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Amateur versus professional online reviews: Impact on tourists' intention to visit a destination

Abstract

Online reviews are now a major source of information for tourists to reduce the perceived risks when selecting intangible brand services. Online reviews generated by different types of writers and distributed via different platforms have become an indispensable source of information for tourists. This study examines the relative effect of online reviews written by amateurs and professionals on tourists' intention of visiting a new destination. A composite behavior model incorporating both attitude and affect constructs is used to compare the influence of the two types of online reviews on tourists' behavioral intentions. Trust and curiosity are proposed as mediating variables for explaining the different intentions of visiting a tourist destination after reading the different types of reviews. Respondents were asked to read genuine online reviews about Macau written by either amateur or professional reviewers and then complete a questionnaire. A path analysis using structural equation modeling was performed. Empirical results suggest that the influences of reviews by professionals are stronger than those by amateurs on tourists' behavioral intention of visiting a destination. Furthermore, trust and curiosity in a destination are important mediating variables affecting tourists' behavioral intention. These conclusions provide useful theoretical support for the suggestion given to destination management organizations regarding the utilization of professional reviews to improve tourists' intention of visiting the attractions at the sites.

Key words: online review; trust; curiosity; tourists' behavior; visit intention; Macau, China

Introduction

Online reviews are an important form of electronic word of mouth (WOM) as they exert substantial influence on consumers' behavioral intentions when purchasing products and services. Online reviews have an even larger impact on tourists' consideration when they shop for intangible services, such as hotel rooms (Qiang, Rob, Bin & Wei, 2011; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009). Tourists are a major category of consumers in tourism services; thus, the terms "tourist" and "consumer" are used interchangeably in this research. When tourists make a decision regarding a destination or other travel services new to them, they face a high level of perceived risk. An effective way to reduce the perceived risk of visiting an unknown place or purchasing an intangible travel service is to search and refer to more information, such as online reviews, to understand more about the place or services (Teo & Yeong, 2003).

Online reviews generated by different types of writers and distributed via different platforms have become an indispensable source of information for tourists. Differences in platforms, e.g., social networks or review sites such as TripAdvisor (M. Lee & Youn, 2009), and in the types of writers who generate the reviews, e.g., amateur and professional reviewers (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Chung, Lee, Lee & Koo, 2015), editors (Smith, Menon & Sivakumar, 2005; Zhang, Ye, Law & Li, 2010), or marketers (Bronner & de Hoog, 2010), were shown as having different degrees of influence on tourists' purchasing intentions. This study focuses on the influence produced by the reviews of different types of review

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writers, since some types of writers, such as amateur reviewers, can write reviews for different platforms. Most research has tried to compare reviews from amateur reviewers who are perceived as independent of the service providers against those from writers such as the editors and marketers associated with the information source (Zhang et al., 2010). Consumers usually consider independent sources to be more credible and as providing more useful information than marketing agents (Bronner & de Hoog, 2010). There are other independent sources of reviews such as professional reviews that are provided by well-trained experts to critique products or services (Hann, Dijkstra & Dijkstra, 2005). However, there is little extant literature that examines the influence of online reviews written by professionals. This study compares the effects of reviews generated by amateur and professional reviewers who are not connected with the destination and associated promotion agents, such as destination management organizations (DMO), on a tourists' intention of visiting a novel destination. To compare the influence of the two types of online reviews on tourists' behavioral intention and understand the internal reasons, a testing model was been developed comprising both attitude (trust) and affect (curiosity) as mediating variables. Therefore, the results of this study contribute to a better understanding of how different independent sources of online reviews influence tourists' decisions regarding the choice of destination through their effect on the tourists' trust in and curiosity about the destination.

Theoretical background

Online reviews

Online reviews are a form of WOM recognized to exert a significant influence on referral marketing (Buttle, 1998). WOM was found to be more important than traditional advertisements in persuading consumers to try new products or services (Sheth, 1971). With the advent of the Internet, new electronic communication channels are available for the distribution of WOM. These types of WOM are generally referred to as electronic WOM (eWOM). Litvin, Goldsmith, and Pan (2008, p. 461) suggest that eWOM can be defined as "all informal communications directed at consumers through Internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristics of particular goods and services, or their sellers." Current Internet technologies encourage users to post comments concerning their use of products and services on a variety of platforms with minimum effort. These types of eWOM are usually referred to as user-generated content or online reviews. Some scholars have argued that online reviews are a new element in marketing communications and can be viewed as free sales assistance for customers by providing them with more information (Chen & Xie, 2008). Online reviews are also found to have an important role in consumers' decision-making processes when shopping at online stores (Utz, Kerkhof & Bos, 2012). Since online reviews are a form of eWOM and eWOM a type of WOM, it is reasonable to argue that online reviews share many characteristics of eWOM and WOM as outlined in Buttle's WOM model (1998). Buttle's model comprising intrapersonal variables associated with the generation and consumption of WOM, such as customer satisfaction and the WOM valence. The other set of variables contains extrapersonal variables, which consist of contextual conditions influencing the searching and reading of WOM. These extrapersonal variables consist of variables such as culture and external influence. Researchers have provided empirical evidence to support this classification. For example, valence, source, and argument quality (Lee, 2009) have different effects on an online review's influence on consumers' behavioral intentions.

