

TRIPADVISOR

A COMMUNITY FOR TRAVELLERS



A Qualitative Study of the Influence of TripAdvisor on
Consumers' Decision-Making Process



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ABSTRACT

Today's consumer has changed from being passive recipients of information, provided by the companies, to being actively involved in the marketing process. This is partly due to technological advancements, where the internet has played a significant role in enabling this development. This is particularly because of features of web 2.0, which allow consumers to communicate in online forums about products and services, influencing other consumers' perception of products, and consequently their purchase decision. Thus, product and service providers are affected by this change of consumer behavior. This strongly applies to the tourism industry, which is one of the largest in the world, as the consumer is provided with travel products, being predominantly intangible and rarely repeat purchases. Furthermore, as consumer information is perceived as more trustworthy than information from product providers, this makes consumers seek out platforms enabling them to share and obtain information about such travel products. As TripAdvisor claims to be the world's largest travel platforms, enabling consumers to share their travel experiences, it is highly relevant to investigate how such information is processed by consumers on this platform, consequently leading them to a purchase decision. Moreover, the aspect of what motivates consumers to share information about their own travel experiences with other consumers is thereby also a relevant subject of investigation.

The theoretical framework of this research is based on theory surrounding TripAdvisor, online consumer behavior, trust and online sharing motivation. As the consumer-generated content on TripAdvisor is provided in the form of travel product reviews, data from observations of consumers processing reviews on the platform, along with follow-up interviews have been used in order to answer how consumers process online hotel reviews on TripAdvisor. A model based on heuristic and systematic factors of valence, source credibility, perceived quantity of reviews, visuals, and perceived informativeness and persuasiveness, as antecedents of trust, consequently leading closer to a purchase decision, was used in order to analyze the data. The results from the research show that consumer-generated information on TripAdvisor is found trustworthy, with the element of visuals particularly influencing the decision-making of consumers. Furthermore, it was evident that the perceived informativeness of reviews is highly individual, based on personal preferences. If the content is relatable to the consumer, they find the information useful.

When investigating consumers' motivations for sharing travel experiences through reviews, interviews with both active TripAdvisor review writers, along with non-active review writers were conducted, to find reasons for sharing travel experiences on the platform, as well as reasons for not sharing. A model based on 4 categories of motivational factors, each containing specific motivations, was used as an analytical tool. These motivations were: Intrinsic factors (containing altruism, self-enhancement, and enjoyment), extrinsic factors (containing reciprocity and reputation), feeling-based factors (containing venting and expressing positive feelings), and trust-based factor (containing trust in platform). The results from the research showed altruism, reciprocity, and trust in platforms as key motivations for review writing on TripAdvisor, indicating both intrinsic, extrinsic, and trust-based factors being dominant to feeling-based factors on the platform.

When comparing results from the two parts of the investigation, common denominators were found to be the importance of fast processing and the sense of solidarity in the platform. Furthermore, the results of the research showed that the size of TripAdvisor has both positive and negative impacts on both the consumer's trustworthiness in the platform and their motivation to share their own travel experiences through reviews.

Keywords: TripAdvisor - online consumer behavior – trust – decision-making process – consumer-generated content – online reviews – sharing motivation – online communities – eWOM -

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1. Introduction

Tourism constitutes a key role in today's world economy and the industry is one of the world's largest. In 2016, global international tourism revenue amounted to 1.22 trillion U.S. dollars (Statista, 2018). Over the last decades the industry has experienced continued growth and is one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world (Www2.unwto.org, 2018). The tourism industry is constantly evolving, consumers are orientating globally, the world has become "smaller" due to the easy access towards world products and services and it is both easier and cheaper to travel to the other side of the globe (VisitDenmark, 2018).

Globalization has a huge role in this context. First of all, *"conventional wisdom is that globalisation leads to travel, which is in and of itself a boost to the tourism industry"* (Ivanov & Webster, 2013: 231). Looking more specifically into a consumer related perspective, *"globalization has tremendously formed, modified and conditioned the modern global consumer"* (Samli, 2013: 1). In continuation hereof, it is elaborated that *"today's global consumer is a very different creature than consumers about three decades ago. Today's consumer has many features that simply did not exist in the first three quarters of the twentieth century"* (Samli, 2013: 5). At the same time, since new platforms are constantly evolving on the Internet, today's consumer has more product awareness because they have many alternative sources to choose among. They are well-informed about products and brands, since they are provided with much more information about these, and as a result of this, they become more quality conscious (Samli, 2013: 5).

However, today's consumers should not be considered as passive individuals of the consumption of information about products and brands. They are more involved in this process than ever before. Considering the role of marketing, a new era of consumer marketing has emerged and *"[...] many authors have acknowledged that the traditional demarcation between producers and consumers has become blurred and distorted as consumers assume increasingly active roles in the marketing process"* (Gamble & Gilmore, 2013: 1860). Technological advancements in the digital age such as the Internet (Akar and Topcu, 2011; Dhar and Chang, 2007) and Web 2.0 technologies (Burmam, 2010; Daugherty et al., 2008; Hardey, 2011) are considered as main influential factors towards this process (Berthon et al., 2008; Christodoulides, 2009; Jeong and Jeon, 2008). At the same time social functions *"[...] which include the increase in consumers' desire to be interactive"* (Gamble & Gilmore, 2013: 1860) as well as *"[...] the*

resistance to oppressive marketing controls” (Gamble & Gilmore, 2013: 1860) are considered as other crucial factors towards this new era of consumer marketing (Gamble & Gilmore, 2013: 1860). The technological and social advancements in the digital age have resulted in a consumer co-creation facilitator in form of social media (Cox et al., 2009; Christodoulides, 2009; O’Connor, 2010; Smith, 2009). In continuation hereof, Gamble and Gilmore notice, *“it is this synthesis of social communication and social production and the related rise in consumer participation of the marketing process facilitated by these developments that has led to an era of ‘co-creational marketing’”* (2013: 1861). Egger et al. refer to Prahalad and Ramaswamy as the first to introduce the concept of co-creation and they define it as *“[...] the practice of developing systems, products, or services through collaboration with customers, managers, employees, and other company stakeholders”* (Egger et al., 2016: 8).

However, in a tourism context, this means that boundaries of both marketing and consumer behavior have shifted considerably and both *“social media and ICTs [information and communication technologies] have turned tourists from passive consumers of information, provided by traditional media and official tourism channels, into active information creators”* (Gon et al., 2016: 438). Social media platforms and websites 2.0 allow tourists to interact and communicate with each other. It facilitates tourists to produce new information and content, such as *“[...] texts, photographs, videos and audio files”* (Gon et al., 2016: 436), which can be accessed by other tourists (Gon et al., 2016: 436). Due to these dynamics *“[...] tourists support the creation of new knowledge, contribute to destination image construction and travel decision process”* (Gon et al., 2016: 436).

In this project, we shed light on the travel decision process and take into consideration the role of online consumer reviews, also known in the literature as consumer generated content or “CGC” (Filieri et al. 2015: 175). It is argued that online reviews, a form of electronic word of mouth (eWOM), are generally recognized as the most impactful information source in consumers’ decision-making processes (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Gruen et al., 2006; Park & Lee, 2009; Xie et al., 2016; Jiménez & Mendoza 2013; Pan & Chiou, 2011; Ring et al., 2016). A study from 2014 also indicates that about three-quarters of consumers take into account online consumer reviews when planning their travel itineraries (Xie et al., 2014), and in a newly released report from Skift, the largest industry intelligence platform in travel, they also note that travel review websites such as TripAdvisor are measured as the most important information source among consumers during travel planning (49%), followed by advices from

friends and/or family (40%), whereas information from destination websites are considered significantly lower (21%) (Skift Report, 2017: 10). This, however, indicates that online consumer reviews constitutes a crucial role for tourists when planning their travel, which makes these especially relevant to examine further.

It is further argued that online reviews offer quality information and thereby help consumers to reduce risk in purchasing experience goods (Xie et al., 2016; Murray, 1991). Xie et al. elaborate that this is due to the fact that *“consumer reviews written by previous buyers signal a certain level of evaluation and feedback of experience goods, thus providing an important reference for new buyers to help them make informed decisions and choose the products that best match their preference”* (2016: 211-212). Perhaps even more interesting to notice, it has been argued that *“[...] consumers trust other consumers’ recommendations of a product more than company-generated communications”* (Choi et al., 2017: 975). Therefore, it is evident that online reviews are important for consumers, as it offers them a certain level of evaluation and feedback, thus providing them with a certain level of trust and reduced purchase risk.

Conversely, in latest literature, the level of trust towards consumer online reviews has been questioned (Gavilan et al., 2018, Kusumasondjaja et al., 2012, Banerjee et al., 2017, Filieri et al., 2015) and TripAdvisor e.g. *“[...] has recently been forced by the UK Advertising Standards Authority to remove its ‘misleading’ slogans referring to the trustworthy and honest nature of all the reviews hosted on its website”* (Filieri et al., 2015: 175). This means that many consumers may be more critical towards the way they read online reviews. E.g., in the study of Gavilan et al. (2018) they found that trust in the ratings depend on the number of reviews when the rating is good, but if the rating is bad, the number of reviews have whatsoever no influence on how trustworthy the rating is. At the same time, there may be a great variation in the content of each review, which may affect the consumer’s purchase decision. E.g., language, valence, and pictures may differ and some elements may be more relevant for consumers than others when conveying these reviews in their travel decision. Therefore, in this project, we find it interesting to critically examine how consumers use online reviews by looking deeper into the dynamics when they process and evaluate online reviews - what do they see and what elements of the review catch their attention and why, thus finding out how these elements affect the trust in online reviews.

When examining how consumers process online reviews, we choose to specify the focus on online *hotel* reviews. Hotels are relevant in a tourism context since they represent, as well

as motels, hostels, guesthouses, bed and breakfasts, and other commercial enterprises “[...] temporary homes away from home for tourists, and as such, are the focal point from which most tourism activity emanates in a destination” (Shoval et al., 2011: 1594) and also a more routinized part of the tourism product. At the same time online hotel reviews are especially relevant to shed light on, since it has been argued that interpersonal communication and eWOM is vital when consumers are buying intangible products (Litvin et al., 2008). Even though, hotels can be considered a tangible product, we argued that the experience of staying at a hotel can be considered as intangible through e.g. service and atmosphere. Choi et al. further state that *“hospitality and travel services tend to be intangible and experience-based and their attributes cannot be completely assessed until they have been purchased and consumed. Consumers of such services tend to rely on recommendations from others in order to minimize uncertainty and perceived risk”* (2017: 975). This, however, indicates that online consumer reviews play a particular important role in relation to hotel booking, which is also evident in the research from Zhang et al. who argue *“[...] in the context of hotel room booking, online reviews have been identified as the most important information source for consumers”* (2016: 299).

At the same time, it is relevant to highlight that consumers have different platforms to choose among when searching for online hotel reviews. However, in order to specify the focus of this project, we choose to focus on one platform. We intend to look more specifically into the dynamics of how consumers are processing and evaluating online hotel reviews on the most popular platform of UGC (User-generated content) in a tourism context. We, therefore, choose to focus on TripAdvisor.com¹. This social media platform is first and foremost interesting, since it facilitates online hotel reviews. Furthermore, the platform is the world’s largest and most popular travel information site (O’ Connor, 2010) with over 600 million reviews and approximately 7.5 million accommodations, attractions, airlines and restaurants (TripAdvisor, 2017) and the website *“[...] holds a dominant position in consumer online travel reviews”* (Whitehead, 2011: 6). This level of activity and popularity as a whole makes TripAdvisor very interesting to focus on as the research object for online hotel reviews.

In order to gain an understanding of how consumers are processing online hotel reviews, the data of this project will be obtained from observations as well as interviews. In relation to the observations, we observe how consumers are processing six different hotels in Paris on

¹ From now on referred to as TripAdvisor

TripAdvisor. As we are interested in the role of consumer-generated content, we delimit to this type of content as best as possible by neutralizing non-consumer generated factors such as price, location and hotel features. In relation to the interviews, we conduct these as follow-up conversational interviews by interviewing the participants after they have processed the reviews. Observations can therefore tell us *how* consumers process the reviews, whereas the interviews can help us understand *why* consumers process the online hotel reviews on TripAdvisor in the way they do. Therefore, we see a big advantage in combining these two methods in the context of this project. Furthermore, comparing the data from the observations and the interviews may also show differences or mismatches in the results, which potentially can open up interesting conclusions. By drawing on previous literature of antecedents of trust towards online consumer reviews, we set up a model, which will function as our analytical tool to identify and examine how consumers process online hotel reviews on TripAdvisor.

At the same time, we intend to take our project one step further in relation to the consumer's decision-making process. This means that we do not only want to focus on the stage in the decision-making process where consumers take into consideration other consumers' online reviews in order to book a hotel. We are also interested in the last stage of the process where consumers make an evaluation of a product or service after their purchase (Dahlén, 2010). More specifically, we are interested in understanding what makes consumers write online reviews. Therefore, in this project, we also shed light on consumers' motivations for writing online reviews on TripAdvisor. At the same time many authors have been focusing on what motivational factors are driving eWOM in general, whereas we intend to focus more specifically on *online reviews*, which constitutes a certain type of eWOM. Furthermore, we also focus on motivational factors for writing online reviews on *TripAdvisor*, which specify the examination of motivational factors for writing online reviews further, since a specific platform is taken into consideration.

Attempting to understand both the consumption part as well as the creation part towards online consumer reviews on TripAdvisor is also especially relevant, since it has been emphasized that the market of consumer generated content “[...] *will expand greatly in the near future – in terms of both size and importance and that success in this market may depend on determining key motivational factors relating to consumption and creation attitudes*” (Gamble & Gilmore, 2013: 1865). Examining both the consumption part as well as the creation part towards online reviews on TripAdvisor is also interesting in order to investigate common denomina-

tors between consumers who read reviews on TripAdvisor and consumers who write reviews on TripAdvisor.

We interview consumers in order to understand their motivations for writing online reviews on TripAdvisor. By drawing on previous literature discussing motives for engaging in eWOM, we set up a model, which will function as our analytical tool to identify and examine motivational factors for writing online reviews on TripAdvisor. Theory discussing motivation will be in the context of voluntary knowledge sharing motivation in order to fit the theory as best as possible towards the context of this project.

Based on these considerations, this ultimately leads us to investigate the following problem formulation:

How do consumers process online hotel reviews on TripAdvisor and what motivates consumers to write online reviews on TripAdvisor?

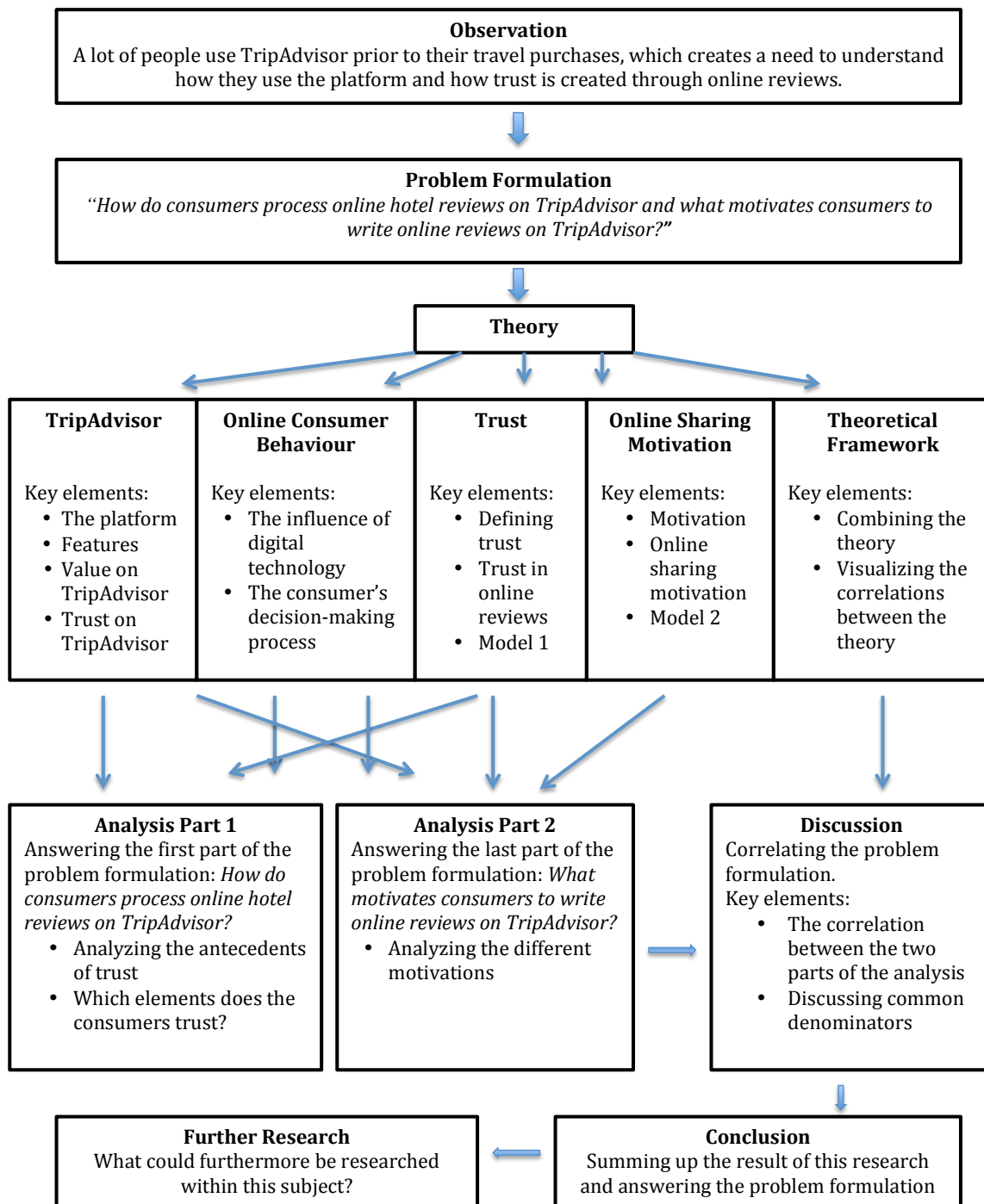
After presenting the objective of this project, we will now delve into how we answer our problem formulation and elaborate on the data that was shortly presented in the introduction. More specifically, we will now present the methodology, which will give an insight into the methodological considerations of this project.

2. Methodology

In this chapter, the methodological approach of our project will be presented. We firstly present the project design, which function as a visual reflection of the process of our project, and which will help the reader to obtain an immediate overview of the project. Afterwards, our philosophical approach will be presented. Hereafter, we present the research methods used in this project and elaborate why these are appropriate for knowledge generation in the context of our problem formulation. Lastly, we present the limitations and experiences that we have come upon through the process.

2.1. Project Design

In the following, an illustration of our project design can be seen. This model illustrates our process from idea to conclusion and creates a quick overview of how we answer our problem formulation.



2.2. Philosophical Approach

In this section, a clarification of our philosophical approach of this project will be presented. For the reader to understand how we as researchers view this investigation, we clarify our philosophical approach, which we do by elaborating the paradigm that we work within. This entails, as mentioned, how we view the world but also our set of beliefs that affect how we, as researchers, have entered this study (Long, 2007). Since we in this project work within the fields of social constructivism, we will now address the ontological-, epistemological-, and methodological assumptions that are distinct for this approach.

2.2.1. Social Constructivism

When clarifying our ontological assumptions, we ask ourselves: What is real? (Long, 2007). As we work as social constructivists, this entails that no single reality exists. Considering the approach of social constructivism, Guba (1990) argues that each individual experiences a different truth. This however means that reality only exists, when we observe it and furthermore, it is subjective to each person observing it.

When discussing the epistemological approach of our project, we ask ourselves: How can we know anything? (Long, 2007). In this project, we accept the fact that the researcher and the data influence each other, since we believe that our knowledge of the world is constructed and therefore do not function as an objective truth (Guba, 1990). Consequently, we therefore accept that our interpretation of the data is subjective and reflects our own understanding of the world, as well as how we construct knowledge about the world. The reality in which we work is therefore a social construction and an independent perception that we hold as observers (Long, 2007). We view the knowledge spawned from this project as contextual knowledge, which is derived from the participating actors, namely the participants but also us as researchers. Broderick (2007) argues how knowledge creation in communities is constructed socially, situated and individually, which points to the reason for accepting our own influence on the result of this project.

In this project, our aim is therefore not to find one singular truth about how consumers process online reviews or why they write them, but several opinions, explanations and motivations for this. Consequently, we therefore aim to understand in what ways consumers pro-

cess online reviews; not in order to find one singular answer, but create awareness to the different dimensions when they process the online reviews. Likewise, we aim to understand what motivates consumers to write online reviews and not to prove why they do it. Our investigation does therefore not provide us with a definite answer of how all consumers process online reviews or why they are motivated to write them, but it explores the possible dimensions of this. More specifically, this means that we accept that our project can only provide answers about the people who participated. However, it can add to an interesting understanding of the variety of perceptions and motivations. It introduces various realities on the matter.

In light of generalization, we argue that this project is not able, nor does it want to generalize at any matter. Meaning derived from situations that are strongly context-dependent, cannot be transferred to other situations. Francis argues this, when he points out that a social constructivist view potentially “[...] undermines the claim that knowledge in any field of human experience derives from methods and procedures that transcend the circumstance of their use” (2005: 252). The knowledge contracted from this project is thereby only limited to these circumstances. However, we view our data as a necessary addition to understanding how the construction of online reviews and the processing of them influence the decision-making process in relation to our focus.

A part of discussing our philosophical approach demands a discussion of us as researchers, since we as constructivists see reality as an ‘observer-dependent category’ (Grant, 2003). We therefore conclude this section with a discussion of us as researchers. We as researchers are all between 26 and 32, which means we grew up with the development of social medias, like TripAdvisor. This provides us with a pre-understanding of social media communities, which reflects our choice of venue, but at the same time creates some obstacles. When analyzing our data it is important that we are aware of the fact that we might view observations or answers as ‘online normality’, which might result in us overlooking elements. An example could be, when a person shuffles through the tabs in a browser window. Shuffling through the tabs might seem as a normal behavior to us, but it might reflect other aspects for the participant, which could e.g. be confusion. Moreover, we may have different experience with the platform of TripAdvisor in contrast to the participants, which also means that we might be missing out on elements or factors. These issues are all factors, which we take into consideration when analyzing our data. We will do so by trying to question our own assump-

tions and reflecting about our results. Moving on, we will now discuss the applied methods of the project.

2.3. Qualitative Methods

In the following, we will present how we apply the qualitative methods in this project. However, before emphasizing this, we will try to provide a short introduction of the method in general in order to create a starting point for understanding the idea behind these specific methods. It is relevant though to highlight that it has been argued that it is very difficult to find a final definition of what qualitative methods actually are (Køppe & Colin, 2012).

2.3.1. Understanding Qualitative Methods

Overall, qualitative methods can naturally be considered as a contradistinction to quantitative methods. Their strong and greater prioritization of the individual and its way of life is, among others, often used as argument against the quantitative method (Køppe & Colin, 2012). Qualitative methods have been defined as any type of research that does not utilize statistics or other sorts of quantification as main source of empirical results (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Thus the method is concerned with words and uses text as empirical material rather than numbers (Flick, 2011; Bryman, 2012).

The method is based on a social construction of realities and “[...] *is interested in the perspectives of participants, in everyday practices and everyday knowledge [...]*” (Flick, 2011: 2). In the definition by Denzin and Lincoln, they also notice that “[...] *qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them*” (2005: 3). This is relevant for the purpose of this project, since we attempt to do our best in order to understand how and why people process online reviews on TripAdvisor in the way they do and further obtain an understanding of what motivates them to write online reviews. We do this by using the methods of qualitative interviewing and observation. Therefore, in the following we will account for each method and further elaborate why these methods are especially relevant for the purpose of this project.

2.3.1.1. Qualitative Interviews

Starting with the method of qualitative interviewing, which has become a central method in human and social sciences today (Brinkmann, 2013). Interviews can be recognized as “[...] *an interchange of views between two persons, conversing about a subject of mutual interest*” (Brinkmann, 2013: 3). This method is especially relevant to apply in this project because we work within a social constructivist paradigm and attempt to reach an understanding of the meaning of others. In this connection qualitative interviewing is obvious to utilize, since “*interviews provide a useful way for researchers to learn about the world of others*” (Qu & Dumay, 2011: 239). It is relevant though, to clarify that there are different forms of qualitative interviews. In this project, we utilize qualitative interviews more as focused conversations than in-depth interviews. We are aware that conversations may lack in extracting deeper meanings from the participants. However, since we adapt focused conversations toward specific topics, we still think that our data is able to give an indicator of the world of others, at least towards the specific topic that is in focus. More specifically, this entails that we use focused conversations to develop knowledge about why consumers process online hotel reviews on TripAdvisor in the way they do and further, what motivates consumers to write online reviews on TripAdvisor.

Research also distinguish between different types of interviews and they range from structured through semi-structured to unstructured interviews (Brymann, 2012; Brinkmann, 2013; Phillips & Stawarski, 2008). However, the standardized nature of structured interviews is not appropriate for qualitative researchers, whereas the semi-structured and unstructured interviews are preferred because of their increasing levels of flexibility. This makes the interview controlled more by the participants’ inputs rather than preplanned constraints (Edwards & Holland, 2013). In this project, we have chosen to adapt the semi-structured interview setup. This setup is chosen, first of all because of its “[...] *knowledge-producing potentials of dialogues*” (Brinkmann, 2013: 21), which allow new angles to be brought up. Secondly, because we still want to maintain a certain focus towards the “problems” that we examine in this project. In this relation, the semi-structured setup has an advantage compared to the unstructured interview, since “[...] *the interviewer has a greater saying in focusing the conversation on issues that he or she deems important in relation to the research project*” (Brinkmann,

2013: 21). Furthermore, this method creates a natural pace and fluency with a purpose, which makes it appear like a dialogue free from obvious techniques (Gillham, 2000).

Moreover, we chose to do individual interviews, also known as personal interviews, which are conducted face-to-face (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1996). We chose this approach to provide the participants with the opportunity to explain, justify and describe their thoughts and reflections of the questions we asked (Hughes, 1990). This form was deemed especially appropriate in relation to the first part of our problem formulation. This, because we combine interview and observation in this part, which means we draw on the participants' movements from the observation when asking them questions regarding their online behavior. As Brinkmann also argues individual interviews have the strength that it is easier for the interviewer, *"[...] to lead the conversation in a direction that is useful in relation to the interviewer's research interest"* (Brinkmann, 2013: 27). In relation to this project, this was to lead the conversation in the direction of why the specific consumer moved the way he/she did when processing online hotel reviews on TripAdvisor. This gave us the opportunity to compare the online observation with the individual interview. It would be too messy to compare individual online observations, if the interview was not focused towards that particular person being observed, which would be the case if we chose to e.g. arrange focus groups.

In the second part of our problem formulation, individual interviews were chosen in order to find out what motivates consumers to write online reviews and many of the considerations were the same as when choosing interviews for the first part of the problem formulation e.g. the fact that it is easier to control the direction of the interview towards the interest of our project. A downside to this control could be that control implies that we construct the interview results to our benefit instead of giving the power to the participants. However, as we conduct semi-structured interviews a lot of the direction of the interview is in the hands of the participants. Even though other methods could have been adapted, such as focus groups, we found that interviews would provide the best data for our project, since the outcome of both parts of the problem formulation could be very individual and based on personal preferences. We will now move on to what issues qualitative interviewing might entail in context of our project.

2.3.1.1.2. Issues with Interviews as a Method

A possible challenge in relation to qualitative interviewing and subjective answers can be social desirability biases. In our interviews, we ask participants about their personal opinions of reading and writing online reviews on TripAdvisor, which may constitute a challenge, since some participants may answer based on what is socially acceptable instead of what they actually mean (Schjødt, 2018). Research has pointed to that social desirability is strongly affected by individuals' knowledge set of cultural norms (Malham & Saucier, 2016).

However, it has been argued that participants who tend to answer questions based on what they think is socially acceptable, can be a problem in both surveys and interviews, since they in such situations may feel a pressure from the researchers (Schjødt, 2018). It is argued that the problem is reduced in surveys in anonymous forms, since this entails that there are less pressure on answers from the respondents, which consequently increases the chance that participants respond honestly rather than what is socially acceptable (Schjødt, 2018).

In interview situations on the other hand, participants may tend to answer questions based on what they think is pleasing to the interviewer, which is important to be aware of both before and after the interview in order to prevent this problem (Schjødt, 2018).

In this project however, we try to reduce social desirability biases by making our participants anonymous. We have made this clear to our participants both before they agreed to be a part of the interviews and also in the beginning of the interviews. At the same, in the beginning of the interviews, we emphasized to our participants the importance of them being as true to their personal opinions as possible when they answer our questions. In relation to reducing social desirability biases, we also see an advantage in the fact that we combine our interviews with observations, since the observation may show a difference between what they say and how they act. It may be that we are able to find imbalances between the interviews and observations, which is something we take into consideration in our analysis. This may tell us that there are social desirability biases, but it may also be an explanation of participants forgetting their behavior. However, we keep an eye on the possible imbalances and take these into consideration when analyzing our data.

In the introduction we shortly presented that observation also was chosen as a method to generate knowledge towards the first part of our problem formulation. We use this method in

order to track the movements of the participants, when they navigate on TripAdvisor and to compare the movements to the interview. This method helps us answer the first part of the problem formulation about *how* the participants process information on TripAdvisor and supports the data from the interviews with the same participants. We will now elaborate why we find this method suitable in this context.

2.3.1.2. Observation as a Method

In this project, we conduct observation by recording the computer screen while our participants research online hotel reviews. We thereby find it relevant to discuss observation as a method and how we use it.

The object of ethnographic studies using observation as a method is often related to humans interacting with other humans in communities, events or just their way of life (Jones & Watt, 2010). In this project however, we have switched one part of the interaction to TripAdvisor as a platform, which means we instead consider how the participants interact with this social media platform. Our focus relies therefore still implicit in the interaction of humans interacting with other humans in communities, but the focus of this project is not centered towards the communication with humans but more the communication with the platform as a tool to gain knowledge from other humans. We thereby view and analyze the interaction with respect for the classic ethnographic traditions.

Observation is an ethnographic method, which is used to understand people who are being studied on their own terms (Jones & Watt, 2010). A part of doing ethnographic analysis is to *“go with what you feel”* (Jones & Watt, 2010) and observation is by its nature selective (Smart et al., 2013), which further elaborates on the previously presented responsibility as researchers to analyze in relation to what we see but also to reflect on our own assumptions. Observation is a method of ethnographic description, where we observe a phenomenon and construct a theory based on how our participants view the same phenomenon (Smart et al., 2013), in this case online reviews on TripAdvisor.

