.
Zhu <i>et al.</i> (2014)	Secondary data (Yelp.com)	Reviewer's expertise			√					<p>A review written by an opinion leader (i.e., a reviewer with more Elite badges and more online friends) is perceived as more helpful by users.</p> <p>Reviewer expertise, in terms of Yelp's Elite badge recognition, has a positive impact on users' perceptions of the helpfulness of a hotel review. The more Elite badges a reviewer has, the more likely users are to believe their reviews are helpful.</p>
Park and Nicolau (2015)	Secondary data (Yelp.com)	Reviewer's expertise			√					Reviewer's expertise has a significant and positive effect on perceived usefulness.
Liu and Park (2015)	Secondary data (Yelp.com)	Reviewer's expertise			√					Reviewer's expertise has no significant effect on usefulness.
Chua and Banerjee (2016)	Secondary data (Amazon)	Reliability			√					There is a positive relationship between a claim of expertise in a review's content and review helpfulness.
Wu <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Experiment	Reviewer's expertise				√	√			When a review is posted by a reviewer with a low expertise level, consumers exhibit lower levels of attitude and reservation intention if the review is written in figurative (vs. literal) language. When the review is posted by a reviewer with a high expertise level, the impact of language



									style is attenuated, and there is no significant difference between figurative and literal language conditions in terms of attitude.
Hwang <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Experiment	Reviewer's expertise				√			When reviews are written by non-experts, high dialectical thinkers exhibit similar levels of attitude certainty across univalent and mixed review conditions. Conversely, low dialectical thinkers exhibit higher levels of attitude certainty in the univalent (vs. mixed) review condition.
Filieri <i>et al.</i> (2018b)	Online questionnaire	Source expertise			√		√		Source expertise has a significant and positive effect on information helpfulness. The indirect effect of source expertise on purchase intentions is significant. As its direct effect without mediator and its direct effect with mediator were both significant, this indicates that information helpfulness has a partial mediation effect.
Thomas <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Online questionnaire	Reviewer's expertise	√				√		Reviewer's expertise significantly impacts online review credibility, which in turn positively influences consumers' purchase intentions.
Lo and Yao (2019)	Experiment	Reviewer's expertise	√						Reviews by high expertise reviewers have significantly higher perceived credibility than those by low expertise reviewers.
Filieri <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Secondary data (TripAdvisor, hotel)	Reviewer's expertise			√				Extremely negative ratings are more likely to be helpful when the reviewer is expert.
Choi and Leon (2020)	Secondary data (Amazon)	Reviewer's expertise			√				Reviewer's expertise has a positive and significant effect on review helpfulness.
Syafganti and Walrave (2022)	Experiment	Reviewer's expertise					√	√	There is no significant main effect of the reviewer's expertise on the intention to book and recommendations.

This thesis proposes that the expertise of the reviewer is an important cue that can influence how consumers perceive deception, based on SIPT. Consumers might utilise a reviewer's expertise cue to build their impression of a reviewer's expertise in the absence of past interaction and nonverbal cues (Walther, 1992). Cheung *et al.* (2008) argue that it is difficult for consumers to assess whether a review was posted by an expert or non-expert because on many online review websites, reviewers can freely register and post reviews without any

authorisation checks, combined with the fact that there are limited cues by which to assess the reviewer's expertise. However, this thesis posits that within the limited cues about the reviewer's knowledge, the reviewer's past behaviour (i.e., expertise level) can be used as a cue that might influence perceived deception.

It seems that the goal of deceivers is to mislead consumers in their booking decisions. Deceivers follow two unethical methods: they either post positive reviews to promote their services or post negative reviews to denounce competitors' services (Kumar *et al.*, 2018). To achieve this goal and take the advantage of the ease of posting reviews on many online review websites (i.e., only a valid email is required to post reviews), it is expected that deceivers will create many fake accounts to post reviews and avoid being identified. Filieri (2016) reported that consumers perceive reviews from a reviewer who has posted only one review on a website as being less trustworthy. In this sense, a review that has been posted by a reviewer who has low expertise level on the website is more likely to be perceived as deceptive than those by reviewers who have high expertise level. Therefore, this study proposes that:

H2: Perceived deception will be higher when the reviewer has a low expertise level than when the reviewer has a high expertise level.

### **3.4.3 The moderating role of online review scepticism**

Online reviews are not limited to only providing easy access to information about products and services. It is anticipated that consumers also develop their understanding of persuasive communication tactics utilised in online reviews (Friestad and Wright, 1994). Online review scepticism is defined as the general tendency to disbelieve online reviews (Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016). Based on PKM, online review scepticism might result from consumers' prior persuasion knowledge (e.g., reading online reviews and news reports about deceptive

reviews) and socialisation (e.g., interactions with family or friends) (Friestad and Wright, 1994).

This study examines online review scepticism to comprehend variations among consumers in perceiving and interpreting a reviewer's profile cues. It contributes to the existing body of research by explaining why perceived deception differs among consumers. Furthermore, it has the potential to demonstrate the role such as mass media in enhancing consumers' awareness of deceptive practices in online reviews and in turn influence consumers' perceived deception. Before moving on to formulate further hypotheses, the following part discusses the variation in consumers' levels of scepticism towards online reviews and explores how the impact of cues available in online reviews differs in shaping consumers' responses.

First, the level of online review scepticism is not equal among consumers. It arises from consumers' prior experiences with attempts to persuade and goes on to influence their responses (McKnight *et al.*, 2002). Consumers might develop persuasion knowledge (i.e., online review scepticism) from different resources. For instance, mass media around the world still discusses and publishes many stories related to the existence of deceptive reviews (e.g., Horton, 2017; Gray, 2022). It is expected that this kind of news will develop consumers' awareness of persuasive unethical behavioural tactics (i.e., deceptive reviews) that deceivers might utilise in the content of online reviews. In addition, consumers' experiences of reading online reviews also impact their persuasion knowledge. Filieri (2016) states that some consumers may be sceptical about reviews that appear on a service's official website since they are often overly positive, leading them to think that the reviews are manipulated (i.e., that the service provider filters reviews as they are interested in selling their services).

Second, the effect of online review cues on consumers' responses is different even if they receive the same cues (McKnight *et al.*, 2002; Fogg, 2003). Sher and Lee (2009) showed that the purchase intention of highly sceptical consumers is not influenced by the argument quality of online reviews, while the purchase intention of consumers low in scepticism is influenced more by online review quantity than quality. Reimer and Benkenstein (2016) showed that review scepticism moderates the relationship between argument quality and the trustworthiness of a review. More specifically, higher review scepticism reduces the positive effect of review argument on the trustworthiness of a review.

This thesis argues that online review scepticism moderates the relationship between reviewer's identity disclosure and reviewer's expertise and perceived deception. Based on PKM, consumers approach online reviews with a certain level of scepticism based on their prior experiences of persuasion attempts (Friestad and Wright, 1994). Scepticism is a state of mind which makes consumers look for additional information (DeCarlo *et al.*, 2013). In the context of online reviews, the disadvantaged party is consumers due to their lack of awareness of reviewers' intentions and characteristics (Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016). This will lead them to look for additional information to build their impressions of a reviewer (Walther, 1992; Xu, 2014; Shan, 2016).

In addition, consumers develop their persuasion knowledge (i.e., online review scepticism) based on their prior experiences of reading online reviews and mass media reports and news. There are several reports in the mass media discussing the existence of deceptive reviews on online review websites that provide some suggestions regarding what to examine when reading online reviews (e.g., Collinson, 2023; Winters, 2023). Even though there is limited information about reviewers in online reviews, the availability of information such as a

reviewer's identity disclosure and a reviewer's expertise might be noticed and interpreted as cues linked to the presence of deceptive reviews by consumers, depending on their level of online review scepticism. This thesis expects that the effect of reviewers' profile cues (i.e., low identity disclosure and low expertise) on perceived deception is higher for consumers with high review scepticism. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: The effect of a reviewer profile with low identity disclosure (H3a) and low expertise level (H3b) on perceived deception is higher for individuals with high online review scepticism.

#### **3.4.4 The mediating effect of perceived deception**

Online reviews play an essential role in consumers' purchase decision process, especially for tourism products. The purchase decision process is not limited to one construct, as consumers develop their attitudes based on evaluative responses towards an object on a cognitive, emotional, and/or behavioural basis (Eagley and Chaiken, 1993). Researchers of online reviews have highlighted the importance of understanding how online reviews influence consumers' perceptions (e.g., Chen *et al.*, 2015; Liu *et al.*, 2019a). Researchers have attempted to evaluate the impact of online review cues on consumers' perceptions in many facets including perceived helpfulness ("to become familiar with, understand, and evaluate the quality and performance of a product sold online" (Filieri *et al.*, 2018b, p. 957)), perceived review trustworthiness ("the degree of confidence in the validity of the information in terms of objectivity and sincerity" (Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016, p. 5993)), perceived credibility ("the extent to which one perceives a recommendation/review as believable, true, or factual" (Cheung *et al.*, 2009, p. 12)), and perceived reviewer expertise and trustworthiness ("expertise generally refers to a source's knowledge and ability to provide accurate information, while trustworthiness is related to a source's motivation to provide truth" (Xie

*et al.*, 2011, p. 179)). In addition, several studies have shown how consumers' perceptions of online reviews play a mediation role and affect their responses (e.g., Purnawirawan *et al.*, 2012; Jiménez and Mendoza, 2013; Filieri *et al.*, 2018b). However, as was illustrated early in Chapter 2, empirical investigations of the effect of consumers' perceived deception in online reviews require further investigation.

In line with PKM, when presented with a persuasion message (e.g., an online review), the key tasks for consumers are interpreting and responding to it. Over time, consumers increase their personal understanding of these persuasion attempts. This enhanced knowledge can assist consumers in identifying how, when, and why hotels attempt to influence them through the content of online reviews. Additionally, it helps consumers adapt a response to these attempts (Friestad and Wright, 1994). Campbell and Kirmani (2008) pointed out that the extent to which consumers attribute an ulterior persuasion motive to a source of information (e.g., a reviewer) is likely to negatively affect consumers' responses.

This thesis expects that if online reviews' profile cues (i.e., low identity disclosure and low reviewer's expertise) in persuasion attempts (i.e., online reviews) are interpreted as deceptive, consumers are more likely to respond negatively. Therefore, one of the research objectives is to assess the role that perceived deception plays in the relationship between reviewers' profile cues (reviewer's identity disclosure and reviewer's expertise) and consumers' responses including booking intention (consumers' willingness to book a hotel room) (Sparks and Browning, 2011), NWOM (consumers' belief that they will tell others about their dissatisfactory experience with a target object) (Ingram *et al.*, 2005), emotion (positive or negative affective reactions to perception situations) (Verhoef, 2005), and trust ("one

party's confidence in an exchange partner's reliability and integrity" (Morgan and Hunt, 1994, p. 23)).

While the impact of perceived deception may extend beyond these consequences, this thesis utilises these constructs to demonstrate the potential effect of perceived deception on the relationship between reviewers' profile cues and consumers' responses. It contributes to the existing body of research by providing insights into an important aspect of how perceived deception (regardless of whether a review deceptive or not) impacts consumers' responses. Additionally, this research has the potential to provide guidance to online review websites and hotels whose reviews suffer being mistakenly perceived to be deceptive. Such guidance can empower online review websites and hotels to understand causes and effects of perceived deception. This is crucial as perceived deception is expected to have negative impacts on booking intention, WOM, emotion, and trustworthiness. The following parts discuss the effect of perceived deception on booking intention, NWOM, negative emotion, and hotel's trustworthiness.

This research focuses on booking intention as a dependent variable which is expected to be affected by perceived deception. Booking intention is used to reflect consumers' willingness to book a hotel room (Sparks and Browning, 2011). Previous research has concluded that the perception of credibility is one of the factors that has the greatest influence on booking intention (e.g., Luo *et al.*, 2015). Xie *et al.* (2011) showed that perceived credibility fully mediates the effect of personal identifying information (PII) on booking intention. Filieri *et al.* (2018b) found that a consumer's perception of online review helpfulness partially mediates the effect of a reviewer's expertise on purchase (booking) intention. However, as discussed previously in Chapter 2, section 2.6.1, it is essential to recognise that the concepts of

deceptiveness, credibility, and trustworthiness are distinct yet closely related. Deceptiveness relates to situations where consumers perceive a reviewer as a deceiver, intentionally posing as a past consumer to manipulate a review and mislead others in their purchasing decisions (Kumar *et al.*, 2018).

On the other hand, credibility refers to how consumers perceive a review as trustworthy, factual, and believable (Luo *et al.*, 2015). A trustworthy review is a review that is perceived to be the honest, sincere, truthful, and non-commercial opinion of a consumer who has experienced a product or a service (Filiari, 2016). Consumers perceive a reviewer as being an actual consumer who has experience with the product being reviewed. Even if a review is perceived as less credible and trustworthy, it does not necessarily imply a manipulation attempt. Consumers might attribute these perceptions to the reviewer's cognitive limitations, such as memory and linguistic skills (Masip *et al.*, 2004; Xiao and Benbasat, 2011).

With regard to incentivised reviews, this refers to reviews that have been written by reviewers who received an incentive (e.g., cash or free products) to promote a hotel's services (Uribe *et al.*, 2016; Kim *et al.*, 2019; Gerrath and Usrey, 2021). The difference between an incentivised review and a deceptive review is related to the legal requirement to disclose promotional content in incentivised reviews (UK Competition and Markets Authority, 2015; FTC, 2020), whereas in deceptive reviews, the deceivers are disguised as actual consumers and post reviews (Kumar *et al.*, 2018). When consumers become aware of reviewers' motivations to post incentivised reviews, this has a negative influence on consumers' behaviours (Hwang and Jeong, 2016; Kim *et al.*, 2019).

This study expects that perceived deception mediates the effect of reviewer's identity disclosure and reviewer's expertise on booking intention. In line with PKM, consumers might



interpret reviewers' profile cues (low identity disclosure and low expertise) as deceptive cues. If they perceive the persuasion attempts as deceptive, this in turn will influence their booking intention negatively. Consumers might interpret an online review as a persuasion attempt from a deceiver who is seeking to mislead them in their booking decision. Consequently, in an attempt to resist perceived deception, it would be expected to have a negative impact on booking intention. Therefore, this study posits that perceived deception mediates the negative effect of a reviewer's profile cues on a consumer's booking intention. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4: Perceived deception mediates the negative effect of a reviewer profile with low identity disclosure (H4a) and low expertise (H4b) on booking intention.

Perceived deception is also expected to influence consumers' NWOM as another dependent variable. Harrison-Walker (2001, p. 63) defined WOM as:

“informal, person-to-person communication between a perceived non-commercial communicator and a receiver regarding a brand, a product, an organization or a service”.

It includes any information about a target object (e.g., hotel) that is transferred from one consumer to another. The term “NWOM” is used here to refer to a consumer's belief that they will tell others about their dissatisfactory experience with a target object (Ingram *et al.*, 2005).

Huefner and Hunt (2000) suggested that NWOM can be divided into two categories based on consumers' intentions: (1) it might be a form of retaliatory action against an object (e.g., a hotel) – that is, an aggressive behaviour with a specific intention to hurt the object, and (2) it

might simply be form of communication that warns other consumers about a risk. Cheng *et al.* (2006) identified that NWOM is a way for consumers to express their dissatisfactory experience with a target object. Dissatisfied consumers are more likely to share NWOM (Sánchez-García and Currás-Pérez, 2011; Jang, Cho, and Kim, 2013). Within the context of deceptive practices, Riquelme *et al.* (2016) showed that perceived deception regarding a retailer's practices negatively affects consumers' satisfaction and subsequent WOM towards the retailer's traditional store.

This thesis expects that perceived deception mediates the effect of reviewer's identity disclosure and reviewer's expertise on NWOM. There is a general feeling that consumers trust online reviews because they perceive these reviews to have been posted by consumers who have prior experience with a product or service. The exposure of news and reports related to hospitality businesses engaging in unethical and illegal activities related to posting deceptive reviews (e.g., Coffey, 2019; Cramer, 2023; TripAdvisor 2023) not only enhances consumer awareness (Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016), but also might influence consumers' perceived deception (regardless of whether a review is deceptive or not). Perceived deception in turn might prompt consumers to act; for example, by engaging in NWOM to warn other consumers regarding deceptive behaviours. Therefore, it is expected that perceived deception mediates the positive effect of a reviewer's profile cues on NWOM. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H5: Perceived deception mediates the positive effect of a reviewer profile with low identity disclosure (H5a) and low expertise (H5b) on NWOM.

This thesis also focuses on negative emotion, which serves as another dependent variable and is expected to be impacted by the perception of deception. Emotions are defined as “positive or negative affective reactions to perception situations” (Verhoef, 2005, p. 249). According to this definition, emotions arise in response to the evaluative judgment of events that happen to consumers.

Emotions are associated with consumers’ experiences and are classified as everyday emotional events that affect consumers’ emotions. In the hospitality sector, for instance, emotions can be triggered by different events such as missing a flight (López-López, Ruiz-de-Maya, and Warlop, 2014), slow service, undercooked food, out-of-stock menu items (Mattila and Ro, 2008), and eWOM information (Liu *et al.*, 2019a). This thesis investigates the influence of perceived deception on consumers’ negative emotion.

In addition, there are two primary dimensions of emotion, which are emotional valence and emotional intensity (Liu *et al.*, 2021). Emotional valence refers to “the emotional evaluation (‘positive’ or ‘negative’) of particular events, objects, or situations” (Catino and Patriotta, 2013, p. 441). This implies that emotional valence has a degree (positive or negative) and a target (a particular event). Consumers might experience positive/negative emotion from their surroundings, which may affect their emotions towards a target object (Yan *et al.*, 2018). Regarding emotional intensity, this refers to “the degree with which the consumer felt the emotions elicited during the consumption episode” (López-López *et al.*, 2014, p. 476). This suggests that emotional intensity can vary over time based on factors such as the occurrence of events and interactions with others.

Furthermore, the interaction between emotion and consumers’ behavioural responses can be modelled into two ways, namely the valence-based approach and the specific emotions

approach (Mattila and Ro, 2008). The valence-based approach captures the overall positivity and negativity of the different emotions that consumers experience, while the specific emotions approach focuses on specific emotions, as they can provide more understanding of how a specific emotion can affect consumers' behaviour (Zeelenberg and Pieters, 2004). However, Bagozzi *et al.* (1999) pointed out that emotions often function in broad categories of positive and negative emotion.

This thesis investigates the emotion elicited by perceived deception. Therefore, this thesis focuses on the effect of perceived deception on negative emotion. This research is considered as an initial step in the process of understanding what causes consumers to perceive deception and in turn its effects on consumers' negative emotion. Therefore, rather than examining the effect of perceived deception on a specific negative emotion, this study applies the valence-based approach, which allows for all sorts of negative emotions to be combined in one construct.

As this thesis aims to explore how perceived deception affects consumers' responses, negative emotion is used as an indicator of consumers' emotional evaluations. Consumers usually try to get a feel for what a hotel will be like before making a booking. For this reason, they might search for information about the hotel on an online review website (Filiari *et al.*, 2015).

Consumers may experience emotions at various stages of tourism experiences, which, in turn, can influence their emotional evaluation. For negative emotion, there are many situations in which consumers might develop negative emotion towards a service provider; for instance, a consumer's direct contact with a service provider (Zeelenberg and Pieters, 2004) and when a consumer holds a high expectation before departure which is not met by what they receive

from the service provider when they arrive (Zhou *et al.*, 2020). Mccoll-Kennedy and Sparks (2003) pointed out that if consumers feel that a service provider has not followed at least an acceptable level of service, then consumers will assess this situation negatively and experience intense negative emotion.

Deception in marketing practices is “unethical and unfair to the deceived”(Aditya, 2001, p. 737). Seiders and Berry (1998) demonstrated that when fairness is considered an issue, consumers’ reactions are usually intensely positive or negative. If a hotel treats its consumers unfairly, consumers’ reactions to the hotel tend to be immediate, emotional, and enduring. Therefore, it is expected that when consumers perceive deception (regardless of whether a review is deceptive or not), they will assess this situation negatively and their negative emotions will increase greatly. It is accordingly expected that perceived deception mediates the positive effect of a reviewer’s profile cues on negative emotion. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H6: Perceived deception mediates the positive effect of a reviewer profile with low identity disclosure (H6a) and low expertise (H6b) on negative emotion.

This thesis also considers hotel’s trustworthiness, which is considered as another dependent variable and is expected to be impacted by the perception of deception. Trust is defined as “one party’s confidence in an exchange partner’s reliability and integrity” (Morgan and Hunt, 1994, p. 23).

The extent to which one party (e.g., the consumer) is willing to rely on an exchange partner (e.g., a hotel) is an essential step in building and developing a long-term successful relationship in any commercial transaction (Doney and Cannon, 1997; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Trust has received a significant attention because of its substantial influence on

consumers' behaviours, and it is considered as a success factor in e-commerce activities (e.g., Flavián, Guinalú, and Gurrea, 2006; Filieri *et al.*, 2015). Existing research on e-tourism has investigated and confirmed the role of trust on WOM intention, recommendation adoption, and intention to travel (Su, Hsu, and Marshall, 2014; Filieri *et al.*, 2015; Abubakar and Ilkan, 2016). This thesis focuses on how consumers' perceived deception influences consumers' trust towards a hotel.

Perceived deception is expected to influence consumers' trust towards a hotel. Miyazaki and Fernandez (2001) highlighted that online retailer fraud involves concerns about deceptive actions by the online retailer, including intentional misrepresentation or failure to deliver goods. This is considered a significant worry for consumers when shopping online.

In advertising literature, Darke and Ritchie (2007) showed that advertising deception causes consumers to become defensive, which leads them to distrust further marketing activities, while Román (2010) demonstrated that consumers' perception of deceptive practices by a retailer lead to distrust in the retailer.

In addition, and as illustrated earlier, deceptive activates are regarded as unethical and unfair to consumers (Aditya, 2001). When consumers perceive unfair behaviour from a service provider (e.g., a hotel), it can destroy trust towards the service provider (Seiders and Berry, 1998). Therefore, in line with PKM, consumers might become more aware of the possibility that some hotels practice unethical and unfair behaviours by using paid reviewers/fake accounts to promote their services and mislead consumers in their booking decisions. Thus, they might perceive that a source of information (i.e., a deceiver) is a hotel that is disguised as an actual consumer to mislead them. Consumers might interpret and perceive this as unfair

behaviour from a hotel, which in turn destroys their trust towards the hotel. Therefore, it can be expected that perceived deception mediates the negative effect of a reviewer's profile cues on a hotel's trustworthiness. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H7: Perceived deception mediates the negative effect of a reviewer profile with low identity disclosure (H7a) and low expertise (H7b) on hotel's trustworthiness.

### **3.4.5 Moderated mediation effect**

After reviewing the existing online review literature and considering the theoretical underpinnings of the research, this thesis anticipates the presence of a moderated mediation effect and considers it as one of the research objectives. Consumers may have insufficient information about reviewers since they do not know their intentions or motivations for posting reviews. However, many online review websites provide several social information cues about reviewers which can be interpreted by and go on to influence consumers' perceptions. The reviewer's profile provides several cues related to a reviewer's identity disclosure and expertise (e.g., Xie *et al.*, 2011; Kusumasondjaja *et al.*, 2012; Xu, 2014; Munzel, 2016; Shan, 2016). Drawing upon SIPT, regarding these cues (i.e., reviewer's identity disclosure and reviewer's expertise), it is expected that consumers utilise them to find out some social information about a reviewer. This study expects that low reviewer identity disclosure and low reviewer expertise might be interpreted as deceptive cues, which in turn influence consumers to perceive deception.

In addition, this study anticipates that consumer differences strengthen the relationship between a reviewer's profile cues and perceived deception. Drawing upon PKM, this thesis considers online review scepticism as being the result of prior persuasion knowledge about the existence of deceptive reviews, and it moderates the relationship between a reviewer's

identity disclosure and expertise on perceived deception (Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016). Furthermore, this thesis posits that developing consumers' persuasion knowledge can assist consumers in identifying how, when, and why deceivers might try to influence them through positive deceptive reviews. At the same time, it assists consumers in adapting a way to respond to these persuasion attempts. Therefore, this thesis expects perceived deception to have an effect on booking intention, NWOM, negative emotion, and hotel's trustworthiness. Therefore, it is expected that perceived deception plays a mediation role in the effect of the interaction between the independent variables (reviewer's identity disclosure and expertise) and online review scepticism on the dependent variables (booking intention, NWOM, negative emotion, and hotel's trustworthiness). Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H8: Online review scepticism moderates the strength of the mediated relationships between reviewer's identity disclosure and booking intention (H8a), NWOM (H8b), negative emotion (H8c), and hotel's trustworthiness (H8d) via perceived deception, so that the mediation is stronger when online review scepticism is high compared to low.

H9: Online review scepticism moderates the strength of the mediated relationships between a reviewers' expertise and booking intention (H9a), NWOM (H9b), negative emotion (H9c), and hotel's trustworthiness (H9d) via perceived deception, so that the mediation is stronger when online review scepticism is high compared to low.

### **3.5 Conceptual Framework**

From the literature review, theoretical background, and hypothesis development, a conceptual framework of the antecedents and consequences of perceived deception is developed. Figure 3.1 summarises the conceptual framework and hypotheses. It shows that perceived deception (a mediation variable) acts causally between the independent variables



(reviewer’s identity disclosure and expertise) and the dependent variables (booking intention, NWOM, negative emotion, and hotel’s trustworthiness). The figure shows that the effect of the independent variables on the mediation variable depends on a moderator variable, which is online review scepticism.

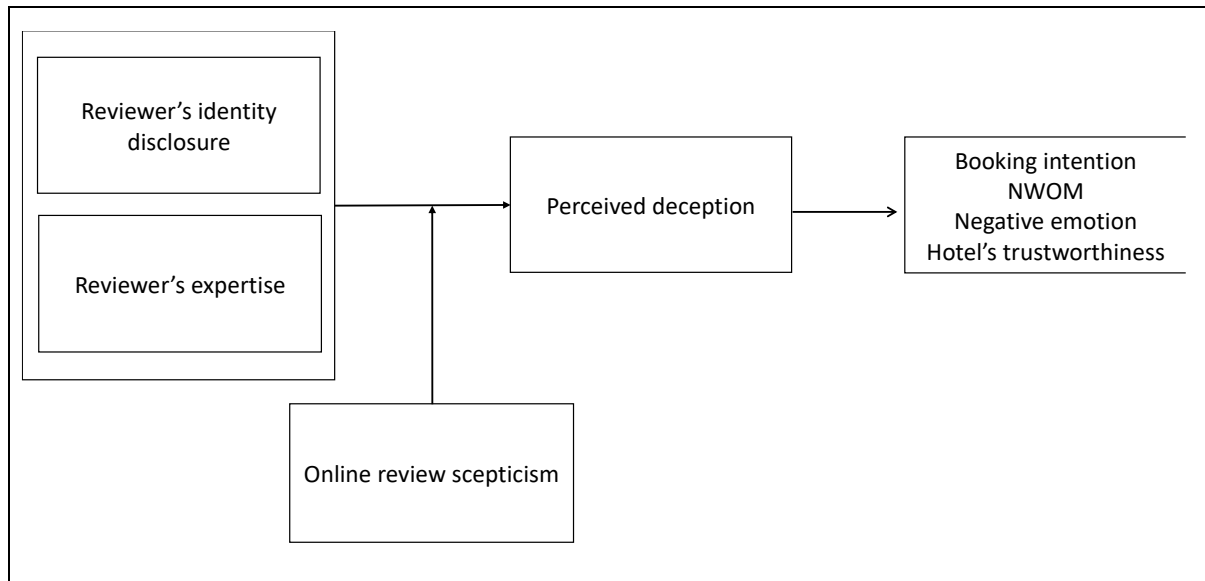


Figure 3-1 Conceptual framework

### 3.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter highlighted that perceived deception is common and considered as a growing problem in online reviews’ content. This requires a closer examination of how reviews, perceived as deceptive (regardless of whether these reviews are deceptive or not) impact consumers’ responses. This thesis has introduced SIPT and PKM as theoretical underpinnings of this research. These theories will assist in understanding how consumers’ perceptions might be affected by online reviews, which may in turn influence their responses. This chapter has also presented the research hypotheses and conceptual framework of the current research. The next chapter will describe the procedures and methods used in this investigation to answer the research questions and achieve the research objectives.

## **Chapter 4 : Research Methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The preceding chapters have illustrated the research background and potential research gaps. The research questions and research objectives were identified in Chapter 1. Potential research gaps were identified by reviewing the online review literature systematically in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 presented the theories underpinning the thesis and the conceptual framework. This chapter, Chapter 4, presents the method applied to answer the research questions and achieve the research objectives. Six key issues are discussed. Section 4.2 presents the research philosophy and discusses it in terms of ontology and epistemology. Section 4.3 explains the methodology, including the choice of methodology, research strategy, and time frame for the research. Section 4.4 presents the methods and techniques that were applied to collect the data. Section 4.5 discusses common method variance (CMV) as a potential problem in behavioural research and how it is dealt with in this study. Section 4.6 presents the data analysis procedures, while section 4.7 discusses the ethical considerations in more detail.

### **4.2 Research Philosophy**

The term “research philosophy” refers to a set or system of beliefs about the way research should be conducted to advance knowledge (Collis and Hussey, 2014). At every stage of the research, numerous types of assumptions must be made (Burrell and Morgan, 2016). These assumptions include – but are not limited to – the nature of reality (ontology) and how we know what we know (epistemology) (Crotty, 1998). The ways in which developing knowledge (methodology) generally draw from different ontological and epistemological assumptions vary based on the nature of the research questions (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2015; Moses and

Knutsen, 2019). Therefore, according to Creswell (2014), it is recommended that researchers clearly state the philosophical ideas that they will adopt. This will enable them to justify their choice of specific methodological approaches, research strategy, data collection techniques, and analysis procedures. Following this line of thinking, the following discussion clearly states the two assumptions made in this research, which are related to ontology and epistemology.

First, ontology answers questions such as: what is the nature of reality? and what is real? Ontological assumptions serve as foundations for a researcher's understanding of the world they are investigating, and they guide what can be considered as valid and relevant data. Ontology is commonly divided into objectivism and subjectivism (Collis and Hussey, 2014). Objectivism refers to the premise that social reality exists independently of researchers and other individuals. Researchers who adopt the ontological assumption believe that their research aims to discover external reality as precisely as possible (Gray, 2004; Weber, 2004; Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2015; Saunders *et al.*, 2019). By contrast, subjectivism includes the assumption that social reality is socially constructed by social actors (i.e., the researcher and individuals). Researchers who adopt the subjectivist ontology perceive reality as being influenced by individuals' experiences, interpretations, and interactions. Thus, researchers concentrate on understanding how individuals construct their perceptions of the world (Gray, 2004; Weber 2004; Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2015; Saunders *et al.*, 2019). However, each of these ontological positions – objectivism and subjectivism – correspond to different ways of thinking about knowledge (i.e., epistemology).

Second, epistemology answers questions such as: how can we know what we know? and what is the nature of truth? Epistemology is influenced by ontology and in turn affects the way knowledge is acquired and understood (Collis and Hussey, 2014). Epistemologically,

objectivists (ontology assumption) aim to discover and understand observable and measurable facts. This stance prioritises the utilisation of scientific methods, such as experiments, and quantitative data to reveal universal principals in the world. Subjectivists (ontology assumption) assert that social reality is made up of the perceptions and consequent actions of individuals. This stance prioritises the utilisation of qualitative methods to gain in-depth insights and to understand subjective meanings and interpretations (Crotty, 1998; Gray, 2004; Weber, 2004; Reed, 2005; Collis and Hussey, 2014; Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2015; Saunders *et al.*, 2019).

Building on previous discussions and the underlying assumptions of various research philosophies, as shown in Table 4.1, this thesis is primarily framed from the positivist position and follows a deductive approach. As shown in Chapters 1, 2, and 3, this thesis has utilised existing theories (i.e., SIPT and PKM) and existing literature on online reviews to develop the hypotheses and conceptual framework. These hypotheses will be tested and either confirmed or rejected. More specifically, it has been adopted the assumption that deceptive reviews exist in online reviews within a reality that is separate from the consumers that perceive them. It has been formulated independent variables (i.e., reviewer's identity disclosure and reviewer's expertise) to test the factors that might affect consumers' perceived deception. The information in a reviewer's profile can be objectively observed and used to measure their influence on consumers' perceptions of deception. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to answer the following research questions: (1) How do a reviewer's profile-related cues affect consumers' perceived deception? and (2) How do a reviewer's profile cues influence consumers' responses through perceived deception?

Perhaps the most serious criticisms of positivist research and its quantitative methods are that they are inflexible, artificial, or not effective regarding understanding the reasoning that individuals attach to actions (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2015). However, employing the experimental method in this thesis will assist in eliminating alternative explanations (Field and Hole, 2003). More specifically, it allows for the measurement of the effect of independent variables (i.e., reviewers' profile information: identity disclosure and expertise) on dependent variables (i.e., booking intention, NWOM, negative emotion, hotel's trustworthiness) via perceived deception. It will also assist in examining the moderation effect of online review scepticism on the relationship between reviewers' profile information and perceived deception. In addition, it can assist in establishing fundamental insights within the realm of online reviews. This includes revealing the fundamental role played by reviewers' profile information in influencing consumers' perceived deception. It can also help to test proposed hypotheses by utilising statistical analysis on data from large samples in a fast and economic manner (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2015).

Taking into account different research philosophies, critical realism can be valuable in acknowledging multiple levels of reality and uncovering underlying social structures and mechanisms that may not be immediately observable. However, it may pose challenges in accessing certain levels of reality, such as deceptive behaviours in online reviews. On the other hand, interpretivism can support in-depth exploration and detailed descriptions of the social phenomenon being studied (Crotty, 1998; Gray, 2004; Weber, 2004; Reed, 2005; Collis and Hussey, 2014; Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2015; Saunders *et al.*, 2019). However, considering the aim of this thesis, which is to examine the causes and effects of perceived deception, interpretivism's time-consuming nature may render it unsuitable. Therefore, positivism is

considered appropriate and utilised in this research, as it enables the establishment of causal explanations of the variables under investigation. The following section moves on to describe the methodology.