In the context of tourism, tourists' concern about making a decision to visit an unfamiliar place stems from the lack of information leading to a high level of perceived risk. In addition, if this need for new information is not met, a somewhat unpleasant feeling of frustration may develop (Litman, 2005). One

way to reduce a tourist's level of perceived risk associated with visiting a destination is to obtain more information about that destination (Teo & Yeong, 2003). Destination information can be obtained from DMO's official documents, guidebooks, travelers' reviews, professional reporters' reviews, and even stories or novels. This new information can reduce the uncomfortable feeling of exposure to risk (Buttle, 1998). Online reviews can fulfill tourists' need for more information and have been found to affect tourists' selection of both destinations (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Wang, 2015) and hotels (Cantalops & Salvi, 2014). Recent literature reviews suggest further research is needed to better understanding of behavioral implications of WOM on travelers (Confente, 2015).

Since this study focuses on a tourist's intention of visiting a destination, the trust of online reviews and the reviews' features that arouse the tourists' curiosity in the destination are its major concern. Trust is closely linked to the role of the writer who generates the review and how it is distributed. Considerable research has classified online reviews by their method of distribution or their distribution platforms. These platforms comprise blogs and microblogs, social networking sites, collaborative projects (such as Wikipedia), content community sites, and sites dedicated to feedback (Sotiriadis & Zyl, 2013). Online reviews from different platforms were found to have varying levels of influence on both consumers' willingness to recommend a product (Lee & Youn, 2009) and their behavior (Thorsten Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh & Gremler, 2004).

Other studies have classified online reviews according to who generated them. An online review can be generated by an amateur reviewer, an editor (Zhang et al., 2010), or a marketer (Bronner & de Hoog, 2010). In addition, online reviews can be generated by either professional reviewers or any other person with a motive to post their comments. The type of writer may be a more generic categorization since different types of review writers can post their content through different channels. For example, amateur reviewers can write reviews on a social network or travel review platform such as TripAdvisor. Within this classification, most of the literature focused on online reviews in tourism was generated by amateur reviewers. It is generally contended that online reviews generated by amateur are more useful than those generated by marketers (Bronner & de Hoog, 2010; Gershoff & Mukhopadhyay, 2003). In fact, reviews generated by professional reviewers and posted on travel sources such as personal blogs and websites, such as British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Travel and Lonely Planet, have received comparatively less attention. Professionals posting on these review platforms include reporters, subject matter experts, and culinary reviewers. They write from a more professional point of view to appraise the subject of curiosity and possess a high level of expertise. They may be invited by governments, organizations, or news sources, or they may write simply out of personal curiosity. Research has found that amateur reviewers usually write differently from professional reviewers (De Jong & Burgers, 2013). Professional review were also found to affect online user intention of downloading software and lead to more active amateur interactions (Zhou & Duan, 2016). However, little is know on whether professional reviews have a difference influence than amateur reviews on tourists' intention of visiting a destination or not. The following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Professional and amateur reviews have different impact on tourists' intention of visiting a destination.

The testing model

Attitude-based behavior models, such as the theory of planned behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991), are widely used in many studies involving the formation of intentions of performing various behaviors. Um and Crompton (1990) provides empirical support to the contention that attitude is a significant predictor

for the selection of a destination both in its inclusion in the set of alternatives and in the final choice. A study by Jalilvand and Samiei (2012) has revealed the significance of TPB constructs on tourists' destination choice. Hence, the development of tourists' attitude toward a destination is considered to be a critical step in developing the intention of traveling to a destination. Online reviews are primarily used to reduce a tourist's perceived risk when selecting a destination. Trust has been identified as an important mediating variable in reducing the perceived risk in the selection of intangible services (Cheng, Rhodes & Lok, 2013; Utz et al., 2012). Therefore, trust is selected as a mediating variable to predict tourists' intention of selecting a destination.