Harvey and MacDonald (1993) argue that the researcher attempts ‘naturalistic’ enquiry, to get the subjects point of view and that the researcher is reflexive. Basically, they argue that the researchers who work within ethnographic research such as observation strive to grasp natural processes in social actions, attempts to understanding subjects’ point of view; hereun-

der what the actions mean for the subject and that the researcher themselves have a critical attitude towards how they themselves influence the research. They furthermore explain how it is impossible to note everything down, when doing observation and that the notation should be guided by the aim of the project (Harvey & MacDonald, 1993), namely our problem formulation.

An important factor to highlight is that observation, as an ethnographic method is not a means of reinforcing preconceptions (Harvey & MacDonald, 1993). It is important to accept that the observation ‘does the talking’. The observation should challenge the preconceptions and provide further data to understand aspects of the social world (Harvey & MacDonald, 1993). It is argued that *“observation provides an opportunity to get beyond people’s opinions and self-interpretations of their attitudes and behaviours towards an evaluation of their actions in practice”* (Gray, 2004: 238), which makes observations very valuable as a supplement to interviews and potentially opens up new angles that were not evident from the interviews.

2.3.1.2.1. Observation as a Method to find out how Consumers Process Online Reviews

It has been argued that the strength of observation in general has been the direct link between the researcher and the data - the data being the interacting humans who are being observed (Pearce et al., 2010). However, in earlier studies much of the data was reliant on the memory of the researcher, making it hard for other researchers to test or view the results of the study. This uncertainty, however, changed with the introduction of more permanent methods of recording such as audiotapes and later video (Pearce et al., 2010). These recordings were permanent and could be archived for future use or re-analysis.

A reason for choosing to record the movements on screen video is the element of technology. TripAdvisor as a platform is the technological opponent to our participants, since the objective is to observe their movements on the platform. *“Video-based observation methods have become commonplace for studying how people interact with technology”* (Tang et al., 2006). Video as a tool for observation has previously been used in several studies (Leruste et al., 2013; Sanger, 1996; Asan & Mantague, 2014). It is an accepted tool for observation and has been used both to record behavior, social relations and group dynamics (Leruste et al., 2013; Sanger, 1996). Leruste et al. (2013) argue how video-based observation has several advantages, such as it can be stored, viewed multiple times and slowed down to further investigate

the specific phenomenon in hand. This is another reason why we chose video-based observation, since we had the opportunity to go back and forth when analyzing the observation. We could thereby re-analyze in order to obtain further knowledge. Instead of following the old video-based observation method where the researchers setup a number of video cameras, we decided to record the computer screen, which was in use during the observation. The screen recording also captures a more detailed record of the participants' movements than any observation using journals or diary would ever record (Tang et al., 2006).

In this project the participants, who were being observed individually were given a laptop with a browser containing six open tabs, displaying six different hotel review pages from TripAdvisor. With this approach we were able to record every movement the participants made during their research on the hotels. We informed the participants that the computer, which they were about to use was being recorded and that the video feed, would be used in relation to the interview, which we conducted after the observation.

For the observation we used the program QuickTime Player on an Apple computer, which features a screen recording function. Each of the participants' movements was recorded through screen recording and we as researcher were present through the whole process. However, we did not make an additional observation of the participant during their computer use. We only used the video-based observation. The timespan of the observations were determined by the participant, since we gave them all the time they needed in order for them to make a choice uninfluenced by time pressure. The time duration thereby varied from 5 to 46 minutes, which reflects that the time the participants used to research and base their decision on was very different and individual.

By using screen recording rather than traditional video camera recording we eliminate the presence of physical equipment to intrude on their research; there is no physical presence of the observer (Tang et al., 2006). However, since we as researchers were present in the room, keeping a distance and making sure not to focus our attention to the participant at work, we were not completely absent from the settings.

2.3.1.2.2. Issues with Observation as a Method

"Observation is inflected with the values and beliefs of the observer in the laboratory and in the field whether the object of inquiry is a molecule, physiology, or human behavior" (Monahan & Fi-

sher, 2013: 38). As the above quotation scrutinizes, we as observers influence the result of the observation. Previous studies have discussed the ‘observer effects’ – also known as ‘researcher effects’, ‘reactivity’ or the ‘Hawthorne effect’ (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; Spano, 2005; Monahan & Fisher, 2013). The focal point of these effects is the argument that subjects, who are being studied, will be influenced by the presence of the researchers (Monahan & Fisher, 2013).

Wilson (1977) argues that the presence of the researcher makes it impossible to conduct any social phenomenon in an accurate or objective way. It is important for us as researchers to consider how we minimize our interference or the observer effects (McDonald, 2005). It is therefore important to accept our own roles in relation to the research. Even though, we observe the computer screen and the movements, which are filmed and not the participant in a social setting, we are still present in the room and the participants are aware that their movements are being watched, maybe not in that exact moment but afterwards. Monahan and Fisher (2013) scrutinize how the participants can behave in a better manner e.g. more ethically, more conscientiously, which might influence the results of the data. However, it is not possible for us to observe whether or not the participants behave in a better manner than they would, since that would demand a frame of reference, which we do not have, but it is nonetheless important to accept that the result of the observation might be biased by it. As long as we strive to influence as little as possible and are aware of our own role in the research, observer effects do not limit social sciences, such as observation; they actually add to the understanding of underlying social norms and cultures (Monahan & Fisher, 2013). We have no way of knowing if the participants behave out of the ordinary in our observation, however, it is important to highlight, that we might have an influence on the outcome through our presence and surveillance. The results, which we retract from the data thereby only reflects the staged situation and can not be directly transferred to a natural setting. The results of the observation can thereby only be read within the reference of this project, since the situation is staged.

Since we approach the data as social constructivists we further accept that in social sciences there is not one ‘truth’ but several (Monahan & Fisher, 2013), which means that we do not look for a distinct truth, but accept the different constructed truths within social relations and constructions. The observer effects are thereby not keeping us from investigating the truth, but actually helping us to understand and represent several truths.

2.3.1.3. Combining Observation and Interviews

In this project, we have chosen to combine two qualitative research methods: Observation and Interview. However, these methods are only combined in relation to the first part of our problem formulation, namely: *How do consumers process online hotel reviews on TripAdvisor?*

Interviewing consumers about their online behavior without a record of their actual behavior may result in lacking information, since consumers may forget their actions and it may be difficult for them to give a detailed account of their online behavior. Therefore, by recording their online behavior on TripAdvisor when choosing among six different hotels allow us to reach a more detailed picture of their online movement – in order to answer questions such as: what do they look at? For how long do they look at each information feature and how much information do they obtain before choosing their final hotel?

Moreover, the main purpose with the observation is, as previously explained, to observe consumer behavior in relation to the platform. This is valuable information in the context of this process when answering how consumers process online hotel reviews on TripAdvisor, since it enables us to conduct a more nuanced investigation by both having their behavior recorded as well as the follow-up interviews. As Gray (2004) argues, observation provides an insight in the participants' actions in practice, excluding their opinions and attitudes. The interviews on the other hand help us understanding why people process information the way they do, which the recording of their online behavior cannot do.

2.4. Conducting the Interviews

In this section we present how the interviews were planned, set up and executed.

2.4.1. Settings and Execution

Since we work with a two-parted problem formulation investigating both how consumers process online reviews as well as what motivates consumer to write them, we decided to work with two types of interviews. Therefore, in relation to our problem formulation, the participants are divided into two group, respectively: Group R (readers), who is defined as the group processing reviews on TripAdvisor and Group M (makers), who are the writers of the

reviews. We made this choice based on the wish to get different data from each of the interview groups. The interviews from Group R were expected to provide us with knowledge about what the participants were viewing and focusing on when processing online reviews. The interviews with Group M were expected to provide us with knowledge about the motivations behind writing reviews and what the purpose is for review writing. These two groups can also contribute with knowledge about the different actors who interact with online reviews on TripAdvisor and therefore together create a more comprehensive understanding of TripAdvisor actors. Finally, it is relevant to note that all of the interviews were conducted in Danish, since the participants were all Danish natives.

2.4.1.1. The Setting and Execution of Group R Interviews

The interviews with group R are, as previously mentioned, the aftermaths of the observation. We chose six hotels in the center of Paris², since we wanted a generic big city that was well known and that the participants probably had some sort of knowledge about. We asked the participants to choose the hotel they wanted to stay at. After the observation we interviewed the participants about their choice of hotel. Through a personal interview face-to-face we could get a nuanced and elaborated insight into the movements from the observation and furthermore an understanding of their thoughts on their actions.

We chose the six hotels based on some specific criteria. First off, our research focus on online reviews, more precisely online reviews on TripAdvisor, therefore we chose the six hotels on TripAdvisor instead of any other hotel review page. We furthermore chose the hotels based on specific features in order for the participants to choose between hotels that were as similar as possible. This was in order to remove the focus from price, features or location and instead shed light on the reviews of the hotel and the evaluation of trust in relation to UGC. We chose hotels with the same amount of stars (the universal star rating from the Hotelstars Union), namely two starred hotels. We then made sure that none of the hotels had any extra features like pool or fitness in order to make the features more alike. By eliminating the features and price, we removed the focus from the obvious tangibles to the intangible values provided by the UGC. The reason for only providing the participants with 6 hotels to choose

² Hotel 1: Hotel de Reims (Appendix 1), Hotel 2: Ibis Budget Paris Porte de Vincennes (Appendix 2), Hotel 3: Le Grand Hotel de Clermont (Appendix 3), Hotel 4: Royal Wagram (Appendix 4), Hotel 5: Zazie Hotel (Appendix 5), Hotel 6: La Place des Alpes (Appendix 6).

among was due to practical issues. We wanted the participants to have several options, but at the same time the participants had to be able to remember the alternatives in order for us to conduct quality interviews. In relations to this, the participants were given a notepad where they could write down information, argumentation or just any comment or observation they made during their research. The interviews were conducted just after the observation to assure that the information was freshly present with the participants.

2.4.1.1. The Setting and Execution of Group M Interviews

These interviews were similar to the previous group in terms of semi-structured personal interviews. As well as with Group R the interviews were conducted face-to-face. The differences between the interviews are the interview guides and setup. The interview setup with this group only consisted of the interview itself and not combined with an observation as in the case of Group R. In these interviews we focused on the personal stories about writing reviews and the motivations behind writing them as well as the knowledge and experience with TripAdvisor as a platform. This was in order to answer the second part of the problem formulation.

2.4.2. Transcribing the Interviews

The length of the interviews in both groups varied from about 12 to 32 minutes without including the observation time. To ensure the best results and the optimal data for the analysis, the interviews were recorded and transcribed. We decided to record all of the interviews, since it is impossible to remember all of the information and extract important elements without the opportunity to re-listening post interview (Gillham, 2000). Furthermore, the recordings were crucial to the transcripts. The interviews were transcribed and are enclosed as appendix A-P. Since not every word is essential to the understanding (Bryman, 2012), we only transcribed the important parts of the interviews, thereby excluding agreeing gesture words, hesitation or mumbling. The reason not to transcribe every single word was also to eliminate a waste of space. Gillham (2000) furthermore argued that it is only possible to study an interview if it is in written form, which concluded the need for the transcripts in the first place.

Since the interviews were conducted in Danish, we not only made a transcript but we also acted as translators at the same time. Since a lot of Danish idioms and expressions can be hard to translate directly to English, we made sure to adjust the translation in a way where the meaning was not lost. However, it is important to highlight that there is a possibility that some small additions to the interview can be lost in translation. The way we executed the transcripts were by playing and pausing the recording whilst writing down the results.

We will now move on to presenting how we structured and formed our interview guides, which we used in the two interview groups.

2.5. The Interview Guides

Since we work with two types of interviews, we also had two different interview guides (Appendix Q and R). Appendix Q represents the interview guide for Group R and Appendix R Group M.

2.5.1. Interview Guide for Group R

The interview guide for Group R was made in strong relation to the observation, which took place just before each interview. The questions were thereby very focused on the choice of hotel and the research about the hotels. We wanted to get the participants to argue and elaborate on their choice as well as their movements in order to understand the thoughts of the participants. By letting the participants talk about what they had read and processed through the semi-structured interviews, we got the opportunity to learn how they processed the information from the hotel pages.

Another element, which we have incorporated in the interview guide, is the element of trust. We ask how they view the credibility of the content on the pages and how trustworthy they find the reviews written by others and why. In relation to the other part of our problem formulation we also ask them why they have not written reviews themselves to get another perspective on what motivates and also prevents people from writing reviews.

2.5.2. Interview Guide for Group M

In the interview guide for Group M, we focused our questions in the direction of the participants' personal stories and motivations behind writing reviews. The semi-structured interviews made it possible for the participants to elaborate on their experiences and how they ended up writing reviews and also question themselves as to why they haven't written reviews at other occasions, where they have had an experience. By keeping the questions open and broad we provided follow-up questions, where we could encourage the participants to do the talking. At the same time, it was important to keep the question simple and approachable, since this is important when creating quality interview guides (Phillips & Stawarski, 2008). Like in the other interview guide, we also added the question about trustworthiness in this interview guide in order to also understand how the writers might view other reviewers as well.

In light of this section above about the interviews, we find it relevant to discuss the participants, who took part in the interviews.

2.6. Participants

In this section, we present the process of finding participants to our interviews and observations. In order to keep the participants anonymous, but still manageable we gave them letters from A to P as well as adding an R or and M in relation to, which interview group they belonged (Group R = readers of reviews – AR, BR, CR, DR, ER, FR, GR, HR, IR, JR, Group M = Makers of reviews – KM, LM, MM, NM, OM, PM).

2.6.1. Requirements for the Participants

Before we requested and looked for any participants we drafted some requirements for participating. Since we conducted two different interview setups, we needed different requirements for the participants. The requirements for the participants of the first interview setup (Group R) were not as comprehensive as the second interview setup (Group M).

The participants from Group R were only requested to have knowledge about TripAdvisor as a platform and not necessarily be active and frequent users of the platform. This requirement, or limit of requirement, was chosen based on the wish to also include consumers, who were not necessarily well-wandered in the community of TripAdvisor and thereby get a per-

spective from consumers who might use the platform in their decision-making process, but not necessarily as their preferred go-to tool.

The participants from Group M were chosen based on their experience with TripAdvisor or online reviews in general. We required that these participants had written reviews prior to the interview and were familiar with TripAdvisor, but not necessarily super users. We also included a couple of participants, who had written reviews on other platforms, since the focus of Group M interviews were based on sharing motivations, which is not limited to TripAdvisor only. Furthermore, we incorporated questions in the interviews with Group R about why they haven't written online reviews themselves in order to further understand where motivation comes from or maybe more important; why it is not present. The wish was to try and add another perspective to sharing motivation by also including the constraints.

2.6.2. Recruiting Participants

When finding participants we used four different approaches.

The first one was writing a request for people who had experience in writing reviews. This request was then shared on the social media platform Facebook, where all three of us shared the post with our personal networks. We afterwards made an addition to the post, which included the request for people who knew about the platform, but haven't necessarily used it, in order to recruit people to both of the interview groups.

We shared this on Facebook, but we also shared it on the social media platform LinkedIn, where we hoped our professional networks could be of help. We chose these approaches based on efficiency in relation to reaching a broad audience as well as people who already have knowledge and experience within online platforms.

The third approach was to make our family and friends ambassadors for our request and have them ask everyone they knew online as well as in real life. We did this to spread out the net even further and including the networks offline as well.

The last approach was what we define as the "facer approach", where we went out on the streets of Aalborg and asked the people if they would like to participate in order to recruit people outside our own network.

All of these approaches led to the finding of our 16 participants and all of the approaches paid off.

2.6.3. The Participants

All of the participants are between 21 and 32 years old. Some research classify people of these ages with the term “digital natives”, which are the definition of people born after 1980, including generation Y and generation Z, where the popular term millennials also is found (Gon et al., 2016). These two digital generations have been discussed in prior studies surrounding consumer behavior, tourism and social media and have been defined as very interactive, tech savvy and digital natives (Molinillo et al., 2018; Sammy et al., 2017; Coşkun & Yılmaz in Sezgin, 2016; Zeng, 2014; Bolton et al., 2013; Canavan, 2018; Li et al., 2013; Nusair et al., 2013; Prensky, 2001). Even though, we work within the digital field and several studies claim that digital natives are experts in this field; we do not see this as relevant in our project, since we work qualitatively with the belief that you cannot define an entire generation (or two) as one. We argue that people within the same generation can provide different approaches as well as perspectives in relation to reading and writing reviews on TripAdvisor. We do therefore not accept these prior findings as the full truth and why we argue, in coherence with our approach as social constructivists, that each individual has different perspectives and motivations when it comes to processing and writing reviews online.

In order for the participants to feel completely safe when they elaborated on their motivations as well as their interpretation of reviews, we decided to keep the names of the participants anonymous. None of the data can be described as being of sensitive character, but in order to insure full disclosure, we informed the participants that their names would not appear in the project. The only personal information, which is present are the gender, age and occupation of the participants. This was in order to get an idea of the people behind this data and to distinguish between the participants.

While conducting both the observation as well as the interviews, we gained some experiences and come across some obstacles, which we will present in the following section.

2.7. Limitations and Experiences With These Methods

After conducting the observations and interviews we have experienced some obstacles along the way. We therefore present a section, where we shed light on our experiences with the two methods and reflections about how they have influenced the project.

2.7.1. Additional Features

Some of the issues we encountered were in relation to our observations. When setting up the framework for the observation we made the hotels as similar in features as possible, as previously argued. We wanted the participants to focus on the consumer-generated information such as written reviews, ratings and pictures that constitutes the online hotel reviews. We later on acknowledged that we could not determine whether the participants were looking at the pictures by the users or the pictures by the hotel, which might have a say in the way they process consumer-generated information. However, since we could not guide the participants only to choose the pictures posted by consumers without obstructing the natural research, we accept the fact that they might be collaborators to the final result.

It may be relevant to highlight that we chose hotels with similar ‘overall rating’, which may constitute a limitation when finding the influence of consumer-generated content. Choosing hotels with different overall ratings might have resulted in a different result as it would allow the participants to base their decision solely on the overall rating; meaning they might neglect other features of consumer-generated content constitutes the overall rating.

Another factor, which we experienced drove the participants away from the consumer-generated content was that of location. Even though, we set up the hotels to be placed more or less the same place in the center of Paris, a lot of the participants spent a great amount of time researching the nearby areas. We do not see it as a problem, since it can be seen as a part of the natural research when looking at hotels, however, it is important to reflect on what the participants might have focused on if this factor had not been there. We scrutinize that the participants had all the time they wanted to research and choose the hotels, which comforts us since time spent on locations did not steal away time from other elements.

2.7.2. Choosing among Six Hotels on TripAdvisor

We think it is important to stress that there may be challenges towards the fact that we set up a scenario where our participants have to evaluate among six different hotels in Paris and finally choose which one of them they would stay at in order to answer the first part of our problem formulation.

First of all, it may be problematic that we force the participants to *solely* look at online reviews on TripAdvisor when choosing their final hotel among six different. This may be problematic due to the fact that many academics have stressed that consumers do often not just use TripAdvisor alone towards their decisions – they use it together with other sources or as external validations, which we also clarify in our theory of trust on page 55-62. However, since we have set the stage and done all the preparatory work and choose the hotels for the participants in advance, we argue that the situation still reflects that they process the reviews as external validations from six different hotel opportunities. The difference emphasized here, just rely on the fact that *we have* done the preparatory work and have selected six hotels for external validations for our participants.

However, the fact that we have done the preparatory work and selected the hotels ahead raises another concern and especially in relation to our position as social constructivists, since it conflicts the subjective nature of our participants. More specifically, we cannot be sure that the participants would even consider the hotels as a possibility if they had to choose themselves.

On the other hand, we still think that we address this issue to some degree, as we give our participants six hotel options to choose among instead of just presenting them with two different options. At the same time, since we are also more interested in *how* the participants process the hotel reviews, although this may be influenced by personal taste, we have a hypothesis, that their way of processing the online hotel reviews, still can give us an indication of what elements they deem important when processing online hotel reviews on TripAdvisor in general.

At the same time, we find it crucial to choose the hotels in advance in order to create a frame of reference and thereby answer our problem formulation of how consumers process online hotel reviews on TripAdvisor. Since we are specifically interested in the influence of the CGC within online reviews, choosing six hotels in advance gave us the possibility to neu-

tralize elements or factors such as price, location and other hotel features that could influence the consumer's choice of hotel.

2.7.3. Hotels in Paris as the objective

We think it is important to reflect on the fact that the participants have to choose among six different hotels in the center of *Paris*, since the location may have an impact on the implicit travel type and therefore may influence the participants' way of processing the online hotel reviews.

Considering the fact that Paris is a famous city and the capital of France, this naturally entails that the location and the city as such, has a lot of offerings and things to experience. Thus consumers' main travel motive for travelling to Paris may be based on their interest in experiencing the city rather than the importance of the hotel and its features.

This may therefore result in them ascribing less value to their accommodation, if they are out experiencing things in the city most of their time anyways. If the trip to Paris is based on a city break, it may therefore influence consumers' way of processing the online hotel reviews due to that some consumers can be more focused on the location rather than the hotel, which may result in them being less critical towards features and service of the hotel. We therefore have a hypothesis that when you travel for city breaks, the hotel may not be considered very important since you might not spend that much time on the hotel. However, this is impossible to determine and generalize and for some, the standard and features of the hotel may be very important although they are in Paris to experience the city.

We therefore reflect on the fact that we placed all the hotels in the center of a famous capital and stress that this potentially can influence consumers' way of processing online hotel reviews on TripAdvisor, although we cannot be sure that this has an impact.

2.7.4. Possible Limitations towards Participants

We see a possible limitation in the fact that we did not ask our participants if they trust online hotel reviews before we chose to interview them. However, most of the participants look at TripAdvisor before their travel and indicate finding online reviews useful.

However, it is important though to stress that two of our participants dissociates themselves from reading online reviews, since they do not trust it. Therefore, when finding out how these consumers process online hotel reviews on TripAdvisor, this process may not be valuable for our analysis since this process is against their own principles and therefore very forced. On the other hand, the fact that they actually have an opinion about the platform makes them interesting to take into consideration, since it is possible for us to get a perspective into what elements of the platform they do not trust. However, we analyze these two participants with an eye on these considerations.

In the next chapter, a visualization and discussion of the findings from the observations will be presented.

3. Visualizing and Presenting the Findings

In order to create an overview of the data collection, we decided to create some visuals to present the data in a manageable way. When conducting ethnographic work, such as this observation, the data can be overwhelming, not only for the observer but also, when trying to present it to the reader (Jones & Watt, 2010). We therefore attempt to make the data more accessible to the reader as well as creating a more approachable dataset for ourselves. Going through the observational data, we will shortly analyze the observation in relation to behavioral tendencies, which will function as a point of reference in the analysis.

3.1. Managing the Data from the Observations

An important factor when managing the data is that of coding. Coding is accepted as a standard procedure when analyzing data (Asan & Montague, 2014). By using coding we can identify different elements in the videos and compare the videos in relation to each other and the participant's post-observation interview. With the implementation of a coding scheme we are able to classify specific variables of interest and use them in the analysis (Asan & Montague, 2014). Each variable must be clearly defined in order to minimize bias from the different researchers (Asan & Montague, 2014). In the following we will present the variable and data.

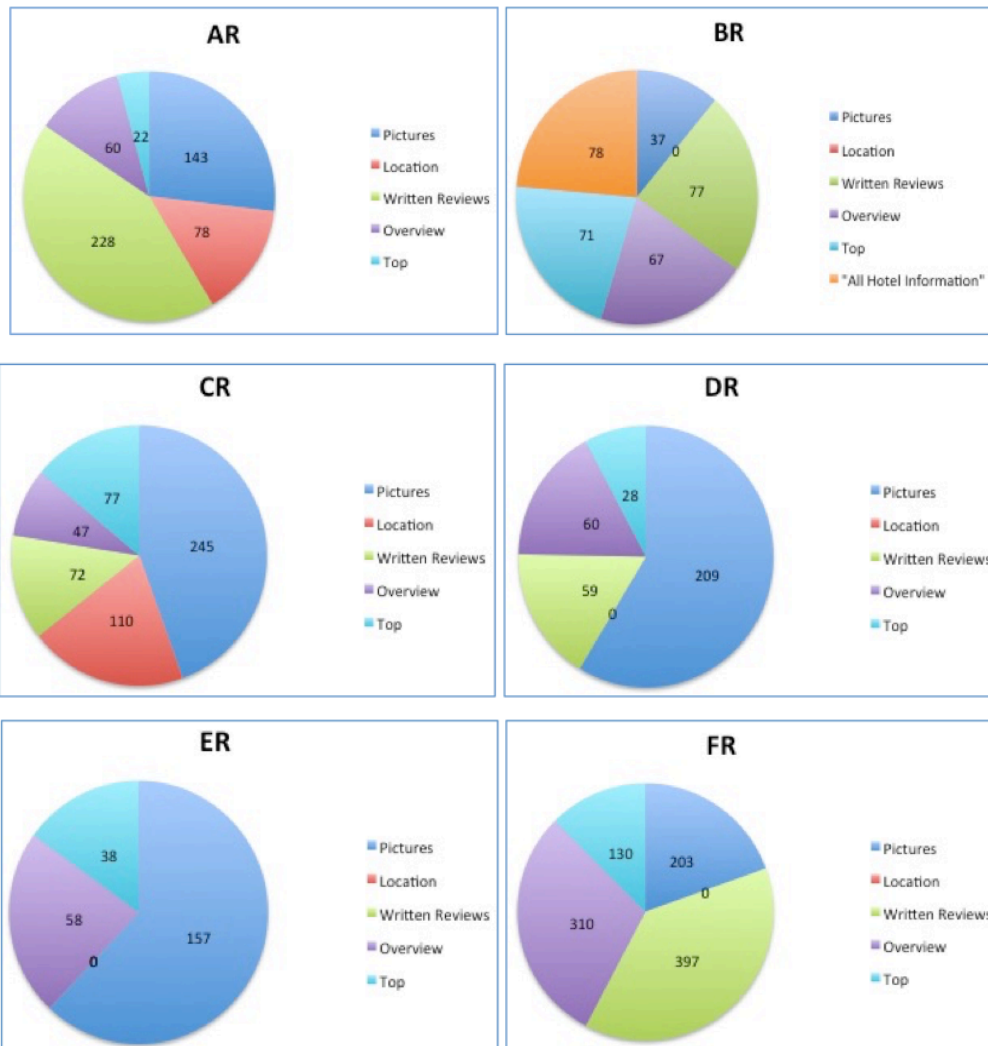
3.1.1. Element Definitions

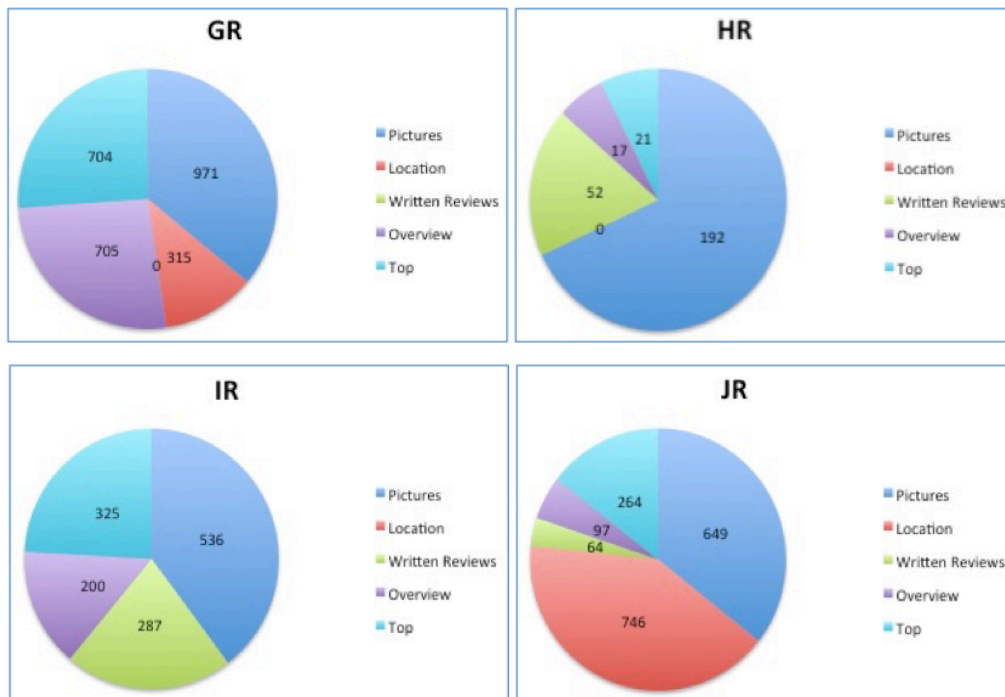
We have outlined a table elaborating on the different elements on the platform, which we argue are important in relation to our theory about what consumers focus on, when processing online reviews. Furthermore, we argue it is important to elaborate on these elements in order to scrutinize how we understand these terms.

Variable	Definition
Pictures	The variable of pictures sort of defines itself. It is the pictures available on the hotel review page; both from the hotel as well as the users. Some of the pictures are visible on the front page, whereas others are shown if you enter the gallery through the front page.
Location	Even though location is not user-generated content we cannot ignore that a number of the participants focus on this feature as an important element when making their decision. The feature is a map, which shows the location of the hotel as well as the area around it. The map allows the user to zoom in and out and navigate around.
Written reviews	The written reviews are the reviews in the bottom of the page showing the individual users text and elaboration about their experience. The written reviews moreover have attached ratings as well as the opportunity to only view reviews with a certain rating and a specific language.
Overview (ratings)	The term overview is presented by the platform itself. The overview shows information about the hotel and its features as well as the ratings in percentage.
Top	By top, we mean the front page or starting page of the hotel review. The top shows the hotel name, the overall rating, price and a sample of the picture gallery.

3.1.2. The Participants' Focus on the Elements

Since the observation is a supplement to the interview, the observation is strongly reliant on the elements and the time spent on each of them. We thereby present the individual results of the observation in relation to what the participants have been focusing on when interacting with the platform. The numbers in the pie charts are seconds spent on the different features.





With these pie charts it is evident how big an impact the photos have on the participants. Even though, many of the participants also spend a lot of time on the written reviews, some do not even acknowledge them. Time can only say little about how the participants process the information, which is why we now discuss the behavioral tendencies to get a more substantial understanding of the observations.

3.1.3. Observing Behavioral Tendencies

When we conduct our observation, we observe the behavior of the participants, when they interact with TripAdvisor. This behavior differs from participant to participant, which we have chosen to present in the section below. This section elaborates the behavioral tendencies and will function as a reference when we analyze our interviews in order to understand the behavior towards the online reviews and therethrough how consumers process the information. The hotels will be referred to by the numbers 1-6, which as previously presented are the following:

- Hotel 1: Hotel de Reims (Appendix 1).
- Hotel 2: Ibis Budget Paris Porte de Vincennes (Appendix 2).
- Hotel 3: Le Grand Hotel de Clermont (Appendix 3).