Table 4-1 Comparison of philosophical research positions in business research

	Positivism	Critical realism	Interpretivism
Ontology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Objective reality: there is only one reality.</li> <li>•Reality is independent of the researcher.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Objective reality: shaped by causal mechanisms.</li> <li>•Reality is external and independent of the researcher.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Subjective reality: there are many realities.</li> <li>•Reality is dependent on the researcher.</li> </ul>
Epistemology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Reality exists beyond the human mind. Adopts an empirical and scientific approach to knowledge.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•There are different layers to reality. The best way to understand social events is to use both direct observation and critical reflection. However, in research investigating deceptive reviews, it may pose challenges in accessing certain levels of reality, such as deceptive behaviours in online reviews.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Knowledge is built by the social construction of the world.</li> </ul>
Approach	<p>Deductive: utilising data to assess hypotheses related to an existing theory to establish general principles. This research builds on existing theory, as shown in Chapters 2 and 3. It develops hypotheses and a framework to be tested by applying statistical analysis of data using large samples in a fast and economic manner.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Abduction: utilising data to explore a phenomenon under investigation in order to identify themes and patterns, and to locate them in a conceptual framework in order to test them through subsequent data collection. The data is utilised in theory generation or modification.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Inductive: utilising data to explore a phenomenon under investigation in order to identify themes and patterns and to create a conceptual framework. The data is utilised in theory generation and building. However, considering the aim of this study, as discussed in Chapter 1 (i.e., to examine the causes and effects of perceived deception), this approach is time-consuming in</li> </ul>

			nature and not suited to the purpose of this study.
Methodology	•Quantitative (e.g., experiment, survey).	(e.g., large	•Multiple methods (e.g., quantitative and/or qualitative), which are used to establish different views of the phenomenon.
			•Qualitative (e.g., interview)

Source (Crotty, 1998; Gray, 2004; Weber, 2004; Reed, 2005; Collis and Hussey, 2014; Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2015; Saunders *et al.*, 2019)

### 4.3 Methodology

Whereas “methodology” refers to “the approach to the process of the research, encompassing a body of methods”, “method” refers to “the technique for collecting and/or analysing data” (Collis and Hussey, 2014, p. 55). The focus of this section is threefold. First, it illustrates the chosen methodology and highlights that this thesis utilises quantitative methods to achieve the research objectives. Second, it explains why experimental research an appropriate research strategy is to apply in order to achieve the research’s objectives. Third, it briefly discusses the applied cross-sectional approach due to the research time frame for the thesis.

#### 4.3.1 Methodological choices

As discussed previously, the choice of methodology is determined by the research ontology, epistemology, and approach. In addition, depending on how the research question of a study is framed, the answer of the research question could be descriptive (i.e., it attempts to provide a picture of a phenomenon), exploratory (i.e., it aims to provide in-depth understanding and insights into the phenomenon under investigation), or explanatory (i.e., it aims to discover causal relationships between variables). As Table 4.2 shows, these methodological choices can be broadly divided into quantitative and/or qualitative categories.

In this thesis, the choice of methodology is determined by the thesis’s objectives. In this thesis, it has been carefully considered which methodological choice aligns best with the thesis’s objectives (see Table 4.2). The thesis’s objectives, which were discussed in Chapter 1, section 1.3, show that the thesis is neither aiming to explore in-depth and clarify understanding of deceptive reviews nor attempting to gain an accurate overview of the situations in which deceptive reviews arise. Instead, the thesis’s objectives are purely framed via an explanatory lens, which seeks to examine the causal relationships between the identified variables (reviewer’s identity disclosure, reviewer’s expertise, online review scepticism, perceived deception, booking intention, NWOM, negative emotion, and hotel’s trustworthiness).

In addition, the purpose of this thesis is neither to focus on discovering a new phenomenon nor to explore its meaning and to generate and build theory, which is usually associated with qualitative research (Bryman, 2016). Furthermore, it does not aim to generate or verify a theory, which is usually associated with mixed methods (Molina-Azorín *et al.*, 2012). Instead, the thesis’s objectives focus on examining the relationship between the identified variables, which is an approach more related to quantitative research. As Table 4.2 shows, quantitative research is usually associated with a deductive approach, which uses data to test a theory. Therefore, and based on the research’s objectives, this study adopts quantitative research as the methodological approach. The part that follows discusses the research strategy.

Table 4-2 Overview of methodological choices and justification for conducting quantitative research

<b>Methodology choice</b>	<b>Brief description</b>
Quantitative research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is related to quantitative data, which uses numerical data (e.g., numbers).</li> <li>• Data can be collected through primary data (i.e., research data generated from an original source (e.g., experiment, survey) or using secondary data (i.e., research data collected from an existing source (e.g., publications, databases))).</li> <li>• It is usually associated with a deductive approach, where data is collected to test a theory.</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quantitative research usually aims to examine the relationship between variables.</li> <li>• In this study, the researcher adopts quantitative research as the methodological choice based on the research objectives. The research objectives are purely framed around explanatory approach; they seek to examine causal relationships between identified variables (reviewer's identity disclosure, reviewer's expertise, online review scepticism, perceived deception, booking intention, NWOM, negative emotion, and hotel's trustworthiness).</li> </ul>
Qualitative research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is related to qualitative data that can be defined by its form (i.e., non-numeric (e.g., words, images)) and by the interactive and interpretative process in which they are created.</li> <li>• Data can be collected through primary data (e.g., interviews, focus groups) or using secondary data (e.g., archives, databases).</li> <li>• It is often associated with an inductive approach, where data is collected to generate and build a theory.</li> <li>• The purpose of this research is neither to focus on discovering a new phenomenon nor to explore its meaning and to generate and build a theory, which are usually associated with qualitative research.</li> </ul>
Mixed methods research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It integrates the use of quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques in the same research.</li> <li>• It is often associated with an abductive approach, where data is collected to aid in theory generation or modification.</li> <li>• Applying mixed methods might help the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. However, due to some challenges related to accessing certain levels of reality (e.g., deceivers' behaviours in online reviews), coupled with the fact that this research aims to test hypotheses and examine cause and effect, applying a quantitative method over mixed methods is more appropriate. The quantitative method allows for the application of some statistical tests to examine relationships between the variables under investigation in this research.</li> </ul>

(Source: Malhotra, Birks, and Wills, 2012; Collis and Hussey, 2014; Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2015; Saunders *et al.*, 2019)

### 4.3.2 Research strategy

A quantitative study usually focuses on examining the relationship between identified variables and thus concentrates on testing a theory. Table 4.3 provides an overview of research strategies that are principally linked with quantitative research design. The choice of research strategy in this study is guided by the research questions and objectives. One of the main research objectives focuses on investigating and examining the effect of independent variables (i.e., reviewer's identity disclosure and reviewer's expertise) on dependent variables (i.e., booking intention, NWOM, negative emotion, and hotel's trustworthiness) through perceived deception.

The application of archival research does not suit what this study is investigating. There is much research on online reviews which adopts archival research as a research strategy to investigate the influence of factors such as reviews and/or reviewers' cues on a review's helpfulness (e.g., Liu and Park, 2015; Park and Nicolau, 2015; Filieri *et al.*, 2019). Information such as review and reviewers' cues and/or reviews' helpfulness is accessible on many online review websites. However, it is not possible to solely access deceptive reviews; neither is information about the number of people who have reported a review as deceptive available. Therefore, this study has excluded archival research as a research strategy due to the difficulty of accessing information related to deceptive reviews.

Having considered the limitations of archival data in meeting the objectives of this research, it is important to note that a survey also has limitations. A survey might be a good choice of research strategy when collecting primary and standardised data about the opinions and behaviours of a large number of participants. It could be employed as a research strategy to investigate and provide potential explanations regarding the specific relationship between variables (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2015). However, this research investigates the probability of a change in independent variables (i.e., reviewer's identity disclosure and reviewer's expertise) that causes a change in the dependent variable (i.e., perceived deception), which is more linked with experimental research.

Despite the limitations of both archival data and survey, the experimental research emerges as the most suitable approach for addressing the objectives of this research. Experimental research is used here as the research strategy to test controlled conditions, examine the validity of the proposed hypotheses, and achieve the research objectives. When researchers apply the experimental research approach, they have control over all the variables.

Researchers can design several scenarios and manipulate the independent variables to discover how changes to the independent variables can result in changes in the dependent variables (effect) (Field and Hole, 2003). Prior studies have widely applied experimental research in online review credibility research as a research strategy (e.g., Xie *et al.*, 2011; Kusumasondjaja *et al.*, 2012; Qiu *et al.*, 2012; Jiménez and Mendoza, 2013; Munzel, 2016; Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016). For instance, Kusumasondjaja *et al.* (2012) applied experimental research as a research strategy to test the effect of review valence (positive vs. negative) and reviewer's identity disclosure (identified vs. unidentified) on consumers' perceptions of the credibility of online reviews and their initial trust in travel services being reviewed.

In addition, the experimental method is not immediately interested in generalising statistical effects on the population. Instead, experimental research is useful for generalising the theoretical effects of variables (Highhouse, 2009; Sparks and Browning, 2011). The current research objectives are to examine the effect of reviewer's identity disclosure and reviewer's expertise on perceived deception and in turn booking intention, NWOM, negative emotion, and hotel's trustworthiness. In addition, this study considers the role of differences among consumers and considers online review scepticism as a moderator variable to examine its effect on the relationship between reviewers' profile cues and perceived deception. Applying experimental research as a research strategy will assist in showing the role played by reviewers' profile information (i.e., reviewer's identity disclosure and expertise) in affecting consumers' perceived deception and in turn their responses (i.e., booking intention, NWOM, negative emotion, hotel's trustworthiness).

To sum up, due to the nature of this thesis objectives and causal relationships implied in the conceptual framework, this thesis adopts experimental research as the research strategy. The experimental research strategy will assist in achieving this research objectives and in testing the influence of manipulated variables (reviewer’s identity disclosure and reviewer’s expertise) (causes) on booking intention, NWOM, negative emotion, and hotel’s trustworthiness (effect) through perceived deception. Also, it will assist in examining the moderation effect of online review scepticism on the relationship between reviewers’ profile cues and perceived deception. The following part briefly discusses the time frame for the current research.

Table 4-3 Overview of the research strategy and justification for applying experimental research

Research strategy	Brief description
Experiment	It is a research strategy used in methodology to investigate the relationship between variables. An independent variable is deliberately manipulated to examine its effects on a dependent variable. The aim of applying the experimental approach as a research strategy is to study the probability of change in the independent variable causing a change in the dependent variable. Applying the experimental research strategy will help the researcher to achieve the research objectives, as they can design several scenarios and manipulate the independent variables (i.e., reviewer’s identity disclosure and expertise) to examine how changes in these independent variables can result in changes in the dependent variables (i.e., booking intention, NWOM, negative emotion, and hotel’s trustworthiness) (effect) through perceived deception.
Survey	The survey as a research strategy allows the researcher to collect primary and standardised data about opinions and behaviours from a large number of participants. It is usually associated with a deductive research approach and tends to be used for exploratory and descriptive research. A questionnaire is an example of a survey research strategy. This study excludes this option, as this study seeks to investigate the probability of a change in the independent variables (i.e., reviewer’s identity disclosure and reviewer’s expertise) causing a change in the dependent variables (i.e., booking intention, NWOM, negative emotion, and hotel’s trustworthiness) through perceived deception, which is more linked with experimental research.
Archival research	It is a research strategy that allows the researcher to examine and analyse data from archival sources (e.g., online review websites) to answer specific research questions and objectives. These are considered as secondary sources because they were created for a different purpose. For instance, data from TripAdvisor will enable the researcher to utilise quantitative data (e.g., number of reviews marked as helpful), which will enable them to compare the effect of independent variables (e.g., review rating, reviewer’s identity disclosure). Due to the difficulty of accessing information related to deceptive reviews on many online review websites, this study has excluded archival research as a research strategy.

(Source: Collis and Hussey, 2014; Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2015; Saunders *et al.*, 2019)

### 4.3.3 Time frame for research

Generally, there are two-time frames: a cross-sectional “snapshot”, which takes a snapshot of a particular time, and longitudinal approach, which takes a series of snapshots that are representational of an event over a given period. Applying a longitudinal approach as a time frame for research might assist in investigating changes and developments over time (Gray, 2004; Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2015; Saunders *et al.*, 2019). However, this study applies a cross-sectional approach as a time frame due to its efficiency and cost (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2015). As this study is conducting this research for the purpose of submitting a thesis, and considering the deadline for thesis submission, this study applies a cross-sectional time frame, as the results can be obtained relatively more quickly compared to a longitudinal time frame. In addition, the cost of collecting the data is also a consideration. The cost in a cross-sectional time frame is more effective than in a longitudinal time frame, as data is collected at only one point in time. However, there are marginal potential benefits in applying longitudinal research, as it assists in understanding the processes of change over time (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2015). This thesis concentrates on examining the role of reviewers’ profile cues (i.e., reviewer’s identity disclosure and expertise) and how these affect consumers’ perceived deception and in turn their responses (booking intention, NWOM, negative emotion, and hotel’s trustworthiness). Therefore, applying a cross-sectional design will help to achieve the research objectives and enable them to show how cues related to reviewers’ profiles might influence consumers’ perceived deception and how perceived deception affects consumers’ responses at a specific point in time. This approach is in line with prior research that has investigated how online reviews and/or reviewer’s cues influence consumers to perceive a review as credible (Xie *et al.*, 2011; Qiu *et al.*, 2012; Xu, 2014).

In brief, this section has described the methodology in three parts. First, it has discussed the choice of quantitative methodology and shown that this choice was determined by the research ontology, epistemology, and approach. This section has discussed in more detail the fact that the choice of a quantitative methodology was due to the research objectives, which focus on examining the relationship between identified variables. Second, this section has shown, in the research strategy part, that experimental research suits the research objectives and this study's investigation of the probability of a change in the independent variables (i.e., reviewer's identity disclosure and reviewer's expertise) causing a change in the dependent variable (i.e., perceived deception). Third, this section has explained the fact that this study applies a cross-sectional time frame due to its efficiency and cost. The following section moves on to describe in greater detail the methods and techniques implemented in the current research.

#### **4.4 Method**

As was mentioned in the previous section (section 4.3), "method" refers to the techniques and tools that are employed to collect data within a particular methodology. This section (section 4.4) discusses in more detail all the techniques and tools applied in experimental research. This section is divided into five main parts – namely, experimental design, participants, stimuli, experimental procedures, and measurement development – to provide a clear understanding of all the techniques employed in experimental research.

##### **4.4.1 Experimental design**

As Table 4.4 shows, there are several experimental research designs that researchers can employ to achieve their research objectives; these are observation, quasi-experiment, and experimental design. The selection of an experimental research design depends on the

researchers' ability to conduct either a between-subject or within-subject experimental design, allowing for the inclusion of additional independent variables without encountering significant issues (Field and Hole, 2003).

In experimental design, researchers select a sample of subjects (i.e., participants) and then randomly assign them to an experimental group and/or control group. This randomisation is important in experimental design, as it assists in isolating the effect of manipulating the independent variables on the dependent variables (Aaker *et al.*, 2005; Kent, 2007; Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2015). Experimental design, as part of experimental research, can be utilised to establish cause and effect between independent variables and dependent variables (Field and Hole, 2003).

In contrast, the observational method or quasi-experiment might be useful in finding out how people normally behave or in situations in which an experimental design cannot be carried out for one reason or another (Aaker *et al.*, 2005; Kent, 2007; Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2015). However, the observational method and quasi-experiment have their limitations, as researchers face challenges in establishing a clear cause and effect relationship between the independent and dependent variables (Field and Hole, 2003).

Despite the limitations of both the observational method and quasi-experiment, the experimental design emerges as the most suitable design for addressing the objectives of this research. One of the main objectives of this thesis is to focus on investigating and examining the effect of the independent variables (i.e., reviewer's identity disclosure and reviewer's expertise) on the dependent variables (i.e., booking intention, NWOM, negative emotion, and hotel's trustworthiness) through perceived deception. In addition, this thesis examines the moderation effect of online review scepticism on the relationship between reviewers' profile

cues and perceived deception. Therefore, this thesis has applied an experimental design, as it assists in establishing a strong cause and effect relationship between the variables compared with an observational method and quasi-experimental design. Through manipulating the independent variables (i.e., reviewer’s identity disclosure and expertise), the experimental design can offer a clearer and more precise understanding of the relationships between variables. Additionally, it aids researchers in identifying the exact reasons behind the observed outcomes (Field and Hole, 2003).

Table 4-4 Overview of experimental research design and justification for applying an experimental design

Experimental research design	Brief description
Observational method	This method can be used to find out about a phenomenon by simply looking at it in a systematic and scientifically rigorous way. It does not involve direct manipulation of any variables and only records behaviour. It enables a researcher to get a good idea of how people normally behave. It cannot allow for the identification of cause and effect, as in experimental design. However, it can be used to construct hypotheses about cause and effect.
Quasi-experimental design	In this design, a researcher has control over the timing of the measurement of the dependent variable but does not have complete control over the manipulation of the independent variable or how subjects are assigned to different conditions. As the researcher does not have full control over the manipulation of the independent variable, this design does not allow them to establish cause and effect, as in experimental design. This is because the researcher is unable to eliminate all of the other possible reasons for why the two groups of subjects differ. However, this design is applicable in situations where there are ethical concerns or other factors that impede the implementation of an experimental design, such as risks to people’s lives. Another limitation is that participants are not assigned randomly to groups, which could result in bias due to how the groups are chosen.
Experimental design	This involves the manipulation of one or more independent variables. There are two experimental designs, which are between-group and within-subjects. Between-group designs use separate groups of subjects for each of the different conditions, either an experiment group (i.e., treatment group) (some form of planned intervention or manipulation will be tested) or a control group (no such intervention is made). Each subject is tested once only. In within-subject (i.e., repeated measures) design, each subject is exposed to all the conditions of the experiment. These types of design enable fairly unambiguous identification of cause and effect. Randomisation achieved in an unbiased manner is an important factor in identifying the effect of the manipulation of independent variables on behaviour. Randomly assigning subjects to either the experimental group or the control group helps control for potential alternative explanations for the manipulation of independent variables. In this study, the researcher’s



	application of an experimental design rather than a quasi-experimental design or observational method is due to it assisting them in establishing a strong cause and effect relationship between the compared variables, which facilitates achievement of the research objectives.
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(Source: Field and Hole, 2003; Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2015; Saunders *et al.*, 2019)

Now, exploring the specifics of the experimental design, the following paragraph discusses key elements such as the selection of a between-subject design and a scenario-based approach to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the experimental design. To test the hypothesised effects presented in the conceptual framework of this thesis, an online experiment was conducted; it used a 2 (identity disclosure: high, low) x 2 (expertise: high, low) between-subject design through a scenario-based approach to explore how reviewers' profile cues influence perceived deception and, ultimately, consumers' responses (specifically, booking intention, NWOM, negative emotion, and hotel's trustworthiness). In addition, the moderation role of online review scepticism on relationships between reviewers' profile cues and perceived deception was also explored. Table 4.5 shows the manipulation of independent variables in four conditions.

Table 4-5 Independent variable manipulation in each condition

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Independent variable manipulation</b>
Condition 1	High identity disclosure, High expertise
Condition 2	High identity disclosure, Low expertise
Condition 3	Low identity disclosure, High expertise
Condition 4	Low identity disclosure, Low expertise

The decision to conduct a between-subject design was based on four key reasons. First, it is possible to apply the experimental design in this thesis and randomly assign subjects to either the experiment group or the control group.

Second, even though a within-subject design is more sensitive than a between-subject design, as it can assist in the detection of the effect of the manipulation of independent variables on the dependent variable (Field and Hole, 2003), it was not appropriate to apply it in this thesis due to the fact that a within-subject design would make the experiment much longer. Thus, it might affect participants' performance from condition to condition. A between-subject design has a lower chance of inducing the fatigue effect, as each subject participates in only one condition (Field and Hole, 2003; Collis and Hussey, 2014). Therefore, applying a between-subject design might assist in improving the quality of the data obtained from subjects.

Third, a between-subject design has simplicity in its procedures and ensures that subjects are randomly allocated to the different conditions (Field and Hole, 2003). This makes it much easier to compare and interpret the effects of the manipulation of the independent variables in each condition.

Fourth, a between-subject design is widely utilised in online review research (e.g., Kusumasondjaja *et al.*, 2012; Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016; Liu *et al.*, 2019a). Therefore, supported by these four reasons, a between-subject design was applied in this experiment study.

In addition to the between-subject design, an online experiment between-subject design was conducted through a scenario-based approach. A scenario-based approach is a special way of doing experiments. In this technique, participants are given a hypothetical scenario to think about. This scenario is explained in a short piece of writing. After that, the participants are asked questions about their perceptions of the described scenario (Ercan *et al.*, 2022). Critics of experiments, especially ones involving hypothetical scenarios, often argue that how participants behave in these experiments does not really reflect how they behave in real-life

situations (Falk and Heckman, 2009). There are some concerns that controlled experiments lead to data that does not reflect real-life situations. Bardsley (2005) highlights that experimental studies do not capture the full and rich real-life context, which could be significant for understanding behaviour in the field.

In contrast, researchers who apply a scenario-based approach contend that this approach provides strong internal validity due to its ability to manipulate and control variables. Moreover, it sidesteps the cost and ethical concerns involved in real-life situations (Bitner, 1990). This control enables researchers to examine specific predictions drawn from models while keeping other factors consistent (Calder *et al.*, 1981). Many marketing researchers apply a scenario-based approach as a method due to its ability to advance causal knowledge (e.g., Falk and Heckman, 2009; Kim and Jang, 2014). It is widely utilised in research related to online reviews (e.g., Munzel, 2016; Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016; Liu *et al.*, 2019a). As the objectives of this thesis focus on examining the effect of reviewers' profile information (i.e., reviewer's identity disclosure and expertise) on perceived deception and in turn consumers' responses (booking intention, NWOM, negative emotion, and hotel's trustworthiness), this research applied the scenario-based approach due to its ability to advance causal knowledge and avoid the expense-related and ethical issues associated with real-life situations. The following part moves on to discuss the participants and how the data was collected.

#### **4.4.2 Participants**

This section discusses the population and sample of this thesis. It also illustrates how the data was collected. To provide a better understanding, the following part is divided into, first, the population and sample, and second, the data collection.

#### **4.4.2.1 Population and sample**

The sample of this thesis was selected based on easy availability, relevance, and minimising bias. Therefore, the non-probability sampling technique was applied. This technique is widely used in online review literature (e.g., Xie *et al.*, 2011; Filieri and McLeay, 2014; Filieri *et al.*, 2018b). Non-probability sampling encompasses various techniques such as convenience, quota, and snowball sampling (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). Convenience sampling was used in this research instead of the other sampling techniques because of its high efficiency in terms of time, money, and effort (Yu and Cooper, 1983; Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2015). The convenience non-probability sampling technique is appropriate for studies related to readers of online reviews on hotels. Filieri and McLeay (2014) explained that the context of accommodation might represent a small percentage of the overall population of readers who read online reviews for different products. Hence, applying the probability sampling technique might result in difficulties in identifying or contacting the sample.

Applying the non-probability sampling technique might assist in achieving this thesis's aim. Bryman (2016) pointed out that applying convenience sampling might provide a springboard for future research or link the results of a study with existing findings in the research area. In addition, experimental design is not immediately interested in generalising statistical effects to the population. Instead, experimental design is useful for generalising the theoretical effects of variables (Highhouse, 2009; Sparks and Browning, 2011). Therefore, applying the convenience sampling technique might assist in achieving the aim of the thesis and exploring how reviewers' profile cues (identity disclosure and expertise) influence consumers' responses (booking intention, NWOM, negative emotion, and hotel's trustworthiness) via perceived deception, in addition to examining the moderation effect of online review scepticism on the relationship between reviewers' profile cues and perceived deception.

The sample in this research was participants who in the United States, were 18 or older, and who read hotels' online reviews for booking purposes. It has been taken the size of the sample into consideration, as increasing its size increases its precision (Bryman, 2016). In order to enhance reliability and generalisability, the suggested minimum requirement in each experimental condition (five participants) was exceeded (Liu *et al.*, 2019b). The target was to recruit at least 40 participants in each experimental condition. Therefore, the sample size aimed to collect data from at least 160 participants. In the main experiment, the sample size was exceeded, and 369 participants attempted to complete the online experiment (there will be more discussion about the participants in Chapter 5). As shown previously, in Table 4.4, between-group designs tend to run on the basis that participants have been randomly allocated to one of four conditions. Therefore, instead of dividing the relevant sample into categories such as male and female in each experimental condition, the participants were randomly allocated to one of the four conditions. The next part moves on to discuss the data collection.

#### **4.4.2.2 Data collection**

The data was collected online for three reasons. First, the aim of this thesis is to investigate the effect of reviewers' profile information on perceived deception and in turn consumers' responses. The aim of this thesis is to measure the effect of reviewers' profile information on consumers who read online reviews. As this occurs online, it was appropriate that the participants encountered the stimuli online. Second, online data collection allowed for the collection of a large amount of data in an economical way, taking into consideration the time limit for submitting the research. Third, and more importantly, UK guidance regarding social distancing and staying alert and safe had to be taken into consideration to help reduce or remove the chance of COVID-19 being transmitted to the participants (Gov.uk, 2020).

Therefore, for the main experiment, it was recruited participants from Prolific. Prolific is a platform for online participant recruitment which explicitly caters to researchers (Palan and Schitter, 2018). Even though Prolific offers similar services to the widely utilised Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk, a crowdsourcing online participant pool for online behaviour studies (Peer *et al.*, 2014)), subjects on Prolific are less dishonest and score higher on attention-checking questions than those on MTurk, which assists in ensuring data quality (Peer *et al.*, 2017).

The decision to recruit participants through Prolific instead of via other online subject pools was due to its feature of subject management. First, Prolific has established straightforward guidelines for determining a minimum payment per unit of time. At the beginning of an experiment, researchers estimate the time required for subjects to complete it. However, the actual time taken by participants is recorded and used later to update the payment calculation. Palan and Schitter (2018) pointed out that clear guidance regarding payment supports valid results and ethical research. However, researchers should be careful not to use excessive incentives, which might attract subjects to participate in studies that they would otherwise choose to avoid. In this thesis, all of these factors were taken into account when determining the payment of participants.

Second, Prolific offers researchers a feature using which they can specify some eligibility criteria for participants (Palan and Schitter, 2018). This study applied criteria for participants, namely that they should be resident in the United States and be 18 or older.

Third, Prolific offers the option to exclude certain participants from taking part in an experiment. This feature assisted in excluding participants who had previous knowledge about manipulation due to their participation in the pre-test study (discussed in section

4.4.3). In addition, Prolific has received attention as an alternative means of collecting data online (e.g., Palan and Schitter, 2018; Godinho and Garrido, 2020; Filieri *et al.*, 2021; Jin *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, based on the advantages that Prolific offers and in line with previous studies, the participants were recruited from Prolific. The next part moves on to discuss the stimuli in more detail.

#### **4.4.3 Stimuli**

As described in the previous section (section 4.4.2), an online experiment with a between-subject design was applied through a scenario-based approach. This research utilised a 2 (identity disclosure: high, low) x 2 (expertise: high, low) approach to explore how reviewers' profile cues influence perceived deception and ultimately consumers' responses. Stimuli were developed in this research. This section is divided into three parts, namely manipulation of the independent variables, scenario selection, and pre-test.

##### **4.4.3.1 Manipulation of independent variables**

Two independent variables were manipulated in this thesis, namely reviewer's identity disclosure and reviewer's expertise. Figure 4.1 shows examples of how online review websites (e.g., TripAdvisor and Google) show reviewer's identity and expertise. Regarding the manipulation of reviewer's identity disclosure into two levels – high and low, it was adopted the same method of manipulation used in prior research and utilised socio-demographic information to manipulate reviewer's identity disclosure (high vs. low), including gender, photo, name, age, marital status, city, and country of residence, or the disclosure of no information at all (e.g., Xie *et al.*, 2011; Kusumasondjaja *et al.*, 2012; Park *et al.*, 2014; Xu, 2014; Munzel, 2016; Shan, 2016; Kim *et al.*, 2020).

For high reviewer identity disclosure, it was examined reviewer’s identity disclosure as a function that provided information about the reviewer’s identity rather instead of eliciting an emotional response or perceived reviewer–receiver similarity. Therefore, it was used and disclosed information related to a reviewer’s identity including the reviewer’s full name, age, marital status, and country of residence (Xie *et al.*, 2011; Kusumasondjaja *et al.*, 2012; Munzel, 2016). The reason for not presenting the reviewer’s photo was that it might raise awareness about who the reviewer was. Furthermore, it avoided a situation in which the participants might be influenced by other factors such as perceptions of warmth and friendliness (Shan, 2016) or perceptions of identification or of having a similar background to the reviewer (Xu, 2014), as these factors might confound the result.

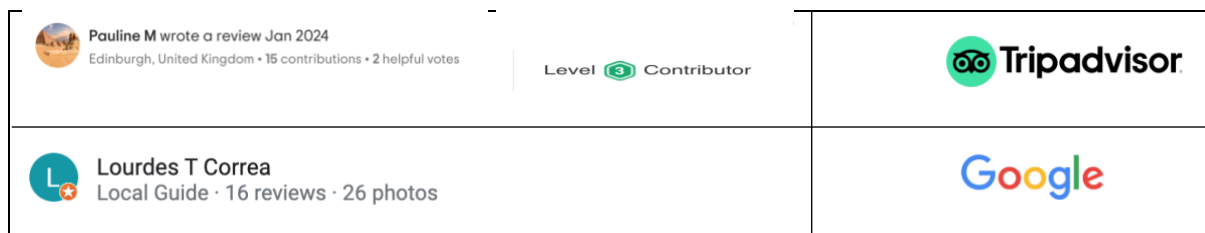


Figure 4-1 Examples of how online review websites show reviewer's identity and expertise

In addition, and to control for the effects of emotional response and/or reviewer–receiver similarity as much as possible regarding the socio-demographic information being considered in the current stimuli, it was used a unisex name for the reviewer (Jordin Muller), who is married and from Oakland, California, United States. The reviewer’s place of origin was the United States, as the participants in the current thesis were from the United States. Regarding age, it was created a reviewer who was 34 years old, as young travellers in the United States are more likely to spend a longer time reading online reviews than older travellers (Statista, 2019). When manipulating the low reviewer identity disclosure condition, no information was provided about the reviewer’s identity (Kusumasondjaja *et al.*, 2012; Xie *et al.*, 2011; Munzel, 2016).



Regarding manipulating the reviewer's expertise into two levels – namely high and low – and consistent with prior studies (Wu *et al.*, 2017; Hwang *et al.*, 2018; Lo and Yao, 2019), it was manipulated the reviewer's expertise based on layouts utilised on online review websites. On many online review websites (e.g., TripAdvisor, Google), reviewers are categorised into different levels based on reviewers' activities (e.g., posting reviews, photos, ratings, etc., on the website). Therefore, the reviewer with high expertise was manipulated to level 5, "Very High Expertise", while the reviewer with low expertise was manipulated to level 1, "Very Low Expertise". The next part moves on to discuss more about the scenario selection.

#### **4.4.3.2 Scenario selection**

The hotel, as the experimental stimuli, was chosen based on three criteria. First, a hotel is classified as an experience good, and its quality cannot be evaluated until consumers have some experience (Mudambi and Schuff, 2010; Pan and Chiou, 2011). Previous research has shown that online reviews influence consumers' purchasing decisions, particularly for services (e.g., hotels and restaurants) (Tsao *et al.*, 2015; Yen and Tang, 2015). Park and Lee (2009) showed that consumers tend to acquire more information from eWOM (e.g., online reviews) when making a decision such as a booking for experience goods (e.g., hotels, restaurants) compared to search goods (e.g., books, clothing), where a consumer can obtain comprehensive details about search goods prior to purchase. Moreover, experience goods (e.g., hotels) do not have features like "try before you buy" or "return in case quality is below expectations" (Racherla and Friske, 2012). This might result in a higher risk being associated with consumers' booking decision, thus increasing the influence of online reviews on consumers' behaviour (Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016). Therefore, through acquiring information from online reviews, consumers may be able to reduce their uncertainty about

the quality of services that they are considering booking (Sparks and Browning, 2011; Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016; Filieri *et al.*, 2018b).

Second, online review websites that specialise in reviews related to tourism products (e.g., TripAdvisor.com) have been criticised in academic research and the mass media, as consumers' booking decisions may be affected negatively due to the existence of deceptive reviews on some online review websites (e.g., Ott *et al.*, 2012; Mayzlin *et al.*, 2014; Horton, 2017). However, online review websites still play an essential role and are considered as an important information source for consumers (Filieri and McLeay, 2014). As mentioned earlier in the introduction chapter, the hotel sector has the most significant influence, comprising £14.38 billion of consumer spending on travel and hotels, out of the estimated £23 billion annually impacted by online reviews in the UK (Competition and Markets Authority, 2015). In addition, the exposure of news related to deceptive reviews might enhance consumer awareness and knowledge of the issue (Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016). Thus, it might also assist in examining the moderating role online review scepticism plays in the relationship between a reviewer's profile information and perceived deception.

Third, the hotel industry is salient in online review research (e.g., Xie *et al.*, 2011; Filieri and McLeay, 2014; Filieri, 2016; Shan, 2016; Liu *et al.*, 2019a). Therefore, a hotel has been chosen as the experimental stimuli based on these three criteria. The following part moves on to present the pre-tests.

#### **4.4.3.3 Pre-test**

This thesis conducted many pre-tests and pilot studies. The purpose of conducting pre-test 1 was to enhance the effectiveness of manipulating the independent variables, namely reviewer's identity disclosure and reviewer's expertise, and to select the stimuli for the main

experiment. Before conducting pre-test 1, it was ran pilot study 1 with 12 university postgraduate research students (nine males, three females; Age M = 31–40) to check the survey's readability and questionnaire wording. The participants were first invited to complete the online survey either on desktops (different browsers) or phones (different software, i.e., Mac and Android) and to make short notes about any issues identified. Then, a short conversation was conducted separately with each participant. There were not any technical problems in completing the survey using different browsers (e.g., Google Chrome, Safari, Edge, and Microsoft Internet Explorer) or with phones' software. The identified issues were related to the "next page" button (not clear) and the clarity of instructions about the survey questions. Based on the suggestions from pilot study 1, it was revised pre-test 1.

93 participants (53 males and 40 females; Age M = 31–40) completed pre-test 1 using Amazon Mechanical Turk. For a reviewer's identity disclosure, participants were exposed to six different types of reviewer profile information ranging from high identity disclosure to low identity disclosure. In order to control for the potential order effect, the reviewer's identity disclosure was randomly presented to participants (Lee and Shin, 2014). Participants' perceptions of reviewer identity disclosure were measured using Hite *et al.*'s (2014) scale with some modifications made to reflect the current research questions and objectives. The participants rated five items using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree) (Cronbach's alpha = .815). The results of analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed significant differences between high reviewer identity disclosure to low identity disclosure ( $M_{\text{Profile(A)}} = 3.69$ ;  $M_{\text{Profile(B)}} = 3.41$ ;  $M_{\text{Profile(c)}} = 3.12$ ;  $M_{\text{Profile(D)}} = 2.8$ ;  $M_{\text{Profile(E)}} = 2.71$ ;  $M_{\text{Profile(F)}} = 2.30$ ,  $F(2789) = 66.417$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This confirms the effectiveness of manipulating the reviewer's identity disclosure into two high and low levels.