Using only attitudes as predictors of behavior leads to a neglect of the decision-maker's emotions compared with affection-based models (Cheung, Chang & Lai, 2000). Critics have questioned whether the attitude construct can capture the influence of all complex emotional experiences. If the attitude construct can reflect only some emotional experiences, then a major component of explainable variance will be missed (Allen, Machleit & Kleine, 1992). A composite model comprising both attitude and affect constructs may perform better in predicting behavior intentions (Brinberg, 1981). Travel is closely related to tourists' emotions as it is about collecting memories and experiences. Scholars have posited that interest in a destination is an essential emotion that drives a tourists' need to travel to that destination (Sharpley, 2008). Interest is a feeling or emotion that causes a person to focus their attention on something (Silvia, 2006) and curiosity is a major motivation for the interest of traveling (Mehmetoglu, 2012). Therefore, curiosity is included in this study to form a composite model with the aim to overcome this shortcoming.

Trust

Trust is a fundamental construct in multiple disciplines such as economics, sociology, psychology, organizational science, and marketing. Trust has been defined differently according to the different worldviews of these disciplines. Trust is commonly referred to as the "willingness to be vulnerable" (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995). A more formal definition of trust can be "a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence" (Moorman, Deshpandé & Zaltman, 1993). After reviewing a collection of cross-disciplinary literature, Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, and Camerer (1998, p. 395) posited trust as "a psychological state comprising the intention of accepting vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another." Most of these definitions relate to the concept of risk, and risk must be present for trust to exist. The other necessary condition is the reliance of one party upon the other. Therefore, much research on trust highlight the importance of reliability and confidence in forming a concept of trust (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

From a marketing viewpoint, trust is a fundamental issue that forms a bond between a brand and its customers (Hiscock, 2001). Scholars have defined brand trust as "the confident expectations of the brand's reliability and intentions in situations entailing risk to the consumer" (Delgado-Ballester, 2004). It was found that trust in a brand has a positive effect on consumers' intention of making a purchase (Sichtmann, 2007). When a consumer needs to buy intangible products/services, their willingness to buy is critically influenced by the perceived risk associated with the transaction (Grewal, Gotlieb & Marmorstein, 1994). The decision to visit a destination defines the boundary that determines the different elements of a tour, such as how to travel, where to stay, and what to do. Each of these activities exposes the tourists to different types of perceived risks. Tourists certainly need the willingness to take a risk when visiting a novel destination. Despite the important role of risk in destination decision making, only few studies include trust as an independent variable. By considering the two conditions needed for trust to exist and the definition of trust in other disciplines, this study defines destination trust as the tourists' willingness to visit a destination in which they have confidence.

Research in technology adoption has shown that trust has a direct, positive impact on human behavior (Nicolaou & McKnight, 2006; Pavlou & Gefen, 2004). Trust can reduce perceived risk, leading to a positive influence on technology user's behavioral intention ((Lee & Song, 2013; Pavlou, 2003; Schaupp, Carter & McBride, 2010). Similar findings were also revealed in studies on tourism and hospitality. For instance, tourists' intention of booking a hotel room is influenced by their trust in the property (Sparks & Browning, 2011). Trust was also found to have a positive influence on tourists' loyalty (Loureiro & González, 2008) and hotels rely on earning guests' trust to establish long-term relationships (Bowen & Shoemaker, 1998). A major contribution of online reviews is the reduction of consumers' perceived risk, particularly regarding intangible services (De Matos & Rossi, 2008). In summary, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: An increase in trust will lead to an increase in the tourists' intention of visiting a destination.

The study by Smith et al. (2005) posited that the recommendation source has an effect on the perceived influence of the recommender with trust as a mediator. Amateur reviews have more trustworthiness than those generated by marketers (Bronner & de Hoog, 2010; Gershoff et al., 2003), and professional reviews with less personal bias are perceived as more trustworthy and better authoritative judgments than amateur reviews (Amblee & Bui, 2007). However, the study by Filieri and Alguezaui (2015) revealed that in review websites like TripAdvisor, the perceived source credibility does not have a significant effect on perceived trust. In general, the reviewers' profile and reputation cue have an impact on the their trustworthiness (Xu, 2014), and the source trustworthiness has an influence on the perceived review trustworthiness (Filieri, 2016). Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Professional and amateur reviews have different impacts on tourists' trust.

Curiosity

Curiosity is believed to function as a motivational prerequisite for exploratory behavior characterized by the gathering of information about the environment (Berlyne, 1960). It is considered to be a critical motive influencing human behavior at every stage of life (Loewenstein, 1994). Curiosity is proposed as either a feeling of interest or a feeling of deprivation. Feelings of interest are aroused when people feel it would be enjoyable to discover new things. In the latter case, curiosity is stimulated when people perceive a lack of important and meaningful information (Litman & Silvia, 2006). This lack of information contributes to people's uncertainty. In general, curiosity is agreed to be defined as the desire to acquire new knowledge and new sensory experiences (Litman & Silvia, 2006, p. 318). However, there are controversies in the field regarding the approaches for examining the origins and underlying causes of curiosity as well as regarding how to operationalize the concept of curiosity.