- Hotel 4: Royal Wagram (Appendix 4).
- Hotel 5: Zazie Hotel (Appendix 5).
- Hotel 6: La Place des Alpes (Appendix 6)

An important tendency from all of the participants is that they look at pictures. Two of the participants even opt out a hotel based on pictures. DR and GR both discover a picture on hotel 3 showing bed bugs and the bites of the consumer's arm, which makes them both opt out the hotel. The exclusion is visible in the observation because after they have discovered the picture none of them return to the hotel in their observation. GR, as well as IR, views every single picture present on the hotel pages, which reflects how important they find the visuals.

Another tendency of the observation is that almost all of the participants have their own structure in how they research the hotel. Most of them have a distinct process in how they look at the hotels, which are only obstructed by e.g. bed bug pictures. The only participant who seems a little more unstructured in his research is JR. He shuffles between elements and hotels in no particular order. However, he is the only participant who focuses on the pictures from the consumers rather than looking at the ones from the hotel as well.

ER researches very quick and only looks at ratings and pictures. She is not the only one who researches superficially. AR also goes through the elements superficially. He reads written reviews and looks at pictures but only the first couple of them. The same goes for DR who superficially scrolls through the written reviews in search for negative reviews. He checks three pages of reviews, but only superficially in the search of negative reviews. HR also researches the written reviews in relation to specific preferences; she is the only one who is just interested in the reviews with 5 bubbles. She marks only to view these, but her process of them is very superficial and she scrolls fast through them, as if she is only looking at the headlines or dates.

Another tendency is that most of the participants scroll past reviews in other languages instead of translating them. IR and BR are the only two participants who translates the reviews instead of scrolling past reviews in foreign languages. It is also interesting to observe that two of the participants do not look at the written reviews at any point in the observation; namely ER and GR. In the case of ER it looks like she is stopped by advertisement and due to her fast paced research she might just move on without thinking that there could be more after the advertisement. Her observation was the shortest of them all, which highlights her

superficial and fast research pattern. Even though, GR was the participant who spent the most time on the research, he never looked at the written reviews, which is interesting.

Lastly, it is interesting that half of the participants ended up shuffling between two hotels before finally choosing the one they wanted. However, the time used on the hotels does not necessarily always reflect this. This will be further discussed in the next section about hotel time duration.

To sum up, a lot of the participants process the hotels very chronological and with individual patterns. However, it is hard to conclude directly how they process the online reviews without combining the observations with the interviews. This is why we in the analysis combine the observation and interview of the participant and in coherence analyze how they process the information individually in relation to the theory to reveal tendencies.

3.1.4. Hotel Duration Time

In addition to the other presented data, we have created an overview of the time spend on the different hotels. We have created the graph in order to discuss the choice of hotels and if they as a product might have acted as a factor in the choice of hotels by the participants. This graph is thereby only additional information, since the choice of hotel is not the focal point of the problem formulation, but merely an object of the research.

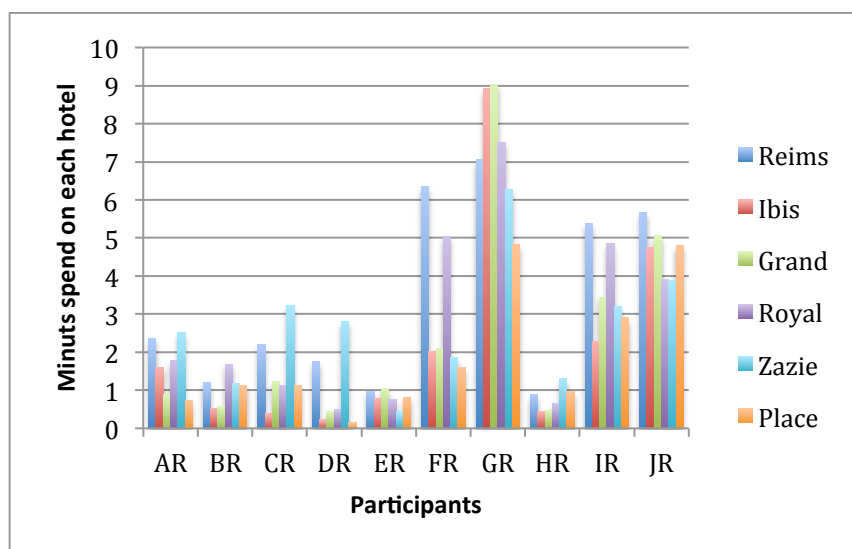


Figure 2

The figure shows, as mentioned, how much time each of the participants spent on each hotel. It shows both the difference in how long time the participants used to research the hotels before making a decision and which of the hotels they focused most of their time on.

The time spent on each hotel differs from each person and it does not reflect the choice of hotel. In order to view the correlation between the hotel duration time and the choice of hotel we present the choices made by the participants in the following table:

	Hotel de Reims	Ibis Budget Paris Porte de Vincennes	Le Grand Hotel de Clermont	Royal Wagram	Zazie Hotel	La Place des Alpes
AR				X		
BR					X	
CR					X	
DR					X	
ER			X			
FR	X					
GR	X					
HR					X	
IR					X	
JR			X			

Comparing this table to figure 2, we see that only half of the participants spent the most time on the hotel of choice (CR, DR, ER, FR, HR). The other half of the participants has hotels they have looked at for a longer time, which suggests that the time spent on the hotel does not necessarily mean they chose the hotel.

The findings presented in this chapter will be included in the first part of the analysis, when relevant, in order to answer our first part of the problem formulation. In the next chapter we will discuss the theory of the project and present the theoretical framework.

4. Theory

In this chapter of the project we discuss and present the theory, which will be used to answer the problem formulation. We elaborate on TripAdvisor, its features, popularity and limitations in order to create a fundament of knowledge about the platform in which we work.

Hereafter, we discuss the theory surrounding online consumer behavior. This is deemed necessary in order to understand the role of TripAdvisor in relation to online consumer behavior. The third part is build around the phenomenon of trust, which leads to our analytic model, which we will use to answer the first part of the problem formulation: *How do consumers process online hotel reviews on TripAdvisor?* In the fourth part of the theory chapter we investigate how prior research have discussed online sharing motivation as well as presenting our own modified model, which we will use to answer the last part of the problem formulation: *What motivates consumers to write reviews on TripAdvisor?* We finish the theory chapter by presenting the theoretical framework of this project, where we also connect the two parts of our problem formulation through all of the presented theory.

4.1. TripAdvisor – Understanding the Forum

Since websites designed for travel commentaries, such as TripAdvisor, have a big influence on behavioral intentions and decision-making (Shakeela & Weaver, 2016), we will in this section of the theory discuss TripAdvisor as a platform; both in terms of purpose and features, but also in terms of creating value and assessing trust in relation to the consumers on this platform. It is important to clarify specific terms, since we refer to these throughout the project. This section of the theory is incorporated to understand the platform in which this project works and not as much as applied theory.

4.1.2. The Platform – Idea and Purpose

TripAdvisor is a social media platform and one of the most visited holiday- and travel portals in the world (Fritsch & Sigmund in Egger, 2016). TripAdvisor was founded in 2000 as a subsidiary to the company Expedia.com, but in 2011 it was spun off by a public offer (Gligorijevic in Egger 2016, Yoo et al. in Egger 2016). They claim to be the world's largest travel site with o-

ver 600 million reviews and approximately 7.5 million accommodations, attractions, airlines and restaurants (TripAdvisor, 2017). Moreover, the brand is available in 49 countries and claim to have the world's largest travel community consisting of 455 million monthly visitors in average (TripAdvisor, 2017). The website creates the possibility for tourists to research and plan their trips based on opinions and reviews from other tourists, who have already experienced that specific accommodation, hotel or airline etc. (Minazzi, 2015; Gligorijevic in Egger et al. 2016). Through reviews, ratings and rankings TripAdvisor helps to inform the tourist about what they might experience in relation to various travel services (Sammy et al., 2017). However, it is a consumer-to-consumer community (Minazzi, 2015), where co-creation and engagement through content sharing are key drivers (Gligorijevic in Egger et al. 2016).

TripAdvisor's business model relies on user-generated content, which attracts a lot of visitors to the site; consumers as well as businesses, which wants to use the platform for advertisement (Gligorijevic in Egger et al. 2016). The three major players in the business model are travellers, suppliers and other tourism partners e.g. travel websites and Facebook (Yoo et al. in Egger 2016). The site can be viewed as an intermediate for supply and demand by giving the tourist a platform to gather and share information and experiences as well as creating a forum for the businesses, which can help them understand their customers, promote their business and monitor their competitors (Yoo et al. in Egger et al., 2016). Yoo et al. sum it up by describing TripAdvisor as *"[...] an infomediary, specializing in the so called 'Big Data' field and focusing on linking and serving the needs of both tourism demand and supply by providing a technological platform through, which content can be created, analysed and distributed to meet the needs of travellers and tourism firms"* (in Egger et al., 2016: 241). Moreover, the platform is defined as an anonymous review website, which is one of the two social media, where people share word-of-mouth. The other category is peer networks, such as Facebook, Twitter etc. (Minazzi, 2015). The platform has created a sort of an ecosystem where the tourist and the business coexist and with the free access to the content both parties generate the necessary traffic for the site to be a success (Gligorijevic in Egger et al. 2016). Through this ecosystem there is a perfect combination of UGC, often argued to be more or less unbiased in relation to the reviewed party, and marketing generated content with targeted potential consumers (Gligorijevic in Egger et al. 2016).

Everything on the platform is accessible and public; reviewed business can respond to the reviews by the consumers and address issues in public, which allows both parties to state

their case and for others to review the online service from the business beyond the check-out point as well (Gligorijevic in Egger et al. 2016). In order to understand how the two parties interact in practice we will now discuss the features of the platform and elaborate on the part of the site, which is relevant for this project.

4.1.3. The Features – Navigating the Site

TripAdvisor offers a huge amount of opportunities both for the consumer as well as the companies. Companies have great amounts of opportunities on the platform, but since our focus is on the consumer and the content that they create, we will only discuss the key features from the consumer perspective. Moreover, we will clarify the terms used surrounding this platform to eliminate doubt about what we are discussing when analyzing the findings.

When making reviews on TripAdvisor, the users are rewarded badges, which are designed to show the user's level of contribution and number of reviews (Gligorijevic in Egger et al. 2016). As a user you have a huge amount of features available, including profile, travel reviews and ratings, forums, destination guides, maps, Facebook interaction etc. (Yoo et al. in Egger et al., 2016). Since we only focus on each page of the chosen hotels as mentioned in the methodology chapter, we have narrowed down the features to those, which are available in this context and present them in the following illustration (Illustration 1).

In order to visualize the platform, we have created an illustration of an online hotel review, where we have highlighted the features. The features will be elaborated after the illustration.

The screenshot shows the TripAdvisor page for Hotel de Reims in Paris. The page is divided into several sections: a top navigation bar, a header with the hotel name and location, a 'Lowest prices for your stay' section, an 'Overview' section with ratings and amenities, a 'Reviews' section, and a 'Pictures' section.

Annotations:

- Rating and volume:** Points to the 4.0 star rating and 258 reviews.
- Ranking:** Points to the hotel's position (#843) out of 1,614 hotels in Paris.
- Price:** Points to the lowest price shown (£123).
- Certificate:** Points to a placeholder for a certificate.
- Pictures:** Points to the gallery of hotel photos.
- Ratings:** Points to the detailed rating breakdown (Excellent, Very good, Average, Poor, Terrible).
- Review language:** Points to the language selection dropdown in the reviews section.
- Written review:** Points to a specific review by 'Thane Saron'.
- Reviewer reputation & number of reviews in same category appears by holding the mouse over or pressing the user picture. Recommendation rating is the thumbs up symbol.** Points to the user profile picture and the thumbs up symbol in the review.

Overview Data:

Rating	Percentage
Excellent	20%
Very good	62%
Average	14%
Poor	3%
Terrible	1%

Reviews (288):

Traveller rating: Excellent (56), Very good (174), Average (41), Poor (10), Terrible (5).

Traveller type: Families, Couples, Solo, Business, Friends.

Time of year: Mar-May, Jun-Aug, Sep-Nov, Dec-Feb.

Language: 12 languages, English (16), French (177), Italian (22), More languages.

Review by Thane Saron:

Reviewed 11 March 2018 via mobile

Hotel de Reims est un très bon hôtel. Une chambre qui est correcte pour le prix. Taille correcte même si la douche est assez petite. Lit double confortable. [More](#)

Response from HoteldeReimsStaff, Manager at Hotel de Reims
Responded 4 weeks ago

Illustration 1

Minazzi (2015) elaborates on the features marked with yellow boxes in the following way:

- The rating
 - Presented by bubbles from one to five (five being the best). The hotel has an aggregated rating that represents the average of all of the individual reviews.
- The ranking
 - How the hotel is positioned in relation to other hotels in the area evaluated on quality, quantity and date of latest review (new reviews influence the popularity rankings more than older ones)
- The volume (Quantity of reviews)
 - How many reviews have been written, which is an indicator of the popularity of the hotel.
- The certification of excellence
 - High performance hotels can get an award for good rating and ranking.
- The reviewer reputation
 - As previously presented, the reviewers are rewarded badges to show their level of expertise in reviewing. *“[...] classifying them from basic to top levels which are visually represented by a star of different color on the base of the level”* (Minazzi, 2015: 38)
- The number of reviews in the same category
 - How many other hotels the reviewer has reviewed.
- The recommendation rating
 - Viewers can mark if they think a review is helpful and it will show as a “thumbs up” under the reviewer’s name. This feature helps solve the problem of information overload for the consumers, since it helps the consumer to spot relevant reviews in a large amount of reviews (Fang et al., 2016).

In extension to this list, we have added a few more features, which we argue are missing from the previous list, since the following features are also present on the platform and thereby cannot be ignored. Those are the ones marked with red boxes:

- Written reviews

- Elaborating texts evaluating tourism products written by individual users. User-generated content, which function as “[...] *important information sources of consumer experience towards products.*” (Fang et al., 2016: 498).
- Review language
 - The option to show reviews written in a specific language.
- Pictures
 - Visual content in the form of pictures from either guests or the hotel.
- Price
 - The price per night based on outside sources. This factor is necessary to consider, since it might have an influence on the evaluation of the hotel and standard, even though we try to minimize this feature’s dominance in this project by using hotels in the same price range.

All of these features help to enable value co-creation through connecting tourism demand and supply. Enabling a platform like this, where travellers can upload and share their travel experiences and reviews as well as “[...] *interact and engage in discussions with other travellers in order to obtain trip-planning support (i.e. explore, dream, plan, and share travel experiences)*” (Yoo et al. in Egger et al., 2016: 243) creates a forum for value co-creation. The issue surrounding value creation on TripAdvisor is what we will discuss in the following section.

4.1.4. Creating Value on TripAdvisor

When investigating why consumers write reviews and how they process reviews, we shortly have to establish what value TripAdvisor provides the consumer, since a direct physical value exchange is not present. Value is something that the consumer seeks and to interrelate the consumer perspective with the platform, we want to shortly present how those two are related.

In the market of tourism and hospitality, quality of service and thereby value, is measured through personal experiences, which results in a big reliance on word-of-mouth, especially electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and recommendation (Gligorijevic in Egger et al. 2016). Since TripAdvisor is constructed as an online review- and recommendation site, it is arguably creating value for consumers through the sharing and reading of personal experiences. In the

research by Fritsch and Sigmund they found that the main motivation for consumers to post reviews was to “help” other consumers or the hotel (in Egger et al., 2016). By helping other consumers and hotels, value is created for several partners in the community, since other consumers are helped in the decision-making process and hotels can make adjustments in relations to their products or their service (Roeflen & Scholl-Grissemann in Egger et al., 2016). In relation to this, it is important for the businesses to try and spot reviews, which might be voted ‘helpful’ and fix any issues presented in such reviews before the reviews have the opportunity to influence other consumers badly in their decision-making (Fang et al., 2016). By doing so, the businesses can influence the value creation to their advantage and prevent negative eWOM.

In its ground element, TripAdvisor provides the technological platform, which enables the co-creation of value (Yoo et al. in Egger et al., 2016). By linking information from businesses and destinations to the content posted by travellers and visitors and the other way around the platform creates generated co-created value for both parts (Yoo et al. in Egger et al., 2016). Since *“TripAdvisor’s main value proposition is access to contents provided by travellers”* (Yoo et al. in Egger et al., 2016: 253), the platform strongly relies on the travellers and visitors to upload content to their platform, which creates an expectation and a responsibility for TripAdvisor to keep providing the necessary community for the consumer to find value (Yoo et al. in Egger et al., 2016). The competition is strong, since *“the tourism industry is one of the leading industries in terms of opening up to consumers and co-creating value with them”* (Stadler & Bilgram in Egger et al., 2016: 365). The key to value creation on TripAdvisor is the element of co-creation, which the platform is founded upon. This value creation is thereby depending on the consumer being active and is thereby crucial for TripAdvisor’s relevance in the future as well.

Fang et al. (2016) scrutinizes how the content of reviews is the most important factor, when it comes to the value of a review, since it influences the risk assessment. Previous studies have investigated the influence of review linguistics on review value (Ghose & Ipeirotis, 2011; Kusumasondjaja et al., 2012; Liu & Park, 2015). This leads us to the next section of the theory, where we will discuss TripAdvisor in relation to trust.

4.1.5. TripAdvisor in Relation to Trust

Reviews are not a new gadget and consumers have navigated the field of reviews for ages. It is argued that many expect to find fake reviews among the large amount of UGC, and with this in mind they read, filter and evaluate reviews (Minazzi, 2015). Furthermore, he argues that companies might manipulate reviews in order to raise a positive perception (Minazzi, 2015), which might be argued to further raise the suspicion surrounding the authenticity of the reviews. Moreover, Minazzi (2015) argues how the amount of reviews is often associated with the trustworthiness of e.g. a hotel since the more reviews a hotel has, the more popular it is. He argues that a hotel with 10 reviews should be considered weaker than one with 80, since more consumers have expressed their opinion and evaluated this hotel and more information about the hotel and the experience is thereby present (Minazzi, 2015). EWOM is “[...] *found to be a widely available, influential, descriptive, useful, personalized and trustworthy type of online content*” (Gligoričević in Egger et al. 2016: 216). It has been argued that the trust surrounding eWOM is high, since it is viewed as being independent from commercial or product related influence (Gligoričević in Egger et al. 2016).

With a wish to influence beyond the website, TripAdvisor expanded with a partnership with Facebook. Through this they can monitor the members activities and the users can view travelling experiences and visited locations of their friends (Gligoričević in Egger et al. 2016). It has been argued that peer networks, such as Facebook, are evaluated as more influential in relation to trusting other users than anonymous review websites, such as TripAdvisor. This is due to the consumers having a personal relation with their peer networks (Minazzi, 2015). Therefore, by incorporating Facebook into TripAdvisor, the level of influence and trust might be strengthened. It becomes a personalized recommendation system of word-of-mouth, where social ties create a high level of trust (Gligoričević in Egger et al. 2016).

On TripAdvisor the users are able to view possible feedback from friends when they research e.g. a hotel, which can help lower the risk perception in relation to eWOM (Minazzi, 2015) and thereby increasing the level of trust. Moreover, the credibility also relies on the website. It is argued that consumers have more trust in consumer-to-consumer virtual communities than corporate blogs, which places TripAdvisor high on the trust scale when compared to company websites or company produced content (Minazzi, 2015). It is thereby argued that consumer-to-consumer communities and social ties as those on Facebook have a

high influence on the level of trust, which TripAdvisor seems to have incorporated in their approach.

In research by Hsu et al. (2012), it was discovered that bookings after reading reviews on TripAdvisor are more likely to happen, which shows how reviews have a strong influence on the final decision of whether to book or not. It is thereby argued that hotels should consider using TripAdvisor as a part of their marketing strategy in order to monitor perceptions, possible customers and expectations (Sezgin & Aktas in Sezgin, 2016; Fang et al., 2016). Especially, since it is argued that negative reviews have a higher trustworthiness than positive ones (Kusumasondjaja et al. 2012).

However, it is important to point out that the trustworthiness of reviews have been discussed and criticized, since everyone can write reviews, which provides the opportunity to create fake reviews. The hotels themselves or people who have not visited, e.g. a hotel, are thereby able to write fake reviews through fake profiles (Dellarocas, 2006), which Kusumasondjaja et al. (2012) argue might partly explain why negative reviews are considered more trustworthy, since ambassadors or employees can create positive reviews of the given hotel. Through this, the hotels have the opportunity to falsify their reputation, compete with negative reviews and also influence their competitors with negative reviews on their pages (Minazzi, 2015).

Likewise, a study by Ayeh et al. (2013) shows how trustworthiness is more influential than expertise, when it comes to TripAdvisor. Furthermore, in cases where the trustworthiness is perceived as compromised the impact could be very severe for the companies (Llameiro, 2014). Hu et al. (2012) further discuss how the user can spot authentic reviews. Authentic reviews have a more random and personal approach when elaborating on the experience, since the reviewers background influence the language and expression (Hu et al., 2012). Fang et al. (2016) further argue that the trust in the review relies on the trust of the reviewer, which the consumer acknowledges by marking the review helpful. The written reviews marked as helpful are thereby evaluated trustworthy, since other consumers have accepted the reviewer as trustworthy and therethrough marked the review the same (Fang et al., 2016). However, it is important to point out that the written reviews marked as helpful can be fake as well, so there can be no guarantee.

In light of the discussion of trust on TripAdvisor in relation to possible fake reviews, some hotels and UK's Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) ordered a rewrite of TripAdvisor's

trust claim, where they had TripAdvisor remove the word ‘trust’ from their website (Ayeh et al., 2013). The phenomenon of trust will be further discussed and elaborated later in the theory section. In order to understand the platform and the community we also need to clarify the consumer behavior in online communities, which we will move on to in the following section.

4.2. Online Consumer Behavior

In this section, theory of consumer behavior and the decision-making process will be explained. First, an account of the development of digital technologies and how this has affected consumer behavior will be emphasized. Second, a model of the consumer’s decision-making process will be presented. Here, different stages of the decision-making process will be described, however a more in-depth presentation of the stages where TripAdvisor plays a crucial role will be elaborated. An account of how TripAdvisor plays a role towards consumer behavior as well as the decision-making process will form a theoretical starting point of our project and form an inter-correlation of our problem formulation. However, this inter-correlation will be further explained in the framework presented in the end of our theory chapter.

4.2.1. Relevance of Consumer Behavior

In the beginning of the new millennium, research attention started a shift from a product development approach to understanding consumer product evaluation in the purchase decision and the factors that can influence customers' decision-making process (Gursoy, 2017). This includes the field of tourism, and thus, the concept of consumer behavior has become a critical element of the marketing area in this field, as marketing communications highly affect the behavior of the consumer and influence their decision-making (Dahlén et al., 2010). This makes the consumer-oriented marketing approach highly relevant.

Knowledge of buying behavior help explain how consumers think, feel and select among existing buying alternatives as well as how the consumer’s environment influences their decision-making when making a purchase. This can all lead to an understanding of how marketers can improve their marketing campaigns to more effectively reach the consumer (Stankevich, 2017). They need to understand how consumers gather information about products and ser-

vices, and the different alternatives and use this information to select among competing products and services (Belch G. & Belch M., 2009).

4.2.2. How Digital Technologies have Changed Consumer Behavior

The dramatic development of information technology during the last decades has changed consumer behaviors, as the Internet has grown to be one of the most effective means for tourists to seek information about and purchase tourism-related products. It is argued that many travellers are intensely technology dependent in seeking and preparing for their upcoming travel experiences. Perhaps the most important feature of this decade is the development of new social systems including tools such as new types of virtual communities and consumer review sites (Xiang et al., 2014). This therefore offers a different kind of convenience to consumers. They can make public judgment on purchases and have easy access to huge amounts of product information as the Internet facilitates the search for products online, and it also helps the evaluation between products to make the best purchase possible (Mittal, 2013). This gives the consumers more power and influence, as they can both express their opinion on their purchases and they have access to compare and choose between more products than earlier.

Marketing communications have changed with the development of digital technologies from one-way communication; from marketers to consumers – now into two-way communication; from marketers to consumers and from consumers to marketers (Stankevich, 2017). Therefore, the consumers have become marketing co-creators by providing user-generated content regarding products and services and, thus, now have more power and influence on marketing communications. Coskun and Yilmaz (2016) state that consumers have transformed into ‘prosumers’, who have different needs, higher expectations and are more critical towards products. They are more individualistic, independent, have high demands, and more conscious of their power and rights as consumers, as they can speak their voice on social media. Also, they are more likely than earlier to seek information before buying, adopting the new technologies for this purpose. Moreover, they do not get involved in the co-production process of products because they need to, but because they want to (Coskun & Yilmaz in Egger et al., 2016).

According to Xiang et al. (2014) the consumer is consciously searching for user-generated information in order to form a more comprehensive, less biased judgment of the targeted

travel products. This means that marketers need a systematic way to satisfy consumer demand and manage word-of-mouth (Court et al., 2009), or eWOM by influencing consumers' attitudes, perceptions, and intentions (Xiang et al., 2014).

The concept of eWOM is especially useful when the consumer is searching for travel product information, as these products lack the features of pre-trial and frequent repeat purchases. Thus, online user-generated content is a way for consumers to obtain knowledge communicated by peers who are not biased and do not have any commercial interests in the travel products (Yoo & Gretzel, 2011). Furthermore, since tourism products are mostly intangible, experiential and perishable services, the product information is very important for the consumer experience (Coskun & Yilmaz in Egger et al., 2016). Thus, social media travel platforms like TripAdvisor can be argued to influence the consumer behavior by affecting the decision-making process of the contemporary consumer, as they can reach the product information they demand quickly and at any time. They are also able to evaluate and compare competing travel products when having access to the user-generated content, such as comments and ratings related to the products and services. The decision-making process will now be explained more detailed, with a focus on the stages where TripAdvisor has most influence on the consumer.

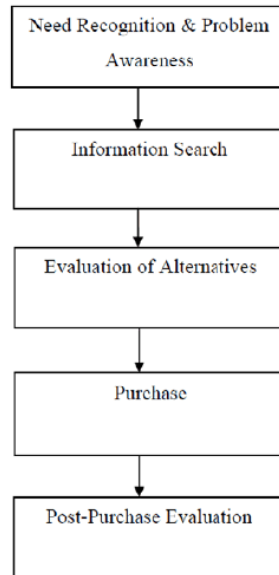
4.2.3. The Consumer Decision-Making Process

According to Solomon et al., consumer behavior is defined as: *"the study of the processes involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use or dispose products, services, ideas or experiences to satisfy needs and desires"* (1995: 6). This indicates that the consumer goes through three stages of the decision-making process, which is pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase as proposed in a model of Solomon, Bambossy and Askegaard (Dahlén et al., 2010). However, Blackwell, Miniard and Engel (2006) propose a more detailed framework of the stages the consumer goes through in the decision-making process of purchasing a product or a service. This framework is called 'The consumer decision-making process framework', and includes five stages the consumer goes through in the purchase decision-making process. This model can help clarify the critical stages of the consumers' purchase decision-making in the context of online travel platforms like TripAdvisor.

Different models concerning the consumer decision-making process have been proposed during more than 50 years, like the Nicosia model of buyer behavior (Nicosia, 1966), the Howard and Sheth model (1969), and the McCarthy, Perrault and Quester model (1997). However, the Blackwell, Miniard and Engel model (2006), which contains many of the aspects of the other models, seems very comprehensive and focused on the consumer. Furthermore, the model's core focus is on motivational factors, which provide a better understanding of the reasons behind the purchase decision (Blackwell et al., 2006). Therefore, this model is suitable as the decision-making process framework of this project.

An illustration of the 5 stages of the model can be seen below. These stages of the decision-making process will be further elaborated in this section, focusing on the stages that are most affected by the features of TripAdvisor. Taking this framework into account we will elaborate how online user-generated content may influence the different stages of the decision-making process.

4.2.3.1. The Consumer Decision-Making Process Framework



Source: Blackwell, Miniard and Engel, 2006

As seen in the illustration of the model, the 5 stages the consumer goes through in the decision-making process, are: 'Need recognition and problem awareness', 'information search', 'evaluation of alternatives', 'purchase', and 'post-purchase evaluation'. As mentioned, online re-

views on TripAdvisor do not have an impact on all the stages. Thus, we will mainly focus on the stages relevant for our research, which are ‘information search’, ‘evaluation of alternatives’, and ‘post-purchase evaluation’. Furthermore, the relevancy of these stages in relation to our investigation will be explained. The remaining stages of the process will only briefly be explained to get an understanding of the model as a whole.

4.2.3.1.1. Need Recognition and Problem Awareness

The first stage of the decision-making process framework is need recognition, which arises when the consumer realizes a difference between their actual state of affair and their desired state of affair. Thus, the need recognition depends on the discrepancy between the consumer’s current situation and their desired situation (Engel et al., 1995; Solomon, 1996; Kotler & Armstrong, 2001). The consumer will then have to take action to buy a product or service to satisfy their need. However, this stage is hardly affected by TripAdvisor, as we assume that most consumers enter the platform after recognizing a need to travel, to find more detailed information about the travel they want to undertake. Need recognition could arise, if consumers enter TripAdvisor and have their need awoken by lurking at different products and then obtain a desire to travel. However, we focus on features on the platform that are supposed to provide more in depth information about the certain travel products. This will be more relevant in the next stage of the decision-making process, which is information search.

4.2.3.1.2. Information Search

Once the need is recognized, the consumer is likely to search more product-related information before making a purchase decision. The information search process can be divided into two parts: the internal search and the external search (Oliver, 2011). The internal search is when the consumer has previous experience with a product or service and compares alternatives from these experiences. External search is used when the internal search does not provide sufficient information to make a purchase decision. According to Oliver (2011) the consumer will go for external search of information based on the value, the importance, and the complication of the product or service. If the product is not of value or importance of the consumer’s life, he/she will probably restrict to the internal search. The external search is likely

to happen for consumers purchasing travel products as such products cost a lot of money and therefore is of great importance to the consumer. Moreover, it is argued that many tourists only have the opportunity of going on vacation once a year (Coskun & Yilmaz in Egger et al., 2016), and thus the travel purchase will be important to the consumer. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier in this section, travel products lack the features of pre-trial and frequent repeat purchases, which mean the consumer rarely has any experiences with the product beforehand. Thus, the internal search will not be sufficient. In the external search process the consumer uses several sources such as other consumers, friends (WOM) or web pages before purchasing (Dahlén, 2010).