For the reviewer's expertise, the participants were presented with four different numbers of reviews written by the reviewer (1, 50, 100, and 1,000 reviews) in random order. In each number presented, participants' perceptions of reviewer expertise were measured using Ohanian's (1990) scale with some modifications to reflect the current research questions and objectives. The participants rated five items using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree) (Cronbach's alpha = .94). The results of ANOVA showed significant differences between the high number of reviews submitted by a reviewer and the low number of reviews ( $M_{1000 \text{ reviews}} = 4.40$ ;  $M_{100 \text{ reviews}} = 4.13$ ;  $M_{50 \text{ reviews}} = 3.83$ ;  $M_{1 \text{ review}} = 2.70$ ,  $F(1859) = 246.783$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This confirms the effectiveness of manipulating the reviewer's identity into two high and low levels.

In summary, the results confirmed the optimal selection of the intended manipulation of independent variables (i.e., reviewer's identity disclosure and reviewer's expertise) into two high and low levels after pre-testing various stimuli in pre-test 1. More information about the participants' profile information and reviewer's identity profiles are provided in Appendix 1.

After analysing the results of pre-test 1, several challenges emerged that warranted further investigation. It was encountered a challenge when recruiting participants from Amazon Mechanical Turk, as many participants completed the survey within seconds, despite an expected completion time of five minutes. This raised a potential issue regarding the validity of the responses in the future main experiment, as it suggested the participants might not be adequately engaging with the questionnaire.

Furthermore, it was made slight adjustments to the manipulation of reviewer's expertise to align this with the typical format found on various online review websites, consistent with prior studies (Wu *et al.*, 2017; Hwang *et al.*, 2018; Lo and Yao, 2019). In these manipulations





of reviewer’s expertise, high reviewer expertise indicated that the reviewer was in level 5 (very high expertise), whereas low reviewer expertise showed that the reviewer was in level 1 (very low expertise). In addressing these issues, an additional pre-test (pre-test 2) was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the independent variable manipulations (i.e., reviewer’s identity disclosure and reviewer’s expertise) in creating the desired experimental conditions. Participants in pre-test 2 were recruited from Prolific, ensuring a distinct participant pool for this specific phase of the research.

Before running pre-test 2, pilot study 2 was run with 12 university postgraduate research students (nine males, three females; Age M = 31–40) to check the manipulations’ readability and questionnaire wording. The same method was applied as in pilot study 1: the participants were first invited to complete the online pilot study and then a short conversation was conducted separately with each participant. All of the participants indicated that they had no difficulties regarding readability and questionnaire wording.

After pilot study 2, pre-test 2 was conducted to examine the reviewer’s identity disclosure and reviewer’s expertise scenarios that had been manipulated. A different set of subjects (n = 82; 30 males, 52 females; Age M = 31–40) was recruited through Prolific and randomly assigned to view one of the four conditions that would be utilised in the main experiment (the choice of Prolific is discussed in section 4.4.7). Table 4.6 shows the experiment stimuli for reviewer’s identity disclosure and expertise, which resulted in four conditions. In addition, it shows the number of subjects assigned to each condition.

Table 4-6 Conditions and scenarios examined in pre-test 2

Condition	Scenario	Experiment stimuli for reviewer’s identity disclosure and expertise	Number	Percent
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Condition 1	High reviewer identity disclosure, high reviewer expertise	<p><b>Jordin's profile</b></p>  <p><b>Jordin Muller</b> 34 years, Married Oakland, California, United States</p> <p>Level <b>5</b> Very High Expertise</p>	20	24.4
Condition 2	High reviewer identity disclosure, low reviewer expertise	<p><b>Jordin's profile</b></p>  <p><b>Jordin Muller</b> 34 years, Married Oakland, California, United States</p> <p>Level <b>1</b> Very Low Expertise</p>	18	22
Condition 3	Low reviewer identity disclosure, high reviewer expertise	<p><b>User's profile</b></p>  <p><b>User</b> Unknown city</p> <p>Level <b>5</b> Very High Expertise</p>	23	28
Condition 4	Low reviewer identity disclosure, low reviewer expertise	<p><b>User's profile</b></p>  <p><b>User</b> Unknown city</p> <p>Level <b>1</b> Very Low Expertise</p>	21	25.6
Total	-	-	82	100

To assess the level of reviewer identity disclosure, participants were asked to assess their perceived level of information about the reviewer's identity using scales adapted from Hite *et al.* (2014,  $\alpha = 0.949$ ) using 7-point Likert scales (1 = very strongly disagree, 7 = very strongly agree). To assess the reviewer's expertise level, participants were asked to assess their perceived level of reviewer expertise using scales adapted from Ohanian (1990,  $\alpha = 0.855$ ) using 7-point Likert scales (1 = very strongly disagree, 7 = very strongly agree). The measurement scales for identity disclosure and expertise are presented in Table 4.8).

The independent sample *t*-test was applied to independently test the mean differences across two groups (high and low reviewer identity disclosure and high and low reviewer expertise) (Field and Hole, 2003). The results of the independent sample *t*-test showed the effectiveness of the manipulation of the reviewer's identity disclosure, and there was a significant difference in the reviewer's identity disclosure (high vs. low) ( $M_{\text{high}} = 4.56$ ,  $SD = 1.43$  vs.  $M_{\text{low}} =$

2.08,  $SD = 1.14$ ;  $t(70.351) = -8.556$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The same method was applied to test the mean differences between the reviewer's expertise (high vs. low). The results of the independent sample  $t$ -test showed the effectiveness of the manipulation of the reviewer's expertise, and there was a significant difference in the reviewer's expertise (high vs. low) ( $M_{high} = 5.42$ ,  $SD = 0.887$  vs.  $M_{low} = 3.723$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ;  $t(75.208) = -7.910$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

From these results, it can be concluded that the manipulation of both independent variables (reviewer's identity and reviewer's expertise) worked as intended. Subjects who assigned the high reviewer identity disclosure condition perceived the reviewer's identity disclosure to be higher than subjects who assigned the low reviewer identity disclosure condition. Subjects who assigned the high reviewer expertise condition perceived the reviewer's expertise to be higher than the subjects who assigned the low reviewer expertise condition.

Given these results, the four experimental scenarios were deemed ready to be utilised in the main experiment. The first scenario reflected high reviewer identity disclosure, and included the reviewer's full name, age, marital status, and country of residence, while high reviewer expertise included a high level of expertise. The second scenario reflected high reviewer identity disclosure versus low reviewer expertise. The third scenario reflected low reviewer identity disclosure (i.e., there were no disclosures about the reviewer's identity) versus a high expertise level. The fourth scenario reflected low reviewer identity disclosure versus low reviewer expertise. Figure 4.2 summarises the purpose of and sample size for the pre-tests and pilot studies conducted at this stage.

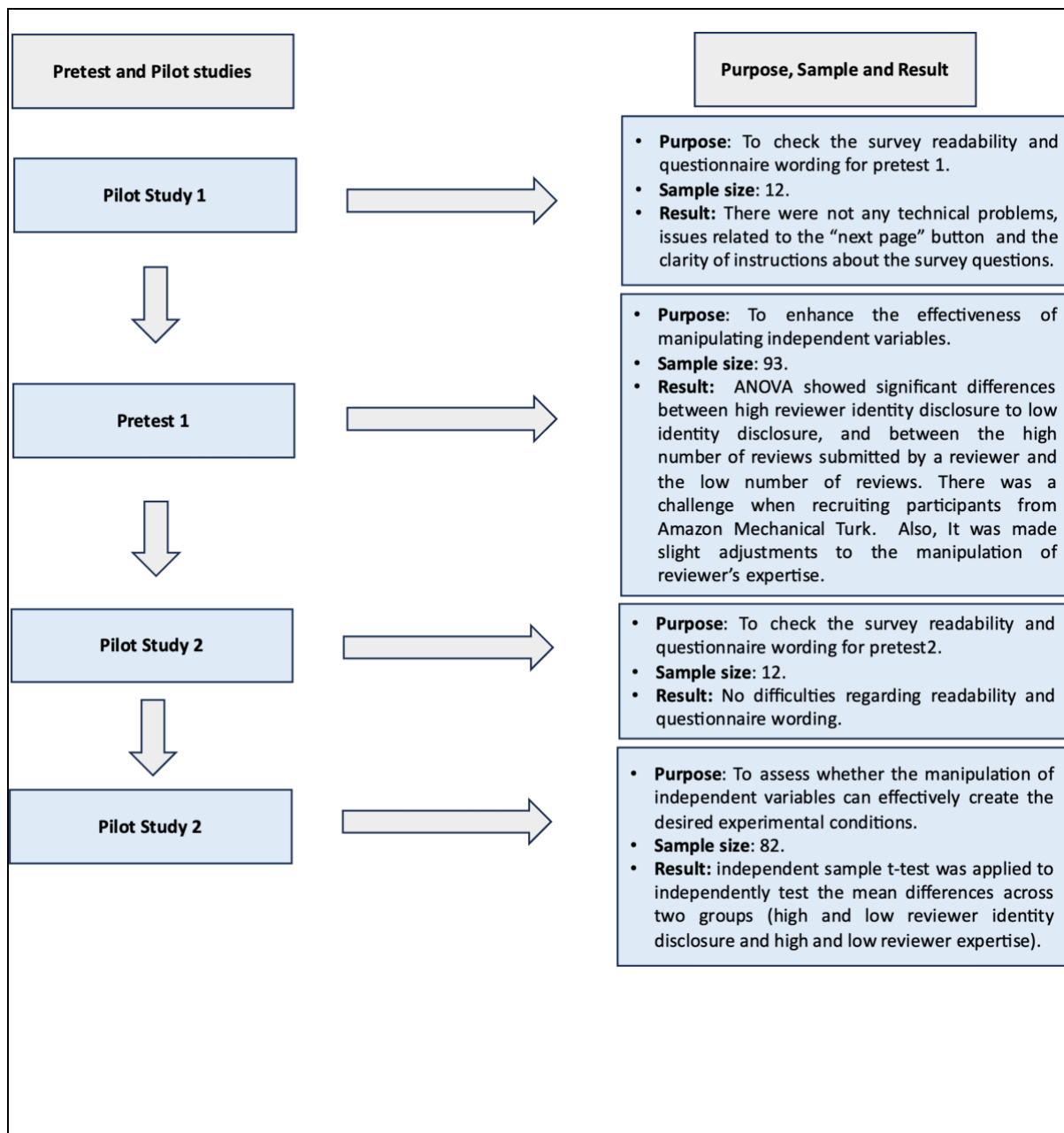


Figure 4-2 Purpose of and sample sizes for the pre-tests and pilot studies

Thus far, an online experiment between-subject design had been applied through a scenario-based approach. This research utilised a 2 (identity disclosure: high, low) x 2 (expertise: high, low) design to explore how reviewers’ profile cues influence perceived deception and, ultimately, consumers’ responses. The necessary stimuli were prepared by manipulating the independent variables, selecting scenarios, and conducting pre-tests. The next section discusses the experimental procedures.



#### 4.4.4 Experimental procedures

The stimulus material included screening questions, scenario descriptions, experimental conditions, realism checks, manipulation checks, measurements for all hypothesised variables, and demographic information.

First, the stimulus material began with screening questions, which are frequently used in online review research. This approach can help ensure that all the participants have an appropriate level of knowledge related to the scenarios (Nieto-García *et al.*, 2017; Wu *et al.*, 2017; Liu *et al.*, 2019a). The participants were asked questions about their reading of online reviews before booking a hotel using 7-point Likert scales (1 = very strongly disagree, 7 = very strongly agree). The participants who answered somewhat disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree were filtered out due to their limited engagement with reading online reviews for booking purposes.

Second, for the scenario description, the participants were instructed to imagine they were searching for a hotel for their next vacation: while looking at an online review website, they find the following review about a hotel and some information about the reviewer. The purpose of choosing to not show the name of the hotel was to avoid the potential brand effect (Qiu *et al.*, 2012; Xu, 2014). The findings of the study by Vermeulen and Seegers (2009) showed that the effect of reviews on consumers' attitudes is more significant for unknown hotels. In addition, the scenario also did not show any information about the price and how many stars the hotel has in order to avoid influencing subjects' perceptions of the hotel, review, and reviewer (Qiu *et al.*, 2012). Furthermore, the scenario did not specify the destination to avoid potential bias in participants' prior knowledge or preferences related to specific locations (Kusumasondjaja *et al.*, 2012; Liu *et al.*, 2019a).

Third, after reading the scenario description, the participants were randomly allocated to one of the four experimental conditions, following a 2 (identity disclosure: high, low) x 2 (expertise: high, low) between-subject design. For each experimental condition, the page included an image that looked like a screenshot from an online review website to mimic the participants' experience of reading online reviews. It did not show the name of the online review website to avoid the potential brand effect (Qiu *et al.*, 2012; Xu, 2014). In addition, it kept consistent all the experimental conditions regarding the review, which were adopted from an online review website. The review's content was: "Upon check in we were pleasantly surprised by the decor, the location to so many downtown attractions and the attentiveness of the staff. WOW! Service in the restaurant was outstanding and the food was amazing. We truly enjoyed our dining experience. All in all I would not hesitate to recommend this hotel to anyone I meet". Figure 4.3 shows an example of one of the experimental conditions. Appendix 3 details all the experimental conditions.



Figure 4-3 An example experimental condition (condition 1: high identity disclosure vs. high expertise)

Fourth, after being exposed to one of the experimental conditions, the participants were instructed to complete an online questionnaire containing measures regarding realism

checks, manipulation checks, the mediation variable (perceived deception), the moderator variable (online review scepticism), the dependent variables (booking intention, NWOM, negative emotion, hotel’s trustworthiness) – adapted from previous studies and discussed in more detail in section 4.4.5 – and demographics.

Lastly, after completing the measurement of all the variables under investigation, the participants were instructed to answer questions relating to demographic information, including gender, age, education, income, and occupation. In addition, to ensure the validity of the responses, attention-checking questions were inserted into the middle of the scales (e.g., “please select strongly disagree option”). Figure 4.4 shows all the steps in the experimental design and the rationales for each step.

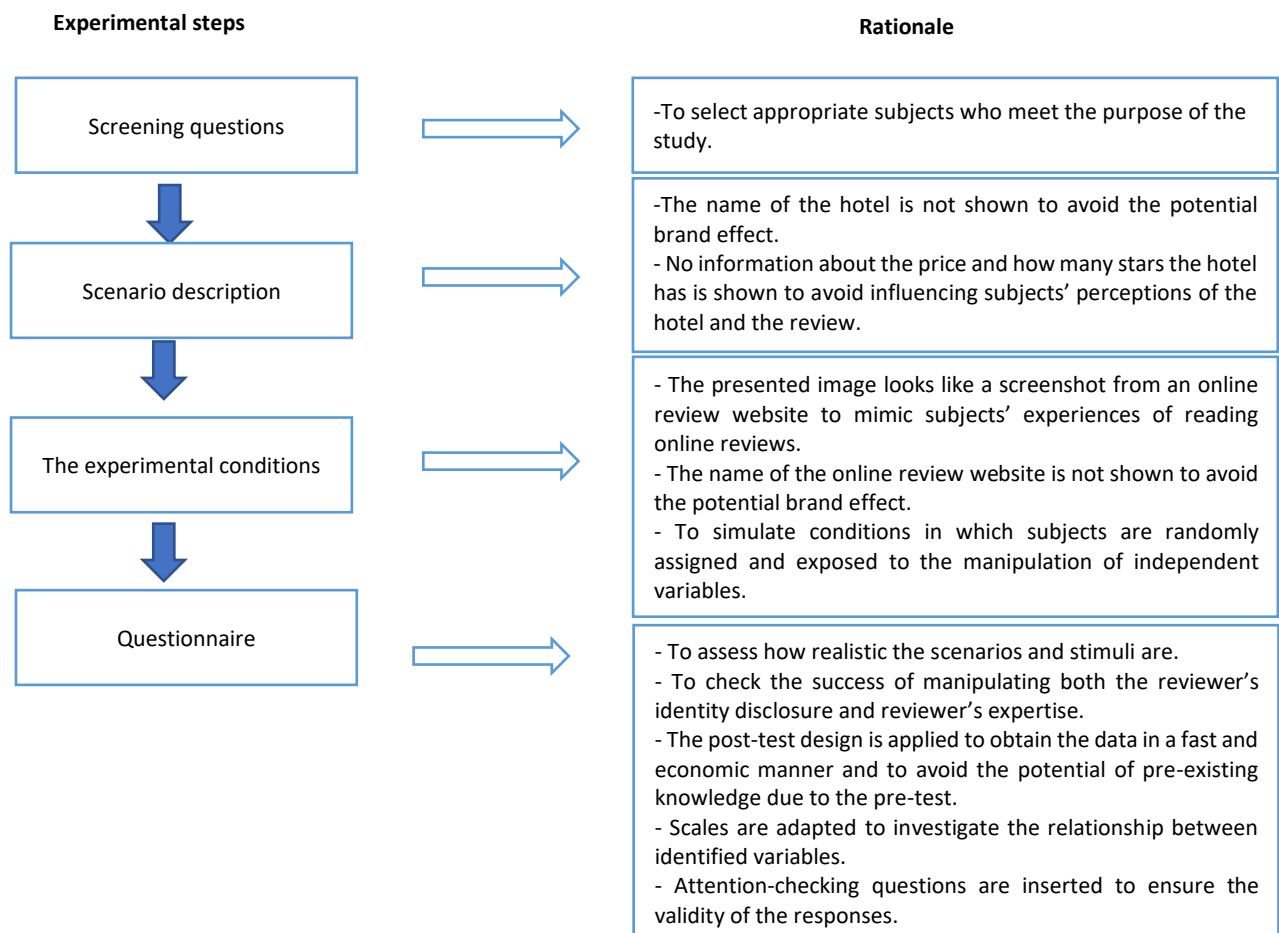


Figure 4-4 Experimental design and rationale (adapted from Liu *et al.*, 2019a)

Having discussed the various components of the stimulus material, it is crucial to explain the reasons for the timing of the online questionnaire containing all measurements. In line with this consideration, a post-test design was employed. The following part will delve into the details of the chosen post-test design, providing insight into its significance in capturing participants' responses after exposure to the manipulation of independent variables.

A post-test design was utilised, in which the assessment of the participants' responses took place after the manipulation of the independent variables. Applying the post-test design can assist in determining if there is a significant difference in the dependent variables as a result of the manipulation of the independent variables. In contrast, a pre-test/post-test design measures participants' responses before and after they are exposed to manipulations. The pre-test/post-test can assist researchers in assessing the change in dependent variables over time and evaluating the effect of the manipulation of the independent variables. However, one problem associated with the pre-test/post-test design is that participants might affect their subsequent performance (Field and Hole, 2003).

The Solomon four-group design assists in examining the effect of the manipulation of independent variables on the dependent variables. It considers the potential of pre-existing knowledge due to the pre-test. However, this design is expensive in terms of time and the number of participants (Field and Hole, 2003). Therefore, this study applied the post-test design to obtain the data in a fast and economic manner and to avoid the potential of pre-

existing knowledge due to the pre-test. Table 4.7 provides a description of the between-subject design.

Table 4-7 Description of the between-subject design

Between-subject design	Description	Figure
Post-test design	It is probably the most straightforward type of experimental design that can be performed. The assessment of subjects' responses takes place after manipulations of the independent variables take place. Subjects are randomly assigned to different conditions. After they are exposed to manipulations, their responses are measured.	<pre> graph LR     RA[Random Allocation] --&gt; GA[Group A]     RA --&gt; GB[Group B]     GA --&gt; EG[Experiment group]     EG --&gt; M1[Measurement]     GB --&gt; CG[Control group]     CG --&gt; M2[Measurement]     </pre>
Pre-test/post-test design	The assessment of subjects' responses takes place both before and after they are exposed to manipulations.	<pre> graph LR     RA[Random Allocation] --&gt; GA[Group A]     RA --&gt; GB[Group B]     GA --&gt; M1[Measurement]     M1 --&gt; EG[Experiment group]     EG --&gt; M2[Measurement]     GB --&gt; M3[Measurement]     M3 --&gt; CG[Control group]     CG --&gt; M4[Measurement]     </pre>
Solomon four-group design	It combines characteristics of both the post-test design and the pre-test/post-test design. It can be applied to assess the effect of manipulations while also considering the potential effect of pre-testing. It has four conditions, two control and two experimental. Subjects are randomly assigned to one condition. The assessment of subjects' responses takes place both before and after they are exposed to manipulation in Group A and Group B, while the assessment takes place only after exposing subjects to manipulated independent variables.	<pre> graph LR     RA[Random Allocation] --&gt; GA[Group A]     RA --&gt; GB[Group B]     RA --&gt; GC[Group C]     RA --&gt; GD[Group D]     GA --&gt; M1[Measurement]     M1 --&gt; EG1[Experiment group]     EG1 --&gt; M2[Measurement]     GB --&gt; M3[Measurement]     M3 --&gt; CG1[Control group]     CG1 --&gt; M4[Measurement]     GC --&gt; EG2[Experiment group]     EG2 --&gt; M5[Measurement]     GD --&gt; CG2[Control group]     CG2 --&gt; M6[Measurement]     </pre>

(Source: Field and Hole, 2003)

After discussing the various components of the stimulus material, including screening questions, scenario descriptions, experimental conditions, realism checks, manipulation checks, and measurements for all hypothesised variables, it is crucial to show another critical aspect of the research process. In addition, a pilot study 3 was conducted to validate the effectiveness of the chosen experimental procedures and to identify potential challenges or adjustments needed for the main experiment. The following part provides insights into the findings of the pilot study 3.

The pilot study 3 was run, and 35 university postgraduate researchers were invited to check the experiment's readability, the questionnaire wording, and to examine the initial reliability of measurements. The participants were first invited to complete the online pilot study either on desktops (different browsers) or phones (different software, i.e., Mac and Android) and to make short notes about any issues identified. Then, a short conversation was conducted separately with the participants who completed pilot study 3.

In pilot study 3, the stimulus material began with screening questions, following which eight participants, who did not regularly read online reviews before booking hotels, were filtered out. Six participants, who failed to correctly answer the attention-checking questions or who did not complete the experiment, were removed. This resulted 21 participants (12 males, nine females; Age M = 31–40).

The participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions: condition 1 (high identity disclosure, high expertise), condition 2 (high identity disclosure, low expertise), condition 3 (low identity disclosure, high expertise), and condition 4 (low identity disclosure, low expertise). As Table 4.8 shows, there were six participants in each condition, except for

condition 2, where the number of participants was 3. This difference occurred because some of the participants in condition 2 did not answer the attention-checking questions correctly. However, in the main experiment of this study, the number of participants in each condition was ensured to be similar. In terms of reliability, this was assessed for each construct using Cronbach's alpha and ranged from 0.71 to 0.97 (see Table 4.9). The adaption of the measurements is discussed in the following part. Finally, all the participants who completed the pilot study confirmed that the instructions provided in all parts of the study were clear and straightforward. The next part moves on to discuss more about measurement development.

Table 4-8 Pilot study conditions

Condition	Frequency
Condition 1: high identity disclosure, high expertise	6
Condition 2: high identity disclosure, low expertise	3
Condition 3: low identity disclosure, high expertise	6
Condition 4: low identity disclosure, low expertise	6
Total	21

Table 4-9 Pilot study's reliability assessment

Construct	Cronbach's alpha
Reviewer's expertise	.93
Reviewer's identity disclosure	.89
Perceived deception	.92
Online review scepticism	.88
Booking intention	.97
NWOM	.71
Negative emotion	.94
Hotel's trustworthiness	.93

#### 4.4.5 Measurement development

As demonstrated briefly in the previous section (section 4.4.4), existing validated measurements were adapted to measure the realism check, the manipulation check of the independent variables (i.e., reviewer's identity disclosure and expertise), perceived deception, online review scepticism, booking intention, NWOM, negative emotion, and hotel's trustworthiness.

For the realism checks, and to assess how realistic the scenarios and stimuli were, items were adapted from Liao (2007) that had been recently used by Liu *et al.* (2019a) (using 7-point Likert scales; 1 = very strongly disagree, 7 = very strongly agree).

The methods employed to measure the variables in this study had implications for both validity (the degree to which a measure accurately assesses the intended concept) and reliability (the consistency of measures under similar conditions) (Hair *et al.*, 2020). The selection of measures for all variables considered in this thesis was driven by their relevance and demonstrated reliability in previous research.

For the manipulation check, two independent variables were manipulated (that is, these were manipulated to measure their effect on the dependent variables), namely reviewer's identity disclosure and expertise. Reviewer's identity disclosure was operationally defined as presenting oneself online in a way that makes it easy for others to recognise one and using a single, consistent method of identification (e.g., real name, posting one's geographic location) (Forman *et al.*, 2008). The success of the manipulation of the reviewer's identity disclosure was checked based on Hite *et al.*'s (2014,  $\alpha = 0.86$ ) measures, which were recently used by Chen *et al.* (2019,  $\alpha = 0.845$ ).



Regarding the reviewer's expertise, this was operationally defined as the extent to which the reviewer is perceived as having knowledge, skills, and/or expertise in a specific domain (Fileri *et al.*, 2018b). The success of the manipulation of the reviewer's expertise was checked based on Ohanian's (1990,  $\alpha = 0.89$ ) measures, which were recently used by Shan (2016,  $\alpha = 0.94$ ) in an online review context. All were measured on 7-point Likert scales.

For perceived deception (mediation variable, which explains the relationship between independent variables and dependent variables), this was operationally defined as the extent to which a consumer perceives that a review they have read intends to mislead them. Darke and Ritchie's (2007,  $\alpha = 0.80$ ) scales, which were recently utilised by Xie *et al.* (2015,  $\alpha = 0.91$ ), were applied to measure perceived depiction.

In terms of online review scepticism (moderation variable, which affects the nature of the relationship between independent variables and the mediation variable), this was defined as the general tendency to disbelieve online reviews (Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016). This research adapted the scale items used to measure online review scepticism from Skarmeas and Leonidou (2013,  $\alpha = 0.94$ ), which were recently used by Reimer and Benkenstein (2016,  $\alpha = 0.91$ ). All were measured on 7-point Likert scales.

Regarding the dependent variables (which may change in response to changes resulting from the manipulation of other variables), booking intention was used to reflect consumers' willingness to book a hotel room (Sparks and Browning, 2011). A three-item scale was used to measure booking intention; this was adapted from Dodds *et al.* (1991,  $\alpha = 0.96$ ) and recently used by Fileri *et al.* (2018b,  $\alpha = 0.892$ ) in an online review context.

NWOM was defined as a consumer's belief that they would tell others about their dissatisfactory experience with a target object (Ingram *et al.*, 2005). It was measured based on Sánchez-García and Currás-Pérez's (2011,  $\alpha = 0.90$ ) measures.

Negative emotion was defined as negative affective reactions to perception situations (Verhoef, 2005). It was measured based on scales used by Burke and Edell (1989,  $\alpha = 0.96$ ) and López-López *et al.* (2014,  $\alpha = 0.96$ ).

Finally, hotel's trustworthiness was defined as the extent to which one party (e.g., a consumer) was willing to rely on an exchange partner's (e.g., a hotel's) reliability and integrity (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). It was measured based on Senecal and Nantel's (2004,  $\alpha = .88$ ) measures.

All were measured on 7-point Likert scales. Table 4.10 shows all the measurement scales that were adapted in this research to measure the mediation, moderation, and dependent variables. The next part moves on to discuss pilot study 3, which was run before collecting the data for the main experiment.

Table 4-10 The measurement scales for the realism check, manipulation check, and the mediation, moderation, and dependent variables

	Items	Adapted from
<b>Realism check</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) This scenario could happen in real life.</li> <li>2) This scenario sounds realistic.</li> </ol>	Liao (2007)
<b>Reviewer's identity disclosure (manipulation check)</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) It is easy to identify who this reviewer is.</li> <li>2) The reviewer has disclosed information that allows me to know their identity.</li> <li>3) I feel that I know the identity of this reviewer.</li> <li>4) I know nothing of the identity of this reviewer. (reverse-coded)</li> </ol>	Hite <i>et al.</i> (2014)

	5) The reviewer has not disclosed information that allows me to know their identity. (reverse-coded)	
<b>Reviewer's expertise (manipulation check)</b>	I think this reviewer is... 1) Experienced. 2) Unqualified. (reverse-coded) 3) Skilled. 4) Knowledgeable. 5) Non-expert. (reverse-coded)	Ohanian (1990)
<b>Perceived deception (mediation variable)</b>	I believe this review is... 1) Misleading. 2) Truthful. (reverse-coded) 3) Dishonest. 4) Deceptive.	Darke and Ritchie (2007)
<b>Online review scepticism (moderation variable)</b>	1) I am not basically doubtful about online reviews. (reverse-coded) 2) Online reviews are often questionable. 3) I am generally uncertain about online reviews. 4) I am generally sceptical about online reviews.	Skarmeas and Leonidou (2013)
<b>Booking intention (dependent variable)</b>	1) The likelihood I would book this hotel is... 2) The probability I would consider booking this hotel is... 3) My willingness to book this hotel would be...	Dodds <i>et al.</i> (1991)
<b>NWOM (dependent variable)</b>	On the basis of reading this review, I would... 1) Say positive things about the hotel to other people. (reverse-coded) 2) Discourage friends and relatives from going to that hotel. 3) Advise against the hotel when someone sought my advice.	Sánchez-García and Currás-Pérez (2011)
<b>Negative emotion (dependent variable)</b>	After reading this review, I feel a sense of... 1) Anger. 2) Sadness. 3) Irritation. 4) Disappointment. 5) Frustration. 6) Resentment. 7) Indignation. 8) Disgust.	Burke and Edell (1989) and López-López <i>et al.</i> (2014)
<b>Hotel's trustworthiness (dependent variable)</b>	I think the hotel is... 1) Undependable. 2) Dishonest. 3) Unreliable. 4) Insincere. 5) Trustworthy. (reverse-coded)	Senecal and Nantel (2004)

To sum up, this section has attempted to provide a clear understanding of all the techniques that were employed in this research including experimental design, participants, stimuli, experimental procedures, and measurement development. The next section moves on to consider CMV.

#### **4.5 Common Method Variance (CMV)**

The prevalence of common method variance (CMV), which is “variance that is attributable to the measurement method rather than to the constructs the measures represent” is a potential problem in behavioural research (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003, p. 879). According to Chang *et al.* (2010), CMV might be a concern when data is collected from self-report questionnaires. This concern is strongest when data is derived from the same subjects at the same time. A great deal of research into CMV has focused on identifying potential sources of method biases and assessing numerous procedural and statistical methods available for managing method biases (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). The following paragraphs focus on identifying potential sources of method biases and the approaches that have been followed to reduce them. Then, they outline the statistical techniques that were used to control method biases.

Regarding identifying potential sources of method biases, CMV was reduced by first making sure that all the items were clear and specific (Peterson, 2000). To do so, all the items used in the current study were subjected to series reviews with the researcher’s supervisors. In addition, participants in the pilot study were asked to review the items in terms of simplicity, understandability, and fluency. All the comments received in these steps were taken into consideration in the final design of the experiment to ensure the survey was clear and specific.

Second, reverse-coded items were applied to some items that measured the variables (Hinkin, 1995). The purpose of using this approach was to ensure as far as possible that the

subjects engaged in controlled cognitive processing and to minimise the effects of CMV (Aulakh and Gencturk, 2000; Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). Also, it was added attention-checking questions to make sure that the subjects were engaged with each item. In addition, the subjects were also informed at the beginning of the experiment that they would be completely anonymous. They were also assured that there were no right or wrong answers and that they should answer the questions as honestly as possible.

Third, methodological separation of the measurements was applied to control the effect of CMV (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). For example, each measurement was on a separate page and was introduced by short instructions before each measurement.

Fourth, the procedural remedy of counterbalancing was applied. It was applied to all the items that measured variables by presenting the items in a randomised order. In addition, the order of the measurement of the dependent variables was also randomised as a means of controlling CMV.

Fifth, it was used different response format as “much lower to much higher” and “strongly disagree to strongly agree” to measure variables. Finally, the order of answer such as “strongly disagree to strongly agree” to “strongly agree to strongly disagree” with all measurement in one survey. This technique was applied randomly in order to control the effect of CMV, to ensure there was no receiving response bias, and to enhance data quality. Regarding the statistical remedy, the test that was applied will be discussed in the data analysis procedures section (section 4.6)

Thus far, this section has discussed the various approaches that were followed to mitigate potential method biases. It was conducted a series review of all the items utilised in the

experiment to ensure their simplicity, understandability, and validity. It was also applied reverse-coding to items and methodological separation of measurements to minimise response biases and CMV. Furthermore, it was implemented randomised ordering of both the items that measured the variables and the measurement of the dependent variable to counteract order effects. In addition, it was incorporated different responses using formats such as “much lower to much higher” and “strongly disagree to strongly agree” to enhance data quality. The analytical procedures are described in the next section.

#### **4.6 Data Analysis Procedures**

All the data collected were inserted into SPSS version 27.0 software. This research followed a systematic approach to deal with data accuracy and create value from the raw data for further analysis, ensure the measurements’ appropriateness and the success of the manipulation of the independent variables, and test the hypotheses. Specifically, this research followed three stages, namely data preparation, preliminary analyses, and hypothesis testing.

##### **4.6.1 Data preparation**

The purpose of data preparation is to deal with data accuracy and create value from raw data for further analysis (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2019; Pallant, 2020). Six issues were considered, namely data validation, editing and coding, error detection, outliers, normality, and common method variance (CMV), before moving on to the preliminary analyses.

First, data validation is concerned with determining, as far as possible, if an experiment has been conducted correctly and is free of fraud or bias (Hair *et al.*, 2006). In this step, it was made sure that data would only be kept from the subjects who met the screening criteria and consulted online reviews before making a hotel booking. Also, as it had been included many

attention-checking questions to improve the quality of the data, it was filtered out subjects who failed to correctly answer the attention-checking questions.

