

**Article title: Exploring electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in the consumer purchase decision-making process: The case of online holidays – evidence from United Kingdom (UK) consumers**

**Author(s): Cheng-Hao Chen, Bang Nguyen, Philipp “Phil” Klaus and Meng-Shan Wu**

#### **ABSTRACT.**

This study explores the role of electronic-word-of-mouth (eWOM) in the consumer decision-making process when purchasing a holiday. Using an ethnographic approach, it explores the role of eWOM on consumers’ attitudes toward online reviews (eReviews) and their subsequent behavior. Across the consumer decision-making processes – information search, evaluation, and purchase – the study develops a conceptual framework with three eWOM dimensions: (1) motivation, (2) source, and (3) content. Findings explore the variations of eWOM’s influence across the decision-making stages with implications for theory and practice. The study further highlights implications for segmentation practices in the tourism industry.

**KEYWORDS.** Online Review, electronic-word-of-mouth (eWOM), consumer purchase decision-making process, information search, segmentation, United Kingdom.

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The tourism industry is one of the most important sources of the global economy, and is rapidly growing (Jones, Lee, & Chon, 2011; Klaus & Maklan, 2011; Koc, 2004). According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (2013), tourism contributes US\$ 7 trillion to the world’s economy and to around 9.5% of the global economy and to around 4.3% of global employment (Intel, 2011). For example, in 2011, UK citizens engaged in 56 million tourism-related visits abroad and 42 million inside the UK (Office of National Statistics, 2011). Despite the recent economic recession, 25% of UK consumers continue to perceive a holiday as an essential part of

their lives. These consumers will rather switch to a less expensive leisure holiday type than not go on holiday at all (Intel, 2011). In 2014, the gross domestic product (GDP) growth of the travel and tourism sector is forecast to reach 4.3% (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2014). Due to the recovery from recession, higher consumer spending is driving the growth of travel and tourism. As a result, tourists are expected to spend more per 45 trip and enjoy long-haul travels, especially in the European markets. Due to these changing circumstances, the sector of travel and tourism is expected to bring job opportunities in the process (The World Travel and Tourism Council, 2014).

The arrival of the digital age and rise of online channels influences the tourism industry and its markets dramatically (Buhalis, 2003; Tham, Croy, & Mair, 2013). The use of communication technologies, such as smartphones, social networks, and other emerging tools, has changed the way consumers make purchasing decisions (Klaus, 2013; Leung, Law, Van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013). Consumers can share experiences directly with others through eWOM (Akehurst, 2009). The tourism industry needs to evaluate the influence of online communication channels, such as blogs, forum and rating websites, on their customers' behavior, and subsequently, their overall strategy (Lee, Law, & Murphy, 2011). These channels' transparency has increased price and promotion comparisons and interaction among peers (Klaus & Nguyen, 2013). Consumers now take advantage of the opportunity to disseminate their feelings and opinions to a vast number of potential consumers online eWOM. Consumers express their views in various forms, such as peer ranking or reviews, both positive and negative (Browning, So, & Sparks, 75 2013). Cheung, Lee, and Rabjohn (2008) suggest that consumers are more likely to pay attention to the negative forum content from fellow consumers than the positive one. Swarbrooke and Horner (2007) point out that, given the considerable monetary and emotional involvement of purchasing a holiday product, consumers are strongly influenced by others' opinions. This highlights the shift from friends and families toward online sources as consumers' primary decision-making process resource (Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011).

The purpose of this paper is to explore the role of eWoM in the consumer purchase decision-making process in the context of online holiday purchases. While many previous studies have concentrated on the influence exerted by either negative or positive reviews on consumer purchasing-decisions (Gupta & Harris, 2010; Lee,

Park, & Han, 2008; Park & Kim, 2008; Park, Lee, & Han, 2007; Sen & Lerman, 2007; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009), few studies have explored these influences across multiple consumer behavioral decision-making stages in a single comprehensive study, from initial information search through to the purchase. Our study aims to fill this gap, and highlights the influential factors that underline the concept of the consumer decision-making process, illustrated by a number of factors, namely: (1) motivation (e.g. purchase intention), (2) source (e.g. type of electronic word of mouth), and (3) content (e.g. positive, negative, and neutral reviews) on a product or a service. In addition, the present study fills another gap by conducting research into eWOM and the consumer purchase decision-making process in choosing a holiday, an area previously suggested as highly relevant for further exploration (see for example Sen & Lerman, 2007; Xie, Miao, Kuo, & Lee, 2011). Using a qualitative study, insights are provided into consumer attitudes and behaviors during the decision-making process. We explore the attitude toward and influence of eWOM, expressed as eReviews, on consumer behavior. Our study sets two objectives:

1. To explore the influence of eWOM and identify the importance of utilizing online information in the consumer purchase decision-making process.
2. To develop a conceptual framework of the role of eWOM in the consumer purchase decision-making process.

The paper is structured as follows: First, we present our literature review, the theoretical foundation of our study. Second, based on our review of the literature and an exploratory study in which 36 in-depth interviews are conducted, we present our findings. Next, we introduce the resulting conceptual model. Finally, we discuss the theoretical and managerial implications of our study.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMING**

Scholars highlight the crucial role of WOM in the consumer decision-making process (see for example Beiger & Laesser, 2004; Arndt, 1967; Cheung et al., 2008; Wen, 2012). According to Swarbrooke and Horner (2007, p. 416) WOM is “the process whereby consumers who have experienced a product or service pass on their views, both positive and negative, about the product or service to other people”.

WOM is considered to be highly trusted and more credible than other forms of controlled marketing communication, such as advertising (Breazeale, 2009) and promotion (Dye, 2000). This credibility applies in particular to the tourism sector (Pan, MacLaurin, & Crotts, 2007).

Over the past decade, research is increasingly dedicated to understanding eWOM's effectiveness and its influence on consumers' behavior (Murphy, Mascardo, & Benckendorff, 2007). eWOM "refers to any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual or former consumers about a product or firm, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet" (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004, p. 39). In addition, the key concept of eWOM is researched with regard to both the perception of usefulness and the attitude toward the use of a social network as an effective communication channel for the choice of tourism destinations. Specifically, this stream of research focuses on the enjoyment factor, which emphasizes the role of fun provided by the social network, and represents a stronger predictor for consumer attitude and tourism behavior intention (DiPietro, Di Virgilio, & Pantano, 2012; Phelan, Chen, & Haney, 2013). In our study, we adopt Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan's (2008, p. 461) eWOM definition, which describes eWOM as "all informal communications directed at consumers through Internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristics of particular goods or services, or their sellers".

eWOM differs from traditional WOM because of its potential to reach a large audience via the Internet (Black & Kelley, 2009). Another difference is that the source of the statement is typically not personally known to the information-seeking consumer (Black & Kelley, 2009; Bronner & De Hoog, 2010; Pan et al., 2007). eWOM, contrary to WOM, is seen as an information that does not "vanish as soon as it is uttered" (Stern, 1994, p. 7). Rather, content published on the Internet cannot only be accessed globally, but is also stored for an indefinite period (Cheung et al., 2008). Consumers can repeatedly access this information at their convenience at any time (Xie et al., 2011). Lee, Rodgers, and Kim (2009) state that there are conflicting views of eWOM's role in the tourism decision-making process. Black and Kelley (2009) assert that eWOM is the primary source of information, whereas Papathanassis and Knolle (2011) argue that it is only a secondary and complementary source. Both studies, however, highlight the importance of eWOM as a consumers' source for information gathering, and subsequently decision making in the tourism industry.