Winer (2009) states, with the digital development the Internet has become an important resource for product information. Especially online reviews and forums providing user-generated content are significant sources of information (Winer, 2009). This makes the information search stage highly relevant for our project, when investigating consumer behavior and what makes the consumer decide travel products on a platform like TripAdvisor, as it provides travel product information that is always available for the consumer, influencing their purchase decisions.

4.2.3.1.3. Evaluation of Alternatives

In this stage, the consumer evaluates the information obtained through the search, and alternative products and services are compared according to the needs. The consumer use evaluative criteria to make the purchase decision, which will be different depending on the product category. This can be from the utilitarian dimensions to the hedonistic dimensions (Dahlén, 2010). The utilitarian dimensions can be tangible benefits such as cost, performance and features of the product, while the hedonistic dimensions can be taste, prestige, brand and image (Nagaraja & Girish, 2015). According to Ha et al. (2010) the evaluation process can be very time consuming and quite complicated, and several factors such as age, culture, taste and budget all have an impact on the individual consumer's evaluation process. As TripAdvisor contains user-generated content such as reviews and ratings of travel products with many alternatives in the different product categories, such as hotels, this platform can be very influential in the consumer's evaluation process of alternatives. It makes it easier to make quick comparisons of the products and services, which facilitates the evaluation process. Also, our data is

based on a process of evaluating alternative products in form of hotels, which furthermore scrutinizes the relevance of this stage.

4.2.3.1.4. Purchase

When the consumer has made an evaluation of alternatives the final decision of the purchase is conducted. However, the consumer must still implement the decision and make the actual purchase. Additional decisions may be needed such as when to buy, where to buy, and how much money to spend. There may also be a time delay between making the purchase decision and making the actual purchase. This is particularly for complex purchases that need high involvement, like travel products. In this period it is important for marketers to keep the consumer hooked to maintain purchase intentions (Stankevich, 2017). On TripAdvisor the consumer cannot make the actual purchase when they have decided which travel product they want. Instead they are referred to other pages, where they can purchase their product. Moreover, the processing of information on the platform has been dealt with in the two previous stages, and thus the purchase itself is not relevant when investigating the influences on consumer behavior on TripAdvisor.

4.2.3.1.5. Post-Purchase Evaluation

It is likely the consumer makes an evaluation of a product or service after the purchase to see if the need that initiated the process has been satisfied (Dahlén, 2010). This can also be a prediction of whether or not the consumer will make repeat purchases and become brand loyal or recommend the product to others (Nagaraja & Girish, 2015). The consumer can become 'brand ambassador' by recommending the product to others and, thus, influence others consumers' decision-making process in the stages of 'need recognition', 'information search' and 'evaluation of alternatives' (Nagaraja & Girish, 2015). However, if the consumers are dissatisfied with the product, they may provide negative feedback that can restrain others from purchasing the product. According to Perrey and Spillecke (2011), the most important factors affecting the outcome of post-purchase evaluation are opinions of peers, friends and family regarding the purchase made, while Trehan and Trehan (2011) state that peer opinions tend to impact consumer's level of satisfaction regardless of their level of objectivity.

During this stage, the consumers may provide user-generated content on TripAdvisor in form of product reviews about their consumption experience. In such cases the consumer's review becomes a source of information during the information search or pre-purchase evaluation stages of other consumers' decision-making processes. The post-purchase evaluation stage may not be relevant when investigating the influences of TripAdvisor on the consumer's pre-purchase decision-making process. However, when investigating what motivates consumers to write their own travel review, this stage will be relevant, as it is part of the evaluation of the purchased product. Furthermore, understanding the decision-making stages the consumer goes through provides a connection between our two parts of the problem formulation: how the consumer process information on TripAdvisor and what motivates the consumer to write reviews on the platform. Both acts influence each other according to the decision-making process. Namely, the consumer that creates the review in the post-evaluation stage contributes to the information, which can be found by other consumers in the 'information search' and 'evaluation of alternatives' stages.

4.2.3.1.6. Critique of the Framework

It should finally be noted that the framework of Blackwell et al. (2006) has been criticized, as the consumer does not necessarily go through all the stages of this decision-making framework every time they make a purchase; e.g. not all stages apply to repeat product purchase as the consumer already has some preferences and the process is thereby more automatic. The consumer does not engage in the decision-making process when they buy a product repeatedly (Belch G. & Belch M., 2009). However, as travel products are rarely repeated product purchases (Yoo & Gretzel, 2011), we argue that the stages of information search and evaluation of alternatives are both very important in the tourism product category, and thus, the decision-making framework provided by Blackwell et al. (2006) is useful to understand when TripAdvisor has an impact on the purchase decision of the consumer.

Concluding this section, we will now move on to the theory related to the phenomenon of trust.

4.3. Theory of Trust

As emphasized in the theory of the consumer's decision-making process, making a decision is a complex process and consumers go through different stages in this process. When consumers go through the different stages, many factors may influence their decision.

In this project however, we focus on the influence of trust in the stages of 'information search', 'evaluation of alternatives' and 'post-purchase evaluation'. We do this by examining the influence of online consumer reviews in these stages. More specifically, we ask *how consumers process online consumer hotel reviews on TripAdvisor and what motivates consumers to write online reviews?*

4.3.1. How Trust Occurs Within the Problem Formulation

In order to answer the first part of our problem formulation, it is relevant to highlight that we examine online consumer reviews as the object for trust. This, because it is argued that people read online consumer reviews as external validations, which are able to reduce perceived risk in purchases (Murray, 1991; Xie et al., 2016; Choi et al., 2017; Filieri et al., 2015; Blöbaum, 2016). Considering the fact that “[...] *someone who knows all need not trust [...]*” (Blöbaum, 2016: 5), trust can be considered as “[...] *an intermediate state between knowledge and ignorance*” (Blöbaum, 2016: 5). This however, consequently indicates that online reviews actively contribute and constitute an important role in the phase from ignorance to knowledge. When investigating how consumers process online hotel reviews on TripAdvisor, we therefore delve more specifically into elements of an online review that lead consumers to trust the online review overall.

At the same time, we wish to investigate what motivate consumers to write online reviews. Also in this part of our problem formulation, trust may play a crucial role. How we intend to apply trust in this part of our problem formulation is elaborated in our theory of motivation on page 69-73.

In the following, theory of trust will therefore be elaborated. We do this, by accounting for why trust is important in the context of this project and discuss how the phenomena can be defined. Furthermore, we present how trust and online reviews have been examined in pre-

vious literature in order to create a starting point for, how to apply trust in relation to the first part of our problem formulation.

4.3.1.1. The Importance of Trust in the Context of this Project

Trust is important in relation to the decision-making process because *“we make complex decisions every day, requiring trust in many different entities for different reasons”* (Adali, 2013: 1). At the same time, it is argued that *“[...] trust provides a social mechanism for managing the risk associated with decisions with an eye to an uncertain future”* (Blöbaum, 2016: 4), which means trust constitutes an important role towards new purchases, since these often are connected with a higher risk. Considering trust towards the digital world, it is argued that *“[...] trust is one of the most important factors in determining whether people will purchase online”* (Sparks & Browning, 2011: 1311) and since, *“[...] customers increasingly rely on the Internet for information and purchases [...]”* (Bart et al., 2005: 133) examining trust in this context is therefore highly relevant.

It is argued that digitalization and the Internet have influenced trust in many ways. For example, trustors and trustees have moved closer to each other (Blöbaum, 2016: 22), e.g. *“internet users do not have to rely on a single source; instead, they can add further sources without any major effort”* (Blöbaum, 2016: 22). At the same time, the Internet has enabled eWOM such as online consumer reviews, which compared to traditional word-of-mouth, allow users to quickly and easily obtain specified external validations on products and services from other consumers worldwide.

Online reviews have become extremely popular among consumers. Authors emphasize that consumers trust other consumers (Racherla, 2012; States News Service, 2015) and as argued in the introduction, *“[...] consumers trust other consumers’ recommendations of a product more than company-generated communications”* (Choi et al., 2017: 975). Other tourism research has also shown that content generated by consumers is perceived as more trustworthy than content generated by travel agents, mass media and official destination websites (Dickinger, 2011; Fotis et al., 2012). But why do consumers trust consumer-generated content more than company information? This question may be relevant to emphasize as a starting point towards the research of this project, considering the fact that we examine trust in relation to content generated by consumers.

Blöbaum states: *“In everyday understanding, trust is often linked to positive expectations to the effect that something will never happen or that something will go the way one wishes”* (2016: 5). A hidden economical agenda and too glamorous content from tourism actor websites who are competing against each other in order to convince tourists to visit their place, have resulted in many tourists have gained unrealistic expectations of a travel destination. Thus, when experiencing the place, a disappointment of expectations has occurred resulting in ‘a crisis of trust’ (Blöbaum, 2016). In this relation, it may be highly relevant to refer to the concept of ‘service quality’, which refers to the degree of consistency between the consumer’s expectations or wishes and the experience or perception of the delivered service (Andersen et al., 2011). Andersen et al. present a model based on the concept of service quality. In this model they talk about negative quality gap and positive quality gap (Andersen et al., 2011). Negative quality gap is closely related to the ‘crisis of trust’, since the gap occurs if the consumer experiences that the service do not meet the expectations. The consumer will be disappointed and the degree of dissatisfaction will correspond to the disappointment because the service quality is too poor (Andersen et al., 2011). On the other hand, positive quality gap will occur, if the consumer experiences that the service surpasses the expectations. Here, the consumer will be over satisfied and perhaps even excited because the service quality is experienced very high (Andersen et al., 2011). However, this indicates that expectations and trust is closely connected, which Blöbaum also indicated in the above, stating: *“In everyday understanding, trust is often linked to positive expectations to the effect that something will never happen or that something will go the way one wishes”* (2016: 5). It is relevant to highlight the concept of ‘service quality’, since online reviews may have a crucial impact towards service quality.

It is argued that consumer reviews can boost the feeling of humaneness on a website and thus increase consumer’s level of trust (Karimov et al., 2011). As emphasized in the introduction, eWOM is generally recognized as the most impactful information source in consumers’ decision-making processes. The platform of TripAdvisor have become so popular among consumers that it potentially influence the travel decisions of approximately 455 million consumers who visit the platform each month to get recommendations over various tourism products (TripAdvisor, 2017). Considering the concept of trust in the context of social media, Tang and Liu highlight that *“[...] with trust, we make the mental shortcut by directly seeking information from trustees or trusted entities, which serves a two-fold purpose: without being overwhelmed by excessive information (i.e., mitigated information overload) and with credible infor-*

mation due to the trust placed on the information provider (i.e., increased information credibility). Therefore, trust is crucial in helping social media users collect relevant and reliable information” (2015: 1).

However, sites and platforms that are based on consumer-generated content often allow users to freely post information without any confirmation process that may secure the quality and reliability of the information. Posting information on TripAdvisor, which is the media we take into account, only requires the confirmation of you being a real person, but the social media platform has no quality process of the actual content or information that the user posts. Thus, when consumers process consumer-generated travel information on TripAdvisor, “[...] *the absence of any filtering mechanism may result in inaccurate or false information*” (Nhon & Khuong, 2015: 317) that the user actively use towards their decision-making process. However, in recent years this issue has been raised in several mass media “[...] *reporting stories of hotel managers posing as customers or encouraging their staff to write fake glowing reviews about their organization or even negative reviews about their competitors*” (Filiari et al., 2015: 175). The attention towards fake reviews in mass media has resulted in many users becoming aware of this issue (Jindal & Liu, 2008), which consequently challenges trust towards online reviews.

Although online reviews are susceptible towards manipulation, the reviews still create a feeling of transparency for products and services experienced by other consumers. Blöbaum (2016) emphasizes that this type of data is extremely relevant to evaluations of trust for two reasons. First, because “[...] *they are based on use and evaluation by other trustors*” (Blöbaum, 2016: 13) and second, because “[...] *they are based on data and often appear in numerical form, a method of presentation that is considered to be particularly objective*” (Blöbaum, 2016: 13). In relation to TripAdvisor these numerical forms could e.g. be ratings. Furthermore, Blöbaum stresses that online consumer reviews have “[...] *produced offerings that can be used as heuristics of trustworthiness by recipients without expending major resources*” (2016: 12). Online reviews can therefore, as mentioned above, be considered as external validations, which are able to reduce perceived risk (Blöbaum, 2016).

Trust and risk are related in the sense that “[...] *trust constitutes a relationship shaped by risk, in which the person who trusts makes him- or herself dependent on the person he or she trusts*” (Blöbaum, 2016: v). Furthermore, Blöbaum emphasizes that “*trust only becomes risky when it manifests itself in the form of an action*” (Blöbaum, 2016: 3). Considering the fact that

“only a person who acts risks something and makes himself or herself vulnerable and dependent on the trustee” (Blöbaum, 2016: 3).

Considering the relevance of trust towards online reviews, we therefore find it interesting in this project, to examine how consumers process and evaluate information from other consumers in order to obtain trust. More specifically, we do this by observing and interviewing how consumers process and evaluate online consumer hotel reviews on TripAdvisor when relating to the different elements of the reviews. Furthermore, as later argued in the section of sharing motivation on page 69-73, we also examine the role of trust towards what motivates people to write online reviews.

4.3.2. Defining Trust

Trust is not a simple task to define, considering the fact that *“[...] trust is a broad and complex concept and it has been investigated extensively by multiple disciplines such as psychology, sociology, economics, management, and computational sciences”* (Tang and Liu, 2015: 2). This means that each study has its own definition and perspective on trust, thus, there is no final definition of the concept, however all studies have contributed to a better understanding of the concept in general (Shankar et al., 2002).

Considering some of the studies, psychologists view trust mainly as the state of an individual (Tang and Liu, 2015) and the research of this discipline *“[...] focuses on trust as a state of willingness to make oneself vulnerable”* (Blöbaum, 2016: 6). Sociologists, on the other hand, are more focused about the role and position of trust in social systems and see trust as a relation between trustor and trustee (Blöbaum, 2016; Tang and Liu, 2015). However, these are natural positions considering what the disciplines are.

In this project, we stick to the simple definition by Morgan & Hunt, who define trust as one party's confidence in an exchange partner's reliability and integrity (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). This definition is similar to the one by Moorman et al., who define trust as *“[...] a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence”* (1993: 82). Both definitions emphasize the importance of confidence. In the article of Morgan & Hunt, they state that *“the literature on trust suggests that confidence on the part of the trusting party results from the firm belief that the trustworthy party is reliable and has high integrity, which are associated with such qualities as consistent, competent, honest, fair, responsible, helpful, and benevolent”*

(1994: 23). It is relevant though, to clarify that we in this project consider the individuals belief instead of the firms belief that the trustworthy party is reliable and has high integrity. At the same time, since we focus on online trust, the *qualities* associated with the individual's belief that the trustworthy party is reliable and has high integrity, will also be different. We characterize these, as antecedents of trust instead of qualities and these will be further elaborated in our model later in the theory section on page xx. Although online and offline trust are parallel in many ways, it is important though to stress that there are some central distinctions between each type (Shankar et al., 2002). Looking at offline trust, the object of trust is normally either a human or an organization. Whereas the object in online trust is typically the technology or website (Shankar et al., 2002; Bart et al., 2005), which means that “[...] consumers develop perceptions of trust in a Web site based on their interactions with the site” (Bart et al., 2005: 134). Blöbaum also notices that “[...] digitalization is changing the objects of trust, especially the performances and content that are being offered” (Blöbaum, 2016: 22).

At the same time, it is relevant to highlight that TripAdvisor has a “regulatory” role towards companies in that sense it facilitates external validations from consumers worldwide on companies’ products and services. The platform connects consumers with other consumers, which means the platform is built upon the concept of consumer trust. It is the consumers who are the focal point and those who are by default, producing the content on the website. Therefore, trust in the context of this project, is not directly concerned about consumer-firm trust but more consumer-consumer trust. This however also entails that the above-mentioned distinction between offline and online trust becomes more blurred considering the fact that the object of trust is a combination of the human and the technology. As we consider online reviews on TripAdvisor, as the object of trust, there are both dimensions of offline- and online trust to consider. Filieri et al. emphasize “[...] if travel consumers find that the information from reviews is credible, current, useful, valuable, sufficiently complete and relevant to satisfy their information needs, they will trust CGM³ more because they will think it comes from real customers and not from biased information sources” (2015: 176). This however indicates that the “real” human dimension plays an important role towards trusting TripAdvisor. However, the technological features that TripAdvisor offers towards making an online review such as visuals, text, rating etc. may also play an important role towards people’s interpretation of

³ CGM refers to consumer-generated media e.g. TripAdvisor (Filieri et al., 2015)

online reviews, thus, affecting their level of trust towards the reviews. However, many of these elements will be elaborated in the model of “Antecedents of trust towards consumer-generated content on TripAdvisor and its influence on purchase decision” on page 62-69.

4.3.3. Trust and Online Reviews

Several authors have considered trust in relation to online reviews, and we will now sum up some of the studies in order to form a theoretical starting point for applying trust theory in this project. However, before looking deeper into the studies, it is relevant to emphasize the following: “[...] *When carrying out studies on trust, it is necessary to establish in each case what it is that trust is being directed at in a specific situation*” (Blöbaum, 2016: 5). In continuation hereof, Blöbaum highlights the importance of being specific towards which *factors* that influence the evaluation of trust. These factors are also recognized in the literature as “[...] *antecedents of trust or as perceived trustworthiness*” (Blöbaum, 2016: 10). He further argues that these factors can belong to the object of trust (Blöbaum, 2016). At the same time it is relevant to highlight that these “[...] *factors differ depending on whether the object of trust is a performance, content, a person, an organization, or a sphere of society*” (Blöbaum, 2016: 10). In this project, as mentioned, we consider the object of trust as online reviews on TripAdvisor. Therefore, we choose to enhance studies, which have examined factors or antecedents of trust towards online reviews in order to create a theoretical foundation and draw on previous tested theory when creating the theoretical framework for this project.

Starting with the study of Elwalda et al. (2016), who investigated what the effects are of the perceived derived attributes of online consumer reviews on consumer trust and purchase intention. The authors used a model of perceived derived attributes (PDA model), which argue that ‘perceived usefulness’, ‘perceived ease of use’, ‘perceived enjoyment’ and ‘perceived control’ have an impact on consumer trust and purchase intentions. They found that consumer trust in an e-vendor and their intentions to shop online are considerably affected by ‘perceived usefulness’, ‘perceived ease of use’ and ‘perceived enjoyment’ derived from online reviews. Furthermore, they found that ‘perceived control’ resulting from online reviews significantly affects consumer’s intentions and trust in e-vendors, especially for consumers who often use online reviews before they make a purchase (Elwalda et al., 2016).

Another study proposes a conceptual model to understand “[...] *what independent varia-*

bles influence the perception of the Perceiving Information Credibility and how Perceiving Information Credibility affects the Trust and Travel Decision-making” (Nhon & Khuong, 2015: 326). The model suggests ‘Internet experience’, ‘Openness’, ‘Source identity’ and ‘Similarity’ as factors influencing consumer perception of credibility of online travel-related information in online communities (Nhon & Khuong, 2015). The study found that the degree of perception towards online information credibility by the consumer has a positive effect on trust and the travel decision of the consumer (Nhon & Khuong, 2015).

The study of Filieri et al. (2015) sheds light on TripAdvisor. In this study the authors investigate why consumers trust TripAdvisor. To do this, they test a model of antecedents and consequences of trust towards consumer-generated media. This model has similarities with the model incorporated in the study of Nhon & Khuong (2015). It considers the antecedents of online trust as ‘Perceived Source Credibility’, ‘Information Quality’, ‘Perceived Website Quality’, ‘User Satisfaction with previous experiences’ and ‘User Experience proficiency’ (Filieri et al., 2015). The findings of the study indicate that information quality, website quality, and consumer satisfaction influence trust towards consumer-generated media. The authors also found that “[...] *trust influences consumers intention to follow other users’ advice and to foster positive word of mouth*” (Filieri et al., 2015: 174).

The last study we highlight comes from Zhang et al. (2014). This study examines “[...] *the influence of online reviews on consumers’ decision-making [...]*” (Zhang et al., 2014: 78). In the study, the authors developed a model, which they call ‘heuristic-systematic model’ in order to examine the influence of online reviews on consumers behavioral intentions. This model tests if ‘Source Credibility’, ‘Argument Quality’ and ‘Perceived Quantity of Reviews’ affects consumers purchase intention. The antecedents of this model therefore also overlap with some of the antecedents emphasized in the other studies.

As mentioned, we draw on studies that have examined trust in relation to online reviews in order to conduct a model that can be used as an analytical tool to answer the first part of our problem formulation, namely: *How do consumer process online hotel reviews on TripAdvisor?* In the following, we therefore present the model that will be used as an analytical tool to find out how consumers process online consumer hotel reviews on TripAdvisor.

4.3.2. Model for Analysis Part 1

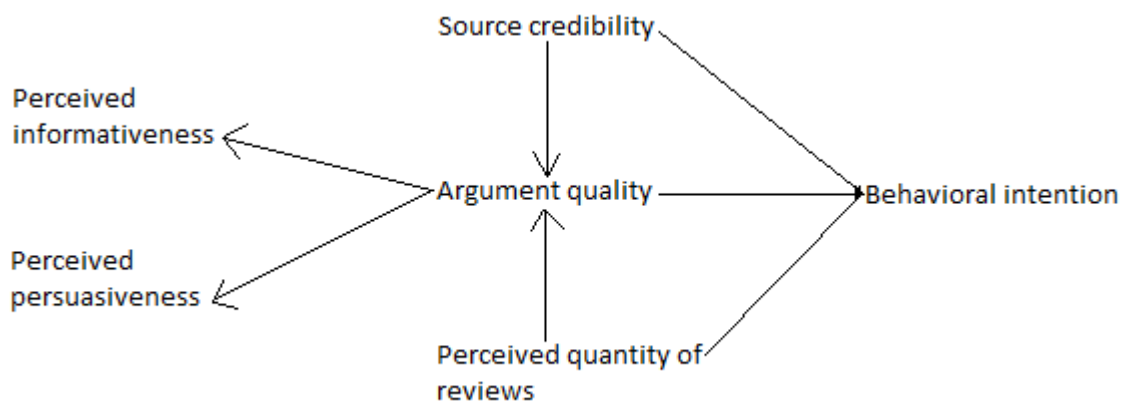
When investigating the first part of our problem formulation concerning how consumers process online hotel reviews on TripAdvisor, we find it important to consider the consumer-generated elements and factors of the platform that has an influence on the purchase decision-making. Therefore, a model that considers the impact of consumer-generated content on TripAdvisor on the purchase decision-making will be relevant as analytical tool.

As mentioned earlier, travel products can be difficult to assess in terms of quality before a purchase, as such experiential products are intangible (Liu & Park, 2015). Therefore, consumers search for information online about these products to reduce the perceived risk when planning a trip. User-generated online reviews of travel experiences on reliable websites are perceived as unbiased and trustworthy information that can prevent the consumer from regretting their purchase and instead improve their decision-making (Filieri et al., 2015; Park & Nicolau, 2015). Travel review sites, like TripAdvisor, contain a huge amount of this kind of user-generated information about travel products. However, many consumers are not capable of processing this amount of information (Fang et al., 2016; Liu & Park, 2015). Earlier studies have researched the impact of online travel reviews on business performance and found that online sales were boosted by the reviews (Ye et al., 2009). Other studies have focused on the factors of online reviews influencing the consumers in order to investigate what information has an impact on the traveller's planning. Research on the factors making online travel reviews useful for the consumer has been conducted (Fang et al., 2016; Liu & Park, 2015), along with the significance of the perceived trust in the reviews (Filieri et al., 2015; Sparks & Browning, 2011), and more specifically on how the reviews influence the purchase decision-making of the consumer (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009; Park & Nicolau, 2015; Zhang et al., 2014). This leads us to the inspiration for creating our analytical model for this project.

4.3.2.1. Inspiration for Our Model

As mentioned in the theory of trust, Zhang et al. (2014) developed a model to identify factors of online travel reviews that were important to the consumer's purchase decision-making. The model is called the heuristic-systematic model. This model divides factors of heuristic and systematic character influencing the argument quality of the reviews, which further influence the behavioral intention (the purchase decision-making) of the consumer (Zhang et al., 2014).

We utilize a modified version of this model as analytical tool when analyzing how consumers process hotel reviews on TripAdvisor. We find it necessary to modify the model, since the heuristic-systematic model is limited to only the textual review, whereas our project focus zooms out and discuss on the complete online review including pictures and ratings. The original model of Zhang et al. (2014) is illustrated below and the different factors of the model will now be elaborated along with our additions for the modified model that will be presented at the end of this section.



Source: Zhang et al. (2014)

The systematic factors of the model are: ‘argument quality’, ‘perceived informativeness’, and ‘perceived persuasiveness’. The heuristics factors of the model are: ‘source credibility’ and ‘perceived quantity of reviews’. We start off, by presenting the systematic factors.

Systematic factors are characterized by the cognitive elements associated with decision-making, where people spend time processing the information provided to make the decision and evaluate arguments for choosing one alternative over another (Zhang et al., 2014).

4.3.2.1.1. Argument Quality

Argument quality refers to: “[...] the strength or plausibility of persuasive argumentation” (Zhang et al., 2014: 81). The consumer has to perceive the arguments of the review as convincing, which can lead them to either deciding to purchase or not purchase the product reviewed, as they find the information valid. Argument quality is measured by examining whether the information of the review is complete, consistent, accurate and adequate (Zhang et

al., 2014). Two dimensions of argument quality are proposed in the model, which are perceived informativeness and perceived persuasiveness.

4.3.2.1.2. Perceived Informativeness and Perceived Persuasiveness

Perceived informativeness is the consumer's perception of the overall information quality of the review, while perceived persuasiveness is how the consumer generally perceives the review as being persuasive. According to Zhang et al. (2014), online reviews are consumer-oriented information evaluating products and services narrated with a certain level of objective product descriptions, and thus have an informative function that affects the overall argument quality of the review. Information quality reflects the relevancy, sufficiency, accuracy, credibility, and usefulness of the information provided in the review, and has an impact on purchase intention (Filieri et al., 2015). Furthermore, a review often also contains persuasive language with more subjective attitudes and emotional expressions that is likely to influence the consumer, and thus be more persuasive in nature and affect the argument quality (Zhang et al., 2014). Therefore, these two systematic dimensions are argued to be important elements having an impact on the overall perceived argument quality of the review, which can further lead to influencing the decision-making of the consumer. Since these two dimensions compose argument quality, we have chosen to create these as one element in our model; eliminating 'Argument Quality' as an element and gathering the two dimensions (Perceived Informativeness and Perceived Persuasiveness) in one, which will be shown in the model later in this section.

The heuristic factors of the model are the elements of 'source credibility' and 'perceived quantity of reviews'. Heuristic factors are characterized by relying on little information that can reduce the cognitive burden and time cost associated with decision-making. People can scrutinize few cues and alternative choices to make a decision, and heuristic decision-making reduces the storing of information in memory, as the information necessary to make the decision also is reduced (Shah & Oppenheimer, 2008). Given the notion that it can be difficult for users to process the huge amount of information on online review platforms as TripAdvisor, consumers tend to seek heuristic cues to simplify the information and reduce time costs (Park & Nicolau, 2015).

4.3.2.1.3. Source Credibility

Source credibility is the consumer's overall credibility of the source providing the review, and captures the consumer's perceived trustworthiness of the reviewer (Zhang et al., 2014). Users develop expectancies regarding the argument quality of online reviews from credible sources. Such expectations of the validity of arguments may strengthen the final evaluation of argument quality, and thus source credibility can have an influence on the argument quality of the review (Zhang et al., 2014). We have learned that TripAdvisor has functions of ranking systems and reputation levels of users providing reviews to the platform. This makes it possible for users to get information about the reviewers, like how many reviews they provide and the overall quality of their reviews. This makes it accessible for users to find out to what extent the sources are credible. If the consumer finds the source credible and the information provided reliable, the review will be more likely to have an impact on the decision-making (Zhang et al., 2014).

4.3.2.1.4. Perceived Quantity

Perceived quantity of reviews is the consumer's perception regarding the volume of reviews and the popularity of corresponding products within online review sites. The number of arguments equals argument strength and people believe that a consensus of opinions is correct. Thus, the perceived quantity of reviews is useful in the purchase decision-making process, as the purchase confidence can be improved through observing or imitating other users' purchase behavior (Zhang et al., 2014). Users will favor the consensus of a large amount of reviews, which bias the processing of these reviews positively, and the argument quality will be perceived as more persuasive and informative. Therefore, the perceived quantity of reviews can influence argument quality (Zhang et al., 2014). On TripAdvisor numerical indicators makes it easy for the users to have an overview of the number of reviews on certain travel products. This makes it an important heuristic cue influencing the purchase decision-making.

4.3.2.2. Additions to Creating our Analytical Model

We will use the heuristic-systematic model as inspiration for the analytical model used in this project. However, as we investigate other features than the written user-generated review itself, we will adjust and add two other factors that potentially can influence the decision-making process when the consumer uses TripAdvisor to choose their travel product. These two factors are ‘valence of reviews’ and ‘visuals of reviews’. As mentioned earlier, TripAdvisor has other user-generated content than the written review itself. The features of ratings system and user-generated pictures attached to the reviews should also be considered as having an impact on the consumer using TripAdvisor.

4.3.2.2.1. Valence of Reviews

When addressing the rating system, where TripAdvisor users can rate travel products, the concept of valence should be considered. Valence refers to the positive or negative feelings towards the product being reviewed (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009). On TripAdvisor ratings (bubble ratings) is a function that indicates the positive or negative attitudes towards the products. Therefore, the user can easily get an overview of the quantity of positive and negative reviews, which is the overall valence of the travel product as shown on the platform. However, as we in this study have eliminated differences in the overall rating of the travel product, valence will not be restricted to this measure but also encompass the individual rating of each of the reviews and their positive/negative attitude towards the travel product reviewed. Valence can also be argued to influence the argument quality of each individual review, as strong positive or negative attitudes towards the travel product in form of ratings may strengthen review arguments of positive or negative character towards the product. However, the influence of valence on the trustworthiness of the reviews could be questioned, and thus this will also be discussed.