Second, data editing and coding is the process whereby the raw data are checked for mistakes by either the researcher or the respondent (Hair *et al.*, 2006). To minimise unintentional mistakes as much as possible, the experiment was launched after conducting pilot and pre-test studies and making sure that the experiment worked as intended. Moreover, a “force response requirement” was added to all the questions in the questionnaire to make sure that there were no issues with missing data. As it had been applied reverse-coded items, it was ensured that these were listed as items under one construct in one direction in the SPSS transformation tool.

Third, error detection techniques can assist in identifying the wrong type of data and editing them (Hair *et al.*, 2006). Data error detection can be conducted using basic descriptive statistics such as mean, minimum, and maximum (Pallant, 2020). This research put error detection in place in all the previous steps in order to track and correct wrong data in order that it could be retrieved for further analysis.

Fourth, outliers refer to scores that are very different from the rest of the data (Field, 2018). As outliers have extreme values, they might cause the mean to result in a biased estimate (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2019; Hair *et al.*, 2010). Outliers were checked using the univariate detection method (Hair *et al.*, 2010). All the variables’ scores were converted to a standardised score (z-score). Any z-scores above +3.29 or below -3.29 are potential outliers (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2019).

Fifth, this research checked the data for normality. The simplest way to check normality is to draw some histograms, P–P, or Q–Q plots of the data and to see the shape of the distribution (Field, 2018). However, there are several problems with looking only at histograms. First, they can only reflect the sample distribution and not the distribution of the population from which the sample came. Second, they do not work with small samples ( $N < 30$ ), as the distribution will be messy. Third, looking at distribution does not reveal the extent to which the distribution is different from the normal and thus problematic (Field and Hole, 2003). In short, looking only at histograms to assess whether the data is normally distributed is a subjective approach.

Hair *et al.* (2019) stated that researchers should always use both graphical plots (subjective approach) and statistical tests (objective approach) to assess normality. Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests are objective approaches used to assess normality. These tests compare the set of scores in the sample to a normally distributed set of scores with the same mean and standard deviation. If the test is non-significant ( $p > .05$ ), it tells that the distribution of the sample is not significantly different from the normal distribution (Field and Hole, 2003). Field (2018) points out that the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test and Shapiro–Wilk test have their limitations. In a large sample of 200 or more, it is easy to obtain significant results from small deviations from normality. However, these significant results do not necessarily explain whether the deviation from normality is problem enough to bias any statistical procedures that will be applied to the data.

Normality should be examined and interpreted in conjunction with histograms (e.g., P–P or Q–Q plots), Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests, and the values of skewness and kurtosis (Hair *et al.*, 2010). The skewness value provides an indication of symmetry, while



kurtosis provides information about the peakiness of the distribution (Pallant, 2020). In line with Filieri *et al.*'s (2015) study, normality can be assessed through skewness and kurtosis where values do not exceed  $\pm 2.58$  or  $\pm 1.96$ . Therefore, the current data was checked for normality by applying both subjective (e.g., Q–Q plots) and objective (Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests and the values of skewness and kurtosis) approaches. Significant results from the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test and the Shapiro–Wilk test do not necessarily explain whether the deviation from normality is considered as a problem with large samples of 200 or more. Therefore, normality should be examined and interpreted in conjunction with Q–Q plots and the values of skewness and kurtosis.

Sixth, this research also considered common method variance (CMV) in the data preparation. In the previous section (section 4.5), this research discussed the various approaches that were followed to mitigate potential method biases. There are also statistical techniques that can be used to control method biases. The Harman's one-factor test is one of the most widely used statistical techniques used to assess CMV (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). If CMV is a serious problem, it would be expected that one single factor would not emerge or that one general factor would not account for most of the covariance variables (Aulakh and Gencturk, 2000; Chang *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, in line with Ahmed and Sun (2018) and Reimer and Benkenstein (2016), this research performed the Harman's one-factor test on all the items. If the total variance extracted by one factor exceeds 50%, common method bias is present.

Up to this point, the data preparation was focused on dealing with data accuracy and creating value from raw data for further analysis. This research considered six issues, namely validation, editing and coding, error detection, outliers, normality, and CMV). Table 4.11

provides a summary of the analytical techniques applied in each step. The next part moves on to discuss in more detail the data analysis procedures used in the preliminary analyses.

Table 4-11 Summary of data preparation analytical techniques

Issue	Analytical technique
Data validation	Descriptive statistics
Editing and coding	SPSS transformation tool
Error detection	Descriptive statistics such as mean, minimum, and maximum
Outliers	Univariate detection method (a standardised score (z-score))
Normality	Q–Q plots, Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests, and the values of skewness and kurtosis
Common Method Variance	The Harman’s one-factor test

#### 4.6.2 Preliminary analyses

Before moving on to examine the proposed hypotheses, this section describes the six stages of the preliminary analyses. These are related to presenting the descriptive statistics about the subjects (i.e., participants); testing unidimensionality, convergent, and discriminant validity; assessing reliability by examining the multicollinearity between independent variables; showing that the scenarios were experimentally and mundanely realistic; and ensuring that the manipulation of the independent variables worked as planned.

First, utilising descriptive statistics and frequencies to present the demographic profiles for all the subjects. This will assist readers in understanding more about the characteristics of the sample (Pallant, 2020).

Second, all the constructs utilised in the current research will be assessed their validity. Validity refers to the extent to which a measure or set of measures that has been used in research correctly measures the concept it purports to measure (Hair *et al.*, 2019). The validation of constructs is an essential step for theory testing in social science (Steenkamp and Van Trijp, 1991). Therefore, the assessment of constructs occurs before and after data collection.

Before data collection, content validity is considered via an initial assessment of the constructs, which refers to the extent to which the measurement items used in the research are relevant to and representative of the constructs under investigation (Kerlinger and Lee, 2000). The approach followed in this study is in line with Hosany *et al.*'s (2015) approach. As discussed early in section 4.5, all the items used to measure the independent, mediation, moderator, and dependent variables were adapted from previous research. Then, the items were assessed regarding their content by the researcher's supervisors, and it was ensured that the items were relevant to and representative of the constructs. Lastly, in the pilot study, the interviewees were asked about the clarity and understandability of the items used, and there were no issues in this regard. As a result, there was no need to review the content of the constructs, as all the items were adapted from previous studies and subjected to assessment by experts, and no issues with clarity and understandability were found.

Regarding validation after the data collection, this thesis examined the items in terms of unidimensionality, convergent, and discriminant validity. Unidimensionality refers to a set of indicators that share only a single underlying factor (Gerbing and Anderson, 1988). In social science, a basic goal is to provide a theoretical explanation of behaviour; for example, to explain the behaviour of a consumer. Theories cannot be developed unless there is a high

degree of correspondence between the constructs and procedures used to operationalise them (Peter, 1981). According to Hattie (1985, p. 139) “one of the most critical and basic assumptions of measurement theory is that a set of items forming an instrument all measure just one thing in common”. Thus, for logical and empirical necessity, items must be unidimensional (Bagozzi, 1980).

According to Hosany *et al.* (2015, p. 486), items can be considered unidimensional when satisfying two explicit conditions: “first, an indicator should be significantly associated with the underlying latent variable and, second, the indicator must represent a single factor” (Anderson and Gerbing, 1982; Phillips and Bagozzi, 1986). Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to test unidimensionality. The purpose of applying EFA was to find a way to summarise the information embedded in several items into a smaller number of factors (Hair *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, this thesis analysed all 27 items in the six constructs to examine whether all the indicators were associated with the underlying latent variable and only loading onto a single factor. After unidimensionality had been established, this thesis moved on to examine the items in terms of convergent and discriminant validity.

Convergent and discriminant validity are the most widely accepted methods used to empirically measure validity (Hair *et al.*, 2019). Convergent validity refers to “the extent to which scale items, designed to measure a latent variable, correlate” (Hosany *et al.*, 2015, p. 487). This was used to measure whether the items used in the current experiment to measure constructs demonstrated a high percentage of variance. Discriminant validity refers to “the degree to which two concepts are distinct” (Hair *et al.*, 2019, p. 122). This thesis conducted exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to examine convergent and discriminant validity in line with McLeay *et al.*'s (2021) study. Also, this thesis applied the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) test and

Bartlett's test for sphericity. According to Hair *et al.* (2019), the purpose of the KMO test is to confirm that the data is suitable and accurate for factor analysis, while Bartlett's test for sphericity is used to test for the presence of correlations among the variables. The outcome of the KMO test ranges from 0 to 1, and the appropriate value is more than 0.50. The Bartlett's test for sphericity requires a  $p$ -value lower than 0.05 ( $p < 0.05$ ).

This thesis examined convergent validity using: (1) factor loadings (higher than the recommended cut-off of 0.5); (2) the average variance extracted (AVE) (the AVE value should be higher than 0.5); and (3) composite reliability (CR) (the lower acceptable value was 0.60). In addition, the discriminant validity of all the constructs was assessed by means of the Fornell–Larcker criterion, where the square-root of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct should be greater than the construct's correlations with other constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Third, Cronbach's alpha was applied to examine the reliability of the scales. Reliability refers to the extent to which measures are consistent in their values under the same conditions (Hair *et al.*, 2019). To assess reliability, and according to Hosany *et al.* (2015), Cronbach's (1951) coefficient  $\alpha$  remains the most widely accepted and pervasive index for assessing the internal reliability of subscales' measures. Nunnally (1978) recommended a minimum acceptance level value of 0.80 for basic or applied research.

Fourth, multicollinearity reflects a situation in which the independent variables are highly correlated among themselves (Hair *et al.*, 2006). One issue that can make it difficult to assess the individual importance of the independent variables (reviewer's identity disclosure and reviewer's expertise) is the existence of multicollinearity between them (Field, 2018). There are two popular statistics used to assess multicollinearity in datasets, which are the tolerance

value and variance inflation factor (VIF) (Kline, 1998). This thesis applied both tests to examine multicollinearity.

Finally, before moving on to examine the proposed hypotheses, it was performed both realism and manipulation checks. For the realism check, this thesis followed Liu *et al.*'s (2019ab) approach to assess the mundane and experimental realism of the experimental design. One sample *t*-test was conducted for all the experimental conditions (test value = 4). In terms of the manipulation check, the purpose of this check is not to ensure that the outcome is impacted but to ensure that the manipulation of independent variables worked as planned (Hair *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, this thesis applied the independent sample *t*-test to test the mean differences across the two groups (high and low reviewer identity disclosure and high and low reviewer expertise) (Field and Hole, 2003).

The preliminary analyses were complete after this thesis had applied various analytical techniques to present the descriptive statistics about the subjects; test unidimensionality, convergent, and discriminant validity; assess reliability; examine the multicollinearity between independent variables; show that the scenarios were experimentally and mundanely realistic; and ensure that the manipulation of the independent variables worked as planned. Table 4.12 provides a summary of the analytical techniques applied in the preliminary analysis stage.

Table 4-12 Summary of the preliminary analyses' analytical techniques

Stage	Analytical technique
Demographic profile	Descriptive statistics and frequencies
Unidimensionality	Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

Convergent and discriminant validity	Exploratory factor analysis (EFA), Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett’s test for sphericity, factor loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), composite reliability (CR), and the square-root of average variance extracted (AVE)
Reliability	Cronbach’s alpha
Multicollinearity	The tolerance value and variance inflation factor (VIF)
Realism check	One sample <i>t</i> -test
Manipulation check	The independent sample <i>t</i> -test

### 4.6.3 Hypothesis testing

As was pointed out previously, the third part of the analysis was focused on hypothesis testing. The hypothesis testing took place after the valid responses had been retained from the data preparation, the constructs had been examined in terms of validity and reliability, and the realism and manipulation of the experiment had been checked. The analysis involved examining the differences in means across different groups, assessing the moderating role of online review scepticism, testing for the presence of mediation effects, and, finally, exploring the possibility of moderated mediation effects. Each of these analytical techniques served a specific purpose in investigating the research hypotheses.

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was used to examine the mean differences across groups (high and low reviewer identity disclosure and high and low reviewer expertise) on perceived deception. The *t*-test is an inappropriate statistical technique for comparing the differences between three groups and more. A major problem with the *t*-test is due to its limited ability to assess differences between two levels of independent variables, while conducting many sample *t*-tests on the same dataset inflates the Type I error rate (Field and Hole, 2003). ANOVA is best suited to situations assessing differences between three or more levels of independent variables and the interaction effects between independent variables

and a dependent variable (Field and Hole, 2003). It is widely used in experimental studies to assess differences between groups (e.g., Wu *et al.*, 2017; Liu *et al.*, 2021).

Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) is a multivariate procedure which assesses group differences across multiple metric-dependent variables simultaneously. In MANOVA, each experimental group is observed on two or more dependent variables (Hair *et al.*, 2019). However, ANOVA is useful to assess differences across one or more nonmetric independent variables on a single dependent variable. In the experiment study, the independent variables were always nonmetric variables, which are related in many instances to discrete actions (e.g., one group was presented with a reviewer with a high expertise level and the other with a reviewer with a low expertise level). This suggested that the independent variables in the experiment study must be measured using a nominal scale. Finally, in experimental research that manipulates two independent variables, as in the current research (high and low reviewer identity disclosure and high and low reviewer expertise), two-way independent ANOVA indicates that two independent variables have been manipulated, and so different participants took part in all the conditions (Field and Hole, 2003). Therefore, two-way independent ANOVA is a way of determining whether the means of four groups differ significantly regarding perceived deception.

In this analysis, this thesis used the PROCESS macro, as suggested by Hair *et al.* (2019), to examine the observed variables in the model and estimate various effects such as mediation, moderation, and combined effects. While other statistical tools such as structural equation modelling (SEM) can also analyse observed variables, they typically require more complex coding to generate the same statistics that PROCESS automatically provides (Hayes *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, the PROCESS macro was chosen to be utilised as a result of its ease of use



for testing the proposed effects in the current model including assessing moderation, testing for mediation effects, and exploring the possibility of moderated mediation effects.

To assess the moderation role of online review scepticism on the relationship between independent variables (reviewer's identity disclosure and reviewer's expertise) and perceived deception, the PROCESS macro-Model 1 was applied separately for reviewer's identity disclosure and reviewer's expertise in relation to perceived deception. This thesis applied the PROCESS macro-Model 4 to assess the role played by perceived deception in the relationship between reviewer's identity disclosure and reviewer's expertise and consumers' responses (i.e., booking intention, NWOM, negative emotion, and hotel's trustworthiness) (Hayes, 2022).

Generally, in the mediation model, it is vital to have at least one (mediator variable) M, which acts causally between X (independent variable) and Y (dependent variable). The effect of X on Y is transmitted through the causal effect of X on M, which finally affects Y (Hayes, 2022). In addition, some mediation models allow for moderation of a mechanism. This is what Hayes (2022) calls a conditional process model, which is also known as a moderated mediation model. Within this model, the first-stage moderated mediation allows to test the effect of independent variable (X) on mediation variable (M) dependent on moderator variable (W), which could be anything that influences the effect of X on M (Hayes *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, when exploring the possibility of moderated mediation effects, this thesis applied moderated mediation analyses (Model 7) based on Hayes (2022). Model 7 assisted in estimating the direct and indirect effects of the independent variables (reviewer's identity disclosure and reviewer's expertise) on the dependent variables (booking intention, NWOM, negative

emotion, and hotel’s trustworthiness) through the mediation variable (perceived deception) as moderated by the moderation variable (online review scepticism).

To sum up, it has been shown that the hypothesis testing involved examining the differences in means across different groups, assessing the moderating role of online review scepticism, testing for the presence of mediation effects, and, finally, exploring the possibility of moderated mediation effects. Table 4.13 provides a summary of the analytical techniques that were applied in the preliminary analysis stage.

Table 4-13 Summary of the hypothesis testing’s analytical techniques

Analytical technique	Purpose
Analysis of variance (ANOVA) test	To examine the mean differences across groups (high and low reviewer identity disclosure and high and low reviewer expertise) on perceived deception.
PROCESS macro-Model 1	To assess the moderating role of online review scepticism on the relationship between the independent variables (reviewer’s identity disclosure and reviewer’s expertise) and perceived deception.
PROCESS macro-Model 4	To assess the role played by perceived deception in the relationship between reviewer’s identity disclosure and reviewer’s expertise and consumers’ responses (booking intention, NWOM, negative emotion, and hotel’s trustworthiness)
PROCESS macro-Model 7	To estimate the direct and indirect effects of the independent variables (reviewer’s identity disclosure and reviewer’s expertise) on the dependent variables (booking intention, NWOM, negative emotion, and hotel’s trustworthiness) through the mediation variable (perceived deception) as moderated by the moderation variable (online review scepticism).

This section has described the fact that this thesis used SPSS version 27.0 software to insert and analyse all the data. A systematic approach was taken in the data analysis, as this concentrates on dealing with data accuracy and creating value from raw data for further analysis; ensures the measurements’ appropriateness and the success of the manipulation of the independent variables, and facilitates testing of the hypotheses. This section has also described all the analytical techniques used in each step and the purpose of applying them. The following part of this chapter moves on to describe the ethical considerations in greater detail.

## 4.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations refer to the moral values or principles that researchers should consider during their research (Collis and Hussey, 2014). Punch (2014) emphasises the importance of ethical considerations in research involving human participants. Ensuring the quality of research is the responsibility of the researcher, and ethical considerations play an essential role in achieving this goal (Mason and Suri, 2012; Webster *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, prior to data collection, the researcher obtained ethical approval from the ethics committee at the University of Sheffield. This was done by submitting an ethics application form, a participation information sheet, and a consent form. Approval was granted under application number 038554.

As this study conducted its experiment online, all the participants had to give their consent to participate in the experiment at the beginning. The researcher provided the participants with both a consent form (which included information about taking part in the experiment, how the information would be used during and after the experiment, and confirmation of the fact that the information a participant provided could be used legally by the researchers (see Appendix 3)) and a participant information sheet (which described the research's purpose, details of what the participants could expect when taking part in the research, and their right to withdraw at any time without giving any reason (see Appendix 4)). In addition, the researcher reassured the participants that their participation was confidential. The online experiment kept the identity of the participants anonymous and did not ask for any information that might harm them. The researcher provided their contact details to the participants in case of concerns or complaints.

## **4.8 Conclusion**

The methodology chapter has provided a comprehensive presentation and detailed discussion of all the methods and techniques employed in this research. It can be concluded that this thesis is primarily framed from the positivist position and follows a deductive approach. Based on the research objectives, this thesis is purely focussed on explanatory study, and it examines causal relationships between variables (reviewer's identity disclosure, reviewer's expertise, online review scepticism, perceived deception, booking intention, NWOM, negative emotion, and hotel's trustworthiness). Therefore, experimental research is used here as the research strategy to test the effects of manipulating the variables, examine the validity of the proposed hypotheses, and achieve the research's objectives. Before collecting the data for the main study, this thesis conducted many pre-tests and pilot studies to make sure that the manipulation of the independent variables worked as intended, that the experiment worked, and that there were no issues with readability and clarity. In addition, this thesis also followed various approaches to mitigate potential method biases. Finally, during the data analysis, this thesis followed a systematic approach to deal with data accuracy and create value from raw data for further analysis, to ensure the measurements' appropriateness and the success of the manipulation of the independent variables, and to test the hypotheses. The following chapter (Chapter 5) moves on to describe in greater detail how this thesis applied these steps in the data analysis.

## **Chapter 5 : Data Analysis and Results**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the results of the data analysis. These are discussed in the format indicated in the data analysis procedures in the methodology chapter (Chapter 4, section 4.6).

This chapter is divided into three main parts. First, the data preparation part deals with data accuracy and creating value from raw data for further analysis. Second, the preliminary analysis part describes the demographic information of the participants and the checks of the variables undertaken to ensure validity and reliability. Third, the hypothesis testing part focuses on showing the results and findings of proposed hypotheses.

### **5.2 Data Preparation**

As discussed previously in the methodology chapter (Chapter 4, section 4.6.1), the purpose of data preparation is to deal with data accuracy and create value from raw data for further analysis (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2019; Pallant, 2020). Six issues, namely validation, editing and coding, error detection, outliers, normality, and common method variance (CMV) were assessed separately before moving on to the preliminary analyses.

#### **5.2.1 Data validation (screening question and attention check)**

369 participants attempted to complete the online experiment. A screening question was introduced at the beginning of the experiment to select participants who read online reviews before booking a hotel; this was done using a 7-point scale (1 = very strongly disagree, 7 = very strongly agree). In total, three were filtered out due to not reading online reviews before booking a hotel. In addition, many attention-checking questions were added into the experiment to improve the quality of the data and to make sure that the participants paid

attention to all the questions. In total, 45 participants were filtered out, as they failed to correctly answer the attention-checking questions. After deleting the responses that did not meet the screening-question criteria and that failed to answer the attention-checking questions correctly, 321 participants were retained for further analysis.

### **5.2.2 Data editing and coding**

After data validation, the second step in the data preparation was data editing. It was added a “force response requirement” to all the questions; therefore, there was no issue with missing data, and there was no issue with editing and coding the data for such mistakes. However, this thesis utilised reverse-coded items to make sure that the participants engaged with each item. The SPSS transformation tool was used to recode items and ensure that all items were in one direction.

### **5.2.3 Error detection**

The SPSS software allowed to perform error detection routines. Error detection was put in place in all the previous steps in order to track and correct incorrect data that would be retrieved for further analysis. Data errors were checked using basic descriptive statistics such as mean, minimum, and maximum, in line with Pallant’s (2020) guidelines. With these simple checks, this thesis could identify whether some items were outside the range of values of a 7-point scale such as, for example, 8 = very strongly disagree or 14 = very strongly agree. Such errors were corrected using the SPSS transformation tool by recoding them into the same variable and setting the value of the variable as 1 = very strongly disagree and 7 = very strongly agree. In addition, error detection was also employed to check all transform reverse-coded items. There were not any errors there, as the mean of the reverse-coded items had a similar value to other items in the same construct.

#### 5.2.4 Outliers

Part of the data preparation was focusing on detecting outliers in the current dataset. Through applying the univariate detection method (Hair *et al.*, 2019), all the variables' scores were converted to a standardised score (z-score). Any z-scores above +3.29 or below -3.29 are potential outliers (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2019). Before calculating z-scores for the variables, the items used to measure perceived deception, hotel's trustworthiness, NWOM, booking intention, and online review scepticism were averaged utilising the SPSS transformation tool to form composite measures of these items. Table 5.1 shows the standardised score (z-score) for all the variables. No cases in the current datasets were identified as outliers.

Table 5-1 Standardised score (z-score)

<b>z-score</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>
Perceived deception	321	-1.44	2.78
NWOM	321	-1.36	2.89
Booking intention	321	-3.27	2.25
Hotel's trustworthiness	321	-2.59	1.63
Negative emotion	321	-0.94	3.05
Online review scepticism	321	-2.26	1.81

#### 5.2.5 Normality

The current data was checked for normality. As discussed previously in the methodology chapter (section 4.6.1), it was utilised both subjective (Q–Q plots of all the variables) and objective statistical tests (Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests, and the values of skewness and kurtosis) to assess whether the current data was normally distributed or not (Hair *et al.*, 2010).

First, Table 5.2 shows the normal Q–Q plot of all the variables. It shows that all the variables have some deviation from normality. Second, Table 5.3 presents the results of the Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests. Both tests of normality for all the variables are

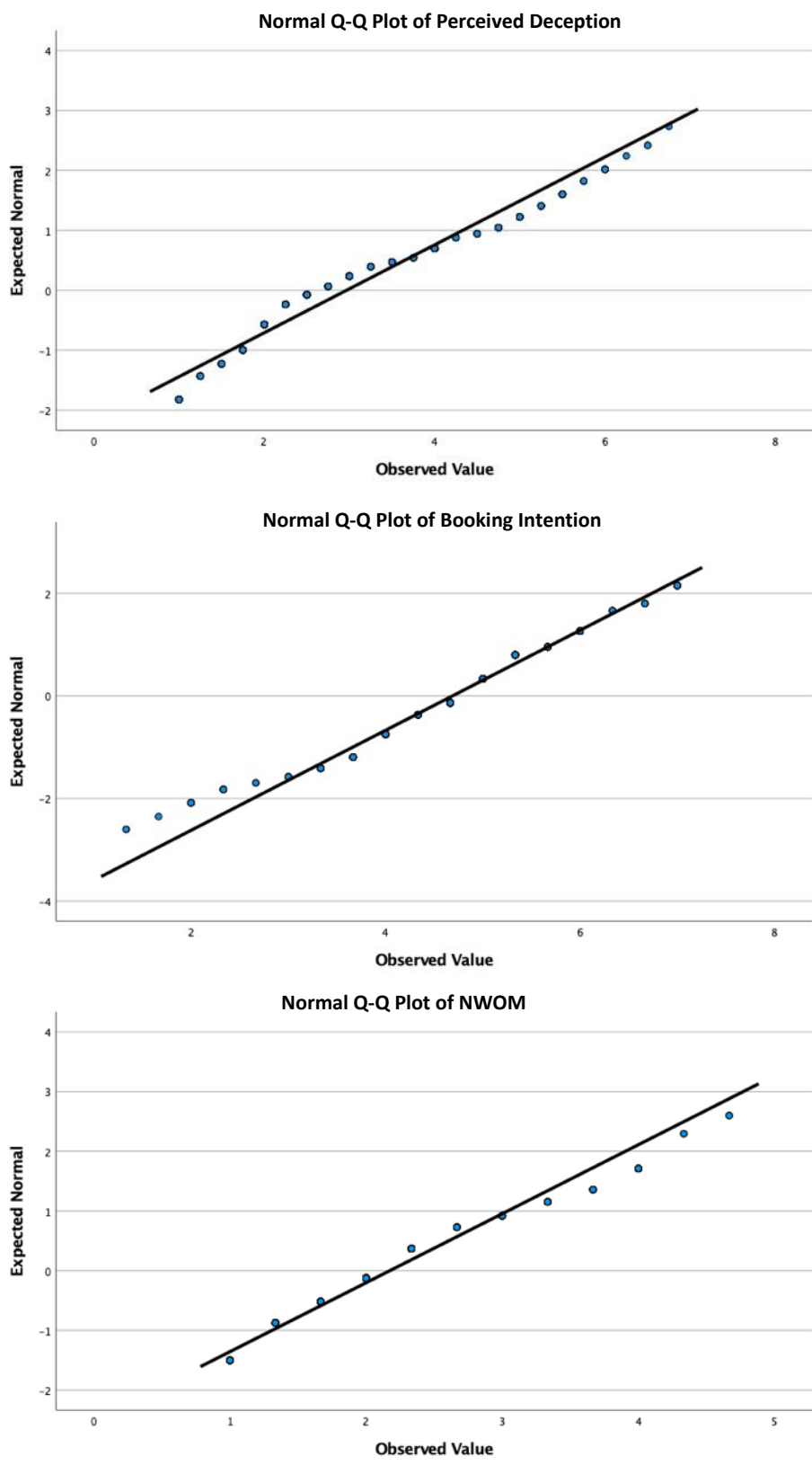
significant ( $p < 0.05$ ), which indicates that the distribution deviates significantly from normality. However, the significant results from the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test and Shapiro–Wilk test do not necessarily explain whether the deviation from normality is considered a problem in a large sample of 200 or more – like the one used in this research. Therefore, normality should be examined and interpreted in conjunction with Q–Q plots and the values of skewness and kurtosis (Hair *et al.*, 2019).

Third, Table 5.4 presents the skewness and kurtosis scores of all the variables (normality can be assessed through skewness and kurtosis where values do not exceed  $\pm 2.58$  or  $\pm 1.96$ ). These values provide insights into whether a distribution has heavy or light tails compared to a normal distribution. The negative and positive value of skewness were in a range of  $-0.087$  to  $-0.628$  and  $0.198$  to  $1.203$ , respectively. The negative and positive values of kurtosis were in a range of  $-0.101$  to  $-1.484$  and  $0.797$  to  $0.849$ , respectively. From these values, it can be concluded that the current data is normally distributed, as the skewness and kurtosis values are in the acceptable range.

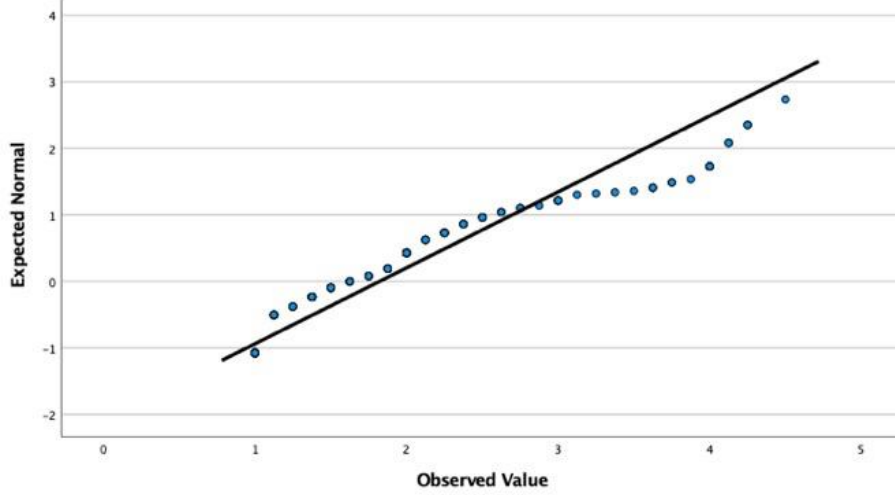
To sum up, it was checked the normality in the current data. The results from the Q–Q plot of all the variables and the Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests indicate that the distribution deviates from normality. However, the results do not necessarily explain whether the deviation from normality should be considered a problem in a large sample (i.e., 200). The skewness and kurtosis scores indicate that deviations for all the variables are in the acceptable range. The next part moves on to present the results of the Harman’s one-factor test, which was utilised to control method biases.



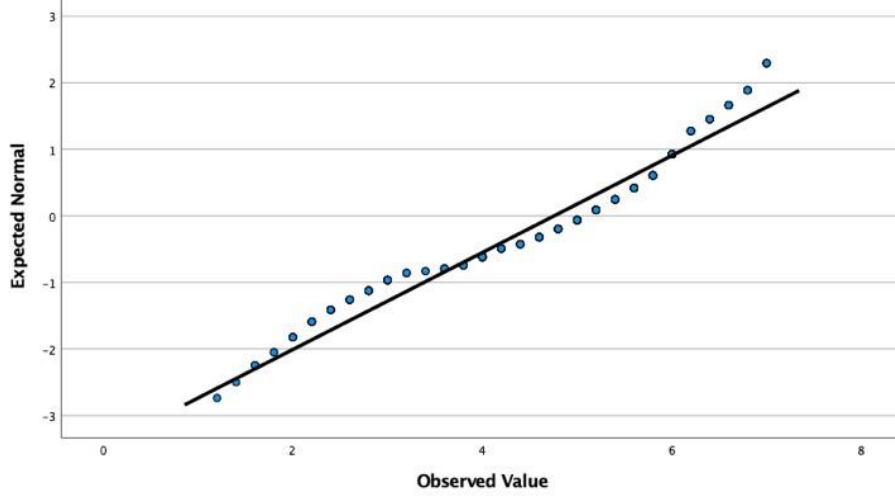
Table 5-2 Normal Q-Q plot of all the variables



Normal Q-Q Plot of Negative Emotion



Normal Q-Q Plot of Hotel's Trustworthiness



Normal Q-Q Plot of Online Review Scepticism

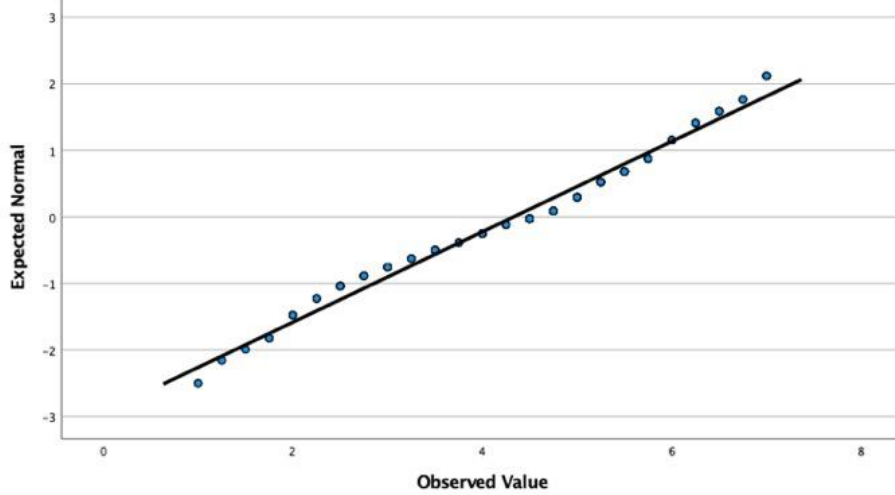


Table 5-3 The Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests

Variable	Kolmogorov–Smirnov			Shapiro–Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Perceived deception	0.144	321	< 0.001	0.933	321	< 0.001
Online review scepticism	0.115	321	< 0.001	0.969	321	< 0.001
Booking intention	0.146	321	< 0.001	0.959	321	< 0.001
NWOM	0.171	321	< 0.001	0.929	321	< 0.001
Negative emotion	0.174	321	< 0.001	0.843	321	< 0.001
Hotel’s trustworthiness	0.125	321	< 0.001	0.937	321	< 0.001

Table 5-4 Skewness and kurtosis values

Variable	N	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Perceived deception	321	2.964	2.50	1.36	0.653	-0.472
Online review scepticism	321	4.33	4.50	1.472	-0.237	-.863
NWOM	321	2.173	2	0.865	0.673	-0.101
Booking intention	321	4.69	5.00	1.02	-0.343	0.849
Negative emotion	321	1.82	1.625	0.876	1.203	0.797
Hotel’s trustworthiness	321	4.76	5.00	1.37	-0.628	-0.565

### 5.2.6 Common Method Variance (CMV)

In the methodology chapter (Chapter 4, section 4.5), it was discussed the various approaches that were followed to mitigate potential method biases. In addition, there are also statistical techniques that can be used to control method biases. It was performed the Harman’s one-factor test on all the items. If the total variance extracted by one factor exceeds 50%, common method bias is present. As shown in Table 5.5, there is no problem with common method bias in the current data since the total variance extracted by one factor is 36.562%, which is lower than the recommended threshold of 50%. Therefore, the design of the questionnaire and the statistical remedy suggest that CMV does not affect the data.