Tourists who want to travel to a destination are driven by needs that induce them to take part in a touristic activity (Sharpley, 2008). These tourism motivations have postulated as a psychological concept by Iso-Ahola (1982). A number of influential empirical studies suggest these motivation factors can be classified into either extrinsic or intrinsic factors. While extrinsic factors can be represented by the culture in which a tourist lives, intrinsic factors can be represented by a tourist's desire to experience different activities and the freshness of the destination (Mehmetoglu, 2012). In the literature on motivation by novelty, Mayo and Jarvis (1981) contended that the concept of curiosity must be examined to understand why people travel.

The operationalization developed by Berlyne (1960) can be considered relevant to the research on tourism (Litman & Spielberg, 2003). To categorize different types of curiosity, Berlyne identified two dimensions of curiosity: the first extending between perceptual and epistemic curiosities and the

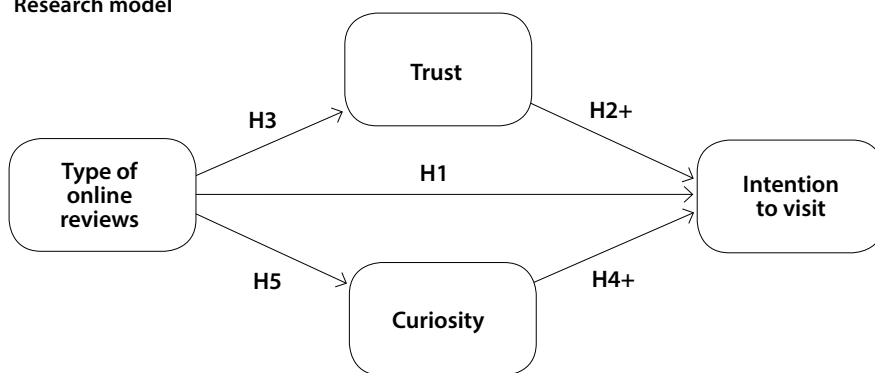
second between specific and diverse curiosities. Perceptual curiosity refers to "a drive which is aroused by novel stimuli and reduced by continued exposure to these stimuli" (Berlyne, 1954). It can lead to a curiosity in exploring new destinations. Epistemic curiosity refers to a desire for knowledge and examines people's curiosity in learning about new things. Specific curiosity refers to the desire for a particular piece of information, whereas diverse curiosity refers to a more general seeking of stimulation. External stimulation and tourists' quest for new knowledge triggers exploration behavior. Therefore, curiosity is a major cause of interest to travel to a destination. Although curiosity in a destination is an important driver to a tourists' need to travel, it receives little attention in extant literature. In terms of writing, professional reviewers have the ability to research the destination and its attractions. Furthermore, they are skilled writers and thus can write from an interesting perspective or choose an appealing title. In summary, this leads to the following hypotheses:

H4: An increase in curiosity will lead to an increase in a tourist's intention of visiting a destination.

H5: Professional and amateur reviews have different impact on tourists' curiosity.

As a summary, the testing model, as shown in Figure 1, was constructed based on the above hypotheses to test for the effect of switching from online reviews written by professionals to those by amateur reviewers (TR) on a tourists' intention of visiting (ITV) a destination. Trust (DT) and Curiosity (DC) are the mediating variables.

Figure 1
Research model



Research design

A quasi-experiment design using a structured questionnaire administered by an interviewer was adopted in this study. Respondents were asked to fill out some basic information about their knowledge of the destination as the first step, and then online reviews about Macau written by either amateur or professional reviewers were presented to the respondents. After the respondents read the material, they were asked to complete the scales as shown in Appendix A.

Macau was selected as the destination in this study because it is famous on a global scale. Macau, a former Portuguese colony, is currently the largest gaming center in the world. However, Macau also has a significant number of world heritage sites that portrays a fusion of East and West. This unique blend of entertainment and cultural tourism experience provides a rich variety of topics for online review generation. Therefore, it is easier to locate reviews from both amateur and professional reviewers. Previous research has studied the effect of website contents on the formation of Macau's image (Choi, Lehto & Morrison, 2007; Tang, Scherer & Morrison, 2011), and the impact of online reviews on

tourists' intention to visit Macau (Wang, 2015). There is limited study on the effect of online reviews on tourists of the Western market to visit Macau.