We argue that valence in form of ratings can be considered a heuristic cue, as it takes little effort to evaluate and compare products on basis of ratings, and it reduces time costs by being measured on a basis of quantitative information. Not all research explains valence as a decisive factor in the consumer’s purchase decision-making. Vermeulen and Seegers (2009) found that both positive and negative reviews improve the probability of consumers to consider booking a hotel, as negative reviews contributes to hotel awareness. However, other studies

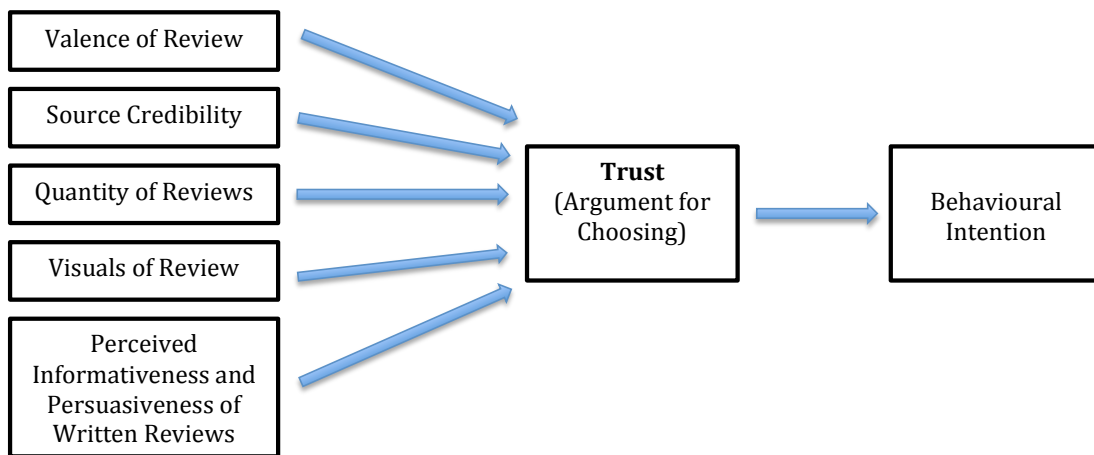
point out valence in form of star ratings in reviews as an important element of influencing the consumer's decision-making (Park & Nicolau, 2015; Ogut & Tas, 2012; Sparks & Browning, 2011). Thus we argue this as a factor that can possibly have an impact on the way consumers process hotel reviews on TripAdvisor.

4.3.2.2.2. Visuals of Reviews

The pictures attached to the reviews might also impact the decision-making of the consumer, and should therefore also be considered as an important factor influencing the consumer. It seems that there has not been much focus on visuals in earlier studies concerning the influence of user-generated online reviews. However, studies have investigated the influence of pictures in travel advertising (Walters et al., 2007) and destination websites (Lee & Gretzel, 2012) on consumer's attitudes towards travel products and their purchase intention, and found that pictures had a positive effect on both attitudes and purchase intention. This can be explained by mental imagery processing, which is a way of processing information and keeping it in memory through, e.g. visuals like pictures that stimulates the mental imagery (Yang et al., 2017).

The study of Yang et al. (2017) investigated the effect of both textual and visual content in online restaurant reviews and found that images was the most important factor affecting both review usefulness and review enjoyment. Taking these earlier studies into consideration, we argue that pictures in reviews may play an important part in influencing the consumer's purchase intention, and thus we add it as a factor in our model. We argue that visuals in form of pictures are also heuristic cues, as they are time saving information that is easy to process for the user. Moreover, as mentioned, they are easily stored in memory because of the mental imagery and require little cognitive effort.

Considering these additions and adjustments from the original heuristic-systematic model developed by Zhang et al. (2014) our final analytical model will be as illustrated below.



Model 1: Antecedents of trust towards consumer-generated content on TripAdvisor and its influence on purchase decision.

Filieri et al. (2015) proposed a model to investigate why travellers trust TripAdvisor. This model is quite similar to the model of Zhang et al. (2014), only being different by proposing factors influencing the consumer's perceived trust instead of behavioral intentions. As we have argued that trust is an antecedent for making purchase decisions, we propose this as an element of our model. Thereby, the five antecedents of trust in our model leads to the overall trust of the reviews consequently strengthening the argument for choosing a travel product or service, and thereby influencing the consumer's behavioral intention towards product purchase.

4.3.2.3. Critique of the Model

An important issue to consider when looking at our model is that the different antecedents or elements are not as easily segregated as the model might suggest. The elements are often intertwined, but in order to make it approachable in relation to the analysis, we have to make a clear distinction between them.

Another critique is that the model might suggest visually that all of the elements lead to trust. However, this might also be the opposite; namely distrust. The elements can thereby appear as both arguments for choosing a product but also arguments to why not. In the case of this project we focus on what elements the participants trust, which is why the model is pre-

sented as it is. However, we know that we cannot discuss what they trust without discussing what they do not trust.

Having determined the model, which will form the base of the analysis of the first part of our problem formulation, we will now move on to the online sharing motivation which is our theoretical foundation of the analysis of the second part of our problem formulation.

4.4. Online Sharing Motivations

To answer the second part of our problem formulation of what motivates consumers to write online reviews on TripAdvisor, theory of online sharing motivations is highly relevant. The management of online travel communities relies on members to share their knowledge (Lee et al., 2014), and the underlying motives for sharing can enhance the level of knowledge sharing in online travel communities (Yoo & Gretzel, 2011; Fang & Chiu, 2010), such as TripAdvisor. In this section the psychology behind human motivation will be presented along with different kinds of motivations directed more specifically at online sharing. This will finally lead us to a framework that can be used to analyze specific motivations for contributing to online reviews on TripAdvisor.

4.4.1. Motivation in General

According to Ryan and Deci *“to be motivated means to be moved to do something”* (2000: 54), and motivation is a key determinant for general behavior (Lin, 2007; Jiming & Xijian, 2013), while Gleitman (1991) states that motivation refers to the human psychological state, related to the fact that their actions are directed. Thus, motivation can explain why people take action to do certain kinds of things. In this study, in order to understand why consumers share knowledge on TripAdvisor in form of reviews, we will try to understand the human psychology behind the motivation to share this knowledge, as TripAdvisor is an online platform in which *“[...] consumers often partake in discussions whose goals include attempts to inform and influence fellow consumers about products and brands”* (Kozinets, 2002: 2).

To better understand the motivation of knowledge sharing, different motivation theories have been proposed. Taking into consideration that the consumers sharing their knowledge

on TripAdvisor do it voluntarily, the theories proposed in this section will be in the context of voluntarily knowledge sharing motivation.

A traditional theory of motivation is Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs* (1970) that is based on human needs that motivate people to take certain action. The motives are classified into categories of (1) physiological needs, (2) safety needs, (3) needs of belonging, (4) esteem needs, and (5) self-actualization needs (Maslow, 1970). Maslow also distinguishes between internal and external psychological needs that motivate people to take action (Maslow, 1987), with the internal needs for self-esteem and self-actualization and the external needs for belonging, involving recognition from peers. Thus, considering motivations behind knowledge sharing the three latter needs in Maslow's hierarchy can be relevant.

Taking these types of motivations further, Ryan and Deci (2000) also make the distinction between internal and external motivations in their concept called the *Self-Determination Theory*. They distinguish between intrinsic motivations and extrinsic motivations, which both derive from personal motivation (Wang et al., 2016). This is a way of categorizing the needs and expectations of individuals that motivates to behave in certain way. Here intrinsic motivations are driven by a personal interest in the activity of sharing knowledge itself, where any given action is taken for the inherent enjoyment of helping others or simply because they find it interesting, gain knowledge from it, or enjoy the challenging aspect of doing it. There are no external rewards or pressure to increase the motivation; instead people act out of free choice (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Gagné, 2009). On the other hand, extrinsic motivation focuses on goal-driven reasons and refers to doing something because it leads to a separable outcome. It can be driven by some kind of reward like gaining recognition, gaining money, or to be beat others in competition. Moreover, such motivations can also arise to avoid any kind of punishment. It is typically based on the calculation of the cost and benefits associated with the action taken. If the benefits exceed the costs, people will be motivated to take action (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Gagné, 2009).

Ryan and Deci (2000) further divide extrinsic motivations into controlled and autonomous motivations; the controlled motivations is behavior out of external pressure like seeking approval from oneself or others, or, as mentioned earlier, gaining rewards or avoiding punishment. The autonomous motivations are self-determined with internal goals and include actions that are personally meaningful and in line with own values or own goals. Thus, the extent of internalization of motives is decisive for whether the motivation is controlled or auto-

nomous. Intrinsic motivations are also autonomous self-determined actions, as they derive from personal interests and enjoyment (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Concerning knowledge sharing, Gagné and Deci (2005) found out that autonomous motivations have more positive effects on intentions to share than controlled motivations, as such motivations seem to increase voluntarily actions and pro-social behavior. Furthermore, autonomous actions lead to higher quality of performance (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This can also entail the quality of knowledge sharing.

Ajzen (1991) proposes another distinction between the different kinds of motivations that influence a certain behavior. Three factors were identified as influences of intentions; (1) attitudes toward the behavior, (2) social norms regarding the behavior, and (3) beliefs about one's control over the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Attitudes toward the behavior refer to the degree to which a certain behavior is evaluated favorable or unfavorable. Thus, the outcome of the behavior is considered. Social norms regarding behavior are the social pressure, which influences whether or not to perform the behavior. It includes what other people and peers think about the action or behavior and the motivation is affected by their opinion. Here, external factors highly influence the motivation. Beliefs about one's control over the behavior are about having the necessary skills, opportunities and resources to engage in the behavior. The ease or difficulty of performing the behavior influence motivations and the self-efficacy of a person is decisive for whether or not any action is taken (Gagné & Deci, 2005).

4.4.2. Motivations for Online Knowledge Sharing

Several authors have investigated motivations for online knowledge sharing, and both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations have been found to be positively related to the willingness to share knowledge on social media (Yoo & Gretzel, 2008; Jiming & Xinjian, 2013; Wang et al., 2016). Studies of the relationship between personality and intrinsic and extrinsic sharing motivations (Yoo & Gretzel, 2011) as well as the relationship between the nature of the shared content and motivations (Ekdale, 2010) have also been conducted. Wang (2016) found that intrinsic motivation had a more significant impact on online travel experience sharing than extrinsic motivations. Yoo and Gretzel's (2008) investigation of motivations was directed at creating reviews on TripAdvisor, but also showed that intrinsic motivation was the driving force. More specifically, users were driven by positive motives like enjoyment, positive self-enhancement, helping travel product providers and concern for other consumers rather than

the need to vent because of dissatisfaction (Yoo & Gretzel, 2008). Others have also provided a more detailed framework of motivations, distinguishing between more than the two factors of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in their studies of online knowledge sharing. E.g. material rewards, reputation, and reciprocity have been found as important factors motivating knowledge sharing in virtual communities (Jiming & Xinjian, 2013), which can all be categorized as extrinsic motivations.

According to Yoo and Gretzel (2011) tourist-generated content on social media is mostly motivated by altruistic and hedonic benefits. This was supported by the study of Lee and Hyun (2016) who more specifically studied online travel communities, like TripAdvisor. They found altruism (when the user share content because they enjoy helping others) having a significant impact on why people share travel knowledge on these platforms. In this study other deciding factors were reciprocity benefits (getting something in return when contributing to online travel communities), enhancing personal reputation, and trust (the level of trust in other member's knowledge sharing in online travel communities) (Lee & Hyun, 2016). Here we see both intrinsic motivations (altruism) and extrinsic motivations (reciprocity and enhancing reputation) as crucial factors, while trust is more difficult to categorize. However, review sites have been found to be the most trustworthy social media platform when it comes to travel information (Munar & Jacobsen, 2013). Therefore, trust may also be a decisive factor when looking at motivations for sharing in relation to TripAdvisor.

Munar and Jacobsen (2014) conducted a study of motivations of sharing travel experiences online, with a distinction between the different kinds of social media, like Facebook, Twitter and review sites such as TripAdvisor. The study distinguishes between self-centered motivations and community-based motivations. The self-centered motivations include recognition from peers, increasing social ties, augmentation of self-esteem, enjoyment of online activity, and getting something in return (reciprocity) (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). Here we see both intrinsic (augmentation of self-esteem and enjoyment of online activity) and extrinsic (recognition from peers, increasing social ties, and reciprocity) motivations. Community-based motivations are based on solidarity feelings like helping other online users by providing practical travel related information (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). Both types of motivation were found as influencing the online information sharing, but regarding review sites like TripAdvisor, community-based motivations were the dominating factor (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014).

Ekdale et al. (2010) argue that motivation depends on the kind of content shared online. In their study of blogging motivation they found that in blogs focusing on personal and social life, intrinsic motivations ranks high, whereas in blogs about politics and society, extrinsic motivations is more important. This is supported by the study of Jiming and Xinjian (2013) who found that intrinsic motivations are more important when sharing hedonic information, which relates to information of personal and social life. On the other hand, extrinsic motivations are more important when sharing utilitarian information, which is more practical oriented. Thus, the nature of the content shared online seems decisive for whether intrinsic or extrinsic motivations are most positively related to the act of online knowledge sharing.

4.4.3. A Model for the Motivations for Writing Reviews on TripAdvisor

In this section, we present the model, which will be used in the second part of the analysis, answering the last part of the problem formulation: *What motivates consumers to write reviews on TripAdvisor?*

Reviewing earlier literature on motivation, we see that researchers mainly make the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Thus, we also find it appropriate to consider this distinction in our research. However, we would like more detailed proposals on what motivates consumers to share their knowledge and experiences on TripAdvisor. Moreover, we learn from more specific investigations on online sharing of travel experiences that several subcategories that can be related to both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations have been found as significant drivers for sharing reviews online. However, to provide a more detailed model of motivations, we will add motivational factors that are difficult to categorize as neither extrinsic nor intrinsic motivations. These categories will be called feeling-based motivations and trust-based motivation, which thus will leave us with 4 main categories. We argue that the role of extrinsic and intrinsic motivations can still be discussed along with the additional motivational main categories. The 4 main categories will contain 8 subcategories to make our own model as detailed as possible.

4.4.3.1. Intrinsic Motivations: Altruism, Self-enhancement, and Enjoyment

Regarding intrinsic factors, altruism has been found as a significant factor for online information sharing (Yoo and Gretzel, 2008; Yoo and Gretzel, 2011; Lee and Hyun, 2016; Munar & Jacobsen, 2014) along with both personal self-enhancement and enjoyment of sharing (Yoo & Gretzel, 2008; Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). We argue that these intrinsic motivational factors may encourage TripAdvisor users to write reviews as they share advice and recommendations about travel product that can be helpful information to other users in their travel decision-making. This can lead the reviewer to conduct altruistic behavior because they like to be helpful and they know that can make other people happy with their travel purchase. Moreover, reviews can also be helpful constructive feedback to the companies developing the products evaluated, and thus the altruistic behavior is both directed at other consumers and the product providers.

Providing helpful information can also make the users feel good about themselves, increase their feeling of self-efficacy (Munar & Jacobsen, 2013) and maintain or enhance their self-esteem because they are being useful to others, which is why personal self-enhancement may be an important factor too. Enhancing one's self-esteem can be driven by positive recognition from others, but as review sites has a relatively low level of social interaction compared to other social media platforms, like Facebook, self-enhancement is related to the user's inner feelings when contributing with useful knowledge of their own travel experience (Yoo & Gretzel, 2008).

Furthermore, the users could simply just find it entertaining being online and see it as a pleasurable hobby in itself to share information with others. The enjoyment of sharing online information can be applicable to all sorts of social media platforms, because of the high user involvement. Therefore, the factor of enjoyment of sharing will also be relevant to consider in relation to TripAdvisor reviews.

4.4.3.2. Extrinsic Motivations: Reciprocity and Reputation

From the studies reviewed in this section, the most common extrinsic motivations factors influencing the desire to share online information are reciprocity and recognition from peers (Jiming & Xinjian, 2013; Lee and Hyun, 2016; Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). When providing valuable travel information in reviews, the reviewer might expect other users to do the same. This

can be an unspoken agreement between users where help goes both ways. This can encourage the sharing of information about travel experiences on TripAdvisor knowing you will get something in return. This can also be the other way around; when you feel that you owe sharing your own information, because you have been provided with useful information yourself (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). Yoo & Gretzel (2008) found that reciprocity can also be applied in the consumer to company context. This implies that the consumer will return the favor when having a positive experience with a travel product by writing positive reviews on travel platforms (Yoo & Gretzel, 2008). Finally, reciprocity can also imply receiving some kind of reward for contributing with knowledge (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014; Lee & Hyun, 2016). On TripAdvisor you don't receive anything from the platform when contributing with reviews. However, there might be other external factors that could possibly reward you. For example, a company could pay persons to write positive reviews about them, which is why it could also be important to consider this aspect of reciprocity.

Considering recognition from peers, TripAdvisor has its own rating system, where the reviewers are ranked by other users on the basis of the usefulness of their reviews. This can enhance the reputation of the reviewer on the platform. Thus, we argue that enhancing user's reputation may also be an important motivational factor, encouraging people to write reviews on TripAdvisor.

4.4.3.3. Additional Factors: Feeling-Based Motivation and Trust-Based Motivation

Besides these mentioned intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factor, we propose three additional elements in our framework; venting negative feelings, expressing positive feelings, and trust in platform. These additional factors can be divided into categories, where venting and expressing positive feelings can be categorized as feeling-based motivations, whereas trust in the platform stands alone in the category of trust-based motivation.

4.4.3.3.1. Feeling-Based Motivations: Venting and Expressing Positive Feelings

When consumers provide companies with feedback in form of reviews or inform other consumers about a product, it may not be with the intention of being constructive or informative, but rather to vent negative feelings because of an unsatisfactory product experience. This is a

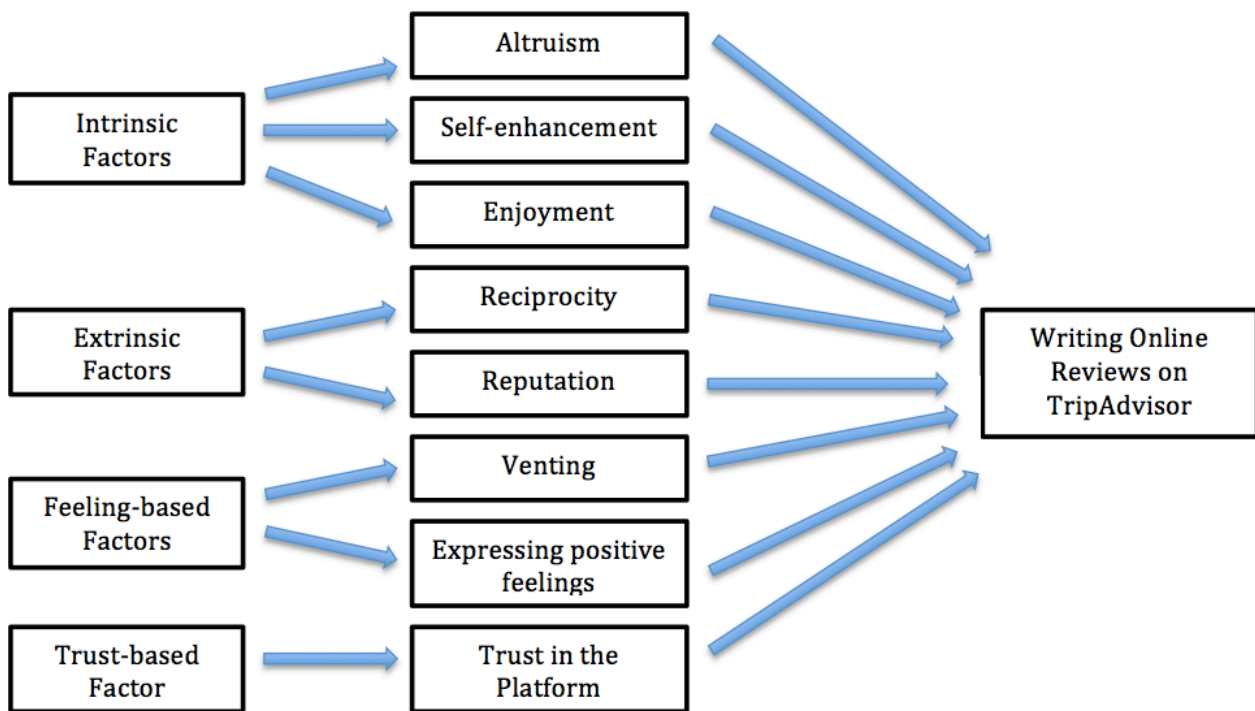
way for consumers to get frustration off their chest (Yoo & Gretzel, 2008), and thus is based on feelings rather than reflection. The study of Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) also suggested this factor as an important motivator for online content sharing. As travel products implies high consumer involvement and the cost of these products are usually high, the expectations of the product will also often be high, which makes it more likely for the consumer to get dissatisfied (Yoo & Gretzel, 2008). Thus, we argue that venting could be apparent on a site like TripAdvisor.

In the same vein, expressing your feelings could also be of positive character rather than of negative. A positive travel experience can make consumers want to share their joy and satisfaction with other consumers or the product provider. This can be done by the consumer expressing these feelings in online communities (Hennig & Thurau, 2004), which makes expressing positive feelings a factor to be considered when writing reviews on TripAdvisor.

4.4.3.3.2. Trust-Based Motivation: Trust in Platform

As mentioned earlier, the level of trust in other member's information sharing can be a motivational factor for writing reviews. This was suggested in the study of Lee & Hyun (2016) and we find it as a relevant factor in our research, as review sites have been found as the most trustworthy social media platforms (Munar & Jacobsen, 2013). This makes it possible that trust in the information provided on the platform, and in the site itself, can be an important factor encouraging consumers to write reviews on TripAdvisor themselves.

This leads us to the final model consisting of the 8 proposed motivational factors. An illustration can be seen below:



Model 2: Motivation for Writing Online Reviews on TripAdvisor

4.4.3.3. Critique of the Model

In the model we have divided the motivations into 8 factors but they are not necessarily as easily divided as shown. A lot of the motivations can be mixed and the consumers can be motivated by more than one of the 8 at the same time.

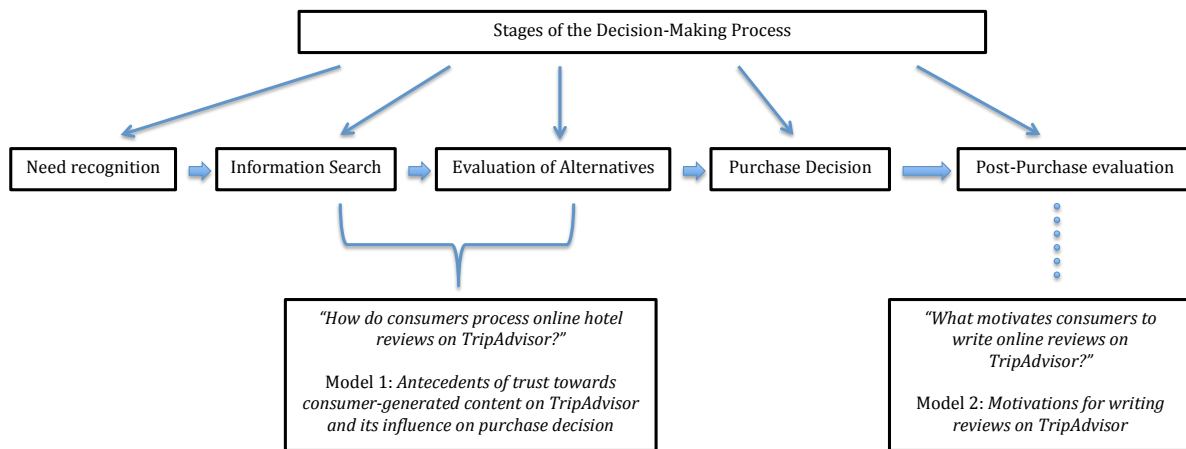
Moreover, having these motivations are not equal to writing an online review, as the model might suggest, but a review can be a result of a motivation. Meaning, a consumer can be motivated by different factors but the motivation has to be followed by the action of writing before resulting in an online review. An example could be a consumer, who is motivated by altruism; to help others, but is stopped by practical issues like time consumption or a confusing platform process.

After having presented the four parts of the theory (TripAdvisor, Online Consumer Behavior, Trust and Online Sharing Motivation), we will now move on to present how the parts are interrelated in the following section.

4.5. Theoretical Framework

We will now present the theoretical framework of this project. The framework illustrates how each theoretical section presented above occurs in the process towards answering our problem formulation. It therefore also illustrates the inter-correlation of our problem formulation. However, before elaborating further on the framework, an illustration will be presented.

The Influence of TripAdvisor on the Consumer Decision-Making Process



Framework: The Influence of TripAdvisor on the Consumer Decision-Making Process

4.5.1. Understanding the Framework

This framework illustrates a theoretical process of how we will answer our problem formulation. The framework should overall be understood as how TripAdvisor potentially has an impact on the stages of the consumer's decision-making process in our project.

In the theoretical framework, the stages of the consumer's decision-making process are therefore highlighted. However, the stages of 'recognition need' and 'purchase' are only highlighted in order to illustrate the natural passages of the consumer's decision-making process. This however entails that we work more superficial with the stages of 'recognition need' and 'purchase', but we find it crucial to include these stages in the framework in order to illustrate an overall understanding of how the stages of the decision-making process are connected in relation to TripAdvisor.

The main reason for going into the stages of ‘information search’, ‘evaluation of alternatives’ and ‘post-purchase evaluation’ in depth, is due to the problem formulation, where we wish to find out *how consumers process online hotel reviews on TripAdvisor and what motivates consumers to write online reviews on TripAdvisor*.

When investigating the first part of our problem formulation, it is the stages of ‘information search’ and/or ‘evaluation of alternatives’ that we work within. Within these stages, we investigate the influence of TripAdvisor and investigate how consumers process online hotel reviews on TripAdvisor and what elements or antecedents of trust in the online reviews that have an influence on their behavioral intention, which potentially lead them closer to their purchase decision. In order to find out how people process online hotel reviews on TripAdvisor, we use the model presented in our theory on page 68, “Antecedents of trust towards online reviews on TripAdvisor and its influence on the purchase decision”. However in order to use this model, we find it necessary to set up a prerequisite, namely:

- *Consumers process online hotel reviews on TripAdvisor in order to obtain higher levels of trust, consequently leading them closer to their purchase decision.*

As emphasized earlier in this project, it is generally accepted among many academics that consumers use online reviews in order to obtain higher levels of trust towards their purchase decision (Lee et al., 2011; Racherla et al., 2012; Filieri et al., 2015; Nhon & Khuong, 2015; Gavalan et al., 2018). Therefore, basing this model on the prerequisite that *consumers process online hotel reviews on TripAdvisor in order to obtain higher levels of trust, consequently leading them closer to their purchase decision* is well-supported by many academics.

However, as illustrated in the framework, we also work within the stage of ‘post-purchase evaluation’ in the consumer’s decision-making process. Within this process, we investigate *what motivate consumers to write online reviews on TripAdvisor*, which therefore reflects the second part of our problem formulation. To find out what motivates consumers, we utilize the model: ‘Motivations for Writing Online Reviews on TripAdvisor’, as described in our theory on page xx. This model is used as our analytical tool to find out what motivates consumers to write online reviews on TripAdvisor.

As illustrated in our framework, we have made a *dotted line* from the consumers’ stage of ‘post-purchase evaluation’ to writing an online review on TripAdvisor. This however, indica-

tes that the consumer does not necessarily write an online review on TripAdvisor in their stage of ‘post-purchase evaluation’.

4.5.2. Critique of the framework

We will now account for possible limitations of our framework.

One possible limitation of this framework may be that it reflects that we monitor the same consumer towards his/her decision-making process, which would entail that we should find out how this specific consumer process online hotel reviews on TripAdvisor and what motivates this specific consumer afterwards, to write an online review on TripAdvisor. This however, is a possible limitation of the framework, since we do not intend to find correlations of one specific consumer’s decision-making process and the influence of TripAdvisor. At first, we investigate the two parts of our problem formulation independently, which entails that we do not intend to monitor the same consumer. When our two parts of the problem formulation are analyzed, we gather the problem formulation and discuss common denominators between consumers who process online hotel reviews on TripAdvisor and consumers who write online reviews on TripAdvisor.

5. Analysis

In this chapter, we will present our analysis and thereby seek the answer of our problem formulation, namely: *How do consumers process online hotel reviews on TripAdvisor and what motivates consumers to write online reviews on TripAdvisor?*

The analysis will be divided into two parts; one addressing the first part of our problem formulation and one addressing the second part of our problem formulation.

5.1. Analysis Part 1 – Processing Online Reviews

In this part of our analysis, we use the model presented in our theory of trust: “*Antecedents of trust towards consumer-generated content on TripAdvisor and its influence on purchase decision*”. The model is used as an analytical tool to investigate how consumers process online ho-

tel reviews on TripAdvisor and thereby answer the first part of our problem formulation. This model will help us examine what elements within the online reviews consumers' trust, consequently leading them closer to their purchase decision.

More specifically, in this part of the analysis, we therefore go through each antecedent of trust, as considered in the model, and analyze our empirical data on the basis of each antecedent. This will first and foremost tell us, how consumers process online reviews on TripAdvisor and further give us an idea of how each antecedent of the overall online consumer review has an impact on the consumer's purchase decision.

As emphasized in the theory on page 62-68, the model distinguishes between heuristic and systematic factors. We start this analysis considering the heuristic factors after which the systematic factors will be analyzed. Lastly, we discuss 'Argument for Choosing', which is the combination of all of the antecedents that results in whether consumers will trust the overall review and consequently affect their purchase decision.

5.1.1. Valence of Review

In this section of the analysis we will analyze the data in relation to valence of review. Valence refers to, as previously discussed on page 66 in the theory section, the positive or negative feelings towards the product being reviewed (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009). Even though, this part of the analysis is mainly focusing on the participants who was observed and interviewed about the choice of hotel from group R (AR, BR, CR, DR, ER, FR, GR, HR, IR, JR), we also include considerations from participants from group M (KM, LM, NM, MM, OM, PM), who were interviewed about their motivations to write reviews, since they also reflect on how they as writers of reviews also read reviews. The participants from group M will thereby function as additional data to this theme as well as the observation of the participants from group R.

As presented in the theory, the valence of the reviews may have a big importance, since it helps create a fast overview of the evaluated standard of the product. As a heuristic cue valence takes little to no time and creates an overview based on quantity of reviews, which might explain why 7 of the 10 participants look at ratings as one of the first things. AR argues how the ratings was the first thing he looked at together with the price of the hotel as well as location (Appendix A). BR also started by comparing the price and ratings to evaluate, which one

to choose. However, since they were almost the same, she had to move on to other elements (Appendix B). This suggests that if the hotels had more differentiated overall ratings she might have already excluded some of the hotels in the first phase of her research. DR, ER, FR and GR also presented how one of the first things they looked at was the rating. GR specifies by saying that it is just easier to look at the overall picture of the reviews through the number 1 to 5 instead of having to read every review and make an assessment (Appendix G). This highlights the point that valence provides a fast evaluation, which the theory scrutinizes.