Table 5-5 Harman’s one-factor test

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sum of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %
1	9.872	36.562	36.562	<b>9.872</b>	<b>36.562</b>	<b>36.562</b>
2	4.611	17.078	53.640			
3	2.214	8.199	61.839			
4	2.013	7.456	69.295			
5	1.570	5.813	75.108			

6	0.749	2.776	77.884
7	0.553	2.047	79.931
8	0.490	1.814	81.745
9	0.442	1.639	83.383
10	0.404	1.496	84.880
11	0.380	1.406	86.285
12	0.339	1.254	87.539
13	0.329	1.219	88.759
14	0.319	1.181	89.940
15	0.305	1.130	91.070
16	0.266	0.986	92.056
17	0.253	0.937	92.992
18	0.248	0.919	93.911
19	0.234	0.867	94.778
20	0.214	0.794	95.572
21	0.203	0.752	96.324
22	0.200	0.752	96.324
23	0.187	0.691	97.067
24	0.175	0.646	98.404
25	0.151	0.560	98.404
26	0.144	0.535	99.499
27	0.135	0.501	100.000

To conclude the data preparation section, the purpose of all the steps followed was to deal with data accuracy and create value from the data for further analysis. The data preparation considered six issues related to validation, editing and coding, error detection, outliers, normality, and CMV. The results show that the 321 cases were retained for further analysis. The next section of this chapter, therefore, moves on to discuss and present all the steps in the preliminary analyses.

### 5.3 The preliminary analyses

As mentioned previously in the methodology chapter (Chapter 4), the data was collected online, Qualtrics was used as a tool to design the experiment, and all the study participants were recruited through Prolific. After dealing with all the issues in the data preparation phase, a total of 321 cases were considered for further analysis. Before moving on to examine the proposed hypotheses, the preliminary analyses focus on presenting the descriptive statistics

of the participants; testing unidimensionality, convergent, and discernment validity; assessing reliability; examining the multicollinearity between independent variables; showing how the scenarios were experimentally and mundanely realistic; and ensuring that the manipulation of the independent variables worked as planned.

### **5.3.1 Demographic profile**

The data was collected online in July 2022. The demographic profiles of the 321 usable responses are detailed below using descriptive analysis. Demographic summaries are shown in Table 5.6. 76.32% of the sample was female, 23.05% was male, and 0.62% was others. The percentage of female participants turned out to be higher. This could be attributed to the greater availability of female participants during the experiment's lunchtime sessions. Consequently, the observed higher percentage may be a result of this availability factor. It is important to note that investigating the gender effect on perceived deception is not within the scope of the thesis's objectives.

The respondents were also asked to provide information about their age, which was measured in years. The respondents' ages varied from 21 to 70 or above. Most of the participants (about 98%) were between 21 and 60 years old. The biggest age group percentage, 39.25%, related to participants aged between 31 and 40 years old. The next biggest age group percentage, 23.05%, related to participants aged between 21 and 30 years old.

The education distribution measured the highest degree received by participants. The majority of the respondents had a bachelor's degree (37.96%), followed by a high school degree (34.89%), graduate degree (17.43%), and associate degree (9.97%). These results

indicate that just over half of the participants (65.11%) are educated at least an associate degree level or higher).

The respondents were also asked to select one of five occupation categories that described their employment status. About 72.27% of the participants were employees, while the second highest number were unemployed (17.76%); this was followed by the entrepreneur, retired, and student categories, which accounted for less than 10% jointly. These results show that the majority of the participants have a guaranteed income based on the occupation categories and, thus, they have the ability to search for information, make a decision, and book a room in a hotel.

Turning to income, the annual household income of the respondents was as follows: \$1–\$20,000 (13.08%), \$20,001–\$40,000 (28.38 %), \$40,001–\$60,000 (25.55%); \$60,001–\$80,000 (15.26%), \$80,001–\$100,000 (5.92%), and \$100,001 or more (5.92%). 5.92% of the respondents preferred not to share information about their annual household income.

To conclude the demographic profile part, the examination of the effect of different demographic information on perceived deception was not one of the objectives of the current study. However, the demographic profile information shows that females, males, and others participated in the current study. Most of the participants (about 98%) were between 21 and 60 years old. Taking together education, occupation, and income information, it would be expected that the participants have sufficient knowledge to obtain information from online reviews before making an online booking, as they are educated. The majority of the participants have a guaranteed income based on the occupation categories and, thus, they have the ability to search for information, make a decision, and book a room in a hotel. Table 5.7 shows the participants' demographic summary by conditions.

Table 5-6 Participants' demographic summary

	<i>n</i>	(%)		<i>n</i>	(%)
<b>Gender</b>			<b>Occupation</b>		
Male	74	23.05	Unemployed	57	17.76
Female	245	76.32	Student	10	3.12
Other	2	0.062	Employed	232	72.27
			Entrepreneur	12	3.73
			Retired	10	3.12
<b>Age</b>			<b>Annual household income</b>		
21–30	74	23.05	\$1–\$20,000	42	13.08
31–40	126	39.25	\$20,001–\$40,000	91	28.35
41–50	64	19.94	\$40,001–\$60,000	82	25.55
51–60	53	16.51	\$60,001–\$80,000	49	15.26
61–70	4	1.25	\$80,001–\$100,000	19	5.92
			\$100,001 or more	19	5.92
			Prefer not to say	19	5.92
<b>Education</b>					
High school	112	34.89			
Associate degree	32	9.97			
Bachelor's degree	121	37.96			
Graduate degree	56	17.54			

Table 5-7 Participants' demographic summary by conditions

Condition 1					
High identity disclosure, high expertise					
Total number: 76					
	n	%		n	%
<b>Gender</b>			<b>Occupation</b>		
Male	10	13.15	Unemployed	13	17.1
Female	65	85.52	Student	4	5.26
Other	1	1.31	Employed	56	73.7
			Entrepreneur	1	1.31
			Retired	2	2.63
<b>Age</b>			<b>Annual household income</b>		
21-30	12	15.79	\$1-\$20,000	5	6.58
31-40	31	40.79	\$20,001-\$40,000	21	27.63
41-50	19	25	\$40,001-\$60,000	18	23.68
51-60	14	18.4	\$60,001-\$80,000	12	15.8
61-70	0	0	\$80,001-\$100,000	8	10.52
			\$100,001 or more	6	7.9
<b>Education</b>			Prefer not to say	6	7.9
High school	20	26.3			
Associate degree	6	7.9			
Bachelor's degree	39	51.31			
Graduate degree	11	14.47			

Condition 2					
High identity disclosure, low expertise					
Total number: 83					
	n	%		n	%
<b>Gender</b>			<b>Occupation</b>		
Male	13	15.66	Unemployed	15	18.07
Female	70	84.33	Student	2	2.4
Other	0	0	Employed	57	68.67
			Entrepreneur	7	8.43
			Retired	2	2.4
<b>Age</b>			<b>Annual household income</b>		
21-30	17	20.4	\$1-\$20,000	12	14.45
31-40	31	37.34	\$20,001-\$40,000	29	34.93
41-50	18	21.7	\$40,001-\$60,000	16	19.2
51-60	16	19.3	\$60,001-\$80,000	12	14.4
61-70	1	1.2	\$80,001-\$100,000	6	7.22
			\$100,001 or more	6	7.22
<b>Education</b>			Prefer not to say	2	2.4
High school	34	40.9			
Associate degree	10	12.04			
Bachelor's degree	25	30.12			
Graduate degree	14	16.87			



<b>Condition 3</b>					
<b>Low identity disclosure, high expertise</b>					
<b>Total number: 81</b>					
	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>		<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Gender</b>			<b>Occupation</b>		
Male	26	32.09	Unemployed	14	17.28
Female	55	67.9	Student	3	3.7
Other	0	0	Employed	59	72.83
			Entrepreneur	2	2.46
			Retired	3	3.7
<b>Age</b>			<b>Annual household income</b>		
21-30	23	28.39	\$1-\$20,000	16	19.7
31-40	24	29.6	\$20,001-\$40,000	21	25.92
41-50	19	23.4	\$40,001-\$60,000	20	24.7
51-60	13	16.04	\$60,001-\$80,000	13	16.04
61-70	2	2.46	\$80,001-\$100,000	1	1.23
			\$100,001 or more	3	3.7
<b>Education</b>			Prefer not to say	7	8.64
High school	24	29.6			
Associate degree	9	11.11			
Bachelor's degree	32	39.5			
Graduate degree	16	19.75			

<b>Condition 4</b>					
<b>Low identity disclosure, low expertise</b>					
<b>Total number: 81</b>					
	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>		<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Gender</b>			<b>Occupation</b>		
Male	25	30.9	Unemployed	15	18.5
Female	55	67.9	Student	1	1.23
Other	1	1.23	Employed	60	74.07
			Entrepreneur	2	2.46
			Retired	3	3.7
<b>Age</b>			<b>Annual household income</b>		
21-30	22	27.16	\$1-\$20,000	9	11.11
31-40	40	49.38	\$20,001-\$40,000	20	24.7
41-50	8	9.88	\$40,001-\$60,000	28	34.5
51-60	10	12.34	\$60,001-\$80,000	12	14.8
61-70	1	1.23	\$80,001-\$100,000	4	4.93
			\$100,001 or more	4	4.93
<b>Education</b>			Prefer not to say	4	4.93
High school	34	42			
Associate degree	7	8.64			
Bachelor's degree	25	30.9			
Graduate degree	15	18.5			

### 5.3.2 Unidimensionality

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to test unidimensionality. The purpose of applying EFA is to find a way to summarise the information embedded in several items into a smaller number of factors (Hair *et al.*, 2019). All 27 items of the six constructs were simultaneously analysed. Table 5.8 shows that all the indicators were associated with the underlying latent variable and were only loading onto a single factor. However, there was an issue with items related to the perceived deception and hotel's trustworthiness constructs. Even though these constructs were theoretically distinct, their items were cross-loading onto one factor. This means that these items were strongly associated with each other and represented a single concept (Hair *et al.*, 2019). Perceived deception was operationally defined as the extent to which a consumer perceives a review that they are reading intends to mislead them, while hotel's trustworthiness was defined as the extent to which one party (e.g., a consumer) is willing to rely on an exchange partner's (e.g., a hotel's) reliability and integrity (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). This thesis included hotel's trustworthiness, as consumers might attribute misleading behaviour to a hotel, thinking the purpose is to influence their booking decision. However, due to the fact that the perceived deception construct was an essential construct (mediation variable), hotel's trustworthiness was omitted from the current conceptual framework.

In addition, all 22 items of the five constructs were simultaneously analysed again to test unidimensionality. As Table 5.10 shows, unidimensionality was established, as all the indicators were associated with the underlying latent variable and represented a single factor. Therefore, all 22 items of the five constructs were retained for further analysis to examine the convergent and discriminant validity, which is discussed in more detail in the following part.

Table 5-8 Unidimensionality

Construct	Scale Item Descriptions	Factor Loading				
		1	2	3	4	5
<b>Perceived deception (PD)</b>	I believe this review is					
	PD1. misleading.	<b>0.733</b>				
	PD2. truthful.	<b>0.759</b>				
	PD3. honest	<b>0.754</b>				
	PD4. deceptive.	<b>0.705</b>				
<b>NWOM</b>	On the basis of reading this review, I would					
	NWOM1. say positive things about the hotel to other people.					<b>0.678</b>
	NWOM2. discourage friends and relatives from going to that hotel.					<b>0.842</b>
	NWOM3. advise against the hotel when someone sought my advice.					<b>0.886</b>
<b>Booking intention (BI)</b>	BI1. The likelihood I would book this hotel is...					<b>0.773</b>
	BI2. The probability I would consider booking this hotel is...					<b>0.831</b>
	BI3. My willingness to book this hotel would be...					<b>0.839</b>
<b>Hotel's trustworthiness (HT)</b>	I think the hotel is					
	HT1. undependable.	<b>-0.811</b>				
	HT2. honest.	<b>-0.858</b>				
	HT3. unreliable.	<b>-0.837</b>				
	HT4. sincere.	<b>-0.839</b>				
	HT5. trustworthy.	<b>-0.823</b>				
<b>Negative emotion (NEmo)</b>	I feel a sense of					
	NEmo1. anger.		<b>0.889</b>			
	NEmo2. sadness.		<b>0.862</b>			
	NEmo3. irritation		<b>0.719</b>			
	NEmo4. disappointment.		<b>0.688</b>			
	NEmo5. frustration.		<b>0.77</b>			
	NEmo6. resentment.		<b>0.747</b>			
	NEmo7. indignation.		<b>0.652</b>			
	NEmo8. disgust.		<b>0.903</b>			
<b>Online review scepticism (ORS)</b>	ORS1. I am not doubtful about online reviews.			<b>0.761</b>		
	ORS2. Online reviews are often questionable.			<b>0.812</b>		
	ORS3. I am generally uncertain about online reviews.			<b>0.756</b>		
	ORS4. I am generally skeptical about online reviews.			<b>0.808</b>		

Extraction Method: Maximum Like Extraction Method: Maximum Likelihood.  
 Rotation Method: Varimax with Ka Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

### 5.3.3 Convergent and discriminant validity

After unidimensionality was established, all 22 items of the five constructs were simultaneously analysed to examine the convergent and discriminant validity. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to examine convergent and discriminant validity. Table 5.9 shows the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett’s test for sphericity results. According to Hair *et al.* (2014), the purpose of KMO is to show that the data is suitable and accurate for factor analysis, while Bartlett’s test for sphericity is for testing for the presence

of correlations among the variables. The outcome of the KMO test ranges from 0 to 1, and the appropriate value is more than 0.50. The Bartlett’s test for sphericity requires a  $p$ -value lower than 0.05 ( $p < 0.05$ ). As presented in Table 5.8, the KMO value was 0.899, exceeding the accepted minimum limit of 0.50. Bartlett’s test of  $p$ -value was significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). These results indicated that the data was suitable and accurate for factor analysis.

Table 5-9 KMO and Bartlett’s test

<b>KMO and Bartlett's Test</b>		
KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy		<b>0.899</b>
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	<b>5179.423</b>
	df	<b>321</b>
	Sig.	<b>0.000</b>

Convergent validity was examined using: (1) factor loadings (higher than the recommended cut-off of 0.5); (2) the average variance extracted (AVE) (the AVE value should be higher than 0.5); and (3) composite reliability (CR) (the lower acceptable value is 0.60). In addition, the discriminant validity of all the constructs was assessed by means of the Fornell–Larcker criterion, where the square-root of AVE for each construct should be greater than the construct’s correlations with other constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

The average variance extracted (AVE) is computed as the total of all the squared standardised factor loadings (squared multiple correlations) divided by the number of items, as shown in the equation below:

$$AVE = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n Li^2}{n}$$

where  $L_i$  represents the standardised factor loading, and  $i$  is the number of items. So, for  $n$  items, CR can be computed from the squared sum of factor loadings ( $L_i$ ) for each construct and the sum of the error variance terms for a construct ( $ei$ ), as shown in the equation below (Hair *et al.*, 2019):

$$CR = \frac{(\sum_{i=1}^n L_i)^2}{(\sum_{i=1}^n L_i)^2 + (\sum_{i=1}^n ei)}$$

Table 5.10 shows that convergent validity was established, as the standardised factor loadings for all the items were higher than the recommended cut-off of 0.5. Further, AVE exceeded 0.5 for each construct. Regarding the CR values, all of the values were well above the threshold of 0.60.

In terms of discriminant validity, Table 5.11 shows that the Fornell–Larcker criterion for assessing discriminant validity was met. This is evidenced by the fact that the square root of AVE for each construct (in boldface) was greater than the correlations between the constructs, as described below AVE (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Table 5-10 Scale items, factor loading, AVE, CR, and Cronbach's alpha

Construct	Scale Item Descriptions	Factor Loading	AVE	CR	Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ )
<b>Perceived deception (PD)</b>		<b>(3)</b>	<b>0.554</b>	<b>0.832</b>	<b>0.888</b>
(7-point, strongly disagree – strongly agree)	I believe this review is				
	PD1. misleading.	0.677			
	PD2. truthful.	0.787			
	PD3. honest	0.799			
	PD4. deceptive.	0.708			
<b>NWOM</b>		<b>(5)</b>	<b>0.655</b>	<b>0.849</b>	<b>0.878</b>
(7-point, strongly disagree – strongly agree)	On the basis of reading this review, I would				
	NWOM1. say positive things about the hotel to other people.	0.684			
	NWOM2. discourage friends and relatives from going to that hotel.	0.850			
	NWOM3. advise against the hotel when someone sought my advice.	0.880			
<b>Booking intention (BI)</b>		<b>(4)</b>	<b>0.681</b>	<b>0.865</b>	<b>0.889</b>
(7-point, much lower – much higher)	BI1. The likelihood I would book this hotel is...	0.796			
	BI2. The probability I would consider booking this hotel is...	0.831			
	BI3. My willingness to book this hotel would be...	0.848			
<b>Negative emotion (NEmo)</b>		<b>(1)</b>	<b>0.622</b>	<b>0.929</b>	<b>0.931</b>
(7-point, strongly disagree – strongly agree)	I feel a sense of				
	NEmo1. anger.	0.897			
	NEmo2. sadness.	0.852			
	NEmo3. irritation	0.736			
	NEmo4. disappointment.	0.709			
	NEmo5. frustration.	0.785			
	NEmo6. resentment.	0.752			
	NEmo7. indignation.	0.655			
	NEmo8. disgust.	0.889			
<b>Online review scepticism (ORS)</b>		<b>(2)</b>	<b>0.654</b>	<b>0.883</b>	<b>0.913</b>
(7-point, strongly disagree – strongly agree)	ORS1. I am not doubtful about online reviews.	0.788			
	ORS2. Online reviews are often questionable.	0.833			
	ORS3. I am generally uncertain about online reviews.	0.778			
	ORS4. I am generally skeptical about online reviews.	0.835			

Extraction Method: Maximum Likelihood.      Extraction Method: Maximum Likelihood.  
 Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normal Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Table 5-11. Correlations and squared AVE

	PD	NWOM	BI	NEmo	ORS
<b>Perceived deception (PD)</b>	<b>0.744</b>				
<b>NWOM</b>	0.254	<b>0.809</b>			
<b>Booking intention (BI)</b>	-0.326	-0.285	<b>0.825</b>		
<b>Negative emotion (NEmo)</b>	0.302	0.365	-0.247	<b>0.788</b>	
<b>Online review scepticism (ORS)</b>	0.551	0.131	-0.305	0.174	<b>0.808</b>

Note.  $n = 321$ .  
 Note. Off-diagonal values are correlation coefficients and on-diagonal values are the square root of AVE

To sum up, after establishing unidimensionality for all the indicators, the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to test both the convergent and discriminant validity. The above outputs show that convergent and discriminant validities were established for five constructs (i.e., perceived deception, NWOM, booking intention, negative emotion, and online review

scepticism). For convergent validity, the standardised factor loadings for all items were higher than the recommended cut-off of 0.5. The average variance extracted (AVE) exceeded 0.5 for each construct, and composite reliability (CR) values were well above the threshold of 0.60. Regarding the discriminant validity, the square-root of AVE for each construct was greater than the construct's correlations between the constructs. The next part, therefore, moves on to discuss and present the reliability assessment for all the scales.

#### **5.3.4 Reliability assessment**

After examining the validity and ensuring that all the scales measured the concepts that they were designed to measure, Cronbach's alpha was applied to examine the reliability of the scales. Field and Hole (2003) stated that to be reliable, the measurements must first be valid. As discussed earlier, the convergent and discriminant validities were established in the current study. Nunnally (1978) recommended a minimum accepted level value of 0.80 for basic or applied research. In Table 5.10, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients range from 0.878 for NWOM to 0.931 negative emotion. This result indicates that the scales used in this research display a strong level of consistency. The next section will go on to examine the multicollinearity between the independent variables.

#### **5.3.5 Multicollinearity**

After demonstrating that all the items used in the current study measured the concepts that they were designed to measure and showing that the items displayed a strong level of consistency, this section will investigate the importance of the independent variables. Multicollinearity reflects a situation where the independent variables are highly correlated among themselves (Hair *et al.*, 2006). There are two popular statistics used to assess multicollinearity in datasets, which are the tolerance value and variance inflation factor (VIF)

(Kline, 1998). Multicollinearity among the independent variables is an issue if the tolerance value is smaller than .10 and the VIF is 10 or larger (Hair *et al.*, 2006).

To examine multicollinearity in the current dataset, the corresponding measure of the independent variables (reviewer’s expertise and reviewer’s identity disclosure) and the dependent variable (perceived deception) were averaged by utilising the SPSS transformation tool to form composite measures of these constructs. Table 5.12 shows that the tolerance between reviewer’s expertise and reviewer’s identity disclosure was .976 and the VIF was 1.025. It can be concluded that multicollinearity was not problem among the independent variables, as the tolerance value was substantially above .10; the minimum limit of acceptability, while the VIF was much smaller than 10 – in line with the criterion set by Hair *et al.* (2006). The following parts move on to examine the realism and manipulation check for the experiment.

Table 5-12 The tolerance value and VIF

Coefficients			
Model		Collinearity Statistics	
		Tolerance	VIF
1	Reviewer’s expertise	0.976	1.025
	Reviewer’s identity disclosure	0.976	1.025
Dependent variable: Perceived deception			

### 5.3.6 Realism check

Following Liu *et al.*’s (2019ab) approach, the participants were asked, firstly, to read the scenarios and instructions. Then, they were asked to rate their feelings regarding whether the scenario could happen in real life (mundane realism) and how realistic the scenario was (experimental realism) (Liao, 2007). 7-point Likert scales were employed to assess the mundane and experimental realism of the experimental design. One sample *t*-test was conducted for all the experimental conditions (test value = 4). Table 5.13 shows that the



realism checks indicated that the scenarios were mundanely and experimentally realistic ( $t$ -values  $> 1.96$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) (Field, 2018).

Table 5-13 Realism check

Scenario	Mundane realism (Mean)	$t$ -value	Experimental realism (Mean)	$t$ -value
Condition 1: (High reviewer identity disclosure with high reviewer expertise level) ( $n = 76$ )	6.24	22.62*	6.45	33.43*
Condition 2: (High reviewer identity disclosure with low reviewer expertise level) ( $n = 83$ )	6.12	20.791*	6.43	33.285*
Condition 3: (Low reviewer identity disclosure with high reviewer expertise level) ( $n = 81$ )	6.11	26.22*	6.28	30.445*
Condition 4: (Low reviewer identity disclosure with low reviewer expertise level) ( $n = 81$ )	6.17	25.357*	6.32	32.206*

- $t$ -values  $> 1.96$ ;  $p < 0.05$  (Field, 2018)

### 5.3.7 Manipulation check

A manipulation check is an essential test in any experiment study. The purpose of this check is not to ensure that the outcome is impacted but to ensure that the manipulation of the independent variables has worked as planned (Hair *et al.*, 2019). Two independent variables (reviewer's identity disclosure and reviewer's expertise) were manipulated into two levels. To assess the level of reviewer's identity disclosure, participants were asked to assess their perceived level of information about the reviewer's identity using scales adapted from Hite *et al.* (2014,  $\alpha = 0.957$ ) using 7-point Likert scales (1 = very strongly disagree, 7 = very strongly agree). The independent sample  $t$ -test can be employed to test the mean differences across two groups (i.e., high and low reviewer identity disclosure) (Field and Hole, 2003). An independent  $t$ -test demonstrated the effectiveness of the manipulation check, and there was

a significant difference in reviewer's identity disclosure ( $M_{\text{high}} = 5.20$ ,  $SD = 1.22$  vs.  $M_{\text{low}} = 1.95$ ,  $SD = .846$ ;  $t(279.97) = -27.56$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

To assess the level of reviewer's expertise, the same approach as the previously described one was applied here. The participants were asked to assess their perceived level of expertise about the reviewer using scales adapted from Ohanian (1990,  $\alpha = 0.940$ ) using 7-point Likert scales (1 = very strongly disagree, 7 = very strongly agree). The independent sample *t*-test was used to check the manipulation of reviewer's expertise (high and low) by comparing the scores for high and low reviewer expertise. An independent *t*-test demonstrated the effectiveness of the manipulation check, and there was a significant difference in reviewer's expertise ( $M_{\text{high}} = 5.40$ ,  $SD = 0.969$  vs.  $M_{\text{low}} = 2.82$ ,  $SD = 1.002$ ;  $t(318.968) = -23.393$ ,  $p < .001$ ). From these results, it can be concluded that the manipulation of both independent variables (reviewer's identity disclosure and reviewer's expertise) was successful.

In summary, it has been shown in the preliminary analyses section that females, males, and others participated in the current study. About 98% of the participants were between 21 and 60 years old. The majority of the participants had a guaranteed income based on occupation categories and, thus, they have the ability to search for information, make a decision, and book a room in a hotel. In terms of construct validity, unidimensionality was established for all the indicators related to the perceived deception, NWOM, booking intention, negative emotion, and online review scepticism constructs. Hotel's trustworthiness was excluded from the current model, as its items were cross-loading with items related to the perceived deception construct. Meanwhile, the output shows that the convergent and discriminant validities were established for all 22 items of the five constructs. In addition, the results also show that multicollinearity was not problem among the independent variables. Finally, the

outcomes show that the scenarios were mundanely and experimentally realistic and that the manipulation of both independent variables was successful. The following section of this chapter moves on to test the proposed hypotheses and report the results in greater detail.

### **5.3 Hypothesis Testing**

As was pointed out in the introduction to this chapter, the third part of this chapter focuses on hypothesis testing. This includes comparisons between groups and the examination of relationships between variables. Thus far, 321 valid responses have been retained for further analysis from the data preparation section. In addition, the preliminary analysis section showed that the manipulation of reviewer's identity disclosure and reviewer's expertise (i.e., the independent variables) worked as intended. Figure 5.1 presents the conceptual framework after establishing the validity of all the constructs and omitting hotel's trustworthiness; it includes reviewer's identity disclosure and reviewer's expertise (independent variables), online review scepticism (moderator variable), perceived deception (mediation variable), and booking intention, NWOM, and negative emotion (dependent variables). Table 5.14 presents the proposed hypotheses, research objectives, and analysis techniques used in the current study. The hypothesis testing part can best be treated under four headings, namely two-way independent ANOVA analysis, moderation analysis, mediation analysis, and moderated mediation analysis. The rest of this part presents how these statistical techniques assisted in testing the proposed hypotheses and achieving the research objectives.

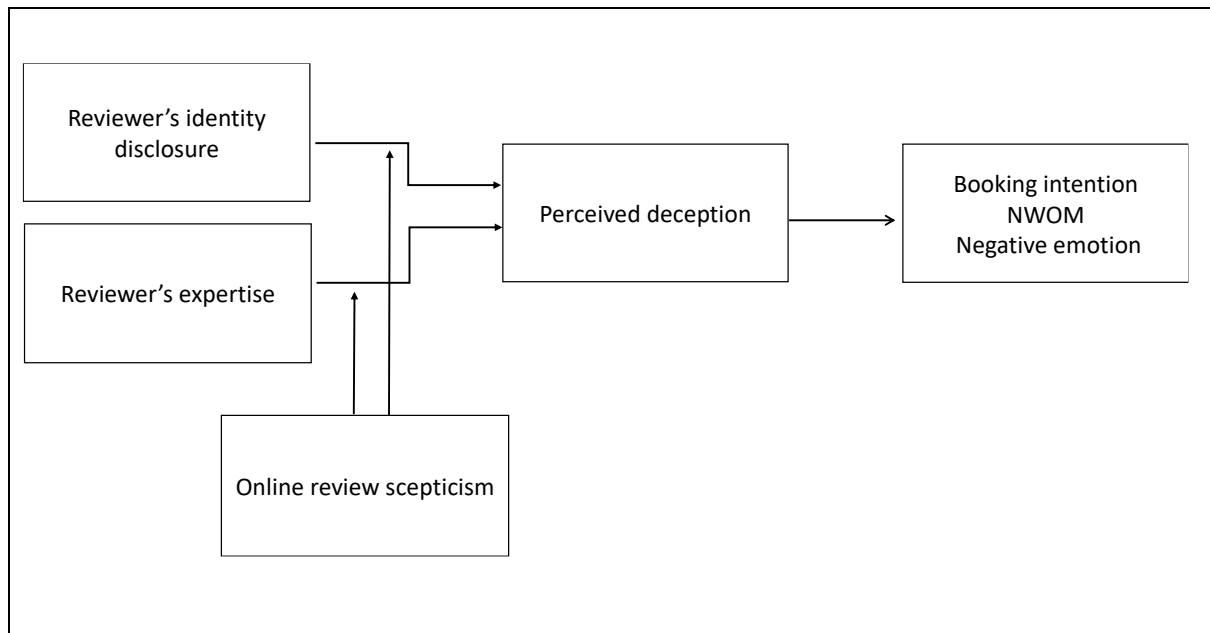


Figure 5-1 New conceptual framework after omitting hotel's trustworthiness

Table 5-14 Hypotheses, research objectives, and analysis techniques

Hypothesis	Research Objective	Analysis Technique
H1: Perceived deception will be higher when the reviewer has low identity disclosure than when the reviewer has high identity disclosure.	Explore how cues related to a reviewer's profile influence consumers' perceived deception.	Two-way independent ANOVA
H2: Perceived deception will be higher when the reviewer has a low expertise level than when the reviewer has a high expertise level.		
H3: The effect of a reviewer profile with low identity disclosure (H3a) and low expertise level (H3b) on perceived deception is higher for individuals with high online review scepticism.	Examine how online review scepticism moderates the relationship between a reviewer's identity disclosure and expertise and perceived deception.	Hayes Process Macro-Model 1 – Moderation
H4: Perceived deception mediates the negative effect of a reviewer profile with low identity disclosure (H4a) and low expertise (H4b) on booking intention.	Assess the role of perceived deception in the relationship between a reviewer's profile cues and consumers' responses.	Hayes Process Macro-Model 4 – Mediation
H5: Perceived deception mediates the positive effect of a reviewer profile with low identity disclosure (H5a) and low expertise (H5b) on NWOM.		

<p>H6: Perceived deception mediates the positive effect of a reviewer profile with low identity disclosure (H6a) and low expertise (H6b) on negative emotion.</p>		
<p>H8: Online review scepticism moderates the strength of the mediated relationships between reviewers' identity disclosure and booking intention (H8a), NWOM (H8b), and negative emotion (H8c) via perceived deception, so that the mediation is stronger when online review scepticism is high compared to low.</p>	<p>Examine the mediating role of perceived deception in the relationship between identity disclosure and expertise interacting with online review scepticism and their impact on consumers' responses.</p>	<p>Hayes Process Macro-Model 7 – Moderated Mediation</p>
<p>H9: Online review scepticism moderates the strength of the mediated relationships between a reviewers' expertise and booking intention (H9a), NWOM (H9b), and negative emotion (H9c) via perceived deception, so that the mediation is stronger when online review scepticism is high compared to low.</p>		

### 5.3.1 The two-way independent ANOVA analysis

As discussed previously in the methodology chapter (Chapter 4, section 4.6.3), an ANOVA test was applied to examine the mean differences across the groups (high and low reviewer identity disclosure and high and low reviewer expertise) on perceived deception. H1 proposed that perceived deception will be higher when the reviewer has low identity disclosure than when the reviewer has high identity disclosure, while H2 predicted that perceived deception will be higher when the reviewer has low expertise than when the reviewer has high expertise. Therefore, the null hypothesis tested was the equality of a single dependent

variable's means across groups. It was applied with reviewer's identity disclosure (H1) and reviewer's expertise (H2) as independent variables with two levels and perceived deception as a single dependent variable. The two-way independent ANOVA analysis was conducted to test the main and interaction effects of reviewer's identity disclosure and reviewer's expertise on perceived deception separately.

Table 5.15 shows the outputs of the two-way independent ANOVA analysis. For reviewer's identity disclosure, the main effect of reviewer's identity disclosure on perceived deception was significant ( $F(1, 358.05) = 94.270, p < 0.001$ ). The eta squared ( $\eta^2 = 0.229$ ) indicated that the effect of reviewer's identity disclosure on perceived deception lies in the large effect size based on Cohen's convention (Cohen, 1988). Figure 5.2 shows that a reviewer profile with a low identity disclosure ( $M_{\text{low identity disclosure}} = 3.532, SD = 0.0835$ ) increases perceived deception compared with a high identity disclosure ( $M_{\text{high identity disclosure}} = 2.380, SD = 0.0844$ ). This indicates that participants assigned to the low identity disclosure condition perceived deception more than those in the high identity disclosure condition. Therefore, H1 is supported.

Regarding the reviewer's expertise, the results suggest that there is a significant main effect of reviewer's expertise on perceived deception ( $F(1, 358.05) = 77.294, p < 0.001$ ) (see Table 5.15). The eta squared ( $\eta^2 = 0.196$ ) indicated that the effect of reviewer's expertise on perceived deception lies in the large effect size based on Cohen's convention (Cohen, 1988). Figure 5.8 shows that a reviewer's profile set at a low expertise level ( $M_{\text{low expertise level}} = 3.478, SD = 0.083$ ) increases perceived deception compared with one set at a high expertise level ( $M_{\text{high expertise level}} = 2.434, SD = 0.085$ ). In particular, participants assigned to the low expertise level condition perceived deception more than those in the high expertise level condition. Therefore, H2 is supported.