Papathanassis and Knolle (2011) suggest that the use of information in the tourism sector has created new challenges. Researchers advise that firms should pay greater attention to eWOM (Cheung et al., 2008; Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008), suggesting that online reviews (hereafter eReviews) should be considered and monitored as part of a firm's marketing strategy (Gretzel, Yuan, & Fesenmaier, 2000; Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011; Ye, Law, & Gu, 2009). Nielsen (2009) recommends that firms should encourage their consumers to become more involved in providing eReviews in order to increase consumer engagement. This engagement will lead, in turn, to increased loyalty (Black & Kelley, 2009). Parra López, Bulchand-Gidumal, Gutiérrez-Taño, and Díaz-Armas (2011) recognize that with the considerable rise in the number of user-generated content (UGC) platforms (Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick, Mayer, & Johnston, 2009) interaction is vital. Consumers are increasingly using UGC channels such as the Mac Forum as a consumer service portal, fostering two-way communication between the firm and its consumers (Tham et al., 2013).

## **2.1 eReviews**

Researchers suggest that eReviews are the most important source of eWOM in the tourism industry (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008; Ip, Lee, & Law, 2012; Parra-López et al., 2011). As eReviews become more popular, the number of consumers sharing their experiences online is increasing (Hills & Cairncross, 2011; Litvin et al., 2008). Research demonstrates that eReviews are important to the tourism industry (see for example Chaffey et al., 2009) because of their strong positive influence on sales (Goldsmith & Horowitz, 2006).

Scholars suggest that the influence of eWOM on purchasing behavior may vary in (1) terms of low impact versus high impact purchases (Doh & Hwang, 2009); (2) experiential versus utility products (Murphy, Pritchard, & Smith, 2000); (3) consumers' tendencies to consult eWOM (Senecal & Nantel, 2004); (4) the number of reviews connected to an offering (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006); and (5) between segment characteristics (Ramkissoon & Nunkoo, 2008). For example, Senecal and Nantel (2004) show that consumers who often access eReviews select recommended products twice as often compared with those who do not. Doh and Hwang (2009) indicate that the role of eWOM in the decision-making process increases for high-involvement products, such as holidays (Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005). Chevalier and

Mayzlin (2006) show that an increase of eReviews correlates to sales increases. In line with their findings, Ye et al. (2009) present evidence from the hotel sector, stating that a 10% improvement in reviewers' ratings led to a 4% sales increase.

## 2.2 Consumers' Reasons for Relying on eWOM

Researchers try to explore why consumers rely on eWOM (see for example Arsal, Woosnam, Baldwin, & Backman, 2010). Goldsmith and Horowitz (2006) find eight key reasons as to why they do: to reduce risk; because others are using it; to identify lower prices; to get information easily; by accident (unplanned); because it is "cool"; because they are stimulated by off-line inputs such as television; and to obtain prepurchase information. Other reasons include: to save time and make better decisions (Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2003); to receive up-to-date information (Gretzel, Yoo, & Purifoy, 2007); and to enjoy a reliable search process (Arsal et al., 2010; Xie et al., 2011).

## 2.3 eWOM Content

Several studies explore the effects of eReviews' content on consumers' attitudes and behavior (see for example Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011), including comprehensiveness and relevance (Cheung et al., 2008), facts rather than story-telling (Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011), product ratings (Duan, Gu, & Whinston, 2009), timeliness (Cheung et al., 2008), up-to-date information (Gretzel et al., 2007), and levels of involvement (Cai, Feng, & Breiter, 2004). For example, Gretzel et al.'s (2007) findings highlight that online information such as reviews are more important than information supplied by travel providers owing to their more up-to-date nature (Arsal et al., 2010).

Researchers establish the information content of eReviews in leisure as: dining out, getting around, travel tips, and destination activities (Reza Jalilvand, Samiei, Dini, & Yaghoubi Manzari, 2012; Xie et al., 2011). This is comparable with Arsal et al.'s (2010) themes of accommodation, things to do and places to see, transportation and destination information (i.e. language, weather, currency, and what to wear). We identify two key aspects of third-party eReview content about the destination or the experience, namely how the information is constructed, and what kind of information is provided.

## 2.4 eWOM Credibility

Online source credibility is crucial to consumers' evaluation of eWOM (see for example Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011). Studies show that perceived credibility of eWOM increases when personal information is present (Black & Kelley, 2009; Cheung et al., 2008; Xie et al., 2011). In the tourism industry, Black and Kelley (2009) find that well-written stories in online consumer reviews enhance credibility. Moreover, consumers accept that a holiday cannot be perfect and small numbers of negative reviews enhance eWOM credibility (Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011).

Xie et al. (2011) suggest that negative eWOM is more influential than positive eWOM and more time is spent critically examining negative rather than positive content (Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011). Ricci and Wietsma (2006) assert that positive reviews are used for increasing product knowledge and that negative reviews are used to confirm the reader's preconceived decisions (Arsal et al., 2010). On the one hand, Papathanassis and Knolle (2011) suggest that overly positive eReviews are viewed with suspicion due to their lack of criticism. On the other hand, Laczniak, De Carlo, and Ramaswami (2001) state that consumers distrust extremely negative content (Pan et al., 2007). Thus, both extremes are of little credibility (Xie et al., 2011).

Our literature review indicates that research into the role of eWOM in the consumer purchase decision-making process often focuses on a single context (Sen & Lerman, 2007) using (Goldsmith & Horowitz, 2006). For example, previous studies have focused on a single concept such as the influence of negative or positive reviews on consumer purchasing decisions (Gupta & Harris, 2010; Lee et al., 2008; Park & Kim, 2008; Park et al., 2007; Sen & Lerman, 2007; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009). In this study, we highlight multiple influential factors, namely (1) motivation, (2) source, and (3) content of eReviews, linking both the concept of the consumer decision-making process with these influencers. Thus, we fill an important gap by exploring these relationships across three different decision-making stages in a comprehensive study, here in the case of online holidays (Sen & Merman, 2007; Xie et al., 2011). Based on our analysis of the literature, we define the role of eWOM in the consumer purchase decision-making process, in line with Papathanassis and Knolle (2011), as "using information to influence the decision process through the method(s) in an online context".

### **3. METHOD**

Our research aims to develop a conceptual framework for understanding the role of eWOM in the consumer purchase decision-making process in the context of holiday destinations. Our theoretical framing builds on existing consumer purchase decision-making behavior and eWOM research (see for example Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007).

We employed an ethnographic approach (Bell, 2010). Based on observation of, and inter-views with, 36 participants in a natural setting, we gained an understanding of eWOM's use and influence in consumers' purchase decision-making of their holiday (Hammersley, 2007). Our observations assisted us in discovering how the participants actually behaved, rather than relying solely on how they said they behaved (Bell, 2010). We categorized our data according to behavioral responses, and not according to predetermined categories (Hammersley, 2007), thus supporting our study's exploratory nature (see for example Veal, 1997). To achieve data variance, we systematically examined three market segments, as advocated by researchers, based upon their perceived differences in opinion, attitude, and behavior (Dibb & Simkin, 2008); decision-making (Cheung et al., 2008); and their choice of holiday type (see for example Bell, 2010): young professionals, families, and "empty nesters".

#### **3.1 SAMPLING AND DATA COLLECTION**

Prior to the main study, we held three pilot interviews to test the ethnographic research design. During this stage, the research setting, research questions, and interview questions, were refined. We audio recorded and transcribed all interviews.

A key component of our study was to examine and evaluate how consumer use eWOM in their decision-making process of holiday purchases online. To meet these aims, we employed a purposive, non-probability, sampling technique (Bryman, 2006; Klaus & Maklan, 2011). Based on the findings of prior studies, we made a judgement as to whom to interview based on the relevant characteristics our study proposed to investigate (Castillo, 2009). Specifically, our sample consisted of adults who use the Internet to search and purchase their holidays, qualifying them as "a judgment sample



of persons who can offer ideas and insights into the phenomenon” (Churchill, 1979, p. 67). For recruitment, a snowball design was employed to reach the selected participants whereby selected participants were asked if they could recommend anyone with the required characteristics (Saunders et al., 2007). More importantly, as advocated by previous studies, the approach can be more effective than other methods in situations where criteria are a determining factor of the sample selection (Biernacki & Walforf, 1981; Faugier & Sargeant, 1997; Kalton & Anderson, 1986). We recruited a total of 25% of the sample through this method. The remaining 75% of the sample were recruited through travel agencies while consumers were waiting to book their holiday or be served. We deemed the sample technique appropriate for the scope of the research, primarily to include only consumers who have access to the Internet. Our sampling approaches are purposive techniques whereby the sample met a predetermined criterion (Bryman, 2006). This methodology reflects a prerequisite based on the limited time and funding of our study. Castillo (2009) asserts that purposive sampling is suitable when the researcher knows of individuals who are “capable of assembling a representative sample”.