AR further reflects the heuristics of valence as he argues, when using TripAdvisor regularly or during a trip, it is just easier to look at the overall rating and assess if it is positive or negative. He points out that he is not interested in reading excessive amounts of reviews if he uses the platform often, but only under these circumstances. He would rather read the written reviews on other occasions (Appendix A). JR adds to this by saying that he does not get influenced by any reviews but instead the overall rating, when saying: *"[...] if one of the hotels has gotten reviews saying it was just fantastic or extremely bad, then it would probably influence me."* (Appendix J: 2). This explicitly indicates how he is influenced by either extremely positive or extremely negative reviews. This might also be why he does not go further into the written reviews in the observation, since a lot of these are rated 3 or 4 bubbles. Which support his argument that he is only influenced by extremely positive or negative ratings.

He is not the only one with this opinion. CR argues: *"If I have to look at reviews, then I look at whether or not it is okay. I don't want to book a hotel that is shit. But whether they have 3 or 4 stars is not that important to me."* (Appendix C: 4). She further elaborates how she is convinced that the individual ratings will either tip to the very positive side, because friends of the owner will review very positive, or to the very negative side, since these are the consumers who are motivated to write reviews according to her (Appendix C). This shows that she views individual ratings as either very positive or very negative and that the average rating then reflects if the negative or the positive reviews dominate. The valence of the individual reviews is therefore not of much interest to her if the overall rating is mediocre. It is the valence of either extremely positive or extremely negative character that is of importance to her.

IR adds to this by saying that he is more likely to react if the overall rating is extremely negative rather than if it is extremely positive, which might reflect the risk of purchasing a really bad product. He thereby steers away from products where the overall rating is negative. However, he points out that it is only in relation to the overall rating and not necessarily due

to a couple of bad individual ratings, since they are very subjective (Appendix I). MM from group M also scrutinizes how she does not believe in the written reviews that rates very negative. In addition to IR, she argues that if the overall rating is very negative there might be some truth to it. Moreover, she insists that the written reviews can be very biased or just angry people and the individual ratings that are very negative are thereby, according to her, not very trustworthy. However, in contrast to the extremely negative reviews, she trusts the extremely positive ones, since she writes positive reviews herself (Appendix M). This indicates that her own experience with writing reviews has an impact on how she processes them herself in relation to ratings and assessing the valence of the product. KM from group M disagrees with MM when it comes to the extremely positive reviews. She perceives the mediocre ratings most reliable, since she argues *“Average reviews are fine because they are a little sceptical and it seems more realistic”* (Appendix K: 1). So in relation to MM, she agrees that the extremely negative ratings and reviews reflect people who are venting, which makes her perceive the reviews as untrustworthy. However, contrary to MM, she argues that the extremely positive ones also are suspect.

KM elaborates on how she likes to compare the overall rating with the ratings of the first couple of written reviews in order to investigate if the average score is consistent with the written reviews. If not, she does not trust the average score and digs deeper into the written reviews to see what is hidden (Appendix K). Her observation shows her investigating the correlation between the overall rating and the first couple of written reviews and finds that she stops when finding out that they are consistent. This shows how the overall rating in itself is not sufficient to everyone even though it might look good or be on the positive side. Another participant, AR, agrees with this, since he also wants to read the written reviews behind the individual rating, as it influences the overall rating. He states:

“They might rate it bad but then I think it sounds very good considering for what use I have of it. Also, if they rated it positively but it is not anything I have to use it for... I would rather base my opinion from what they are writing than how they rate it.” (Appendix A: 2).

He argues how the rating cannot be isolated. He wants to know what argument underlies the rating in order to find it useful and in order to understand the overall rating. Thereby, he

argues that valence by itself might not say that much about what experience he is going to have, or have an isolated influence on why he would or would not choose the hotel.

Another element, when discussing the influence of valence on the decision-making, is that of misrepresentation or even manipulation. IR argues how all reviews are biased and the ratings of each review are thereby subjective and might not reflect the standard. He does not find them useful, since he does not believe that people reflect on their experiences. The different subjective written reviews and ratings thereby creates the average rating, which he can never be convinced is representative or trustworthy enough for him to base any decision on (Appendix I). Nonetheless, he does say that if all written reviews are negative or positive, then he might accept it but he insists that the overall rating is misrepresentative in most cases and cannot be used for anything. He thereby seems to be looking for ultimate truths, which is not found in reviews, since they by nature are subjective. JR has an extended concern, since he argues that he thinks people might be prone to wanting to change the average rating with their contribution. He states:

“That is also one of the problems I have with TripAdvisor, that people have an idea about their experience is worth 3 stars or 3 bubbles. Then they find out that the average is 4 bubbles and then they give the hotel 0 bubbles or 1 bubble to bring down the average rating. So sometimes I think you can experience that people tend to rate in one or another end of the spectrum.” (Appendix J: 4).

In that way, he feels that the rating might be misrepresentative in relation to both average and individual ratings. Another participant, OM from group M, further contributes with the issue of manipulation. He has experienced being contacted by a company, with a manual on how to delete a review, in order to retract his bad review in exchange for money. This has made him more sceptical when only seeing good reviews or a very high average rating, since there might be some manipulation related to the extremely positive ratings (Appendix O). IR agrees by saying he would be prone to write a review if he were given money, which he thinks people are doing anyway (Appendix I).

The valence of reviews is thereby a very individual assessment. However, a lot of the participants use it to get an overview, since they trust in the more the merrier. Some of the participants however are very sceptical towards the extreme positive or negative ratings, whereas

other participants are more influenced by them and find these more trustworthy. Summing up on the findings in this section of the analysis:

- 7 out of 10 of our participants look at ratings as one of the first things
- A lot of the participants are influenced if the rating is either extremely positive or extremely negative, since this has an influence on their attitude towards the product.
- A few participants find extremely negative ratings irrelevant and frivolous.
- Overall ratings do not reflect much, individual ratings say more, but not without the texts to explain the rating; hence valence is dependent on information.
- Distrust in valence is found in some of the participants, which makes them question the validity of ratings.

A lot of the participants argue that the ratings are not the only factor of which they base their decision upon, since it is subjective and the reviewers behind are biased as well. This, we will now move on to in the next section about source credibility.

5.1.2. Source Credibility

In this section, we analyze the data in relation to source credibility; namely the consumer's overall credibility of the source providing the review, which captures the consumer's perceived trustworthiness of the reviewer (Zhang et al., 2014). Like in the first section about valence, the data from the interviews of group R will be analyzed together with the observation.

BR argues that the consumers are the ones she goes to first, when it comes to getting a perception about which experience she can expect. She finds the consumers who talk about the experiences the most trustworthy factor, since they can explain to her, what she can expect (Appendix B). IR on the other hand, do not trust other consumers, since he argues that he often cannot relate to the arguments they present and scrutinizes that the opinion of other consumers gives him nothing (Appendix I). However, in his observation it is clear that he spends a lot of time, one fifth of his observation time, reading the reviews. He both translates the reviews as one of the only participants and he also reads a couple of answers from the hotels. He

argues that he constantly asks the questions of: who is the reviewer? He is critical towards what have motivated them to write the review and argues that it is different from person to person how you experience things (Appendix I). Nonetheless, it is then interesting why he spends so much time reading them, if he does not believe them anyways. It suggests that even though he is critical towards the source, he also takes the reviews into consideration. The same goes for JR; even though he does not spend a lot of time reading reviews, he does look at them in the observation, but he is sceptical, since, as previously discussed, he expects a level of manipulation.

Other elements, which we have found influencing the source credibility, are culture or nationality. AR argues how he does not believe reviews written by Americans no matter what. He states:

"I know that if they are American I don't read them because, I have been to USA myself, and everything is huge. So when they get to Paris they think everything is very small and everything is shit because it is so small. So don't go to Paris you idiot. They only rate with one star because everything is too small. [...] They look differently at European standards." (Appendix A: 2).

He is very consequent with opting out American reviews, which is also seen in the observation. For him Americans have no credibility as reviewers due to different preferences and cultural standards. He simply does not take them seriously (Appendix A). He has the same critical perception about consumers older than him. He does not expect them to have the same preferences as him and do therefore not find their reviews credible (Appendix A). This however does not cohere with his observation. He spends about 40% of his observation time looking at written reviews, but he does not at any time investigate how old the reviewers are and since it is not visible without pressing or moving the mouse over the reviewer we can assume that in this case, he did not take age into consideration when evaluating the source credibility of the written reviews. This suggests that it might not be as crucial as he argues and that the source credibility is not necessarily something he focuses a lot on, except in relation to nationality.

GR, who did not spend any time at all looking at the written reviews, points out:

“Well, there were some of the reviewers who appeared again and again, who apparently have had some negative experiences at all the hotels. So I think that maybe some of them have been there to look for errors or mistakes. I tried to push them a side” (Appendix G: 2).

Since he does not read any of the written reviews, it is in the pictures he finds the people, who appear more than once. He thereby reflects that he does not trust these users, which makes him question the trustworthiness of the specific pictures as well. Another participant, who questions the source credibility in relation to pictures, is IR, who points out that he is attentive to the date of the pictures posted both by the hotel and the reviewers. He does not find older pictures trustworthy unless there are newer pictures to confirm the current standard of the hotel. He argues if the hotel is only represented by old pictures it makes him question the credibility of the reviews (Appendix I). Thereby, he states that old pictures alone are not sufficient.

Another participant, who is critical towards the source, is CR. She argues how she does not trust reviews without pictures, when saying:

“When people write something like it is very filthy in a review, but don’t deliver any documentation. But there were also guests who had uploaded pictures, so they can easily upload a picture where it is dirty” (Appendix C: 2).

This statement indicates that she does not trust the reviewer unless they document their statements with some sort of evidence like pictures. She is thereby sceptical to every review that has not pictures attached. This might also be why she in the observation enters reviews through the pictures. She looks at the pictures and, as the only participant to have that approach, she enters the written review attached to the picture. The source credibility is thereby dependent on visual documentation for the words spoken.

Even though, our theory discusses how source credibility is mostly in relation to other consumers, we found that the credibility in the platform also has some relevance regarding the trust of the content. AR argues that he trusts the platform and finds the content credible because it is a big site used by many consumers and because he is familiar with it, and as he phrases it: *“it is not just some random shit”* (Appendix A: 5). He acknowledges that he has no reason for why he trusts the platform but he just believes that it is not filled with fake profiles

(Appendix A). This might also be why he does not go any further into the source credibility of each review other than looking at whether or not the reviewer is American. This might also be why none of the other participants investigate the reviewers more thoroughly. It might be because they trust the platform and are familiar with it, since many of them view it as a trustworthy forum.

Another element in relation to the trust in the platform is the certificate of excellence, which BR notices as the only participant. She spots that hotel 5 (Zazie Hotel) has a certificate of excellence, which strengthens her trust in the written reviews and the ratings, since TripAdvisor have acknowledged this hotel. She argues that:

“If there is a certificate it is like: this person might not have had an experience that is consistent with the expectations but at least I know I won’t get fucked over. I don’t care if it is a suite or anything as long as I don’t waste my money” (Appendix B: 2).

Moreover, BR scrutinizes that she perceives TripAdvisor as sort of a counterpart to Facebook when it comes to reviews. She argues that people who review on Facebook are mostly venting and she does not take venting seriously, as presented earlier in the section about valence of reviews. Since she finds TripAdvisor more trustworthy she automatically finds the content more trustworthy compared to the content on Facebook. Furthermore, she prefers the user-anonymity on TripAdvisor rather than personal profiles on Facebook, as she states, it is more about what you write than who you are. She believes the sources on TripAdvisor to be credible, since it is not personal but rather informative (Appendix B). This suggests that if you trust the platform, then you might also be prone to trust the content. This might also be why IR and JR do not trust the reviewers, since they do not trust the platform due to the opportunity of manipulating the general perception of the hotels.

BR further argues that spotting booking.com on TripAdvisor strengthened her trust, since she is more familiar with booking.com. She argues that if these two platforms are collaborating, she trusts that TripAdvisor is not a complete scam or it would deceive her (Appendix B). This indicates that familiarity may influence the trust in the platform, which is also reflected by the participants from group M, who are more or less all positive towards the platform, since they have or do participate in the forum, which means that they are familiar with it (Ap-

pendix L, M, N & O). The platform itself thereby has a lot to say in relation to how the participants view the source credibility.

The findings of this section of the analysis can therefore be summed up as followed:

- Some participants trust the consumers as a source in general in order to view what to expect when you book experiences. Others distrust the consumers in general since they do not have knowledge about their motivations or if they are manipulated.
- Nationality or cultural differences can influence the source credibility.
- One participant is sceptical towards consumers, who repeatedly appear as negative.
- The date of the reviews can influence the source credibility.
- One participant argues that reviews are not trustworthy without additional documentation to support the statements.
- The platform, where the reviews are posted, can have an influence on the credibility of the reviews.
- Platform familiarity can have an influence on the credibility of the reviews.

Trust might also lie within the amount of reviews on the platform, which we will now move on to in the following section.

5.1.3. Perceived Quantity of Reviews

In this section, we analyze the data in relation to the antecedent, “quantity of reviews”, which is defined as the level of importance of the number of reviews when evaluating the argument for choosing or opting out hotels. In this part of the analysis, it is mainly the data from the interviews, which will be analyzed since it is difficult to observe if the participants look at the total amount of reviews, since we cannot observe whether or not the participant is looking at something else.

As explained in the theory on page 65, a huge amount of reviews strengthens the popularity of the product and consumers perceive the reviews as more trustworthy if a lot of consumers confirm it.

One of the participants, AR, argued that he was looking for red flags (warning signs) when he read the reviews of the 6 hotels in order to be warned. However, he made it clear that one red flag did not dominate his decision if a lot of people approved of the hotel (Appendix A). It is clear that the quantity of the reviews has an impact on the participant. Moreover, this participant claims to have a lot of trust in pictures but he scrutinizes that *"[...] if there have been 20.000 reviews that don't match this picture, then I will probably start doubting whether or not it is fake."* (Appendix A: 5). This reflects the importance of the quantity of reviews and the power in numbers.

This notion is also present with participant JR, who actually claims himself as one who does not care for reviews at all, which is also reflected in his observation; he spends little to no time on the written reviews. He strongly argues, how he knows that individual reviews can be manipulated, which makes him avoid these. However, he further argues: *"Of course, if there are 85 bad reviews then I would probably not think it was anything for me"* (Appendix J: 2). The quantity of reviews thereby becomes relevant to him even though he claims to avoid reviews in general.

JR is not the only one who is critical about reviews. DR is also a big critic of written reviews, since he claims that they can be very subjective and hence unrelatable, especially when it comes to negative reviews. However, he further argues that the more negative reviews there are, the more he trusts them as a unit. He is convinced by the strength in numbers (Appendix D). HR agrees with this by claiming that 17 good reviews are not very many in order to convince her, she needs more. However, she finds the individual reviews helpful rather than avoiding them, since she argues that it is nice to get different people's opinions (Appendix H). She might thereby feel that the individual reviews are helpful, however, she also needs to have the strength in numbers.

Opposite to these participants, we find ER, who actually finds the amount of reviews discouraging by saying: *"I just think there are so many reviews that you cannot cope with them"* (Appendix E: 2). She finds big amounts of reviews unmanageable and it can keep her from even engaging in the written reviews. She expresses it is easier just to look at the rating, book, and sort of hope for the best, since the huge amount of reviews are just too overwhelming

(Appendix E). This participant shows the opposite side of the idea of the more the merrier, where the quantity might scare some people off from reading reviews.

In relation to ER, who processes the ratings instead of the written reviews because of the density, GR does it the other way around. He argues how he looks at the ratings in relation to the quantity of reviews in order to evaluate if the rating is righteous, when saying:

“I looked at the overall rating, how many points it got. And then the amount of reviews in order to assess whether the rating is righteous. If there is one negative review out of five in total then it can change a lot for the overall rating” (Appendix G: 2).

He points out that the quantity of the reviews is very important to how he assess the rating and its trustworthiness (Appendix G). This is related to the point that there is strength in numbers, however, in this case it is more in terms of getting the right perception of the standard rather than being convinced on the basis of quantity or ratings. GR’s observation confirms this argument, since we see him holding the mouse over the rating and the quantity of reviews as one of the first things he does with each hotel. He questions the ratings in terms of how many reviews they are based on.

One thing that strikes about these participants, is that even though the ones talking about how the quantity of reviews is very important to them in relation to their perception of the given hotel, none of them chose the hotel with the most reviews, namely Hotel 2 (Ibis Budget Paris Porte de Vincennes) (Appendix 2) with over 1000 reviews. BR points out that all of the hotels have about 200-300 reviews except for Ibis, which has over 1000 reviews (Appendix B). Even though, all of the other hotels have an overall rating of 4 and Ibis has an overall rating of 3,5, the previous argument of strength in numbers would suggest that the overall rating of Ibis would be more reliable than the other hotel’s overall ratings, since they are based on only one fifth of the amount of reviews that Ibis has. This could suggest that the quantity is not always as important as they argue or it could suggest that the quantity of reviews might not be accepted in isolation. One addition to quantity could be that of the visuals, which we will analyze in the next section.

To sum up this section, we now present the findings of this section of the analysis:

- A lot of the participants perceive strength in numbers, which indicates that the perceived quantity is important to them.
- A huge amount of reviews might scare consumer off and prevent them from engaging in written reviews.
- Quantity can determine whether the overall rating is perceived righteous or trustworthy.

5.1.4. Visuals of Review

Like in the previous sections of the analysis, we will mainly draw on data from the follow-up interviews with the participants from Group R. The observations will also be considered and used when relevant. Single elements from interviews with Group M will also feature, since the visuals of reviews were also mentioned by one of these participants.

One thing that is relevant to start with is that in the previous sections we experienced a big difference in whether participants spend time on the elements, such as the ratings, the reviews and taking time to investigate the quantity or source credibility of the users. However, when looking at the visuals of reviews, all of the participants take these into consideration and investigate them. As the pie charts show, all of the participants spend an amount of time looking at the pictures. We will now look further into how they process them.

As presented in the section about source credibility, CR argues that she needs documentation in order to trust the information she reads (Appendix C). This is where visuals can play an important part in the decision-making process and in relation to argument for choosing.

A lot of the participants argue that pictures are the first element they look at (Appendix C, D, E, F & H). DR argues how he is pretty visual and that pictures are his primary source for information, since they are not as subjective or easy to manipulate as words. He further scrutinizes how pictures are quick to give you an overview of the overall standard of the hotel rather than if you had to go through a lot of text material, which says a lot about his natural research approach (Appendix D). This method of going through the pictures as the first thing is consistent with his observation, where he focuses a lot of his time comparing and shuffling through pictures. CR and GR agree with the statement of pictures providing an overview in order to create a perception of the hotel. CR argues:

“When you read a review it is always other people’s subjective evaluation. Whereas, when I look at pictures I can form my own impressions. I think it is easier to make an assessment from pictures” (Appendix C: 2).

Beside CR stating this, GR went through every single picture in every hotel as one of the first things in the observation, which also reflects how he thinks they are important. Like DR, HR adds that she trusts pictures more than any other element in the reviews: *“I find them more trustworthy, and it is faster to go through pictures than reviews. It is easier to just look at some pictures than reading a lot of stuff”* (Appendix H: 2). AR and IR also look at the pictures as one of the first elements just after price and location, and found that pictures are an important element when deciding upon a hotel (Appendix A & I). However, when looking at the two first hotels, AR’s observation showed that he looked at pictures as the last element. But after doing that for two hotels he changed his approach to looking at the pictures first. This might be due to the reviews being written in languages he does not understand, which made him go to the pictures first from thereon. His observation thereby says that at first he did not look for pictures to get a quick overview, but the language barrier might have pushed him in that direction and resulted in him having to choose based more on pictures than on the reviews, as it suggested he wanted according to his observation. One participant stood out from the rest; namely BR. She did not focus as much on pictures as the rest of the participants and it was the last element she looked at during her research of the different hotels in her observation. However, when asked about what she like about the different hotel, she does not say that pictures are not important, as she actually argues that they have a big influence: *“Concerning the one I chose, there were some beautiful pictures and it was kind of hipster and young. So it was the pictures that did it. And then finally the certificate”* (Appendix B: 2). She argues that it is of importance but just not as important as other elements like the certificate of excellence (Appendix B).

Some of the participants pointed out how the pictures were the final and most essential element for choosing the given hotel (Appendix C, D, E, G, H & I). DR explained, how the final choice of hotel was based on the pictures, since it looked very home-like and cozy, which is an important thing for him, when travelling. The same goes for HR, who also was looking for the homely vibe in the hotels. This reflects that these participants are driven by what they are

familiar with and by their style rather than other motives like features or other consumers' reviews. This was also evident in the section about valence of reviews, where DR and HR both focused a lot on ratings rather than the written reviews behind the ratings. ER's observation showed that she did not look at the written reviews at all, which might also be why she found the pictures crucial to her choice, since the element of written reviews was neglected. As previously presented, IR was very sceptical in relation to other people's opinions and reflections (or lack of), which makes it obvious why he chooses to decide on a hotel based on pictures and location, even though he spends a lot of time reading reviews in his observation. But since he, like GR, goes through every picture on each hotel, he is clearly steered by this element. GR elaborates that he makes the final choice based on pictures; however, it is the pictures from the consumers that influence him the most, which might reflect that he trusts pictures, but he would like to see the pictures from the consumers, since they are not trying to sell him anything (Appendix G). His observation does not show that he is only interested in the pictures from the consumers directly, since he is going through every picture there is, but he pauses at some of the pictures from consumers, which suggests he takes a little more time to process those.

Almost all of the participants use visuals to exclude hotels, when processing the hotel review pages (Appendix A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H & I). AR describes how he found some of the hotels very nasty, which made him opt out those. *"There were some very nasty pictures. [...] Generally it looked very, very bad. I thought that I didn't want that."* (Appendix A: 1). Nasty pictures resulted in him stopping his research of some of the hotels, which was also the case with DR. DR stopped his research of hotel 3, when he came across a picture of bed bugs and bites from them. In the observation he keeps looking at these pictures and thereafter never going back to hotel 3 in his research. He also states that hotels that looked trashed or where people had been bit were excluded immediately (Appendix D). BR also scrutinizes how she excluded some hotels, which had bad pictures, since she does not like unprofessional pictures (Appendix B), which might be due to her profession as a graphic designer. It is interesting that she excludes some hotels because of pictures, when she focuses a lot on the written reviews and the ratings, as previously presented. But as in the case of HR and DR, it might be due to taste or personal preferences. ER highlights this argument, when asked if there was something that made her opt out hotels, by stating that she opted out a hotel because she didn't like the colors: *"Yes, when things were too colourful. Weird bed sheets and such things. I don't know why,*

but it doesn't look nice" (Appendix E: 1). This furthermore adds to the argument that taste and personal preferences has a lot to do with what the participants choose. One thing is certain: the visual is important to them. Especially, according to GR, who states that he would not book a hotel if it had no pictures to show. He would not trust that he would get what the other information told him or what written reviews might say, since he did not have the opportunity to get a visual of what to expect (Appendix G).

Using the visuals as a way to establish your expectation to the hotel is not limited to GR. CR uses the visuals to get a sense of what to expect in relation to cleanliness:

"Pictures do not tell anything about service, but I fucking don't care about service. Whether the staff is angry or something like that doesn't bother me. I just want to sleep in a bed that is not dirty. So it is definitely pictures I find most important" (Appendix C: 2).

Here, it is evident, how she process pictures, since they can tell her something about what is most important for her; namely if it is dirty or clean. She further states that reviews saying that the hotel is dirty but not showing any documentation, is not what she needs, since she depends on the visual to confirm the words (Appendix C). MM from group M elaborates how she thinks that pictures can be very helpful in relation to reviews, since they can help the consumer see what to expect as well as if you are showing your friends where you are going: *"Then you can say: 'come and see this hotel room, doesn't it look nice?'"* (Appendix M: 4). AR also points out how the pictures can help you determine what to expect in relation to if it is a new or old hotel; not necessarily good or bad, but in order to sense the type of hotel (Appendix A). However, FR points out that if you cannot see what to expect e.g. if the pictures show two different standards or look, then it is a reason to opt out the hotel, since she do not trust it or know what she is saying yes to (Appendix F). JR highlights the same, when he discusses how he is skeptical of a hotel that has a lot of pictures but not any pictures of the surroundings: *"[...] when you have a hotel with a lot of pictures but you don't show any of the surroundings, I find that strange"* (Appendix J: 2). He finds this strange and questions why these pictures are not present (Appendix J). The visuals can thereby say a lot but they can also tell the participant something by being absent, like e.g. the surroundings are ugly.

IR states that the pictures cannot always represent the hotel in isolation e.g. if the pictures does not add up. If the consumers show pictures of two different standards of the rooms, then

the reviews are necessary in order to get some more information on why that might be (Appendix I). GR also highlights that bad pictures does not necessarily equal a bad place, because the experience can be good even though the pictures are not very flattering and the other way around; the pictures can show a beautiful place, but the reviews alarm you not to visit due to the experience of the place (Appendix G). FR also scrutinizes this point, when she says:

"I still looked at the reviews, because I feel that if you have been at a hotel before then... of course the visual says a lot, but you also have to see what the reviews have to say about it, because when it comes to it, it can be... if it is a two star hotel, it can be rated as four stars in experience." (Appendix F: 2).

GR underlines that *"Pictures can sometimes say something different"* (Appendix G: 3), which implicitly leads to the question: different than what? This implies that the pictures cannot reflect the hotel in isolation.

It is evident that all of the participants find the visuals of the review very important, which is also argued by the research by Yang et al. (2012), who found that images are the most important factor, which affects both review usefulness and review enjoyment. The importance of the visuals in relation to the argument for choosing is thereby not in question. However, it is interesting to see that the level of influence as well as the evaluation of the visuals are very individual.

To sum up we now present the findings of this section of the analysis:

- All of the participants find the visuals important.
- Many participants find pictures more trustworthy than written reviews.
- Pictures quickly create a perception of the hotel.
- A lot of the participants looked at pictures as the first element, but one looked at them as the last element, which indicates that the priorities are different when it comes to pictures.
- Pictures can be essential for the decision-making, since they can reflect personal preferences.

- Pictures can result in opting out hotels.
- Visuals help align expectations.
- Pictures are not always sufficient in isolation.

All of the previous sections have discussed some elements that might tell the participants something about the hotels, but what do they provide of information and are they persuasive enough? That is what the next section about perceived informativeness and perceived persuasiveness is all about.

5.1.5. Perceived Informativeness and Persuasiveness of the Written Reviews

In this section of the analysis we analyze the data in relation to how the participants view the informativeness and persuasiveness of the reviews or if or how they take them into consideration in their decision-making process.

Some of the participants argue how information from the interviews are relevant in relation to being warned or finding red flags that might give them an insight into the travel experience (AR, CR, DR & GR). AR describes how *“[...] they wrote that the pictures the hotel had provided were not true because the hotel had not been renovated for many years and the power outlets look dangerous”* (Appendix A: 1). He further states that he is looking for red flags to warn him about the experience like *“[...] if it is something like the carpet is ruined, they haven’t been cleaning, when you take a bath there is water all over the floor, then I don’t want to pay any money for it”* (Appendix A: 3). This reflects how he finds these red flags informative and takes them into consideration when purchasing travel experiences. CR argues the same by stating that one the reviews told her that the hotel room smelled like booze, which is something the pictures cannot tell (Appendix C). DR supports this argument by claiming he does not really look at reviews other than to check for warnings like: *“[...] is there anything in the reviews, where people elaborate if there is something to be aware of, like if there is a dead cat in one of the rooms, then you might not choose that”* (Appendix D: 2). He relies a lot on the pictures in general but in this case he perceives written reviews as informative if they have the ability to

warn him about possible issues with the hotel. GR does also perceive the written reviews as informative if it can warn him, by saying this:

"[...] there were also reviews, where I thought, well okay. There were some with, what are they called, bed bugs, where I thought, well okay, it doesn't matter how nice it looks, if the standard is that low. So that could be one I would exclude." (Appendix G: 2).

By this he also indicates that he does not question the credibility of the written negative reviews or warning reviews, since he would rather not take the chance and ignore it. The same goes for DR, when he is willing to reject a hotel based on a negative written review or red flag.

It is not all of the participants who find written reviews as relevant as others. IR talks about how he checks the reviews if the pictures does not add up e.g. if the pictures show a good and a bad room at the hotel. Only then, he finds the reviews relevant since he wants to know *"[...] what does the review tell you, because one person might have stayed in a good room and another person have stayed in a bad room"* (Appendix I: 4). He thereby only perceives the informativeness of the written reviews as high and important, if it can answer his possible questions. Another participant, who finds the informativeness of written reviews really high, is AR, when he argues: *"I would rather base my opinion from what they are writing than how they rate it"* (Appendix A: 2). He furthermore states that he has based his decisions on written reviews and pictures and that the hotels with very negative written reviews are the ones he opts out (Appendix A). This search for information in the written reviews is also visible in his observation, since he, like previously presented, uses about 40% of his time looking at written reviews and reading them. This is also evident for BR. However, it is important to highlight that even though they find written reviews relevant for their decision, the informativeness of the reviews is the most important part.

KM from group M also scrutinizes how the informativeness of written reviews is defined by the content. She elaborates by saying that *"[...] if there is more than one exclamation mark then I scroll past it. I am serious about that. It could very well be persons, who haven't got their way"* (Appendix K: 1). It is not very informative for her to read other peoples' venting, so she does not perceive such reviews as entailing a high level of informativeness. The same goes for AR, who said:

"I saw that someone wrote that it was annoying that the hotel had an elevator but they were two girls and they could just exactly fit their luggage in there and I thought; what is the problem? Because they were able to have their luggage with them. How annoying that a two starred hotel has an elevator... I mean, shut up" (Appendix A: 2).

He does not find venting informative either, which results in him not perceiving the written review as a quality review. This is also highlighted in his comment about why written reviews are relevant since he "[...] would rather base my opinion from what they are writing than how they rate it" (Appendix A: 2), as previously presented. The information given by the written reviews is thereby more important to him than ratings, since it can argue why the rating is the way it is. DR elaborates the same, when he discusses how the information is important in case of the warning signs, which he finds helpful and informative. He also states, like the others, that the written reviews can be very subjective and irrelevant, which affect the rating, considering the following:

"It is always stuff like; oh no one person had a bad experience with the receptionist who was rude and then she gives one star, but it is just stupid to give one star based on that. The hotel can be quite good anyway" (Appendix D: 2).

He does not perceive such written reviews as informative, since he can't relate to the evaluation of the hotel based on one incident.

A lot of the participants are skeptical towards the informativeness of written reviews in general, since the subjectivity of the written reviews can result in them being irrelevant to the participants. Especially IR, who previously also claimed that he do not think that people reflect on their experiences (Appendix I) and JR, who also argue that people's preferences are different, which also makes it hard to find written reviews informative (Appendix J). GR states that:

"Well, you have to take it with a grain of salt. You can have a bad weekend because of whatever reason and then the hotel is just super bad because it didn't have your favourite croissant at breakfast, so..." (Appendix G: 3).