Table 5-15 ANOVA results for perceived deception

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	DF	MS	F	p-value	Partial Eta Squared $\eta^2$
Reviewer's identity disclosure	106.478	1	106.478	94.270	< 0.001	0.229
Reviewer's expertise	87.303	1	87.303	77.294	< 0.001	0.196
Interaction effect	42.850	1	42.850	37.938	< 0.001	0.107
Error	358.050	317	1.129			
Total	3416.69	321				

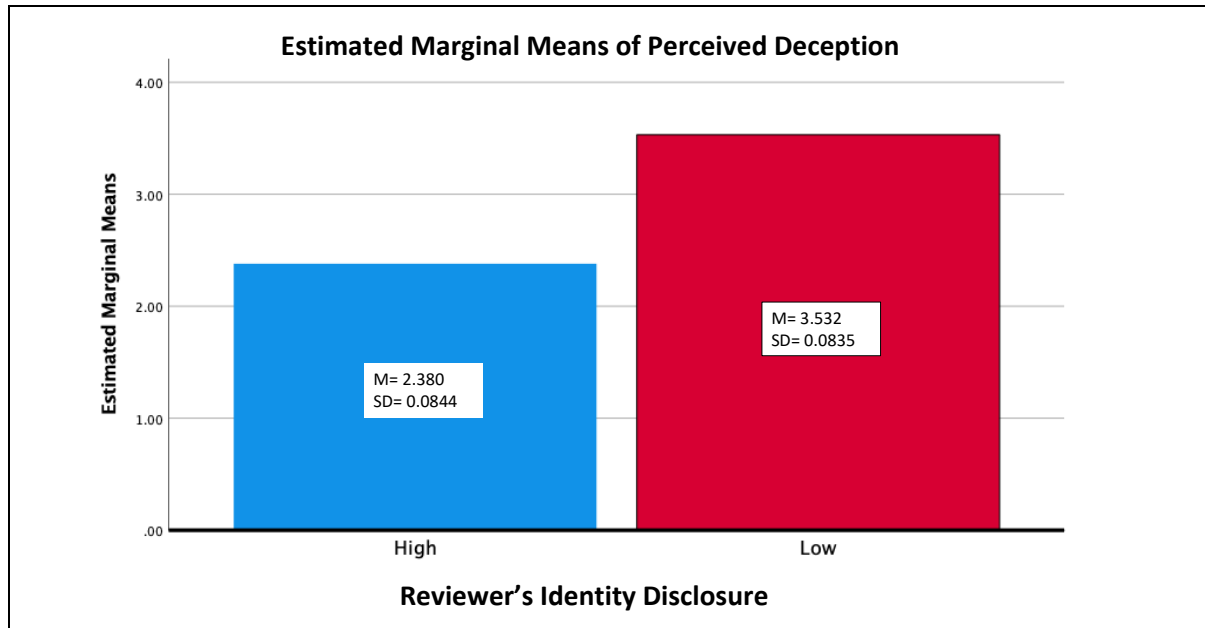


Figure 5-2 Reviewer's identity disclosure and perceived deception

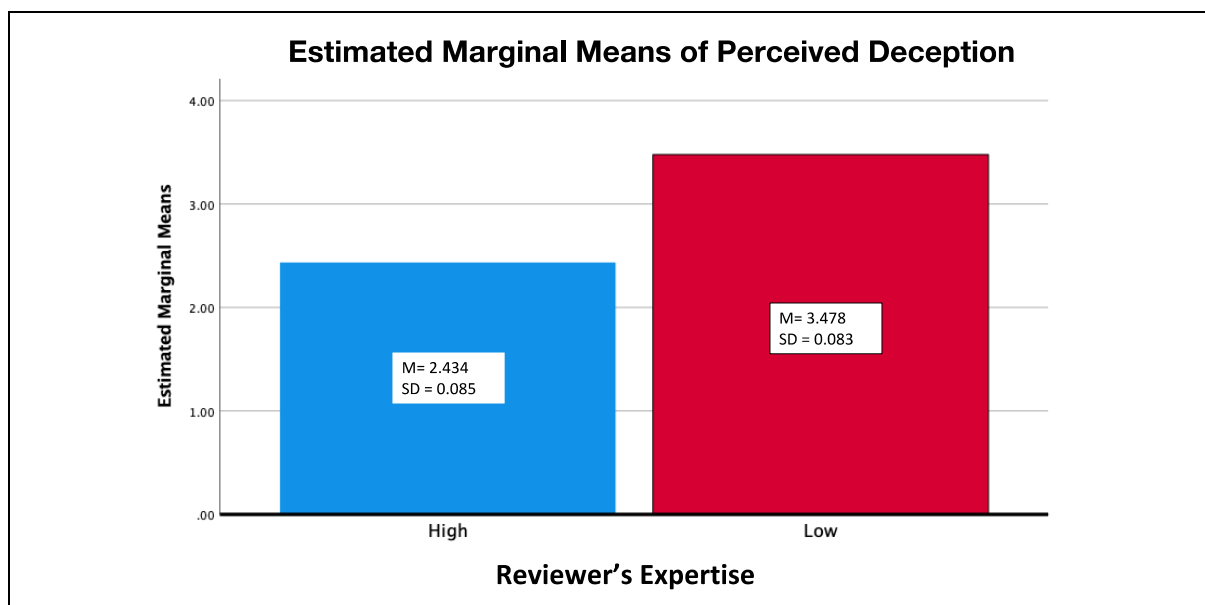


Figure 5-3 Reviewer's expertise and perceived deception

Examining the interaction effect between reviewer’s identity disclosure and reviewer’s expertise on perceived deception is not one of the objectives in the current research. However, Table 5.15 reveals a significant interaction effect between the reviewer’s identity disclosure and expertise, confirming its impact on perceived deception ( $F(1, 358.05) = 37.938$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The eta squared ( $\eta^2 = 0.107$ ) indicated that the interaction effect of reviewer’s identity disclosure and reviewer’s expertise on perceived deception lies in the large effect size based on Cohen’s convention (Cohen, 1988). This indicates that the relationship between identity disclosure and perceived deception is influenced by the reviewer’s expertise. As visualised in the interaction plot (see Figure 5.4) and Table 5.16, participants exposed to the reviewer profile with low identity disclosure versus low expertise level perceived deception more than other conditions ( $M = 4.420$ ,  $SD = 0.118$ ). To examine if there is a significant difference between the conditions’ impact on perceived deception, this thesis created a new column and divided the participants based on their conditions. Table 5.17 presents the results of a pairwise comparison test using the Bonferroni method; this confirmed the mean differences between condition 4 and the other conditions on perceived deception. The results confirmed the interaction effect of low reviewer identity disclosure and low expertise level on perceived deception.

Table 5-16 Interaction effect of reviewer’s identity and expertise on perceived deception

Reviewer’s Identity Disclosure	Reviewer’s Expertise	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
<b>Low</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>4.42</b>	<b>0.118</b>	<b>4.187</b>	<b>4.652</b>
	high	2.645	0.118	2.413	2.877
High	Low	2.536	0.117	2.307	2.766
	High	2.224	0.122	1.984	2.464



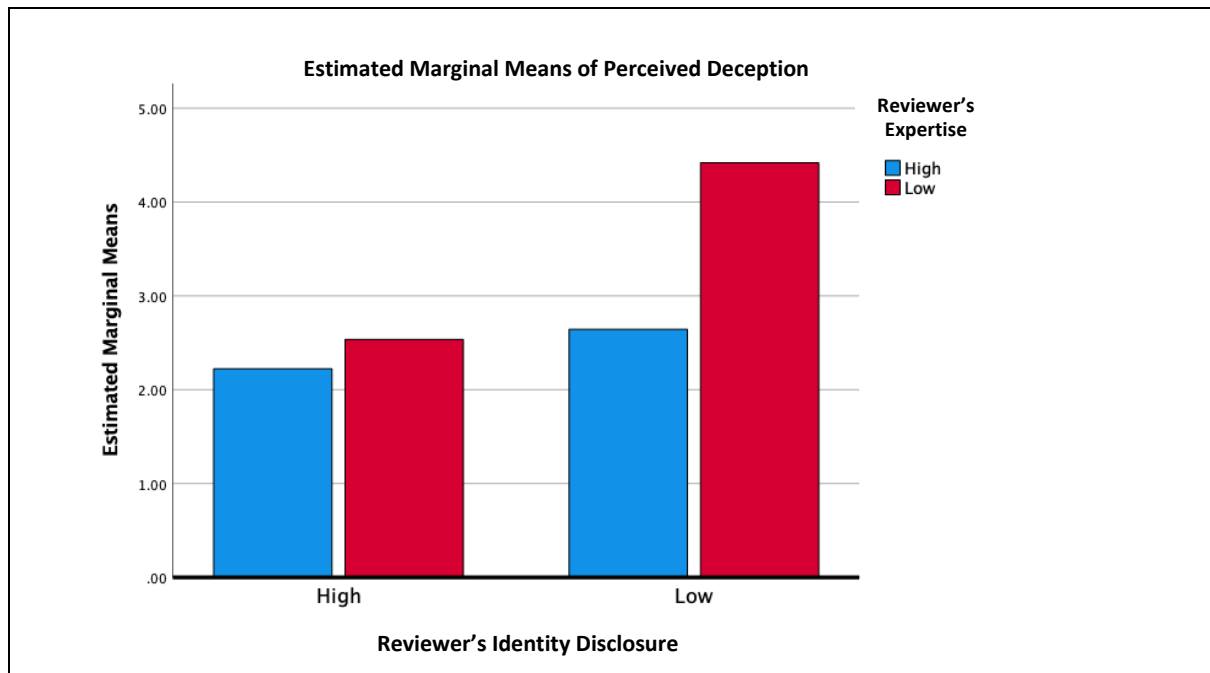


Figure 5-4 Interaction effect of reviewer's identity and expertise on perceived deception

Table 5-17 Pairwise comparison test between four conditions

(I) Conditions	(J) Conditions	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	P-value	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
High identity disclosure vs. high expertise	2	-0.3125	0.16873	0.39	-0.7604	0.1355
	3	-0.4214	0.16972	0.081	-0.872	0.0292
	4	-2.1961*	0.16972	<0.001	-2.6467	-1.7455
High identity disclosure vs. low expertise	1	0.3125	0.16873	0.39	-0.1355	0.7604
	3	-0.1089	0.16599	1	-0.5496	0.3318
	4	-1.8836*	0.16599	<0.001	-2.3243	-1.4429
Low identity disclosure vs. high expertise	1	0.4214	0.16972	0.081	-0.0292	0.872
	2	0.1089	0.16599	1	-0.3318	0.5496
	4	-1.7747*	0.167	<0.001	-2.2181	-1.3313
Low identity disclosure vs. low expertise	1	2.1961*	0.16972	<0.001	1.7455	2.6467
	2	1.8836*	0.16599	<0.001	1.4429	2.3243
	3	1.7747*	0.167	<0.001	1.3313	2.2181

\* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

### 5.3.2 Moderation analysis

H3a proposed that the effect of a reviewer's profile with low identity disclosure is higher for individuals with high online review scepticism. The PROCESS macro-Model 1 was applied here to assess the moderating role of online review scepticism on the relationship between reviewer's identity disclosure and perceived deception. The PROCESS macro-Model 1 allows to test the effect of independent variable (X) on dependent variable (Y) dependent on the moderator variable (W) (Hayes *et al.*, 2017).

Reviewer's identity disclosure was used as an independent variable (X), perceived deception as a dependent variable (Y), and online review scepticism as a moderator variable (W). In addition, reviewer's identity disclosure is a categorical variable which takes 1 for low identity disclosure and 2 for high identity disclosure. It was not possible to put this variable into the regression, as it is not considered a metric variable. Therefore, it was transferred to a dummy variable, which takes 1 for low reviewer identity disclosure and 0 otherwise. The statistical significance levels of the direct and indirect effects were evaluated by means of 5,000 bootstrap samples to create bias-corrected confidence intervals (CIs; 95%).

Table 5.18 shows that there is a positive and statistically significant moderating impact of online review scepticism on the relationship between low reviewer identity disclosure and perceived deception ( $b = 0.5090$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ). Simple slope tests indicated that the relationship between reviewer's identity disclosure and perceived deception is statistically significant and positive when online review scepticism is higher (+1SD;  $b = 1.6312$ ,  $SE = 0.1592$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) but not when review scepticism is lower (-1SD;  $b = 0.1327$ ,  $SE = 0.1598$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ).

Figure 5.5 provides a graphical representation of the statistically significant moderating effect found according to high and low levels of the moderating variable. The graph plots two curves

showing the level of perceived deception considering both the level of reviewer’s identity disclosure as well as online review scepticism. Individuals with high online review scepticism have higher perceived deception compared to individuals with low online review scepticism depending on whether the review is posted by a reviewer with high identity disclosure or low identity disclosure. However, when the level of online review scepticism is high, reviewers with a high level of identity disclosure have a lower level of perceived deception compared to reviewers with a low level of identity disclosure. Therefore, H3a is supported, as high levels of online review scepticism strengthen the relationship between reviewer’s identity disclosure and perceived deception.

Table 5-18 Moderation effect of online review scepticism on the relationship between reviewer’s identity disclosure and perceived deception

Consequent						
Antecedent	Y (Perceived deception)					
	Coeff	SE	<i>p</i>	LLCI	ULCI	
Reviewer’s identity disclosure	0.8820	0.1127	0.000	0.6603	1.1037	
Online review scepticism	0.2040	0.0535	0.002	0.0988	0.3092	
Reviewer’s identity disclosure x Online review scepticism	0.5090	0.0767	0.000	0.3581	0.6599	
Constant	2.4463	.0800	.0000	2.2888	2.6037	
		R <sup>2</sup> = 0.4779				
		F(3,317)= 96.7364, <i>p</i> = 0.000				

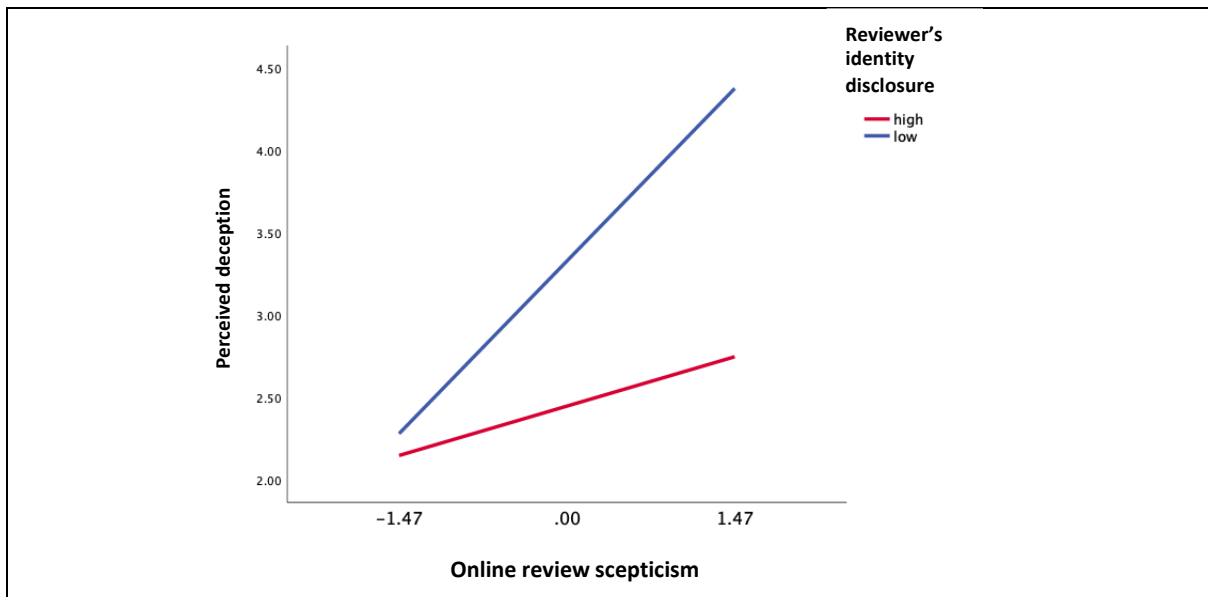


Figure 5-5 Online review scepticism strengthens the positive relationship between reviewer’s identity disclosure and perceived deception

Regarding H3b, it was proposed that the effect of a reviewer’s profile with low expertise on perceived deception would be higher for individuals with high online review scepticism. The same method of analysis was applied, and the PROCESS macro-Model 1 was used to assess the moderating role of online review scepticism on the relationship between reviewer’s expertise and perceived deception. Reviewer’s expertise was used as an independent variable (X), perceived deception as a dependent variable (Y), and online review scepticism as a moderator variable (W). In addition, reviewer’s expertise is a categorical variable which takes 1 for low expertise level and 2 for high expertise level. It was transferred to a dummy variable that takes 1 for low expertise level and 0 otherwise. The statistical significance levels of the direct and indirect effects were evaluated by means of 5,000 bootstrap samples to create bias-corrected CIs (95%).

As shown in Table 5.19, the results reveal that there is a positive and statistically significant moderating impact of online review scepticism on the relationship between a low reviewer expertise level and perceived deception ( $b = 0.3262, p < 0.001$ ). Simple slope tests indicated

that the relationship between reviewer’s expertise and perceived deception is statistically significant and positive when online review scepticism is higher (+1SD;  $b = 1.2755$ ,  $SE = 0.1691$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ) but not when online review scepticism is lower (-1SD;  $b = 0.3152$ ,  $SE = 0.1671$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ).

Figure 5.6 provides a graphical representation of the statistically significant moderating effect found according to high and low levels of the moderating variable. The graph plots two curves showing the level of perceived deception considering the level of reviewer expertise as well as online review scepticism. Individuals with high online review scepticism have higher perceived deception compared to individuals with low online review scepticism, regardless of whether the review is posted by a reviewer with a high or low expertise level. However, when the level of online review scepticism is high, reviewers with a high expertise level have a lower level of perceived deception compared to reviewers with a low expertise level. Therefore, H3b is supported, as high levels of online review scepticism strengthen the relationship between reviewer’s expertise and perceived deception. Thus far, the results support H3 (a, b).

Table 5-19 Moderation effect of online review scepticism on the relationship between reviewer expertise level and perceived deception

Consequent						
Antecedent	Y (Perceived deception)					
	Coeff	SE	<i>p</i>	LLCI	ULCI	
Reviewer’s expertise	0.7954	0.1187	0.000	0.5618	1.0289	
Online review scepticism	0.2934	0.0585	0.000	0.1785	0.4086	
Reviewer’s expertise x Online review scepticism	0.3262	0.0808	0.001	0.1671	0.4852	
Constant	2.5172	0.0849	0.000	2.3501	2.6843	
		$R^2 = 0.4155$				
		$F(3,317) = 75.1197, p = 0.000$				

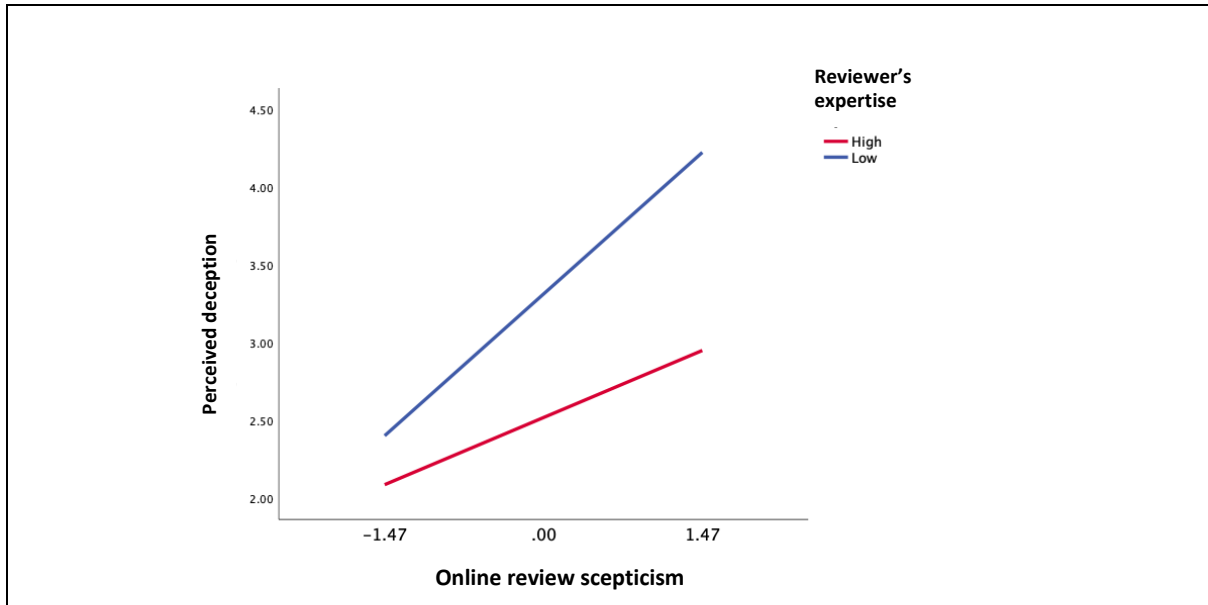


Figure 5-6 Review scepticism strengthens the positive relationship between reviewer’s expertise level and perceived deception

### 5.3.3 Mediation analysis

H4a proposed a mediation effect of perceived deception in the relationship between a reviewer’s profile with low identity disclosure and booking intention. Therefore, the PROCESS macro-Model 4 was applied. Reviewer’s identity disclosure was used as an independent variable (X), perceived deception as the mediator variable (M), and booking intention as the dependent variable (Y). For the purpose of the analysis, a dummy variable was used for reviewer’s identity disclosure – it takes 1 for low reviewer identity disclosure and 0 otherwise.

Table 5.20 shows that reviewer’s identity disclosure has a positive and statistically significant effect on perceived deception ( $a = 1.1456, p < 0.000$ ). In particular, individuals assigned to the low identity disclosure condition have higher perceived deception than those assigned to the high identity disclosure condition. Perceived deception, in turn, has a statically significant and negative effect on booking intention ( $b = -0.2665, p < 0.000$ ). This result suggests that when perceived deception increases, participants tend to not book a room in the hotel.

Finally, the test showed that perceived deception plays a mediation role in the relationship between reviewer’s identity disclosure and booking intention. According to Hair *et al.* (2019), if both the direct and indirect effects from X to Y are significant, there is a partial mediation effect; if the direct effect becomes insignificant when the mediator is added, and the indirect effect is significant, there is a full mediation effect. If the direct effect is never significant, but the indirect effect is, there is an indirect mediation effect.

In the current case, the results show a significant and statistically negative indirect effect of reviewer’s identity disclosure on booking intention via perceived deception ( $ab = -0.3053$ ,  $_{Boot}CIB = -0.4416, -0.1896$ ;  $_{Boot}SE = 0.0654$ ) based on 5,000 bootstrap samples, with a 95% CI. There is no significant direct effect of reviewer’s identity disclosure on booking intention ( $c' = 0.1367$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). This indicates that perceived deception has an indirect mediation effect in the relationship between reviewer’s identity disclosure and booking intention. Hence, H4a is supported.

Table 5-20 Coefficients for the mediation model (X: Reviewer’s identity disclosure, M: Perceived deception, Y: Booking intention)

Consequent								
Antecedent	M (Perceived deception)				Y (Booking intention)			
		Coeff	SE	<i>p</i>		Coeff	SE	<i>p</i>
Reviewer’s identity disclosure	a	1.1456	0.1383	0.000	<i>c'</i>	0.1367	0.1194	0.2530
Perceived deception	-	-	-	-	b	-0.2665	0.0438	0.000
Constant	i <sub>1</sub>	2.3868	0.0982	0.000	i <sub>2</sub>	5.4076	0.1299	0.000
		R <sup>2</sup> = 0.1771				R <sup>2</sup> = 0.1102		
		F(1,319)= 68.6342, <i>p</i> = 0.001				F(2,318)=19.6884, <i>p</i> = 0.000		
Mediator								
Indirect effect of X on Y								
		Coeff		BootSE		BootLLCI		BootULCI
Perceived deception		-0.3053		0.0654		-0.4416		-0.1896

H5a proposed that perceived deception has a mediation effect in the relationship between low identity disclosure and NWOM. This thesis applied the same test, the PROCESS macro-Model 4, to assess the mediating role of perceived deception. Reviewer's identity disclosure was used as an independent variable (X), perceived deception as the mediator variable (M), and NWOM as the dependent variable (Y).

Table 5.21 shows that reviewer's identity disclosure has a positive and significant effect on perceived deception ( $a = 1.1456, p < 0.000$ ). In particular, individuals assigned to the low reviewer identity disclosure condition have higher perceived deception than those assigned to the high reviewer identity disclosure condition. Perceived deception, in turn, has a statistically significant and positive effect on NWOM ( $b = 0.1695, p < 0.000$ ). This result suggests that as perceived deception increases, participants are more likely to spread NWOM.

Lastly, the test showed that perceived deception plays a mediation role in the relationship between reviewer's identity disclosure and NWOM. The result shows a significant and positive indirect effect of reviewer's identity disclosure on NWOM via perceived deception ( $ab = 0.1942, \text{BootCI} = 0.1074, 0.2926; \text{BootSE} = 0.0475$ ) based on 5,000 bootstrap samples, with a 95% CI. There is no significant direct effect of reviewer's identity disclosure on NWOM ( $c' = -0.0542, p > 0.05$ ). This indicates that perceived deception has an indirect mediation effect in the relationship between reviewer's identity disclosure and NWOM. Hence, H5a is supported.



Table 5-21 Coefficients for the mediation model (X: Reviewer's identity disclosure, M: Perceived deception, Y: NWOM)

Consequent								
Antecedent	M (Perceived deception)				Y (NWOM)			
		Coeff	SE	<i>p</i>		Coeff	SE	<i>p</i>
Reviewer's identity disclosure	a	1.1456	0.1383	0.000	c'	-0.0542	0.1033	0.6003
Perceived deception	-	-	-	-	b	0.1695	0.0379	0.0000
Constant	i <sub>1</sub>	2.3868	0.0982	0.000	i <sub>2</sub>	1.6980	0.1124	0.0000
		R <sup>2</sup> = 0.1771				R <sup>2</sup> = 0.0653		
		F(1,319)= 68.6342, <i>p</i> = 0.000				F(2,318)=11.1093, <i>p</i> = 0.0000		
Mediator	Indirect effect of X on Y							
		Coeff		BootSE		BootLLCI		BootULCI
Perceived deception		0.1942		0.0475		0.1074		0.2926

H6a proposed that perceived deception has a mediation effect in the relationship between low identity disclosure and negative emotion. The PROCESS macro-Model 4 was applied to assess the mediating role of perceived deception in the relationship between low reviewer identity disclosure and negative emotion. Reviewer's identity disclosure was used as an independent variable (X), perceived deception as a mediator variable (M), and negative emotion as a dependent variable (Y).

Table 5.22 shows that reviewer's identity disclosure has a positive and statistically significant effect on perceived deception ( $a = 1.1456, p < 0.000$ ). In particular, individuals assigned to the low reviewer identity disclosure condition have higher perceived deception than those assigned to the high reviewer identity disclosure condition. Perceived deception, in turn, has a statistically significant and positive effect on negative emotion ( $b = 0.1972, p < 0.0000$ ). This result suggests that when perceived deception increases, participants tend to develop negative emotion.

Finally, the test showed that perceived deception plays a mediation role in the relationship between reviewer's identity disclosure and negative emotion. The results show a significant

and positive indirect effect of reviewer’s identity disclosure on negative emotion via perceived deception ( $ab = 2260$ ,  $_{\text{Boot}}\text{CI} = 0.1265, 0.3360$ ;  $_{\text{Boot}}\text{SE} = 0.0524$ ) based on 5,000 bootstrap samples, with a 95% CI. There is no significant direct effect of reviewer’s identity disclosure on negative emotion ( $c' = -0.0185$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). This indicates that perceived deception has an indirect mediation effect in the relationship between reviewer’s identity disclosure and negative emotion. Therefore, H6a is supported.

Table 5-22 Coefficients for the mediation model (X: Reviewer’s identity disclosure, M: Perceived deception, Y: Negative emotion)

Consequent								
Antecedent	M (Perceived deception)				Y (Negative emotion)			
		Coeff	SE	<i>p</i>		Coeff	SE	<i>p</i>
Reviewer’s identity disclosure	a	1.1456	0.1383	0.0000	c'	-0.0185	0.1031	0.8574
Perceived deception	-	-	-	-	b	0.1972	0.0379	0.0000
Constant	i1	2.3868	0.0982	0.0000	i2	1.2454	0.1122	0.0000
		$R^2 = 0.1771$				$R^2 = 0.0916$		
		$F(1,319) = 68.6342, p = 0.0000$				$F(2,318) = 16.0300, p = 0.0000$		
Mediator								
Indirect effect of X on Y								
		Coeff	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI			
Perceived deception		0.2260	0.0524	0.1265	0.3360			

Turning now to reviewer’s expertise, H4b proposed a mediation effect of perceived deception in the relationship between a reviewer’s profile with a low expertise level and booking intention. The PROCESS macro-Model 4 was applied. Reviewer’s expertise was used as an independent variable (X), perceived deception as the mediator variable (M), and booking intention as the dependent variable (Y). For the purpose of the analysis, a dummy variable was used for reviewer’s expertise that takes 1 for low expertise level and 0 otherwise.

Table 5.23 shows that reviewer’s expertise has a positive and statistically significant effect on perceived deception ( $a = 1.0254$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ). In particular, individuals assigned to the low

expertise level condition have higher perceived deception than those assigned to the high expertise level condition. Perceived deception, in turn, has a statistically significant and negative effect on booking intention ( $b = -0.2720, p < 0.000$ ). This result suggests that when perceived deception increases, participants tend to not book a room in the hotel. Finally, the test showed that perceived deception plays a mediation role on the relationship between reviewer's expertise and booking intention. The results show a statistically significant and negative indirect effect of reviewer's expertise on booking intention via perceived deception ( $ab = -0.2789, \text{BootCI} = -0.3979, -0.1792; \text{BootSE} = 0.0552$ ) based on 5,000 bootstrap samples, with a 95% CI. There is no significant direct effect of reviewer's expertise on booking intention ( $c' = 0.1929, p > 0.05$ ), this indicates that perceived deception has an indirect mediation effect in the relationship between reviewer's expertise and booking intention. Hence, H4b is supported.

Table 5-23 Coefficients for the mediation model (X: Reviewer's expertise, M: Perceived deception, Y: Booking intention)

Consequent								
Antecedent	M (Perceived deception)				Y (Booking intention)			
		Coeff	SE	<i>p</i>		Coeff	SE	<i>p</i>
Reviewer's expertise	a	1.0254	0.1412	0.0000	c'	0.1929	0.1166	0.9922
Perceived deception	-	-	-	-	b	-0.2720	0.0428	0.0000
Constant	i1	2.4411	0.1010	0.0000	i2	5.3944	0.1300	0.0000
		R <sup>2</sup> = 0.1418				R <sup>2</sup> = 0.1141		
		F (1,319) = 52.7035, <i>p</i> = 0.0000				F (2,318) = 20.4849, <i>p</i> = 0.0000		
Mediator								
Indirect effect of X on Y								
		Coeff	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI			
Perceived deception		-0.2789	0.0552	-0.3979	-0.1792			

H5b proposed that perceived deception has a mediation effect in the relationship between reviewer's expertise and NWOM. The PROCESS macro-Model 4 was applied to assess the mediating role of perceived deception on the relationship between low reviewer expertise

and NWOM. Reviewer's expertise was used as an independent variable (X), perceived deception as the mediator variable (M), and NWOM as the dependent variable (Y).

Table 5.24 shows that reviewer's expertise has a positive and statistically significant effect on perceived deception ( $a = 1.0254, p < 0.000$ ). In particular, individuals assigned to the low expertise level condition have higher perceived deception than those assigned to the high expertise level condition. Perceived deception, in turn, has a statistically significant and positive effect on NWOM ( $b = 0.1733, p < 0.000$ ). This result suggests that as perceived deception increases, participants are more likely to spread NWOM. Finally, the test showed that perceived deception plays a mediation role in the relationship between expertise level and NWOM. The results show a statistically significant and positive indirect effect of reviewer's expertise level on NWOM via perceived deception ( $ab = 0.1777, \text{BootCI} = 0.1008, 0.2641; \text{BootSE} = 0.0412$ ) based on 5,000 bootstrap samples, with a 95% CI. There is no statistically significant direct effect of reviewer's expertise level on NWOM ( $c' = -0.0876, p > 0.05$ ). This indicates that perceived deception has an indirect mediation effect in the relationship between reviewer's expertise and NWOM. Hence, H5b is supported.

Table 5-24 Coefficients for the mediation model (X: Reviewer's expertise, M: Perceived deception, Y: NWOM)

Consequent								
Antecedent	M (perceived deception)				Y (NWOM)			
	Coeff	SE	<i>p</i>	Coeff	SE	<i>p</i>		
Reviewer's expertise	a	1.0254	0.1412	0.0000	c'	-0.0876	0.1011	0.3876
Perceived deception	-	-	-	-	b	0.1733	0.0371	0.0000
Constant	i <sub>1</sub>	2.4411	0.1010	0.0000	i <sub>2</sub>	1.7044	0.1126	0.0000
		R <sup>2</sup> = 0.1418				R <sup>2</sup> = 0.0667		
		F (1,319) = 52.7035, <i>p</i> = 0.0000				F (2,318) = 11.3638, <i>p</i> = 0.0000		
Mediator	Indirect effect of X on Y							
	Coeff		BootSE		BootLLCI		BootULCI	
Perceived deception	0.1777		0.0412		0.1008		0.2641	

H6b proposed that perceived deception plays a mediation effect in the relationship between reviewer's expertise and negative emotion. The PROCESS macro-Model 4 was applied to assess the mediating role of perceived deception in the relationship between low reviewer expertise and negative emotion. Reviewer's expertise was used as an independent variable (X), perceived deception as the mediator variable (M), and negative emotion as the dependent variable (Y).

Table 5.25 shows that reviewer's expertise has a positive and statistically significant effect on perceived deception ( $a = 1.0254, p < 0.000$ ). In particular, individuals assigned to the low expertise level condition have higher perceived deception than those assigned to the high expertise level condition. Perceived deception, in turn, has a statistically significant and positive effect on negative emotion ( $b = 0.1996, p < 0.000$ ). This result suggests that when perceived deception increases, participants tend to develop negative emotion. Finally, the test showed that perceived deception plays a mediation role in the relationship between reviewer's expertise and negative emotion. The results show a statistically significant and positive indirect effect of reviewer's expertise on negative emotion via perceived deception ( $ab = 0.2047, \text{BootCI} = 0.1217, 0.2959; \text{BootSE} = 0.0446$ ) based on 5,000 bootstrap samples, with a 95% CI. There is no significant direct effect of reviewer's expertise on negative emotion ( $c' = -0.0379, p > 0.05$ ). This indicates that perceived deception has an indirect mediation effect in the relationship between reviewer's expertise and NWOM. Hence, H6b is supported. In sum, the results support H4 (a, d), H5 (a, d), and H6 (a, d).

Table 5-25 Coefficients for the mediation model (X: Reviewer's expertise, M: Perceived deception, Y: Negative emotion)

Consequent								
Antecedent	M (Perceived deception)				Y (Negative emotion)			
	Coeff	SE	<i>p</i>		Coeff	SE	<i>p</i>	
Reviewer's expertise	a	1.0254	0.1412	0.0000	c'	-0.0379	0.1009	0.7075
Perceived deception	-	-	-	-	b	0.1996	0.0371	0.0000
Constant	i <sub>1</sub>	2.4411	0.1010	0.0000	i <sub>2</sub>	1.2484	0.1125	0.0000
		R <sup>2</sup> = 0.1418				R <sup>2</sup> = 0.0919		
		F (1,319) = 52.7035, <i>p</i> = 0.0000				F (2,318) =16.0899, <i>p</i> = 0.0000		
Mediator	Indirect effect of X on Y							
	Coeff		BootSE		BootLLCI		BootULCI	
Perceived deception	0.2047		0.0446		0.1217		0.2959	

### 5.3.4 Moderated mediation analysis

The conceptual framework (see Figure 5.1) shows that perceived deception (a mediation variable) acts causally between the independent variables (reviewer's identity disclosure and expertise) and the dependent variables (booking intention, NWOM, and negative emotion). The effect of the independent variables on the mediation variable depends on the moderator variable, which is online review scepticism. Logically, it would be expected that perceived deception plays a mediation role in the effect of the interaction between the independent variables (reviewer's identity disclosure and expertise) and between online review scepticism and the dependent variables (booking intention, NWOM, and negative emotion) (H8abc and H9abc). Therefore, this thesis applied a first-stage moderated mediation analysis (Model 7) based on Hayes (2022). Within this model, the first-stage moderated mediation allows to test the effect of the independent variable (X) on the mediation variable (M) dependent on the moderator variable (W), which could be anything that influences the effect of X on M (Hayes *et al.*, 2017). Model 7 can assist in estimating the direct and indirect effects of the independent variable on the dependent variable while considering the moderation introduced by a mediation variable.