In order to be selected for an interview, we screened the respondents for certain characteristics. The participants had to be UK citizens; they had to be older than 18 year-of-age; they had to have been on a least one leisure holiday within the last three years; they had used the Internet at least once to search for information or to purchased a holiday, and they belonged to one of our segments. These criteria ensured that our members of our sample had actual experiences with online holidays and were thus relevant for the study, and that the participants could be part of our investigation into the impact of eWOM. For the purpose of this study, we focused on UK participants only as a starting point purely because UK travelers have been recognized to be one of the growing areas in the sector.

Because of the important of these segments for tourism (Bell, 2010), we decided to conduct 12 interviews with consumers from each of these segments. We deemed a total of 12 interviews per segmented group an appropriate number for a preliminary investigation into this under researched area (see for example Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011). Veal (1997) suggests that it is the absolute size of the

sample that is a key consideration rather than it constituting a specific percentage of the population. Thus, a sample of 36 was deemed both sufficient and appropriate for our study. The sample size included a sufficient number of participants, represented both genders, and all age groups (Geissler, 2005). This is similar to previous studies by Papathanassis and Knolle (2011), which involved 30 participants, and Geissler's (2005), which had 22 participants. To generate a representative sample (Bell, 2010), our study used participants from across the UK, in seven different counties, including Suffolk (n = 18), Ayrshire (n = 5), Dorset, Kent, Yorkshire (n = 3 each), Berkshire, and Somerset (n = 2 each).

We conducted the interviews at a prearranged location, either at the workplace or the home of the interviewees, according to their preference. The interviews lasted between 35 and 65 minutes. We transcribed the interviews and coded the data using NVivo 9.0. This enabled us to generate key themes and compare the data (Clisbee, 2003). We employed a systematic coding process, following a grounded approach, analyzed by comparing frequencies of responses (Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011). This enabled us to evaluate the data and indicate measurement consistency (Tinsley & Weiss, 1975). We assessed intercoder reliability (Rust & Cooil, 1994) in order to measure only "the extent to which the different judges tend to assign exactly the same rating to each object" (Tinsley & Weiss, 2000, p.98).

We confirmed coding reliability (PRL statistic of .88) based on correlational (analysis of variance) indices to assess the degree to which "ratings of different judges are the same when expressed as deviations from their means". Four researchers carefully considered the patterns in the interview transcriptions, and grouped data together describing the same views. Furthermore, we noted the recurrence of words and phrases that were used by the respondents to describe arising themes (Nguyen, Melewar, & Chen, 2013). Our analysis of the content highlighted consistencies and meanings about the relationship between eWOM and the consumer purchase decision-making behavior. Through interpretation, we understood the possible role of eWOM in the tourism industry. This enabled us to provide support to the conceptualization for our study.

The data analysis integrated three dimensions with either sub dimensions, which were carried forward for further analysis.

To maximize the content and face validity of the dimensions emerging from our exploratory research, we asked a panel of expert judges to review the item pool and dimensions (Klaus & Maklan, 2012). The expert panel comprised four marketing academics familiar with the subject of eWOM, tourism, and consumer purchase decision-making process. Using the Q-sort technique (Funder, Furr, & Colvin, 2000), we printed each item in the initial pool on an index card and asked each panel member to create dimensions by grouping similar aspects of the consumer purchase decision-making process. It was up to the panel members to decide on the number of categories and to find appropriate labels and descriptions of the categories (Klaus, 2013). The proportion of agreement among the judges was high, demonstrating high reliability (Spearman correlation coefficient was  $r=0.88;p<0.05$ ). Finally, we consulted four marketing academics on the conceptual description of the three dimensions. As a result, we retained all three main and eight sub dimensions.

#### **4. FINDINGS**

The data analysis reveals three main and eight sub dimensions, as shown in Table 1, representing the construct of eWOM in the consumer purchase decision-making process: (1) motivation, which constitutes of the sub dimensions search, benefits, and support; (2) source, including the sub dimensions influence, trust and characteristics; and (3) the content-dimension, which constitutes of the sub dimensions technology and images. Based upon our findings we submit three stages of the consumer purchase decision-making process: information search, evaluation, and purchase. We will now describe the role of eWOM in each of these dimensions and stages in more detail.

##### **4.1 MOTIVATION**

The motivation dimension describes the elements that cause consumers to seek online information through eWOM. To investigate the key motivation dimension, we conduct the following protocol: we first brief the respondents that to be selected for an interview, they are required to have consumed one holiday in the last three years and to have used the Internet to search for information. IN doing so, we thus establish that all respondents use eReviews for their holiday purchase decision-making process. We concluded that using eReviews constitutes a significant

element in the search for holiday-related information on the Internet. The data analysis suggests that the dimension consists of three sub dimensions, which include both behaviors and attitudes of participants at this stage. These are examined in the following.

TABLE 1. Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) Dimensions

eWOM Dimensions	Definitions	Subdimensions
Motivation	Describes the elements that cause tourism consumers to seek online information through eWOM	Search Benefits Support
Source	Refers to the <i>origin</i> of the online communication, here in the form of eReviews. It thus describes the impact that certain elements of eReviews' content have on the reader.	Influence Trust Characteristics
Content	Identifies the importance of eWOM content, discussing the specific content sought by consumers.	Technology Images

### *Search*

All of the participants state that they use the Internet to search and book travels and holidays. The data show that there is a much higher use of travel agents for European and long-haul travel than for domestic travel. We find brochures to be the most popular information source for holidays. Television, newspapers, and magazines are less popular sources of travel information. WOM is frequently used in evaluating offers from all travel types.

### *Benefits*

Findings show that some respondents indicate convenience, availability, and credibility as eReviews' main benefits when making their own travel arrangements.

For example, one respondent stated: “I check everything online nowadays. That especially includes eReviews of exotic places. You can read them everywhere and (they) give you a sense of how it is.”

### *Convenience*

This refers to when and where searches can be carried out: at home including “when the kids are asleep” and at work, that is “being able to look up possible holiday destinations and packages any time”. Ease describes the effortlessness with which information is accessed and made comparable once connected to the Internet.

### *Support*

One of the main reasons of consumers for using eReviews is to gain support for their decisions. Consumers with previous experience of a destination are less likely to consult eReviews in their decision-making process. For example, one respondent stated: “I always use my own knowledge when revisiting a destination.” Another states that she would, “only use eReviews if (we are) planning to stay in different accommodation to our previous visit” First-time tourists seek eReviews to verify that their decision is correct. For example, one respondent mentions: “First time I went to Cyprus, I looked at online reviews to support my decision.”

## **4.2 SOURCE**

The source dimension refers to the *origin* of the online communication, here in the form of eReviews. It thus describes the impact that certain elements of the content of eReviews’ have on the reader. Findings reveal several attributes, namely: positive and negative eReview content; consumers’ propensity to purchase or reject an optional influence of fictional versus fact reviews and level of perceived trust. We examine their effects from the consumers’ perspective by exploring the corresponding attitudes and behavior next.