However, he continues by arguing that:

"[...] in general I believe what people are writing. If you have had a good time and takes it that further and write a review, then I believe it and if you have had a bad experience, then it has been bad, so..." (Appendix G: 3)

This also reflects that he might not find the written review very informative but he acknowledges it and trusts that it is true from the reviewer's perspective. Lastly, OM argues that he perceives reviews on TripAdvisor as very informative, since *"The most I have viewed are relatively constructive"* (Appendix O: 4). He does not experience the same level of irrelevance in the written reviews as the previous participants emphasized.

Some of the other participants agree with him in their statements, since they seem to find written reviews essential, when travelling. AR says that he uses written reviews every time he books; not necessarily on TripAdvisor, but he reads them before he books. He argues that: *"The written reviews were the ones most essential along with the price."* (Appendix A: 5). FR also states that she uses the written reviews to get a sense of the place, since she likes it to be a quiet and safe place, where she can relax (Appendix F). This kind of information may be difficult to extract from other elements than in the written reviews, which makes the informativeness of the written reviews essential to her decision-making. LM from group M adds to this, when sharing her previous booking stories:

"We chose one because we could read on TripAdvisor that it was a good place for diving and family friendly, because we couldn't find anything at Hotels.com concerning diving opportunities, which were the reason for the whole trip" (Appendix L: 5).

The informativeness of the written reviews was thereby essential for her booking the hotel at that time. NM supports this with her story about when she went hiking:

"I was trying out a hiking trip in Novo Scotia and wanted to investigate what kind of hiking shoes to wear. How should I gear up? And then I read a whole lot of reviews on TripAdvisor before the trip so I knew what to expect. And then I had a very good experience because I knew I

shouldn't wear snickers. They would get soaked. I had to wear rubber boots. That improves your experience" (Appendix N: 3).

She thereby searched for written reviews with a high level of information and perceived a lot of written reviews as informative, since they help her on her trip.

In relation to the participants from group R, there seems to be a tendency of perceiving the warning reviews as informative, since they tell what to look out for. However, a lot of the participants also perceive written reviews, which they relate to in terms of preferences, as informative and persuasive, since they reflect interests or standards similar to the participants'. In terms of perceived persuasiveness it is the same argument. If the written review reflects information of value, then it is persuasive to the participants and the other way around.

To sum up, the findings of this section of the analysis will now be presented:

- Participants perceive red flags or warnings in written reviews as informative.
- Reviews are only relevant if the perceived informativeness is high or if they are perceived as relevant in relation to personal preferences, hence persuasive.
- Venting or unrelatable reviews are not perceived as informative.
- Some participants find written reviews essentials to their decision, since they provide information that the participants may not find other places, which makes them perceive written reviews having high informativeness.
- Information from written reviews helps align expectations.

After analyzing all of the 5 antecedents of trust, we will now discuss how they correlate and examine what antecedents of the online review overall affects trust.

5.1.6. Argument for Choosing – What Elements Do the Participants Trust?

In this section of the analysis, we combine the 5 elements from above in order to present which elements are important when the participants have to choose or opt out hotels and thereby how they process online hotel reviews on TripAdvisor. The argument for choosing or

opting out a hotel reflects what elements the participants trust or distrust and thereby affects their decision-making process.

It is evident that all of the participants find visuals important when making a choice and trust pictures as a valid source. IR is the only participant who turned out not to completely trust pictures by questioning if they are obsolete. IR is generally very critical towards all consumer-generated content, like JR, due to the subjectivity and possibility of manipulation. We found that these two participants trust pictures as the only element. JR does also include the location as a very important element. However, since this is not consumer-generated, we cannot argue it as a part of the argument for choosing, since our model is based on consumer-generated content. Nonetheless, none-consumer-generated elements also influence the consumer.

GR is also influenced by location, but other than that he is also very controlled by the pictures and does only process reviews in relation to pictures, like CR also does. They seem to trust the written reviews if they are supported by pictures, but do not necessarily find written reviews useful. GR trusts that the consumers express the truth about their experience through the written reviews. However, he cannot necessarily use the written reviews without pictures. The written reviews are thereby only important to him in relation to the pictures attached and the quantity, since he uses that to evaluate the overall rating. GR thereby trusts and bases his arguments on pictures, especially the ones by consumers, and the overall rating based on the quantity of reviews. The same goes for CR.

AR and DR are also, like the other participants, very influenced by and uncritical towards pictures, but they also read written reviews in order to find warning signal or red flags that can steer them away from bad experiences. They are skeptical towards written reviews, since they are not always relatable, but they trust 'red flag' written reviews that make sense to them, which also show how the informativeness of the written word is important for them in case of negative reviews. These two participants base their 'argument for choosing' on trusting pictures as well as negative reviews with warnings they relate to. Moreover, AR's choice is also based on location and trust in the reviewers, which he does not have if the reviewer is American. This is due to cultural differences.

BR trusts the consumers and bases a lot of her arguments on the written reviews and the informativeness of those. As the other participants, she trusts pictures but her main trust and choice of hotel lies within the written reviews and the certificate of the hotel, which is a gua-

rantee for her. FR and HR also place a lot of trust in the written reviews and do not consider the source credibility or motivations of the reviewers. They trust the information and evaluation of others, which they, together with pictures, base their choice on. The last participant, ER, is the least interested in consumer-generated content, since she only base her choice on the pictures and not other consumer-generated elements. She trusts the overall rating but does not want to read the written reviews, since it is too comprehensive. She bases her decision on pictures and the overall rating. She trusts the overall ratings from the consumers and does not question or reflect on what motives or credibility that lies behind.

In this sum up, it is evident that our participants all trust pictures and find them important in the decision-making process. This is supported by our theory arguing how pictures have a positive influence on consumers' attitudes towards travel products and how they influence their purchase intention (Walters et al., 2007; Lee & Gretzel, 2012). Through visuals the participants' mental imagery are stimulated and they thereby find value in those (Yang et al., 2017). The valence of the reviews influences a lot of the participants; some question their origin, some just trust them and some do not trust them unless the overall rating is extremely negative. It is only a few of our participants who question the source credibility of the reviewers, however a lot question the motives behind the reviews. Other participants trust the evaluation of others without questioning it. The perceived quantity of the reviews is important to a few, since they evaluate the rating based on this. However, not very many even consider the perceived quantity of reviews. The perceived informativeness and persuasiveness of written reviews is very important for many participants, since it reflects whether or not they can relate to information from the written reviews and find them useful based on personal preferences. It is also the element that varies the most in relation to what people perceive as informative. It is very reliant on personal preferences and taste as well as how much the given participant trusts or cares about other consumers' opinion. The 'arguments for choosing' are thereby very individual but one thing is certain: all of the participants trust pictures and deem them important in the decision-making process, since they argue that the pictures are more objective than other elements.

Now we will move on to the second part of the analysis, where we analyze the data in order to investigate the second part of our problem formulation.

5.2. Analysis Part 2 - Online Sharing Motivation on TripAdvisor

In this part of the analysis, data from the interviews is analyzed to investigate the motives for writing reviews on TripAdvisor, which will allow us to answer the second part of our problem formulation. The model ‘Motivations for Writing Online Reviews on TripAdvisor’, as described in the theoretical section, will be used as the analytical tool. The analysis will be structured by dividing it into sections based on the 4 main categories of motivational factors suggested in the model, containing the respective 8 motivational factors belonging to each main category. Data from the interviews, where we can identify any of the 8 motivational factors as proposed in the model, will be analyzed to find out which factors are significant when deciding to write reviews on the platform. However, some factors will possibly be dragged into sections of other factors and overlap to explain relations between them, as well as some comments from the participants may contain evidence of multiple motivational factors. Finally, we will sum up on our findings in the analysis.

5.2.1. Intrinsic Motivations

In this section, we will analyze the intrinsic motivations, which are driven by personal interest in the activity of sharing knowledge itself, where any given action is taken for the inherent enjoyment of helping others or simply because they find it interesting, gain knowledge from it, or enjoy the challenging aspect of doing it. There are no external rewards or pressure to increase the motivation; instead people act out of free choice (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Gagné, 2009). The intrinsic motivations are: altruism, self-enhancement, and enjoyment.

5.2.1.1. Altruism

In several comments from the interviewees, we found evidence that altruism was an important motivation that drove people to write reviews on the platform. One of the participants, LM, told us about travel experiences where she had written a review on TripAdvisor about it afterwards. When asked about why she wrote the reviews, she replied:

“The first I wrote was a trip to Mallorca with my boyfriend, where we stayed at the cosiest place in a city in the middle of nowhere, where there was the most fantastic restaurant. So I thought

that they were really good at connecting with us, and I thought I would like to help them and help others to experience it. So that's why I decided to spend some of my time - because it does take some time - the same night to make a review" (Appendix L: 2).

Here we clearly see that LM had a very positive experience, which makes her recommend the product to other users. She says that she wants other people to have the same experience as she had, and in that way helping other consumers has partly made her write the review. Thus, altruism can be identified as a key motivation for LM. Furthermore, she emphasizes that reviewing is time consuming, which even more strengthens the argument of altruistic motivation, as she sacrifices her time to provide helpful information to other users on TripAdvisor. However, this comment also says that she wrote the review because she 'would like to help them', which refers to the restaurant that provided her with the experience. She wants to return a favour to the restaurant as she feels that she should pay something back for providing her with a very positive experience that satisfied her. This point to that she has also been motivated by reciprocity, as she gives something back to the experience product provider. Therefore, it can be argued that two motivational factors are evident in this comment. It can thus be said that she is both driven by an intrinsic motivation of altruism along with the extrinsic motivation of reciprocity.

LM furthermore told us about another travel experience she had in Egypt where she also wrote a review about her experience. She explains how the guide in Cairo pushed for her and her boyfriend to write a review (Appendix L) and when we asked about why she finally did it, she replied: *"[...] because I really wanted the best for him, I wrote a good review about him and because I was so grateful for the help that he had provided* (Appendix L: 2). Once again, we see that she apparently wrote the review because she wants to pay him back for being a good guide and influence her travel experience in a positive way, which calls for a motivation related to reciprocity. However, we asked her to confirm that it was a positive experience and whether or not she just wrote the review because the guide told her to (Appendix L). Then she said:

"Really positive! No, it was not like he demanded it, he was just ... it is also because you hear a lot about Egypt and that it is dangerous. But it was not at all dangerous with him. He made me feel secure, which I thought people should know" (Appendix L: 2).

Here we learn that LM also wrote the review to disprove prejudices about the travel experience. She wants other TripAdvisor users to feel confident about buying this travel product if they have any doubts about making the purchase - at least, when being accompanied by this specific guide. In this way, she intends to help others who are in doubts about making a travel purchase to Egypt, which again shows that her motivation for writing this information in a review is highly related to altruism. Thus, we once again can identify both altruism and reciprocity as motivational factors.

The participant MM was asked whether or not she writes reviews after every travel experience. She replied:

"It depends. For instance, I always write restaurant reviews to help others, but also just to give the restaurant a thumbs up for the good experience. But also for experiences where you go out to see something culturally. Then I also always leave a review, especially in Danish to say to the Danish people that they have to come and experience this. Get out of their comfort zone. Climb up a volcano, it is not that dangerous" (Appendix M: 2).

Here we see altruism as a dominating motivation for writing reviews, as MM tells that she always writes reviews to recommend experiences she had enjoyed herself. However, she states that it is also to laud the restaurant, and thus we can also identify a desire to share the enjoyment of the experience. In this case MM gives a 'thumbs up' directed at the product provider. The motivation of expressing positive feelings can also be identified in this comment and we therefore both see motives that are based on feelings along with the intrinsic motivation of altruism.

From all the above comments, it seems that positive travel experiences can lead to altruistic behaviour when deciding to write reviews on TripAdvisor. However, there were also participants who have had more negative travel experiences. One of them was OM who went on a trip with his high school class, where they participated in some Irish dance and it turned out to be different from what had been informed (Appendix O). He wrote a review about it and we asked him what he expected to get out of it. He answered:

“I hoped to... you know, do it so that others could see that some of the things, which were promised, not necessarily were what you got. Or some of the things were not described enough” (Appendix O: 2).

The comment indicates that OM urges to inform other people what to expect from the product, as he feels misinformed. He wants other TripAdvisor users to know what he thinks is the right information about the product, and in that way adjust their expectations through the review so they will not experience the same disappointment as he did. Thus, he is motivated by altruism as he intends to help others by writing the review.

We asked another participant, KM, if she actively shares her own knowledge in online forums (Appendix K). She said:

“I don’t add anything on these forums. It is only when I get persuaded to make a commentary. I think I give most ratings when I get feedback on a mail or if there are stars next to the product or something like that. I don’t actively enter any page to rate something. Only if I have a very bad experience and have to save the rest of the population. And I have done that” (Appendix K: 2).

We learn that KM is actually not a person who actively enters online platforms to review products, but having a bad product experience would make her write a review to warn others about the product. Her only motive is to be helpful to other consumers, which is clearly indicated, as she wants to save the rest of the population if she had a very bad product experience. She would do this to prevent other consumers from having the same negative purchase experience she had. Thus, we see that altruism is the only factor that would make her write a review. It should be noted that this example is not directed specifically at TripAdvisor, but general online review sites. It can though be argued that her opinion could be applied to TripAdvisor reviews as well as any other sites.

Another participant, JR, was asked whether or not he had written a review himself, and said:

“No, only if it is extremely bad I might write it was unacceptable. Then I would probably return to TripAdvisor and write it there, so that no other people walk into the same trap as I did. [...] I

don't have the need to smear other people in a public place, so it would more be to point out that is not always as good as they claim" (Appendix J: 3).

Here we see that when having a bad product experience, JR does not have the urge to vent his frustration, but rather make other people aware of his lack of satisfaction with the travel product, so that they will not experience the same disappointment as he did. Thus, we see an altruistic behaviour as motivation for writing a review, where his frustration is constrained and the review would be based on distributing practical information rather than based on his feelings. He is conscious about being constructive in his review and that it should be valuable information to other users. This keeps him from venting, as this motivational factor is more related to expressing feelings of frustration. His comment about not wanting to smear other people in public places underlines that he is aware that venting could hurt other people and their business, even though his experience with a product had been disappointing. However, it should be noted that this situation is hypothetical, as he says that he has never written a review when having a bad travel experience (Appendix J). It should be taken into consideration that when actually being in a situation of getting mad and frustrated, it might be difficult to restrain your feelings and keep yourself from venting when writing the review. But solely based on his commentary, altruism seems to be a dominating motivation for JR.

From the above 3 comments, it can be argued that having negative experiences with travel products that does not live up to the expectations, are main drivers for altruistic motivation of review writing on TripAdvisor. Thus, both predominantly positive and negative experiences seem related to altruistic behaviour. This is further enhanced in the next comment, where LM elaborates a negative experience:

"[...] it was not the hotel we expected, so it was really bad. And Hotels.com had behaved irresponsibly towards us during the trip to Cairo. So we had to react because we felt that our safety was at stake. We wanted to target Hotels.com and we did that with a review. You can hear that it is sort of an extreme scenario, [...], where people needed to know, that it wasn't okay" (Appendix L: 5).

This comment reflects that altruism will more likely be a motivation when consumers have had a more extreme experience with their purchased product. When they either have had a

very positive or negative experience, they tend to tell other consumers about the product or service purchased. This could be because they may feel more helpful recommending it to others when the product has made a big impression on them either in a positive or negative way, which strengthens the urge to either recommend or warn against the travel product with which they have had the experience.

5.2.1.2. Self-Enhancement

The motivational factor of self-enhancement turned out to be very difficult to identify in our data from the participants. As described in the theoretical section, self-enhancement is about contributing with useful knowledge to other consumers, like altruism. What separates these two factors is that altruistic motivation is based on providing helpful information only for the sake of being helpful, whereas self-enhancement is focused on the inner feelings of the person when writing reviews that can be helpful to others. None of the participants particularly expressed how it made them feel about themselves, when sharing useful knowledge to help other users. When asked whether or not PM had considered if her review contributed with anything, she replied:

“No. I suppose if there are 300 reviews on a site, then mine will not be conclusive. So I don’t feel it does really anything. Maybe if it was a small hotel that did not have any reviews yet I could imagine it would be conclusive” (Appendix P: 1).

This comment tells us that when writing a review, it is important for PM that it will make a difference for the other consumers who read it and influence their decision-making. This could be because she wants to feel good about herself for making a difference by guiding other consumers to making the right purchase. However, this comment does not explicitly say anything about her inner feelings, and thus it could just as well be an expression of altruistic behavior. There are other examples in our data like this comment, where we feel it would be rather far-fetched to argue of any proofs of self-enhancement. Therefore, we choose to move on from this element without any further proofs that it should be a motive for review writing on TripAdvisor.

5.2.1.3. Enjoyment

Regarding the motivation of enjoyment, the participant, OM, talked about the first time he made a review on TripAdvisor, and commented:

“First time I made a review it was... it was actually when I discovered TripAdvisor... at a restaurant where they asked me to do it, because they asked nicely, you know. They would like us to do it. And then I tried it and thought ... I thought it was quite fun to write [...]” (Appendix O: 2).

OM tells that he was influenced externally to write his first review on TripAdvisor by a product provider. This, of course, does not indicate that he wrote it because of the intrinsic motivation of enjoying the activity itself to writing the reviews. However, he ends up expressing that he actually found it fun to write it. Taking into consideration that he earlier in the interview stated that he had written around 10 reviews (Appendix O), we find it possible that the fact that he discovered actually finding it enjoyable to write the review, could very well be what encouraged him to write several others. Therefore, we argue that the enjoyment itself of writing reviews may be the critical motive for his further review writing on TripAdvisor. Later in the interview OM stated:

“I like to write something when I feel I have something to share. And I often think I do when I have visited a place. I have done it a few times where I have been out eating a couple of places here in Denmark. I do that as well” (Appendix O: 4).

This also point to him enjoying the activity of sharing, whenever he feels it is relevant. This further strengthens the point that he finds enjoyment in writing reviews on TripAdvisor and sees it as a hobby. These two comments from OM turned out to be the only evidence of enjoyment as no other participants expressed any feelings of enjoyment. It is possible that consumers also find enjoyment in, for instance, helping other consumers through review writing or strengthen their personal reputation on social media platforms. However, as described in the theoretical section, this factor is defined in this study by standing alone as a hobby in itself that brings you pleasure. It will not be valid if stemming from other motivational factors. Therefore, nothing further can be added to the element of enjoyment.

5.2.2. Extrinsic Motivations

We will now turn our focus on the extrinsic motivations. As presented in the theory chapter, extrinsic motivation focuses on goal-driven reasons and refers to doing something because it leads to a separable outcome. It can be driven by some kind of reward like gaining recognition, gaining money, or to be beat others in competition. Moreover, such motivations can also arise to avoid any kind of punishment. It is typically based on the calculation of the cost and benefits associated with the action taken. If the benefits exceed the costs, people will be motivated to take action (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Gagné, 2009). The extrinsic motivations are reciprocity and reputation.

5.2.2.1. Reciprocity

Turning our focus on the motivational factor of reciprocity, we see that the participant MM comments:

"[...] we have used TripAdvisor to find a good restaurant. Then I have thought there were some people and their reviews helped me to this good restaurant. So I wanted to leave a good review so the next person who visits can also be helped in the same way. And that is the same with hotels" (Appendix M: 1-2).

MM has found a TripAdvisor review useful for her own purchase decision and that motivates her to help other consumers in the same way as she had been helped to find this restaurant. She shares useful information to pay back other TripAdvisor users. Thus, reciprocity is her main motivation for sharing knowledge, as she wants to be as helpful to others in the same way they have been to her. In this case we see reciprocity in the consumer-to-consumer context.

In another interview, LM talks about why she does not write reviews after each travel experience, and says:

“For example when I have stayed at a hotel through Hotels.com, well then I don’t feel like writing. I delete the mails, but at TripAdvisor you have made an effort and done some research when finding a unique experience and succeeded. Then you are like, other people should get to try this also. I want to support this, because TripAdvisor helps me to find the best experience instead of a mediocre experience” (Appendix L: 2).

Here, LM says that she opts out of writing reviews on Hotels.com, even though she actually receives mails that encourage her to do it. She argues that she prefers to write her reviews on TripAdvisor. The reason for choosing this platform is because she feels that TripAdvisor has provided her with useful travel product information that helped her purchase the best travel experience possible. She feels that other people should also get the best travel product, as she had gotten it herself. Therefore, she returns the favor by being helpful to other consumers on the platform by writing recommendations through reviews. This is an example of reciprocity. Moreover, this comment can also be related to the motivational factor of trust, as she clearly indicates that she finds information on TripAdvisor trustworthy and as a main reason for choosing to write reviews on this platform rather than on Hotels.com. This could point to an interrelation between these two factors, as we from this example learn that trust in the platform can result in reciprocity because you find the information helpful and, therefore, want to pay back by being helpful yourself.

The two above-mentioned examples of reciprocity as motivation both demonstrate TripAdvisor users who have received help on the platform and, therefore, conduct a helpful behavior towards other users. However, we also find an example in our data, where it is both ways around. OM was asked if he had considered whether or not his review had contributed to anything, and replied: *“Yes definitely! It is because I can feel that there is this exchange... You know, people use it. View it. I do it as well. See what others write”* (Appendix O: 2). In this comment OM underlines that it is important to him that there is an exchange between the users on TripAdvisor when writing reviews. He puts a lot of significance in the trade of information between consumers on the platform, and for him this is an aspect that makes TripAdvisor a useful tool. The comment indicates that OM both is motivated to knowledge sharing because he wants to pay back other consumers for sharing valuable information as well as getting something in return for sharing his own information. He sees it as a relationship that goes both

ways. Thus, it can be argued that reciprocity for OM is a key element of the platform and, moreover, a key motivation for exchanging knowledge through the activity of writing reviews.

Another participant, IR, who had actually not written reviews on TripAdvisor earlier, was asked what would motivate him to do such a thing. His answer was:

“If someone said: you will get 10% of your bill refunded if you write a review, then I could spend five minutes, but I wouldn’t take it serious anyway. Just say if it is positive or negative, you know, I don’t want to lie” (Appendix I: 5).

Here, it is evident that the only factor that could make him write a review is if he would receive economic compensation. Thus, his single motivation for review writing is to get a reward, which once again relates to reciprocity, but this time factors outside TripAdvisor are main drivers. He is not the only participant who is driven by reciprocity through economic incentives, as PM states what her motives for review writing would be: *“[...] if there was any reward or advantage by doing it. You could get some points or something like that. Otherwise not, I am not really the type I think”* (Appendix P: 2). Once again, it is evident that getting rewarded is a key motivation. Furthermore, PM also states when asked if she had written reviews on other platforms than TripAdvisor:

“Yes, but only to do a workplace or my family a favour. Otherwise, I have never done it. [...] My brother has just started his own company, so I wrote a review for his company. Or the places I have been working as a waiter, I have given them top ratings and write reviews that is very good and can benefit them” (Appendix P: 1).

In this comment, PM tells that she writes reviews to benefits people to whom she has a personal relationship. This can also be argued as a reciprocal motivational factor as she pays back her workplace due to professional relations. However, we can also identify altruism, as she does a favor to her brother without expressing any expectation of getting something in return. No matter what, her motives for writing the reviews are influenced by factors outside the platforms on which she writes the reviews. It should be taken into consideration that her reviews were not written on TripAdvisor, but we argue that this could just as well be the case,

since the companies involving her personal relations, might as well have been companies relevant to this platform.

We have both seen evidence that puts reciprocity in the consumer-to-consumer context, where TripAdvisor users pay back for being provided with useful information. Moreover, we also found that other external influences like receiving money or doing favors that are personally related would be a driver for writing reviews. In the section of altruism we also saw examples of motivation based on reciprocity. These were in the consumer-to-company context.

5.2.2.2. Reputation

Moving on to reputation, this turned out to be a motivational factor seemingly not very prominent in our data. However, when talking about reasons for sharing knowledge on TripAdvisor, the participant OM said:

“[...] TripAdvisor is good at telling you if people have read your review and you can give “useful votes” to each other and so on. So I thought it was quite cool to get sort of a response to my input. And know that someone has seen it” (Appendix O: 2).

OM is aware of the fact that TripAdvisor has a system ranking the reviewers and, moreover, he finds it exciting what other users think about his reviews. The comment indicates that he cares about whether or not the information he has provided is useful to others as he says that it is cool to get response to his input. Furthermore, OM specifically mentions the function where you can rate other reviewers as useful and this also tells us that he cares about how other TripAdvisor users perceive him as a reviewer and he urges to obtain a certain status in the community. Therefore, it can be argued that he is motivated by enhancing his reputation on the platform. From our data this comment turned out to be the only evidence of enhancing your reputation as a driver for writing reviews.

5.2.3. Feeling-Based Motivations

In this section we will analyze the feeling-based motivations, which are defined as motivation that derive from feelings rather than reflections. The feeling-based motivations are venting and expressing positive feelings.

5.2.3.1. Venting

Focusing on the negative aspect of the feeling-based motivations, which is venting, one of the participants, CR, talked about a review she and her friends had written on AirBnB after a travel experience. We asked her why she had written the review, and she explained:

“Because we were fucking annoyed that they wrote they had a kitchen, but they had no cutlery and no pans. Then you can’t write that you have a kitchen. So yeah, it was aggression that was the motivation in that case” (Appendix C: 3).

CR and her friends clearly had been misinformed about the travel product they had purchased. Their expectations were not met as they had expected not only to have a kitchen in their rented apartment, but also a functional one. This led them to feel disappointed, as the purchased product did not deliver what they felt was promised, and thereby created feeling of frustration to a point having to react. This reaction was based on letting out their frustration through writing a review on the purchased travel product, and thus it can be argued that the main motivation was venting.

Another example is the participant, KM, who talked about the reason for writing a review on TrustPilot because of a negative experience on a restaurant she had visited multiple times:

“Because it kept happening. It takes so long to get a got damn snack burger! I thought to myself that was not good enough and wrote to them. And my friend was with me and she was like: do it! [...] It was to inform them that it sucked. That the staff sucked!” (Appendix K: 2).

KM’s language is characterized by frustration. She indicates that she had been dissatisfied by a product purchase several times which can possibly have led her to build up feelings of frustra-

tion. It finally resulted in her writing a review about her dissatisfaction to blow off steam. Once again we can identify venting as the motivation for writing this review.

Additionally, LM elaborates on a negative experience she had at a bar, where she and her friends felt ignored by the bartenders and decided to write a review on their Facebook page about it:

“[...] we decided to leave, we thought it was rubbish, we just wanted two drinks, so they could just take our order and go back to making drinks and make ours when there was time. And we were maybe a little drunk, so we thought it was bad, so I think we instantly wrote that it was too lousy that we couldn’t even be acknowledged” (Appendix L: 5).

This is another example of a dissatisfied consumer. LM and her friends do not feel that the service quality lives up to the standard, as they do not feel acknowledged by the waiters. This makes them frustrated and further leads them to write a review about their experience. This shows that they were driven to write the review by venting negative feelings. Noting that she says they wrote the review instantly after the experience, demonstrates that venting can be a rather impulsive action. This seems consistent with our theory suggesting that venting is based on feelings of frustrations, which possibly can be more powerful in the moment of disappointment over the desired purchase.

It is important to notice that the 3 examples from our data of reviews motivated by venting were written on the platforms of AirBnB, TrustPilot and Facebook, while we found no evidence of this motivational factor on TripAdvisor. Thus venting cannot necessarily be applied to TripAdvisor. This may tell us something about TripAdvisor as a platform compared to others. Taking this notion further, 3 of the participants talked about expressing their opinions on venting as a motivation of writing reviews: MM and NM talked about their considerations on the consequences of the companies when writing reviews about their products:

“I always make sure to leave some good words. If I do not have anything good to say about the place, then I won’t write anything about them... or make sure to write something constructive at least. I don’t write anything saying it is just some shit. The companies can’t use that for anything. They are also a company that has to be functional, so if anything the need to have something constructive they know how to improve in the future” (Appendix M: 2).

We learn that MM has concerns about the companies, as she considers the consequences of her reviews. She is aware that she might affect their business when writing negative reviews about their products. Therefore, she only writes negatively to be constructive and help them improve their products. The concern for the companies was supported NM, who said:

“[...] I don’t feel like ruining a business because I had a bad experience. I would rather write personally to the people responsible and tell them they could do something differently” (Appendix N: 2).

She shows concern by saying that she does not shows her dissatisfaction in public, where other consumers can be influenced negatively in a way that would hurt the business of the companies. She also expresses, when having a negative experience with a product, her criticism is based on being constructive and helping the companies optimizing their products. Another participant, LM, talks about the same subject:

“[...] I think I would like to benefit the company and not write a bad review, because I don’t want to ruin anything if they had been unlucky one day. If it was time and time again or was it totally unacceptable, we got ripped off, or it was unsafe. If your safety were threatened for example, then I think I would do it. But I write a good review in order to promote them and then I think, if it is bad then I just don’t say anything, because you read the positive ones, so ... it can be enough not to write a review” (Appendix L: 4).

In the same way as the participants of the two preceding comments, she expresses her constraint of writing negative reviews because she is concerned about the consequences for the companies. She does not want to be destructive and ruin their business. She instead expresses that restraining herself from writing reviews would be a punishment for the companies, when providing her with a negative product experience. All the 3 comments above demonstrates reasons for not being motivated by venting when writing reviews and suggests that the participants LM, MM and NM are all consumers who prevents themselves from venting. It should, though, be noted that LM was actually among the participants where we found evidence of venting as motivational factor. However, in the comment proving venting, she underlined they

were drunk in the situation (Appendix L) which can be argued as an excuse for writing the review. This can be an expression for, to some extent, regretting the action. Furthermore, she does say in the comment that she might write a negative review if it was consequently bad or a very extreme service quality gap. These 3 participants were all TripAdvisor reviewers (Appendix L, M & N). From this it can be argued that TripAdvisor distinguishes from other platforms when it comes to the motivational factor of venting.

5.2.3.2. Expressing Positive Feelings

The other aspect of feeling-based motivation is the factor of expressing positive feelings. We have already learned in the section of altruism that this motive did appear in a comment.

NM talked about a positive travel experience she had in Copenhagen that made her write a review. When asked about the reason for writing the review she said:

“Because it was fantastic, and for free. And very informative. For my point of view it was exciting to hear what foreign guides think of Denmark and the Danish people. And it was exciting because my boyfriend was with me. He got an exposition of Copenhagen in two hours. And I was like: do you think that about Danish people? It was very exciting and the guide was just fantastic. I had to share that with other people” (Appendix N: 2).

She underlines that the guided tour was for free, which can have had an influence on her level of expectations regarding the experience. Going on a guided tour for free could very well have resulted in low expectations. Thus, the review could very well be written because the experience surpassed her expectations, as she tells it was fantastic and praises the guide. This made her express her positive feelings through a review on TripAdvisor. This was the only clear evidence in our data of expressing positive feeling as a motivation for writing reviews.