The result of the study can provide useful references for Macau's promotional strategies. All material used in the study are genuine reviews collected from different online review sources such as TripAdvisor, BBC, and Lonely Planet. When the material was constructed, reviews and pictures of the same themes were selected and included in both types of reviews. This controlled for the informational factors that may have arisen owing to differences in the attractiveness of different types of content, presented as a limitation in previous studies (Smith et al., 2005). The material comprised three professional and four amateur online reviews. These were chosen to provide respondents multiple reviews without making the reading long and boring. An example each of online reviews from amateur travelers and professional reviewers is shown in Appendices B and C, respectively.

This study used a multiple indicator, multi-independent cause model or group code approach as described in the literature (Aiken, Stein & Bentler, 1994; Russell, Kahn & Spoth, 1998). In essence, it resembles the use of dummy variables in regression analysis. The TR were modeled as observable variables. The group that read online reviews by amateur reviewers was coded "zero," and the group that read online reviews by professionals was coded "one." If the path from the group variable to the other independent variable was significantly different from zero, the means of the two groups were different across the other independent variable.

Although various scales have been developed to measure brand trust and advertisement trust, there are virtually no such aspects related to measuring trust toward destinations. The DT scale in the questionnaire (T1 to T4) was adopted from the trust scale developed to measure customer trust levels regarding their intention of purchasing intangible services such as hotel rooms (Cheng & Loi, 2014; Delgado-Ballester, 2004). In addition, two indicators (T5 and T6) on destination trust derived from the destination image literature (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003) were added to this original set. The DC scales (N1, N2, N5, and N6) were developed with reference to the role of curiosity in tourists' motivation for traveling (Litman & Silvia, 2006; Litman & Spielberger, 2003; Mehmetoglu, 2012). The scales center on the tourists' desire to know and learn about a new destination. Two indicators (N3 and N4) were added that the tourists would be interested if something they liked actually appeared in the destinations.

The actual decision making that leads to the action of visiting is not easy to observe and measure; therefore, proxies need to be used to predict the likelihood of tourists who will actually visiting a destination. In destination marketing, researchers use the intention of traveling as a predictor for tourists engaging in the actual behavior of visiting a destination (Beerli, Meneses & Gil, 2007; Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Ng, Lee & Soutar, 2007). The ITV scales consist of items adopted from the literature used to measure the intention of purchasing intangible services (Cheng & Loi, 2014; Park & Kim, 2008). All these scales employ seven-point Likert scales ranging from "strongly agree" or "very high," anchored to value 1, to "strongly disagree" or "very low," anchored to value 7.

The scales were produced in Macau, and the data collection took place at the end of 2014 in the city of Umeå in Sweden. The selection of the study place is due to the interviewee's participation in an exchange student program that facilitated the collection of data, where the respondents were expected to have relatively little knowledge regarding Macau. The respondents were convenient samples selected within a university community where surveys were handed to passers-by. A pretest was conducted with 20 respondents to check on the readability, length, and comprehensibility of the text. Modifications

were made according to comments received to arrive at the final version. Respondents were allocated either type of the online reviews to read, and the same survey procedure was applied.

Data analysis and findings

There were 122 valid responses in the study. Although the sample size is limited, the number of valid responses satisfied the minimum number of samples (119) required for structural equation modeling (SEM) that was employed following Westland's algorithm for Structural Equation Modelling analysis (Westland, 2010). It is based on a medium anticipated effect size (0.3), a desired statistic power level of 0.8, an observed/latent variable ratio (15/3), and a probability level of 0.5. All the respondents reported that they had not traveled to Macau previously. Approximately 65% of the respondents preferred to travel solo, whereas 35% preferred to travel in groups. The sample consisted of 58% males and 42% females. Other characteristics of the respondents are shown in Table 1. Most respondents were between 18 to 35. The data shows that only about 17.2% of the respondents knew something about Macau and only 8.2% knew 'quite a bit' about the destination. None of them knew substantially about Macau. These respondents' characteristics indicated that the data collected was suitable for further analysis. If the respondents already knew the destination considerably, the effect of the experiment would not have been significant. The mean and standard deviation of the scales are reported in Appendix A.

Table 1
Descriptions of respondents

Variables	Measures	Responses (%)
How much do you already know about Macau?	A great deal	0.0
	Quite a bit	8.2
	Something	17.2
	No much	37.3
	Nothing	36.9
Age group	18-25	71.3
	26-35	25.4
	36-45	2.5
	45-55	0.0
	Over 55	0.0
Would you consider Macau as a travel destination?	No	0.0
	Maybe	68.9
	Yes	23.9
Nationality	Sweden	54.9
	China	22.1
	Germany	9.0
	Russia	3.3
	France	2.5
	Others*	8.2

* USA, Canada, Spain, Denmark, Netherlands, Finland, Iran, Croatia, Ghana

The relationships between DT, DC, and ITV were analyzed using the SEM method. This study use Partial Least Square (PLS) as the SEM estimator since PLS is intended to minimize the variances of endogenous constructs. The focus is on investigating the predictive power of the independent variables and model building (Hair, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2011; Sarstedt, Ringle & Hair, 2014). SEM based on PLS was selected, and SmartPLS Ver2.0 M3 (Ringle, Sven & Alexander, 2005) was used to perform

the analysis. The analysis procedure involved two stages of testing for measurement and structural models (Hair et al., 2011).