### *Influence*

Respondents indicate that they believe in positive reviews, though some disbelieve positive reviews and look for further proof before committing online to a holiday. One respondent stated: “You can’t always trust everything that is written online, so you have to do a bit of research yourself.” In most cases, respondents desire reinforcement from several sources to gain a more balanced view. Only two participants state that they have no particular reaction to extremely positive reviews. Findings further highlight that consumers are more likely to believe positive reviews

than negative reviews. The effect of positive reviews has a significantly greater impact on the propensity to purchase than the adverse effect of negative reviews.

Approval of negative reviews is low. Respondents state that they do not take negative reviews seriously. Comments include “that’s ridiculous, but funny” and “I don’t understand why that is an issue, people just like to moan for the sake of it”.

Respondents state that to have an effect on their intention to purchase, there would need to be several bad reviews.

In comparison to the influence of positive reviews on consumers’ decision-making process, we found a broader variety of responses to negative reviews. We observe the majority of respondents are actively searching for negative reviews online. Consumers want to know “why” people had felt compelled to leave a negative review. Some negative comments were, however, deemed irrelevant. For example a review titled ‘terrible’ complains about cats in a resort and “staff leaving you alone” i.e. not proactively serving guests. Neither one of the negative comments had any impact on the participant.

Consumers coming across a negative review for the first time do not display an extreme negative reaction. For example, “this (negative review) is a concern for my holiday. However, there is only one like this, and, the rest of them said that the food was lovely”. If more than one negative review occurs concerning the same aspect, consumers’ purchase intentions decrease. A respondent state: “If I see more than one negative review, I simply won’t buy from them.”

Negative reviews are read in more depth than both, positive or ambivalent reviews. A respondent reiterated this: “I read the reviews briefly unless it is really bad, then I read the full review.” Such behaviour is common.

Our findings suggest overall, customers are more cautious when reading positive eReviews.

### *Trust*

Our study investigates whether respondents use the firm’s website, or look elsewhere for eReviews. The majority responded that they would look elsewhere. The

two main reasons for searching for additional reviews are stated as (lack of) trust and to gather additional information. Consumers trust third party review sites more and believe that companies' site reviews may be biased because "they are trying to sell you something". The majority of respondents who actively seek further information did so via TripAdvisor. They often said that this was out of habit: "I always go to TripAdvisor". TripAdvisor enables travellers to provide comments on products and destinations they have experienced, and consumer-generated online reviews consistently inform and influence individual travel purchase decisions (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008; Lu & Stepchenkova, 2012; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). They also look elsewhere for less biased and trustworthier reviews. Some reasons why consumers use the firms' website, despite the mentioned caveats, are (a) they trust the booking site, (b) they gather sufficient information from the site, (c) they are lacking expertise in finding other reviews, (d) out of habit, and (e) because of a lack of time.

TripAdvisor was quoted as the most used third party review site. Other eReview websites mentioned are: Watchdog.com, Expedia, Lonely Planet, Thomas Cook and Thompson. When asked about what constitute a credible third party review, several participants find it difficult to provide an answer. A surprising find is that negativity is a credible element as "it is more likely that an actual consumer, not the provider, who wrote it".

### *Characteristics*

Our respondents prefer eReviews focusing on facts, rather than a story. This is because they only want to retrieve key information, without having to read through all reviews. A respondent state: "I don't have time for that (stories). Just give me the facts." Of the few preferring a story review, the key reason is to help them gain more insight and to visualise their holiday experience. These respondents feel that stories are "more real." Respondents who like both, facts and stories, prefer more information to support the facts. Our research highlights that consumers have their preference for a story, facts or a combination of the two, but there is not one over-riding preference.

We find mixed result enquiring whether story or facts would affect consumers' level of trust. Some respondents believe that reviews would be trustworthier if there was evidence that the reviewer had actually been on that holiday. Others, on the contrary, believe it would be less trustworthy, due to bias of the review writer.

We highlight the following eReview characteristics to create trust and favourable opinions: (a) the ratings (the extremes were read in more detail), (b) the

total number of reviews, (c) the type of personal information provided, including name, nationality and length of stay, (d) correct grammar and spelling, and (e) the travel date. Favourable responses to above points increase service quality expectations, for example: “that they were looked after and receive a high level of consumer care at the resort”.

### **4.3 Content**

The content-dimension identifies the importance of eWoM the content. In our analysis, we highlight two aspects, namely *technology* and *images* as influencers of the consumer purchase decision-making process.

#### *Technology*

Our research explores the impact of emerging technologies, such as social media and mobile apps on eWoM development. We find that the respondents participate in social networking, all using Facebook. Other social networks used are LinkedIn and Twitter. Consumers state that a review posted on a social network site influences their overall perception of the target destination. For example, a respondent state: “I use a number of website, not just forums. Last time, I asked friends on Facebook for their recommendations and opinions.”

#### *Images*

We find that images play an important role in the consumers’ purchase decision, substantiated by quotes, such as “I put more emphasis on images than descriptions when I look for a holiday”. We find that nearly all of the respondents comment on images at some point during the interviews. Respondents mention both provider images and UGC images as part of their decision-making. Consumers place emphasis on provider images while investigating the offering in more detail. A typical comment is “I look at the pictures before I read anything”. Some respondents state that they are actively searching for user-generated images. Comparing both, provider and UGC images, consumers state that they find the provider images often to be misleading, suggesting a provider bias. For example: “Hotel pictures always look good – larger rooms, more peaceful setting, better facilities etc. That is misleading. I prefer looking at snapshots from others who actually was there.” Consumers believe provider sites display often misleading images by, for example, only showcasing the best rooms. UGC pictures, in contrast, reflect reality better (often more crowded than anticipated)



as well as consumer snapshots. Images of families and children support families' perceptions of the holiday's child-friendliness.

#### **4.4 DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES**

According to our findings the consumers' decision-making process in the context of online holiday purchases consists of three stages: *information search*, *evaluation* and *purchase*.

##### *Information search*

Findings show that all respondents discuss their holiday decisions with other consumers prior to their purchase such as partner, spouse, family (including adult children), and friends. Consumers seeking opinions from people they travel with, state that involving others encourages a joint decision that suit all members' holiday needs and wants. For example, a respondent state: "we come to an agreement to ensure everyone is happy with the planned purchase – that it is to everyone's tastes." Consumers state that often they individually search for holiday information. Once completed, they, as a group consolidate to make a final decision. Consumers often consult family members and friends not travelling in order to gain additional knowledge about a certain place and to determine if it is a good decision.

Respondents state that the accommodation is a key factor when deciding upon a destination. A respondent state: "I mainly care about the accommodation, if it is a bit further, then we can always rent a car". Respondents mention the accommodation as focal point of their search, because they spend their time "relaxing at the hotel" and "not to explore the country." For example: "The geographical area is not of concern to me as long as certain needs are met. I look for desired climate and a suitable distance from the airport."

##### *Evaluation*

We find that participants evaluate reviews on four sets of criteria: (1) to complement existing provider information; (2) explore experiences and opinions of others; (3) advice on whether to avoid a destination, and; (4) possible comparisons between the firm-provided information and peer-provided information.

##### *Purchase*

We find that the majority of respondents use online tourism-related reviews prior to purchase. Consumers often read reviews after purchasing but before travelling for two reasons: to search for proposed activities and scan for possible new reviews.

Several respondents state that they read online tourism-related reviews after the holiday. This may be related to the availability and prioritization of time during the time prior to the initial purchase. As suggested by a respondent: “I sometimes look (at the website) when I return from my vacation, it depends how much time I have”. A respondent state that she recently looked at the reviews following her holiday due to a bad experience. Other respondents affirm this motive.

Despite not being the actual purchaser of the holiday, almost every interviewee stated that they would sometimes, if not always, read the online holiday reviews as well, emphasises the travel decision-making process as a multi-person affair.

## **5. DISCUSSION**

Our findings explore the role of eWoM in the consumer purchase decision-making process of a holiday. Based on our data analysis, we develop a conceptual model exploring the influence of eWoM in the consumers’ online holiday purchase decision-making process (Figure 1).