We had other examples where the participants could possibly be driven by this motivation. For example, KM was asked why she only did star ratings but not wrote reviews including text. She replied: *“It takes too long. If it had been something overwhelming to some degree then I probably would write some text too”* (Appendix K: 2). This comment could be related to the motivation of expressing positive feelings as something overwhelming could be related to a positive experience that made her want to share her satisfaction. However, it could just as

well be related to the motivation of recommending the experience to other and, therefore, be based on altruism. Finally, an overwhelming experience could possibly be a negative experience that made her express frustration through venting. Thus, we do not see such comments as valid evidence of any specific motivational factor.

When comparing the two feeling-based motivations, we learn that venting is arguably more evident in our data than expressing positive feelings. However, when only focusing on reviews written on TripAdvisor, venting is not visible while the motivation of expressing positive feelings seems limited. Thus, the feelings-based motivations do not seem like a motivational factor driving consumers to write reviews on TripAdvisor.

5.2.4. Trust-Based Factors

We will now turn our focus to the last category of the motivational factors for writing reviews on TripAdvisor, which is trust-based factors involving trust in the platform.

5.2.4.1. Trust in Platform

Considering the person who actively writes reviews on TripAdvisor, relevant comments were made about trustworthiness. When talking about her opinion on TripAdvisor, MM says:

“I think it is very useful if you are new in a big city and you don’t know about the culture and the food and the city in general. Then you can always go in there to find out – what would I like? Where can we eat? TripAdvisor is very good at guiding you to places where you do not get screwed or get some bad food, for example, but instead a good experience” (Appendix M: 1).

She expresses that TripAdvisor is good at guiding her to places where she will avoid negative product experiences. This indicates that she finds information on the platform helpful. It seems like an incorporated aspect of her travel habit. All of this tells us that she perceives the platform as trustworthy. Later in the interview she added:

“I would like to leave a trustworthy review too, so that it can be helpful to other people. I would like to leave something useful to both the company and the consumer” (Appendix M: 4).

This comment tells that when trusting other reviews it encourages MM to write a review herself. She argues that when she feels trust in other consumers' reviews it motivates her to give something back, and thus the comment makes a connection between the trust in the platform and reciprocity. From this, it can be argued that trust in the platform and reciprocity are motivations that can be interrelated, which we also found evidence of in the section of reciprocity. This further strengthens that point. This is also consistent with the argument that when you trust reviews on a platform, you perceive them as more useful. And when you are provided with useful information, you will be more likely to pay back by providing other users with useful information by writing reviews yourself.

Also LM and NM, who writes reviews on TripAdvisor, comment on their opinion on the platform: *"I think it is very trustworthy and I prefer to use it instead of trying to figure it out by yourself"* (Appendix L: 2). NM further comments: *"I think it is very useful because, for example, when I go to Copenhagen for 1-2 days, then I go to TripAdvisor for advice on what to see"* (Appendix N: 1). LM directly expresses that she trusts the information on TripAdvisor, while NM indirectly tells it by stating that she uses the platform for advice, and find it useful. As in the case of MM, it can also be argued that TripAdvisor is an incorporated tool for advice when she is discovering new places. Therefore, they both seem to trust the platform.

Another active TripAdvisor review writer, OM, states:

"On TripAdvisor I feel like I have something to say. Well of course it is true that there are some of the same things that you could do and say on Facebook... you know... their pages where you can go and review. I just think I have a different view of Facebook, more as being a place where people go to complain. [...] Most things I have viewed are relatively constructive on TripAdvisor" (Appendix OM: 4).

Here OM compares TripAdvisor and Facebook. He expresses being aware that the two platforms have the same function of reviewing products and services. However, he views the content differently. When stating that Facebook is a place of complaining while TripAdvisor content is constructive, it tells us that he finds the information on TripAdvisor more useful, as it is a platform where knowledge is shared with the intent of helping other users. Thus, it can be

argued that he perceives the information on TripAdvisor as more trustworthy which points to the fact that he has a high level of trust in the platform.

In the interview with LM, she also compares TripAdvisor with other platforms providing the same kind of functions, like reviewing products and services. When talking about TripAdvisor in relation to those other platforms, she says:

“The others [platforms] are mainstream. I think TripAdvisor is for the friendliness of the travel, or you know. It is for the travellers, not for the advertisement. I actually don’t know who made it and if they profit from it. I thought it was someone, who enjoyed travelling and then he started it. [...] I think it is for travellers to travellers. A help” (Appendix L: 3).

When saying that other platforms are ‘mainstream’, and furthermore, that TripAdvisor is for travellers and not for advertisement, LM expresses her perception of TripAdvisor as a platform containing legit information, while questioning the legitimacy of other platforms. Moreover, as she states that TripAdvisor is for travellers to travellers, it seems like she perceives the platform as more of a united community that shares their passion with other consumers who have the same passion. All of this points to LM expressing that TripAdvisor is a platform where the consumers are eager to help each other by providing useful information. Thus, we learn that she perceives TripAdvisor as more trustworthy than other platforms containing the same functions.

When focusing on the participants, who do not actively write reviews on TripAdvisor, IR talked about why the reviews did not influence his decision-making when choosing a product on the platform:

“It is because I don’t believe it. It is the same argument... who writes it? Which interest do you have? How do you see it? And it can be different from person to person. And from time to time. TripAdvisor is good enough but I don’t order my vacation there” (Appendix I: 4).

Here we learn that IR does not find the reviews helpful, as the information is too subjective because it only expresses the opinions of people who might not see things the same way as he does. Therefore, he questions the trustworthiness of the user-generated content on TripAdvisor. This was strengthened when he was asked about his opinion on the platform, where he

clearly expresses his dislike: *“I do not care about it. It means nothing to me”* (Appendix I: 6). Later, he was asked why he had never written a review on TripAdvisor himself, and said: *“It is because I have the opinion that people don’t care about it, just like me”* (Appendix I: 6). As he has earlier said that he does not find TripAdvisor trustworthy and therefore don’t care about the platform, this comment tells us that his lack of motivation for writing reviews is because he puts other people in his place and suppose they would not care about it, if he provided them with reviews. From this, we learn that the lack of trust can be regarded as a kind of anti-motivation, which supports trust in the platform as antecedent for writing reviews on TripAdvisor. We argue that the users actively writing reviews on TripAdvisor could very well be motivated by doing it, because they trust the platform. This evidence of distrusting the platform as an anti-motivation for review writing is consistent with this argument.

5.2.5. Sum Up of Analysis of Online Sharing Motivation on TripAdvisor

We will now sum up our findings from this analysis, to find out which of the motivational categories and the motivational factors belonging to these categories are apparent from our data.

5.2.5.1. Intrinsic Factors

Focusing on intrinsic factors, altruism was the dominant motivation for writing reviews on TripAdvisor. We found examples that altruism can be followed by the extrinsic factor of reciprocity and vice-versa, as both factors were apparent among the same participants. Feeling-based motivation was also identified along with altruism, in this case expressing positive feelings. Altruism was a prominent motivation both emanating from more extreme degree of negative product experiences and positive product experiences. Regarding the negative product experiences, evidence was found that altruism was dominant to venting. The other two intrinsic factors of self-enhancement and enjoyment were both difficult to identify, with enjoyment only vaguely evident while self-enhancement seemingly not apparent at all.

5.2.5.2. Extrinsic Factors

In the category of extrinsic factors, we found evidence of reciprocity as motivational factor for review writing. Evidence was found of reciprocity in the consumer-to-consumer context, where TripAdvisor users pay back for being provided with useful information. Also external influences, like receiving money or doing personally related favors, were identified as motivation of reciprocity. However, this was not the case among active TripAdvisor review writers. We also saw examples of motivation based on reciprocity in the consumer-to-company context. The other extrinsic motivation of reputation was far less prominent with only one example of this motivational factor.

5.2.5.3. Feeling-Based Factors

When analyzing the feeling-based motivational factors, venting is arguably more evident in our data than expressing positive feelings. However, when only focusing on reviews written on TripAdvisor, venting was not a factor that motivated consumer to write reviews. This was explained by consumers' restrain from hurting the businesses of the product providers. Expressing positive feelings was neither that prominent. Overall, feelings-based motivations did not seem like significant motivational factor driving TripAdvisor users to write reviews.

5.2.5.4. Trust-Based Factors

Considering the motivational factor of trust-based factors, namely trust in the platform, we found that all the participants, who actively write reviews on TripAdvisor have a high level of trust the platform, as they find the information provided by other consumers as constructive and the consumers are perceived as more helpful. It is evident that trust in TripAdvisor is an important motivational factor when deciding to write reviews on the platform. On the other hand, distrust in the content could also make people restrain from writing reviews, which further supports that trust in the platform is an important antecedent for writing reviews on TripAdvisor. Moreover, we found evidence that trust and reciprocity are two motivational factors that can be connected as trust leads to consumers finding information on the platform more useful, which further leads them to be motivated by paying back by providing useful information themselves.

Summing up on the 4 motivational categories we see that TripAdvisor users can be both motivated to review writing by extrinsic, intrinsic, feeling-based and trust-based motivations. Being motivated by one of these categories does not eliminate other categories, as some of the participants expressed multiple motivations belonging to different categories. It is evident that most review writing emanates from having extreme travel product experiences, as these make a big impression on the participants. However, among TripAdvisor users, extrinsic and intrinsic motivations seem to overshadow feeling-based motivations. This was explained by concern for the well-being of the product providers, as participants do not want to be destructive to the businesses by venting frustrations, which they find purposeless. They would rather provide constructive criticism directed at the companies, by either recommending products or warn against them with the purpose of being helpful to other TripAdvisor users. This is mainly done through the intrinsic motivation of altruism and the extrinsic motivation of reciprocity. Trust-based factors seems to be a decisive prerequisite for writing reviews on TripAdvisor, which encourages consumers to be helpful by providing constructive and useful information both directed at other consumers and product providers. The trust-based factors seems particularly connected to extrinsic motivations as the consumer urges to return favors to other consumers for receiving what they perceive as useful information, which relates to the motivation of reciprocity.

When looking further into the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of review writing on TripAdvisor, we see a clear pattern that motivations based on solidarity, like altruism and reciprocity are largely prominent, while motivations based on the consumer themselves, like self-enhancement, enjoyment, and reputation are only evident to a very small extend. This supports the findings of an earlier study, mentioned in our theoretical section, by Munar and Jacobsen (2014) who found that concerning the platform of TripAdvisor, motivations for review writing were to a larger extend evident in community-based motivation rather than self-centered motivations.

After conducting the analysis, we will now move on to the discussion, which will examine common denominators between the two parts of the analysis.

6. Discussion - Correlating Our Problem Formulation

In this chapter of the project, we connect the two parts of our analysis, which entails that this chapter enhances, how our problem formulation is interrelated. We discuss, based on the above analysis chapter, how common denominators occurs between consumers who process online hotel reviews on TripAdvisor and consumers who write online reviews TripAdvisor. The discussion will function as an addition to the analysis, since it discusses common denominators between the two parts of the analysis, as well as elements from the data that went beyond the grasp of our two analytical models.

The discussion will be divided into 3 sections. We start off by discussing the element of fast processing. Hereafter, we discuss TripAdvisor and the community spirit. Lastly, we discuss the consequences of TripAdvisor being a big platform.

6.1. Fast Processing

In this part of the discussion, we highlight the tendency of fast processing. This is due to the fact that the participants indicate that it has to be easy and fast to both process online hotel reviews and to write online reviews. However, this element goes beyond our model of antecedents of trust, but we still think it is important to highlight the tendency, as a common denominator for the two parts of our problem formulation.

From our data, it seems that many of the participants read the online reviews fast and superficially. This is also evident, since the heuristic factors, such as pictures and rating rely on little information that can reduce the cognitive burden and time cost associated with decision-making, has been found to be important elements to the participants from the first part of our analysis. Since we do not have anything to compare with, it is impossible to measure how fast they process the online hotel reviews. However, one observation that may be an indicator of a fast and superficial way of processing online hotel reviews, can be found when we ask AR how many reviews he read before he made his final choice of hotel, where to he answers: *“3-4. There were many in French that I didn’t understand but the ones in English or German I could understand”* (Appendix A: 2). This comment is interesting in relation to fast and superficial processing, considering that TripAdvisor enables you within each written review to use “GoogleTranslate”. However, we cannot be sure that the connection is related to

AR reading the reviews fast and superficially. It may also be because he recognizes e.g. the bad translation tool of GoogleTranslate, or he just does not care that much about the written reviews.

However, a similar observation is evident from JR, when we asked him, whether anything in the written reviews caught his attention, where to he answers: *“I quickly scrolled through them, since I realised that many of them was in Spanish or French. I don’t understand those”* (Appendix J: 2). Again, we cannot be sure that this comment has to do with the participant’s scrolling fast and superficially through the reviews, but at least towards the written reviews, it seems that the process is very fast.

Another example that may tell us something about a fast processing of written reviews, is evident from GR. GR went through every photo within the online reviews. In continuation of this observation, we therefore ask GR if he also went through all the written reviews, where to he answers: *“Well, basically I just looked at the ones that were featured first”* (Appendix G: 3). Comparing GR’s way of processing online reviews, this actually tells us that he does not go through the online reviews fast and superficially, since he looks at every picture that is featured within each review. However, his way of processing the written reviews is fast and superficial, since he only considers the ones that are featured first. This comparison therefore seems to indicate that his interest or trust towards the written reviews is limited, and this may be why he processes the written reviews fast and superficially or more specifically, why he only looks at the ones that are featured first.

In continuation of this discussion, it may be relevant to include HR, since she emphasizes (when we ask her why she prefer pictures over reviews): *“I find them more trustworthy, and it is faster to go through pictures than reviews. It is easier to just look at some pictures than reading a lot of stuff”* (Appendix H: 2). This comment however supports our interpretation that participants may find enjoyment in processing elements of the reviews that are easy and fast, but it also seems to be crucial that they find these elements trustworthy.

In the second part of our analysis, an easy and fast process may also be something that can have a positive effect on some of the participants’ motivations for writing online reviews. However, this element also goes beyond the motivational factors of the model that we utilized of motivation for writing online reviews.

In our data we found PM, who emphasizes:

“[...] We wrote a review because we were dissatisfied. It was also because AirBnB ask you to write a review. Like GoMore. On TripAdvisor you have to seek it out yourself. Go in actively and write a review. I would never do that” (Appendix P: 1).

Although the main driver for PM and her friends writing an online review may be due to a very dissatisfied experience, she also indicates that the process of writing a review on TripAdvisor is too demanding and that is why she would never write a review on this platform. At the same time, PM already stated not to be very engaged in writing online reviews (Appendix P). This may be what constraints her from writing on TripAdvisor, as it is too demanding and time consuming.

Another example, though, can be emphasized from LM who is, as opposite to PM, an active review writer. When we asked her about why she chose to write reviews, she emphasized:

“The first I wrote was a trip to Mallorca with my boyfriend, where we stayed the cosiest place in a city in the middle of nowhere, where there was the most fantastic restaurant. So I thought that they were really good at connecting with us, and I thought I would like to help them and help others to experience it. So that’s why I decided to spend some of my time - because it does take some time” (Appendix L: 2).

In the end of this statement, we also observe a time reference, where LM explicitly indicates that it is demanding to write reviews on TripAdvisor due to the time consumption. However, LM is an active review writer and it seems that she enjoys it. In relation to this, it may therefore be discussed if the motivations of altruism or reciprocity will overshadow the demanding process that some participants point to. This point was also found in the second part of the analysis. However, since it is time consuming to go in and write a review on TripAdvisor, it may result in motivations for online reviews being more constructive in nature on TripAdvisor, as we found in the motivational factors of altruism and reciprocity.

In the second part of our analysis, we did not find evidence of the motivation of ‘venting’ in participants who write reviews on TripAdvisor, but we learned that LM wrote her only review based on ‘venting’ on Facebook. Another example is PM, who writes a review, based on the motivation of ‘venting’, on AirBnB. Since ‘venting’ is based on motivational factors driven by feelings, this may therefore tell us that TripAdvisor do not provide the setting for consu-

mers to write reviews based on ‘venting’, since it is time consuming to write reviews on the platform. The time consuming process may therefore result in the consumer having the time to reflect on their impulsive action as it happens, and thereby constrain themselves from venting or writing reviews based on feelings. However, another explanatory factor may be that TripAdvisor can be seen as a community for travellers, more specifically it can therefore be discussed whether TripAdvisor’s role as a community, may prevent the motivation of ‘venting’, since it is reflected by solidarity between travellers. However, we will discuss TripAdvisor’s role as a community in the following.

6.2. TripAdvisor – The Community Spirit

From the first part of our analysis, it is evident that due online reviews on TripAdvisor being based on information from travellers, some participants trust the source of the review. More specifically in relation to our theory, this reflects source credibility, which consequently increases the level of trust towards the online reviews on TripAdvisor. The fact that TripAdvisor reflects a community that is based on information from travellers, is a central point to highlight, when discussing a common denominator between the two part of our problem formulation. Since this both has a role towards how consumers process online reviews on TripAdvisor and since it also reflects community-based motivations, namely altruism and reciprocity.

As mentioned, it was evident from the first part of our analysis that source credibility, based on the fact that it is travellers who primarily write the online reviews, has a positive effect on participants’ trust towards online reviews on TripAdvisor. However, in this context, it was also evident that many participants expressed their awareness of manipulated reviews, which more specifically entails that they by default trust the online reviews, since they perceive the sources as credible. However, they do not trust the sources blindly.

The reflection of TripAdvisor as a community of solidarity is also an interesting element to highlight in relation to our findings of the second part of our analysis. It was evident that many participants were motivated to write reviews on TripAdvisor in order to share their experience with other consumers. This implicitly reflects the community spirit of the platform. More specifically, in the second part of the analysis we found that when many of the participants share their experience based on altruism and reciprocity, it indicates that they do it in order to contribute to the community of TripAdvisor. The community spirit is also highlighted

in the findings of our analysis that reciprocity and trust in TripAdvisor as a platform are interconnected. The community spirit of TripAdvisor may also be an explanation of why we do not identify the motivation of ‘self-enhancement’ in the participants who write reviews on TripAdvisor, since this motivation is defined by inner feelings of self-efficacy, which reflects self-centered motivations. One clear example can be found from BR, who writes many reviews but not on Facebook, as she argues: *“Because then they can see it’s me. It is also like on Facebook that if you have something negative to say, then you are just a person that complaints [...]”* (Appendix B: 2). The fact that TripAdvisor users by default are anonymous connotes the community spirit of TripAdvisor. Being anonymous furthermore constraints the consumers from chasing egoistic self-centered acknowledgement. This is supported by our findings from the analysis, since it shows how the self-centered motivation of reputation is hardly evident. The element of anonymity on TripAdvisor may therefore also contribute to the motivations of altruism and reciprocity, since they are not self-centered motivations. Another reason why, is that the participants are not focused on source credibility in relation to personal information about the individual reviewers, when they process online hotel reviews, since TripAdvisor is more about the content and not the individual reviewers as such. This all indicate that the consumers on TripAdvisor might be more interested in the common opinion rather than the individual opinion on the platform. The community spirit might also explain why the feeling-based motivations are predominantly absent on TripAdvisor, since it is an expression of your own needs rather than any concern for other consumers by providing constructive information through reviews.

However, in connection to self-centered motivations, it may also be relevant to reflect on the concept of ‘social desirability’, which we emphasized in our methodology on page 15, as a possible limitation of qualitative interviewing when interviewing participants about personal opinions. More specifically, when considering motivations that are more self-centered in nature, participants may give an answer of what is socially accepted instead of what they actually mean. However, we do see examples of participants who do not mind expressing things that may not be social desirable. E.g. when we ask PM why she has chosen not to write a review about one of her experiences, she answers: *“[...] I really don’t care about whether other hotels get reviews or not”* (Appendix P: 1). Also AR expresses: *“[...] I am very egoistic in that area, so if I have a bad experience I tell my friends about it but I don’t want to tell the whole world. I don’t give a fuck [...]”* (Appendix A: 5). Here, some people would probably have a

tendency to give a different answer if they evaluate it as social unacceptable *not to care* and *not give a fuck*.

In the analysis we moreover found an interesting addition to this. In the first part of the analysis some participants made it clear that they do not trust extremely positive or extremely negative reviews. They tend to trust the mediocre rated reviews more. However, in the second part of the analysis, we found that the dominating motivation for writing reviews was altruism, which appeared when a consumer had an extremely positive or extremely negative experience. This can create a discrepancy between review writers and review readers, since readers trust mediocre rated reviews, but writers provide extremely negative or positive reviews. Thereby, a discrepancy between supply and demand can occur. This can be a challenge to the community spirit.

However, the community element reflected on the platform of TripAdvisor can be recognized as a common denominator of consumers who process online hotel reviews on TripAdvisor and consumers' motivation for writing online reviews on TripAdvisor. In the following, we discuss the element of TripAdvisor, as being a big platform and discuss this, as a common denominator for the two parts of our problem formulation.

6.3. Being a Big Platform – Good or Bad?

In this part of the discussion, we examine TripAdvisor as a big platform, which is a factor that is enhanced in our analysis, both in relation to the data analyzed towards the first part of our problem formulation but also in relation to the last part.

In the first part of the analysis, we saw that TripAdvisor as a big platform relied on elements that contributed to the level of trust among many participants. We found that participants, who explained their trust towards online reviews on TripAdvisor, rely on the fact that the platform is so big. A lot of the participants argued, how they trust the platform, because of it being well-known. Familiarity might thereby also play a part in increasing the trustworthiness of the platform. This importance of the size of the platform is also supported as some of the participants expressed how their way of processing online reviews were related to the quantity of reviews. If the overall rating is based on a huge quantity of reviews, they are more likely to trust the online hotel review.

In the last part of the analysis, we found that some of the participants argued how their reviews did not make any difference unless they have the ability to warn others, since the platform is so big and filled with so many reviews. They emphasized that their personal reviews would not make any difference and therefore are unimportant due to the many consumers already contributing on the platform. This, however, resulted in the fact that the big size and many review contributions of TripAdvisor actually have a negative impact on some of the participants' motivation for writing online reviews. This is also supported when some of the participants explain a motivation to write more personalized reviews since these reviews actually are able to make a difference in this relation.

What may also be an interesting consideration to highlight from our data in this context, is that one of the participants argues that she is not motivated to write a review on TripAdvisor, but she did it at GoMore and when we ask her why, she answers, *"[...] because you are more personally invested. It is single persons. So if you think they are nice, I would give them 5 stars"* (Appendix P: 2). In connection to the element of being personally invested, it may also be interesting to highlight the element of personal relations, since we found evidence in our analysis that this motivation may lead to personal favors in form of altruism and reciprocity, which further might lead to manipulation of reviews and therefore decrease the level of trust towards online reviews. E.g. PM argues:

"My brother has just started his own company, so I wrote a review for his company. Or the places I have been working as a waiter, I have given them top ratings and writes reviews that it is very good and can benefit them" (Appendix P: 1).

Also MM, implicitly indicates manipulation towards online reviews based on her personal relations, when arguing *"[...] I have some friends who do some volunteer stuff, entrepreneurs, like Box Town here in Aalborg. I am very good at writing reviews for them to help their business"* (Appendix M: 3). Although these participants write online reviews to help their friends and family, they may support and maintain the distrust towards online reviews and TripAdvisor in general, if their reviews are not based on their actual experience. Therefore this personal relation may also be considered as a common denominator of our two parts of the problem formulation.

We will now move on to presenting the conclusion of the project.

7. Conclusion

In this project, we have, as social constructivists, examined the influence of TripAdvisor on consumers' decision-making process. Our object was to examine *how consumers process online hotel reviews on TripAdvisor and what motivates consumers to write online reviews on TripAdvisor*. At the same time, our intention was to connect this process between review readers and review writers on TripAdvisor. However, since our purpose was not to examine the influence of TripAdvisor on the same consumer's decision-making process in both parts of the problem formulation, our investigation was based on finding common denominators between consumers who process online hotel reviews on TripAdvisor and other consumers who write online reviews on TripAdvisor. This was a way to explore the connection between each part of the process.

7.1. How do consumers process online hotel reviews?

Through qualitative methods, respectively; observation and qualitative interviewing, we explored how consumers process online hotel reviews on TripAdvisor. More specifically, we used observation to trace how the participants processed six different hotels on TripAdvisor. This provided the possibility to analyze their online movements between each hotel. At the same time, our qualitative interviews, which functioned as conversational follow-up interviews, allowed us to create a more nuanced picture of the participants' online movements. The qualitative interviews benefited our investigation by obtaining specified knowledge of *why* the participants processed the online reviews on TripAdvisor in the way they did.

By using the model of 'Antecedents of trust towards consumers-generated content on TripAdvisor and its influence on purchase decision', as our analytical tool, we investigated how the participants processed online hotel reviews on TripAdvisor.

In this project, we found that all participants trust pictures and find the 'visual' material of the online reviews on TripAdvisor very important in their decision-making process. We also found that 'valence' of the reviews influenced a lot of the participants in their decision-making process. However, some questioned their origin, some just trusted them and some did not

trust them unless the overall rating was extremely negative. At the same time, we found that only few of the participants questioned the ‘source credibility’ of the reviewers, but many questioned the motives behind writing the reviews. Additionally, some participants simply trust the evaluation of others without questioning it. We further found that ‘the perceived quantity’ of the reviews was important for some participants, since they evaluated the rating based on this. However, not many participants even considered the perceived quantity of the reviews. Lastly, ‘the perceived informativeness and persuasiveness of written reviews’ was found to be very important for many participants, since it reflected whether or not they could relate to information from the written reviews and found them useful based on personal preferences. Gathering these elements, we found that the ‘arguments for choosing’ and how consumers process online hotel reviews were very individual. However, one thing was certain: all of the participants trusted pictures and deemed them important in their decision-making process, since pictures gave them the most objective indication of the hotel.

7.2. What motivates consumers to write online reviews on TripAdvisor?

Through qualitative interviewing, we investigated what motivates consumers to write online reviews on TripAdvisor. We utilized qualitative interviews, also in this case as conversational interviews, to gain knowledge of these motivations. Using this research method for this part of our problem formulation, allowed us to extract subjective answers from the participants, which we deemed very important towards the investigation of motivations.

By using the model of ‘Motivation for writing online reviews on TripAdvisor’, as our analytical tool, we investigated what motivates consumers to write online reviews TripAdvisor.

In this project, we found that consumers can be both motivated to write reviews based on ‘extrinsic’, ‘intrinsic’, ‘feeling-based’ and ‘trust-based’ motivations. However, being motivated by one of these categories did not eliminate other categories, as some of the participants expressed multiple motivations. We found that most review writing emanates from having extreme travel product experiences. However, among TripAdvisor users, extrinsic and intrinsic motivations seemed to overshadow feeling-based motivations. This was explained by concern for the well-being of the product providers, as participants did not want to be destructive to businesses by venting frustrations, which they find purposeless. Additionally, we found that they would rather provide constructive criticism directed at the companies, by either recom-

mending products or warn against them with the purpose of being helpful to other TripAdvisor users. This was mainly done through the intrinsic motivation of ‘altruism’ and the extrinsic motivation of ‘reciprocity’. Trust-based motivations seemed to be a decisive prerequisite for writing reviews on TripAdvisor, which encouraged consumers to be helpful by providing constructive and useful information both directed at other consumers and product providers. The trust-based motivations seemed particularly connected to extrinsic motivation of reciprocity, as the consumer urged to return favors to other consumers for receiving what they perceived as useful information. Comparing the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of review writing on TripAdvisor, we found a clear pattern that motivations based on solidarity, like altruism and reciprocity were largely prominent, while self-centered motivations, like ‘self-enhancement’, ‘enjoyment’, and ‘reputation’ were only evident to a very small extend.

7.3. Common Denominators

In our project, we found common denominators for consumers who read online reviews on TripAdvisor and consumers who write online reviews on TripAdvisor.

‘Fast processing’ was found to be the first common denominator between the two groups of consumers. This was found to be a mutual element, as consumers who process online reviews, were found to be especially focused on ‘heuristic factors’ such as pictures and rating, which rely on little information that can reduce the cognitive burden and time cost associated with decision-making. At the same time, fast processing was also argued to influence consumers who write online reviews. However, in relation to TripAdvisor, this element may constitute a negative role, since we found participants indicating that it is too time consuming to write reviews on TripAdvisor. We also found that TripAdvisor and ‘the community spirit’ of the platform is something that can unite consumers who read online reviews on the platform and consumers who write online reviews on the platform. According to consumers who read online reviews, the fact that it is travellers who primarily write the online reviews, was found to have a positive effect on participants’ trust in online reviews on TripAdvisor. At the same time, we found that many participants were motivated to write online reviews on TripAdvisor in order to share their experience motivated by community-based motivations such as altruism and reciprocity. This implicitly reflects the community spirit of the platform. However, we also argued that the big size of the platform and the many review contributions on the

platform may have a negative impact on some of the participants' motivation for writing online reviews, since they do not feel their reviews were able to make any difference. Finally, we found that TripAdvisor being a big platform and being acknowledged and used by many consumers, increased the level of trust in the platform. Thereby, familiarity affects the trust of TripAdvisor and the size of the platform can positively influence the consumer.

8. Further Research

In this last part of the project, we will reflect on what further research can be conducted within the field of TripAdvisor and online consumer behavior.

After conducting our research, several other research opportunities have sprung from it. One issue, which could be interesting to investigate, is that of consumer-generated content versus company-provided information on TripAdvisor. Since we, in this project, only focus on the effect of online consumer reviews, we argue that further research could investigate the influence of company-provided information on review readers. Thereby, also comparing the two different sources of information. In this project we only shortly discuss other elements that goes beyond the consumer-generated content. Therefore, we argue such additional research could contribute to this field of research.

Moreover, drawing on our results, we find that further research discussing the correlation between the same consumer reading reviews and writing reviews would be of interest. In this project we investigated the consumers independently of each stage of the decision-making process instead of having the same participants in each group. This provided answers on whether or not the writers of reviews also read reviews themselves, but only to a limited extend. In our data, we found that consumers read reviews in order to align expectations and moreover, we found that the dominant motivation for writing is dependent on whether or not your experience either succeeded the expectations or fell short. This raises the question: can reading reviews affect the motivation to write reviews on TripAdvisor? Since you have a better possibility to align your expectations, you might not experience the service quality gap as explained in our theory. This could be interesting to research further. We thereby find that an investigation of how reading reviews can have an influence on writing them, might be relevant in addition to this project.

Since our findings are based on data from a limited age group, it would furthermore be interesting to conduct research of the same nature with other age groups in order to see whether or not this could provide additional or different data. Online consumers are of all ages, which is why this approach is interesting in order to view how different online consumers process or are motivated to write reviews on TripAdvisor.

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