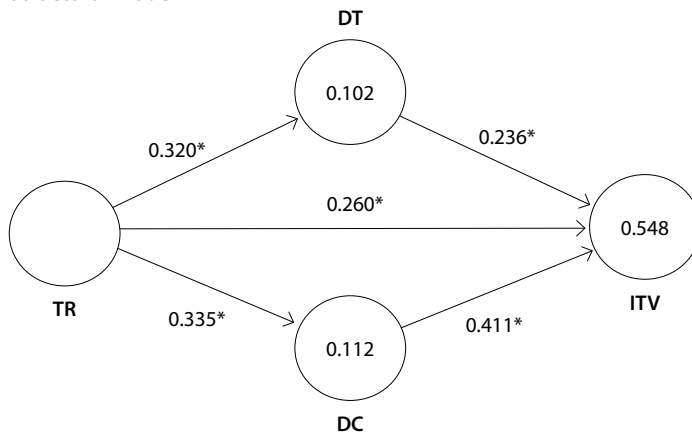
The tests of the measurement model entailed checking for internal consistency reliability, indicator reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity using the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion. The test results shown in Table 2 reveal that the scales satisfied the requirements of the tests. Moreover, all indicators had a loading of more than 0.7 ($p < 0.01$) as shown in Appendix A, and the condition for discriminant validity was satisfied.

Table 2
Measurement model results

Variables	Average variance extracted	Composite reliability	Cronbach's alpha	Highest squared correlation with other variable
Curiosity (DC)	0.6814	0.9276	0.9069	0.6235
Trust (DT)	0.6660	0.9227	0.8998	0.6235
Intention to visit (ITV)	0.7732	0.9108	0.8568	0.4649

Since the measurement model was satisfactory, we could proceed with examining the structural model. The results of the structural model testing are shown in Figure 2. Since all the paths were significant, this led to the conclusion that all the hypotheses were supported. The R-square of ITV had a value of 0.548, and the Q-square value was 0.3707. TR was found to have a strong total effect (0.4638, $p < 0.01$) on ITV, according to Cohen (1992). DT had a moderate total effect (0.2365, $p < 0.01$) and DC has a strong total effect (0.4111, $p < 0.01$) on ITV. Given the existence of other factors such as the needs of the tourists, social group influence, and situational constraints, which could influence the tourists' intention of visiting a destination, the variables of the model are considered substantial because they explained 54.8% of ITV's variance with a strong total effect from TR. The Q-square value of ITV indicated that the model has good predictive power for this variable.

Figure 2
Structural model



Note: * = $p < 0.01$

The significance of the path "from TR to ITV" showed that a difference in the types of online reviews has both direct and indirect effects on ITV. The direct effects are represented by the path "from TR to ITV," whereas the indirect effects are achieved through the two mediating variables of DC and DT. If

the path "from TR to ITV" was removed, ITV's variance explained would drop from 54.8% to 50.2%. This means that DC and DT are strong partial mediators for TR in affecting ITV. It was also noted that TR had almost the same explained variance value on DT (10.2%) and DC (11.2%). This means that TR has a medium but significant explanation power for both DT and DC.

Discussion

The study contributions to the following two areas: the relative strength of professional reviews versus amateur reviews and the significance of trust and curiosity on tourists' intention of visiting a destination. The results of the analysis posit that hypothesis H1 is supported, and professional reviews are found to have a stronger effect than those generated by amateurs on the revisit intention of the tourists since the path coefficient of "Switching from professional to amateur reviews (TR) to ITV" is significant, with a positive value of 0.26. Similarly, hypotheses H3 and H5 are also supported with professional reviews having a stronger effect on curiosity and trust, since the coefficients on the paths "from TR to DC" (0.335) and "from TR to DT" (0.320) are positive and significant.

Reviews play an important role of providing information about the destination. In this aspect, professional reviewers may be able to gain privileged access to attractions with better time slots, receive first-hand materials from the DMOs, and possibly even collect behind-the-scenes information. Professional reviewers are well-trained experts critiquing products or services. In contrast, amateurs generally lack professional reviewers' knowledge and skills to introduce the best aspects of a destination. Therefore, professional reviewers can produce reviews that are more informative, readable, and attractive, thus being better equipped to arouse readers' curiosity. Furthermore, professional reviews are less in number than amateur reviews. This can reduce the adverse effects in making destination decisions caused by the information overload phenomenon faced by tourists (Malhotra, 1984). Therefore, these provide an explanation for the two types of reviews having different impacts on tourists' curiosity about the destination and professional reviews being more effective in arousing the tourists' curiosity.