\*Insert Figure 1 about here\*

Our model comprises and explores (a) consumers’ key motivations for consulting eWoM, (b) eWoM’s influence in the consumer purchase decision making process. Our model’s main contribution is the exploration of consumers’ information seeking behaviour during each stage of their online holiday purchase, which hopefully will build a foundation for future research.

The eWoM dimensions in our conceptual model relate to the three stages of consumer purchase decision-making process. We demonstrate the effect of eWoM on the consumer purchase decision-making process.

### **5.1 THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS**

We found that some information was sought after more than others and that certain information is more or less relevant according to the stage of the process. For example, consumers initially seek more information about the accommodation, rather than attractions of their holiday destination. Attractions are found to be of greater importance once the destination choice has been finalised (Weaver & Lawton, 2011). Thus, we suggest that consumers only absorb the information they require at each stage and look for different types of information at different stages of the holiday

planning process. Specifically, we find that eReviews play a more significant role at the pre-purchase stage of the consumer purchase decision-making process (Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011). In selecting a holiday online, the pre-purchase stage is more important than both, post-purchase and post-consumption stages (Wen, 2009; Xie et al., 2011). In the following we elaborate further on our study's theoretical implications.

#### *Existing knowledge*

In line with the internal and external knowledge concept (Ramkissoon & Nunkoo, 2008), we demonstrate that consumers have a predisposition to seek eWoM mainly to support existing knowledge. We observe a pattern of consumers actively seeking reviews to support their intuition of whether the offering in question can be perceived as suitable or not. This is in line past research, which highlights the importance of a consumer's predisposition to a favourable view of the product prior to seeking third party opinions (Xie et al., 2011). Ricci and Wiestma (2006) propound the theory that consumers use negative reviews are used to confirm their decisions. Thus, consumers seek eReviews to support their existing pre-purchase perceptions, whether positive or negative.

#### *Positive versus negative reviews*

Ricci and Wiestma (2006) argue that positive reviews are used to increase product knowledge. Our research highlights that this might not be the case. Our data indicates positive eWoM as key confirmatory tool of purchase decisions. Positive eReviews increased both purchase intentions and purchases. The data indicates that the some consumers react more decisively to positive eReviews than others. This suggests that eWoM plays a primary role in the consumer purchase decision-making process. Our study delivers empirical evidence to the claim of Black and Kelley (2009). Further, Doh and Huang (2009) expects this behaviour to be of greater significance when purchasing a high-involvement product, such as a holiday. Park, Jumin and Ingo (2007) define involvement as the perceived personal relevance of a product based on the individual consumers needs, interests and values. They found that the significance of online product reviews with a high level of involvement were only effected by review quantity when the quality was high. Our analysis confirms that multiple positive eReviews increase consumers' propensity to purchase

Previous studies submit that consumers do not take all negative reviews seriously (Arsal et al., 2010; Laczniak et al., 2001). Nearly half of the respondents

state that they would seek further negative reviews before affirming their credibility. This is a finding, which is surprising, and adds knowledge to an, according to Pan, MacLaurin and Crofts (2007), under-researched phenomenon. We propose that multiple eReviews, which contain negative comments, decrease consumers' propensity to purchase. We state that negative eReviews are read in greater depth than positive eReviews. Thus, firms need to adopt a constant monitoring process to control the possible damage of negative eReviews.

### *Trust*

We highlight that trust is relevant in any purchase decision (Wen, 2009). Consumers seek eWoM sources perceived as to provide a trustworthier information source. Consumers have a clear preference for where they read eReviews, mainly due to their familiarity with the online information provider, and subsequent trust. Surprisingly, the content that provided the most credibility was of negative nature. The reason is that the consumers believe this eReviews are written by an actual consumer, not the provider. We also find that evidence of a reviewer actually having been to the destination is of utmost importance. Other important elements are well-written reviews and the presence of personal information. Other features of content offered by previous research, such as story-telling (Black & Kelley, 2009) and inclusion of specific facts (Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011) were cited once only. Interestingly, we also find that good grammar and spelling increases eReview credibility.

### *Images*

We find that images are of key importance during the consumer purchase decision-making process, adding a valuable contribution to existing knowledge. This is not highlighted within the literature review and very few studies mention the importance of images in this process. Papathanassis and Knolle (2011, p.220) state that "most respondents justified their choices on the basis of the brochure description and comment on the images" and Geissler (2005) finds that his respondents were cautious of provider images because they are seen as false advertising. Neither of these studies draws on the impact of pictures in their conclusions. Patterson (2007) discusses the importance of pictures within the consumer purchase decision-making process, which specifically examine the impact of information used in selecting a tourism purchase. However, his research is specifically about brochures. We emphasise the importance of images and posit that a reason for a lack of exploration in this field may be due to a lack of accessibility and knowledge about this type of information source

by consumers (Geissler, 2005). Our data analysis reveals that user-generated images impact the consumer purchase decision-making process both positively and negatively. Specifically, consumers are increasingly using user-generated images to support their purchasing decision.

## **5.2 MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Consumers consult eReviews because the information is easily accessible; out of habit; and/or because it is also financially inexpensive option to use, highlighting eReviews' importance to tourism businesses and managers alike.

Our findings support only three out of eight main motivations to consult eReviews, suggested by Goldsmith and Horowitz (2006): (1) ease, (2) unplanned searches and (3) pre-purchase information. The remaining five reasons: (4) using eWoM to reduce risk, (5) because others do it, (6) price reasons, (7) because it is 'cool' and (8) encouragement from advertisements are not supported by our study. Furthermore, receiving up-to-date information and firm credibility information (Arsal et al., 2010) were not stated by the participants in this research. Given this evidence, we posit that the motivations for travel consumers using eReviews are easy, quick and convenient access to online information. These attributes are essential for marketers and can be used for development of online campaigns.

We find that consumers give greater importance to images than narratives. Consumers determine eReview legitimacy upon images. Firms shall use images more vividly on social media such as Instagram or Facebook and encourage consumers to take pictures and share them with their friends. This, in turn, will increase authenticity and trust perceptions.

Consumers prefer stories, facts, or a combination of the two. In line with the research of Lee and Youn (2009), our findings highlight that there is no specifically preferred platform for gathering eWoM information during the consumer purchase decision-making process. Hence, a possibility for tourism firms to develop around this finding by combining different approaches.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

Our research explores the consumers' process of investigating tourism-related offerings information online in three corresponding stages, *information search*, *evaluation* and *purchase*. Our research finds that consumers purchasing high-

involvement products such as holiday purchases are more likely influenced by eWOM than previously examined. First, we find that seeking UGC content plays a dominant role in this process, responding to calls from previous research (e.g. Black & Kelley, 2009; Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011; Xie et al. 2011). Second, we find that eWOM importance is greater for first-time purchases than for repeat purchases. Third, we find that consumers also seek information from a wider variety of information – provider, UGC and WOM and involve opinions of people other than the person actually paying for the tourism product. Some actively seek provider and UGC information, whereas others are more passive reading only what is presented to them. Fourth, we demonstrate the use and sequence of information sources retrieved. These findings are important in understanding the consumer journey and at what stage a potential consumer may either gain or lose interest in the product.

Fifth, we find that images have a pervasive influence on the users of provider and UGC information. Sixth, we find that the effects of positive eReviews are greater and are more likely to impact the purchase decision than those of negative reviews. However, negative eReviews are read in more depth than positive eReviews and are also perceived to be more credible. Our research can be applied to tourism companies and our framework provides a basis to explore service failure and recovery by identifying varying behaviour during different stages. Finally, our findings indicate that the eWOM definition may be expanded to include images, as images were found to be an exceptionally important influencing factor in the customers' decision to purchase. This seems even more relevant today because “a picture speaks a thousand words”, with consumers taking pictures of almost anything, and therefore this should be reflected in existing eWOM definitions.