In the first part of the analysis, it was tested H8abc. Reviewer's identity disclosure was the independent variable (X), online review scepticism was the moderator variable (W), perceived deception was the mediator variable (M), and booking intention, NWOM, and negative emotion were the dependent variables (Y). In the second part, it was tested H9abc. Reviewer's expertise was the independent variable (X), online review scepticism was the moderator variable (W), perceived deception was the mediator variable (M), and booking intention, NWOM, and negative emotion were the dependent variables (Y). The bootstrap CIs of indirect effects were estimated using a level of confidence of 95% and 5,000 samples.

#### **5.3.4.1 Reviewer's identity disclosure**

The PROCESS macro-Model 7 moderated mediation analysis was applied to test whether perceived deception plays a mediating role in the impact of the interaction between reviewer's identity disclosure (X) and online review scepticism (W) on booking intention, NWOM, and negative emotion (Y) (H8abc).

In terms of booking intention (H8a), Table 5.25 shows the results from running the PROCESS macro-Model 7. This thesis does not focus on the first two parts of the tables here, as these results are consistent with the outcomes of the moderator and mediation analyses presented previously (Chapter 5, section 5.3.2 and section 5.3.3).

The last part of Table 5.26 shows the index of moderated mediation for booking intention, which is statistically significant (Index = -0.1365,  $_{\text{BootSE}} = 0.0299$ ,  $_{\text{BootLLCI}} = -0.1991$ ,  $_{\text{BootULCI}} = -0.0830$ ). The indirect effect of reviewer's identity disclosure on booking intention via perceived deception is statistically significant and negative when online review scepticism is high ( $b = -0.4347$ ,  $_{\text{BootCI}} = -0.6222, -0.2724$ ;  $_{\text{BootSE}} = 0.0902$ ) but not when online review scepticism is low ( $b = -0.0354$ ,  $_{\text{BootCI}} = -0.1105, 0.0303$ ;  $_{\text{BootSE}} = 0.0356$ ). Thus, H8a is supported.

Table 5-26 Coefficients for the moderated mediation model (X: Reviewer's identity disclosure, W: Online review scepticism, M: Perceived deception, Y: Booking intention)

Predictor variable R <sup>2</sup> = 0.4779, F(3,317)= 96.7364, p= 0.000	Mediating variable (Perceived deception)				
	Coeff	SE	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	2.4463	0.0800	0.000	2.2888	2.6037
Reviewer's identity disclosure	0.8820	0.1127	0.000	0.6603	1.1037
Online review scepticism	0.2040	0.0535	0.002	0.0988	0.3092
Reviewer's identity disclosure x Online review scepticism	0.5090	0.0767	0.000	0.3581	0.6599
Predictor variable R <sup>2</sup> = 0.1102, F(2,318)= 19.6884, p= 0.000	Dependent variable (Booking intention)				
	Coeff	SE	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	5.4076	0.1299	0.000	5.1521	5.6631
Reviewer identity	0.1367	0.1194	0.253	-0.0981	0.3715
Perceived deception	-0.2665	0.0438	0.000	-0.3285	-0.1802
Mediator	Conditional indirect effect of X on Y at values of the moderator				
	Online review scepticism	Coeff	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
Perceived deception	low	-0.0354	0.0356	-0.1105	0.0303
Perceived deception	Average	-0.2350	0.0525	-0.3469	-0.1415
Perceived deception	High	-0.4347	0.0902	-0.6222	-0.2724
Mediator	Index of moderated mediation				
	Index	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI	
Perceived deception	-0.1365	0.0299	-0.1991	-0.0830	

Regarding NWOM (H8b), the index of moderated mediation is statistically significant (Index = 0.0863,  $_{Boot}SE = 0.0225$ ,  $_{Boot}LLCI = 0.0466$ ,  $_{Boot}ULCI = 0.1339$ ), as shown in Table 5.27. The indirect effect of reviewer's identity disclosure on NWOM via perceived deception is statistically significant and positive when online review scepticism is high ( $b = 0.2766$ ,  $_{Boot}CI = 0.1542$ ,  $0.4156$ ;  $_{Boot}SE = 0.0668$ ) but not when online review scepticism is low ( $b = 0.0225$ ,  $_{Boot}CI = -0.0211$ ,  $0.0675$ ;  $_{Boot}SE = 0.0223$ ). Thus, H8b is supported.

Table 5-27 Coefficients for the moderated mediation model (X: Reviewer's identity disclosure, W: Online review scepticism, M: Perceived deception, Y: NWOM)

Predictor variable R <sup>2</sup> = 0.4779, F(3,317)= 96.7364, p= 0.0000	Mediating variable (Perceived deception)				
	Coeff	SE	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	2.4463	0.0800	0.000	2.2888	2.6037
Reviewer's identity disclosure	0.8820	0.1127	0.000	0.6603	1.1037
Online review scepticism	0.2040	0.0535	0.000	0.0988	0.3092



Reviewer's identity disclosure x Online review scepticism	0.5090	0.0767	0.000	0.3581	0.6599
Predictor variable $R^2 = 0.0653$ , $F(2,318) = 11.1093$ , $p = 0.0000$	Dependent variable (NWOM)				
	Coeff	SE	$p$	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	1.6980	0.1124	0.000	1.4770	1.9191
Reviewer's identity disclosure	-0.0542	0.1033	0.6003	-0.2573	0.1490
Perceived deception	0.1695	0.0379	0.0000	0.0949	0.2442
Mediator	Conditional indirect effect of X on Y at values of the moderator				
	Online review scepticism	Coeff	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
Perceived deception	low	0.0225	0.0223	-0.0211	0.0675
Perceived deception	Average	0.1495	0.0372	0.0810	0.2282
Perceived deception	High	0.2766	0.0668	0.1542	0.4156
Mediator	Index of moderated mediation				
	Index	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI	
Perceived deception	0.0863	0.0225	0.0466	0.1339	

In terms of negative emotion (H8c), the index of moderated mediation is statistically significant (Index = 0.1004,  $BootSE = 0.0238$ ,  $BootLLCI = 0.0571$ ,  $BootULCI = 0.1496$ ), as shown in Table 5.28. The indirect effect of reviewer's identity disclosure on negative emotion via perceived deception is statistically significant and positive when online review scepticism is high ( $b = 0.3217$ ,  $BootCI = 0.1845, 0.4689$ ;  $BootSE = 0.0731$ ) but not when online review scepticism is low ( $b = 0.0262$ ,  $BootCI = -0.0223, 0.0837$ ;  $BootSE = 0.0263$ ). Thus, H8c is supported.

Table 5-28 Coefficients for the moderated mediation model (X: Reviewer's identity disclosure, W: Online review scepticism, M: Perceived deception, Y: Negative emotion)

Predictor variable $R^2 = 0.4779$ , $F(3,317) = 96.7364$ , $p = 0.0000$	Mediating variable (Perceived deception)				
	Coeff	SE	$p$	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	2.4463	0.0800	0.000	2.2888	2.6037
Reviewer's identity disclosure	0.8820	0.1127	0.000	0.6603	1.1037
Online review scepticism	0.2040	0.0535	0.000	0.0988	0.3092
Reviewer's identity disclosure x Online review scepticism	0.5090	0.0767	0.000	0.3581	0.6599
Predictor variable $R^2 = 0.0916$ , $F(2,318) = 16.0300$ , $p = 0.0000$	Dependent variable (Negative emotion)				
	Coeff	SE	$p$	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	1.12454	0.1122	0.0000	1.0248	1.4661
Reviewer identity	-0.0185	0.1031	0.8574	-0.2213	0.1843
Perceived deception	0.1972	0.0379	0.0000	0.1227	0.2717
Mediator	Conditional indirect effect of X on Y at values of the moderator				

	Online review scepticism	Coeff	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
Perceived deception	low	0.0262	0.0263	-0.0223	0.0837
Perceived deception	Average	0.1740	0.0423	0.0962	0.2611
Perceived deception	High	0.3217	0.0731	0.1845	0.4689
Mediator	Index of moderated mediation				
	Index	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI	
Perceived deception	0.1004	0.0238	0.0571	0.1496	

### 5.3.4.2 Reviewer's expertise

Turning now to reviewer's expertise (H9abc), the PROCESS macro-Model 7 moderated mediation analysis was applied to test whether perceived deception plays a mediating role in the impact of the interaction between reviewer's expertise (X) and online review scepticism (W) on booking intention, NWOM, and negative emotion (Y) (H8abc).

First, regarding booking intention (H9a), the index of moderated mediation is statistically significant (Index = -0.0887,  $_{\text{BootSE}} = 0.0245$ ,  $_{\text{BootLLCI}} = -0.1417$ ,  $_{\text{BootULCI}} = -0.0459$ ), as shown in Table 5.29. The indirect effect of reviewer's expertise on booking intention via perceived deception is statistically significant and negative at both levels of online review scepticism; that is, high ( $b = -0.3470$ ,  $_{\text{BootCI}} = -0.4951, -0.2198$ ;  $_{\text{BootSE}} = 0.0708$ ) and low ( $b = -0.0857$ ,  $_{\text{BootCI}} = -0.1610, -0.0163$ ;  $_{\text{BootSE}} = 0.0347$ ). Thus, H9a is supported.

Table 5-29 Coefficients for the moderated mediation model (X: Reviewer's expertise, W: Online review scepticism, M: Perceived deception, Y: Booking intention)

Predictor variable $R^2=0.4155$ , $F(3,317)= 75.1197, p= 0.000$	Mediating variable (Perceived deception)				
	Coeff	SE	<i>p</i>	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	2.5172	0.0849	0.000	2.3501	2.6843
Reviewer's expertise	0.7954	0.1187	0.000	0.5618	1.0289
Online review scepticism	0.2935	0.0585	0.000	0.1785	0.4086
Reviewer's expertise x Online review scepticism	0.3262	0.0808	0.001	0.1671	0.4852
Predictor variable $R^2 = 0.1141$ , $F(2,318)= 20.4849, p= 0.000$	Dependent variable (Booking intention)				
	Coeff	SE	<i>p</i>	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	5.3944	0.1300	0.000	5.1387	5.6502
Reviewer's expertise	0.1929	0.1166	0.0992	-0.0366	0.4224
Perceived deception	-0.2720	0.0428	0.0000	-0.3563	-0.1878
Mediator	Conditional indirect effect of X on Y at values of the moderator				

	Online review scepticism	Coeff	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
Perceived deception	low	-0.0857	0.0374	-0.1610	-0.0163
Perceived deception	Average	-0.2164	0.0442	-0.3060	-0.1373
Perceived deception	High	-0.3470	0.0708	-0.4951	-0.2198
Mediator	Index of moderated mediation				
	Index	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI	
Perceived deception	-0.0887	0.0245	-0.1417	-0.0459	

Second, regarding NWOM (H9b), the index of moderated mediation is statistically significant (Index = 0.0565,  $_{BootSE} = 0.0180$ ,  $_{BootLLCI} = 0.0252$ ,  $_{BootULCI} = 0.0949$ ), as shown in Table 5.30. The indirect effect of reviewer's expertise on NWOM via perceived deception is statistically significant and positive at both levels of online review scepticism; that is, high ( $b = 0.2210$ ,  $_{BootCI} = 0.1200, 0.3349$ ;  $_{BootSE} = 0.0549$ ) and low ( $b = 0.0546$ ,  $_{BootCI} = 0.0101, 0.1065$ ;  $_{BootSE} = 0.0246$ ). Thus, H9b is supported.

Table 5-30 Coefficients for the moderated mediation model (X: Reviewer's expertise, W: Online review scepticism, M: Perceived deception, Y: NWOM)

Predictor variable	Mediating variable (Perceived deception)				
	Coeff	SE	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	2.5172	0.0849	0.000	2.3501	2.6843
Reviewer's expertise	0.7954	0.1187	0.000	0.5618	1.0289
Online review scepticism	0.2935	0.0585	0.000	0.1785	0.4086
Reviewer's expertise x Online review scepticism	0.3262	0.0808	0.001	0.1671	0.4852
Predictor variable	Dependent variable (NWOM)				
	Coeff	SE	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	1.7044	0.1126	0.0000	1.4828	1.9260
Reviewer's expertise	-0.0876	0.1011	0.3867	-0.2864	0.1112
Perceived deception	0.1733	0.0371	0.0000	0.1003	0.2463
Mediator	Conditional indirect effect of X on Y at values of the moderator				
	Online review scepticism	Coeff	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
Perceived deception	low	0.0546	0.0246	0.0101	0.1065
Perceived deception	Average	0.1378	0.0333	0.0756	0.2059
Perceived deception	High	0.2210	0.0549	0.1200	0.3349
Mediator	Index of moderated mediation				
	Index	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI	
Perceived deception	0.0565	0.0180	0.0252	0.0949	

Third, in terms of negative emotion (H9c), the index of moderated mediation is statistically significant (Index = 0.0651,  $_{BootSE} = 0.0187$ ,  $_{BootLLCI} = 0.0310$ ,  $_{BootULCI} = 0.1047$ ), as shown in

Table 5.31. The indirect effect of reviewer’s expertise on negative emotion via perceived deception is statistically significant and positive at both levels of online review scepticism; that is, high ( $b = 0.2546$ ,  $_{\text{BootCI}} = 0.1488, 0.3762$ ;  $_{\text{BootSE}} = 0.0582$ ) and low ( $b = 0.0629$ ,  $_{\text{BootCI}} = 0.0110, 0.1228$ ;  $_{\text{BootSE}} = 0.0291$ ). Thus, H9c is supported.

Table 5-31 Coefficients for the moderated mediation model (X: Reviewer’s expertise, W: Online review scepticism, M: Perceived deception, Y: Negative emotion)

Predictor variable $R^2 = 0.4155$ , $F(3,317) = 75.1197, p = 0.000$	Mediating variable (Perceived deception)				
	Coeff	SE	$p$	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	2.5172	0.0849	0.000	2.3501	2.6843
Reviewer’s expertise	0.7954	0.1187	0.000	0.5618	1.0289
Online review scepticism	0.2935	0.0585	0.000	0.1785	0.4068
Reviewer’s expertise x Online review scepticism	0.3262	0.0808	0.001	0.1671	0.4852
Predictor variable $R^2 = 0.0919$ , $F(2,318) = 16.0899, p = 0.000$	Dependent variable (Negative emotion)				
	Coeff	SE	$p$	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	1.2484	0.1125	0.0000	1.0271	1.4697
Reviewer’s expertise	-0.0379	0.1009	0.7075	-0.2365	0.1607
Perceived deception	0.1996	0.0371	0.0000	0.1267	0.2725
Mediator	Conditional indirect effect of X on Y at values of the moderator				
	Online review scepticism	Coeff	$_{\text{BootSE}}$	$_{\text{BootLLCI}}$	$_{\text{BootULCI}}$
Perceived deception	low	0.0629	0.0291	0.0110	0.1228
Perceived deception	Average	0.1588	0.0368	0.0910	0.2343
Perceived deception	High	0.2546	0.0582	0.1488	0.3762
Mediator	Index of moderated mediation				
	Index	$_{\text{BootSE}}$	$_{\text{BootLLCI}}$	$_{\text{BootULCI}}$	
Perceived deception	0.0651	0.0187	0.0310	0.1047	

To sum up, the hypothesis testing section presents all the analytical techniques that were utilised to test all the hypotheses. The results reveal that reviewers’ profile cues (reviewer’s identity disclosure and reviewer’s expertise) significantly influence consumers’ responses (booking intention, NWOM, and negative emotion) via perceived deception. Furthermore, the relationship between reviewers’ profile cues (reviewer’s identity disclosure and reviewer’s expertise) and perceived deception is moderated by online review scepticism. The indirect effect of identity disclosure on booking intention, NWOM, and negative emotion via perceived deception is significant when online review scepticism is high. In contrast, the

indirect effect of expertise on booking intention, NWOM, and negative emotion via perceived deception is significant at both levels of online review scepticism, i.e., high and low.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

To conclude this findings and results chapter, this chapter has focussed on presenting all the steps and analytical techniques that were followed when dealing with data preparation in terms of data accuracy and creating value from raw data for further analysis. First, a final sample size of 321 participants was retained for further analysis. Second, this chapter has described the demographic information of the participants and the process of checking the variables for validity and reliability in the preliminary analysis section. This chapter has shown that the scenarios were mundanely and experimentally realistic and that the manipulation of both independent variables was successful. Finally, the hypothesis testing section confirms that all the hypotheses are supported. The following chapter (i.e., the discussion chapter) moves on to provide an in-depth discussion of the results in relation to the research objectives and existing literature.

## Chapter 6 : Discussion and Conclusion

### 6.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 illustrated that online reviews serve as a valuable source of information for many consumers. A better understanding of what leads consumers to perceive deception in online reviews (regardless of whether a review is deceptive or not), remains a significant concern. Identifying the reasons behind perceived deception reviews can assist online review websites and hotels to ensure that genuine reviews are not mistakenly perceived to be deceptive. This, in turn, may enhance consumers' trust and reliability in online review websites (Filiari *et al.*, 2018b; He *et al.*, 2022). Additionally, it can help hotels to mitigate the negative consequences of perceived deception.

The theoretical foundations of perceived deception were explored in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, where it was highlighted that deceptiveness, credibility, and trustworthiness are separate, although closely associated, constructs. A review is perceived as deceptive when consumers believe that a reviewer intentionally poses as a former consumer and manipulates the review to mislead them in their purchase decisions (Kumar *et al.*, 2018). On the other hand, a credible review is one that consumers perceive as reliable, truthful, and believable (Luo *et al.*, 2015). Trustworthy reviews are characterised by their honest, sincere, and non-commercial opinion, reflecting the genuine opinions of consumers who have experienced a product or a service (Filiari, 2016). Even if a review is perceived as less credible and trustworthy, it does not necessarily imply that attempts have been made to manipulate the review. Instead, consumers may attribute these perceptions to the reviewer's cognitive limitations, such as memory and linguistic skills (Masip *et al.*, 2004; Xiao and Benbasat, 2011).

This thesis is motivated by the realisation that, despite existing literature on how cues in online reviews influence consumers' perceptions (e.g., Camilleri and Filieri, 2023; Brand and Reith 2022; Yan and Hua 2021), the factors that lead consumers to perceive reviews as deceptive (regardless of whether a review is deceptive or not) and how this influences their responses remains inadequately explored.

This thesis builds on two well-known theories: social information processing theory (SIPT: Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978; Walther, 1992) and the persuasion knowledge model (PKM: Rule et al., 1985; Friestad and Wright, 1994). These theories are supplemented with existing literature on online reviews (discussed in chapter 2 and 3), to develop and test a framework to explore how reviewers' profile cues (reviewer's identity disclosure and expertise) influence consumer responses (booking intention, NWOM, and negative emotion) via perceived deception. The moderation effect of online review scepticism on the relationship between reviewers' profile cues and perceived deception are also examined.

Drawing upon SIPT, it is proposed that most consumers do not have a previous relationship with a reviewer nor knowledge about their expertise. Therefore, consumers' perceptions of other reviewers are impacted by whatever information is available about reviewers on an online review website (Walther, 1992). On many online review websites, there are many observable cues available in an online reviewer's profile such as information related to the reviewer's identity disclosure and expertise. In line with previous online review studies (e.g., Xie *et al.*, 2011; Kusumasondjaja *et al.*, 2012; Munzel, 2016; Liu and Park, 2015; Filieri *et al.*, 2019), consumers might utilise this kind of information and it might in turn influence their perceptions. In this thesis, it is expected that reviews posted by reviewers with low identity disclosure are more likely to be perceived as deceptive than those with high identity

disclosure. Furthermore, reviews posted by reviewers with low expertise level are expected to be perceived as deceptive than those with high expertise level.

In addition, the exposure of news and reports related to unethical and illegal activities by individuals and hospitality businesses, specifically those involving the posting of deceptive reviews (e.g., Coffey, 2019; Cannon et al., 2019; Cramer, 2023; TripAdvisor, 2023), serves multipurpose. It might enhance consumers' awareness (Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016). This heightened awareness might also influence consumers' perceptions of deception in online reviews. Therefore, this study drew on PKM (Friestad and Wright, 1994) to understand how differences in consumers' persuasion knowledge (i.e., online review scepticism) might affect how they interpret reviewers' profile information cues and in turn perceived deception. It is proposed that the effect of a reviewer's profile with a low identity disclosure and low expertise on perceived deception is higher for consumers with high online review scepticism.

Research focusing on online reviews has highlighted the importance of understanding how online reviews influence consumers' perceptions (e.g., Chen *et al.*, 2015; Liu *et al.*, 2019a). Several studies have shown how consumers' perceptions of online reviews play a mediation role between online reviews factors and consumers' responses (e.g., Purnawirawan *et al.*, 2012; Jiménez and Mendoza, 2013; Filieri *et al.*, 2018b). However, there is a lack of academic knowledge regarding how consumers respond to online reviews they perceive as deceptive. Drawing upon PKM, when consumers are presented with a persuasive message (e.g., an online review), their key tasks are to interpret and respond to it (Friestad and Wright, 1994). This research considers the role that perceived deception plays in the relationship between reviewers' profile cues and consumers' responses for three types of consumer responses namely booking intention, NWOM, and negative emotion.



In Chapter 4, an overview of the methodology adopted to explore the research questions and achieve the research objectives was presented. An online experiment using a 2 (identity disclosure: high, low) x 2 (expertise: high, low) between-subject design through a scenario-based approach was used to explore how profile cues influence perceived deception and ultimately consumer responses (i.e., booking intention, NWOM, and negative emotion). The hotel industry was chosen as the research context given its salience in online review research (Filiari and McLeay, 2014; Liu *et al.*, 2019b). In Chapter 5, the data collected from the online experiment was analysed and the results presented.

Table 6.1 presents the proposed hypotheses and research objectives. The findings of this thesis provide several theoretical and practical contributions. The rest of this chapter is divided into three sections, namely theoretical contributions, managerial implications, and limitations and future studies.

Table 6-1 Summary of the research objectives, proposed hypotheses, and results

Research Objective	Hypothesis	Result
1- Explore how cues related to a reviewer's profile influence consumers' perceived deception.	H1: Perceived deception will be higher when the reviewer has low identity disclosure than when the reviewer has high identity disclosure.	Supported
	H2: Perceived deception will be higher when the reviewer has a low expertise level than when the reviewer has a high expertise level.	Supported
2- Examine how online review scepticism moderates the relationship between a reviewer's identity disclosure and expertise and perceived deception.	H3: The effect of a reviewer profile with low identity disclosure (H3a) and low expertise level (H3b) on perceived deception is higher for individuals with high online review scepticism.	Supported
3- Assess the role of perceived deception in the relationship between a reviewer's profile cues and consumers' responses.	H4: Perceived deception mediates the negative effect of a reviewer profile with low identity disclosure (H4a) and low expertise (H4b) on booking intention.	Supported
	H5: Perceived deception mediates the positive effect of a reviewer profile with low identity disclosure (H5a) and low expertise (H5b) on NWOM.	Supported
	H6: Perceived deception mediates the positive effect of a reviewer profile with low identity disclosure (H6a) and low expertise (H6b) on negative emotion.	Supported

4- Examine the mediating role of perceived deception in the relationship between identity disclosure and expertise interacting with online review scepticism and their impact on consumers' responses.	H8: Online review scepticism moderates the strength of the mediated relationships between reviewers' identity disclosure and booking intention (H8a), NWOM (H8b), and negative emotion (H8c) via perceived deception, so that the mediation is stronger when online review scepticism is high compared to low.	Supported
	H9: Online review scepticism moderates the strength of the mediated relationships between a reviewers' expertise and booking intention (H9a), NWOM (H9b), and negative emotion (H9c) via perceived deception, so that the mediation is stronger when online review scepticism is high compared to low.	Supported

## 6.2 Theoretical Contribution

This thesis significantly contributes to the field of online reviews in several ways. This study addresses gaps in the extant literature by building on two well-known theories (i.e., SIPT and PKM) (Walther, 1992; Friestad and Wright, 1994) and supplementing them with existing literature on online reviews (e.g., Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016; Filieri, 2016; Ahmad and Sun, 2018; Filieri *et al.*, 2018b). This thesis contributes to existing knowledge of online reviews (e.g., Xie *et al.*, 2011; Xu, 2014; Liu and Park, 2015; Munzel, 2016; Filieri, 2016; Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016; Shan, 2016; Filieri *et al.*, 2018b) by developing and testing a conceptual framework. The conceptual framework highlights the role played by reviewers' profile cues (i.e., low identity disclosure and low expertise level) in influencing consumers' perceived deception and in turn subsequent consumer responses (i.e., booking intention, NWOM, and negative emotion). In addition, conceptual framework also emphasises the important role of consumers' persuasion knowledge (i.e., online review scepticism); in effect, how they interpret such information in online reviews and, consequently, how they respond to such attempts. The following sections provide more information about how this study's findings advance the online review literature and discuss them in relation to this study's objectives.

### **6.2.1 Reviewer's identity disclosure and expertise's effects on perceived deception**

Reviewers' profiles are a common source of information about reviewers (e.g., Liu and Park, 2015) since the parties involved (a reviewer and a consumer in an online review website) have no previous experiences with each other and do not expect to have any future conversations (Racherla *et al.*, 2012).

First, reviewer's identity disclosure refers to the online provision of precise information about reviewers' identities that reviewers have created themselves, including cues such as a reviewer's real name and location (Filiari *et al.*, 2019). In many online review websites, the reviewer's identity information is prominently displayed alongside the review's content. However, the rules and options for identity disclosure can vary between these websites. For instance, TripAdvisor offers reviewers multiple ways to disclose their identities, including adding their photo, name, country, place of visit, bio, and other information. On the other hand, websites like Booking.com provide reviewers with more limited options, such as disclosing their name, country, and photo only. This variation in identity disclosure is influenced by both the online review websites' rules and the preferences of the reviewers. Reviewers, in turn, have the freedom to choose whether to reveal some information about their identities or remain entirely anonymous.

Second, reviewer's expertise is derived from consumers' perceptions of the reviewer's knowledge, skills, or expertise in a particular domain (Ohanian, 1990). Evaluating a reviewer's expertise in online reviews can pose a challenging task. Unlike traditional WOM, online reviews are usually posted by reviewers who are anonymous and do not have a prior relationship with consumers (Cheung *et al.*, 2008; Park and Lee, 2008). Thus, consumers are required to utilise various cues available on online review websites to build their impression

and assess a reviewer's expertise. The reviewer's expertise must be assessed based on the relatively impersonal text-based resource exchange provided by actors on online review websites such as the number of previous reviews written on the online review website, the reviewer's expertise level, or the reviewer's badge (e.g., Zhu *et al.*, 2014; Liu and Park, 2015; Filieri *et al.*, 2018b; Hwang *et al.*, 2018).

Within the online review context, consumers may have insufficient information about reviewers since they do not know their intentions or motivations for posting reviews. Based on SIPT, consumers' perceptions of other reviewers are impacted by whatever information is available on an online review website (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978; Walther, 1992; Walther and Parks, 2002). Prior online review researchers have concluded that reviewers' profile cues affect consumers' perceived online review helpfulness and usefulness (e.g., Liu and Park, 2015; Filieri *et al.*, 2018b), credibility (e.g., Xie *et al.*, 2011; Lo and Yao, 2019), and the trustworthiness of a reviewer (e.g., Willemsen *et al.*, 2012; Munzel, 2016). The findings of this thesis corroborate these recent results and highlight the fact that cues related to a reviewer's profile (i.e., low reviewer's identity disclosure and low reviewer's expertise level) have main and interaction effects on consumers' perceived deception. This thesis extends the way in which SIPT has been applied in the online review context (e.g., Xu, 2014; Shan, 2016) by empirically showing the role low reviewer identity disclosure and low expertise level play in affecting consumers' perceived deception. The following paragraphs, therefore, move on to discuss how reviewers' identity disclosure and expertise have main and interaction effects on consumers' perceived deception.

In this thesis, it was proposed that perceived deception is higher when the reviewer has low identity disclosure than when the reviewer has high identity disclosure (H1). The findings

support this hypothesis, highlighting the importance of information about a reviewer's identity for consumers. This finding agrees with previous findings in the online review literature that show the effect of reviewers' identity disclosure on perceived helpfulness (e.g., Forman *et al.*, 2008; Karimi and Wang, 2017), credibility (e.g., Xie *et al.*, 2011; Kusumasondjaja *et al.*, 2012), usefulness (e.g., Liu and Park, 2015; Park and Nicolau, 2015), and the trustworthiness of a reviewer (e.g., Munzel, 2016). In addition, this thesis demonstrates that low reviewer identity disclosure plays a role in affecting consumers' perceived deception.

The current findings differ from previous studies which found that reviewers' identity disclosure has no significant effect on review helpfulness and usefulness (e.g., Baek *et al.*, 2012, Racherla and Friske, 2012; Chung *et al.*, 2018; Kim *et al.*, 2020). Some of these studies used secondary data from existing databases of online reviews such as Amazon.com, Yelp.com, and TripAdvisor.com. One possible explanation for this difference is that these studies treated reviewer's identity disclosure as a binary variable (i.e., 1 if reviewers disclose information and 0 otherwise). For example, they considered only one cue in the reviewer's identity disclosure, such as the presence of the reviewer's real name. However, in this thesis, the investigation is focused on what leads consumers to perceive deception. The results of the online experiment with a between-subject design emphasise the role of low identity disclosure in affecting consumers' perceived deception compared to high identity disclosure. This is consistent with earlier research that conducted experiments and demonstrated that when there are more cues available in a reviewer's identity disclosure, consumers perceived a review's credibility and the trustworthiness of a reviewer to be higher than when there were a low number of cues available regarding the reviewer's identity disclosure (Xie *et al.*, 2011; Kusumasondjaja *et al.*, 2012; Munzel, 2016; Li and Liang, 2022). This thesis extends the way

in which SIPT (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978; Walther, 1992; Walther and Parks, 2002) has been applied in the online review context (e.g., Xu, 2014; Shan, 2016) by empirically showing the role low reviewer identity disclosure in affecting consumers' perceived deception. Consumers use cues related to reviewers' identity disclosure – such as the reviewer's real name, age, marital status, and location – as an alternative way of making judgments about a reviewer. However, when a low number of cues are available in the reviewer's identity disclosure, consumers perceive deception to be higher than when there are a high number of cues available in the reviewer's identity disclosure.

Furthermore, within the scope of this thesis, it was hypothesised that perceived deception is higher when the reviewer has low expertise level (H2). The findings support this hypothesis, highlighting the importance of a reviewer's expertise in affecting consumers' perceived deception. This finding is aligned with prior research that show the role a reviewer's expertise plays in perceived helpfulness (e.g., Zhu *et al.*, 2014; Park, and Nicolau, 2015; Filieri *et al.*, 2018b), perceived credibility (e.g., Lo and Yao, 2019; Thomas *et al.*, 2019), the perceived trustworthiness of a reviewer (e.g., Willemsen *et al.*, 2012), and purchase intention (Naujoks and Benkenstein, 2020). In addition, this thesis demonstrates that low reviewer's expertise level plays a role in affecting consumers' perceived deception.

The current findings contradict previous studies that suggested that a reviewer's expertise has no significant effect on review usefulness (e.g., Willemsen *et al.*, 2011) and negative effect on review helpfulness (e.g., Liu *et al.*, 2023). A possible explanation for this might be related to the operationalisation of a reviewer's expertise. The operationalisation of a reviewer's expertise in Willemsen *et al.*'s (2011) study reflected the extent to which a review's content contained claims of expertise. While Liu *et al.*'s (2023) study measured reviewer's expertise

by the total numbers of reviews posted by a reviewer. In contrast, a reviewer's expertise in this thesis is reflected by the reviewer's expertise level (i.e., a cue provided by the system which categorises a reviewer into different levels based on their previous activities on an online review website). According to Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986), consumers follow two distinct routes in the way they process information: the central and peripheral route. First, consumers who are motivated and willing to process information follow the central route and spend more time examining cues in a review's content (e.g., information quality). Second, consumers who lack motivation and have less ability follow the peripheral route and examine cues unrelated to the content of a review, such as a reviewer's profile information. It seems possible that these inconsistent findings are due to consumers assessing a reviewer's expertise based on a cue provided by an online review system (i.e., the reviewer's expertise level) in a reviewer's profile information. In the context of a review's content, consumers might assess information quality based on information accuracy, relevance, timeliness, and value-added information (Filiari and McLeay, 2014).

This thesis extends the way in which SIPT (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978; Walther, 1992; Walther and Parks, 2002) has been applied in the online review context (e.g., Xu, 2014; Shan, 2016) by empirically showing the role low reviewers' expertise in affecting consumers' perceived deception. This finding suggests that it is not necessarily the case that a review posted by a reviewer with a low expertise level is perceived as less credible and discounted by consumers (Filiari, 2016). Instead of that and according to the current findings, low reviewer's expertise might lead to perceived deception.

In addition, examining the interaction effect of a reviewer's identity disclosure and a reviewer's expertise was not one of the objectives in this thesis. However, the results show that there is a significant interaction effect between a reviewer's identity disclosure and a reviewer's expertise on perceived deception. This result suggests that it is only when an online review is written by a reviewer with low identity disclosure and a low expertise level that there is an interaction effect on perceived deception. This finding extends the way in which SIPT (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978; Walther, 1992; Walther and Parks, 2002) has been applied in the online review context by empirically show an interaction effect between low identity disclosure and a low expertise level on consumers' perceived deception. For instance, Kusumasondjaja *et al.* (2012) showed that when a reviewer's identity is disclosed, negative online reviews are perceived as more credible than positive online reviews. Lo and Yao's (2019) results indicated that the perceived credibility of online reviews written by reviewers with high expertise and consistent ratings is significantly higher than that of reviews written by reviewers with low expertise and inconsistent ratings. Filieri *et al.* (2019) demonstrated that when a reviewer's identity is disclosed and/or a reviewer is an expert, extremely negative ratings are more likely to be helpful. Instead, this thesis's results show the importance of information about a reviewer in a reviewer's profile and emphasises the fact that when a reviewer's identity disclosure and expertise are low, an online review is more likely to be perceived as deceptive.