The stronger effect of professional reviews on DT and DC might be due to the following reasons. First, reviews generated by amateurs are vast in number, and in many cases, they contain a mix of positive and negative valences. Consumers not only are overloaded with information that decreases its usefulness (Park & Lee, 2008) but also have to spend considerable elaboration to develop a consistent view on the subject matter. Second, increasing numbers of reviews are found to be incorrect and /or inaccurate. Some hotels have recently sued reviewers for fraudulent reviews written with malicious intent (Green, 2014). These tarnish the reliability of amateur-generated reviews in general. Third, although reviews by an amateur may have an advantage over reviews written by a marketer with a connection to an organization (Bronner & de Hoog, 2010; Buttle, 1998), they are found to be less trustworthy compared to professional reviews. Amateur reviewers claim to be independent of any organization; however, they are also anonymous, which means that their claims cannot be verified. The readers have difficulties in judging whether or not they can believe these reviews. The independence of professional reviewers is also markedly different from editors' reviews, which have been shown to have a negative influence on consumers (Zhang et al., 2010). Most professional reviewers are independent of the DMO of the destination they write about, and they need to declare all conflicts of interest. From the perspective of reducing tourists' perceived risk, professional reviews may be more trustworthy because their writers need to preserve their reputation based on reader opinion. It is believed that they would not risk damaging their status by producing fraudulent or inaccurate reviews. The channels such as the BBC and Lonely Planet that publish these reviews also need to be more stringent in terms of review

quality in order to maintain their trustworthiness. Both above outlets enhance the perceived reliability of professional reviews when compared with those by amateurs.

This study also contributes to providing strong empirical support for the contention that the proposed mediating variables can influence tourists' intention of visiting a destination. Both independent variables, DT and DC, have significant influence on ITV, and together, they account for 54.8 percent of ITV variance, and the predictive power is considered substantial. The variable curiosity has a significant path coefficient of 0.411; this supports the hypothesis H4 that curiosity has a significant effect on tourists' visit intention. The finding on DC is a confirmation of (Mehmetoglu, 2012) discussion on holidaying interest in that the exploration of a destination relies heavily on the tourists' curiosity. Furthermore, the coefficient of the "from DC to ITV" path has a value of 0.411, and the coefficient of "from DT to ITV" has a value of 0.236; these scores mean that DC has a much stronger effect on tourists' intention of visiting a destination than DT. Although it is an important emotion variable that Mayo and Jarvis (1981) contended to be examined under people's motives for traveling, affective variables like curiosity is not commonly employed to explain tourists' behavior intention. For instance, Jalilvand and Samiei (2012) study on the effect of WOM on destination choice only comprises TPB constructs. The present study sheds light on the importance of affective variables and indicates that the lack of these variables in models that explain tourists' visit intention could have a serious deficiency. The finding on the effect of DT on visit intention (hypothesis H2) is in line with previous studies on the effect of trust upon tourists' intention of taking a risk when deciding to commit themselves to make an intangible purchase such as hotel rooms (Cheng et al., 2013; Sparks & Browning, 2011).

DMO and hotels sometimes feel overwhelmed in the management of online reviews generated by tourists because they appear uncontrollable. The results of this study provide a possible solution by placing more focus on reviews by professional reviewers. This is not to suggest that DMOs should intentionally try to bias the reviews by such professionals. Instead, they should actively use these professionally written reviews to provide tourists with an authentic image of the destination. This study shows that the tourists' formation of attitude and emotions related to the destination image has an important mediating effect on their propensity for visiting a destination. From the findings of the study, curiosity clearly has a stronger influence than trust. Since travel will always have an adventurous nature, tourist will need to take some risk in exploring the destination. From this perspective, DMOs might put a priority focus on placing more elements in the promotion that can arouse the tourists' curiosity and their desire to explore the destination. However, trust is still an important variable, and DMOs should also strengthen the tourists' trust on the destination.

Conclusion

The effect of the different types of online reviews on tourists' choice of destination has been a subject of much interest to researchers given its value in destination marketing. The ultimate goal of these studies is to understand the online reviews' effect on tourists' decisions to visit a particular destination. In practical terms, DMOs can use this knowledge to properly formulate their marketing strategies. This study arrived at two major conclusions. First, the findings suggest that reviews by professionals are more persuasive regarding the tourists' intention of visiting a destination than those generated by amateurs. Second, the study posited that the effect of online reviews on tourists' intention of visiting can be explained substantially by two mediating variables, namely DC and DT, and the affective variable DC has a stronger strength than the attitudinal variable DT. These conclusions provide useful

theoretical support for the suggestion given to DMOs regarding how to utilize professional reviews to improve tourists' intention of visiting their attractions.