## **6.1 LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES**

No empirical research is without limitations, and this is true for our study, too. We identify two main drawbacks of the chosen sampling technique, those of reliability and bias (Castillo, 2009). Reliability is a cause for concern because there is a difficulty in knowing if the researcher has judged correctly. The bias arises because there is no randomization used to represent the population (Castillo, 2009). To overcome these limitations, we use of an equal number of participants for each of the three segments helped to minimise this limitation. This research is not intended to be definitive (Saunders et al., 2007). No empirical research is without its limitations, and

this is also true for our study. We identify three main drawbacks of the chosen sampling technique, namely reliability, bias, and generalizability. Reliability is a cause for concern because there is a difficulty in knowing whether the researcher has judged correctly. The bias arises because there is no randomization used to represent the population (Castillo, 2009). To overcome these limitations, the use of an equal number of participants for each of the three segments helped to minimize this limitation. This research is not intended to be definitive (Saunders et al., 2007). Finally, in our study we identified our framework with the variables and their relationships with eWOM purely based on the interviewees in this particular context. We developed the framework based on existing literature; however, since it focuses on one particular context, it may thus have issues of generalization, and other contexts may have different relationships between the constructs. Therefore, we highlight that our conceptualization is exploratory and call for further research to generalize our findings and subsequent framework. Its importance is nevertheless essential for future research.

We recognize that further research is required. For example, numerous questions arise from our study, which are interesting and worthy of further exploration in order to reveal insightful discoveries. In particular, researchers may ask: why are eReviews not often used in repeat visits? Why do travelers initially seek more information on accommodation rather than attractions? Do the findings vary between variables such as age affect the answers? Some may seem to reflect more personal needs rather than a norm, and should be further investigated. In addition, the extent to which technology can have an impact on the use of eWOM in the future, in particular if use-friendly applications are made available, should be explored. Further research into understanding applications would be advantageous for tourism practitioners. User-generated images increasingly play a prominent role in the consumer purchase decision-making process as they become more accessible.

This aspect warrants further academic exploration, considering the contradiction between misleading provider and UGC images, and, UGC as more credible information sources. Furthermore, the participants who classified themselves as highly sceptical about e-Reviews were found to read them, nonetheless, despite their belief that they would have only a minimal impact on their decisions. A future

area of study could examine if eReviews have a greater impact on cynical readers than these readers are aware of.

## REFERENCES

- Akehurst, G. (2009). User generated content: the use of blogs for tourism organisations and tourism consumers. *Service Business*, 3(1), 51-61.
- Andrić, B. and Ružić, I. (2010). Effect of e-marketing on consumer behaviour in hospitality. *Tourism & Hospitality Management 2010, Conference proceedings*, 692-706.
- Arndt, J. (1967). The role of product-related conversations in the diffusion of a new product. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 4(3), 291-295.
- Arsal, I., Woosnam, K.M., Baldwin, E.D. and Backman, S.J. (2010). Residents as travel destination information providers: An online community perspective. *Journal of Travel Research*, 49(4), 400-413.
- Beiger, T. & Laesser, C. (2004) Information sources for travel decisions: towards a source process model. *Journal of Travel Research*, 42(4), 357-371.
- Bell, J. (2010). *Doing your research project: A guide for first-time researchers in education, health and social sciences*. 5th ed. Berkshire: McGraw Hill.
- Black, H.G. and Kelley, S.W. (2009). A storytelling perspective on online customer reviews reporting service failure and recovery. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 26(2), 169-179.
- Breazeale, M. (2009). Word of Mouse. An assessment of electronic word-of-mouth research. *International Journal of Market Research*, 51(3), 297-318.
- Bronner, F. and de Hoog, R. (2010). Consumer-generated versus marketer-generated websites in consumer decision-making. *International Journal of Market Research*, 52(2), 231-248.
- Bryman, A. (2006). 'Integrating quantitative and qualitative research: how is it done?', *Qualitative Research*, 6(1), 97-113
- Buhalis, D. (2003). *eTourism: Information technology for strategic tourism management*. Essex: Pearson Education Limited.
- Cai, L.A., Feng, R. and Breiter, D. (2004). Tourist purchase decision involvement and information preferences. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 10(2), 138-148.
- Castillo, J.J. (2009). Judgemental sampling. Retrieved 5 August 2012 from <http://www.experiment-resources.com/judgmental-sampling.html>
- Chaffey, D., Ellis-Chadwick, F., Mayer, R. and Johnston, K. (2009). *Internet marketing: strategy, implementation and practice*. 4th ed. Essex: Pearson Education Limited.
- Cheung, C.M.K., Lee, M.K.O. and Rabjohn, N. (2008). The impact of electronic word-of-mouth: The adoption of online opinions in the online customer communities. *Internet Research*, 18(3), 229-247.
- Chevalier, J.A. and Mayzlin, D. (2006). The effect of word of mouth on sales: Online book reviews. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 43(3), 345-345.
- Churchill, G. A. (1979). A paradigm for developing better measures of marketing constructs. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 16, 64-73.
- Clark, M., Riley, M., Wilkie, E. and Wood, R.C. (1998). *Researching and writing dissertations in hospitality and tourism*. Croatia: Thomson.
- Clisbee, M. (2003). *Using N-vivo for literature analysis: Strategies in qualitative research: Methodological issues and practices using QSR NVivo and NUD\*IST*. London: University of London.
- Crotts, J. (1999). Consumer Decision Making and Prepurchase Information Search.



- In Consumer Behavior in Travel and Tourism*, A. Pizam and Y. Mansfeld, eds., 149–168. New York: The Haworth Hospitality Press
- Dibb, S. and Simkin, L. (2008). *Marketing segmentation success: Making it happen!* New York: Haworth Press.
- Doh, S.J. and Hwang, J.S. (2009). How consumers evaluate eWoM (electronic word-of-mouth) messages. *CyberPsychology & Behaviour*, 12(2), 193-197.
- Duan, W., Gu, B. and Whinston, A.B. (2009). Informational cascades and software adoption on the Internet: An empirical investigation. *MIS Quarterly*, 33(1), 23-48.
- Dye, R. (2000) The buzz on buzz. *Harvard Business Review*, 88(November/December), 139-146.
- Edwards, S.M. (2007). Motivating online word-of-mouth. *American Academy of Advertising conference proceedings*, 32.
- eMarketer (2011). Consumers embrace social media for brand feedback. Retrieved 27 July 2012 from <http://www.emarketer.com/Article.aspx?R=1008495>
- Funder, D. C., Furr, R. M., & Colvin, C. R. (2000). The Riverside behavioral Q-sort: A tool for the description of social behaviour. *Journal of Personality*, 68(3), 451-489.
- Geissler, G.L. (2005). An examination of the golf vacation package-purchase decision: A case study in the U.S. Gulf Coast region. *Journal of Hospitality & Leisure Marketing*, 31(1), 65-82.
- Goldsmith, R.W and Horowitz, D. (2006). Measuring motivations for online opinion seeking. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 6(2), 1-16.
- Gretzel, U., & Yoo, K. H. (2008). Use and impact of online travel reviews. In P. O'Connor, W. Höpken & U. Gretzel (Eds.), *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2008*, 35-46. New York: Springer Wien.
- Gretzel, U., Yoo, K. H. and Purifoy, M. (2007). Online travel review study: Role and impact of online travel reviews. Laboratory for Intelligent Systems in Tourism, Texas A&M University Retrieved 20 August 2012 from [www.tripadvisor.com/pdfs/OnlineTravelReviewReport.pdf](http://www.tripadvisor.com/pdfs/OnlineTravelReviewReport.pdf)
- Gretzel, U., Yuan, Y.L. and Fesenmaier, D. R. (2000). Preparing for the new economy: Advertising strategies and change in destination marketing organisations. *Journal of Travel Research*, 39(2), 146-156.
- Hammersley, M. (2007). *Ethnography: Principles in practice*. 3rd ed. Abington: Routledge.
- Hennig-Thurau T., Gwinner K.P., Walsh G., Gremler D.D. (2004) Electronic word-of-mouth via consumer-opinion platforms: What motivates consumers to articulate themselves on the Internet? *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 18 (1), 38-52.
- Hennig-Thurau, T., & Walsh, G. (2003). Electronic word-of-mouth: Motives for and consequences of reading customer articulations on the Internet. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, 8(2), 51-74.
- Hills, J.R. and Cairncross, G. (2011). Small accommodation providers and UGC web sites: perception and practices. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 23(1), 26-43.
- Ip, C., Lee, H. A., & Law, R. (2012). Profiling the users of travel websites for planning and online experience sharing. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 36(3), 418-426.