This thesis's findings show that when there are more cues available in a reviewer's profile, they are more likely to interact with each other and influence consumers' perceptions. This interaction effect may partly be explained by Cheung *et al.*'s (2008) suggestion. Cheung *et al.* (2008) examined a reviewer's expertise as a dimension of source credibility and showed that



a source's credibility has no significant effect on perceived online review usefulness. However, Cheung *et al.* (2008) suggested that the source's credibility may be more helpful in determining the usefulness of an online review when there are more cues available about a reviewer. Sundar *et al.* (2007) pointed out that when more than one cue is shown at the same time, their effects are more likely to be understood in combination than as individual pieces of information. Therefore, this study's results provide further support regarding the importance of the cues available in a reviewer's profile. Consumers' perceptions might be impacted when there are more cues available in a reviewer's profile, as they might assist consumers in assessing who the reviewer is.

In summary, this section has provided an overview of how reviewers' identity disclosure and reviewers' expertise have a main and interaction effect on consumers' perceived deception. It has also discussed how the findings make an additional theoretical contribution to SIPT by showing how low reviewer identity disclosure and/or low reviewer expertise influence consumers' perceived deception. The section that follows moves on to consider and discuss the second objective of this research.

### **6.2.2 The moderating role of online review scepticism**

In this thesis, online review scepticism is utilised to show and understand how consumers' differences in perceiving and interpreting persuasion attempts (i.e., online reviews) affect their responses. It was attempted to show how differences in consumers' persuasion knowledge (i.e., online review scepticism) might affect how consumers interpret reviewers' profile information cues and in turn perceived deception. This has deepened knowledge around the unethical practice of deception in the online review context (Friestad and Wright, 2009). This thesis extends the way in which PKM (Rule *et al.*, 1985; Friestad and Wright, 1994)

has been applied in the online review context (e.g., Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016) by empirically demonstrating that online review scepticism plays a moderating role in influencing the relationship between reviewers' profile cues (i.e., reviewer's identity disclosure and reviewer's expertise) and the perception of deception.

The exposure of news related to the existence of deceptive reviews (e.g., Horton, 2017; Gray, 2022) not only enhances consumer awareness (Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016), but also might influence consumers' perceived deception. According to PKM (Rule *et al.*, 1985; Friestad and Wright, 1994), As time passes, consumers improve their personal knowledge about methods used in online reviews. By developing consumer knowledge, consumers can learn to identify how, when, and why such hotels influence them. It also helps consumers adjust their responses to these attempts to persuade (Friestad and Wright, 1994). In this thesis, it was expected that the effect of reviewers' profile cues on perceived deception would be higher for consumers with high online review scepticism. It was proposed that the effect of a reviewer profile with low identity disclosure (H3a) and low expertise (H3b) on perceived deception is higher for individuals with high online review scepticism.

Consistent with the thesis's hypotheses, the results confirm that there is a positive and statistically significant moderating impact of online review scepticism on the relationship between low reviewer identity disclosure and low reviewer expertise on perceived deception. In general, consumers with high review scepticism have higher perceived deception compared to consumers with low review scepticism depending on whether the review is posted by reviewers with high or low reviewer identity disclosure and high or low reviewer expertise. However, when the level of online review scepticism is high, a reviewer with a high level of identity disclosure or high expertise has a lower level of perceived deception

compared to a reviewer with a low level of identity disclosure or low expertise. Therefore, H3a and H3b are supported, as high levels of review scepticism strengthen the relationship between the reviewer's identity disclosure and expertise and perceived deception. One plausible explanation for these results is that consumers with high online review scepticism may interpret reviewers' profile cues, such as low identity disclosure and low expertise, as being potential deceivers who try to influence their booking decision. Consequently, they are more inclined to perceive deception when encountering reviews from reviewers with low identity disclosure and low expertise levels.

This finding aligns with prior research on online reviews, which has identified an interaction effect between online review scepticism and specific review cues, such as review argumentation, in shaping review trustworthiness (Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016). However, the primary focus of this thesis was to expand the application of PKM within the online review context. It specifically aimed to demonstrate the moderating effect of online review scepticism in the relationship between low reviewer identity disclosure and low reviewer expertise and the perception of deception.

This outcome is contrary to that of Sher and Lee (2009), who found that for consumers with high online review scepticism, neither argument quality nor review quantity as cues have an effect on shaping consumers' purchase intention. However, the results of this study show that high levels of online review scepticism strength the relationship between the reviewer's profile cues (i.e., the reviewer's identity disclosure and the reviewer's expertise) and perceived deception. A possible explanation for this might be related to the fact that over the course of many years, consumers might improve their personal knowledge (i.e., online review scepticism) about the importance of the many cues that are available in online reviews as

additional information (Friestad and Wright, 1994). Consumers with high online review scepticism might become more aware of the existence of deceptive practices in online reviews. Therefore, they perceive deception to be higher when a review is posted by a reviewer with a low level of identity disclosure or low expertise compared to a reviewer with a high level of identity disclosure or high expertise.

### **6.2.3 The effect of perceived deception**

The current research assessed the role played by perceived deception in the relationship between a reviewer's profile cues (i.e., a reviewer's identity disclosure and a reviewer's expertise) and consumers' responses (i.e., booking intention, NWOM, and negative emotion). As pointed out previously in chapter 3, section 3.4.4, the effect of perceived deception may extend beyond these consequences; therefore, this study utilised booking intention, NWOM, and negative emotion to demonstrate the effect of perceived deception on the relationship between reviewers' profile cues and consumers' responses. This research extends PKM (Rule *et al.*, 1985; Friestad and Wright, 1994) by showing that developing persuasion knowledge (i.e., online review scepticism) can assist consumers in identifying how, when, and why potential deceivers might try to influence them through online review content. At the same time, it assists consumers in adapting a way of responding to these persuasion attempts.

Prior online review literature has concluded that reviewers' profile cues can affect consumers' perceptions in many facets including perceived online review helpfulness and usefulness (e.g., Liu and Park, 2015; Filieri *et al.*, 2018b), credibility (e.g., Xie *et al.*, 2011; Lo and Yao, 2019), and the trustworthiness of a reviewer (e.g., Willemsen *et al.*, 2012; Munzel, 2016). In addition, several studies have shown that consumers' perceptions of online reviews can affect their responses (e.g., Purnawirawan *et al.*, 2012; Jiménez and Mendoza, 2013; Filieri *et al.*, 2018b).

The findings of this study corroborate these recent results and highlight the role that perceived deception plays in the relationship between reviewers' profile cues and consumers' responses. This study makes an additional theoretical contribution: by building upon two well-known theories (i.e., SIPT and PKM) and supplementing them with existing literature on online reviews, it was highlighted the role that reviewers' profile cues play in influencing consumers' perceived deception and in turn subsequent consumers' responses (i.e., booking intention, NWOM, and negative emotion). It was also emphasised the important role played by consumers' persuasion knowledge and their experiences (i.e., online review scepticism) with regard to how consumers interpret such information in online reviews and in turn respond to attempts to deceive. These findings suggest that over time, consumers might develop their knowledge about the possibility of being deceitful through online review content. Consumers might interpret a review posted by a reviewer with low identity disclosure and/or low expertise as a deception attempt. This leads consumers to adapt a response against such attempts.

This study's hypotheses were generally supported by the results. First, perceived deception mediates the negative effect of a reviewer profile with low identity disclosure and low expertise level on booking intention. Therefore, H4a and H4b are supported. These results are consistent with findings from previous studies, which suggest that online reviews posted by reviewers who disclose their identity influence consumers' perceived credibility and in turn influence their booking intention (Xie *et al.*, 2011). Filieri *et al.*'s (2018b) findings showed that a reviewer's expertise influences consumers' perceptions of online review helpfulness and in turn influences their booking intention. However, the results of this study highlight an interesting additional finding regarding the fact that low reviewer identity disclosure and low

reviewer expertise level affect consumers' perceived deception and in turn negatively affect consumers' booking intentions. One possible explanation might be that consumers reduce their booking intentions when faced with perceived deception as a way of protecting themselves from being deceived and making suboptimal or incorrect decisions (Mayzlin *et al.*, 2014; Luca and Zervas, 2016). Therefore, perceived deception impacts consumers' booking intentions negatively.

Second, another finding that stands out from the results reported earlier is that perceived deception mediates the positive effect of a reviewer profile with low identity disclosure and low expertise level on NWOM. Therefore, H5a and H5b are supported. Cheng *et al.* (2006) identified NWOM as a way for consumers to express their dissatisfactory experience with a target object. Prior studies have shown that consumers who are dissatisfied due to a service failure are more likely to share NWOM (Sánchez-García and Currás-Pérez, 2011; Jang, Cho and Kim, 2013), while Riquelme *et al.* (2016) showed that perceived deception regarding a retailer's practices negatively affects consumers' satisfaction and subsequent WOM towards the retailer's traditional store. In the online review context, consumers have a general perception that they can rely on online reviews because they believe these reviews are written by consumers with prior experience with a product or service (Filiari, 2016). The current results indicating that perceived deception in an online review's content prompts consumers to share NWOM. Consumers might be dissatisfied with their experiences of reading online reviews if they perceive a reviewer to be a deceiver who is trying to mislead them in their booking decisions. It is possible, therefore, that consumers might share NWOM as a result of perceived deception to warn other consumers regarding deceptive behaviours from a hotel.

Third, it was hypothesised that perceived deception mediates the positive effect of a reviewer profile with low identity disclosure and low expertise level on negative emotion. The result of this study confirms that perceived deception mediates the positive effect of a reviewer profile with low identity disclosure and low expertise level on negative emotion. Therefore, H6a and H6b are supported. As mentioned in Chapter 3, section 3.4.4, consumers may experience emotions at various stages of their tourism experiences, both before and after, and these emotions can subsequently affect their overall emotional evaluation (López-López *et al.*, 2014; Liu *et al.*, 2019a). Prior studies have noted that there are many situations in which consumers might develop negative emotions towards a service provider, such as during a consumer's direct contact with a service provider (Zeelenberg and Pieters, 2004) and when a consumer holds a high expectation before departure which does not meet what they receive from the service provider when they arrive (Zhou *et al.*, 2020). The results of this research further support the idea that consumers experience emotions during tourism experiences at different stages. One interesting finding is that within online reviews, perceived deception mediates the positive effect of a reviewer profile with low identity disclosure and low expertise level on negative emotion. A possible explanation for this might be that consumers feel that a deceiver is using unethical and unfair methods to mislead them during their booking decision. Seiders and Berry (1998) demonstrated that when fairness is considered an issue, consumers' reactions are usually intensely positive or negative. Therefore, when consumers perceive deception in online reviews, they will assess this situation negatively and their negative emotions will increase greatly.

#### **6.2.4 Moderated mediation effect**

The results of this thesis offer a further theoretical advancement by integrating two established theories, namely SIPT (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978; Walther, 1992) and PKM (Rule *et al.*, 1985; Friestad and Wright, 1994). By incorporating insights from prior research on online reviews (e.g., Munzel, 2016; Filieri *et al.*, 2018b; Thomas *et al.*, 2019), this thesis underscores the significance of reviewers' profile cues in shaping consumers' perceptions of deception. Consequently, these perceptions influence subsequent consumer responses, including booking intentions, NWOM, and negative emotion. Additionally, this thesis underscores the pivotal role played by consumers' persuasion knowledge (i.e., online review scepticism) in how they interpret information within online reviews. This interpretation, in turn, dictates their responses to such information.

Hypotheses suggest that perceived deception plays a mediating role in the relationship between two key independent variables—reviewer's identity disclosure and reviewer's expertise—and three key dependent variables: booking intention, NWOM, and negative emotion. It is also hypothesised that online review scepticism moderates the strength of these mediated relationships. This means that the mediation effect of perceived deception is stronger when online review scepticism is high compared to when it is low. According to the findings of this thesis, the indirect effect of identity disclosure on consumers' responses via perceived deception is only significant when online review scepticism is high. In contrast, the indirect effect of expertise on consumers' responses via perceived deception is significant at both levels of online review scepticism, i.e., high and low. Therefore, hypotheses 8abc and 9abc are supported. These findings advance SIPT and PKM by highlighting the influence of consumers' persuasion knowledge (i.e., online review scepticism) on their interpretation of reviewer's profile information (i.e., reviewer's identity disclosure and expertise) and



perception of deceptive. These results provide robust evidence that perceived deception in online reviews significantly impacts consumer responses. The observed decrease in booking intention, increase in negative word-of-mouth (NWOM), and experience of negative emotions clearly demonstrate the tangible consequences of perceived deception.

### **6.3 Managerial Implications**

The results of this thesis have important implications for online review websites, the mass media, regulators, and businesses (i.e., hotels) in the tourism industry and other industries. First, the findings of this thesis have important implications for online review websites. Policymakers have enacted legislation related to online review websites as a way of fighting deceptive practices. For instance, deceptive reviews are considered as illegal and unethical behaviour (Thompson and Grant, 2023). The UK Advertising Standards Authority has asked TripAdvisor to stop claiming or implying that all their reviews come from real, trusted travellers (Advertising Standards Authority, 2012). However, deceptive reviews have become a top concern for many online review websites, as they are hard to identify. In 2022, representatives from many online review websites met for a closed-door conference to discuss how they could work together to tackle deceptive reviews (Cramer, 2023).

The existence of deceptive reviews is a serious threat to trust in online review websites. If online reviews appear to be deceptive, they will be more likely to generate disappointment. This kind of negative experience provides consumers with evidence that the website is not capable of preventing the publication of deceptive reviews, creating a lack of trust in its content (Filiari *et al.*, 2015). However, the challenges faced by both online review websites and businesses whose products and services are being reviewed extend beyond the existence of actual deceptive reviews. Another significant problem is related the issue of perceived

deception (what consumers perceive is a deceptive review regardless of whether the review is deceptive or not), which is the focus of this thesis.

The findings of this study show what leads consumers to perceive deception in online reviews and in turn its negative effects on consumers' responses. The results emphasise the important role played by a reviewer's profile information (i.e., a reviewer's identity disclosure and expertise) in affecting consumers' perceived deception. The findings reveal that factors such as low identity disclosure and low expertise not only affect the perception of deception; they also significantly contribute to the misinterpretation of real reviews that might be helpful.

To address the issue of real reviews being mistakenly perceived as deceptive, online review websites should take proactive measures. They should prioritise making reviewers' profile information more prominent and next to review content (e.g., Munzel, 2016). This approach might assist to put the focus on reviewer's profile information within a review, capturing greater attention from consumers (Xie *et al.*, 2011).

The disclosure of the reviewer's identity is a choice made by the reviewer when they submit a review. The rules and guidelines set by online review websites influence how reviewers present themselves to others in an online review website. Online review websites should offer reviewers a comprehensive option to share their identities, which may include elements like name, marital status, location, age, and other relevant information (e.g., Kusumasondjaja *et al.*, 2012). Having access to more information about reviewers can help prevent a genuine review from being mistakenly perceived as deceptive.

With regards to reviewer's expertise, online review websites should encourage their reviewers to share their experiences, which, in turn, can help improve their expertise levels.

Sharing experiences does not entail only posting online reviews. There are many other activities, such as adding reviews, photos, videos, votes, and suggested edits, that can help improve the reviewer's expertise level (e.g., Filieri *et al.*, 2018b).

In addition, the results confirm the interaction effect between low reviewer identity disclosure and low expertise level on perceived deception. When a reviewer's profile displays cues related to high identity disclosure or high expertise level, there is no interaction effect on perceived deception. This underscores the importance of available cues in a reviewer's profile. Consequently, even if a reviewer has low identity disclosure but possesses a high expertise level, it does not have a significant effect on perceived deception. These proactive measures might assist to prevent real reviews being mistakenly perceived as deceptive and in turn determining online review website reliability (Filieri *et al.*, 2018b).

Second, the findings have important implications for the mass media and regulators. The findings show the moderation role of consumers' persuasion knowledge (i.e., online review scepticism) on interpreting cues in a reviewer's profile information (i.e., a reviewer's identity disclosure and expertise) and perceiving deception. The mass media and regulators have taken steps to increase consumers' awareness of deception. For instance, mass media around the world publishes many stories of the existence of deceptive reviews on many online review websites (e.g., Horton, 2017; Gray, 2022), while regulators such as ICPEN run annual education campaigns related to fraud prevention (ICPEN, 2020).

This thesis does not focus on the identification of deceptive reviews. Instead, it places its main emphasis on understanding the factors that lead consumers to perceive deception. The findings of this thesis reveal the significant roles of consumers' persuasion knowledge (i.e., online review scepticism) in interpreting cues in a reviewer's profile information which in turn

influence their perception of deception. Reporting deceptive practices in the online review industry has the potential not only to discourage deceptive reviews activities but also to increase consumer awareness. Mass media and regulators should actively encourage and support reporting for deceptive activities in online review websites.

Third, the findings of this thesis also speak to the management of some hotels that might suffer from their reviews perceived as deceptive (regardless of whether their reviews are deceptive or not). As discussed in Chapter 1, section 1.2, it is important to note that not all deceptive reviews are published by hotels to influence consumers' booking decisions. Some individuals deliberately submit deceptive reviews with intent to impact a hotel's ranking, without any influence from the hotel itself (TripAdvisor, 2023). The findings of this thesis confirm the negative consequences of perceived deception on consumers' responses, such as booking intention, NWOM, and negative emotions. This emphasises the need for hotels that might suffer from their reviews perceived as deceptive to actively engage in finding tools to prevent such deceptive activities on online review websites. This step might contribute to decrease consumers concerned about the existence of deceptive reviews, subsequently reducing perceived deception.

In addition, hotels can monitor online reviews in their websites to ensure that genuine reviews to not being mistakenly perceived as deception. Hotels can encourage reviewers to provide more detailed information about their identities when posting reviews on hotels' websites. Also, hotels can find ways to assess the reviewer's expertise who write reviews about them (e.g., how many times the reviewer has booked on a hotel). In a way to increase trust toward hotel website and their reviews, hotels can provide information about reviewers' identity and history about their activities on the website (Levy and Gvili, 2015).

## 6.4 Limitations

As pointed out earlier, this thesis contributes to online review literature and proposes certain managerial implications. Although this thesis adopted a pioneering angle when investigating how reviewers' profile cues (identity disclosure and expertise) influence consumers' responses (booking intention, NWOM, and negative emotion) via perceived deception, and shows the moderation effect of online review scepticism on the relationship between reviewers' profile cues and perceived deception, it has some limitations.

First, this thesis concentrated on reviewers' profile cues and perceived deception. When the experiment was conducted, all the experimental conditions regarding the review, which was adapted from an online review website, were kept consistent. This thesis did not manipulate a review's content and investigate its role in affecting consumers' perceived deception. As was shown in Chapter 2, many previous studies have demonstrated the role that cues available in reviews' content play in influencing consumers' perceptions such as review valence, information quality, review objectivity, and others (e.g., Cheung *et al.*, 2009; Cheung *et al.*, 2012; Racherla *et al.*, 2012; Luo *et al.*, 2013; Lee and Shin, 2014; Xu, 2014; Filieri *et al.*, 2015; Luo *et al.*, 2015; Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016; Dong *et al.*, 2019). Future study could be undertaken on manipulated review content, such as valence, to explore its influence on consumers' perceived deception.

Second, in addition to explore the role of a review's content, this study did not investigate the effect of an online review website as factor impacting on consumers' perceived deception. Online review websites that host reviews, such as independent consumer review websites (e.g., TripAdvisor.com), third-party websites (e.g., Booking.com), and hotel websites (e.g., ihg.com), are considered as sources of information (Lee and Shin, 2014; Filieri, 2016). As was

shown in Chapter 2, many studies have examined the effect of online review websites on consumers' perceptions. For instance, Filieri *et al.* (2015) examined the effect of website quality on consumers' perceptions of trust towards online review websites and found that it positively affects consumers' perceptions. Filieri (2016) reported that consumers seem to be more sceptical of reviews that appear on a hotel's website. They also found that consumers no longer perceive independent online review websites as highly trustworthy sources of information. Instead, it seems that consumers perceive some third-party online review websites to be equally or more trustworthy than independent online review websites. This might be related to the mass media publishing many stories related to the existence of deceptive reviews on these online review websites (e.g., Horton, 2017; Gray, 2022). Future studies could further explore the effects of online review websites (e.g., whether a review is posted on an independent consumer review website or a third-party website) on consumers' perceived deception.

Third, this study manipulated reviewers' identity disclosure as a function to provide information about a reviewer, while neglecting the role of a consumer's identity. Perceiving similarity between a consumer and reviewer refers to "the degree to which pairs of individuals who interact are similar with respect to certain attributes, such as beliefs, values, education, social status, etc." (Chan *et al.*, 2017, p. 58). As was shown in Chapters 2 and 3, previous studies have investigated the role of similarity between a reviewer and consumers and found that reviewers with high similarity have an effect on consumers' perception that reviewers are trustworthy (Shan, 2016), hotel booking intention (Chan *et al.*, 2017), and product attitude (Shin *et al.*, 2017). Future studies might further focus on the effect of

reviewers' identity disclosure on consumers' responses via perceived deception and explore the role of similarity as moderator.

Fourth, this study manipulated a reviewer's expertise into two levels (high and low) based on a reviewer's activities on an online review website. On many online review websites such as TripAdvisor and Google, reviewers are categorised based on their activities (e.g., posting reviews, photos, ratings, etc., on the website). However, reviewers might use online review content to claim their expertise. Previous studies have investigated the impact of expertise claims in a review's content on consumers' perceptions. For instance, Willemsen *et al.* (2011) found that expertise claims in a review's content are weakly related to the perceived usefulness of reviews for both search and experience goods. In addition, Willemsen *et al.* (2012) found that claims of expertise within the review content led to two indirect consequences on the attitude toward the review, i.e., a positive indirect effect through perceived expertise and a negative indirect effect through perceived trustworthiness. Future studies could further focus on the impact of reviewers' expertise level on consumers' responses via perceived deception and explore the moderation role of expertise claims.

Fifth, it was chosen hotels as the service context in the scenario of the experiment. Research has shown that the effect of online reviews on consumers' decision-making varies depending on different product categories (i.e., search and experience) (Park *et al.*, 2009). Future studies could replicate the current findings in a different product category. In addition, the sample was primarily composed of respondents from the USA. Even though this thesis's findings might be applied to similar cultural contexts, it is uncertain whether comparable results will occur in an alternative geographic region. For instance, research has shown that differences in cultural background may affect consumers' perceptions of trustworthiness (Dong *et al.*,

2019). Future research should consider extending these investigations to diverse cultural contexts (e.g., developed economy and emerging economy) to examine the generalisability of the findings.

Sixth, this thesis was used an online experiment with a between-subject design to explore how a reviewer's profile cues influence perceived deception and ultimately consumer responses. In addition, this thesis did not investigate the effect of an online review website as factor impacting on consumers' perceived deception. As shown previously in chapter 2 and chapter 3, most studies used quantitative methods to investigate the effect of online reviews on consumers responses. Therefore, future research might employ qualitative methods to inductively explore how consumers assess deception in online reviews. Future research could conduct interviews with users of specific online review websites to deeply investigate factors contributing to the perception of an online review as deceptive to consumers. The findings of this investigation are expected to contribute to the literature on online reviews by enhancing understanding of what effect consumers to perceived deception in online review context.

Despite these limitations, the thesis extends online review literature by developing and testing a conceptual framework which shows how reviewers' profile cues (i.e., reviewer's identity disclosure and reviewer's expertise) impact perceived deception and, in turn, subsequent consumer responses. The conceptual framework also shows the moderation effect of online review scepticism on the relationship between reviewer's profile cues and perceived deception.



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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Pretest 1

In pretest 1, it recruited participants from Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) to participate in the pretest study. MTurk is a crowdsourcing online participant pool for online behaviours studies (Peer *et al.*, 2014). In addition, MTurk as online participant tool, has received attention as alternative way for conducting experiment studies in online reviews (e.g. Munzel, 2016; Wu *et al.*, 2017; Hwang *et al.*, 2018; Liu *et al.*, 2019a). In exchange for monetary compensation, 93 participants (53 males and 40 females; Age M = 31-40, SD = 1.067) participated in the pretest study. Table 1 shows demographics details of participants.

Demographic distribution of the participants

	<i>n</i>		<i>n</i>
<b>Age</b>		<b>Education</b>	
18-20	0	Less than high school diploma	1
21-30	22	High school diploma	12
31-40	35	Associate degree	3
41-50	22	Bachelor degree	57
51-60	11	Graduate degree	20
61-70	3		
71 and above	0		
<b>Gender</b>		<b>Employment</b>	
Male	53	Unemployed	2
Female	40	Employed	89
		Entrepreneur	1
		Retired	1

Profile	Amount of information	Reviewer's profile information
Profile A	Full surname and name, age, marital status, city, state, and country.	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><b>Jamie's Profile</b></p> <p><b>About Jamie</b>            Name: <b>Jamie Walsh</b>            Age: <b>36</b>            Marital Status: <b>Married</b>            Location: <b>Denver, Colorado, United States</b></p> </div>
Profile B	The first name, the initial of the surname, age, city, state, and country.	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><b>David's Profile</b></p> <p><b>About David</b>            Name: <b>David S</b>            Age: <b>41</b>            Location: <b>Oakland, California, United States</b></p> </div>

Profile C	The first name, age, country.	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th><b>Helen's Profile</b></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td> <b>About Helen</b>  Name: <b>Helen</b>  Age: <b>29</b>  Location: <b>United States</b> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	<b>Helen's Profile</b>	<b>About Helen</b> Name: <b>Helen</b> Age: <b>29</b> Location: <b>United States</b>
<b>Helen's Profile</b>				
<b>About Helen</b> Name: <b>Helen</b> Age: <b>29</b> Location: <b>United States</b>				
Profile D	The first name and age.	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th><b>Linda's Profile</b></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td> <b>About Linda</b>  Name: <b>Linda</b>  Age: <b>41</b> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	<b>Linda's Profile</b>	<b>About Linda</b> Name: <b>Linda</b> Age: <b>41</b>
<b>Linda's Profile</b>				
<b>About Linda</b> Name: <b>Linda</b> Age: <b>41</b>				
Profile E	The first name.	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th><b>Robert's Profile</b></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td> <b>About Robert</b>  Name: <b>Robert</b> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	<b>Robert's Profile</b>	<b>About Robert</b> Name: <b>Robert</b>
<b>Robert's Profile</b>				
<b>About Robert</b> Name: <b>Robert</b>				
Profile F	No information.	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th><b>User_001's Profile</b></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td> <b>About User_001</b>  User ID: <b>User_001</b>  Age: <b>Unknown</b>  Marital Status: <b>Unknown</b>  Location: <b>Unknown</b> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	<b>User_001's Profile</b>	<b>About User_001</b> User ID: <b>User_001</b> Age: <b>Unknown</b> Marital Status: <b>Unknown</b> Location: <b>Unknown</b>
<b>User_001's Profile</b>				
<b>About User_001</b> User ID: <b>User_001</b> Age: <b>Unknown</b> Marital Status: <b>Unknown</b> Location: <b>Unknown</b>				

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## Appendix 2: Experimental conditions

### Condition 1: High Identity Disclosure vs. High Expertise

#### Jordin's profile



**Jordin Muller**  
34 years, Married  
Oakland, California, United States

Level

5

**Very High Expertise**

#### Awesome place

Upon check in we were pleasantly surprised by the decor, the location to so many downtown attractions and the attentiveness of the staff. WOW! Service in the restaurant was outstanding and the food was amazing. We truly enjoyed our dining experience. All in all I would not hesitate to recommend this hotel to anyone I meet.

## Condition 2: High Identity Disclosure vs. Low Expertise

### Jordin's profile



**Jordin Muller**  
34 years, Married  
Oakland, California, United States

Level **1**  
**Very Low Expertise**

### Awesome place

Upon check in we were pleasantly surprised by the decor, the location to so many downtown attractions and the attentiveness of the staff. WOW! Service in the restaurant was outstanding and the food was amazing. We truly enjoyed our dining experience. All in all I would not hesitate to recommend this hotel to anyone I meet.



### Condition 3: Low Identity Disclosure vs. High Expertise

#### User's profile



**User**  
Unknown city

Level **5**

**Very High Expertise**

#### Awesome place

Upon check in we were pleasantly surprised by the decor, the location to so many downtown attractions and the attentiveness of the staff. WOW! Service in the restaurant was outstanding and the food was amazing. We truly enjoyed our dining experience. All in all I would not hesitate to recommend this hotel to anyone I meet.

## Condition 4: Low Identity Disclosure vs. Low Expertise

### User's profile



**User**  
Unknown city

Level

1

**Very Low Expertise**

### Awesome place

Upon check in we were pleasantly surprised by the decor, the location to so many downtown attractions and the attentiveness of the staff. WOW! Service in the restaurant was outstanding and the food was amazing. We truly enjoyed our dining experience. All in all I would not hesitate to recommend this hotel to anyone I meet.

## Appendix 3: Consent Form for Research Participants



### Participant Consent Form

[Online Review]

<i>Please tick the appropriate boxes</i>	Yes	No
<b>Taking Part in the Project</b>		
I have read and understood the project information sheet dated 01/03/2022 and the project has been fully explained to me. (If you will answer No to this question please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that taking part in the project will include an online short questionnaire. The study will take 5 minutes to complete	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that by choosing to participate as a volunteer in this research, this does not create a legally binding agreement nor is it intended to create an employment relationship with the University of Sheffield.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time. I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>How my information will be used during and after the project</b>		
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I give permission for the [anonymised data] that I provide to be deposited in [Online Research Data (ORDA) at the University of Sheffield] so it can be used for future research and learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers</b>		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name of participant [printed]

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher [printed]

Signature

Date

#### Project contact details for further information:

Abdulrahman Alzaid, Management School, Conduit Rd, Sheffield S10 1FL, UK. Email: aalizaid1@sheffield.ac.uk.  
If participants have further questions about their rights or if they wish to lodge a complaint or concern, they may contact the Management School at Sheffield University, Sheffield, S10 2TN. (Phone: +44 (0)114 222 3232, Email: sums@sheffield.ac.uk)

## Appendix 4: Participant Information Sheet



# Participant Information Sheet Online Review

*You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.*

### 1. What is the project's purpose?

In recent times, online reviews have become an important source of information in consumer decision-making. Unfortunately, some companies recognise this importance and become using them to promote their products, to mislead potential consumers, and to influence their purchase decision. To gain a better understanding how consumers examine the information in online review, the current study aims to investigate how cues in a reviewer's profile may influence consumer perception and in turn, affect their attitudes. This study will take 5 minutes to complete a short questionnaire.

### 2. Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen to take part in the research because you have appropriate level of experience about reading online reviews and booking a room in a hotel. I am interested in your knowledge, opinions and experiences surrounding reading online review before taking a booking decision.

### 3. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. Participation is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time without giving a reason. If you do decide to take part, you will be given a copy of this information sheet to keep (and be asked to indicate your agreement to the online consent form). You can still withdraw at any time without giving any reason. Please note that by choosing to participate in this research, this will not create a legally binding agreement, nor is it intended to create an employment relationship between you and the University of Sheffield.

### 4. What will happen to me if I take part? What do I have to do?

If you give your consent, you will be asked to complete only one time, an online questionnaire. It estimated that it will take you 5 minutes. There are no other commitments or lifestyle restrictions associated with participating

### 5. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

Yes, All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential and will be anonymised. You will not be able to be identified in any theses, reports or publications.

### 6. What is the legal basis for processing my personal data?

According to data protection legislation, we are required to inform you that the legal basis we are applying in order to process your personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of

a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1)(e)). Further information can be found in the University's Privacy Notice <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>.

**7. What will happen to the data collected, and the results of the research project?**

Due to the nature of this research, the results will be used in the researcher's thesis.

**8. Who is organising and funding the research?**

Abdulrahman Alzaid, PhD student at University of Sheffield (UK). His supervisors are:

Prof. Fraser McLeay (University of Sheffield (UK))

Dr. Victoria-Sophie Osburg (University of Montpellier (France))

Dr. Anthony Grimes (University of Sheffield (UK)).

**9. Who has ethically reviewed the project?**

This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure.

**10. What if something goes wrong and I wish to complain about the research?**

In the unlikely case of concern or complaint, then you should contact the researcher (Abdulrahman Alzaid [aalizaid1@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:aalizaid1@sheffield.ac.uk)) in the first instance. If you feel that your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction then you can contact the Head of the Department of Marketing and Creative & Cultural Industries at the University of Sheffield (Prof. Fraser McLeay, [fraser.mcleay@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:fraser.mcleay@sheffield.ac.uk), +44 114 222 9662) who will then escalate the complaint through the appropriate channels.

**11. Contact for further information**

If participants have further questions about their rights or if they wish to lodge a complaint or concern, they may contact the Management School at Sheffield University, Sheffield, S10 2TN. (Phone: +44 (0)114 222 3232, Email: [sums@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:sums@sheffield.ac.uk))

Thank you for reading this far and considering taking part in this research. If you would like to participate then please complete and sign the consent form.

## List of Abbreviations

ANOVA	An analysis of variation
ATR	Annals of Tourism Research
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
BI	Booking intention
CABS	Chartered Association of Business Schools
CGC	Consumer-generated content
CMC	Computer-mediated communication
CMV	Common method variance
CQ	Cornell Hospitality Quarterly
CR	Composite reliability
EFA	Exploratory factor analysis
ELM	Elaboration Likelihood Model
eWOM	Electronic Word of Mouth
FTC	Federal Trade Commission
FtF	Face-to-face communication
HSM	Heuristic Systematic Processing Model
HT	Hotel trustworthiness
ICPEN	International Consumer Protection and Enforcement Network
IJCHM	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management
IJHM	Journal of Hospitality Management
JHTR	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research
JST	Journal of Sustainable Tourism
JTR	Journal of Travel Research
KMO	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test
NEmo	Negative emotion
NWOM	negative word of mouth
ORS	Online review scepticism
PD	Perceived deception
PIT	Prominence-Interpretation Theory
PKM	Persuasion Knowledge Model
QGAM	Quality of grammar and mechanics
SIPT	The Social Information Processing Theory
TM	Tourism Management
UGC	user-generated content
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor
WOM	Word of Mouth