As with other studies, this study has some limitations that need to be addressed by future studies. First, the parsimony model of current study has only include trust and curiosity as mediating variables and the direct effect of TR to ITV indicates that additional mediating variables might exist that can be further explored to improve the explanatory power of the model. Second, the development of a destination image is a gradual process, and the tourists may read reviews from different sources together. The present research method may not be able to adequately represent this process. A longitudinal research methodology could be applied to analyze the change when the tourist read more reviews of different types to understand the process. Finally, the materials adopted in this study only comprise of reviews with positive valence. Future studies may explore the effect of different valences from both amateur and professional reviews on tourists' visit intention in order to give a more complete picture of the impact of the two sources.

Appendix A

Destination decision model scale and measurements

Destination trust		Mean	S.D.	Loading	t-value
T1	I have confidence that Macau will give me a delightful travel experience.	4.61	1.364	0.881	44.83
T2	Macau guarantee a satisfactory travel experience	4.48	1.368	0.827	30.92
T3	Travel to Macau would not disappoint me	4.39	1.321	0.783	22.43
T4	Macau meets my expectation	4.41	1.218	0.841	28.81
T5	I feel safe if I decide to visit Macau	4.57	1.465	0.803	17.78
T6	Macau is a nice place to stay	4.66	1.388	0.815	20.43
Destination curiosity					
N1	I want to know more about Macau	4.52	1.796	0.852	31.70
N2	I want to receive some more information about Macau	4.52	1.702	0.856	32.78
N3	Macau has the attractions that I like	4.44	1.324	0.849	32.87
N4	Macau has a unique atmosphere that attracts me	4.36	1.355	0.767	21.62
N5	Travel to Macau can let me learn some interesting things	4.67	1.669	0.763	15/13
N6	Travel to Macau can let me try some interesting things	4.67	1.540	0.804	20.68
Intention to visit: what is the likelihood that					
V1	You would travel to Macau	4.11	1.637	0.926	47.79
V2	You would recommend Macau to your friends	4.08	1.679	0.839	21.98
V3	You would consider Macau as a travel destination	4.38	1.628	0.870	39.07

Appendix B

Example of a professional review for a destination

BBC travel journalist Andy Jarosz

Macau beyond the roulette wheel

"... A stroll through the historic district's narrow cobblestone streets makes it easy to see the fusion of Chinese and Portuguese that created such a distinct Macanese culture. Shops selling fresh egg tarts that could have come straight out of a Lisbon bakery are found alongside stalls with *bakkwa*, *wafer-thin slices of marinated dried meat*; colonial European buildings are decorated with bright red Chinese lanterns;

even within the Catholic churches there are paintings of the Madonna and child, both with unmistakably Asian features and dressed in flowing Chinese silk robes.

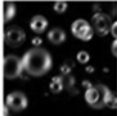
Street signs meanwhile display names in Cantonese and Portuguese, with the two versions not always sharing the same meaning; the Portuguese wanted to commemorate historical figures by naming streets and alleys in their honour, but the Chinese did not always hold them in the same high esteem.

The most prominent landmark in Macau, beyond the garish glitz of the modern casinos, is the ruin of St Paul's Church, a 17th-century Jesuit church that was destroyed by fire in 1835. All that remains is the elaborately carved façade, which dominates the skyline of old Macau, with the long set of steps leading up to the church crowded by Chinese visitors posing for photographs using it as a backdrop ... "

Appendix C

Example of an amateur review for a destination

<http://www.tripadvisor.com/Tourism-g664891-Macau-Vacations.html>



Greybeckh

Contributor

★ 14 reviews

🌐 Reviews in 8 cities

👤 8 helpful votes

“Not to be missed.”

🌟🌟🌟🌟🌟 Reviewed November 6, 2013 NEW

We visited the Museum as part of a tour that included St Paul. The museum is extremely clean, quiet and cool. This is a great way to learn about the history of Macau, the surrounding islands and the 400 years of Portuguese colonisation. Some of the items on display pre date Roman history and are truly wondrous. The view from the fort is spectacular and is great way to get some good pics of Macau.

Visited November 2013

Less ▲

Was this review helpful? Problem with this review?

See 2 more reviews by Greybeckh for Macau

Ask Greybeckh about Macao Museum

This review is the subjective opinion of a TripAdvisor member and not of TripAdvisor LLC.

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