- Klaus, Ph. (2013). "The Case of Amazon.com: Towards a conceptual framework of online customer service experience (OCSE) using Emerging Consensus technique (ECT)," *Journal of Services Marketing*, 27(6)
- Klaus, Ph. and Maklan, S. (2011). "Bridging The Gap For Destination Extreme Sports - A Model of Sports Tourism Customer Experience," *Journal of Marketing Management*, 27(13-14), 1341-65.
- Klaus, Ph. and Maklan, S. (2012). "EXQ: A Multiple-item Scale for Assessing Service Experience," *Journal of Service Management*, 23(1), 5-33.
- Klaus, Ph. and Nguyen, B. (2013), "Exploring the role of the online customer experience in the firms multi-channel strategy – An empirical analysis of the retail banking services sector," *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, forthcoming.
- Koc, E. (2004). The role of family members in the family holiday purchase decision-making process. *International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration*, 5(2), 85-102.
- Laboy, F. and Torchio, P. (2007). Web 2.0 for the Travel Marketer and Consumer: A White Paper. Retrieved 27 July 2011 from [www.esitemarketing.com/web2-travel-marketing.php](http://www.esitemarketing.com/web2-travel-marketing.php)
- Laczniak, R.N.; De Carlo, T.E.; Ramaswani, S.N. (2001). Consumers response to negative word-of-mouth communication: An attribution theory perspective," *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 11(1), 57-73.
- Lee, M., Rodgers, S. and Kim, M. (2009). Effects of valence and extremity of eWoM on attitude toward the brand and website. *Journal of Issues and Research in Advertising*, 31(2), 1-11.
- Lee, M. and Youn, S. (2009). Electronic word of mouth (eWoM): How eWoM platforms influence consumer product judgement. *International Journal of Advertising*, 28(3), 473-499.
- Litvin, S.W., Goldsmith, R.E. and Pan, B. (2008). Electronic word-of-mouth in hospitality and tourism management. *Tourism Management*, 29(3), 458-468.
- Lu, W., & Stepchenkova, S. (2012). Ecotourism experiences reported online: classification of satisfaction attributes. *Tourism Management*, 33(3), 702-712.
- Mintel (2011). Holiday review – UK – January 2011. Mintel Leisure [Online]. Retrieved 10 May 2012 from [http://academic.mintel.com/sinatra/oxygen\\_academic/search\\_results/show&/display/id=545163/display/id=562724/display/id=545163](http://academic.mintel.com/sinatra/oxygen_academic/search_results/show&/display/id=545163/display/id=562724/display/id=545163)
- Murphy, L., Mascardo, G. and Benckendorff, P. (2007). Exploring word-of-mouth influences on travel decisions: friends and relatives vs. other travellers. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 31, 517-527.
- Murphy, P., Pritchard, M. P., and Smith, B. (2000). The destination product and its impact on traveller perceptions. *Tourism Management*, 21(1), 43-52.
- Nguyen, B., Melewar, T. C., and Chen, J. (2013), "A Framework of Brand Likeability: An Exploratory Study of Likeability in Firm-Level Brands", *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 21(3).
- Nicolau, J.L. and Más, F.J. (2005). Heckit modelling of tourist expenditure: Evidence from Spain. *International Journal of Service Industry Management*, 16(3/4), 271-293.
- Nielsen (2009). Global face and networked places: a Nielsen report on social networking's new global footprint. Retrieved 19 April 2012 from <http://www.scribd.com/doc/13117994/Nielsen-Global-Faces-and-Networked-Places>

- Nielsen (2006). User-generated content drives half of U.S. top 10 fastest growing web brands according to Nielsen//Netratings. Retrieved 27 July 2012 from [http://www.nielsen-online.com/pr/PR\\_060810.PDF](http://www.nielsen-online.com/pr/PR_060810.PDF)
- Office of National Statistics (2011). Visits abroad by UK residents. Retrieved 27 July 2012 from <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=352>
- Pan, B., MacLaurin, T., Crotts, J. (2007). Travel blogs and the implications for destination marketing. *Journal of Travel Research*, 46(1), 35–45.
- Papathanassis, A. and Knolle, F. (2011). Exploring the adoption and processing of online holidays: A grounded theory approach. *Tourism Management*, 32(2), 215-234.
- Park, D.H., Jumin, L. and Ingo, H. (2007). The effect of online consumer reviews on consumer purchase intention: The moderating role of involvement. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, 11(4), 125-148.
- Parra-López, E., Bulchand-Gidumal, J., Gutierrez-Tano, D. and Dian-Armas, R. (2010). Intentions to use social media in organising and taking vacation trips. *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 27(2), 640-654.
- Patterson, I. (2007). Information sources used by older adults for decision-making about tourist and travel destinations. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 31(5), 528-53.
- Ramkissoon, H. and Nunkoo, R. (2008). Information search behaviour of European tourists visiting Mauritius. *Tourism Original Scientific Paper*, 56(1), 7-21.
- Reza Jalilvand, M., Samiei, N., Dini, B., & Yaghoubi Manzari, P. (2012). Examining the structural relationships of electronic word of mouth, destination image, tourist attitude toward destination and travel intention: An integrated approach. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*. 1(1-2), 134- 143
- Ricci, F., and R. T. A. Wietsma (2006). “Product Reviews in Travel Decision Making.” Paper presented at the Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2006, Lausanne, Switzerland.
- Robson, C., 2002. *Real world research*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Rust, R., & Cooil, B. (1994). Reliability Measures for Qualitative Data: Theory and Implications. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 31 (February), 1-14.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. (2007). *Research Methods for Business Students*. 4th ed. Essex: Pearson Education Limited.
- Sen, S. and Lerman, D. (2007). Why are you telling me this? An examination into negative consumer reviews on the web. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 21(4), 76-94.
- Senecal, S. and Nantel, J. (2004). The Influence of Online Product Recommendations on consumers' Online Choices. *Journal of Retailing*, 80(2), 159-169.
- Sirakaya, E. and Woodside, A.G. (2005). Building and testing theories of decision-making by travellers. *Tourism Management*, 26(6), 815–832.
- Stern, B. (1994). A revised model for advertising: multiple dimensions of the source, the message, and the recipient. *Journal of Advertising*, 23(2), 5-16.
- Swarbrooke, J. and Horner, S. (2007). *Consumer behaviour in tourism*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Swinscoe, A. (2011). Is Twitter about to grow up as a customer service channel? Removing the follow back requirements. Retrieved 27 March 2012 from <http://thesocialcustomer.com/adrianswinscoe/39559/twitter-about-grow-customer-service-channel-removing-follow-back-requirement>

- Tinsley, H. E. A. & Weiss, D. J. (1975). Interrater reliability and agreement of subjective judgements. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 22, 358-376.
- Tinsley, H. E. A. & Weiss, D. J. (2000). Interrater reliability and agreement. In H. E. A. Tinsley & S. D. Brown, Eds., *Handbook of Applied Multivariate Statistics and Mathematical Modeling*, 95-124. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- The World Travel and Tourism Council (2011). Economic impact data and forecasts. Retrieved 30 June 2011 from [http://www.wttc.org/eng/Tourism\\_Research/Economic\\_Research](http://www.wttc.org/eng/Tourism_Research/Economic_Research)
- Trochim, W.M.K. (2006). Nonprobability sampling. Retrieved 29 July 2011 from <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/samprnon.php>
- Veal, A.J. (1997). *Research methods for leisure and tourism*. 2nd ed. Harlow: Pearson Education Inc.
- Weaver, D.B. and Lawton, L.J. (2011). Information sources for visitors' first awareness of a low profile attraction. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 28(1), 1-12.
- Wen, I. (2009). Factors affecting the online travel buying decision: a review. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 21(6), 752-765.
- Wilson, J. (2010). *Essentials of business research: A guide to doing your research project*. London: SAGE Publications Inc.
- Xiang, Z., & Gretzel, U. (2010). Role of social media in online travel information search. *Tourism Management*, 31(2), 179-188.
- Xie, H., Miao, L., Kuo, P.J. and Lee, B.Y. (2011). Consumers' responses to ambivalent online hotel reviews: The role of perceived source credibility and pre-decisional disposition. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 30(1), 178-183.
- Ye, Q., Law, R. & Gu, B. (2009). The impact of online user reviews on hotel room sales. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 28(1), 180-182.

## **Appendix A – Interview protocol and sample interview script**

(Interview No.2, Female, 24, MSc, Law, 4 times, 42 weekly online hours)

### **Key questions**

1. What Internet information sources are used?
2. Comments made by participant in relation to their decision making process?
3. What forms of eWoM have the greatest influence? (e.g. 3rd party reviews platforms; reviews on a company's website; social networks)
4. If there is an option to follow a link to read online reviews about the product, was it followed? (Make a note of the websites if not followed – ask why not at the end of this stage.)
5. What is the participant's reaction to extreme reviews (Positive/Negative)
6. Other sources would be used to reaching the purchase decision?

### **Cause**

1. What do you use online reviews for?  
Holidays, Gadgets, Movies, Books.
2. What information sources do you use when booking travel to the following destination?  
Internet, Brochures, Magazine.
3. Do you use online reviews if you have visited the destination before? / Do you use online reviews if you are visiting the destination for the first time?  
Yes/Yes
4. Why do you look for information on the Internet?  
To making sure I get the best value for my purchase.
5. What do you want to find out from the reviews you read?  
I would like to read critical reviews from the third independent party.
6. How long have you been using online reviews for tourism?  
About 5 Years, from 2007.
7. What made you start using online reviews for tourism? Or why do you use online reviews for tourism?  
My friends and families are using it, easy access. Want to find out as much information as possible regarding to my decision on holiday destination.

### **Process**

1. Do you discuss your holiday decisions with other people prior to purchase?  
Yes, my families, my friends.
2. What information about the holiday do you want to obtain from online reviews?  
Information about the conditions of accommodation, transportations, holiday location, local entertainment.
3. When do you read tourism related reviews?  
Dining info, tourist attractions, hotel rating, services.
4. Have you posted an online holiday review?  
No, never.
5. If you are not the person paying for the holiday, do you still read the online review?  
Yes, I would. I want to enjoy my holidays.

6. Do you use social networking sites? Have you read reviews posted by your contact on social networking sites? Is your perception of that destination influenced by the content you have seen on the social networking site?  
Yes, I do.  
Yes, I have.  
Definitely.
7. Do you have smartphone?  
Yes, iPhone.

### **Effect**

1. If you find sufficient sources of online reviews on the websites from which you are making the purchase, do you still look for further reviews from other websites? Why?  
Yes, I would compare the review result from various sites and hoping for same outcome from each site.
2. Are there particular sources of online reviews that you place more trust in the others? If yes, why?  
Trip advisor – it is an independent review body.
3. What do you feel are the key elements of a credible third party online review? Why?  
Not really a sakes tactic posted by the org. I trust consumer review more than org review.
4. Do you prefer a review tells a story or one that just focuses on the facts of the case? Why?  
Facts of the case, I only need to know what I want to know.
5. If you read an extremely positive review, what is your reaction? How does this effect your intention to purchase?  
Is it real? I would double check before making the purchase.
6. If you read an extremely negative review, what us your reaction? How does this effect your intention to purchase?  
Perhaps not true, I would again check the outcome before making the purchase.
7. Are you aware that some websites restrict people from posting reviews, if they have not made a purchase from the company, whereas other sites allow anyone to post a comment? Does this effect your level of trust in the content? Why?  
No, I am not aware of the situation. Yes, it will effect the level of trust, because if the site is making sure that whoever posts online review have actually been to the place before.

## Appendix B - Detailed sample description (eWoM Informant Profiling)

Interview Number	Market Segment	Age	Gender	Education Status	Occupation	Tourism Travel Frequency/ Year	Weekly Use of Internet
4	YP	22	Male	Further	IT	1	21
5	YP	23	Female	Further	Retail	2	14
7	YP	23	Female	Degree	Sales	2	56
8	YP	24	Female	Degree	Automobile	7	42
10	YP	24	Female	Degree	Retail	2	15
11	YP	24	Male	Degree	Sales	2	56
12	YP	23	Male	GCSE	Retail	1	42
13	YP	23	Female	Further	Real Estate	1	5
14	YP	23	Male	Degree	Retail	2	15
23	YP	27	Male	GCSE	Trade	1	2
30	YP	23	Male	Degree	IT	3	35
31	YP	23	Female	Degree	Accountant	3	42
2	FAM	24	Female	MSc	Law	4	42
6	FAM	57	Male	Further	Finance	3	4
9	FAM	30	Female	Further	Restaurant	2	7
18	FAM	23	Female	Further	Retail	2	21
19	FAM	29	Female	Degree	Finance	2	14
20	FAM	31	Female	Further	Sales	2	7
21	FAM	32	Male	GCSE	Service	2	12
26	FAM	27	Female	Further	Secretary	1	1
27	FAM	32	Female	Degree	Education	3	3
28	FAM	59	Female	Further	Construction	5	7
29	FAM	39	Male	HND	Service	4	3
32	FAM	26	Male	Degree	IT	3	56
1	EN	43	Female	MSc	IT	1	2
3	EN	53	Male	Further	Education	2	4
15	EN	51	Female	Further	Service	3	21

16	EN	49	Female	GCSE	Trade	1	28
17	EN	46	Male	Degree	IT	3	28
22	EN	63	Male	Degree	Banking	5	7
24	EN	62	Female	Degree	Finance	3	2
25	EN	66	Male	Degree	Construction	4	4
33	EN	55	Female	None	Account Manager	2	5
34	EN	47	Male	Further	Retail	5	14
35	EN	60	Male	Further	Finance	3	4
36	EN	53	Female	None	Retail	2	7



## Appendix C – Coding structure

Dimensions	Sub-Dimensions	Attributes
<b>eWoM</b>		
Key motivation	Tourism information search  Benefits of eReviews  Support	Finding, searching, browsing information.  Incentives, positive/negative comments, identification of communities.  Assistance, help, guidance, involvement.
Influences	Peers' and reference points  Trust and credibility  eReview characteristics	Friends, family, past experiences, online reviews.  Relate, trustworthy, credible, fair.  Facts, stories.
Content	Technology  Types of information	Gadgets, high-tech, smartphones.  Dining out, nightlife, accommodation, images.

<b>Consumer Decision Process</b>	<b>Purchase Making</b>	<b>Stages</b>	<b>Attributes</b>
Purchase decision-making processes	<p>Information search</p> <p>Evaluation</p> <p>Purchase</p>	<p>Pre-purchase characteristics.</p> <p>Alternating options.</p> <p>Intentions to purchase and post purchase.</p>	